DE GRUYTER OPEN

Nordic Journal of Migration Research

Special Issue Article • DOI: 10.1515/njmr-2017-0011 NJMR • 7(2) • 2017 • 97-104

RACE, GENDER, AND RESEACHER POSITIONALITY ANALYSED THROUGH MEMORY WORK

Abstract

Drawing upon feminist standpoint theory and memory work, the authors analyse racial privilege by investigating their own racialized and gendered subjectifications as academic researchers. By looking at their own experiences within academia, they show how authority and agency are contingent upon racialization, and how research within gender, migration, and critical race studies is often met by rejection and threats of physical violence. The article illustrates how race is silenced within academia, and furthermore how questions of race, when pointed out, are often interpreted as a call for censorship. The authors conclude that a lack of reflection around the situatedness of knowledge, as well as the evasion of discussions on racial privilege, contribute to maintaining whiteness as a privileged site for scientific knowledge production.

Keywords

Gender • race • memory work • researcher positionality • Denmark • transnational adoption

Received 13 March 2016; Accepted 23 January 2017

Rikke Andreassen*, Lene Myong#

*Roskilde University, Denmark

#University of Stavanger, Norway

Introduction

How do race and gender shape researcher subjectivity and agency? To what extent is knowledge production and researcher positionality embedded in racial structures? And what does this tell us about race and racialization in the Nordic region? In this article, we pursue these questions through examining our own racialized and gendered subjectification as academic scholars. We have worked within migration studies, critical race studies, and gender studies for the past 15 years, and we use our experience as scholars to provide nuanced understandings of racialization in a Danish context. We draw upon memory work as a tool for exploring our racialized and gendered subjectifications (Berg 2008; Hyle *et al.* 2008; kennedy-macfoy & Nielsen 2012). Our ambition is to produce knowledge not only about our own positionality but also about the broader racialized and gendered structures of the society within which we are situated.

We begin by situating the article in relation to work that focuses on racism and racialized subjectification in the Nordic regions. This is followed by an account of our theoretical framework and applied methodology. The main part of the article consists of an analysis of our memory work, in which we examine three themes that have been central to our work and subjectification as scholars: the racialized production of (in)authentic researcher positions, violence as a condition for disseminating research about race and gender, and representation and agency in relation to racialized researcher positionality.

Race in the Nordic regions

In Europe, scholarly reluctance to engage with the category of race has been particularly dominant within the German-speaking and Nordic regions (Lewis 2013). This explains, in part, why the Nordic research fields of migration and gender continue to work within a paradigm of ethnicity, and ongoing debates speak to how the concepts of race and racialization remain contested in Nordic academia. During the past 15 years, a growing number of scholars have insisted on using the concept of race. This turn to race may be seen as a reaction to how privileging ethnicity makes it difficult to address systemic inequality and structural racism. The insistence on race breaks away from the ideal of colour-blindness, which was imposed in Europe following the atrocities of World War II (Goldberg 2006; Su Rasmussen 2003), and from Nordic welfare states' ideologies promoting egalitarianism through sameness (Gopal 2000; Hervik 2011).

This article is embedded in critical perspectives exploring the meaning of race in the Nordic regions. We are here thinking of how attention to race has, in part, been developed around an interest in racism (e.g., Bang Svendsen 2014; Bangstad 2014; Gullestad 2004, 2002; Hervik 2015, 2011; Horsti 2016; Keskinen 2014) and whiteness as ideal and norm (e.g., Bang Svendsen 2015; Hübinette & Lundström 2014, 2011). Studies such as these have critically theorized and examined manifestations of racism, but have also shown how criticism and opposition to these manifestations are often deflected through the logic of colour-blindness and anti-racism

Email: *rikkean@ruc.dk, #lene.myong@uis.no

that underpins different forms of Nordic exceptionalism (Danbolt 2016; Habel 2012; Rastas 2012). We are also inspired by scholarly work that unpacks the affective and representational politics of race (e.g., Gondouin 2016; Smedegaard Nielsen 2015), as well as the aesthetic and socio-economic legacies of colonialism (with) in the Nordic regions (e.g., Andreassen 2015a; Keskinen *et al.* 2009; Loftdottir & Jensen 2012; Habel & Sawyer 2014). Several studies have also focused on the racialization of migration (e.g., Lundström 2014; Myong & Trige Andersen 2015; Stokke 2012) and how meanings of race are negotiated in people's everyday lives (e.g., Adeniji 2013; Andreassen & Ahmed 2014; Hübinette & Tigervall 2009; kennedy-macfoy 2013; Myong 2009; Sawyer 2002).

