Reconceptualizing Educational Research Methodology

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Reflection on racialization, whiteness, and researcher positionality as 'not-quite-white' in the field of educational studies

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Abstract

This article draws on two autoethnographic vignettes from an ethnographic field study conducted in a Danish elementary school over six months. By unfolding two vignettes from photo-elicitation interviews (PEIs), the study analyses how researcher positionality relates to students' experiences of marginalization and makes feelings of being racialized or othered come to the fore. The study proposes the notion of 'sticky' emotion and affect as an analytical lens that provides a more critically reflexive analytical framework to address the interactions between the researcher, racialized students, positionalities, and the research process. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion and reflection on racialization and whiteness to challenge the pull of racialization. The theoretical framework draws on the concepts of whiteness and racialization, which is followed by methodological reflections on researcher positionality.

Keywords

researcher positionality; vignette; affect; sticky emotion; racialization; whiteness; Nordic exceptionalism; ethnography; racialized students

Introduction

In this article, I examine my own positionality as a researcher in relation to students' experiences of marginalization through racialization and othering. To illustrate these reflections, I present insights drawn from two autoethnographic research vignettes (Ellis & Brochner, 2000; Humphreys, 2005) that I developed during fieldwork conducted in an elementary school in early 2023 in the Jutland area of Denmark. The vignettes were constructed from photo-elicitation interviews (Harper, 2002, p.13; Basha and Skrefsrud, 2023) with two racialized students (aged 12–13) in which I introduced a selection of 15 photographs taken in a classroom and the schoolyard as part of my fieldwork. The main contribution of this article is to contribute to discovering a new understanding of whiteness and racialization as a field researcher as I am reflexive about my own (and others') positionality.

While I was deeply committed to understanding the racialized students' experiences of non-belonging at school, as well as their encounters with racialization and social justice, I recognized that I still had 'blind spots' related to my vision of racialization and whiteness. White 'blind spots,' an ableist term that I keep in quotes (see editors' introduction), refer to areas of ignorance or, at the very least, an avoidance of acknowledging racial differences (Frankenberg, 1993). As noted by Gillborn (2015) and Delgado and Stefancic (2000), these 'blind spots' can perpetuate social injustices and hinder discussions on racialization, thereby reflecting a 'colourblind' (or better, 'colour-evasive')[1] approach in which whiteness remains unexplored and unrecognized. By documenting my complicity in discovering my whiteness, I acknowledge my own perpetuation of inequity, which is one meagre step in challenging the pull of racialization.

Discovering these 'blind spots' was challenging, frustrating, and painful, but also enlightening (Frankenberg, 1993). The interviews with the two racialized students affected me deeply on an emotional level, challenging both my positionality as a researcher and my personal identity. The joy came from listening, conversing, and sharing stories; the pain, however, came from hearing a racialized student's experiences of classroom racialization and feeling unable to ask follow-up questions. These interviews thus served as a means to explore my own racialized subjectivity as a researcher (Andreassen & Myong, 2017; Berg, 2008). In this article, I apply research vignettes as interpretative 'reflexive accounts' (Humphrey, 2005; Haraway, 1988) to reflect upon how my positionality and situatedness as a female researcher influenced the knowledge production process (Harding, 2004). By examining my positionality as a critical site of knowledge production, I aim to unpack broader structures of racialization and whiteness that illuminate the significance of racialization in a contemporary Nordic context. This approach allows me to offer a more critically reflexive analytical framework to address the complex interactions between researcher, participants, positionalities, and the research process (Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2023). The research question is: How does a researcher's positionality, particularly in terms of racialization and whiteness, influence the interpretation and understanding of racialized students' experiences in a

[1] Color-evasiveness as a racist ideology resists positioning as problematic as it does not partake in dis/ability as a metaphor for undesired, unknowing, or disadvantaged (Annamma et al., 2017, p. 153). Evasion is about avoidance or escape, not about explicitly creating solutions to problems (Annamma et al., 2017).

Nordic educational context? The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the discussion and reflection on racialization and whiteness to challenge the pull of racialization.

The article is structured as follows: First, I situate the study within existing research on whiteness, racialization, and research positionality. Second, I introduce the theoretical framework for my discussion, drawing on the concepts of whiteness and racialization, as well as incorporating the notions of 'sticky' emotions (Ahmed, 2004, 2014) and affect (Ahmed, 2004; Hemmings, 2012). Third, I reflect on the methodological approach before presenting and analysing the two autoethnographic research vignettes from my fieldwork. I conclude with a final reflection on how this study may contribute to knowledge about researcher positionality and the broader structures of racialization and whiteness within which Nordic education is situated.

