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Kinned to be Norwegian: Transnational adoptees' positioning in relation to whiteness and the negotiation of nationhood

Introduction

Current studies on nations and everyday nationhood explore the reproduction of nations in relation to the context of migration-related diversity (Antonsich 2018a, 2018b, 2015; Edensor 2006; Erdal and Ezzati 2014). In this context, the nation becomes dynamic – affirmed, shaped and changed through ongoing negotiations that centre on (de)constructing differences in relation to intersecting categories that demarcate nation and nationhood (Erdal et al. 2017; Zhao 2013). Global migration has also created various ‘border subjects’ – subjects who have ambivalent positions with respect to these demarcating categories, for example, transnational adoptees. This article analyses how transnational adoptees in Norway negotiate their national belonging and identities by positioning themselves in relation to whiteness and how the everyday nationhood of Norwegianness is reproduced and revised in these negotiations.

Transnational adoption is an interesting phenomenon to study in relation to nation and nationhood. It touches on the questions of kinship and place of origin, which are related to the two nationalist ideologies, *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli* (Smith 1971, 1986), or the *ethnic-genealogical* and *the civic-territorial*, understood as two contrasting but conflating dimensions in the construction of nations and nationhood (Eriksen 2004; Tamir 1995). More importantly, this article views transnational adoption as one part in a series of transnational movements and broader global migration processes that are characterised by certain historical colonial power relations (Myong 2009; Hübinette and Tigervall 2008). Transnational adoptions follow

the same patterns as global migration flows if we consider the beginning and ending points of these flows. Not least, many transnational adoptees share certain phenotypical features with non-Western immigrants, most notably of not looking white (Myong 2009; Hübinette 2007).¹ Therefore, transnational adoptees' national identity and belonging also connect to questions of race and whiteness – a central aspect of the article that also intersects with questions of kinship and place of origin, which are particularly important in the Norwegian context.

The empirical data consists of fourteen in-depth interviews with adult transnational adoptees in Norway. Adopting an agency-centred approach to everyday nationhood in which the nation is understood as everyday processes of accomplishment or becoming (Antonsich 2015; Brubaker et al. 2006; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Thompson 2001), this article focuses on individual adoptees' positioning processes in relation to whiteness, which is perceived as the norm of Norwegianness. Finding a place in white Norwegian nationhood is simultaneously an endeavour to redefine the boundaries of the nation. It is in this sense that I use transnational adoptees' narratives of national identity and belonging as a case to discuss everyday nations and nationhood.

This article aims to contribute to two inter-related scholarly discussions on nations and nationalism. First, it contributes to the discussion on the relationship between race and nation (Anthias and Yval-Davis 1993; Collins 1998; Gilroy 1987; Gunaratnam 2003), with a special focus on how adoption and adoptive kinship influence the co-constitution of race and nation. Second, it contributes to discussions on everyday nations in the context of migration-related diversity, particularly from the perspectives of in-betweenness or border subjects, including not only transnational adoptees but also the descendants of immigrants (Antonsich 2018a; Erdal 2013), mixed-race children (Unterreiner 2017), 'third culture kids' and 'cross culture kids'

(Cottrell 2011). The positioning processes of transnational adoptees, as a unique case of in-betweenness, highlights a further differentiation among racially minoritised groups, which contributes to the current discussions on hierarchy of belonging (Back, Sinha and Bryan 2012; Hage 2000; Skey 2011, 2014) in the reproduction of everyday nationhood.

Following this introduction, I provide a brief literature review of the two above-mentioned scholarly discussions and introduce the theoretical perspectives relevant to the analysis. I then introduce the case of transnational adoption in Norway and present the methodology. In the analysis session, I first analyse how transnational adoptees deconstruct or reconstruct the norm of whiteness in positioning themselves as white; then I analyse how adoption opens dimensions for negotiating their national identity and belonging in these positioning processes. In the conclusion, I will return to the research question and highlight the findings as regards the relationship between race and nation and studies on everyday nationhood and migration-related diversity.

[Race, whiteness, and nation as framed in migration-related diversity](#)

The absolute separation between nationalism and racism by Anderson (1983) has long been opposed by feminist theorists (e.g., Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993; Collins 1998; McClintock 1995) and scholars of cultural studies, with support from postcolonial theories (e.g., Gilroy 1987; Gullestad 2006; Hall 2000). While race and racism have historically served as a naturalised structuring principle for national processes, they continue to demarcate the boundaries of the nation and define the constituents of national identities through the racialisation of other social categories applied to national exclusions, for example, citizenship, culture, religion, and genealogical origin (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993; Gilroy 2000; Vassenden and Andersson 2010; Yuval-Davis 2011). Racialisation processes are often

intertwined with other power relations, most notably gender and class (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993; Gilroy 1987; Gunaratnam 2003). In the current context of global migration, racialisation processes are not only embedded in institutional structures through practices such as migration control and integration (Back, Sinha and Bryan 2012; Berg and Kristiansen 2010; Myrdahl 2010), but also proceed through the 'everyday technology of racialisation that encodes phenotype, descent, family name, accent, dress and religion as signifiers of belonging and citizenship status' (McIntosh 2014: 314 — see also Gullestad 2006; Yuval-Davis 2011).

