

Article

“Whiteness Isn’t about Skin Color.” Challenges to Analyzing Racial Practices in a Norwegian Context

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Abstract: While being Norwegian is often associated with being white, the absence of a discourse on race makes it difficult to analyze racialization scientifically. It is sometimes argued that critical race theory is developed within an American context and that it is not culturally relevant in a Norwegian context. We argue that while this might be true in some cases, critical race theory might nevertheless give new insights into how racial practices and colonial structures continue to be important parts of the power relations in Norway. We base our article on two empirical materials from a Norwegian-Sámi context and from professionals in Norwegian child protective services in order to illuminate how racialization is expressed. In our comparative perspective and collaborative and self-reflexive writing process, we use the concept of interpretive repertoire to explore how postcolonial and critical race theory is a challenging, but nevertheless useful approach to analyze racialization and discrimination in Norway.

Keywords: critical race theory; racialization; Norway; Sámi; childcare services; colonial structures; interpretive repertoire; whiteness



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1. Introduction

Tone Gunn (Norwegian): Are you less white than I am?

Astri (Sámi/Norwegian): No, I guess I’m not. I’m a lot paler than you.

Tone Gunn: Yeah, but you’re also something more than I am?

Astri: Yeah, I’m perhaps white in a different kind of way.

Tone Gunn: Yes, because whiteness isn’t about skin color. We have to be careful to not be too essentialist now. You’re “in-between.”

Astri: Yeah, I’m Sámi raised in Oslo and I speak with an Oslo-dialect, which makes me even whiter.

In this article, we examine the critical potential of using comparative and collaborative writing as methods in analyzing racialization practices. The dialogue in this introduction illustrates some of the conversation that we have had in the process of writing this article. Our focus in the article is to discuss theoretically the process of analyzing race in a Norwegian context, where we combine critical race theory with postcolonial theory. We use some empirical examples to highlight our theoretical and methodological arguments. Our project in the article is therefore not to document if and how racialization is done in Norway. On the contrary, our goal is to explore the challenges and opportunities of such a perspective analytically for us as researchers, through a comparative, collaborative and self-reflexive writing process, where we analyze both the challenges and opportunities of doing racial analysis in a Norwegian context. While our projects did not have a comparative research design, the article reflects the fact that we have been close colleagues through our projects and have had many discussions during the projects as scholars with similar theoretical interests.

Theoretically, we are inspired by critical race theory and postcolonial theory, where researchers focus on the social identity, location, and often taken-for-granted privileges and marginalization related to visible differences [1–16]. In a public debate on critical race theory, scholars such as Torkel Brekke [17] have claimed that this theoretical tradition is mostly relevant within an American context and that this perspective is not relevant in a Norwegian context. We argue in this article that while it may be true that race and racialization is done quite differently in Norway compared to, for example, in the US, where race is a much more present social category in everyday life [1–3,7], critical race theory is useful for understanding the implicit, but nevertheless powerful hierarchies that exist in Norwegian society. Racism is not something that only exists in the US. Even though race is a concept that has been taboo in Norwegian academia since World War II, being Norwegian [18–20] or European [19,21–25] is nevertheless in everyday life something that is still very much associated with being white. The violent terrorist attack and ideology of Anders Behring Breivik is an example of the very much present racism. However, as Sindre Bangstad [26] points out, the ideology of Breivik is not just the result of a “mad man”, but must be seen in relation to the mainstreaming of racist discourses.

Norway has traditionally had a relatively homogenous population, with the exception of Finns, the Sámi population, Greenlanders, Kvens/Finns, Roma, Romani and other national minorities. Norway’s relatively homogenous society has its serious advantages because it provides an unusually high level of trust of citizens in each other [27]. Mutual trust is also the oil that reduces friction in the socio-economic system and reduces transaction costs, and thus is a fundamental basis for the Norwegian welfare model. However, mass immigration might have a negative effect on social trust [28–30]. This drastic change regarding mass immigration is something that Norway shares with many other European countries, and this can explain some of the indignation of the host population in addition to the painful problems in terms of the socio-cultural integration of immigrants into the host society [31,32]. However, it is clear that Norwegian society is becoming more and more multicultural, and the statistics show that Norwegians are in fact growing more positive towards immigrants [33]. Nevertheless, racism and ethnic discrimination still exist in Norway [34–37], and it is documented that there is persistent discrimination towards ethnic minorities in the labor market [38] and in the educational system [37]. Even second-generation immigrants experience discrimination, despite usually speaking the language fluently and having the proper educational qualifications [39]. It is also well documented that the Indigenous Sámi people and the Kven, a national Finish minority in Norway [40], also experience discrimination and psychological distress associated with this discrimination [41]. (We have chosen to capitalize “Indigenous” because it is a normal practice in Indigenous studies to capitalize “Indigenous” when one is referring specifically to Indigenous or Aboriginal people, but not when one is referring generally to the original inhabitants of a continent or country, such as Norwegians in Norway. Indigenous in this context do not refer to the original inhabitants, but to the Indigenous status of the Sámi people.)

Being Norwegian is still—despite the inclusion of the Sámi, Kven, and immigrants into Norwegian society and into the national “We”—very much associated with being white [42,43]. Race is, however, an analytically problematic term partly because “race” in a Norwegian/Nordic context is sometimes substituted for concepts such as “ethnicity”, “culture”, “multiculturalism”, “diversity”, or “Muslim”, terms that indirectly signify racialization. An example is that many grocery shops in Norway have a shelf with the sign “ethnic food”, or that people sometimes say that people “look ethnic” rather than talking about their race. Though these divides often occur in implicit ways, one can argue that phenotypical differences, i.e., specific visible physical features, most prominently skin color, are an important reification of ethnic and racial boundaries in a Norwegian context [12,18,19,42,44,45]. We argue that this ambiguous role of racialization in a Norwegian context also has methodological and analytical implications that we as researchers need to

address when doing research that deals with issues related to racialization and ideas about visible differences.

