

Silencing the Indigenous Perspective in the Textbook Accounts of Norwegian Migration to America

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ABSTRACT

The historiography of Norwegian migration to North America in the 19th and early 20th centuries had, until recently, largely ignored its impact on indigenous people. Taking as a point of departure the presentations of migration to America in Norwegian lower and upper secondary school textbooks in social studies and history, this article demonstrates that the displacement of Native Americans is mostly absent in these presentations, and almost none of the textbooks discuss it in terms of settler colonialism. Such a narrative sustains the perception of North America as a sparsely inhabited continent with enough space for everyone and ultimately justifies Europeans' right to claim possession of the land. Given that the consequences of settler colonialism continue to persist to the present day, I argue that ignoring the fact that Norwegian migrants were also settlers reproduces historical power relations and oppressive epistemologies. Aligned with the view that history education based on a single master narrative hinders critical thinking, this article contends that there is a need to decolonize the teaching of Norwegian migration to America by incorporating the perspective of Native Americans.

Keywords: *Norwegian exceptionalism; coloniality; settler colonialism; migration to America; textbook analysis; multiperspectivity; critical thinking*

Received: September, 2023; Accepted: February, 2023; Published: March, 2023

Introduction

In 1891, the Leif Erikson Memorial Association in Chicago, an organization established by Norwegian Americans, invited painters to participate in a contest to depict Leif Erikson's discovery of America¹ (Wirth, 2023). Norwegian artist Christian

¹ Leif Erikson was a Norse explorer who is believed to have been the first European to set foot on continental North America, around the year 1000.

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Citation: Stachurska-Kounta, M. (2024). *Silencing the Indigenous Perspective in the Textbook Accounts of Norwegian Migration to America*. Nordisk tidsskrift for pedagogikk og kritikk. Special Issue on Education and Coloniality in the Nordics, 10(3), 158–175. <http://doi.org/10.23865/ntpk.v10.5416>

Krogh's painting *Leiv Eiriksson Discovering America* won the competition and was subsequently exhibited in the Norway Pavilion at the 1893 World's Fair, held in Chicago to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's arrival in the New World. By including the award-winning painting, the Norwegian organizers intended to emphasize that Scandinavians were the first to "discover" America. The intention behind this was clearly to enhance the image of Scandinavian immigrants, but the message also conveyed the notion of an inherent right to the land which trumped the rights of Native Americans.

In February 2023, Krogh's painting became the center of a controversy when the department director at the Norwegian National Museum, while explaining its removal from the main exhibition, referred to it as "a romanticization of Norwegians who went to America" and "a colonialist image" (Borud, 2023). The statement sparked a strong reaction in the Norwegian public opinion, with accusations that the director had cancelled the artwork due to its association with colonialism. What is relevant in this context is that many critics appeared to overlook the historical background of the painting. Instead, they dismissed linking Leif Erikson's expedition with the later colonization of America, considering such a claim as absurd and ahistorical (Pedersen & NTB, 2023; Sundby et al., 2023). The ensuing public debate revealed a significant lack of understanding in Norwegian society regarding the connection between Norwegian migration to America and the displacement and elimination of Native Americans during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Drawing upon fourteen Norwegian textbook series in social studies and history published in recent years by four leading educational publishers, this article explores the textbook presentations of Norwegian emigration to America in the 19th century. The reason for including textbooks from both lower and upper secondary school was to shed light on the predominant narratives about Norwegian overseas emigration in school teaching in Norway and to investigate to what extent the textbooks include the perspectives of Native Americans. The article begins with the historical background, followed by a theoretical reflection on the relevance of the term "settler colonialism" in relation to Norwegian emigration to America. I find it necessary to outline the essential points of reference for the analysis since this history is not widely known in the Norwegian public sphere, as demonstrated in the debate about the coloniality of Krogh's painting. In this regard, by examining Norwegian emigration to America through the lens of settler colonialism, the article addresses a gap in the analysis of presentations of colonialism in Norwegian textbooks. Previous studies have primarily concentrated on textbook depictions of colonialism, understood solely as the conquest and control exercised by European colonial powers over overseas territories (Aamotsbakken, 2008; Torjussen, 2018). Notably, no textbook analyses of the presentations of 19th century overseas emigration to America in terms of settler colonialism have been conducted in other Nordic countries either.

The analysis reveals that the textbooks primarily situate Norwegian migration within the national context and fail to establish a link to the history of the conquest

of America. Drawing on post- and decolonial perspectives, I argue that the omission of Native Americans and the silencing of Norwegian involvement in settler colonialism should be seen as a manifestation of a popular perception of Norway being untouched by colonial legacies. This perception has been a part of a broader Nordic sense of exceptionalism rooted in the image of the Nordic countries as global champions of democracy, peace building and human rights, as well as advocates of egalitarian social structures and cultural values (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012).