Previous research

A few Nordic scholars' studies have explicitly explored (e.g., Andreassen & Myong, 2017; Gullestad, 2002) the notion of race as a social category and how races are reproduced through racial structures that give some people a pass and other people not—socially, politically, economically, and ideologically. Similarly, Vertelyte's (2019) ethnographic study has explored Danish education policies and practices and 'race' and 'racism' as a silent category among students in schools. In her research on processes of racialization in friendship formation practices among adolescents, Vertelyte (2019) recognizes that the ways that racism was explained by the students (and silenced by the teachers) were key to understanding the absence of and challenges for antiracist education in Denmark. Also using a critical ethnographic approach, Yang Ahrong's (2021) study shows how the children's racialized experiences are concerned with their fears of not belonging yet struggling to make sense of their feelings towards 'race-blind' discourses and 'color-blind' norms. Also, in Norway Sandra Fylkesnes (2019) conducted a systematic review of studies of whiteness in Norway and illustrates how the legacy of colonialism produces hidden racialized discursive patterns that constitute otherness and reinforce the centrality of whiteness to the Norwegian self-image. Critical pedagogies have been approached through the lens of anti-racism, which calls for postcolonial-decolonial (Eriksen, 2021; Eriksen & Svendsen, 2020) and affective approaches (Vertelyte & Staunæs, 2021). Similarly, Tobias Hübinette and Catrin Lundström's (2023) book *Race in Sweden: Racism and antiracism world's first colourblind nation* attempts to capture, analyse, and criticise the notions of race and consequently also the notions of racism and antiracism that they have encountered in their own empirical studies. *Race in Sweden* is a major contribution to the existing literature on race, racism, and antiracism in Europe. With its focus on postwar antiracial colorblindness, it has the potential to help shape future critical studies of race in the Nordic countries (Hübinette & Lundström, 2023).

Theoretical framing: Racialization, and whiteness

Robert Miles (1994, p.553) employs the concept of racialization to refer to groups distinguished by phenotypical appearance. Miles (1994) seems to be referring to a larger category in which the characteristic of the 'Other' is naturalized and used as a basis for social differentiation and discrimination (p.556). I understand racialization and whiteness as connected concepts

unimaginable without one another. Racialization is a constant process of 'doing race' (Berg, 2008, p. 214).

Whiteness is understood as an imperial social construct identity, as an "unmarked category against which difference is constructed" (Lipsitz, 1995, p. 369) as power (Dyer, 1997) and a process of racialization based on a privileged position (McIntosh, 1997; Dyer, 1997, p. 45). Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2007) describes whiteness as "invisible and unmarked as the absent centre against which others appear only as deviants or points of deviation" (p.157). McIntosh (1997, p. 291) describes white privilege as an "invisible package of unearned assets" with a lot of opportunities and benefits that are granted to white people, based on their whiteness. Such privilege simply confers dominance, gives permission to control, because of one's race or sex" (McIntosh 1997, p. 296). As such, Gillborn (2015) conceptualizes whiteness as producing a power struggling to let some bodies pass as racially unnoticed and others not and consequently to subject some bodies to the processes of racialization and others not. As Ruth Frankenberg points out, whiteness as multi-dimensional is a "location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society" and a set of cultural *practices* that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg 1993, p. 1).

The concept of 'whiteness' can be seen as particularly salient in the context of the Nordic countries, often seen by others (Fylkesnes, 2019) and representing themselves as predominantly 'white' countries, characterized by 'ethnic' homogeneity (Loftsdóttir, 2014, p. 29). This illustrates that whiteness is also linked to colonial representations, privilege, and dominance, and that whiteness must be understood as a social and cultural construction that can change over time (Dankertsen, 2019; Fylkesnes, 2018).

Nordic exceptionalism

As articulated by Hervik (2019), the Nordic countries—Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and Finland—tend to represent their historic positions as outside of the colonial project, nurturing a self-image as both humane and gender-equal. The idea of exceptionalism in Nordic countries has been important for understanding racism and racialization in these countries (Loftsdóttir, 2014, p.28). Nordic exceptionalism is grounded in the ideology and materiality of Western colonialism, which provides an explanatory framework for continuing relations of racism and racialization in these societies (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). As Clarke and Vertelyte (2023) point out, Nordic educational institutions reproduce racialized processes in curricula and classrooms (Fylkesnes, 2019) in seeming contradiction to their stated purpose of education for all. Nordic exceptionalism is embedded within the educational system and manifest in the production of knowledge and social identities (Eriksen & Stein, 2022). In Norway, anthropologist Marianne Gullestad was for many years the key voice of the anthropology of racism. According to Gullestad (2002, p. 46), concepts and values such as 'likeness', 'similarity', 'identity', or 'sameness' are quite prevalent in Nordic countries. Gullestad (2002, p. 47) adds that Norwegian egalitarianism called for 'imagined sameness' and can therefore be explored under both nationalism and racism, where being 'too different' can become a threat to the 'peace and quiet'. As a policy concept, exceptionalism is commonly used in the context of Nordic equality and welfare policy to indicate how the Nordic

model works as a lesson or model for the rest of the world to emulate (Clarke & Vertelyte, 2023).

This implies that Nordic people must consider themselves to be the same to feel of equal value, which structurally and socially means rejecting differences (Gullestad, 2004). Studies such as these have contributed to the examining of the manifestations of racism but have also shown (Clarke & Vertelyte, 2023; Eriksen, 2021; Fylkesnes, 2019) how Nordic exceptionalism enters everyday classroom interactions and hinders discussions on race in social work curricula.