Norway is not unique in a Western European context in having relegated a discourse on race to the margins after World War II. The same case can be said for countries like Germany, France, the Netherlands, and other Nordic countries. Alana Lentin [22] has argued that the silence about race in Europe on the contrary allows European states to declare themselves non-racist, letting an inherent European superiority continue. We argue that while race very much disappeared from the academic and public debate after World War II, intrinsic racial hierarchies existed in Europe long before World War II and the Nazi ideology, and this is something that is crucial for understanding both the cultural, political and academic history of Europe and the European societies of today. Europe's imperial and colonial past, and its military confrontations in the past and present with people from outside Europe is also something that must be critically analyzed in producing Europe's racial superiority [24,46].

In a Norwegian context, it is well documented that while some Sámi people did in fact voluntarily choose to hide their Sámi background and teach their children Norwegian in order to secure a better future in Norwegian society [40], this took place in a society where the Sámi were marginalized and discriminated against. Norway also had a forced assimilation policy, the so-called Norwegianization policy, which formally started with the establishment of "Finnefondet" [The Lapp Fund] to promote the teaching of Norwegian in schools in Sámi and Kven areas. The Norwegianization policy was also gradually tightened through strict school instructions, residential schools, and economic incentives to motivate the teachers [47]. This policy also went hand in hand with the thriving field of Nordic race research, aiming at documenting and categorizing "primitive" people, including the Sámi people, and "superior" races, [48]. Just to exemplify these ideas about inferior and superior races, we have included a quote below from the Director of Schools and the state's chief inspector of Norwegianization measures from 1923 to 1935:

The Lapps have had neither the ability nor the will to use their language as written language. (...) The few individuals who are left of the original Lappish tribe are now so degenerated that there is little hope of any change for the better for them. They are hopeless and belong to Finnmark's most backward and wretched population, and provide the biggest contingent from these areas to our lunatic asylums and schools for the mentally retarded [47].

This quote illustrates how colonization, welfare policies, assimilation policies towards the Sámi, and racialization went hand in hand, reproducing a hierarchy between those who are civilized, rational, and capable of taking care of themselves and those who are not. We also argue that the silence around racialized sides of the Norwegian welfare state is helping reproduce racist ideologies by including them as an inherent part of what constitutes Norwegian values. This association shows that seemingly moderate statements about race and ethnicity can be based on underlying frames of interpretation that are built on racist and nationalistic ideologies. "Norwegianness" is constructed as an implied, superior category, where the idea of a national community is based on a generalized ancestry [49,50]. Norwegian academia is not innocent in this matter either, given the fact that race was a very much present category in Norwegian academia up until World War II [23,48].

2. Methodology

The first piece of empirical material consists of 13 interviews with 15 employees of the Norwegian Child Protective Services (CPS) [51]. This was a qualitative study of how gender and "race"/ethnicity are performed or done [52]—rather than something that one is—and it provided a way to organize ways for doing gender in the CPS. The empirical material contains interviews with employees from local offices of the CPS, including both women and men with and without a minority background. The participants spoke from their positions as professionals. The purpose of the research was to illuminate how the categories of "Us" and "Them" are created by examining how negotiations of Norwegianness were

expressed in anecdotes from cases, with a special focus on gender equality. The study explored how norms and values are often implicit in the CPS, and how these implicit norms and values nevertheless have an effect on clients from a minority background.

The second piece of empirical material was collected from a project about how Sámi presence, loss, and reconciliation are articulated in daily life, as well as how these practices are performed among young adult Sámi people in northern Nordland and southern Troms in Norway—in what are referred to as the Lule and Marka Sámi areas [53,54]. The Sámi people are an Indigenous people in northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and northwest Russia. The material has a qualitative approach and was collected through participant observations and nine interviews between 2011 and 2013. In the interviews, Dankertsen focused on the everyday articulated Sáminess and how this has changed the participants' lives. The thesis illuminates that, in those areas of interest, "Norwegian" and "Sámi" are not mutually exclusive categories that reflect totally separate societies and cultures. They instead must be seen as part of a daily life that is influenced by both the Norwegian and Sámi presence. Sámi articulation must here be seen as a multifaceted process dependent on context, which is negotiated and continually created in social relations and which is subject to change. In other words, this study's focus is on how the participants do or articulate being Sámi, not on how "being" Sámi is something static and unchangeable.

The article is framed as a dialogue between us as researchers and our empirical material. We have chosen quotes from four of our interviews. In the writing process, we analyzed these four quotes together as a dialogue between two close colleagues who—while having similar theoretical interests—belong to two distinct fields of research and who have empirical material from two quite different projects. Through this dialogue, we wanted to examine how the Norwegian context makes it difficult to analyze racialization in Norway. In the article, we analyze excerpts from these two empirical materials through the concept of interpretative repertoires [55]:

Rather than attempting to derive 'discourses' from a set of materials and then considering how those discourses work together and against one another in the abstract, the focus is very much on the implementation of those discourses in actual settings. For these reasons, we have found it preferable to talk about interpretative repertoires rather than 'discourse' per se [55].

By using the concept of interpretative repertoire, we will analyze the interviewees' opportunities to conceptualize racialization in their daily life. We interpret the excerpts as examples of social practices, not as attitudes or underlying motives or intentions [55]. To highlight the importance of context in the analysis of racialization we use a comparative perspective of racialization practices. The comparative method is a useful strategy for revealing power structures in society that would otherwise be difficult to discern. In this way, we can examine how racialization extends beyond visible differences. Thomas Hylland Eriksen states:

By realizing in which ways the social impact of ethnicity can vary within a society and between societies, it is possible to learn about the distribution of power, and about the interrelationship between individual and society, through pursuing widely different contexts which are made immediately intelligible and comparable because one variable, ethnicity, is kept constant [56].