Our article takes its point of departure in this cluster of research and its different explorations of race as the product of (changing) processes of racialization that are contingent on historical, socio-economic, and political conditions. We examine our (racialized and gendered) positionality as sites of knowledge production, and we aim to unpack structures of race, gender, and knowledge that speak to the status and meaning of race in a contemporary Nordic context. We focus, in particular, on how the racialization of our positions as scholars informs how we disseminate our research and how it is received, both inside and outside academia.

Epistemology and methodology

Our theoretical framework is inspired by feminist standpoint theory, which suggests that collective and individual experiences are central to the production of knowledge. In the 1980s, feminist scholars such as Sandra Harding deconstructed traditional scientific ideas about objectivity and neutrality inherited from positivist science (e.g., Harding 1987, 1995). Harding argues that the self-understanding of science as neutral, value-free, and objective is false (1987: 182). Implicated in this is an understanding of knowledge, not as given and static, but as the result of a struggle between dominant and marginalized groups and voices (Hemmings 2012). Thus, according to Harding, science must be understood as biased and knowledge as situated. Seeking an answer to this problem, she proposes 'standpoint knowledge' or 'strong objectivity' (1993: 57, 69). Black feminist thinkers (e.g. Hill Collins 2000; hooks 1984/2000, 1992) have made a pivotal contribution to feminist standpoint theory with their insistence that knowledge production is embedded in racial differentiation and inequality. Patricia Hill Collins argues that:

> [b]ecause elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship. As a result, U.S. Black women's experiences as well as those of women of African descent transnationally have been routinely distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge. (Hill Collins 2000: 251).

Thus, she identifies a need to develop new epistemologies in which experience should be a criterion for meaning, that is, experience should be a fundamental epistemological tenet (2000: 208ff.). In other words, black standpoint feminism accentuates how the positions occupied by 'women' are stratified according to race and class, amongst other things, but also that these positions constitute a site of epistemic privilege. This, however, does not imply that marginalized people per se are seen as truthful individuals, or as Clare Hemmings puts it: 'Knowledge of and from the margins is considered more accurate and rigorous not because certain subjects have a naturally more truthful disposition, but because of the conditions of existence that provide differential access to power and authority' (Hemmings 2012: 155). Standpoint feminism's claim that knowledge produced from the margins provides valuable insights into the workings of the uneven distribution of power and privilege is useful for this article, because we make use of our experiences as entry points for analysis. Drawing upon standpoint feminism's insights that knowledge is situated and knowledge production should begin with lived experiences, we argue that our different standpoints – Rikke Andreassen as a white woman, Lene Myong as a woman of colour – as well as our research positions constitute productive sites from which gendered and racialized differentiations and hierarchies may be analysed and understood.

Methodologically, we are inspired by memory work and auto-ethnography, and following Frigga Haug and Anne-Jorunn Berg, we understand memory work as a bridge that connects theory with lived experiences (Haug 1987: 14) and everyday practices (Berg 2008: 224). Berg argues that memory work is a method through which one can make links between lived experiences, political relations and the production of knowledge (Berg 2008: 214). While memory work as a method was developed primarily for exploring structures of gender oppression, Berg shows that it is equally useful for investigating racial oppression and privileges. Berg's analysis (2008) of whiteness illustrates how it (as a privileged position) is constructed and maintained through practices of silencing.

A number of Nordic scholars have used their racialized and gendered positionality to analyse race formations in this tradition (see Mørck & Khawaja 2009; Andreassen & Ahmed 2014; kennedy-macfoy & Pristed Nielsen 2012). Ylva Habel (2012) uses her experiences – as a racialized woman teaching a mainly white student body – as a point of departure for talking about race in academia in Sweden, while Lin Prøitz and Henry Mainsah (2015) use auto-ethnography to analyse their experiences of racialized individuals in white Norwegian academia. Like Berg, they also encounter silence from white majority Norwegians when talking about race (and gender). While Berg focuses on silence as a maintainability tool that stabilizes whiteness, Prøitz and Mainsah describe how they *feel* when encountering this silence (Prøitz & Mainsah 2015: 175 ff.). Prøitz and Mainsah's account of the feeling of racialization can be traced back to Audre Lorde (1984), who has written about how it *feels* to be racially positioned as a black woman. Likewise, Sara Ahmed has shown how discomfort can be an analytical lens; discomfort identifies bodies which fail to align themselves with racial and gendered norms (Ahmed 2006: 154).

