

Kebabnorsk and Minority-Background Youth: Racialization of Language in Norwegian

In the past fifty years or so, Norway has endured a variety of radical changes. What was once a poor, largely homogeneous, farming and fishing country is now an oil-rich, diverse land buzzing with innovation and development. Around fifteen percent of Norway's population has an immigrant background. Recently, many of these immigrants are refugees from non-Western countries, including Pakistan, Somalia, Morocco, Iraq, and Iran. These people tend to be culturally Muslim, and often speak Arabic. Because Norway does not have the same "melting pot" history that the United States does, the emergence of new generations of Norwegians who look and sound differently than the idea of what is "typically Norwegian" is rapidly evolving. Norway is suddenly faced with new issues of racism and the integration of second-generation immigrants into society. In order to examine the discrimination occurring in Norway, I have chosen to examine the novel *Tante Ulrikkes vei* (translates to *Aunt Ulrikke's street* in English) by Zeshan Shakar, which provides two differing perspectives from two young men with a minority background.

The title of the novel provides an idea of both the events and circumstances of the novel, as well as those pertaining to the author himself. Shakar grew up on the very street for which the novel is named, located in Stovner, a low-income area in Oslo often associated with its minority-background residents. Many White Norwegians have negative views of the area, perceiving it as a crime-ridden ghetto. Shakar's realistic setting and his own personal experience with this area and the discrimination often leveled against people with his background provide a stark view of Norwegian society as a system set up for failure, a system that shuts out minority-background individuals. The message of the novel is especially enhanced by the linguistic practices of the protagonists. There are two notable forms of Norwegian used, meaning that the author must codeswitch, depending on who he is portraying. *Kebabnorsk* is the variety of Norwegian typically spoken by culturally Muslim minority-background youth. By its name, it is evident that this variety carries a large stigma, and is seen as uneducated speech.

The novel is set up as responses via email to a project examining minority youth, conducted by researchers at a university. Mo, who writes in Standard Norwegian, is a bright young man who focuses on school work in order to better the situation that he and his family live in. He eventually gets a special scholarship for university, given to minority-background youth, but eventually he realizes that the system is set up against people like him. He gives up on schoolwork and loses his scholarship. The other protagonist, Jamal, opts to record himself talking (the writing is a transcript), speaking *kebabnorsk*. Jamal's circumstances leave him disadvantaged from the beginning: his parents offer little support, and he must care for his younger brother while struggling to find an income. He drops out of high school and is able to work for a while, but eventually is forced to give up when he is tired of working hard labor jobs and loses his funding for trade school from the mosque. In the end, both boys are victims of Racism 2.0: they feel that they are unable to better their lives, as Norwegian society is systemically against them. I will be analyzing how, despite the efforts of the two young men and

their drastically different paths, the result is largely the same: rejection from the society they were born into.