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## *Visible and Invisible Difference Negotiating Citizenship, Affect, and Resistance*

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### **Abstract**

*This article offers a retrospective analysis of discussions on citizenship, exploring the role of (in)visible difference, affect, and resistance. In group discussions with Norwegian youth, we found that positionality played a central role in framing understandings of citizenship, belonging, and discrimination. As white researchers who also experience (in)visible differences, we reflect on the students' explicit discussions of difference, as well as their reactions to our implicit and explicitly acknowledged difference. Additional reflections are put forth on leveraging invisible difference within citizenship education to create space for an inclusive understanding of citizenship, resisting ideas of ethno-nationalism. This discussion demonstrates the potential which experiences with (in)visible difference have for contributing to more inclusive understandings of citizenship. Further potential implications are that acknowledgement of invisible difference by white majority (citizenship) educators may help to open space for an understanding of difference as a citizenship resource.*



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## Introduction

When I refuse to listen to how you are different from me, I am refusing to know who you are. But without understanding fully who you are, I will never be able to appreciate precisely how we are more alike than I might have originally supposed. (Alcoff, 2006, p. 6)

What does positionality have to do with citizenship? How does being a person of colour influence one's views on citizenship? How does having a different mother tongue and speaking with a foreign accent affect the way people judge citizenship and belonging? Personal experience validates the influence of such factors, and thus we retrospectively reflect on (in)visible difference, affect, and resistance in data gathered through group interviews with youth. This analysis highlights that positionality and experiences with (in)visible difference are central and explicit in discussions of citizenship—particularly regarding issues of belonging and discrimination. The dialogues with youth in our case study also had an affective dimension, evoking our own experiences with (in)visible difference and led us as researchers to engage affectively and at times resist narratives of sameness. This reflection piece is the culmination of a research project grounded in citizenship education, exploring youth perceptions of citizenship discourses in Norway (see Dansholm, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). It seeks to address the question: What role do experiences of (in)visible difference play in understandings of citizenship, of affect, and resistance? Through this reflection, we aim to contribute towards educators' critical thinking regarding positionality – both their students as well as their own – in citizenship discussions.

The centrality of positionality and (in)visible difference in citizenship discussions is important in light of citizenship education which has an explicit focus on encouraging democratic ideals, including equality and living in harmony in diversity filled societies (Osler, 2017). This stands in contrast to discourse in the public sphere, including news media, which is adept at painting difference as dangerous and a threat. Such discourse is often focused on different cultures with an implicit understanding that the threatening Other are often people of colour (Hervik, 2019). Yet, through tracing the history of xenophobia, Khair (2016) shows that different skin colour is not necessary for people to be marked as Other. On the other hand, difference exists in many forms and in some theories is understood as a societal good. For example, Arendt [1958] (1998) argues that our humanity and ability to act in the world is tied to our uniqueness and bringing something new to the world—something never before present in any other human being. Nevertheless, this uniqueness and individuals' (in)visible differences tend to be erased in 'we are all the same' discourses present in global citizenship education (Howard et al., 2018). Additionally, research in teacher education shows that the term diversity is often used to denote non-whiteness (Fylkesnes, 2018) with such discourses feeding into imaginaries of sameness (Gullestad, 2006) which render internal variety invisible. Both ethnocentric rhetoric on citizenship as well as macro and micro resistance to this rhetoric have affective dimensions (Zembylas, 2019), and may be played out in different ways depending on one's positionality and experience with (in)visible difference. In this article, we therefore offer retrospective reflection on the interplay of positionality and (in)visible difference in discussions on citizenship, as well as how affect and resistance emerged depending on positionality.

The dataset consisted of group interviews with Norwegian lower secondary 10th grade students in three schools, while the interview guide focused on citizenship in Norway. There has been a longstanding understanding of Norway as homogenous population-wise, despite both cultural diversity between country regions as well as the presence of national and indigenous

minorities (Eriksen, 2020); however, in the last few decades, there has been an increased rhetorical acknowledgement of heterogeneity with a focus on migrant populations which comprise almost 20% of the population (SSB, 2023). The Norwegian statistics bureau continues to categorise naturalised Norwegians as immigrants, with immigrants defined as those with two parents and four grandparents born abroad (Dzamarija, 2014). This demonstrates an ongoing populist understanding of the divide between immigrants and those who have ancestral ties to Norway – referred to locally as “ethnic Norwegians” (Svendsen, 2014). – Demonstrating an exclusionary national ownership gifted to ‘ethnic’ Norwegians and explicitly withheld from immigrants, regardless of generation.

Gullestad (2002) argues that the values which contribute to development of the Norwegian identity include ‘Janteloven’ (Jante’s law), a set of rules placing an emphasis on the importance of individual humility and ‘likhet’ or ‘imagined sameness’. Janteloven was proposed by Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose (1936) and refers to ten collectivistic laws to communal welfare. These laws may be perceived to frame individual achievement as unsettling due to the stability of societal structure in Scandinavian communities. Specifically, these central value concepts encourage the celebration of commonalities and similar social perspectives, whilst discouraging deviations and differences from the status quo. As such, these culture-specific principles function to construct a well-defined, collectivistic, and inclusive identity for those who fulfil the conventional image of a ‘Norwegian’. However, Gullestad (2002) suggests that the process of empowering cultural identity through a sense of national cohesion has set the stage for potential exclusive and xenophobic repercussions, which can contribute to preventing a sense of national belonging amongst persons with immigrant backgrounds (Bygnes, 2012).