When we keep the concept of race constant, we can compare how the concept of race does or does not appear in racialization practices by analyzing the quotes from interviews in two different empirical contexts. By performing such a comparative analysis, we can examine how the available interpretative repertoire guides what is possible or acceptable to say. Through a comparative analysis, we found similarities and differences and obtained a broader understanding of different challenges in analyzing racialization practices in Norway.

To show the critical reflections that we have had through this dialogue, we analyze quotes from four of our interviews. This is a way of exploring the similarities and differ-

ences of the two projects as well as their social and cultural contexts. While these quotes are not representative of all voices within our two fields of research—child care services and Sámi identities—or of all 24 interviews in total from our two empirical materials, our analysis of the quotes illustrates some challenges and opportunities that we as researchers have when analyzing interviews in a Norwegian context. We used collaborative writing as a strategy, where we not only compared two different empirical fields, but also actively utilized our different positions within research. Kristiansen is a Norwegian researcher with the CPS as her research field, and Dankertsen is Sámi-Norwegian with Sámi and Indigenous research as her field. Kristiansen has a background in the CPS, social work, and sociology and belongs to the majority population with her background in Southern Norway. Dankertsen has an academic background in anthropology and sociology and has both Norwegian and Sámi family backgrounds from Northern Norway but has grown up in Oslo. Even though we, the authors, are both white, we are white in different ways, which is also relevant for the main premise of this article—that racialization is about more than visible differences. This also gives us slightly different perspectives when it comes to the analysis.

3. Postcolonial Theory, Norwegian Nationalism, and Critical Race Studies

To clarify what we mean by a Norwegian context, it can be beneficial to compare other countries' expressions of racialization, as well as that expression's dependence on context. Norway and the Nordic countries can be said to belong to a common historical, cultural, and linguistic region that shares several basic cultural values expressed through the terms egalitarian individualism [20], the Nordic model, social democracy, solidarity, and peace work [46]. The Nordic countries can be said to have been built on the idea that safety is created through equality, expressed by the welfare state's goal to equalize social differences through universal welfare. The ideal in Norway of Marianne Gullestad's concept of "imagined sameness" [20] means that it is important that social borders stay as invisible as possible and that differences are de-emphasized because peace, tranquility, harmony, and consensus are also key values in Norwegian society.

To understand how the concepts of ethnicity, culture, nation, and nationalism are constructed in a Norwegian context, it is important to know the role of nationalism in Norway's history and how this is intimately connected to both the development of the modern nation state and to racism [50,57]. Historically, the link between the concepts of nation and nationalism, culture, ethnicity, and race is quite complicated and often multifaceted. The liberal approach to nationalism and culture in the tradition of Herder is non-racial and is tied to place and language, not to origin [58]. In this tradition, having a cultural identity is a liberal right that should be protected by the state [59].

We can see traces of these ideological roots of Norwegian nationhood in the Norwegian constitution, the celebration of Norwegian Constitution Day, and the history and practices of the Norwegian monarchy [60], where the freedom of the people and uniqueness of the Norwegian language and culture have been of greater importance than colonization and notions of being an empire of the world. Norway was in a union with Denmark from 1380 to 1814 and a protectorate under Sweden from 1814 to 1905. Therefore, Norway is a relatively new national state in the Nordic context. The countries' different statuses during World War II, with Sweden as neutral and Norway as German-occupied, also contributed to making Norwegian nationalism appear more "innocent", i.e., less colonial and racially-based [46], in contrast to other countries' more "questionable" nationalism [20].

Postcolonial theories are a critique of colonial systems and ideologies, including the lasting influence of power relations and hierarchies of people in the world. This often involves everything from political and economic relations in the world to how people outside the so-called Western world are stereotypically pictured. Edward Said [61], one of the founding fathers of postcolonial theory, argued in his influential work *Orientalism* how the West depicts the "Orient" or the "Other" in juxtaposition with "Us" and "We". The "Orient" is often represented as primitive, irrational, violent, and inferior to "Us",

in contrast to the representation of “Us” as civilized, rational, peaceful, and superior. This representation of the “Other” also involves a devaluation of their capability for development, where they can only experience progress if they become like “Us”.

In Norway, post-colonialism is not a perspective that is much in use, probably because it is seen as not very relevant, and this is something that can be said about all the Nordic countries. In the edited volume ‘Complying with Colonialism. Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region’ [62], the concept of “colonial complicity” is introduced. The book points out the apparent “innocent” image of the Nordic countries and shows that public debates on colonialism have often ignored the fact that the Nordic countries have also taken part in, and continue to take part in, colonial relations through political, economic, and cultural ties to other Western countries [46]. In addition, the Nordic countries did in fact participate in colonization in the non-Western world and in the transatlantic slave trade [63], in addition to the fact that they colonized people within their own territories.

The colonization of Sápmi was for a long time, and sometimes still is, considered to be more a reflection of unequal power relations. We can see this colonial hierarchy in the way the colonization of Sápmi is often depicted, where the “weaker” Sámi were overrun by culturally stronger people, as a reflection of an inescapable fate rather than intentional colonization [64]. In this way, implicit or explicit ideas about race and ancestry are linked to societal “success” and wealth. One can also say that the Sámi gradually have become white through the strengthened position and acceptance of the Sámi on a cultural, political, and economic level and through their inclusion in the Norwegian welfare state [65]. This is something that has influenced the cooperation between the Sámi and other Indigenous peoples, where the Sámi have often been understood as “the white Indians” [66]. As the Sámi researcher Rauna Kuokkanen points out: “First, the skin color is more or less a non-issue in Sámiland. Second and even more importantly, it is not the skin color that makes one an Indigenous people” [67]. However, racialization of the Sámi is still relevant in everyday life classification [65], and we can therefore see how race and colonization often interact with class relations, where whiteness is achieved through economic and political success.