In the last section, I discuss the implications of this epistemological absence for developing critical thinking skills within history education. Referring to the concept of multiperspectivity as a way of viewing historical events and processes from different perspectives (Stradling, 2003), I argue that a focus on critical thinking in history education cannot be limited solely to source-critical awareness but also needs to include critical reflections on the prevailing historical narratives.

Norwegian migration to America

Scholars estimate that between the 1830s and the 1930s approximately 800,000 Norwegians emigrated from Norway, with the majority settling in North America, mostly in the United States (Myhre, 2015; Østrem, 2014). Parallel to this, during the 19th century, the territorial expansion of the United States resulted in the growth of its continental territory from the original thirteen states to its present form. This expansion, which opened up for migrant settlement, occurred through the removal, relocation, destruction of ways of life and genocide of the indigenous population.

In 1838, writing about potential hazards “from wild animals and the Indians” in a popular guidebook for emigrating Norwegians, *A True Account of America*, Ole Rynning reassured readers that “The Indians have now been transported away from this part of the country far to the west” (Rynning, 1926, p. 91). This information was evidently crucial, as Norwegian migrants typically sought to settle in remote rural areas, away from larger cities or urban centers (Joranger, 2016). Rynning, who had spent some time in America and wrote the guidebook based on his own experience, referred to the situation in Illinois, where many newcomers from Norway settled in the 1830s. At that time, there were hardly any Native Americans left in the state, as the federal policy was focused on pushing them west of the Mississippi River.

With a continuous influx of newcomers from Europe and the eastern states, there was an ongoing demand for new cheap and fertile land. The Upper Midwest, with its fertile lands, was especially attractive for land-seeking Scandinavian and German settlers. From the 1830s on, Norwegian immigrants began to move to new areas within this region, first to Wisconsin, then to Iowa and Minnesota in the 1850s, and eventually to Dakota in the 1870s. These territories were the ancestral home of tribes belonging to the People of the Seven Council Fires, also known as the Sioux. It is also worth noting that many tribes which had been displaced earlier from areas east of the Mississippi River ended up there.

At the beginning of Norwegian organized emigration, those who emigrated were often prosperous farmers, while small farmers and crofters followed later. In this regard, the Homestead Act of 1862 played a significant role in encouraging and facilitating settlement beyond the Mississippi River. It enabled any adult who had never fought against the US Government to obtain 160 acres (65 hectares) of unappropriated public land upon payment of a nominal filing fee and a commitment to cultivate the land and construct a dwelling (Bergland, 2000; Joranger, 2016). This was followed by the General Allotment Act of 1887 (also known as the Dawes Act), which broke up reservation land into small allotments for individual ownership. This policy not only ended the Native American communal holding of property but also opened up surplus land to white settlers, resulting in many Native Americans becoming landless (Hansen, 2013). Given the predominantly rural nature of Norwegian migration during that period and the simultaneous increase in migration from Norway, the Upper Midwest region became the primary settlement area for most Norwegian migrants.

The rapid settlement of the region through homesteading inevitably led to interactions between Norwegian settlers and the indigenous population. In the Upper Midwest and beyond, they witnessed, actively participated in, and were the reasons for breaking apart and displacing the indigenous population. Accounts of the encounters between Norwegian immigrants and Native Americans exist in the form of letters, memoirs, and newspaper articles. While some are based on personal experiences, many also reflect prevailing biased attitudes towards the indigenous population (Bergland, 2000; Joranger, 2016; Øverland, 2006). Scholars attribute this to a process of ethnicization of Norwegian immigrants towards becoming members of American society, as well as a transmission and adaptation of racial attitudes prevalent in Norway towards the Sami people (Fur, 2016). While the early Norwegian accounts often depicted Native Americans as primitive but friendly, Norwegian immigrants did not treat them as equals but rather as a part of the landscape (Bergland, 2000). This changed following an armed rebellion of the Dakota tribe in 1862, which took place in Minnesota, an area many Norwegian migrants chose to settle in. The Dakota War (previously called the Sioux Uprising) had a significant effect on Norwegian perceptions of Native Americans, as it etched an image of Native Americans as savages who attacked innocent civilians (Fur, 2014).

Despite the fact that Norwegian migration to the United States occurred simultaneously with the displacement of Native Americans, historical analysis has only recently started to explore the connections between these two phenomena (Bergland, 2000, 2021; Fur, 2014; Joranger, 2016; Øverland, 2006). One of the reasons why Native Americans have been written out of the history of immigration to the United States is that they are largely omitted from the history of nation building in the United States (Fur, 2014). This omission is notable given the 19th century westward expansion and settlement encompassing one of the defining periods of American national identity. Another explanation for relegating Native Americans to the margins

of historical accounts concerns the “empty land theory” (Bergland, 2021; Fur, 2014). The theory can be seen as both a myth propagated by white settlers to support their claim to land and as a form of suppressing ethical qualms related to the fate of the North American tribes. Settlers would rationalize their land-taking either by pointing out that indigenous people had been removed earlier and accordingly they were occupying unclaimed land, or through arguments referring to the superior civilization they represented and the inevitably tragic fate of tribal life.