Various dimensions of citizenship which surfaced as findings from the larger research project, such as rights, capabilities, and material dimensions of racialised discourse, have been presented in previous articles (see Dansholm, 2021, 2022a, 2022b). In this article, we retrospectively examine more closely both our research participants’ thoughtful and complex reflections on, for example, belonging, discrimination, and democratic ideals such as freedom and equality, and affective dimensions of the students as well as our own reactions to these discussions. Additionally, our positionalities were highlighted in various ways and could be said to have contributed to opening a space for recognition of and reflection on (in)visible difference. Implicitly, we thus reflect on power: the power of (majority) discourses and affective reactions of differently situated students to such powerful discourses, while we allow ourselves as researchers to be vulnerable and transparent about our positionality. We therefore argue that, in addition to students’ personal experiences of (in)visible difference, how we position ourselves as researchers and acknowledge—or *own*—our (in)visible difference has the potential to contribute to more nuanced understandings of belonging as well as discrimination in citizenship education discussions.

### **Literature Review and Theory**

Extensive research has been done on citizenship education (cf. Banks, 2017; Goren & Yemini, 2017; Osler & Starkey, 2006), which includes various conceptualisations such as multicultural citizenship (Banks, 2013; Cha et al., 2018), global citizenship (Goren & Yemini, 2017), cosmopolitan citizenship (Osler, 2017), and active citizenship (Nelson & Kerr, 2006). This article sidesteps these conceptual fractures, focusing on the values of diversity and inclusion which are inherent in most of this literature (Banks et al., 2005; Davies et al., 2018). A body of work on the contribution of minority non-white social science teachers in citizenship education shows how they negotiate and are able to leverage their positionality to (re)define what citizenship and

belonging mean (cf. Burner & Osler, 2021; Kim, 2021; Rodríguez, 2018; Vickery, 2017). Their contributions demonstrate that experiences of (in)visible difference influence their approach to citizenship education and their ability to challenge both students' and curricula's static notions of citizenship. Educational researchers, such as Zembylas (2019) and Eriksen (2020), have also explored the affective dimensions of agonistic conflict over ethno-nationalism as well as the connections between affect and resistance in critical pedagogy. This article builds on these lines of inquiry to explore positionality difference, both on the side of students as well as researchers, and the role of personal affective experiences with (in)visible difference in deliberations on citizenship and belonging.

In order to centre the discussion on the citizenship education values of diversity and inclusion, the framework for the research project is inclusive citizenship (Kabeer, 2005). This concept, resulting from Kabeer and colleagues' synthesis of feedback from marginalised people in diverse parts of the world, highlighted four recurring themes as vital for inclusivity in citizenship to be realised: namely, recognition, self-determination, solidarity, and justice. While these themes are in some respects self-explanatory, it is important to note that the understanding of justice expressed by their research participants included not only fairness in equal treatment, but also an understanding that there are times when it is fair for people to be treated differently—which requires a recognition that people *are* different.

Citizenship as a term in itself can be conceptualised in a variety of ways (Mouritsen & Jaeger, 2018) which are outside the scope of this paper. However, the setting of the project within the Norwegian context provides a linguistic divide between two dimensions of citizenship: namely, legal citizenship (*statsborgerskap*) as covering juridical aspects of citizen membership, rights, and responsibilities, while co-citizenship (*medborgerskap*) focuses on issues of community membership as well as societal and political participation and can be understood to include all residents within the national borders (see Dansholm, 2022b).

Both legal citizenship and co-citizenship experiences are impacted by positionality, and within this paper, positionality is understood as the social space one inhabits, gendered, racialised, and intersectional, as well as one's lived experience (Haraway, 1988). Thus, we understand that a woman of colour experiences social situations differently than a white male, and a person from the minority may have cultural differences which influence their feeling of belonging or experiences of discrimination (Guðjónsdóttir, 2014). However, it must also be clarified that we understand culture to be dynamic, and use the term loosely, with an emphasis on norms and values. We furthermore acknowledge that while certain differences, such as visible difference (see below), are often framed as Other in public rhetoric (Fangen & Vaage, 2018), difference may not always result in othering.

In regards to difference, Alcoff (2006, p. 6) argues that, "In our excessively materialist society, only what is visible can generally achieve the status of accepted truth." Thus, visibility as a social concept provides some reflection points. Brighenti (2007) points out that while many fields address visibility, they tend to treat it as a local concept. However, she argues that there are at least three schemata of visibility, namely social, media, and control (Brighenti, 2007, p. 339), and posits recognition as a type of social visibility. Additionally, she writes that there are minimum and maximum thresholds of visibility and that, "Below the lower threshold, you are socially excluded" (Brighenti, 2007, p. 329,330). Through this explication, we understand there to be literal and figurative visibility and difference. Brighenti (2007) also touches on power when she theoretically

explores visibility in media and the control of visibility. Specifically, she shows that the powers framing the narratives regarding *recognised* visibility remain invisible themselves.

Regarding literal visible difference, Alcoff (2006) discusses visibility as it pertains to gender and race, arguing that “in the very midst of our contemporary skepticism toward race as a natural kind stands the compelling social reality that race, or racialized identities, have as much political, sociological, and economic salience as they ever had” (2006, p. 181). Thus, literal visible difference includes racialised physical appearance or skin colour, as well as symbolically imbued clothing, such as the hijab. Discussions as well as assumptions of ethnic or cultural difference often fall under this category of literal visible difference.

Audible or linguistic differences can be understood as a form of figurative (in)visible difference. A body of educational research finds that an underlying rhetoric exists which frames minority language speakers as deficient (Burner & Biseth, 2016; Fylkesnes, 2018). Additionally, Røyneland and Jensen’s (2020) research combining physical appearance and linguistic aspects shows that linguistic similarity can play a role in understandings of belonging where visible difference might dictate otherness.

Figurative (in)visibility can also be played out in various ways, and invisibility can be enacted through silence. For example, a person of colour may remain silent and thus render themselves essentially invisible, while a linguistically different person can use silence to hide their difference. Cultural differences, including diverse norms and values, may also be rendered visible or invisible through performance or lack of performance of those differences.