Affect and 'sticky' emotions: An analytic lens

The affect analytical framework was inspired by Sara Ahmed (2004, 2012). I draw on Ahmed's (2012) works '*Affective Economy'* and '*The Cultural Politics of Emotion'* to argue that affects and emotions pertain to the affectivity of racialization and whiteness by focusing on the relationship between emotions and body. My ethnographic engagements with affect in this article show how my body was affected by racialized students' stories and emotions within my fieldwork. Given my strong, and at times surprising, affective responses to certain art objects and performances, I understand these to be 'sticky' objects, or, in Ahmed's (2014, p. 194) terms, "how signs become sticky or saturated with affect". I use that tension to guide the way to art objects worthy of further scrutiny in the affective realm (Ahmed, 2014; Rush, 2022).

Affects 'turn us on' or 'turn us off' to certain lines of thinking, conceptualizing, knowing, and making sense (Chadwick, 2021, p. 557). I argue that students' experiences with racialization and whiteness at school can 'stick' and be 'sticky'. Ahmed (2014) explores the influence of emotion on shaping the body and argues that affect and emotions circulate in relationships between bodies as she examines how they 'stick' and move: "Emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others" (p.4).

Encounters (Ahmed, 2013, p. 40; Wilson, 2020, p. 2) is not only a useful concept to think with but is central to pedagogies of discomfort, which are seen as efforts to "strange encounters with a difference". As a 'former refugee' and Kosovar Albanian-Danish female researcher, the encounter I share here resonates with my experiences of these spaces where the fieldwork experience of whiteness can impress upon racialized students.

Following this framing, research can be conceptualized as an affective praxis in which the affects circulating in research and analytic encounters—feelings of (dis)comfort, shame, hostility, anger, empathy, disappointment, and disgust—are regarded as the products of intertwining relational, material, embodied, discursive, intersubjective, and socio-material dynamics (Chadwick, 2021). As a researcher in my fieldwork, I became preoccupied with feelings of discomfort (Chadwick, 2021; Ahmed, 2014, 2017). I experienced my research encounters with racialized students that made me feel uncomfortable. However, the strongest affective manifestations of discomfort (Chadwick, 2021) were experienced when I interviewed racialized students with a Muslim background in contexts of racialization. Haraway (2016) argues that if we want anything to change, we have to enter the fray, and "stay with the trouble" (p.1). In the interview with the racialized student, I

found it difficult to conduct the interview. I was upset and unsettled by this encounter (Chadwick, 2021) for a long time afterward and found the transcription and analysis of the racialized student story difficult.

Methodological standpoint

Autoethnographic vignette and reflexivity

Methodologically, I am inspired by autoethnography, and autoethnographical vignettes specifically. Following Michael Humphreys (2005), I understand autoethnographic vignettes as an alternative approach to representation and reflexivity in qualitative research (Humphreys, 2005). Following Humphreys's (2005) perspective, I am working to "come out from behind the safe and comfortable mask" (p. 842). As Humphreys (2005) points out, despite such fear, I am also trying to seek my voice as a researcher using autoethnography to "move from the inside of the author to outward expression while working to take readers inside themselves and ultimately out again" (pp. 184–185).

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), the term autoethnography means "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 733). Ellis & Bochner (2000) argued that: "autoethnography is those studies that have been referred to by other similarly situated terms, such as personal narratives, lived experience, evocative narratives, reflexive ethnography, and critical autobiography" (p. 739).

I write a reflexive first-person *narrative* with two embedded present tenses to "give the reader a sense of being there in the scene" (Humphreys, 2005, p. 842). According to Humphreys (2005), the use of vignettes is explicit reflexive ethnography. Reflexivity, identity, and positionality have a significant impact a researcher's entire fieldwork, from data collection to analysis (Zhu & Wang, 2024). As argued by DeLuca and Maddox (2015, p. 286, cited in Zhu & Wang, 2024), "Without engaging with the self, identifying positionalities, and managing shifting identities in the field, one simply cannot conduct rigorous and honest ethnographic research." Pillow (2003, p. 186) suggests that using reflexivity ("researcher know thyself") as a form of "confession" imbues the researcher with the ability to be self-reflexive, to recognize an otherness of self, the truth, and the self of others. As Pillow (2003, p. 175) points out, being reflexive, then, not only contributes to producing knowledge that aids in understanding and gaining insight into the workings of our social world but also provides insight into how this knowledge is produced.

From interview to autoethnographic vignettes

The autoethnographic vignettes in this paper came from my research as part of a PhD study project that was conducted in early 2023 at an elementary school in the Jutland area of Denmark. The school has 500 students and around 65 members of staff. Approximately 25% of the students in the school come from ethnic minorities. The school is between two neighbourhoods: on one side are social housing and minoritized families and on the other is a suburb with primarily white, middle-class families.