The concept of race was created in a European scientific context [68], which had, and still has, clear political and social implications throughout almost 200 years of scientific production, and to which Scandinavian researchers have also contributed [19,23,69–72]. The political and ideological basis for racism is inextricably tied to the growth of modern social sciences. Even though race biology as a scientific practice ended abruptly following the Holocaust, and its associated terms disappeared, it has, nevertheless, affected contemporary practices. With good intentions, the concept of race has become taboo within both science and society as a whole. Peace and humanity have also been a part of the Nordic countries’ self-image and international image [46], while the past colonial superpowers of the West have taken an explicitly moral and political reckoning with their inhumane pasts. This places the Nordic countries in an “innocent” position that makes it difficult to discover the racial hierarchies that they are complicit in reproducing [46].

Applying the concept of race is also useful for uncovering science’s racist practices in the past and present. However, we see the danger of reproducing race as a naturalistic category, which Paul Gilroy [73] thoroughly discusses. He argues for denaturalizing and de-ontologizing race in order to expurgate the term from use. The social aspects of racial mentality demonstrate the advantages of turning away from “the dull priorities established by scholastic reflections on the rational irrationalities of ‘race’ and racism” [73]. Gilroy further argues that there is a need for thinking in a utopian way, because seeing, thinking, and acting beyond a race hierarchy cannot be divorced from practical confrontations with the immediate manifestations of racism” [73]. This is, according to Gilroy, a way of imagining political, economic, and social systems where “race” does not make any sense as an essential, naturalized category.

The role of racism and nationalism is also relevant when analyzing the Sámi people and their relation to how Norwegian nationalism is constructed. Historically, the Norwe-

gian state's policies towards the Sámi population were connected to the Norwegianization policy, a strict policy of forced assimilation, where teachers were "front-line soldiers" and Norwegian education was the most important weapon against Sámi language and culture [47]. This is in contrast to, for example, Sweden and Finland, where the historical policies oriented towards segregation were tied to the construction of reservations in which the assumed "full-blooded" Indigenous peoples were placed in areas isolated from the rest of the population, while the rest of the Indigenous community was assimilated into the majority population [74]. While, for example, Greenlanders, Aboriginals, Maori, and Native Americans are clearly tied to racialized, interpretative repertoires, the racialization of the Sámi is somewhat ambiguous in a Nordic context [65]. Race was a central part of research on the Sámi until World War II [23] when the race concept as an analytical tool became taboo like in other European countries [75]. The Norwegian anthropologist Harald Eidheim [76], who is known for his influential work on the marginalization and discrimination of the Sámi, documented briefly how stigmatization of the Sámi in the post-war period also included ideas about the rather unreliable "Sámi physiognomy". However, Fredrik Barth's [77] edited volume 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries', where Eidheim's [76] article was included, can also be seen as an important explanation for why race disappeared as a theoretical concept in a Norwegian context. This book introduced a perspective on ethnicity that focused more on the social boundaries rather than the cultural content, moving away from the idea that it is "objective" features that establish the boundaries between people (Barth 1969):

(. . .) categorical ethnic distinctions do not depend on an absence of mobility, contact and information, but do entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained despite changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories [77].

Here, we see how Barth's perspective involves a focus on the social processes of inclusion and exclusion, where this constitutes the categorical boundaries rather than race and cultural content. His perspective had an enormous impact on ethnic and racial studies in Norway for decades, something that can also explain the analytic absence of race both in academia and in the public debate.

Even though Norway's current integration policy can be said to be "softer" than the assimilation policy aimed towards the Sámi population in the past, there are still some similarities that reside in the expectation to uphold Norwegian norms and values. Norway has often been perceived as being relatively homogenous and egalitarian. While cultural diversity is an increasingly important factor when describing present day Norwegian society, certain practices are fundamentally different from what are considered to be fundamental values in Norwegian society. A good example of this is women's rights and practices that are considered to be problematic, such as hijabs and female circumcisions, something that complicates the acceptance of, and the celebration of, cultural diversity in Norway [78].

In recent years, Norway has moved towards a more conservative political approach to accepting refugees and asylum seekers [79,80], something that has made the concept of race more relevant. Right-wing populism, violent attacks on non-white individuals, and the ideology and massacre of Anders Behring Breivik have also made the debate on race more relevant in Norwegian academia [81,82]. However, these extreme attitudes among a few individuals might also have contributed to the perseverance of the popular understanding that racism always consists of aggressive actions committed by self-identified racists [43]. The investment by others in being "the good guys" combined with the extreme examples of racist attacks therefore seems to contribute to the enduring social anxiety about race in Norway [43]. This means that individuals often are racialized in a sometimes quite implicit, but nevertheless relevant way, and this should be addressed when analyzing issues related to culture, ethnicity, and nationhood in a Norwegian context.

4. Racialization and Representations of Whiteness in the CPS

We will now give some examples to show the dilemmas connected to analyzing racialization in a Norwegian context. The first example is taken from Kristiansen's empirical evidence. "A", a social worker, was asked to list the qualities of an ideal foster home, assuming she could choose freely. In response, she spoke about a placement she had made of a Kurdish child from a Muslim community into a Norwegian foster home:

It is a terribly difficult question. I think that there is a need for someone with good insight into Norwegian society. They do live in Norway and will live in Norway perhaps for the rest of their lives, and they have to adhere to Norwegian rules whether they want to or not. So, I think the quality [of life] a Norwegian home can give [the children] is really, really important. But at the same time, [the child] belong[s] to a Muslim community [and] we have experienced in Child Protective Services how incredibly important it is to have a good, cooperative relationship with the adults of the household to ensure success. I have to say, I think that's easiest to achieve with a Norwegian family. It has to do with the way we think, and about an individualistic versus collective way of thinking. In that, we are very different in the way we assess what is important for the children. (A)