The language of difference is important to explore in light of citizenship education and its variants. One critique of global citizenship education argues that “interconnection cannot be based on a universalism that denies and denigrates difference” (Abdi et al., 2015, p. 1), and empirical research demonstrates how this depreciation of difference can be played out in schools (Howard et al., 2018). In the Scandinavian context, Jante’s Law (Sandemose, 1936), recognisable as a societal aversion to standing out, adds another layer to this denigration of difference. While some may argue that Jante’s Law is an outdated notion, a 2021 book traces the links between Jante’s Law and the high level of social anxiety in Norway. In the book, Ekelund (2021) explores research on conformity, (lack of) freedom of expression, group narcissism, and stress factors. Additionally, she interviews Norwegian psychiatrists as well as immigrants to underscore the psychological and behavioural impact of Jante’s Law within Norwegian society.

Alcoff argues that visible differences are salient, and “yet visible difference threatens the liberal universalistic concepts of justice based on sameness by invoking the specter of difference” (2006, p. 180). Interestingly, “Young’s notion of a ‘politics of difference’ [...] seeks to sever the link between difference and social disadvantage by treating difference as a political resource” (Eisenberg, 2006, p. 11). While Young’s (1990) focus is on group difference at a political level, in line with Arendt’s [1958] (1998) concept of uniqueness, we would argue that difference should be viewed as a resource on the individual level as well. This discussion of difference is not exhaustive, and within this article is confined to differences represented in our empirical data. An understanding of intersectionality is thus implicit, while it is outside the scope of this paper to touch on all forms and axes of difference – such as socio-economic status. And yet, ideally, by destigmatising and demystifying (in)visible differences at the micro level in schools, the ‘threat’ of otherness can be challenged.

Educational policy analysis research indicates there is political intention to foster inclusion (Burner & Biseth, 2016; Fylkesnes, 2019), and yet the discourses for and against citizen diversity work on the macro, the meso, and micro level. Affect theory is one way to tie these together in order to understand how these discourses work both as political language as well as within one's own body (Hynes, 2013). One example of this is what we term *intrusive curiosity*. Within many white majority countries, non-white peoples and those whose linguistic accent varies from the majority are frequently asked such questions as, "Where are you *really* from?" While the enquiring individual defends the question on the basis that they are 'just curious', the inference of otherness inherent in the question links to macro and meso discourses on the Other. Therefore, this intrusively curious question triggers a sensitivity in the recipient of the question. Accordingly, Zembylas (2019) contends that the distinction between emotion and affect is not always clear or relevant, and Hynes (2013) argues for thinking of affect not as static but transitional. Thus, affect theory allows us to explore the connections between discourses in the public sphere, such as racialised anti-immigrant sentiment, and our physical or undefined emotional reactions to these discourses based on our positionality or personal experiences with (in)visible difference. This brings us to the connection between affect and resistance, which Zembylas (2019) applies to critical pedagogy. Resistance, Zembylas (2019) argues, is not just about macro struggle, but through the lens of affect theory can be seen in the micro, in classrooms, in the playground. He further argues that affect theorising allows for a validation of resistance, moving away from pathologizing resistance on an individual level to an understanding of its political legitimacy. Finally, he argues that affective resistance is not just about representation, but production and practice, for example, how our bodies respond and react to discourses in social settings.

Through these concepts, we understand positionality and (in)visible difference as central to navigating citizenship discourses, and therefore vital for citizenship education discussions. Our informants' positionality is therefore presented as per the limitations of our empirical data as well as our socially constructed understanding in order to provide readers with a crude glimpse into their potential life histories, and we as researchers will present our own positionality more fully. We begin with an outline of the data collection and research methodology.

## **Methodological details**

### *Data collection methodology*

The data collection, approved by the Norwegian national ethics committee, consisted of group interviews with 10th grade students from three schools – a total of 44 students in eight groups. Whilst an admittedly small sample size, the group interviews offered rich discussion data for analysis. The objective was to interview one whole class in each school in smaller groups, and thus create space for different citizenship experiences to be in dialogue. However, only at one school (S1) was every member of the class able to join, while at the other two schools (S2 & S3) approximately half of the class joined. The first school (S1) was a private, budget-friendly, Norwegian-language school with a smaller class cohort. This school was originally intended as a pilot and my (Dansholm) son was one of the students (he mainly observed). He had not been a long-time student at the school and therefore, at the time, I was not acquainted with his classmates. Some minor changes were made to the interview guide following the pilot (S1), however due to the richness of the interviews and relevance to the overall analysis, the data was included in the project data. Although most of the participants at S1 were white, over thirty percent were visibly ("racially") different. At the second school (S2)—a public school—all the students were white,

with a few participants with invisible or cultural difference. At the last school (S3)—a public school in a remote area of Norway—there was only one visibly different student, who remained silent throughout.

In order to avoid an overt focus on identity within the student groups, we had asked teachers to provide anonymised information on students, specifically gender and majority / minority status, with the understanding that these teacher-defined positionings would be highly subjective. It became clear that teachers might also find such positions problematic. We had to reassure the teacher at S1 that we did not understand “minority” as equivalent to non-Norwegian or “ethnically” different—simply that they might have a mixed cultural background or family, including other European regions. We utilised this explanation regarding mixed cultural backgrounds at the next schools, and the other two teachers showed less reservation. However, as expected, these positions were at times challenged by students’ self-identifications in the group interviews. Positionality information was collected, including notation on numbers of non-white students, not to label students, but to acknowledge societal perceptions of (or obsessions with) visible differences while providing us as researchers and the readers with a (admittedly limited) degree of insight into the lived experience which may inform students’ opinions. – While factors, such as socio-economic status, were outside the scope of this research. We therefore highlight that while minorities may often be racialised, not all minorities are *racially* Othered.