In this article, we use memories of our academic trajectories to analyse racial and gendered subjectification (Myong 2009). Traditionally, memory work has been carried out in three phases (Hyle et al. 2008: 4), and we have applied this mode of working. Firstly, we have individually written down memories of situations in which race and/or gender appear in relation to our academic work. Secondly, we have discussed and analysed the narrative memories; we approached these memory vignettes as texts that provide insights into affective and embodied experiences of racialized and gendered subjectification. Thirdly, we have analysed the vignettes in relation to a broader understanding of theories related to race and gender. The 'I' that appears in the vignettes corresponds with the 'I' that emerges from the analysis of memories; this means, for example, that Rikke Andreassen has written the analysis of the vignettes followed by the name 'Rikke' (and the same goes for Lene Myong). Yet the analysis that follows each vignette is also characterised by

collaboration; during the latter two stages, we were able to tease out and re-work analytical points from each other's vignettes. In this way, the analytical text is a product of our collective work.

Who gets to speak about whom? Racialization, (in)authenticity, and researcher positionality

> *I participate in a panel about Muslim women, headscarves, and gender equality. I am positioned as the 'academic expert' on the panel; the one who has studied media debates and political discourse about Muslim headgear and gender constructions. My fellow panellists are positioned differently; one is from an NGO working with vulnerable Muslim women, one represents the corporate sector, and one is a 'personal witness', i.e., a woman who wears the hijab herself. I have been to a number of panels like this. After the panel, the woman wearing the hijab – who is rather well-known as she has participated in a number of public debates – says to me: "It's really good that you participate in these debates. You can say things so people listen. When I say it, they don't believe me. But they listen to you." I feel this is a different way of saying that I – as a white, non-Muslim, middle-class academic – have a different authority and voice than she and women like her have. Her words make me feel embarrassed. I feel she is right – and that makes me uncomfortable. I don't know how to answer her. I feel that we are friends or allies in these politicized discussions, yet her comment makes me uncomfortable. I want to answer with something about how people also listen to what she says – but I know it is not really true. (Rikke).*

Race is not verbalized in my conversation with the Muslim woman referred to above, but it is obvious that positionality and authority are connected to race. Furthermore, race intersects with class on the panel – which consists of two white women and two women of colour – as the white people are positioned as 'professional' (academic and corporate) and the people of colour are positioned as having personal experiences of being Muslim and racial/ethnic minorities (one as working with Muslim women and the other as being a Muslim woman herself). This set-up gives the white women authority, as well as a professionalism that enables them to speak about society in general, and frame their utterances as 'objective knowledge'. In contrast, the women of colour are positioned as only able to speak about their own situation as minorities, which 'reduces' their utterances to 'personal experiences'. Stine H. Bang Svendsen has shown how the positionality to speak on behalf of society and have one's utterances carry authority, is often racialized and gendered, in her analysis of Norwegian (white, male) authors speaking on behalf of the Norwegian nation (Bang Svendsen 2015). The white women on the panel do not have the authority to speak on behalf of Danish society, but they are positioned with authority to speak generally about that society, that is, they are believed to possess knowledge about how society operates. Berg has shown that whiteness as an unmarked category belongs within the ideology of scientific objectivity (Berg 2008: 214). Differently from ideas of scientific objectivity, feminist standpoint theory argues that investigations into (or debates about) Muslim women's situation should begin by listening to the Muslim women's experiences – not by listening to a white, non-Muslim researcher or a white, non-Muslim corporate leader. While one can argue that (at least two) Muslim women are being listened to (by being included on the panel), their voices carry a different weight than those of the white panellists. Furthermore, feminist standpoint theory has shown us that objective knowledge is an illusion; yet, on this panel, I am positioned as a researcher possessing 'objective' knowledge. The Muslim women's personal experiences are considered less 'objective', which is partly why my utterances carry more weight than theirs. Inhabiting this position is an experience of racial privilege; it is a racial and class experience of being listened to – and taken seriously. This testifies to Hill Collins' description of academia and the paradigm of epistemology as being white. But whereas Hill Collins argues that women, and especially women of colour, have been left outside knowledge production (Hill Collins 2000: 201), one might argue that today white women, such as myself, are able to perform 'proper' knowledge. The position as holder of 'proper' knowledge is no longer reserved for white men but has been expanded to include (white) women. I would argue that whiteness plays a specific role in the intersection of migration studies, gender, and race; it is precisely because the objects of study are headscarves, Islam, and gender that Muslim women are not included as 'proper' knowledge possessors, and the white researcher can be interpreted as a 'neutral' researcher. In this context, Muslim women are seen as 'too close' to the field, which transforms their insights from knowledge into personal experiences. Had the field been different, for example, within the natural sciences, health, or literature, it is possible that women – independently of race and religion – might have been included.