For many decades migration historians did not challenge this absence. Notably, Norwegian historiography has traditionally used the term “Norwegian emigration to America” in this context, mostly concentrating on the reasons why Norwegians left their home country. As a result, Native Americans are rendered almost invisible in the history of Norwegian migration to America. Taking into consideration that Norwegian migration to America during the 19th and early 20th centuries played a crucial role in mitigating overcrowding and poverty in rural communities in Norway and constitutes an important part of the history of Norwegian nation building, the link between Norwegian history and North American tribal histories cannot be ignored (Bergland, 2000).

Theoretical perspectives on settler colonialism

The idealized depiction of European immigrants as pioneers in search of a new life often obscures the fact that the mass settler migration to the US in the 19th century was backed by violence. This expansion was rationalized by a popular, albeit contested, concept of Manifest Destiny, coined in the 1840s, asserting that American settlers were destined to expand westward. The US western settlement serves as an example of settler colonialism, characterized as a process of driving “indigenous populations from the land in order to construct their [settlers’] own ethnic and religious national communities” (Hixson, 2013, p. 4). Although the term is rooted in the concept of colonialism, there exists a fundamental distinction between settler colonialism and traditional colonialism. While colonialism focuses on exploiting the indigenous population for economic benefit, settler colonialism strives to remove them from the colonial space (Hixson, 2013; Veracini, 2010). Accordingly, given that indigenous people are perceived as hindrances to settlers’ access to land, settler colonialism is inherently premised on the logic of elimination (Wolfe, 2006). Its objective is to disintegrate native societies to pave the way for a new colonial society established on the expropriated land base.

The question at hand pertains to whether Norwegian migrants can be classified as colonial settlers and, as such, complicit in the politics of the elimination of Native Americans. As articulated by Mahmood Mamdani, settlers differ from ordinary migrants due to the manner in which they come into being; settlers “are made by conquest, not just by immigration” (Mamdani cited in Veracini, 2010, p. 3). Veracini extends this argument by asserting that settler colonialism should be seen

as structurally distinct from migration since settlers are “*founders* of political orders,” whereas migrants can be perceived as “*appellants* facing a political order that is already constituted” (Veracini, 2010, p. 3).

Despite the apparent contradiction between migrants and settlers, my claim is that Norwegian migrants to America during the 19th and early 20th centuries can be viewed as both migrants and settlers. First of all, Norwegian migrants were coming to a country and a nation that was in the process of development. This situation persisted at least until 1912, marked by the admission of New Mexico and Arizona, the last two contiguous territories, as states, culminating the US westward expansion in mainland North America. Consequently, even though Norwegians who arrived in the US can be considered migrants as they came to an established society where they encountered an existing political order, most of them eventually transitioned into settlers by virtue of moving further westwards and settling in the areas that were still inhabited or had recently been acquired from Native Americans. It is arguable that this holds particularly true for Norwegians who settled west of the Mississippi River following the enactment of the Homestead Act of 1862, as their land acquisition directly contributed to the displacement and dissolution of the indigenous tribes residing in these areas.

Secondly, although Norwegian immigrants were often concerned with preserving ethnic and cultural traditions, and over time their ethnicity became a more prevalent and visible marker of identity, the construction of a white identity positioned them as privileged in America’s social hierarchy, even if they also experienced othering in the process of assimilation (Sverdljuk et al., 2021). Betty Bergland (2021, p. 29) interprets the whiteness of Norwegian immigrants as “epistemological ignorance,” suggesting that they seemingly did not reflect upon their status as settlers in the land-taking process and that they were actively participating in the removal of the indigenous population. It is beyond the scope of this article to assert the extent to which Norwegian settlers were, in fact, guilty of acquiring and holding land that had previously been inhabited by Native Americans. Is it possible to determine if they were less guilty than Anglo-Saxon farmers who settled on the American prairies at the same time? As Bergland further argues, Norwegian immigrants generally consented to the racial contract and their “whiteness provided the key to land possession, citizenship, and opportunity” (2021, p. 29). This had a special bearing in a settler-colonial setting where Norwegian immigrants, due to their whiteness, were in a privileged position. In interactions with Native Americans, they were thus primarily perceived as white settlers, not immigrants.