We see here how questions are raised implicitly about Kurdish/Muslim foster parents' loyalty to Norwegian rules because of their background. A's perspective entails a dichotomous understanding of Norwegian and Kurdish/Muslim ways of thinking, which are expressed with a special focus on individualistic versus collective thinking, respectively. In this quote, there is nothing to indicate racialization, yet the social worker is expressing a hierarchy where "the quality in a Norwegian home" and "individualistic ways of thinking" per definition are best for a child. In order to create a better family environment for the children, it is better for them to stay in a Norwegian foster home. This resembles the dualism that Said [61] describes, where the "Others" are always inferior and in need of Western intervention or "rescue". A also expresses an image of their work that we analyze as an "innocent" image, where Norwegian society is "the good guys" in the world, with a mission to help "the others" [46]. We can see an implicit dualism between "Us", the Norwegian society depicted as inherently "good", and "Them", something that resembles the dualism between the East and the West that Said [61] explores in his work.

A is a professional, hired by an institution within the welfare state with regulations and an institutional culture that aims to be politically correct. In this context, it aims for neutrality when connected to gender, ethnicity, religion, and race. This aim is important for understanding A's difficulty in explaining why a Kurdish/Muslim foster home is problematic. We sense that her worries run deeper, but her professional language stops her from verbalizing what her worries truly are. A is effectively saying that it seems difficult to place children in culturally-matching homes if these homes are assumed to have values that differ from "the Norwegian," including differing views on raising children. Her attempt to specify through terms such as "collectivist thinking," "good, cooperative relationship," and "adhering to Norwegian rules" reproduces this dualism that we see between "Us" and "Them". We see here that while A tries to represent "the good guys" in the interview, the postcolonial dualism between "us" and "them" [61] is very much present in the quote.

While A refers to "Muslims" and not to skin color, we see this as a euphemism for people from non-Western countries, where the racial and postcolonial power structures are very much present, even though they are only indirectly referred to. The statement that Norwegian families are best for all children can be interpreted as an expression of some uncomfortable, inherently Norwegian ideas about the moral superiority of Norwegian culture. It is an implicit expression of the racial hierarchies in Norwegian society. The lack of terms to describe what this morally superior Norwegianness entails is striking and is reminiscent of what Gullestad [50] writes about racism in Norway when she states that there are some assumed and obvious lines between Norwegians and citizens with non-Western origin that can be tied to ideas of moral superiority.

This analysis shows the dilemma of critical race studies in a Norwegian context where the concept of race is almost non-existent. On the one hand, we as researchers risk drawing conclusions that we have no basis for and that are extrapolated from interview data that attribute opinions and attitudes to interviewees who might not necessarily identify with them. On the other hand, we risk reproducing racialization and racism in a Norwegian context if we as researchers avoid analyzing racialization because of our own “anxiety” about race and racism. The equation between race and ethnicity can be interpreted as a historically-detached representation of cultural differences or as an expression of a political correctness where skin color is neutralized by equating all non-Norwegian backgrounds. Race is both under-communicated and reworded into apparently racially neutral terms. The dichotomies of Norwegian/non-Norwegian, Western/non-Western, and white/non-white are inextricably interlinked, historically speaking. They are, however, often expressed differently in varying contexts. It is especially challenging when the context concerns whiteness because whiteness, like its closely related term “ethnically Norwegian,” is an unmarked category that is even less articulated than other categories. Anne-Jorunn Berg claims:

Articulation of whiteness as a majority position implies not only a break with a dominant silence, but also with “science as usual.” Whiteness as an unmarked category ties in with privileged interpretations of scientific objectivity in particular ways (Haraway 1989/1992, 1997). But even if we know what we “should” do, we are still left with the question of how to critically research whiteness [44].

As the example with A illustrates, whiteness as an unmarked category can make it a methodical challenge to study because we, as two white researchers, also belong to a community where whiteness is an unmarked category. The question then becomes how we as researchers can analyze race in quotes from interviews where race is not explicitly mentioned but nevertheless is an implicit factor in the social interactions that we as researchers study. This illustrates the challenge that we as researchers face when analyzing racism and racialization in a Norwegian context where these issues often are understated or “translated” into an issue of “culture” or “ethnicity”. We, therefore, must take into account the context and use our professional judgement to make sure that our interpretations are made in a correct and responsible way.

5. Racialization of Sámi and Representation of Whiteness

“B”, a 39-year-old Sámi woman, draws a connection between the racism she and her family have experienced as Sámi and racism towards people of non-European backgrounds. She talks about the racism and discrimination that previous generations, including her own family, were exposed to and how this still impacts her today:

Old NOUs (Norwegian Official Reports), for example (. . .) say Sámi people have to become human before they can be christened. What the fuck were we seen as before then?” (B)

Here, we see clearly how B builds a foundation for discussing racism towards Sámi people today by invoking the defunct, racist perspective of viewing Sámi people as subhuman. She is a Sámi who has grown up in a time where the Sámi have gained rights to land, culture, and language, and she is living in the Norwegian welfare society where she has had the opportunity to get an education, get a job, and have a good home for her family. It is, therefore, shocking for her to read how Sámi people were described historically in official documents in Norway. Here, we see the ambivalence between these racialized and colonial experiences of being depicted as an inferior people, and her life today, as an individual living in a rich welfare state like Norway, where she has opportunities for prosperity that her foremothers and forefathers never had. Her anger can also be analyzed in relation to the fact that colonization and racialization as a discourse have often been associated with non-Western peoples, leaving the Sámi people in the shadow. The quote shows the relevance of postcolonial theory because it gives us the opportunity to analyze

the way in which colonial structures in both our own region and in the non-Western world can be seen as a part of the same political, economic, and ideological foundation [46]. Later in the interview, she states:

I get angry when people talk about (..) [that they] do not want foreigners over here. Whether it's Somali or Swedes or . . . and take our boyfriends/girlfriends, and jobs and everything. But ourselves, we don't think about it when we holiday abroad every summer. (B)

This ambivalence is visible in the way she describes newly arrived immigrants in Norway and the racism that they sometimes experience in Norwegian society. The interviewer never asked explicitly about immigrants, so it is obvious that B is trying to point out some similarities and differences in the way she and her family has been colonized and racialized in the past and the way immigrants experience discrimination in Norway today. This shows the potential of doing comparative studies of racialization and colonialism in a Norwegian context, which is in line with what was pointed out by Mulinari, Keskinen, and Tuori [46]. B highlights the double standard, where Norwegians do not find their international travel problematic while simultaneously feeling threatened if foreigners come to Norway. Remarkably, B equates Somalis and Swedes, even if it is obvious that she is aiming at foreigners of non-Western backgrounds and different skin colors. Even though B says this in a context where she talks about racism against foreigners, the reason why she mentions Swedes might be a kind of political correctness, as a result of the general Norwegian anxiety about race [43]. The unusual way of equating these variables in this context complicates our analysis but also creates some interesting reflections around what Norwegiansness is tied to. By equating the categories of Swedish and Somali in relation to the category of foreigner, whiteness becomes apparent, even if it is not articulated, because Swedish, like Norwegian, is a category that is associated with being white. Even though foreigner is a category that strictly speaking refers to those who are not from Norway, it is often in everyday life associated with being non-white [18,20,42–45].

What is productive about comparing B's interview to the example with A? Firstly, we, as researchers, analyze the lack of articulation of race as something tied to political correctness. Secondly, if we look at the context of the interview, we discover a significant difference. In the interview with B, who is Sámi, it is unproblematic as a researcher to bring up racism by asking if she has experienced racism. In the interview with A, this question would be perceived differently because the two are Norwegian workers in the CPS. White people cannot be asked questions like those we asked B without assuming that racism is directed towards non-white people. Even though it is not currently common to speak of Sámi people as a racialized group, the historical backdrop of racial biology and subhuman delineations makes it easier to bring racism in as part of the interpretative repertoire. A's interpretative repertoire differs from B's. Because A does not see herself as a racialized person, she will not relate the concept of race to her own practices as a white person. B, however, has no problem relating her own experiences as a Sámi to the oppression that non-white people experience in Norway:

Want to go to Thailand and stay there for eight months, why shouldn't I? How are we seen there? We expect . . . we're light-skinned and have money and are blue-eyed and daddy is rich, and mom as well. I'm born with a silver spoon and easy access to my inheritance. (B)

This quote shows how the meaning of race changes depending on the available contextual interpretative repertoires. B's reference to whiteness is tied to appearance, economy, and equality. She creates a connection between phenotypical qualities, like light skin color and eye color: "we are light-skinned" and "blue-eyed;" affluence: "we have money;" gender equality: "daddy is rich, and mom as well;" and good economic prospects: "I have easy access to my inheritance." This is a description of how B sees herself and her situation, and of what she thinks people from Thailand would see when meeting her. The ambiguity of Sámi racialization is apparent in the way B changes position, from talking

about her own experiences with racism to deliberately placing herself in a position as white. In this quote she articulates how she is aware of her own privileges, as a citizen of a rich welfare state, in contrast to people in other countries in the world who do not have the same opportunities or wealth. There is a certain ambivalence in this quote because she earlier in the interview articulates a certain anger because of her own family's historic experiences of being non-privileged, racialized, and depicted as primitive and uncivilized. However, her anger can also be analyzed as a form of frustration over the silence over these issues and the fact that Norwegian society continues to reproduce an image of being "innocent" and "the good guys," thus ignoring the colonial and racial structures that continue to shape how people are categorized [46].

While B sees privilege and explicitly states it as white privilege, she also consciously places herself in a position as white. A articulates an implicit whiteness by constructing a Norwegian normality connected to preferred cultural practices such as "individualistic ways of thinking," which exclude the minority. At the same time, we can assume that A, in a Thai context, could have similar experiences as B regarding an awareness of her own position as a white person. Reading the quotes in light of each other, we see that the available interpretative repertoires are somewhat similar and overlapping.

6. History's Relevance for the Interpretive Repertoires

The empirical material must also be seen in connection with the societal changes that have occurred in Norway over the last 50 years. We analyze two different social contexts that have divergent histories. C, a social worker, says:

I feel that there has been a development in the social worker community in relation to being able to point to the obvious. There are obvious things that are problematic in non-Western families, and we don't help the children if we don't talk about them, or if it isn't acceptable to talk about them. [. . .] We should be brave enough to speak about the obvious, without having to worry about being seen as xenophobic. If not, we won't help the children and that's what we're supposed to do. (C)

We see here how C is generalizing and problematizing "non-Western families", implying that the idealized Norwegian family is best for the children. This dichotomous understanding of Western/non-Western reproduces hierarchies between people that can be tied to stories of cultures as racialized and essentialized units connected to colonial ties in the past and present [46]. We see how this is linked to a colonial discourse of "Us" and the "Others" and is thus linked to a hegemony of power relations where Said's dualism between "Us" and the "Others" who are socially constructed as an essentialized and inherently inferior group of people [61]. C avers that "we have to be brave enough to speak about the obvious," while also implicitly saying what "non-Western" means. The paradox of speaking plainly about "obvious differences" and at the same time not having the language to express those differences can be explained by the inherent vagueness of politically correct language.