Collins (1998) also expounds on the mutual constitution of race and nation in the United States through traditional family ideals that are based on the presumption of 'blood ties'. Collins argues that although the US is often considered an example of civic nationalism, its national identity takes both family and race into account, resulting in a hierarchy of different racial families within the boundaries of the nation-state (Collins 1998: 70). Similar hierarchies of citizenship and belonging are discussed in Australia (Hage 2000), Canada (Ship 2005) and the United Kingdom (Gilroy 2000; Skey 2011, 2014), which, much like the US, have had a longer and more visible history of multiculturalism due to their settler and colonial pasts. Moreover, recent literature points to new forms of hierarchies of belonging in the context of new global migrations, in which 'new foreigners/immigrants' or 'religious extremists', who are viewed as a 'threat', are ranked even lower than the 'old immigrants' in the hierarchy of belonging (Back, Sinha and Bryan 2012).

The changing hierarchy of belonging can also be understood in parallel with the discussions of everyday nationhood in the context of migration-related diversity. This literature highlights the dynamic processes of nation-formation in which the individual's national identity and

belonging become multiple, fluid, and multi-directional along dimensions of both temporality and spatiality (Antonsich 2015; Edensor 2006; Erdal and Ezzati 2014; Fox 2017). Meanwhile, this literature also points to the omnipresent and unreflexive features of the nation (Antonsich 2015; Edensor 2002). Accordingly, Fox proposes to uncover the taken-for-granted foundations of everyday nationhood through exploring the 'edges of the nation' in terms of space, time and political discourses (Fox 2017). Parallel to Fox's approach are studies that focus on subjects who are positioned between the categories of 'insiders'-'outsiders' and 'sameness'-'strangeness'. These studies point to the disruption of the smooth reproduction of the nation as a stable identity category and the destabilisation of its defining boundaries, which also indicates the continuing relevance of race and whiteness (Alba 2005; Antonsich 2018a; Erdal 2013; Erdal and Sagmo 2017).

I understand the further differentiations of positions in the discussion of hierarchy of belonging as one of the effects of the destabilisation of categories/boundaries as expounded in the question of everyday nationhood. With the case of transnational adoptees as in-between border subjects, this article intends to explore further the relationship between race and nation in relation to the reproduction of nations and hierarchies of belonging. More concretely, it illuminates how adoption, as another form of constituting family and kinship, intersects with race in demarcating everyday nationhood and in (re)producing the national hierarchy of belonging. Furthermore, to conceptualise transnational adoptees and other in-between subjects as *border subjects* can also bridge the existing literature on perspectives of in-betweenness to Fox's approach to the 'edges of the nation' in the sense that border subjects are also positioned at the edge of the nation.

One important concept for expounding race and nation is racialisation, through which race is made a relevant category in shaping interpersonal relations – something we think and do (Gullestad 2006). In other words, race is a socially constructed and relational category, rather than a biological or cultural one (Berg 2008; Brah 1996; Gunaratnam 2003). This relational aspect entails a ‘majority-inclusive’ approach (Staunæs 2003) that includes the construction of whiteness as an inescapable part of racialisation processes (Berg 2008; Frankenberg 1993; Hage 2000). This article follows this approach and analyses whiteness as not simply skin colourⁱⁱ but as an unmarked privileged majority position that is historically, socially, politically and culturally produced (Berg 2008; Frankenberg 1993). Framed in the context of racialisation and whiteness, the question of one’s national identity and belonging is not about being white or not, but about how to position oneself as ‘white’ as opposed to ‘black’ or ‘non-white’ (Roediger 1991; Sanchez 1999).

Individual positioning processes are thus central to this analysis. I use the concept of *majoritising* and *minoritising* both to conceptualise these relational positioning processes and to illustrate that white majorities and racially marked minorities have become unstable and situational categories (Berg, Flemmen and Gullikstad 2010; Brah 2003; Staunæs 2004). This is particularly the case with transnational adoptees, who can be both majoritised as one of ‘us’ (i.e., white Norwegians) and minoritised/racialised as ‘the others’ (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009; Myong 2009; Zhao 2013).

As to adoption and kinship, I adopt a non-biocentric perspective (Follevåg 2002) and understand adoptive kinship in relation to a process of kinning ‘by which a foetus or new-born child is brought into a significant and permanent relationship with a group of people,

and the connection is expressed in a conventional kin idiom' (Howell 2006:8). Rather than blood ties, this approach focuses on kinned relatedness in understanding kinship.

Another important analytical perspective is performing, understood in relation to the sociological conception of identity as something that is performed and achieved in interaction with others, rather than innate (Goffman 1971), which also has an embodied dimension (Lawler 2008). Although this approach of performing is different from Butler's speech-act-theory-inspired approach to *performativity*, I argue that 'whiteness' as a racial category, similar to gender, is performative. In other words, what we take to be the 'internal' essence of the socially constructed category is 'one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts, at an extreme, a hallucinatory effect of naturalized gestures' (Butler 1999: XV). It is in this way that I discuss whiteness both as an embodied performance and as part of the identity work transnational adoptees do when positioning themselves within Norwegian nationhood.