Finally, we cannot overlook the subsequent efforts of the Norwegian immigrants’ intellectual elite to advance their unique position through invoking Leif Erikson’s “discovery of America.” This made Norwegians reluctant to view themselves as ordinary immigrants, instead bolstering their image as holders of inherent rights to the land, at least as much entitled as Americans of British descent. According to Orm Øverland, these efforts need to be understood in the context of “homemaking

myths,” which immigrant groups construct to demonstrate why they should not be considered foreign (Øverland, 2000, p. 8).

As settler colonialism typically unfolds in association with nation building (Hixson, 2013), its transnational character in the North American borderlands can also be viewed as a crucial catalyst in absorbing European immigrants into American society. In 1893, at a special meeting of the American Historical Association at the Chicago World’s Fair, the same venue that featured Krogh’s painting *Leiv Eiriksson Discovering America* (1893), historian Frederick Jackson Turner put forth an argument about how the American frontier, commonly referred to as the Wild West, shaped the American culture and character. Through his Frontier Thesis, which emphasized the notion of providential destiny, Turner justified the expansionist attitude inevitably premised on the elimination of Native Americans. In the coming decades, the Frontier Thesis became a highly popular and influential interpretation of the origins of the distinct American identity (Hixson, 2013). In this regard, it is possible to argue that the US settler-colonial policy not only provided an opportunity for Norwegian immigrants to obtain free or nearly free land but also enabled them to embody the quintessence of the American character and manifest their American identity through their participation in settler-colonial expansion in the North American borderlands.

Textbook representations of Norwegian migration to America

The article draws on textbooks spanning the years 2006 to 2022, produced by four leading Norwegian publishing houses: Aschehoug, Gyldendal, Cappelen Damm, and Fagbokforlaget.² Among the examined textbooks, eight were written for social studies education in lower secondary school. Four of them – *Arena*, *Relevans*, *Samfunnsfag* and *Aktør* – are aligned with the 2020 curriculum reform. *Aktør* stands out as the sole fully digitalized textbook included in this analysis. *Matriks*, *Nye makt og menneske*, *Underveis* and *Kosmos* represent the older editions within this category. The remaining six textbooks are intended for history education in upper secondary school. Among these, only *Grunnbok i historie* emerges as an entirely new edition, whereas *Alle tiders historie* and *Perspektiver* are newly revised editions. *Portal*, *Tidslinjer* and *Historie*, constituting the remaining trio, are the older editions released prior to the 2020 curriculum reform.

The primary focus of the analysis has been on textbooks aligned with the 2020 curriculum reform. However, for comparative purposes, I have also chosen to include textbooks released following the preceding reform in 2006. In Norway, there is no centralized state-controlled textbook certification process, leaving each school with the autonomy to determine their materials. The primary criterion for selection is the degree to which the textbooks align with the national curriculum guidelines. Nevertheless, due to financial constraints, many schools find themselves compelled

² Formerly Det Norske Samlaget.

to utilize older editions parallel to a new curriculum. Therefore, another rationale for including textbooks published prior to 2020 is that, as of writing this article, they are still in use.

In my analysis, I have endeavored to describe and compare presentations of Norwegian migration to America and the treatment of Native Americans during the 19th century, addressing three research questions. The first question explores the overarching topic under which Norwegian migration is discussed. Is it primarily viewed within the context of Norwegian history or is it positioned within the realm of global or international history? The second question focuses on specific events referred to in the texts regarding Norwegian migration to America. The third question explores whether the textbooks consider the impact of Norwegian migration on the indigenous population. Do the chapters on Norwegian migration to North America make any references to Native Americans and, if so, how are they portrayed or discussed?

To address these research questions, the article analyzes chapters that discuss Norwegian emigration to America. Additionally, I have examined chapters dealing with the treatment of the American indigenous population during the 19th century to ascertain the extent to which the descriptions of these two topics are interconnected. Given that this article looks at textbooks as bearers of historical narratives, the primary focus lies on the textual representations of Norwegian emigration to America and the narratives they sustain. However, I opted to include pictures and assignments from the examined chapters as these supplementary components often provide essential context that impacts on how we read the text.

The analysis reveals that Norwegian migration to America in the 19th century is represented across all the consulted sets of teaching materials. However, the extent of coverage varies, ranging from just a few sentences to three pages. This difference can be attributed to the transition from lower to upper grades and the fact that history is just one of the subject areas within social studies in lower secondary school, receiving comparatively less emphasis. In general, social studies textbooks typically provide only a brief mention of Norwegian overseas emigration, whereas history textbooks delve into the topic more extensively.

While the current subject curricula lack specific competence aims addressing this topic, it can be connected to the broader competence aims related to migration and demographic patterns. In this regard, it is noteworthy that all the new social studies textbooks feature passages on Norwegian emigration to America. Compared to the previous social studies curriculum, the new competence aims are formulated in more general terms and, with a few exceptions, do not specify particular historical events. Instead, they encourage students to reflect on how the past influences contemporary political and social issues on a broader scale. The inclusion of Norwegian migration to America in the 19th century in all the newly published textbooks, despite this shift, indicates that knowledge about this topic continues to be considered socially relevant.