The interviews focused on students’ understanding of the Norwegian vocabulary for legal citizen (statsborger) and co-citizen (medborger). In order to situate the discussion within the national context of public debate, after some introductory questions, a two-minute clip from the national news channel, NRK, was shown (Burner & Osler, 2017; Killerud, 2017) [this clip has since been removed from both NRK and YouTube]. The clip features Faten Al-Hussaini, a Norwegian hijabi television host, interviewing Siv Jensen, a high-profile politician from the right-leaning Progress Party (FRP). The discussion centres on national belonging, language, values, identity, and participation. At one point, Al-Hussaini asks Jensen whether she *sees* her as Norwegian, to which Jensen replies that she can *hear* she is Norwegian. Upon Al-Hussaini further pressing the question, Jensen veers into discussion of participation, values, and an admonition against isolating oneself in a minority community. This clip played an important role in highlighting and engaging public debate. We acknowledge the limitations and potential influence of use of this clip as well as our interview questions; however, repeated analysis of the data demonstrates that the clip did not affect student perspectives to a significant degree (Dansholm, 2022b).

After we conducted the pilot interviews (S1) and undertook further reading on epistemic inquiry (Brinkmann, 2007), I (Dansholm) added a component to the interview guide after the television clip. This consisted of presenting my (our) positionality to the students in order to offer examples of diverse relationships to legal citizenship and co-citizenship. I (Dansholm) invited my co-researchers to present their positionality as well, and Dickstein agreed while Stokmo declined.

The interviews were conducted in Norwegian due to it being the lingua franca of the school environment. Thus, I (Dansholm) had recruited Dickstein and Stokmo specifically as co-interviewers fluent in the regional Norwegian dialects where the schools are situated. The option of presenting their positionality was outside the scope of the initial collaboration agreement, and thus was purely voluntary.

The group interview audio recordings were transcribed fully and kept in their original language (Norwegian) throughout the analysis, while dialogue segments were selected according to their thematic relevance. The dialogue segments which are included in the text retain vocal fillers and repetitions, due to a polyphonic (Liamputtong, 2007) understanding of the importance of participant voices. This also allows for greater transparency. Lastly, Dansholm translated the selected excerpts into English, after which they were proofread by a native Norwegian speaker.

### *Researcher Positionalities*

#### Dansholm

My positionality is that of a white Danish-Norwegian woman whose upbringing and work, predominantly in non-Western countries, has strongly impacted both my cultural reference points and identity. My proximity to difference is enhanced through being the (biological) mother of a mixed daughter (Afro-European). As for linguistics, I speak English as a native speaker and Norwegian as a second language.

I recruited Stokmo, who is my sister, as a co-interviewer at the third school (S3) as she was studying for her masters in education. We did not inform either the teacher or the students that we are sisters (since she declined to present her positionality and the main objective was to highlight student voice), although they likely noticed our familiarity. It is noteworthy that while we are sisters, our life experience is different. My sister has had Norwegian citizenship for many years now, while I continue to maintain my Danish passport. Due to the age gap between us, we also did not spend our childhoods in the same countries, and I returned to Norway as a married woman with two children, while Stokmo spent several of her formative years in primary / secondary education in Norway. Thus, our affective responses to the inevitable intrusive question, “Where are you *really* from?” are slightly different, and I approach my Norwegian side pragmatically since my formative teenage years were spent in countries where I was a foreign citizen.

#### Dickstein

I empathise with the experience of having my national membership (even positively) judged by ethnic Norwegians. I identify as Norwegian, but unlike ‘ethnic’ Norwegians who have an implicit national belonging to the geographic space, I find myself restricted to a cultural belonging. This is most likely due to my parents being labour migrants from South Africa and the United States. I have observed that since childhood I have selected, developed, and expressed parts of my identity to optimise my sense of belonging in the eyes of my fellow countrymen. These characteristics include, for example, being an outdoorsman and avid salmon fisherman. This representation of myself likely developed as a response to being Othered at a young age by visible (curly hair; white but darker features) and (in)visible differences (language/culture). – Including frequently being asked, “Where are you *really* from?”

This intrusive curiosity from members of the majority population is a constant reminder that I may be excluded from the national fellowship and the assumption of citizenship. It is interesting that my Jewish physical features symbolise (racialised) difference, when Jews are an official national minority, representing an explicit connection to the Norwegian nation-state. During encounters with members of the majority population, I habitually insert unobtrusive examples, proving my cultural belonging to Norway. Once I have positioned myself as an ‘honorary’ Norwegian, I feel relieved. I have verified my existence and identity here.



## Stokmo

As my parents are white Scandinavians, one would assume that my citizenship wouldn't be the object of intrusive curiosity. This, however, is not the case as 1) my invisible difference of cultural belonging is comprehensive, and 2) my vowel pronunciation at times makes visible that Norwegian is my second language. This is why, when Dansholm asked if I would like to present my positionality to the students, I declined. This decision was made without much consideration, as it has been my standard (positioning) practice due to the social climate in Norway, which expects 'sameness' (Gullestad, 2006). Ordinary is 'safe' and a 'common' background makes it easier to be accepted. Thus, by positioning myself as ordinary and hiding my (in)visible difference, I avoid defending / proving my right to citizenship and belonging. This can be seen as my affective reaction to, for example, Jante's Law, where I have resigned myself to conforming rather than resisting. However, it is tiring to feel the need to consistently hide parts of myself.

## Findings and Analysis

In this section, we discuss the three schools, and the interplay of students' discussions and affective reactions alongside our, as researchers, affective reactions to the discussions. In previous articles, I (Dansholm) have explored various citizenship aspects of the data collected in these discussions (Dansholm, 2021, 2022a, 2022b), but in this section the focus is on retrospective reflection on positionality, (in)visible difference, and affective dimensions.