Research method and context

This article uses transnational adoption in Norway as a case to explore the reproduction of the nation and the relations between race and nation. With the exception of the adoption of stepchildren and foster children, nearly all adoptions in Norway are transnational (NOU 2009:21). By the end of 2016, there were 21,485ⁱⁱⁱ transnational adoptees living in Norway, adopted mainly from South Korea, China, Colombia, Ethiopia, India, Vietnam, the Philippines, South Africa, Peru, Russia and Romania. Between 1998 and 2007, Norway and its Nordic neighbours of Sweden and Denmark were the top-ranked receiving countries in terms of the number of transnational adoptions in proportion to their populations (NOU 2009:21; Selman

2002). Research also shows that the majority of adoptive parents in Nordic countries (Norway included) are native whites who belong to the economically and socially privileged middle and upper classes (Ben-Zion 2014; Hübinette and Tigervall 2008). Transnational adoption is strictly controlled by the Norwegian authorities and can only be done through an accredited adoption organisation.^{iv}

With respect to the question of Norwegianness, Norway was ethnically rather a homogeneous society^v until quite recently, and it first became a net immigration country in the late 1960s (Brochmann 2003; Vassenden 2010). One consequence of this ethnic homogeneity is that being Norwegian is equated with being white (Berg 2008; Zhao 2013). In the context of the new global immigration, Norwegianness is inevitably discussed and debated in relation to whiteness (Berg, Flemmen and Gullikstad 2010; Buxrud and Fangen 2017; Gullestad 2006; Vassenden 2010). Either explicitly or implicitly, this discussion involves a differentiation between the white majority population and immigrant minorities. However, due to colour blindness in a strong discourse of equality and the generally 'silent' articulation of race in Norway and the Nordic countries (Berg 2008; Gullestad 2006; Hübinette 2007; Mulinari et al. 2009), whiteness is seldom used as a category for national identity among the ordinary majority population, but instead serves as a 'subtext', or 'ethnic map' (Vassenden 2010) for Norwegianness, understood as a taken-for-granted aspect of ethnic/cultural belonging. Not looking white (yet growing up in white Norwegian families), transnational adoptees cannot take whiteness for granted, which provides an opening to study the reproduction of the nation with regards to question of whiteness and race.

The fourteen informants whom I interviewed in this study were recruited from two adoption organisations and one organisation for transnational adoptees. When recruiting, I had two

criteria: informants must be over eighteen years old and not look white. As a result, my informants were adopted from Asian and South American countries and ranged in age from eighteen to thirty-nine at the time of the interviews. Nine of the interviewees were women and five were men. The interviews centred on the everyday experiences of the informants, particularly in situations in which they could not take their Norwegian identity for granted. The study touches on sensitive topics such as experiences of racism, the meaning of biology and personal stories of adoption. In preparing the interview questions, I attempted to avoid stepping over accepted boundaries for what can be shared, which often relates to cultural common sense. I also emphasised that participation was voluntary both before and at the end of the interviews.

I found that my background as an immigrant with a non-white appearance gave me more legitimacy to ask questions related to 'being different', a topic that is otherwise difficult to discuss given the strong ideology of equality in the Norwegian context, where 'equality' (*likhet* in Norwegian) is understood as 'the same' (Gullestad 2002, 2006). Otherwise, such as many other researchers in migration studies (e.g., Carling, Erdal, and Ezzati 2014; Nowicka and Cieslik 2014) I have reflected upon my positionality in the study, which did have a methodological consequence for the development of analytical focuses and the choice of theoretical perspectives (Zhao 2015). For instance, my positionality as a migrant from one of the sending countries of transnational adoptions enabled the interactive positioning process between the informants and me during the interviews to become a process of majoritising and minoritising in itself.

Consequently, I chose an interactionist approach to analyse the interviews (Järvinen 2005) as narrative events (Riessman 2008). Such an approach indicates that I do not interpret the

informants' narratives as facts or 'true' stories, but one version of the storytelling developed in a specific context. The analysis thus not only focuses on the 'told' – what is said by the informant – but also on the 'telling' – the interactive and sequential order of how interviews as narrative events are developed (Mishler 1986; Riessman 2008). With regards to the analytical focus on positioning, I thus analyse both how the informants are positioned in the stories they told and how they are positioned in telling these stories. This approach to interviews is important as it helps me – especially given that the number of interviews is relatively small – to explore the interview data in depth, with special attention to what the interviews highlighted, what might have been downplayed, and their implications for the research questions (Zhao 2015).

The analysis is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on phenotypic differences and analyses how the informants deal with the norm of whiteness in constructing their Norwegian identity and belonging. The analysis shows that despite their phenotypic difference, the informants position themselves explicitly as whites. Consequently, the second and third part explore how the informants negotiate the meaning of adoption in positioning themselves as whites. While the second part focuses on the question of kinship, the third part addresses the question of origin in specific places of origin.

Performing whiteness: Positioning in the context of racialisation

Do phenotypical differences matter for transnational adoptees with respect to their identity of being Norwegian? On the one hand, it does matter, as all my informants have encountered questions by strangers, such as 'Where are you from?' and 'Where are you 'truly' from?',

precisely because they are not perceived as looking white. The following quotes illustrate how the informants normally encounter these questions.