As part of the research process, I returned to the interviews and field notes. Upon revisiting the data material, I expanded my analysis beyond merely examining how I reflected on racialization and whiteness. For this article, I selected 15 photos that I took in a classroom and schoolyard in early 2023. During the period of my observations, the class was working on a theme about 'refugees' and 'my family tree'. I used the photographs as a tool to explore the students' school lives and their experiences with a sense of (non)belonging (Basha & Skrefsrud, 2023) and racialization.

The photos served as a form of photo elicitation (PEI) (Basha & Skrefsrud, 2023; Harper, 2002), used by researchers to help racialized students reflect on experiences of racialization and whiteness in school. PEI has been used in ethnographic studies research (Harper, 2002) and involves "using photographs to invoke thoughts, information, feelings, memory, lived experience, and discussion (p.13). Inspired by Harper (2002), photos can be framed as a participant-driven photo-elicitation method. During the interviews, I asked about the images in the photographs with questions such as: Why did you choose to describe this photograph? What did you like about this? What did you not like? What thoughts and feelings do you have as you look at these photographs?

Using the photographs, combined with the racialized students' stories about the photos, gave them access to talk about racialization and whiteness. According to Harper (2002, p.23), the photographs appear to capture the impossible and it leads to deep and interesting talk. During the interviews, I found myself reflecting and navigating different roles as an interviewer and as co-producer of the knowledge production. Photo elicitation is, simply put, "inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2002, p. 13). The PEI is particularly relevant in connection with research involving child participants, as this method facilitates the study of a child's world and allows the child greater flexibility and freedom to discuss issues that matter to them as a student (Basha & Skrefsrud, 2023; Harper, 2002).

The PEI was recorded and transcribed, and the vignettes for this article were translated into English. For this article, I employed coding (Emerson et al., 1995, pp. 160–161) of my data material. I conducted a line-by-line analysis of the notes using focused coding, identifying instances related to racialization and whiteness. During this re-analysing, I discovered how I had dodged discussions of whiteness with one racialized student during my photo-elicitation interview (PEI) at school as part of my research. Simultaneously, I used photographs as a unique way to communicate activities in their everyday lives. The research participants in both vignettes are racialized[2] students (aged 12-13) with a Muslim background. The research participants were born in the Middle East and raised in Denmark. I do not focus on Danish Muslims as a religious category but as a racialized one. I wrote selected data material into two ethnographic vignettes.

The first vignette is constructed from my reflection on my researcher positionality. Ali's narrative tells of a teaching situation involving the story of a refugee child, racism, and Rasmus Paludan's

[2] The term 'racialized students,' as used in this paper, underscores the experiences of students who are racialized based on their skin color, religion, refugee status or migration background, particularly from the Middle East and (South) East-Europa (Vertelyte, 2024, p.67; Basha, 2022, p.137).

[3]actions of burning the Quran in Denmark. I attempt to capture the experiences of my researcher positionality that are affected by the experience in the PEI. Central to this vignette with Ali was the 'dialogical' approach (Frankenberg, 1993) to the interview. I positioned myself as explicitly involved in the questions, at times sharing information about my own life or elements of my analysis of racism with Ali as it developed through the research process.

The second vignette explicates my researcher positionality in contact with Emine. This is constructed from Emine's narrative of a teaching situation about presenting a family tree, Muslim names, our meeting in a PEI and a re-enactment of the problem, emotion, and the subsequent ripples of intensity. The narrative attracts my researcher's attention because of Emine's exclamation: "I rejected presenting my family's Muslim names. The teacher suggests giving them names such as Gunvor and Anders". The vignette with Emine illustrates how my own 'caughtness' (Frankenberg, 1993) in the relations of whiteness and racialization limited my speech and my abilities as an interviewer. Analytically, what is interesting here is not my dialog (Frankenberg, 1993) with Emine, but my silence (Berg, 2008). The project was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data in January 2023. I have chosen two different vignettes that illustrate new aspects of whiteness and racialization and given analytical attention to how whiteness and racialization come to exist through different emotions. In the next section, I reflect on racialization and whiteness as the category of an experience between me and my interview participants. The vignettes illustrate my researcher's positionality in contact with students.

Vignette I: Ali

I spread 15 pictures across the long table for Ali to view. The following vignette shows how Ali reflects on his experiences related to having a refugee background, race, and racism.

Ali picked up one picture and said:

> *This is a picture from an English lesson. I remember that we should read and discuss in the classroom about Aldin who is a refugee from Syria. I think the story is interesting because there are many similarities between the boy from the story and me. I understand that the boy from Syria who lives in London has a Kurdish background. I have an uncomfortable experience.*
>
> *Researcher: What do you feel when you observe this photograph?*

[3] Paludan is a lawyer with a degree in law from the University of Copenhagen (2008). During the summer of 2018 Paludan continued his political campaigning with meetings and demonstrations across Denmark (Kühle, 2024, p.27). His nationalistic speeches with direct insults against Islam and Muslims sparked particularly strong reactions in ethnically diverse neighborhoods, and in the autumn of 2018, Paludan announced that his demonstrations the following spring would include a Muhammad drawing event, as well as demonstrations "with the theme of burning the Qur'an' and the pouring of urine, bacon, and pig's blood" on it (Sjöberg 2018 citated in Kühle, 2024, p.34). Paludan's ideology is primarily aimed at keeping Denmark for the "real Danes" and making sure Muslims and other foreigners are excluded from the nation (Khawaja, et al.,2023, p.254).