The group interviews at the first school (S1) were conducted in the autumn of 2019. Interviews at the second (S2) and third (S3) schools were held in the early spring of 2020. S1 therefore gave us our first empirical glimpse into youth perspectives on the topic. The groups sizes at S1 were bigger (eight students per group) and the atmosphere was lively, as if participating was a fun reprieve from regular classes. All the students in the class joined the interviews—even if they did not all participated in the conversations to the same degree. About thirty percent of the students in the class presented as visibly different, while in the interviews some students highlighted their own invisible differences.

Our first group interview at S1 with eight students included one non-white student with a white Norwegian parent and two white students from mixed families. The excerpt below shows them drawing on their own and their classmates' (in)visible differences in reacting to the television clip. It is interesting to note that, in contrast to the case of a non-white boy with a white Norwegian parent at S3 who was essentially invisible to or ignored by his classmates, the non-white student (who we will call Chris) in this group was drawn into the discussion by his classmates. In this S1 group, a white boy (who we will call Jon) from a mixed family took the lead with a normative stance, positing that (in)visible difference should be accepted, and that exclusion based on religion or physical appearance is racist. (Note: The students at S1 tended to talk over each other, and thus some utterances were not identifiable.)

**Dickstein** (in reference to the television clip): Okay. What do you think about that?

**Jon** (S1G1MwmVI): That quite a few Norwegians are racist. (laughs) Clearly.

**Student:** Yes.

**Dickstein:** Pardon me?

**Student:** It's true.

**Jon** (S1G1MwmVI): No, like, that you can't be Norwegian with a hijab, that's actually quite racist. That she [Jensen] didn't say that she's [Al-Hussaini] Norwegian just because... If you live in Norway and want to be Norwegian, then of course you will be allowed (skal få lov) to be Norwegian. [...] Because I'm... I'm half Dutch (anonymised), but I'm Norwegian because...

**S1G1FwI**: Aren't you a quarter Dutch?

**Jon** (S1G1MwmVI): What? No, I'm half Dutch.

**Student**: Oh, yes.

**S1G1MwII**: But Norway is a multicultural country and then... So that means that we should be able to believe in what we want as well.

**Student**: Yes.

**Jon** (S1G1MwhVI): It's actually a free country.

**S1G1FwI**: It's like, what you look like, it has absolutely nothing to do with what you look like.

**S1G1FwVIII**: Uhu. It's a free country, so you should... Like, Chris [S1G1MnwVII] is actually Norwegian, right?

**Chris** (S1G1MnwVII): Yes, I'm Norwegian.

This dialogue shows students drawing on their own positionality as they legitimise (in)visible difference as part of democratic citizenship, while they also invoke ideals of freedom and equality in articulating the idea that everyone is or can be Norwegian regardless of religion or visible difference. Jon (S1G1MwhVI) had been classified by his teacher as 'majority', and one of his classmates thought he was only a quarter 'foreign'. However, even if his difference remained largely invisible to those in his social circle, it clearly played an affective role in informing his perspective on the normative ideals of citizenship and belonging. Jon essentially argues that although he comes from a mixed family, he is accepted as Norwegian, and thus this option should be open to all, thereby setting a normative tone for the citizenship debate. His classmates build on this stance and highlight their non-white classmate ("Chris is Norwegian") to justify the discourse of equality and universality. Thus Chris, as a visibly different student who had remained figuratively invisible through silence, was drawn into the conversation by his classmates. Interestingly, while most of this dialogue segment focuses essentially on 'we are all the same' rhetoric and the democratically ideal society ("it's a free country"), the starting point was a social critique of Jensen's othering of Al-Hussaini in the television clip ("quite a few Norwegians are racist"). Thus, this segment highlights the conflict between the rhetoric of universalism and social reality, while the students' own positionalities play a central role in their argumentation.

The second group at S1 was the only group where a full half of the students represented the minority: non-white and white mixed students. In the following dialogue segment, the students also deliberate on Jensen's response to Al-Hussaini. As can be seen, they reflect not only on Al-Hussaini's hijab and whether this negates her national belonging, but also on duality, acceptance of duality as well as the injustice of prejudice and racism. The discussion shows students grappling with complex issues of racial and religious discrimination while affectively drawing on their own positionality to further explore personal identity.

**S1G2MnwVI:** But... Yes, what the girl [Al-Hussaini] was wondering was just a question that this lady [Jensen] could have answered yes or no. And... yeah.

**S1G2FnwIII:** But I think, for example, many of them who are, uh, Islam or believe in... have Mus... uh, Islam as a religion, they maybe think that... and they come to Norway, or something like that, maybe wonder, 'Will I be seen as Norwegian even though I wear the hijab or won't I?'

**S1G2MnwVI:** Hmm. I don't think or maybe it's more... I think they want to be seen as both, but maybe it's kind of... they think... they feel, like that society, for example, in Norway, can have, kind of pressures them towards being one part instead of both, so... Yes, and then they think that it's unfair and such, outside the rules, sort of.

**S1G2FnwIII:** They really just want to be themselves, but maybe people don't always accept that. – At least, within the society we live in today, with peer pressure and all that.

**S1G2MwIV:** It also has something to do with, like if, uh... There are many who, like, if they see someone with the hijab or something, then they wonder what country they come from. Maybe they don't consider them Norwegian, even if that is what they call themselves and what they actually are.

**S1G2FnwVII:** It's not just the hijab. If you have a different skin colour or don't look typically Norwegian, like, then they always wonder, like, yeah, what country they're from.

**S1G2MnwVI:** Yes, I think so too. Two years ago, there was an accident at my dad's work, and he was injured or something, and then it was... The company didn't want to support him through the process, like, even though he had a contract and everything, so then a lot of stuff happened and... Yes, but I think, like, if it had been a white person or a Norwegian (nordmann), then it would have been solved in one month. So much stress.