I used to be very provoked when people didn't 'accept' my answer that I was from Stavanger, because I felt totally Norwegian. Now I am more rounded at the edges. When unknown people ask, I see quickly whether what they ask for is 'Korea.' ... This [that I look Asian] is one of the first things people see when they first meet me. (Haldis)

It is much more natural for me to say that I am from Tromsø, because I am from Tromsø. I grew up here and it is here that I feel at home. Then they ask, 'Yes, but where are you really from?' Or they ask, 'Have you grown up in Tromsø? Were you born here?' ...So I think they in a way try to classify me, or put me in a place. (Kristin)

While Haldis was adopted from South Korea and was in her mid-30s at the time of interview, Kristin was adopted from a Latin American country and was in her early 20s. I look upon the informants' experiences with the 'where-from' question as a process of racialisation and minoritisation through which they are placed into the position of an outsider, or as Haldis described, a position that is not 'totally' Norwegian. This is an experience that transnational adoptees share with other racially minoritised groups, for example, immigrants and their descendants (see e.g., Erdal and Ezzati 2015). On the other hand, unlike immigrants and their descendants, the informants also indicate that they may not necessarily reflect upon their phenotypical differences. Tor, who was in his 30s, and adopted from South Korea, grew up in a small town in East Norway. When reflecting upon his Norwegian identity, Tor said,

Tor: I had always looked upon myself as Norwegian. Before I was 25, my inner image of myself was as a regular Norwegian, white, with blond hair. You could say that this picture was wrong. But I had not thought about being a Korean adoptee at all.

Author: But you knew that you looked different.

Tor: Yes, in a way. Uhm... But you did not think that much about it when you were younger.

Mm ... I think identity is also shaped by the people you associate with. When all the people around you are Norwegian, you sort of feel yourself as one of them too.

.....

Author: what happened when you were 25 then?

Tor: I moved to Oslo. Then you discovered that there were many other people like you, those who are not adopted. You began to see that inner picture was wrong. So I got this identity crisis. ...

This excerpt reflects a common pattern concerning the informants' experiences with 'where-from' questions – that they were seldom asked these questions when they were small, because, as they said, 'everybody knew who I am'. They began to receive these questions frequently after they moved away from home, often to a bigger and more central place. Thus, when Tor was young, in a small, and what he indicated as homogeneously 'white', place where everybody knew him and his family, Tor's majority position was so self-evident to him that he did not reflect upon not being white. Haldis's reaction of being provoked by the question of 'where-from' also points to this self-evidence of identifying as a (white) Norwegian. However, the phenotypic difference become significant when the context changed, in Tor's case, when he moved to Oslo, which has the country's largest population of immigrants (SSB, 2018). It is in this context of migration-related diversity that Tor encountered the norm of whiteness and realised that he could be placed into a minoritised position as an immigrant. Thus, the question is how the informants deal with the norm of whiteness when positioning themselves

as Norwegian. As Tor later indicated in the interview, to avoid being seen as an immigrant, he used to hang out with his Norwegian friends as a way to mark his majority position.

Distancing themselves from immigrants is a common strategy among informants when positioning themselves in relation to Norwegianness. Another important finding as to the norm of whiteness is that they all, albeit to different extents, compare themselves with immigrants, and indicated that despite their phenotypical differences and skin colour, they are also visually perceived as white or look white because of their ways of behaviour and being. To illustrate this, I use the case of Janne, who was the informant who talked the most about 'looking white' in the interviews. Janne was in her 20s and adopted from India. She grew up in a small city in South Norway. Janne had travelled to her home country a couple of times together with her adoptive parents.

Author: Were you perceived as Indian when you visited India?

Janne: No, because they noticed that I was not from there. They saw your postures, your way of dressing and walking. I walk like this [with an upright posture], very upright, do you understand? That's why they understood that I was not one of them. I also had very short hair. Then I noticed that they looked at me the same way as they looked at whites. The other Indian girls don't have such postures or the same way of walking and talking. These are very cultural things.

Author: How about in Norway?

Janne: I am aware that I look Indian, but that's not what I think of when I look at myself in the mirror ... I know that skin colour can make a first impression. For example, when I moved to Trøndelag [a province in Middle Norway], I was like one hundred per cent sure that most people would think 'where is she from?' and 'she must be Muslim.' Right? But at the same time, most people would understand that I am adopted and that I am Norwegian when I start

to talk. This also has a lot to do with postures, or a particular body language. I have a very Norwegian posture, the way I walk.

Though it was in talking about her experience of visiting India that Janne first brought up her whiteness explicitly, I analyse her story of being positioned as white in India as related to the positioning she did both in the story of being a stranger in Norway and in the interview. Quite early in the interview, when being asked about whether she had been mistaken as a foreigner or immigrant in Norway because of phenotypical differences, Janne mentioned her posture, which marks her majority position. However, I did not follow this point up. When I once again asked about the possibility of her being perceived as Indian, this time in India, Janne repeated this point about posture. Furthermore, uncertain whether the author, as a foreigner, could completely understand what she meant by the 'upright' posture, Janne performed it for her. The very same posture was once again brought up – described as 'a very Norwegian posture, the way I walk', when she described her experience as a stranger in Trøndelag, Norway. Therefore, I analyse Janne's whiteness as it emerges in India together with the positioning work she did in Norway, specifically, her positioning in relation to Norwegianness. In other words, Janne positioned herself as a white majority Norwegian in both India and Norway. Here, being white and Norwegian are intertwined with her positioning within Norwegian nationhood. She did so with a clear reference to 'culture'. While culture is the most common category to which the informants refer in positioning themselves as 'white', some informants have also referred to their upper-middle class background to visually mark their 'white' positions.