Emigration to America as a part of national history

For the most part, Norwegian emigration to America is discussed in the textbooks as a part of the narrative concerning economic and societal development in Norway in the 1800s. It is mainly connected to the process of industrialization and the demographic transition that occurred in Norwegian society during the 19th century, although *Relevans 8* provides a longer historical view and links it to Norway's transition from poverty to affluence (Heidenreich & Moe, 2020). Consequently, Norwegian emigration to America is examined in relation to push and pull factors, which are believed to have influenced the decisions of many Norwegians from rural areas to move across the Atlantic and “seek their fortune in the US” (Bredahl et al., 2022a, p. 101; cf. Hellerud et al., 2020, p. 73). Among the push factors, the main focus is on population growth, land shortage and poverty. Additionally, some of the textbooks emphasize the unique Norwegian adventurous spirit, which is linked to better access to education and higher literacy that supposedly made people more interested in exploring the world beyond Norway. As the primary pull factor, the textbooks mention the perception of America as the land of freedom and opportunity, offering cheap or even free land.

The predominance of the Norwegian perspective in the textual representations of Norwegian emigration to America in the 19th century can be attributed to the traditional role of history textbooks in embodying the nation's history. Reflecting on the politics of memory in the context of school education, Fuchs and Otto (2013) highlight two ways that schools in general, and the educational media in particular, have a bearing on the assertion of national identity and on competing or conflicting memories within societies. The first concerns the textbooks' function in expressing the self-image of the nation-state, which is manifested in the history of the nation that students are expected to learn. The second is related to the textbooks' role in creating a collective identity, which is defined in relation to the rest of the world and others.

While some textbooks also draw connections between demographic and industrial changes in Norway and their parallel developments in Europe, two of the history textbooks for upper secondary school provide a more extensive context for Norwegian emigration to America. One notable example is *Portal*, which dedicates a separate chapter to the broader European migration flows towards “overseas countries with white populations” (Abrahamsen et al., 2007, p. 72). Although by referring to “the white population explosion” in the 19th century the chapter potentially opens for addressing the fate of indigenous peoples in the receiving countries, its primary focus is on the rapid industrialization of these countries. In contrast, *Grunnbok i historie* stands out by extending a perspective on European migration to America in the 19th to include cultural encounters between different ethnic immigrant groups and the treatment of the indigenous population in the US (Faust et al., 2021). This perspective reflects one of the competency goals outlined in the new history curriculum for upper secondary school, emphasizing that students should be able to “discuss

cultural encounters as seen from different perspectives” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019b).

While for a long time there has been a growing recognition that multiperspectival history teaching has the ability to disturb the exclusive and ethnocentric character of the national narrative, the scope for multiperspectivity in textbook accounts often revolves around limiting factors such as space, cost, scope, and the degree of flexibility within the curriculum (Stradling, 2003). Subsequently, one could argue that history textbooks designed for upper secondary school permit the introduction of more layers and perspectives into the historical account compared to social studies textbooks intended for lower secondary school. However, the analysis reveals that only the most recently published history textbook, *Grunnbok i historie* (Faust et al., 2021), goes beyond an exclusively Norwegian and Eurocentric perspective when discussing Norwegian overseas migration, and presents the point of view of the indigenous population on European settlement in the US. On the one hand, this may indicate a growing awareness of the necessity to challenge traditional historical narratives. Nevertheless, the fact that the national and Eurocentric perspective continues to dominate accounts of Norwegian emigration to America in the 19th century in all newly published social studies textbooks points to a need to search for methods to translate complex historical processes into tangible narratives, ensuring accessibility for younger learners while at the same time acknowledging different perspectives on the past. Multiperspectivity, which aims at a more complete picture to ensure a fairer historical account (Stradling, 2003), cannot be confined to higher education levels. Notably, the significance of the multiperspectivity approach is seemingly endorsed by the new social studies curriculum, which emphasizes that “the pupils shall learn to think critically, [and] consider different perspectives” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2019a).

Highlighting the significance of the Homestead Act

Almost all the chapters dealing with Norwegian emigration to America mention the Homestead Act of 1862, which appears to be central to help students understand why many Norwegians chose to move to America and settle there. The prevailing view in the textbooks is that the Homestead Act, designed to encourage and facilitate settlement beyond the Mississippi River, presented a unique opportunity for numerous Norwegian small farmers and crofters who would not have had such prospects back home.