Ali: I don't remember so much from that time… I lost my home. But… you told us, that you have a refugee background, and you lost your home too.

Researcher: Yes. It's true, Ali. I remember that it was a tough time for me.

Ali: Are you Kurdish?

Researcher: No, I am an Albanian. Many years ago, I moved from Kosovo to Denmark. It was a war at that time, and I was already a young adult and I remember how difficult it was for me to live as an 'asylum seeker' and then later as a citizen of Denmark.

Ali: There are many reasons why people leave their homelands. Some of them are forced to do so. Just like us. For political or religious reasons. [Pause] …. hmm … I am looking at my classmate Oliver. We had an interesting conversation in the classroom about refugees, Muslim people, and Rasmus Paludan who is burning the Quran. Oliver said that Rasmus Paludan hates Muslims, and his wish is for all Muslims to leave Denmark and Scandinavia. I think that conversation was a little bit uncomfortable.

Researcher: Yes. I understand.

*Ali: …. I think Rasmus Paludan is racist. Sometimes I've been attacked by some boys in the schoolyard. They called me 'p*ker'.*

Researcher: Did you try to tell the teacher?

Ali: Yes, I did. The teacher didn't hear me.

Emotional understanding: Reflection on racism

Central to this PEI with Ali was my involvement and development of a dialogical approach to the interview. As a researcher, I began from the position of an 'insider' (Bourke, 2014; Nelson, 2020, p. 920). As a 'former refugee', I would be familiar with the experiences that racialized students would share with me. I positioned myself as explicitly involved in the questions, at times sharing with Ali information about my own life, for example as a 'former refugee', as it developed through the research process. This interview with Ali yielded a great deal of information. I observed that my Kosovar Albanian-Danish positionality provided opportunities to talk about how it is to 'lose your home' and relate to Ali's experience. In this situation, I felt that my position as a 'former refugee' could be valuable, because I could reciprocate and relate to Ali's experience, as he had also experienced 'losing his home' during the war and moving to Denmark with his family. This intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991) was such that Ali positioned himself to my social status as a 'former refugee' and how 'we know how it is to lose one's home' and to 'live in Denmark'. It seems that my researcher's positionality as a person with dark hair and as a 'former refugee' is read by Ali as part of 'sameness' (Gullestad, 2002).

As an insider researcher (Holmes, 2020), I was more trusted by Ali and was regarded as being 'one of us' (Holmes, 2020). The construction of "shared experiences" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 153) in this situation foregrounds the differences in gender, age, religion, and social position. I am an adult and a 'former refugee' even though I am also a Kosovar Albanian-Danish female researcher. My status as a middle-class professional in an authority position placed me in an outsider position (Lew, 2010). Previous research has pointed to how a researcher can never fully be an insider, as there will always be things that mark them as different from their participants (Nelson, 2020). As Holmes (2020, p. 2) argues, "Through using a reflexive approach, researchers should continually be aware that their positionality is never fixed and is always situation and context-dependent." My researcher positionality may inhabit multiple positions (Holmes, 2020) along that continuum at the same time.

Ali's story illustrates how ideas of Nordic exceptionalism, understood as a framework of racialization, play into educational practice. Ali's experiences are connected to the words *'p*ker'*[4], "*Paludan is burning Quran"*, and *"I think he is racist".* His feelings of 'fear' associated with those slurs become 'sticky', forming a chain of negative associations that stick to, and consequently restrict, the body's freedom of movement and behaviour (Ahmed, 2004, p. 79). This allowed me to reflect on researcher positionality as 'not-quite-white'[5] in a new way, and I experienced that the discussion was rich with emotions.

As Ahmed points out, what makes something sticky in the first place is difficult to determine precisely because stickiness involves such a chain of effects (Ahmed, 2014 p. 91). The words p*ker and "the teacher did not hear me" signify non-whiteness and are addressed to the body that is "out of place" in the context (Puwar, 2004; Ahmed, 2007, p. 159). Phenotypical[6] features, such as dark hair, skin color, and dark eyes, were considered defining characteristics of racialized category (Vertelyte, 2024). The word 'p*ker', as Ahmed (2014 p. 92) points out, might then stick to other words that are not spoken: immigrant, outsider, dirty, and so on, which gives the feeling of being seen as different both physically and culturally. This is exactly what happened in this school.