When the Muslim woman in our conversation points out how people listen to me, she is highlighting my racial privilege. In the Nordic countries, there is a tradition of not verbalizing race (Andreassen, Myong & Henningsen 2008; Andreassen & Ahmed 2014). Retrospectively, I find that the panel and the conversation that followed contributed to this tradition of not naming race. Berg (2008) argues that whiteness is being maintained by silence; the lack of naming race and racialized bodies – even though this is what we were talking about after the panel – makes the effects of race (discrimination and privilege) less visible. Furthermore, my discomfort illustrates race and racial privilege as 'awkward' topics in a Nordic context; one of the reasons we tend not to speak about race is because it is uncomfortable (Myong 2009; Andreassen 2014). Speaking about race highlights not only racial discrimination, but also – and perhaps more importantly in this context – racial privilege. Scholars have argued that contemporary Nordic countries are characterized by an ideology of colour-blindness, which causes a silence around race and racial privilege (Myong 2009; Hübinette & Mählck 2015). Colour-blindness is central to racial formations in the Nordic countries, and has a long history; indeed, it can be located in descriptions of inter-racial interactions in Denmark during the 1920s (Andreassen 2015b). This potential historical colour-blindness may have been strengthened by the Nordic welfare state model, within which the ideology of equal rights and equal opportunities is very strong. Speaking about racial privilege may therefore be interpreted as destabilizing the ideological underpinnings of the welfare state, as it reveals a discrepancy between ideal and reality. This form of discomfort, exemplified in the memory described above, contributes to a practice of avoidance and silence, which maintains whiteness as a majority position.

> *I get a call from a journalist. She wants to write an article on transnational adoption, and she would like to conduct an interview about adoption critique. Besides me, she also plans to interview another critical adoptee. I accept her proposal because it is unusual for journalists to take a more than superficial interest in the thoughts and ideas that inform adoption critique. We begin the interview and the dialog goes back and forth for a while. I try to explain why I see transnational adoption as the effect of structural racism and inequality and not the solution to it. I*

struggle to present my points in a clear and precise manner that is not overly academic. While I am trying to keep track of my points about global inequality and the Danish adoption system, the journalist suddenly asks if I have reunited with my Korean parents. Even though I am used to being asked this question, it always makes me stop in my tracks. I feel myself hesitate, my concentration evaporates. I do not want to answer the question. And so, I think about how I can reject it in an affirmative way without creating animosity. (Lene).

As a female transnational adoptee of colour, the categories of non-whiteness and adoptee intersect and reinforce each other. It is, first and foremost, my non-whiteness that makes me visible as a transnational adoptee. When I speak to journalists I am often called upon, in warm and empathic ways, to relate my research to my own history. Even though I try to explain why I do not want to answer such questions, I am often depicted not only as an adoption scholar, but as an adoption scholar who was herself adopted from Korea. Thus, journalists and non-adopted people often ask me questions such as 'have you reunited with your Korean parents?' or 'how have your adoptive parents reacted to your critical research?'. This resonates with Kim Park Nelson's point that 'the "inside" position of adoptee always trumps the "outside" position of researcher' (2016: 36) and so, to decline a discussion of one's personal adoption story often limits access to the media. This is very different from how white adoption scholars (some of whom are white adopters) are positioned in Danish media; their positionality is often left uncommented upon, unmarked. My refusal to answer these questions does not stem from a rejection of the notion that knowledge production is, indeed, informed by researcher positionality. It is a negotiation of the uneven and racialized distribution of power that marks certain researcher positions as identitarian and political, while others are constructed as transcendent and raised above identitarian matters.