One way to interpret Janne's story is to apply Hage's (2000) conception of whiteness as one form of embodied 'national cultural capital' and affirm that Janne's cultural capital is so strongly/automatically embodied that it effectively counters race. However, this would be an

overly simplified understanding of culture and race that ignores the complex relationship between them (Gilroy 2000; Gullestad 2006; Gunaratnam 2003; Yuval-Davis 2011). I would argue for an understanding of 'embodied cultural capital' such as an 'upright' posture and specific ways of walking and talking as doing and the continued doing of race and highlight the performative aspect of whiteness as a racially constructed category.

First, why are certain postures and cultural practices considered white, whereas others are not? It is through a process of racialisation that they are perceived as 'white' in relation to those that are not. The 'upright' posture itself points to the perceived superiority of whiteness. Therefore, whiteness as cultural capital is also racially constructed and encoded. As a racial category, whiteness is performative, as it is *achieved* (not innate) in a social context and a social order in a way similar to gender, as expounded by Butler (1999, see also Lawler 2008). Second, the perception of Janne's posture as 'white' takes place in a context of majoritising and minoritising processes that concerns the doing of race. As Janne indicated, because of her Indian look she would likely be minoritised as Muslim, which is a generic image of non-Western immigrants. However, it is *after* (not before) she started to talk that she was able to display her cultural capital – allowing her to be perceived to be 'white' as opposed to 'Muslim', and thus majoritising her as white Norwegian. Therefore, the perception of cultural capital as 'white' is not separate from, but part of the racialisation process.

I also argue that the performative aspect of whiteness, described by Janne, first arose without reflection through embodied experience, but has now become more conscious, precisely because the informant was made aware of racialisation processes. The performative aspect is also evident in the interactive situation of the above interview excerpt: most notably Janne's performance of the very Norwegian 'upright' walking posture. The performance is itself a

manifestation of her majority position, from which she told her story of being adopted, as opposed to the position of immigrants. Therefore, the embodied performance of whiteness is also a process of self-racialisation.

It is important to emphasise that the self-racialisation of the adoptees performing whiteness discussed here has to be understood in relation to the racialisation processes that transnational adoptees experience, which include painful experiences of racism (Ben-Zion 2014; Hübinette and Tigervall 2009; Myong 2009). Not all the informants talked explicitly about their experiences with racism, and this depended on how they defined racism. However, they have all been the recipients of racist comments, such as '*Negerunge*' ['Negro child'], '*Svarting* [darkie]', '*Pakkis* [A derogatory name in Norwegian to call a person from Pakistan]', '*Ching Chong*', '*Gulling*' ['yellow guy'], and so on. Myong argues that transnational adoptees' proximity to whiteness is not simply a result of self-identification and desire but also a condition for existence (Myong 2009). My analysis shows that performing embodied whiteness is also a strategy for my respondents to (re-)position themselves as Norwegians in the context of ongoing processes of majoritisation and minoritisation.

By claiming and performing whiteness, including claims that they also look white, the informants delivered the message that one no longer has to have 'white' skin to be able to position themselves as majority Norwegians. In this way, they seem to have revised the norm of whiteness as primarily based on phenotypes. Meanwhile, by referring to their 'white' cultural capital and differentiating themselves from immigrants, they have also maintained the implicit racial boundary in the reproduction of Norwegianness.

Kinned to be Norwegian: The meaning of being adopted and whiteness

What also makes transnational adoption interesting and relevant to the discussion of nation and nationhood is the question of kinship, through its importance in shaping an ethnic community or *ethnie* (Eriksen 2004; Smith 1986). When expounding on the relationship between nation and race, Collins also refers to the complicity of biology in constituting family and kinship (Collins 1999). Following Collins's argument, transnational adoption, which is also transracial in the Norwegian context, disturbs the intersections of race and nation. However, as shown in my previous analysis, when positioning themselves as Norwegians, the informants have adhered to the norm of whiteness, and thus maintained race as a relevant category for defining one's space in the context of Norwegian nationhood. Therefore, the question is how the informants negotiate the meaning of their adoption background and the question of biology and kinship when positioning themselves in relation to Norwegianness and whiteness. Do they consider biology important to their national identity and belonging?

In terms of the question of biology, there is no unified voice among the transnational adoptees. Contradictory voices and perspectives can even be heard from a single informant. How people perceive the meaning of biology and biological bonds is indeed an individual question, as it is for people who are not adopted. However, with regards to the question of positioning in relation to Norwegianness, 'being adopted' is in itself a majoritised position. Indeed, several informants told that when being asked about 'where-from', they would point out their background of being adopted. For example, Janne said,

'I am adopted from India.' – This is my standard answer [to the question 'Where are you really from?']. I usually point out the fact that I am *adopted* from India, not that I have family from India. I think this is about how to identify myself and not putting myself into another category. ...