**S1G2FnwIII:** But it can also... What often happens, for example, for they... I have noticed also that, for example, I, for example, I was born in Kristiansand (anonymised) and I have grown up in Norway, but every time I meet a new person, then they always ask like, 'Where do you come from?' So, I answer, like, that I come from Kristiansand, but then they ask, like... they ask, 'No, but where do your parents come from?' And then I think a lot of us are like... very like, 'Yeah, where *do* I come from?' (laughs)

This segment shows students' affective reactions to discussion of citizenship belonging, drawing on their own visible difference, skin colour, to relate to another visible difference, the hijab as a sign of religious difference, with duality acting as a central feature of the discussion. The speech ticks in the comment about Muslims who wear hijab indicates that this student (S1G2FnwIII) was perhaps not accustomed to discussing issues of religious prejudice. However, the students go on to discuss their affective personal experiences with visible difference as young people of colour and thus they relate to Al-Hussaini's experience of being othered. The segment demonstrates complex deliberations on societal challenges, such as censure of duality ("pressure them towards being one part rather than both") which they describe as unfair. The discussion also

demonstrates the disconnect between citizenship ideals of fairness and justice versus the realities for those who suffer discrimination, whether in the workplace or those whose duality is not accepted due to having a different skin colour than the majority. It is also worth noting the validation demonstrated by the wording which one of the majority students (S1G2MwIV) uses in this segment, where he says that maybe people would not consider someone Norwegian, even if that is “what they actually are”. This stands in contrast to a comment (explored further later) where a majority student (S3G2FwII) at S3 described Al-Hussaini as “actually not totally Norwegian”. The last comment in this segment shows that intrusive curiosity can inflict insecurity and even delegitimise duality (“Yeah, where do I come from?”), while the comment, “They actually just want to be themselves”, highlights the importance of destigmatising difference and recognising or legitimising uniqueness.

At the second school (S2), the students were cooperative and participated, but the atmosphere in the interviews was subdued compared to the previous school and group sizes were smaller. In the presentation of our positionality, Dickstein elaborated on his participation in various Norwegian cultural traditions, such as fishing and hunting, while I (Dansholm) focused on my upbringing abroad and my Danish legal citizenship versus my Norwegian co-citizenship. The students’ initial comments after the television clip and presentation of our positionality were directed to us as responses; and while the effect of physical presence is outside the scope of this paper, in hindsight Dickstein’s presence as co-interviewer and presenting as visibly different seems to have influenced student reflections on (in)visible difference. Additionally, Dickstein presented his Norwegian-ness with a definiteness that I (Dansholm) had not anticipated, which according to this analysis, we understand as part of his affective resistance to the hegemonic discourse of sameness.

The following two dialogue excerpts are from S2, where all our informants were white, and group sizes ranged from five to six. However, some students self-identified proximity to difference which facilitated nuanced reflection on (in)visible difference. The main point of personal experience referenced by students at S2 is linguistic difference, as demonstrated by the following excerpt:

**S2G1FIII:** Umm, I have a stepfather from the U.S. and he came here, like, when he was about my age. Um, and I, he told me that it was quite difficult in the beginning because, um, for example, he was fluent in English, but the school wanted British [English], so he got worse grades for it. And it was difficult to, like, come into the Norwegian society because of all the norms we have. Um, but after a while people have, like, there are many who don’t realise he’s American at all. So, um, I feel that if you live here a long time, then people get used to you eventually. But I know it’s very difficult in the beginning. Uh, yeah.

This excerpt demonstrates that experiences with difference need not be confined to literal visible difference, nor personal experiences. This student had been identified by her teacher as a majority student (not from a mixed or multicultural family), however her proximity to difference acted as a resource in her reflection on citizenship, belonging, and discrimination. She highlights linguistic difference as a potential factor in discrimination, while she also acknowledges challenges which can arise due to cultural difference and the adjustment period for those with an Other background.

Later in the discussion with this S2 group, our positionality as researchers (Dansholm and Dickstein) was reflected on explicitly. The next dialogue segment was a response to the presentation of our positionality following the viewing of the television clip. Two students emphasised an idealised democratic individual identity as criteria for being Norwegian, while the same student who had reflected on her stepfather's linguistic and cultural experience with difference countered with a discussion of prejudice which can accompany both visible and linguistic difference.

**S2G1MI:** It's mostly about what you yourself feel. For example, uh, if you've grown up in Norway your whole life and what you yourself think, even if others think you're from a different place. So, it's more about the importance of what you yourself think, because there's no one else who knows better than you if you're Norwegian or not. It's more about whether you feel Norwegian inside. And at the same time, you have, for example, some parents from a different country, or something, but you've lived in Norway and are used to the Norwegian culture, so you're, like, as Norwegian as everyone else. – Even if maybe not everyone sees you that way, but that's just the way it is.

**Dansholm:** Uhu.

**S2G1FwV:** Yes, I also think that as long as you see yourself as Norwegian, then you're Norwegian, so long as you have, like, a small connection to it. If you just live in Norway, if you've just moved from another country to Norway and feel Norwegian already, then I think you're Norwegian. – So long as you feel it.

**Dansholm:** Yes. Something else? Yes?

**S2G1FwIII:** Uhm, I agree, but also, it's like, it's very easy to be influenced by others, how they see you. Like, at least I think that Norwegians are very, like, uhm, what should I say... judgemental, in a way, that they're a little like, if they see someone that doesn't look very Norwegian, then it's like that, uh, they can come with some, what's it called? Like, conclusions.

**Dansholm:** Yes.

**S2G1FwIII:** Um, uh, so like, for example, you, that like, they're not used to someone speaking such good English. That's because normally Norwegians, you notice they're Norwegian by the way they speak English. They have, like, a certain way. Um, and they think it's kind of strange that you are Norwegian but speak English very well. It's a little, like, in a way, a little scary. – And then they can easily judge you, and like. Yes.