Among the examined textbooks, only four provide an additional perspective, highlighting the impact of the Act on the indigenous population. One example is *Arena 8* (Hellerud et al., 2020). In a separate section titled “Did you know?” students may read that “For Native Americans, the Homestead Act was a disaster, and they were displaced from the land they had lived on for thousands of years” (p. 73). Although the information is not part of the main text, its inclusion potentially allows students to reflect on the contribution of Norwegian settlers to the displacement of

Native Americans. Similarly, the other three textbooks – *Aktør*, *Portal*, and *Grunnbok i historie* – each include a sentence stressing that the Homestead Act was part of the eradication of the indigenous population, aiming to ensure their displacement. Only *Grunnbok i historie* (Faust et al., 2021) has an assignment asking explicitly about the Homestead Act's impact on the American indigenous population (p. 279). Among these four textbooks, two are intended for history teaching in upper secondary school, and two for social studies in lower secondary school. Only one, *Portal*, was published before 2020.

Nevertheless, none of these textbooks discuss the involvement of Norwegian settlers. Instead, they draw attention to the detrimental consequences of US federal policy and, consequently, undermine the settlers' independent role in advocating for the reduction of reservations and the displacement of Native American tribes from their land. While it is praiseworthy that the authors mention the impact of US federal policy on the indigenous population, it is not guaranteed that classroom discussions will delve into the role of Norwegian settlers. The overall impression is, therefore, that while these four textbooks distinguish themselves by offering a more nuanced presentation of the consequences of Norwegian overseas emigration, the passages linking the Homestead Act (1862) and the elimination of the indigenous population do not substantially disturb the established historical narrative that ignores the Norwegian immigrants' involvement.

Epistemological absence of Native Americans

It is noteworthy that in most of the textbook accounts of Norwegian emigration to America, Native Americans are scarcely mentioned. Their absence is somehow reminiscent of the silence of the letters of Norwegian emigrants, which, according to Orm Øverland, “reflects the invisibility of people who were uncomfortable reminders of the ethical ambiguities of immigrant homemaking” (Øverland, 2009, cited in Fur, 2014, p. 68). Apart from the four textbooks that provide an additional perspective on the impact of the Homestead Act (1862), only one other textbook explicitly links Norwegian immigrants to Native Americans. Emphasizing the difficulties they faced in America and the reasons why many of them decided to return to Norway, *Alle tiders historie* (Moum et al., 2020) explains, “Some struggled with poor soil, others contracted diseases or got into conflicts with Indians [sic]” (p. 377). This sentence is revealing in several ways. Firstly, it is striking that a textbook published in 2020 still uses the term “Indians”, which is now considered an outdated and inappropriate name for the indigenous people of America. While this might be an unintended consequence influenced by representations in older textbooks, the use of such a term implicitly positions the indigenous people as inferior to the white explorers. Another issue is that Native Americans are presented as mere obstacles for Norwegian settlers, akin to poor soil and infectious diseases, thereby denying them their subjectivity and humanity. Interestingly, this portrayal of Native Americans evokes the way they were depicted in Ole Rynning's guidebook (1926), as well as in letters sent home by

Norwegian emigrants, where they were often depicted as part of the landscape. As a result, the language used in this sentence seems to perpetuate the oppressive epistemology that was prevalent during the conquest and settlement of Native American lands.

A similar, albeit more implicit, example of this phenomenon can be found in *Portal* (Abrahamsen et al., 2007), where an old postcard from 1912 illustrating the railway to California in Apache Canyon, New Mexico, is meant to showcase the connection between mass emigration to the USA and rapid industrialization (p. 73). In the foreground of the postcard, there is a Native American person looking towards the camera. Yet, the accompanying text only refers to the opening of America's first trans-continental railroad in 1869, completely overlooking the presence of the portrayed Native American individual. This construction was considered one of the greatest technological achievements of its time, and it facilitated the settlement of vast regions of the North American heartland. The "present absence" of the Native American, to use Kathryn W. Shanley's words (cited in Fur, 2014, p. 59), juxtaposed against the emphasis on technological progress and westward expansion somehow encapsulates the silence about the indigenous population in textbook narratives concerning Norwegian emigration to America.

Even though the numerous conflicts between settlers and the indigenous population are unaddressed in chapters covering Norwegian emigration to America in the 19th century, *Samfunnsfag 10* (Bredahl et al., 2022b) and *Aktør* (Dybvig et al., 2020) have separate chapters on the indigenous people in countries colonized by Europeans. Nonetheless, while *Samfunnsfag 10* (Bredahl et al., 2022b) highlights the tragic fate of the indigenous population in North America and encourages students to reflect on why Native Americans prefer not to be called Indians, it fails to establish any connection to Norwegian settlers. Instead, the focus is on the English as the first Europeans in North America, who "could often settle in ways that made the indigenous people feel threatened" (Bredahl et al., 2022b, p. 110). The chapter also mentions the Trail of Tears, an ethnic cleansing and forced displacement of Native American tribes from the Southeastern United States to the designated Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River, which happened in the wake of the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. Although the policy of removal took place parallel to the growing influx of European immigration and was a crucial factor in facilitating Norwegian settlement in North America, the textbook does not acknowledge the interrelation between these historical phenomena.