Following Pillow (2003) in being reflexive, I experienced Ali becoming open to questions and my researcher subjectivity becoming open to scrutiny. Thus, reflexivity, as Rosanna Hertz (1997, p. 8, cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 178) notes, has also focused on "what I know" and "how I know it" and entails "ongoing conversation about the experience while simultaneously living in the moment". As an insider researcher (Holmes, 2020), I was more trusted by Ali and was regarded as being 'one of us' (Holmes, 2020). Reflexivity then "becomes a continuing mode of self-analysis and political awareness" (Callaway, 1992, p. 33, cited in Pillow, 2003, p. 178). I reflect on my feelings and how

[4] Danish racial epithet 'perker' is equivalent to the English racial slang 'paki', commonly used in the UK. 'Perker' is commonly used as a racial epithet to name anyone who has origins from Middle Eastern or Arab Countries and is generically applied to Muslim people in Denmark (Vertelyte, 2024; Li, 2021).

[5] Following Lapina and Vertelyte (2020, p. 238), on the one hand, I am seen as lagging and 'not-quite-white'; on the other hand, it contains the potentiality for conditionally passing as European and of becoming as white.

[6] The notion of 'skin color' is used more often than the notion of 'race'. 'Skin color' is a metonym for many different features of a person's appearance and can in many situations be regarded as a replacement for the word 'race' (Gullestad, 2004, p. 193).

they were connected to my own and Ali's experience of being an 'outsider'—that is, being 'othered'. I felt Ali's 'fear'. Honestly, this interview with Ali affected me. Listening to the story, my body felt numb. I felt sad and angry at the same time. I have felt all these emotions before. At the same time, I found myself struggling with the questions of how much to disclose and when. I gradually became more emotional and responsive to requests for sharing aspects of my life in Denmark as a 'former refugee' and Danish citizen and increasingly used it but still carefully.

Anecdotally, I recall an uncomfortable memory of being called a p[7]*rker as a young student or being asked repeatedly: "Where are you from? Why are you here?" Orelus (2011) cited in Ahmed (2012, p. 178) "compares this mode of questioning, this sense of curiosity and astonishment, with the questions typically asked of immigrants about 'funny accents". These questions are as if to say, or more accurately, are to say, "You are not from here." Being asked "Where are you from?" or "Why are you working in Norway?" is a way of being made into a foreigner of not being at home in a category that gives residence to others (Ahmed, 2012, p. 177). As Ahmed (2007, p. 163) argues, "To be not white is to not be extended by the spaces you inhabit." This is an uncomfortable feeling, and I am very concerned. I think Ali felt listened to when he could talk about his story of racism and suffering but also 'contextualize' those experiences. Discomfort, in other words, allows things to move by bringing what is in the background back to life. However, upon further reflection, I questioned whether Ali would have asked such questions if he were being interviewed by a 'white' researcher.

Vignette II: Emine

I spread 15 pictures across the long table for the racialized student to view. Emine began by discarding any redundant pictures. I then asked her to select photos to label and elaborate on. I wanted to explore Emine's perspectives, opinions, and values on any substantive topic. As the researcher, I acknowledged that all images represented meaningful moments and that I would like to know more about what was going on in the pictures. Emine led in discussing the pictures. I asked Emine to talk about (non-) belonging at school and her school life and to choose some images. Emine verbalized the process of thinking with utterances of "um" and "Which one should I choose?" She picked up a photo with a family tree. The photo was taken by the author of this paper during a German lesson.

> *Researcher: Can you describe what you are seeing?*
>
> *Emine: Family tree from the German lesson. We had a presentation, and it was my turn to present my family tree. I am challenged to make a family tree. I find it difficult, and I don't feel comfortable with this subject. It is difficult for me to work with that because I don't want to present the names of my family. It's*

[7] These experiences are quite common and have been a part of my existence: all these questions are common microaggressions (Lewis et. al., 2016), which rest on the normalized assumption or discourse of Danishness or Norwegianess as whiteness (Ahrong, 2021).

difficult to present Muslim names. I am afraid that the others are going to laugh at me. I noticed that Marius, Valdemar, and the other classmates laughed at Nera, Ali, and Alvin. The teacher was silent. I felt very bad, confused, and embarrassed at that moment.

Researcher: Hmmm ...

Emine: My teacher advised me that I could give some Danish names to my family, such as 'Anders'; 'Gunvor', or 'Signe'. [Pause] … And I did it. I said: "My mom's name is Gunvor, and my brother's name is Anders." My classmates didn't believe me…. To be honest, I don't like my name at all. I feel that they don't like me. You know… being me… sometimes it is difficult…. [Pause] … I want to look like Sofie and other Danes and to have another name. You know… [her voice cracks]. My peers don't like me. I can feel it. I often hear how my [female] teacher calls Danish girls from my classroom 'beauty': "What did you say, beauty?" I just don't want to talk about that anymore.

Being emotional with Emine: Silence and passivity in the interview

To explore my positionality (Nelson 2020) and situatedness, I decided to critically revisit my interview with Emine where I focused on the positioning process that Emine and I experienced during the PEI situation. First, I engaged with a child from the Middle East, who, as a girl, was forced to leave home with her parents because of the war. In contrast, I was forced to leave Kosovo as a young adult; I was in my early twenties. Paying attention to that moment in the room, I noted that it centred around the story of how Emine had felt the effects of whiteness, such as when she said, "I refused to present Muslim-sounding names from my family tree", "I don't like my name", and "I want to be like Sofie".