Because immediately after I say that I am adopted, people say, 'Oh, I see, you have Norwegian parents.' (Janne)

Here, the meaning of adoption does not touch the question of biology, but a question of one's position within Norwegian nationhood. 'Oh, you have Norwegian parents.' This reaction indicates that 'being adopted' is an effective way both to declare one's close and intimate connection to the Norwegian nation and to differentiate oneself from immigrants. This implies that adoptive kinship, like biological kinship, is perceived as legitimate in constructing one's national identity and belonging. Again, we must understand 'being adopted' as a majoritised position in relation to the racialisation and minoritisation processes that the adoptees experience. Renate, another informant who was adopted from India and in her early 20s, also told me that she used to answer 'adopted from' to the 'where-from' question. However, when reflecting upon the meaning of adoption, she returned back to this experience and said, 'I sometimes feel a little bit weird when I say that I am adopted when people ask where I am from. In a way, I feel like this is a relevant thing to add when I say I am from India'.

This quote points to a paradox that the informant experiences in answering the 'where-from' question, that is to point out the background of being adopted is both natural and unnatural. This paradox indicates not only a mismatch between phenotypical appearance and one's sense of national belonging, as for the descendants of immigrants (Anonsich 2018a), but also a mismatch between phenotypical appearance and one's positionality within conceptions of nationhood – how transnational adoptees otherwise would be positioned by others (e.g., the reaction 'You have Norwegian parents.'). In the context of migration-related diversity, adoption thus goes beyond the meaning of biology to add a different layer of meaning connected to nation and kinship. What the excerpts highlight about the conception of kinship

regarding the informants' adoption-background is not the biological connections, but a sense of kinned relatedness, as expounded in the non-biocentric perspective in adoption studies (Follevåg 2002; Howell 2006). This does not mean that biology is not an important question for the informants. For example, several female informants talked about how their experience of being a biological mother had made them reflect more and differently upon the question of biology. However, when the discussion of national identities and belonging is situated in majoritising and minoritising processes, this aspect is downplayed.

'Resemblance' is another biology-related topic discussed in the interviews. Concerning the question of positioning in relation to whiteness, my informants would rather talk about another type of resemblance, which they share with their adoptive parents. For example, Janne told me that both her ways of being and her temperament resemble her adoptive mother. Kristin, another informant, said that her voice and the way she talks resembles that of her adoptive mother, and several times people mistook them for each other when talking to one of them on the telephone.

Earlier I used Janne as an example to illustrate how transnational adoptees claim to look white through embodied performances. Ways of being, such as walking, talking, dressing and posture, are important aspects of this embodied whiteness. When Janne talked about her resemblance to her adoptive mother, she again referred to ways of being. This association of performing whiteness with adoptive relations illustrates that her access to whiteness is not only something she achieved through growing up in Norway but also something she *inherited* from her adoptive family, which again distinguishes her from those who 'have families in India'. For example, children of Indian immigrants who grew up in Norway probably can also perform embodied whiteness, but adoption provides Janne with unique access to whiteness. Adopting

Bhabha's notion of 'mimicry', in which the colonised is conceptualised as the subject of difference 'that is almost the same, but not quite' (Bhabha 1994:86), Tobias Hübinette proposes to understand transnational adoptees' embodiment of whiteness as 'mimicking' (Hübinette 2007: 184). However, this understanding seems to overlook the meaning of adoptive kinship. I would propose to understand adoptees' embodiment of whiteness as an outcome of the kinning process that occurs through adoption. Closely related to kinning and kinned relatedness, my informants demonstrated another type of genealogy that is not based on blood ties, but legitimates their belonging to the nation. Sigrid was in her late 30s and adopted from South Korea. She grew up in a very small town in North Norway. When asked about her relation to her birth country (after the discussion about phenotypical difference), Sigrid said,

I look like a Korean, but I am not Korean. I don't know anything about Korea and its culture: null and nix. Of course, I can read and learn something about it ... I could do that, but that is not my culture. Mm... for example, I have learned how to make fish cakes, because this is what my mother and my grandmother do, and they taught me. But I cannot learn how to make *kimchi*^{vi}, because this is not my culture, right? I am not brought up to do this. (Sigrid)

Sigrid's story is common among transnational adoptees in that it emphasises cultural belonging to the country where they grew up, especially when this belonging is questioned because of their phenotypical appearance. Sigrid referred to her adoptive genealogy to justify her cultural belonging. By doing so, she also made it clear that it was her adoptive genealogy, not her biological genealogy, that was present and functional in her daily life. It is also worth mentioning that when Statistics Norway intentionally excluded the majority of transnational adoptees from the 'immigrant' category, their argument was that adoptive parents count as transnational adoptees' parents (Dzamarija 2014), and those adoptive parents were often

native white Norwegians. Sigrid's narrative thus highlights the common perception that transnational adoptees are kinned not only to their adoptive families but also to the Norwegian nation.

Whiteness as a local belonging: The meaning of origin

Closely related to kinship is the question of origin, which is relevant to the discussion of transnational adoptees' positioning in relation to Norwegianness. For example, when Sigrid brought up the importance of her adoptive kinship, it was to answer my question about the meaning of the birth country, often considered as one's 'origin' or roots. However, my data also reveals that transnational adoptees' relationship to their birth countries is a much more complex issue than that which Sigrid expressed in the previous quote. For example, several of my informants had travelled to their birth countries or expressed an interest in traveling there. Although, like Sigrid, they emphasised their cultural belonging to Norway throughout the interviews, when talking about their experiences of visiting their birth countries, some of them also expressed an alternative belonging, including Tor and Haldis, whom I quoted earlier.