The anticipation of invasive and intimate questions about adoption and the capacity to answer and/or deflect these inquiries is an integral part of adoptee existence (Myong 2009). As an adoptee, my personal life story is never solely mine to own and control. It is the property of everyone. The personal questions one has to field as an adoptee scholar invoke a long history of infantilization and the foreclosure of adoptees as subjects of knowledge. We may understand this in the context of Hill Collins' point about how some forms of knowledge (in particular, knowledge that stems from marginalized groups) tend to be excluded from the category of 'real' knowledge (Hill Collins 2000: 251). Adoptees continue to struggle to be recognized as experts on adoption, as we have primarily been cast as case stories in journalism, scholarship, and fiction in which our stories have been used to serve consumptive purposes or illustrate theoretical and political points made by adopters and non-adoptees. When I am asked to serve as my own case story, I am reminded of this history. I am reminded that I must prepare myself to be called upon to disclose experiences that other researchers (white and non-adopted people) are never or rarely asked to expose. This is a testament to how scholarship by white adopters and non-adoptees, historically, continues to be seen as 'objective' and 'neutral', whereas knowledge production by adoptees is viewed as 'politicized' and 'subjective'.

Part of this issue relates to how transnational adoptee subjectification is closely tied to sentimentalized forms of media consumption. One example is the Danish public service (DR) TV show *Sporløs*, which assists adoptees to search for and reunite with their first families (Myong 2009; Schlichtkrull forthcoming). In return, adoptees have to share intimate details about their upbringing, psychological dispositions, and identities. While these details may reveal little about the individual participants in the show, the solicitation of intimate information creates a situation in which the adoptee subject is defined as transparent, and within which her struggle for identity and history only gain meaning due to their consumptive value for the (non-adoptee) public. *Sporløs* is just one of many examples of how adoptee subjectivity and kinship are turned into a spectacle aimed at consumptive entertainment. This resonates with insights from reality TV research; Skeggs & Woods (2008), for example, have shown how reality TV in the UK has an overrepresentation of working-class participants, whose individual and class-based stories are turned into a spectacle for a middle-class audience to whom they are presented as either pathological or universal (ibid.: 177 ff.). Within this framing larger social and economic structures disappear, whereas particular living situations – which are often mediated via intimate details about family relations, childrearing or personal behaviours – are represented as the results (and failures) of personal and individual choices (ibid. 180 ff.). The inquiries into my adoption history may thus be understood as connected to how non-normative subjectivities and life stories in general are made consumable through the (spectacular) solicitation of intimate details.

Yet the calls for me to relay my personal story have multiple and contradictory implications. In media contexts, where the hierarchy between 'expert' and 'case story' is powerful, I have to negotiate a slippage between these positions; a potential displacement to 'case story' will entail a suspension of scholarly authority. At play, however, is also the question of 'authenticity' and 'evidence'. On the one hand, I experience the call to share personal information as a demand that I, as an adoptee scholar of colour, use my own body and subjectivity as 'evidence' for the arguments I am putting forward, and thus, provide them with a form of lived 'authenticity'. On the other hand, the probing for personal information also entails an excavation of my motivations, as my critique of adoption is often assumed to be grounded in an abusive childhood or a broken relationship between myself and my adopters. The other side to this logic is that adoptees who are more supportive and celebratory of the adoption system are believed to have led happier and less pathological lives. This pathologizing of (critical) adoptees is not exclusive to media representations; critical adoption scholars have shown how the adoptee subject is often conceptualized through pathologizing discourses in adoption research, adoption policy, and adoptive kinship (see, for example, Andersson 2016; Park Nelson 2016; Myong & Bissenbakker 2014). This broader framework positions adoptees as being outside rational thinking, namely, as too emotional or too angry, and it serves, in particular, to delegitimize those adoptee activists and scholars who are critical of dominant adoption epistemologies (Myong & Kaisen 2015). In this way, I experience the pressure to relate my personal history as highly fraught and ambivalent; I am called upon to circulate biographical details as the 'evidence' that lends 'authenticity' to my arguments, but my adoptee biography is simultaneously understood through a discursive framework in which the critical adoptee is assumed to have a pathological history that proves – and thus, becomes the 'evidence' of – her incapacity to think rationally. This position is negotiable, but also precarious.

Don't take it personally: The silencing of violence and structural oppression

We have both experienced how the dissemination of feminist and anti-racist research can be met with strong resistance from the

public. Our experiences testify to how (fear of) violence is often an unavoidable condition, when disseminating research in this area as a woman and/or racial minority.