This discussion could have provided an opportunity to reflect on Norwegian complicity, but instead, the blame is placed on "colonists" [*kolonister*], seemingly identified as English settlers. It is worth noting that both the English term "colonists" and its Norwegian equivalent *kolonister* pertain to colonization, not colonialism. Unlike colonialism, which involves authority over indigenous populations, colonization exclusively concerns the occupation of lands and denotes the settlement of previously uncultivated and uninhabited regions. As a result, such phrasing implicitly

undermines the legitimacy of indigenous land claims. In a similar vein, the chapter of *Aktør* entitled “Occupation and Genocide in America” (Dybvig et al., 2020), while emphasizing the myth of untouched wilderness, refers to the colonization of North America by the British and French. The chapter is not linked to the one discussing Norwegian overseas emigration although such a solution would be technically possible in a digitalized textbook. In this regard, *Grunnbok i historie* (Faust et al., 2021) distinguishes itself again by applying the term “settlers” [*nybyggere*] to Norwegian immigrants. Although the section on cultural encounters does not explicitly mention Norwegian settlers, the same chapter also discusses Norwegian overseas emigration and, in this way, implicitly connects it to the tragic consequences for the American indigenous population resulting from “the spread of settler communities towards the prairie to the west” (Faust et al., 2021, p. 278).

With the possible exception of *Grunnbok i historie* (Faust et al., 2021), the above examples illustrate that the representation of Native Americans in the chapters dealing with Norwegian emigration to America in the 19th century is, for the most part, lacking, dehumanizing and denying. The omission of Native Americans from the historical account may be attributed to at least two factors. One is related to the predominant national perspective on Norwegian emigration history, focusing solely on Norwegian experiences. The second concerns a twisted perception that the removal of Native Americans and the settlement of Norwegian migrants occurred in different places and times. The latter factor, in line with the separation of Norwegian emigration history and the history of the indigenous population in America, also seems to have a bearing on the tendency to disclaim any Norwegian complicity. Yet, it is possible to argue that this denial is rooted in the Nordic self-perception of being outsiders to European colonialism in general and a refusal to acknowledge the impact of colonial legacies on Nordic societies. Finally, although the denial of indigenous agency and dehumanization seems to be a result of the unreflective use of historical sources and old textbooks, this should also be seen in light of coloniality leading to the erasure of the experiences of the indigenous population.

Eliminating the natives and the production of national exceptionalism

In the seminal book *Silencing the Past*, which explores how hegemonic power structures operate in the making and recording of history, Haitian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015, p. 35) argues that “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences”. Trouillot consequently demonstrates how historians are complicit in maintaining oppressive power structures and epistemologies by silencing marginalized groups from the process of historical production.

In the context of Norwegian migration to America, it is possible to argue that Native Americans have been written out of the entire process of historical production. Over the past two decades, by re-examining available sources and moving beyond Norwegian archives, scholars have been able to generate new narratives that also

include the indigenous perspective on the displacement and elimination of Native Americans that occurred during white settlement. Yet, as demonstrated through the analysis of the textbook representations of Norwegian migration to America, it appears that these new narratives are still not widely known beyond academia. A possible explanation is that viewing Norwegian migration to America in terms of settler colonialism and linking it to the elimination of the native population challenges the Norwegian self-perception of being a country without a colonial past. The Norwegian disavowal of involvement in settler colonialism thus reflects a general tendency in the Nordic countries to neglect their various roles in colonial projects, which plays a part in building a national identity based on a sense of exceptionalism (Keskinen et al., 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). This aligns with what Spivak (1999) terms “sanctioned ignorance,” which may be understood as an institutionalized way of excluding certain inconvenient considerations from entering into the debate.

In an effort to capture the Nordic countries’ ambiguous position within a (post)colonial context, the Finnish scholar Ulla Vuorela (2009) introduced the concept of “colonial complicity,” which goes beyond a narrow definition of colonialism as the possession of formal colonies, offering a broader framework for understanding the legacy of the colonial era. By challenging the Nordic self-perception of being colonial outsiders, Vuorela highlights a process of internalizing the colonial worldview, a consequence of participation in and acceptance of colonizing practices. Vuorela’s argument also has relevance in relation to Norwegian immigrants’ participation in settler colonialism during westward expansion in the US. For many Norwegian immigrants, adopting prejudices and denying the humanity of Native Americans had a homemaking function since it helped them to be like other white Americans (Fur, 2014). These attitudes were conveyed in the letters written by immigrants to their families in Norway, which later became key primary sources for historians depicting the Norwegian immigrant experience of settling in the new country and becoming a part of American society. The historical silencing of the indigenous perspective in the dominant narrative about Norwegian migration to America can thus be seen as a result of internalizing the settler-colonial worldview based on the notion of an inherent right to the land.