I felt good in Korea, surprisingly! So I thought like... 'Is it because I am in an Asian country or because it is Korea?' Right? Then I wanted to find out. So I travelled to China, and then to Japan ... just to see. I felt more at home in Korea than in China and Japan. I don't know exactly why, but I also felt very good in Japan and in China. (Tor)

When I was around 23, I became more interested in finding out more about Korea and I wanted to travel there. Before that, I had not emphasised Korea because I felt totally Norwegian, and I felt that if I emphasise Korea, it would reinforce that I was not 'totally Norwegian'. Today, I feel that both Norway and Korea are mine. It's not like I don't feel totally Norwegian anymore. It's like there is something more, something in addition. For me, being Norwegian includes my Korean roots. (Haldis)

Both excerpts confirm that national identity and belonging, when situated in the context of transnationalism and migration-related diversity, have become multiple, multidirectional and fluid, differing both spatially and temporally (Edensor 2006; Erdal and Sagmo 2017; Fox 2017).

Tor's narrative of his multiple belongings in a transnational space (in which he even expressed a possible belonging to some third countries) is in contrast to how he would position himself in Oslo by hanging out with his (white) Norwegian friends. Haldis's narrative illustrates a contrast along the dimension of temporality between her present multiple/hybrid identities and her past one which emphasises being 'totally Norwegian' – she would be 'provoked' if this position were not accepted. However, I would add that in addition to spatiality and temporality, positioning along the axes of majoritising/minoritising processes is another important dimension to understanding the multiplicities and fluidities of one's national identity and belonging. As discussed earlier, Tor's avoidance of being (mis)taken as a foreigner and Haldis's provocation were clearly situated in a racialised context of majoritisation and minoritisation. Furthermore, Tor's and Haldis's narratives contrast with how Sigrid talked about her birth country, which was also framed in the context of majoritisation and minoritisation (with a clear association to her phenotypical differences). These examples illustrate that meanings of origin (here referring to the birth country) are also multiple with regards to how transnational adoptees construct their national identity and belonging. The following question remains: how do transnational adoptees construct the meaning of 'origin' when positioning themselves in relation to Norwegianness, and how is that meaning construction framed in the process of majoritisation and minoritisation?

To emphasise their Norwegian identity and belonging, the informants very often referred to the place in Norway where they grew up as their real 'origin'. For example, when being asked 'where are you really/originally from?', most informants said that they felt more natural when answering with that specific place, also described as the place where they felt 'at home' (also where their families are) or where they felt they belonged. To expound on how the place of origin provides a negotiable dimension for one's positioning within the nationhood, I use an

interview excerpt with Sigrid as an example. Sigrid is not the only one who emphasised the importance of local belonging to the question of national identity and belonging. However, the manner in which she put forward the relevance of local belonging is clearly framed in an interview situation that itself was displayed as a process of positioning that is about majoritisation/minoritisation.

Author: You've lived in various places in Norway. Recently, there have been many discussions about discrimination against foreigners or immigrants. Although transnational adoptees are not the same as immigrants, they look like immigrants. Have you experienced being regarded as a foreigner (Signe: No.) and being discriminated against because of this?

Sigrid: No, never. The only thing I have experienced and heard is when I moved to Oslo - in Oslo, there are people who have never been to Northern Norway, but in Oslo - and began to work in Oslo. And no matter where I was ...when I started to talk to people, they looked at me and said, 'Are you speaking the northern dialect? Isn't it unusual? How is it possible?'[In Oslo dialect] hehe ... They were a bit like, quite shocked that I could speak the northern dialect, because I look like a foreigner...

Author: But why were they so shocked?

Sigrid: Because people in the eastern part of Norway, I think, many of them have never been further north than Lillehammer [a small town north of Oslo], right? So they, see no difference. It is like, if you are from Oslo, either you speak an eastern dialect or a Norwegian which is not good, right? Just like that, done, no more discussion! So when I suddenly appeared with an Asian face, speaking a pure northern dialect, they were totally, totally surprised, they were shocked. They were totally shocked. They do not know what to do or say. It was like, 'Hah?! You speak the northern dialect, with this look?'

Author: But you don't consider it to be discrimination?

Sigrid: No, I never feel discriminated against. Rather I perceive it as people expecting something else from me. Maybe it makes me even more aware of the accent and where I am from.

The interactions between the author and Sigrid in the interview situation are an important aspect of the analysis. The author started with a question about possible discrimination that transnational adoptees may experience due to the phenotypical appearance they share with immigrants. This question provides Sigrid a possible minoritised position in which she may have a discrimination story to share. Sigrid's negation of the question even before the author finished asking it can thus be interpreted as a rejection of this possible minoritised position. Consequently, the manner in which she crafted her story in Oslo about her northern dialects, in itself, articulates a process of how she positioned herself in relation to Norwegianness and whiteness. By telling this story, Sigrid conveys the following message: Yes, my appearance may associate me with immigrants, but my appearance in combination with my pure northern dialect may shape another kind of expectation that is different from what immigrants would receive.