> *I sit down in front of my computer. I don't want to open my email program. Last night I participated in a TV program about gender and Muslim headscarves. I said things like: 'It's not possible to interpret the headscarf as solely oppressive of women; it might be liberating for some women, while being oppressive to other women.' I know, as I turn on the computer, that I will have received hate mail because of my participation. Four mails with subject titles like 'You deserve to die' leap out at me from the screen. I know their content before I read them. I have received emails like them many times before. Sentences like: 'Muslim loving bitch'; 'You're a national traitor and you deserve to die'; 'I saw you on TV. You're so ugly I don't even want to fuck you'; etc. I feel sad, angry, frustrated, and also, a bit scared as I read though the emails. Then, furiously, I leave my office and bang on the door of one of my colleagues. 'People are sending me hate mail', I burst out. My colleague looks shocked. He comes with me back to my office where I read him the emails. 'People are crazy', he responds. 'Don't take it personally. It's not about you. They're just nuts'. (Rikke).*

In her analysis of Finnish anti-immigrant rhetoric, Keskinen has shown how right-wing politicians use anti-feminism and misogyny to criticize immigration politics and people, especially women, who support immigration (Keskinen 2013: 299). Keskinen concludes that anti-immigration rhetoric aims to re-imbue 'white masculinity' with power and authority at a time when such power is being challenged (ibid.: 231). The connection between anti-feminism, anti-immigration and attempts to re-establish white masculinity, as pointed out by Keskinen, is also visible in the memory vignette described above. The hate mails I receive always have male senders, and the criticisms very often take the form of personal, gendered attacks on me as an individual. Derogatory names like 'bitch' are female connoted and often used to put down women; calling someone a 'bitch' is not an invitation to discussion (about research) but rather an attempt to position the person as hierarchically lower than the person doing the naming.

The sentence 'You're so ugly I don't even want to fuck you' reveals the anti-feminism at play. It is used to criticize me because my utterances (and research) are being interpreted as 'pro-immigration' or 'pro-multiculturalism', but it is also a criticism targeted against my physical appearance. My person, and especially my body, become the site for uttering hatred against multiculturalism. Because of my gender, my (female) body becomes a site where strangers' hatred can find an outlet. The hate against me is framed sexually and plays along a patriarchal understanding of womanhood, by which women gain value according to how attractive they are to the male gaze (Bartky 1990). The value of a woman is defined heterosexually, positioning women as objects of (potential) sexual interest for men. The woman does not possess value in herself but only as an object in relation to a man. According to the email sender, I am so ugly that I am not even attractive as a sexual partner – not even as a body to fuck. This criticism not only reduces women to 'fuckable' bodies, it also inscribes itself into a patriarchal discourse within which being 'unfuckable' is seen as the most degrading position for a woman. Being 'unfuckable' equates to being unimportant in the world. The sender does not reflect upon whether I would like to engage in sexual relations with him; my potential desires are not relevant, as such desires would position me as an active subject, in contrast to the passive sexual object to which I am being reduced to via the criticism.

Furthermore, as a white, Danish woman I seem to be expected to perform a certain form of nationality. By arguing in ways which are interpreted as being in favour of multiculturalism, I am perceived as a national (and racial) traitor. Important to racial subjectification in the Nordic countries is white women's historical role as symbolic reproducers of the nation and race (Andreassen 2015a; Warring 1998); one might therefore argue that the 'betrayal' is not simply about arguing in favour of (racial) multiculturalism instead of (white) mono-culturalism, but also about being a white woman displaying this attitude. It becomes a double 'betrayal', as the researcher both verbally and bodily betrays the nation and race. In other words, my gendered and racial positionality as a (white, female) researcher delivers insights into how criticisms of immigration and multiculturalism are connected to imaginary narratives of nationality and whiteness, where race and gender are interlinked in particular ways, with white, women being expected to reproduce race and nation, and encountering accusations of treason when performing differently.

My colleague argues that the hate mail sent to me is not really about me; it should not be taken personally. While I know, this is a strategy of comfort – he is trying to make me feel better by deflecting the hate from my person – his utterance also illustrates how race and racism operate in the Danish context. By arguing that the senders of hate mail are 'nuts', my colleague is indirectly stating that such hate is not structural; it is not illustrative of larger structures of racism and sexism but rather individual incidences instigated by 'crazy' people. Racism, violence, and racial and gendered understandings of nationality (leading to accusations of treachery) are not verbalized; rather, they are silenced in the attempt to comfort. One reason for this silencing might be the context of an imagined Nordic sameness. In this context, the act of raising questions about gendered oppression or structural racism are often seen as polarizing and divisive and a threat to societal coherence. In this way, violence can be said to serve as a condition for research dissemination in relation to structural oppression. This contributes to ongoing and intertwined processes of destabilization, which may take the form of research results being attacked and/or researchers being undermined as experts. These experiences 'trouble' imaginary understandings of the Nordic countries as dominated by progressive politics, gender equality, and tolerance.