This dialogue shows students responding to our positionality, beginning with a particular understanding of idealised democratic openness, where the first two students validated our Norwegian-ness by arguing that if we feel Norwegian, then we are Norwegian. While I (Dansholm) had originally understood this as a general response to our positionality, our later reflection led us to conclude that it was a response to Dickstein's definiteness about his Norwegian-ness. However, the third student, through her own affective experience with or proximity to difference, countered with a more nuanced understanding of social realities. It could be argued that her discussion of English as 'scary' resonates with ideas of Jante's Law, and the censure of standing out as different. Through her argument, she highlights the fact that other people's feelings—or societal

judgements—play an important role in issues of citizenship, belonging, and discrimination. This discussion therefore addresses an affective aspect central to issues of identity and belonging: the relationship and at times conflict between one's view of themselves and the viewpoint understood as the societal norm, particularly when differences are visible or linguistic.

At the third school (S3), the atmosphere was casual but not as lively as S1, and the group sizes ranged from three to five participants. However, the tone in the first interview at S3 was distinctive, as pronounced immigrants-as-threat sentiments were expressed (for more details, see Dansholm, 2021). Whether this is because Stokmo and I (Dansholm) present as visibly the same as the majority can only be speculated on.

An important recurring theme at S3 was visible difference, particularly in the first two groups. The following comment, made by one student after viewing the television clip and presentation of my (Dansholm) positionality, highlights visible difference in definitions of citizenship and belonging, while she also deliberates on the desires of the Other and endeavours to relate to experiences of discrimination.

**S3G1FI:** It's exactly the same as if we, like, make a trip to Turkey or something, where we're looked at more than, like, the others, I think. And... Like, that they notice you more. But it's also, it's like, if I had, like, seen someone with a hijab, then I would have thought she's not Norwegian, like, right away. But, like, it's maybe something that should be talked about a bit more, because maybe they don't want to be seen as different just because of a head covering. It's exactly the same as if I, like, wear a cap, and then would be, like, if people were saying I'm not Norwegian.

This comment demonstrates the student's understanding of visible difference as definitive, and she argues that stereotyping based on visible difference is a universal phenomenon. However, she also endeavours to empathise with those who have been Othered due to difference, trying to understand their feelings, and relates prejudice connected to the hijab to being discriminated against due to any type of head covering. Thus, while this student may not experience racial discrimination in her home country and does not necessarily grasp the power dimension connected to being part of the invisible majority, in this excerpt she utilises her experience of being seen as different while abroad as a reflection point in relating to difference and discrimination.

As we continued with the interviews at S3 and moved into the second group interview, I (Dansholm) found it increasingly uncomfortable that my linguistic and cultural difference was framed as acceptable while Al-Hussaini's (the host in the television clip) belonging was called into question due to her visible difference. Therefore, as the following dialogue segment shows, we explicated the differences and similarities between Al-Hussaini and myself (Dansholm) more clearly. While we had been prepared to engage in epistemic dialogue, this is the only time in the interviews that we explicitly challenged students' ideological stance as opposed to simply asking for clarification.

**S3G2FII:** Hmm, I know in a way it's difficult to explain because you don't think of her... like she's Norwegian because she speaks Norwegian, but she looks... and she doesn't look totally Norwegian. You see she has foreign features and... but it's true, in a way, that she is Norwegian, or she's actually not totally Norwegian, but she has Norwegian citizenship. So, it's actually hard to say if she is... yeah, I don't know.

**Dansholm:** Uhu. Other opinions or thoughts? Or just something that came to mind?  
(pause) What about me? (laughs) Am I... where do I fit in here?

**S3G2FwII:** You are half Norwegian, like, and half Danish. So, then you can be both. (laughs)

**Dansholm:** Yes, but what about that I don't have the same understanding of all the Norwegian norms that Faten (Al-Hussaini) has?

**S3G2FwI:** Umm. (pause)

**Stokmo:** I think you need to explain more (addressed to Dansholm). Because Faten (Al-Hussaini) has lived in Norway her whole life. So, she has acquired all the social norms and codes, but you haven't lived in Norway your whole life so you're missing a good deal in regards to social norms. (laughs)

**Dansholm:** (laughs) Sorry. I hope I haven't done something wrong here. But you understand the difference that I'm trying to point out, about understanding of Norwegian norms.

**S3G2FwII:** But are both her parents foreign?

**Stokmo:** It looks like it.

**S3G2FwII:** Yes. It's... also she has more, in a way, experience from Norway than you have because she's lived here her whole life. But you are more Norwegian than her because you have... you're in fact half Norwegian. And you have Danish citizenship or a Danish passport, so you are... aren't you a Danish citizen?

**Dansholm:** Yes.

**S3G2FwII:** And she is... yes.

**Dansholm:** She has Norwegian citizenship.

**S3G2FwI:** Yes, if she has Norwegian... doesn't she have that? Norwegian citizenship?

**S3G2FwII:** Yes.

**Stokmo:** Yes.

**S3G2FwII:** And she has more experience because she has lived in the country and grown up and... yes, her whole life has been Norwegian in a way. So, uh, yeah.

In this dialogue segment, the students acknowledged Al-Hussaini's belonging due to her linguistic similarity, while they questioned it due to her visible difference. Thus, while linguistic similarity played a role in ascribing belonging, visible difference was posited as the most important factor—more so than citizenship. This othering of someone (Al-Hussaini, who notably was not physically present) due to visible difference elicited an affective reaction in me (Dansholm) and I tried to challenge or resist this discourse. Stokmo, while maintaining an invisibility around her own difference, responded to my affective reaction and was able to assist in calling into question the importance of visible difference (and its connection to white lineage) in understandings of citizenship and belonging. We (Dansholm and Stokmo) therefore drew on my (Dansholm) positionality, explicitly highlighting my invisible (cultural) difference. In this way, my (Dansholm) difference was leveraged to create space for an understanding of citizenship not anchored in

whiteness. As the dialogue likely suggests, it felt awkward to place my positionality at the centre of the discussion, since I had hoped that presenting my positionality after the viewing of the television clip would have been enough to foster understanding of different relationships to citizenship and belonging. However, while it was temporarily discomfiting, I would argue that by being willing to be uncomfortable, Stokmo and I (Dansholm) acted as allies to Al-Hussaini, advocating the idea that there are numerous ways of being different—which need not equate to otherness.