Paralleling an increased openness about racialization and problems connected to integration of non-Western immigrants, there is also a burgeoning dialogue surrounding racism and discrimination aimed at the Sámi population. An example is the 2016 South Sámi movie *Sámi Blood*, which grapples with the racial biology research in Sámi societies, the effects that research has had, and the general discrimination that the Sámi population has experienced in the past and present. D, a Sámi woman in her 30s, talks about her own experiences growing up in a local community that transitioned into becoming more or less Norwegian:

Yeah, as I said, we never talked about being called Sámi or Lapp or . . . we were never . . . we never talked about it, because it was something we didn't identify with. But we all knew we were teased about it. (D)

In this quote, D shows how Sámi language and culture almost disappeared from the way her Sámi community defined themselves, including how they were bullied at school for being Sámi. Even though the assimilation policy led to Sámi people identifying more and more with the majority population, the majority population still held the privilege of assigning this group of Sámi people an identity that they labelled as different. This quote illustrates how the welfare introduced to the Sámi through the so-called Norwegianization policy [47] also came with a cost and often involved a devaluation of one's own family background as a racialized "Other". In order to live a good life, one had to become Norwegian, in line with what the Sámi researcher Asle Høgmo [83] writes about the hidden Sámi culture in post-war Finnmark. In another quote from the interview, we see how D, even though she stated earlier that she did not identify with being Sámi, still experienced being bullied at school because of her Sámi background:

We were bullied at school because we were 1.50 m and smelled of bonfires. (D)

As D shows, much of the discrimination was rooted in speaking broken Norwegian, smelling of smoke, and other markers of being different, but also in ideas and judgements about the Sámi appearance (short, dark haired, narrow-eyed, high cheek boned). Thus, a form of racialization of the Sámi people was practiced. The silence of the racialization of the Sámi is something that makes these experiences even more painful because the ideological roots are concealed [65]. We see here that while the colonial structures that shaped both the forced and the individual, voluntarily assimilation of the Sámi are more and more thematized in a Norwegian context, there is still a need for research that points out the link between the colonial structures and racialization. At the same time, the fact that so many Sámi people were eventually defined as Norwegian shows that Sámi people do not necessarily look that different from the Norwegian majority, and many could pass as part of the majority population and could identify as Norwegian without problems. Sámi activism from the 1960s to today, which developed further with the founding of the Sámi Parliament of Norway in 1989, has led to an increase in people who wish to identify as Sámi again and to reclaim their language and traditions.

It is more the younger people who have shown up now. And they are brave. But perhaps that time is over. Or they refuse to relate to all that. (D)

In the quote above, D shows how young people from areas where Sámi language and culture were nearly erased are increasingly interested in owning their Sámi identity. While in D's upbringing people did not talk about being Sámi or were discriminated for it, such an identity has now become more visible in daily life and in the public sphere. This, however, also creates a space where talking about the colonial and racialized implicit structures that still linger in Norwegian society towards the Sámi become even more difficult. It also creates a void between those who can, and those who for different reasons feel that they cannot show that they are Sámi, or who feel that it is something that is so far away in the past that it is no longer relevant for today's society.

We weren't victims of bullying. I can't brag about that, and I didn't really feel any shame either, but we definitely held ourselves, yes, I guess it was, that was the truth, or my truth or something, yeah, and then I guess it was, well, I guess there was a, yeah, this not talking about it, was in a way a collective decision, or we just understood between ourselves that we just did not talk about these things. So, definitely, our teenage years, or when I was a teenager, it was kind of about escaping from all of that, or not escape. I can't say I've had traumatic experiences surrounding it, but more that it just did not exist. (D)

In this quote, D expresses something that feels impossible to articulate because it is something that has not been spoken about: the discrimination and racialization of the Sámi people as a group. When she says that the traumatic experiences "did not exist," this can be analyzed as a way to express that it was impossible for her to articulate them, something she ties to a collective silence, or, in D's words: "we just understood between ourselves that we just did not talk about these things."

By reading the quotes from C and D with a comparative perspective, we see how changes in Norwegian society have made it more legitimate to use terms that reflect racialization, as C points out. We also argue that by using postcolonial theory [46,61] we can see clearer how the racialization is connected to both colonial structures of the past and present that shape how we relate to other people in Norwegian society. We believe that this can lead to a risk of reproducing racist ideas. At the same time, it gives C, as an employee of the CPS, an opportunity to address problems in immigrant families that she feels political correctness has kept her profession from addressing. D shows that a larger vocabulary for racialization can be a useful tool to fight the same racist ideas. Both show that there has been a change in Norwegian society, for both good and bad, in regard to the opportunity to express oneself about racialization.

Through our dialogues during the writing of this article, we have explored how racialization and racism are articulated differently in various contexts. In these dialogues we have discovered how important the context is for interpreting each other's empirical material. We have also discovered how difficult it sometimes can be to analyze racialization in a Norwegian context, where racialization often is articulated in an implicit, ambiguous, or euphemistic way. This ambiguous role of race in Norwegian society is also enforced by the continuous silence of colonialism and its role in shaping Norwegian society both in the past and present [46]. On the one hand, a less politically correct Norwegian public has, to some degree, legitimized expressing oneself in racist terms. On the other hand, we have also received terms to oppose that same racism. This conflict can be viewed in connection with the term "complying with colonialism" [46], where one argues that the Norwegian state stood outside colonialization processes occurring in the rest of the world and therefore did not confront colonial times or their ideologies. At the same time, Norway has participated in its own colonial ideologies via its oppression of the Sámi people.

7. The Ethical Responsibility of the Researcher

Research produces realities and worlds [84,85]. Because research, for better or worse, always has consequences, the researcher cannot avoid moral responsibility. In addition, the researcher is situated in, and is therefore a part of, the reality they are exploring [85]. The ethical relation between the researcher and the researched, between subject and object, is therefore given another dimension. It is not a question of an abstract subject that relates to a radical, externalized other, but of the researcher taking a moral responsibility for the networks, processes, and relations of which they themselves are physical and subjective participants [85]. The process of research entails a conceptualization aspect, or siting, which necessitates a methodological demand that the research subject should reflect upon their placement in time, space, body, history, and the context of intersectional power structures of which they are a part [85].