To (not) take part: Negotiations of representation and agency

Even though there is a growing interest in the study of race within the social and human sciences in Denmark, this interest is mainly dominated by white scholars. Despite the attention to race, it remains difficult to initiate discussion or self-reflexive dialog on the whiteness of academia and how 'we' as scholars and our knowledge production are embedded in racial structures.

> *I receive a kind and generously worded invitation to speak at a seminar on representations of race. Enclosed with the invitation is an almost finished program. I hesitate to accept. I am the only speaker of colour, and I sense that I am the last one to receive an invitation. I do not feel comfortable with the set-up, but instead of starting a dialog with the organizer, I merely write back that I would like to attend the seminar, but not as a presenter. On*

the day of the seminar, I turn up. It is well attended and quite a few students and activists of colour have joined the audience. At the end of the seminar, the speakers are asked to form a panel and the audience is encouraged to ask questions. I say that I am happy that race is finally receiving attention in Denmark, but also that I feel ambivalent about how this field of research is dominated by white scholars. One panellist is visibly displeased and disturbed by my comment. He says – with a hint of anger – that it is wrong if some people cannot study this or that. So, we never get to discuss the political implications of white scholars dominating the study of race in Denmark. (Lene).

My experience with this seminar may easily be read as an example of tokenism; that is, the symbolic inclusion of a person of colour that serves to legitimize the dominance of white scholars, who – for one reason or another – feel compelled to include a person of colour instead of taking a step back to rethink how their epistemological framework reinforces whiteness (Uttal 1990; Lorde 1984: 118). While the argument of tokenism may serve as a pointed criticism of racist structures, I also find it to have limitations. To be categorized as a token – even when this categorization is part of a wider criticism of racist structures – implies a reduction in agency and subjectivity that forecloses rather than opens up the question of how, as a scholar of colour, one cannot help but be brought into alignment with whiteness. The question here is not one of determinism (something that also obliterates agency), but of how hegemonic whiteness and racism underpin one's existence and agency within white academia (Habel 2012). To think of these structural conditions as negotiable is not equivalent to suggesting they can be transcended, for example, through 'a rejection of tokenism'.

So, I declined the invitation to speak at the seminar. Declining invitations becomes easier as you move up the ranks and into a tenured position, but as a PhD student and junior scholar I took part in many panels where I was the only speaker of colour. Yet I never experienced this as a form of tokenism; it felt more like a continuation of the racial isolation that has characterized my academic subjectification since I began my university studies in the early 1990s. As an undergraduate student, my sense of racial isolation was never reducible to the question of my body being one of very few bodies of colour in a sea of whiteness (Ahmed 2007). Rather, racial isolation was primarily enforced through white syllabi and the exclusive introduction to white thinkers and writers by white faculty; this type of isolation served as the naturalized condition of my student subjectivity.

Later, as a PhD student and junior scholar interested in transnational adoption and racialized subjectification, I participated in numerous workshops and seminars, not just as the only person of colour, but also as the only person with that particular interest. Isolation, then, was not just tied to my embodied difference but also to my research interest. In recent years, things have changed, as the above experience attests. In academic settings and seminars, my body is no longer the only body of colour, the student population in particular having diversified; nor is my interest in race an isolated one. Yet I do not feel that race works in less isolating ways now. Attending the seminar, I tried to raise a question about researcher positionality and my ambivalence about seeing how a growing interest in race in Denmark is dominated by white scholars. But even raising that question – to half-heartedly pose as a feminist killjoy (Ahmed 2010) – felt ambivalent and uncomfortable.

At the seminar, the biggest problem was not the all-white line-up of scholars but that it became impossible to discuss the political implications of white scholars dominating Danish research on race and the extent to which proximity to whiteness makes it easier to assume the authoritative position of 'expert' on race. This is different from how it is to be a scholar of colour engaging critically with race and whiteness in Denmark. Taking up this position, one is often construed as 'evidence' of how race has become irrelevant, otherwise one would never have managed to forge a career in academia (Ahmed 2012). In Denmark, criticism of whiteness often taps into a pool of 'negative' affects and 'hurt feelings' that work to deflect any meaningful conversation. The white scholar, who most vehemently opposed my comment, heard it as a call for white scholars not to engage with the topic of race and ultimately as an act of censorship. This type of reaction re-centres the white subject, not only as central to the conversation, but also as a subject who is somehow being restrained from claiming his or her right to know about race. Hence, one should remain critical of what the growing interest in race entails, including the uneven distribution of scholarly authority and agency among white scholars and scholars of colour.