It is interesting to note that the tone of the last S3 group interview which followed the lunch break was markedly different, with extended reflection on how minorities and refugees may suffer psychologically from experiences of discrimination (see Dansholm, 2021). It can only be speculated on whether my (Dansholm) affective resistance in making my own difference visible was reflected on by the students during lunch. What is clear is that difference plays an important role in narratives of othering, even where citizenship is a factor, while reflecting on one's own experiences with difference can be a useful resource in citizenship education discussions exploring belonging and discrimination.

### **Concluding Discussion**

These findings, while empirically limited to the Norwegian context and our positionally-influenced analysis, offer several points for reflection which could benefit citizenship education practitioners internationally. One positive takeaway is that positionality and experiences with (in)visible difference have the potential to elicit an affective investment from the majority population toward minority well-being. As shown, the findings demonstrate variety in participants' reflections: namely, students reflecting on their own positionality, students reflecting on our positionality as researchers, and us as researchers reflecting on our positionality, and affectively leveraging that positionality to advocate for a view of citizenship which recognises and legitimises difference.

In the context of the three different schools, it could be speculated that our (in)visible and linguistic difference as researchers served a different purpose in each one. In the school (S1) with more visible diversity among the student body, our implicit differences may have contributed to the feeling of a safe space for difference to be articulated. In the second school (S2), our difference—particularly Dickstein's visible difference—elicited reflection on their own experience with and proximity to difference. In the last school (S3), Dansholm's invisible difference had to be actively highlighted in order to challenge the rhetoric of the Other as not one of us. Thus, while the way in which positionality and difference were made visible in each school varied, it is clear they played a central role in discussions of citizenship, belonging, and discrimination—even while the 'normal' positionality of majority students remained largely invisible.

Citizenship education practitioners should also consider the potentially conflictual narratives implicitly evoked in discussions of citizenship and belonging, such as the tension between the ideals of democratic citizenship and notions of universalism versus societal realities and discriminatory rhetoric on the Other. The group interviews demonstrate a correlation between students' utilisation of narratives and their own positionality and experiences with difference. Those with strong identifications with or proximity to difference showed themselves to be acutely aware of the injustices of society while also evoking the normative ideals of democracy, justice, and universalism. On the other hand, students with perhaps less awareness of their own positionality and uniqueness approached the issue in two different ways: either glossing over social



realities to claim democratic ideals, such as those who said whether we ‘feel’ Norwegian is all that matters; or upholding the rhetoric of othering non-whiteness, such as those who said Al-Hussaini was not ‘really’ Norwegian.

These group interviews and our informants’ affective reactions to discourses of othering and depreciation of difference led us as researchers to reflect on our own experiences and ask: If we, as cishet whites, whose claims of belonging are generally legitimised by white Norwegians once their ‘intrusive curiosity’ has been satisfied, struggle in this regard, how much more challenging is it for non-white and minority persons and groups who are Othered due to greater (in)visible difference? This seems to imply that an alternate approach to difference is needed, and we would argue that explicitly highlighting positionality and (in)visible difference has the potential to contribute to the objectives of democratic citizenship education. Here we highlight the *potential*, as Zembylas (2021) shows that affect is also being utilised by right-wing populist movements to garner support through fear and misinformation. He highlights racism, arguing that “the feeling of intimate proximity toward some bodies and the distance from others (Ahmed, 2004) – is racialized” (Zembylas, 2021, p. 180). Thus, the question is whether discourses of racialisation can be challenged through our own proximity to difference as well as an acknowledgment of the difference inherent in us all.

As Arendt [1958] writes, “each [wo]man is unique, so that with each birth something uniquely new comes into the world” (Arendt, 1998, p. 178). This highlights the fact that majority individuals are each unique as well and have differences within, which have the potential to be used as a resource in their enactment of citizenship. Zembylas (2022) draws on Wynter to argue that universalistic conceptualisations which lack acknowledgement of racialisation and legacies of coloniality are problematic. “What we need theoretically and politically are accounts which recognize that we are hybrid beings rather than either biological or social subjects (Wynter & McKittrick, 2015)” (Zembylas, 2022, p. 342).

Arendt [1958], however, acknowledged that there are risks involved: “Although nobody knows whom he reveals when he discloses himself in deed or word, he must be willing to risk the disclosure” (1998, p. 180). This may entail a vulnerability in disclosing our uniqueness. Zembylas argues that “this task needs to provoke educators’ and students’ abilities to expand their affective ties with(in) the world in which they live (Desai & Sanya, 2016)” (Zembylas, 2022, p. 347). Thus, the pedagogical implication which might be derived from these findings is that this risk is the discomfort of acknowledging difference, and that it is something which must be embraced. Our co-citizen educators of colour in white majority countries bear these risks on their body, and due to their profession are not afforded the luxury of silence (c.f. Burner & Osler, 2021; Kim, 2021). Thus, Arendt’s ‘disclosure’ is not just a risk, but rather is a daily reality for those with literal visible differences who carry that risk on their body, while white members of the majority have the ability to cloak themselves in figurative invisibility. But what is contributed through such silence? Is it not incumbent on us as white researchers and educators in white majority countries to challenge perceptions of homogeneity by taking the risk of making visible our own uniqueness and difference in order to be allies? – And thereby, rather than a threat, highlight difference as both ubiquitous and a resource.

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