This distinction is relevant because our methodological question concerns what we do methodically as researchers when interviewees do not speak explicitly about race, but where we still detect a subtext of race and therefore also whiteness. We argue that feminism's contribution regarding the researcher's situatedness—in our context, whiteness and by extension race—is productive for problematizing traditional research ethics. Haraway writes:

We need to learn our bodies, endowed with primate color and stereoscopic vision, how to attach the objective to our theoretical and political scanners in order to name where we are and are not. [. . .] The moral is simple: only partial perspective promises objective vision [86].

Haraway points out something that is so obvious, but curiously overlooked. We as researchers do, as does every other human being, rely on our bodily experiences with the world. We are participants in the world that we study, and we can only access this world through our partial vision, influenced by our own taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. Both of the authors of this article are white Norwegians, something that gives us a position in the world that helps us access and experience the world in a different

way than a non-white researcher might have done. However, as the short dialogue in the beginning of the article illustrates, our slightly different backgrounds have also been an advantage while working with this text. Where one of us has a typical, white, Norwegian background, the other of us has Sámi family background and has both from her own life and family stories experiences of being racialized and discriminated against. While belonging to the same theoretical traditions with common roots, we as researchers are also situated in two different fields of research. It is possible and necessary to take responsibility for the production of knowledge [86]. Gunaratnam claims that one should:

[. . .] examine research relationships with continual reference to history, and to a complicated web of spatial and social relations. This means moving beyond banal acknowledgement of relationality. It means moving towards a focus upon specific embodied practices and interrelations in research, towards the detail of how difference is produced and has effects within specific sites, and towards an examination of how these forms of difference might be connected across very different social spaces and experiences [87].

An important question in this context is how studies of racial privileges connect to assumptions in research, which can be critical when researchers are situated in whiteness. Research about race and ethnicity must be placed in a larger social context, including the colonial structures in the past and present, where we as researchers are also situated in both a historical and political context. How differences are produced and affect specific places at given times is connected to the much larger historical social processes that have taken place and still take place in entirely different areas. Basing our analysis on two different empirical contexts within Norwegian society, we analyze how different forms of racializing have some common traits connected to complicated spatial and social relations rooted in specific historical processes.

8. Conclusions

In this article, we have explored the potential of using comparison and collaborative writing as strategies for analyzing racialization practices in Norway. We have shown how we as researchers, through empirical illustrations, can analyze racialization in a context where the concept of race is partly taboo, silenced, or rewritten through terms like ethnicity, religion, culture, and differences. The racialization is silenced by the continuous Norwegian image of being “the good guys” in the world, innocent in relation to colonialism and global racial hierarchies. However, the way race is articulated in a Norwegian context, and the absence of language for skin color and other differences that show social constructions of racial differences, makes it challenging to analyze racialization processes as researchers. We as researchers therefore need to be conscious of the complex context of race in the Norwegian society, including the potential conflicts between the new multicultural Norwegian society and the social and political benefits of the, until now, relatively homogenous Norwegian society, which is characterized by a high level of trust [27,29,31]. As we have shown, the use of postcolonial theory also makes it easier to analyze the complex ways in which race is articulated in a Norwegian context.

Through collaborative writing, however, we have critically examined our analytical process in a way that opens a more critical perspective for both research processes and societal processes, as well as for our research positions. As our conversation in the introduction shows, we have in the dialogue between us during the work with this article critically challenged each other’s statements and understandings of racialization in relation to colonial structures both on a local, national, and global level. We have explored how we as researchers can be critical without assigning opinions that people do not actually hold, how our own theory-driven understandings affect our interpretations, and how our positions as both researchers and social actors in a Norwegian social context create blind spots that keep us from being sufficiently critical.

A prerequisite for this process has been a common theoretical interpretative repertoire that provides opportunities for conversation. Through our dialogues, we have illustrated

how we can make an analytical comparison by analyzing quotes from two empirical materials that are both taken from a Norwegian context. While this article is based on a small number of interviews, we hope that our dialogue in this article might inspire other researchers to use this comparative perspective on larger data material in a Norwegian context. There is a need for researchers that study racialization in Norway from a comparative perspective that includes interviews with both Indigenous, national minorities, migrants, and Norwegian people. The comparison has been tied to the analysis of racialization, where racialization as a term has been kept constant but the contexts in which it is used vary across Norwegian society. There are also different sub-contexts within the Norwegian context that create a variety of opportunities and limitations when it comes to articulating racialization.

In post-colonial research, the importance of context is a theoretical premise because postcolonial perspectives indeed emphasize how power structures must be understood in light of historical and global power relations and their impact on local processes. We argue that this is just as important in critical race studies. In our analysis and dialogues, we have discovered how colonialism, racialization, and nationalism often are articulated in implicit and euphemistic ways that makes it challenging for us as researchers to interpret what the participants really mean. Contextualization, in addition to our professional judgement as researchers professionalized in post-colonial theories and critical race theories, is therefore crucial when analyzing our empirical materials. The different empirical fields and their attendant norms for cooperation have impacted how we, as researchers, perceive opportunities to use the concepts of race and racism explicitly. We also have to be aware of the social anxiety of race that exists in Norwegian society, something that influences both us as researchers and the interviewees. People of the white majority cannot be asked questions like those in this study without assuming that they refer to non-white persons. Even though it is not common today to speak of Sámi people as a race, the historical context of racial biology and the Sámi's minority position makes it possible for members of the Indigenous population to express racialization processes to a greater degree than a member of the white Norwegian majority population. By bringing together these two materials—CPS interviews and Sámi experiences—we show how racialization is expressed in different ways from a majority and a minority position. The critical potential is, therefore, in the opportunity to describe different power relations connected to racialization.

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