I noticed Emine was sad, almost, it seemed, to the point of tears. I was impressed with Emine's passion in telling her story about that experience from the German lesson. She was open in sharing her feelings as she talked. My response seems to have been largely reassurance, the implication from "Hmm". While listening to Emine during the PEI, it was inevitable that I relate her experiences of negative emotions to my own. In this sense, I was affected by Emine's story about non-belonging at school, racialization, whiteness, and her emotions. As Ahmed (2004, p. 119) argues, I want to challenge the idea that I have an emotion, or somebody makes me feel a certain way. I observed that whiteness was verbalized in the PEI with what Emine referred to above and that the experiences are connected to race. In any event, it would have been interesting to explore the point further, for there was something important to be learned from the incident about how Emine felt about her experience with the teacher and her feelings about racialization.

This PEI with Emine affected me, or, as Ahmed (2004, p. 27) argues, "emotions are what move us"; they move us to think about and contribute to processes of social change. The story about Emine's experience of resisting the presentation of her family names, (non-) belonging in the classroom and school, whiteness, and her emotions was an important part of the conversation that I came away from feeling frustrated, perhaps because I could not fully understand the experiences she

shared, which in turn affected and shaped my interview questions.

I listened to her story carefully. My field notes reflected my sadness and concern: I'm not sure I delved enough. Perhaps I did not know the right questions to ask (Nelson, 2020). I found myself thinking, "Does this moment illustrate my 'blind spot' because I didn't ask questions? Did I reinforce white dominance? What should I have asked at that moment?" I should have asked her about her feelings. I asked myself repeatedly: "Why did the white teacher suggest Emine hide her identity?" On the one hand, my PEI with Emine sometimes resulted in an intense consensus between us. On the other hand, this feeling of recognition was not an identical experience with whiteness. I asked myself: "What was it I felt with Emine? Why did I have that emotion?" My field notes show how my silence was not perceived as contributing to the discussion with Emine. As scholars argue (Andreassen & Myong, 2017; Berg, 2008; Gullestad, 2002), one reason for this silencing might be the context of an imagined Nordic sameness. Such 'blind spots' inhibit those involved from voicing their concerns.

Following Ahmed (2017), I began to engage with many uncomfortable feelings. I did not feel well at that moment. Ahmed's statement (2017, p. 28) that "we must stay with the feelings we wish to leave" is not necessarily linked to 'bad feelings' but rather to experiences of inexactness, doubtfulness, or a lack of self-certainty.

Engaging interpretive hesitancy, practising 'epistemic uncertainty' (Sholock, 2012), and staying with feelings of discomfort, I reflected on the uncomfortable feelings I experienced while in the field when coming to terms with my privileged intersectional identity. Inspired by Lapina and Vertelyte (2020), I recognized that my research positionality was shifting from moment to moment.

Another example, more explicitly connected to the presentation of Muslim names, are Emine's statements such as "*My teacher told me that I can just say some of the Danish names as 'Anders', 'Gunvor', or 'Signe'. [Pause] … And I did it"* or *"Classmates don't like me. I can feel it"*, which are linked to the discourse of 'colour-blindness' (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Frankenberg, 1993; Gullestad, 2004). I reflected on my positionality and that it would have been interesting to explore the point further, for there was something important to be learned from the incident in how Emine thought and felt about the teacher who suggested she choose Danish names instead and possibly something in her refusal to present the 'family tree'.

Reflecting further on Emine's experiences and issues with the presentation of a family tree or issues related to her wish to be white like Sofie is, however, often silenced due to resistance towards 'noticing' or 'seeing' race. Further, to be a 'Dane' and 'normal' are often equated with whiteness both outside and inside the Nordic region. Silence sustains white privilege by shutting down talk of racialization.

As Ahmed (2007, p. 155) points out, whiteness becomes "like itself, as a form of family resemblance". Furthermore, 'likeness' (Ahmed, 2007; Gullestad, 2002) is a sign of inheritance; to look like a family is to 'look alike'. Reflecting on my own Kosovar Albanian-Danish positionality, I

realized how narrow my understanding of racialization and whiteness is in a Danish context and how this severely limited the questions I was able to ask Emine. I could not identify with Emine's experience. I did not feel whiteness in the same way Emine felt it. In rereading the vignette from the interview with Emine, I noticed that I did not ask further questions. I asked myself: "Why did I ignore Emine's feelings? Is this about white privilege? Is race still a 'blind spot'?" Silence (Berg, 2008; Frankenberg, 1993) is a strategy that ignores comments of racialization by essentially pretending that they have not occurred. This is a trademark of 'colourblind' logic, "a mode of thinking about race organized around an effort to not 'see', or, at any rate, not to acknowledge, race differences" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 142). Rereading this vignette with Emine, I could see myself working from within the discourse I am seeking to challenge, maintaining one of the silences I am setting out to break.