Emphasizing the persistence of colonial patterns of power and knowledge production, Aníbal Quijano (2000) argues that the legacy of colonialism survives in contemporary societies in the form of coloniality. The concept of coloniality sheds light on how historical power relations between settlers and Native Americans still shape the production of historical knowledge. During the westward expansion across the North American continent, Native Americans were seen as a main obstruction to white settlers’ access to land. The logic of elimination was thus paramount in settler colonialism, which had to destroy in order to replace (Wolfe, 2006). In a parallel way, the omission of Native Americans from the history of migration to America imposes silence upon the disturbing past and fills that silence with narratives of the land of freedom and opportunity for European immigrants. Both the elimination of Native

Americans during the US westward expansion and the act of silencing their perspective in the process of historical production are premised on power structures that erase marginalized groups. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the act of writing Native Americans out of the historical narratives ultimately reproduces the process of their elimination, as it renders their historical experience and its consequences as insignificant. In the Norwegian context, in addition, it sustains the sense of national exceptionalism tied to the country's alleged lack of a colonial past.

Didactical implications: Critical thinking and multiperspectivity

The process of historical production is a process of knowledge production. It is often underestimated how much we are influenced by presentations and representations of the past that we are socialized into through history education. Although dates, names, and events may fade from memory, the fundamental patterns of understanding the past persist. The Eurocentric perspective on the steady advancement of humanity continues to pervade how we see and understand the world, as well as how we understand our place in the world. Such a view premises historical knowledge that neglects a link between colonialism and modernity (Mignolo, 2007, cited in Eriksen & Jore, 2023).

Grounding history education in a single master narrative limits the potential for developing critical thinking skills. Therefore, it is crucial to establish a connection between critical thinking and the concept of multiperspectivity, which can be defined as “the epistemological idea that history is interpretational and subjective, with multiple coexisting narratives about particular historical events” (Wansink et al., 2018). While both critical thinking as a method to acquire and evaluate knowledge, and the ability to consider different perspectives are integrated into the national curricula for history and social studies, research indicates that textbooks and teaching often fail to question the prevailing epistemologies framed within the context of specific nation-states (Eriksen & Jore, 2023; Fuchs & Otto, 2013). Eriksen and Jore (2023) demonstrate how the absence of recognition of coloniality within Norwegian social studies education represents missed opportunities for fostering students' critical thinking abilities and argue that adopting post- and decolonial perspectives can provide a framework to analyze and critique social and power structures.

The omission of Native Americans together with the silencing of Norwegian complicity in their displacement and elimination is an example of such a missed opportunity to contextualize coloniality within Norwegian history. First of all, it is a missed opportunity to challenge the predominant notion of Norwegian exceptionalism related to the self-perception of being untouched by colonial legacies. In this regard, the topic opens for reflection related to the enduring legacy of colonialism in contemporary societies in the form of persistent racial hierarchies and social discrimination. What impact does it have on our collective identity, and how does it influence our societal self-descriptions? In addition, it is also a missed opportunity to reflect on

patterns of knowledge production. Why and how are some narratives marginalized in the process of historical production? What knowledge is transmitted in textbooks, and what remains undiscussed?

Although the national curricula in history and social studies recognize multiperspectivity as a meaningful approach to develop critical thinking, my findings suggest that this concept tends to be treated selectively. One reason why the textbooks do not provide the Native American perspective on Norwegian migration to America is apparently because this dimension has never been considered relevant from the Norwegian perspective. On a more general level, it is, however, possible to identify two main challenges related to the multiperspectivity approach in teaching history. One concerns an apparent tension between efforts to foster critical thinking by familiarizing students with different perspectives on historical events and a view of history education as a means to socialize them into an established national narrative that contributes to building a national identity. The other points to “the inability to step out of history” (Trouillot, 2015, p. 121), which amounts to an apparently insurmountable difficulty in thinking beyond the established master narratives. These challenges are evident in the textbook examples where the authors provide different perspectives on historical events and processes, although without linking them to Norwegian history, thus reproducing historical and epistemological gaps, or where they provide alternative perspectives but in boxes outside of the main text, implying a marginal significance for such facts. In this regard, the multiperspectivity approach may be instrumental in expanding the understanding of critical thinking skills in history education so that its scope does not only narrow down to a focus on source-critical awareness but, through challenging the process of historical production itself, enables students to deliberate on socially constructed identities and hierarchies rooted in the past.

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