Moreover, with this story, Sigrid points to the importance of having a local affiliation and belonging, because in the Norwegian context, national identity and belonging are often anchored in a specific place – often rural and remote, the place where a person and his/her family were *originally* from (Kramer 1984). In other words, Sigrid's pure northern dialect indicates a real affiliation with a place in North Norway, thus disrupting the minoritising processes. Recently, Antonsich (2018b) discusses how local affiliation can strengthen claims of national belonging among children of migrants in Italy. It is through a similar dynamic

between local and national that origin becomes another negotiable dimension for transnational adoptees to position themselves in relation to whiteness.

Another related analytical point involves the relationship between dialects and Norwegianness. Ellen Andenæs points out that while a spoken Norwegian dialect is perceived as genuine native Norwegian, spoken Norwegian with a foreign accent is interpreted as a sign of non-Norwegianness (Andenæs 2010: 212). When discussing the everyday experiences of the children of immigrants in Italy, Antonsich describes a similar embodied co-existence of strangeness (phenotype) and sameness (a vernacular accent), and how it shapes a reaction of disorientation that disrupts the smooth production of the nation (Antonsich 2018a). On the surface, we may claim that as 'border subjects' of the nation, both transnational adoptees and children of immigrants are placed in a similar condition of in-betweenness in that they are phenotypically not white, but they 'talk white'. However, Sigrid's story entails a local sense of belonging that is also intertwined with kinship, as addressed previously. She not only grew up in North Norway; she has family and genealogy there. Furthermore, Sigrid's positioning through dialect is implicitly made in comparison with immigrants or their children who may equally 'talk white', but mostly in the eastern/Oslo dialect. With her 'pure northern dialect', Sigrid differentiated herself from both the new immigrants (who speak a 'not good' Norwegian) and the descendants of immigrants (who speak an eastern dialect). By using the word 'pure'. Sigrid also underlines that she would in no way be positioned as an immigrant.

Conclusion

The analysis in this article demonstrates that transnational adoptees position themselves as white when encountering the norm of whiteness. While phenotypical differences trigger a

process of racialisation through which transnational adoptees can easily be placed in a minoritised position, adoption provides them with unique access to whiteness, mostly along the negotiable and intertwined dimensions of kinship and the notion of 'origin', referred to as the place where they grew up with their Norwegian families/genealogies. The key element in this positioning process is that, as adoptees, they are kinned to be Norwegian, a process which is also manifested through the embodied performance of 'white culture' and talking 'white' in a 'pure' dialect.

By understanding race as a relational category, this article argues in favour of understanding this positioning process as the continued process of racialisation in a situational context of majoritisation and minoritisation. Transnational adoption, in a Norwegian context, thus does not transcend or destabilise the racial construction of nation, as we may infer from Collins's thesis on the intersection of race and nation through the meaning of biology in constructing the family (Collins 1998). Rather, it adds another layer of meaning concerning one's negotiated positionality in the racial hierarchy commonly held within the nation.

With respect to studies on everyday nation and nationhood, this article also argues that in addition to spatiality and temporality (Edensor 2006; Erdal and Ezzati 2014; Fox 2017), one's positioning along majoritisation/minoritisation processes provides an important dimension for understanding one's multiple and fluid national identities and forms of belonging in migration-related diversity. As shown in the analysis, the manner in which the informants construct the meaning of adoption through the notion of kinship and origin is also dependent on whether the question of Norwegian identity and belonging is framed in the situational context of majoritisation/minoritisation. Moreover, the analysis illustrates that when positioning themselves within the nation, transnational adoptees differentiate themselves not

only from immigrants, but also descendants of immigrants who hold a similar in-between position as to the categories of 'insiders'-'outsiders' and 'sameness'-'strangeness'. This further differentiation indicates a new pattern of hierarchy of belonging in the reproduction of nationhood. Adoption or adoptive kinship is, therefore, constitutive in shaping the hierarchy of belonging, through its intersection with race.

ⁱ As to transnational adoptions and the question of race, we should be aware that in the context of North America (the US and Canada), transracial adoptions are not necessarily transnational.

ⁱⁱ As pointed out in several studies in Europe, EU migrants from Central and Eastern Europe, although white, are still marked for distinction and differentiation and are racialised as 'immigrants' (Back, Sinha and Bryan 2012; Mulinar et al. 2009)

ⁱⁱⁱ This is my calculation based on statistics from Statistics Norway (SSB).

^{iv} An exemption can be applied if the applicants intend to adopt a child from their own country of origin or from a country with which they have special and strong ties/connections. There are three adoption organisations in Norway: 'Verdens barn,' 'Adopsjonsforum,' and 'InorAdopt,' all subject to the supervision of the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs.

^v Despite the indigenous population, the Sami, and the five national minorities — Kvens (Norwegian Finns), Forest Finns, Jews, Roma and Taters (Romani people)— the Norwegian population has been constructed as homogenous due to the long assimilation policies (fornorskingspolitikk) from 1850s to the end of World War II (See Dankertsen 2014; Midtbøen and Lidén 2015).

^{vi} A traditional fermented Korean dish made of vegetables with a variety of seasonings.

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