Concluding remarks

Reflecting on my own research and my identity as a researcher caused me to reflect on my identity and pushed me to consider my discovery of whiteness. In the course of rereading my data material and writing this paper, issues of racialization, whiteness, affect and emotion are interwoven as I grappled with my own identities as a female Kosovar Albanian-Danish researcher. In this article and through the vignettes of my research experiences, I have argued for the importance of the complexities of my multiple positionalities. During the creation and condensation of the vignettes' text, I have been challenged on several levels.

Through the complex intersections of my positioning as a Kosovar Albanian-Danish researcher living and researching in Norway and Denmark, I struggled to negotiate my researcher identity on the inside, outside, and within. Throughout the investigation, I found myself asking: "What is this experience doing to me? I may listen, but how do I listen? How am I experiencing this at this moment? How is this phenomenon showing itself to me? What does it show?"

Through my autoethnographic vignettes, I have intended to share my challenges and vulnerabilities to indicate how racialized students feel and experience racialization and whiteness in the school and classroom and what whiteness can, as a process, do in encounters. The vignette with Emine illustrates the ways that my own 'caughtness' (Frankenberg, 1993) in the relations of whiteness limited my speech and my abilities as an interviewer. Analytically, I am trying to highlight my silence—but not my speech (Frankenberg, 1993; Berg, 2008). Rereading my data material, I could see how I dismissed Emine's racialized experiences and concerns. I was an outsider who could not understand Emine's experiences. Dismissing is used to reinforce 'colour-blindness' by eliminating the concerns of racialized students and subsuming their experiences within white norms (Fylkesnes, 2019; Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Reflecting on the knowledge produced (Harding, 2004) in the racialized students' interviews, what is initially of interest is their desire to live a life free from experiences of racialization and the effects of whiteness. As a result, I began to reconsider how 'not looking Danish' and 'looking different' shape Emine's understanding of her identity.

The vignette with Emine indicates my complicity in encouraging whiteness and white privilege and reinforcing inequitable power relations. As such, I present my data through vignettes, in part, as a way of highlighting not just the racialization and whiteness that Ali and Emine experienced but also the emotional effects of racist incidents. I intended to interview Emine from an 'insider' positionality and thus expected to collect stories about her experience of (non-) belonging at school and racialization. Emine's vignette shows that even though she brought up racialization and whiteness (Bonilla-Silva, 2014) through the PEI, I was not able to add any questions particular to racialization to the interview and did not specifically focus on her emotions and experiences with whiteness. White power and privilege remain significant concerns within education (Fylkesnes, 2019; Vertelyte, 2019). I tried to reinterpret Emine's story, and I realized that I avoided being curious about her story about not presenting her family tree, which continued to be present throughout the PEI. I ask myself: How do we as researchers engage with racialized students? What are we listening for? As Pillow (2003, p. 182) points out, race is a privileged absence—absent because researchers sometimes see no need to address processes of racism and racialization in their research and privileged because approaching theory and research as if they are raceless perpetuates a reproduction of Eurocentric privilege reinforcing its own assumed neutrality.

Staying with discomfort thus potentially becomes a form of political labour (Ahmed, 2017, p. 32) that resists normative imperatives to move away from that which threatens comfortable 'truths'. According to Harding (2004, p.7), knowledge is supposed to be based on social and human experiences, and so different experiences should enable different perceptions of ourselves and our environments. My researcher positionality had no clear dichotomy between the insider and the outsider. I experienced that my researcher positionality inhabits multiple positions (Holmes, 2020) along that continuum at the same time. Mercer (2007, cited in Holmes, 2020, p. 6) suggests that the insider/outsider dichotomy is a continuum with multiple dimensions and that all researchers constantly move back and forth along several axes, depending upon time, location, participants, and topic.

Central to the vignette with Ali was my 'dialogical' approach to the interview. In Ali's vignette, I experienced my positionality as an insider researcher similarly attempting not to reproduce oppressive research epistemologies; however, in the vignette, I brought in my insider views of racial subjugation, which were similar to those of Ali. I positioned myself as explicitly involved in the questions and shared information about my own life with Ali. In certain moments, I may be included in Ali's use of the 'one of us', as in, we both have experienced how it is to 'lose one's home' and we both represent multicultural Danish society. Even so, this mutual experience or understanding of racialization and whiteness did not make the research process any easier. Ali generously responded to my question by sharing the stories about his experience with racialization and his story about "Rasmus Palludan, who burns the Quran". I remarked on this during the conversation; I was listening carefully to his story. In this vignette I was not silent.

As field researchers we consume and produce the research we need to interrogate and challenge the White norms (Fylkesnes, 2019; Gordon, 2005) we encounter so that we can envision alternative interpretations. People cannot see their 'blind spots' and Whiteness. Reflecting on my

own researcher positionality I discover my 'whiteness' and discovering such 'whiteness' makes me worried for anyone who prides herself/himself on doing good work and raises several issues that have implications for qualitative research (Gordon, 2005).

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