Concluding remarks

This article has investigated connections between race, gender and knowledge production, and it raises broader questions on how whiteness, racism, and sexism continue to shape researcher positionality and knowledge production in Denmark. Rikke Andreassen's first memory illustrates how whiteness, as an unmarked category, is associated with scientific objectivity; positioned as a white researcher, one is enabled to speak in general terms about race and racism and to access a position associated with 'scientific neutrality' and rational thinking. Yet as her second memory vignette shows white female researchers are not exempt from sexualized violence; dissemination of anti-racist research is often followed by verbal threats intended to silence and stifle the researcher. Lene Myong's first memory points to a different form of racialization; as an adoptee scholar of colour her researcher position is marked as subjective and political. Even though feminist standpoint theory teaches us that all knowledge is situated, the memories reveal how specific forms of knowledge are still perceived as more valid than others. Importantly, our analysis not only underscores how race, knowledge production, and speaking positions are interlinked, it also emphasizes the silencing of these interlinked processes.

Furthermore, the memory vignettes testify to the continued difficulties of verbalizing structural racism and whiteness in a Danish context. When race and whiteness *are* being pointed out – as in Lene Myong's last memory vignette about a seminar on racialized representations – these points are often met with rejection and understood as a call for censorship. The lack of reflection around the situatedness of knowledge, as well as the evasion of any substantial discussions on racial privilege, contribute to maintaining whiteness as a privileged site for scientific knowledge production and dissemination. In this article, we have attempted to address these questions by naming some of the racial structures and privileges that impact upon our working conditions. We hope that this might lead to further acknowledgement of how structural inequalities and stratifications of gender and race continue to shape knowledge production in a Danish context.

Lene Myong's contribution has been funded by The Velux Foundations and the research project A Study of Experiences and Resistance to Racialization in Denmark (SERR), grant no. 10321.

Rikke Andreassen (PhD, University of Toronto, Canada; Associate Professor, Roskilde University, Denmark) is a researcher and teacher working within the fields of media, communication, gender, sexuality and race. She is the coordinator and co-founder for the research network 'Re-developing international theories of media and migration in a Nordic context' (TheoryNord). She has published three volumes, latest *Human Exhibitions. Race, Gender and Sexuality in Ethnic Displays* (Ashgate, 2015), and a large number of articles in various journals including *Social Identities*, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, *Race and Class* and *NORA. Nordic Journal of feminist and gender research*.

Lene Myong is Professor at Network for Gender Studies, University of Stavanger, Norway. She received her PhD from the Department of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark, in 2009. Her work has been published in journals such as *Cultural Studies*, *Sexualities,* and *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies.*

References

Adeniji, A 2013, 'Searching for words: Becoming *mixed raced,* black and Swedish' in *Afro-Nordic landscapes: equality and race in Northern Europe*, ed M McEachrane, Routledge, London & New York, pp. 149-161.

Ahmed, S 2012, *On being included: racism and diversity in institutional life*, Duke University Press, New York & London.

Ahmed, S 2010, *The promise of happiness*, Duke University Press, Durham & London.

Ahmed, S 2007, 'A phenomenology of whiteness'. *Feminist Theory*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 149-168.

Andersson, M 2015, 'The risk of relatedness: governing kinship in Swedish transnational adoption policy' in *Critical kinship studies,* eds C Kroløkke, L Myong, S Willum Adrian & T Tjørnhøj-Thomsen, Rowman & Littlefield, London, pp. 203-219.

Andreassen, R 2015a, *Human exhibitions: race, gender and sexuality in ethnic displays,* Ashgate, Farnham.

Andreassen, R 2015b, 'Nordic colour blindness and Nella Larsen' in *Affectivity and race: studies from Nordic contexts,* eds R Andreassen & K Vitus, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 95-110.

Andreassen, R 2014, 'The Nordic discomfort with "race"'. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 42-44, DOI: 10.2478/njmr-2014-0004.

Andreassen, R & Ahmed, U 2014, '"I can never be normal": a conversation about race, daily life practices, food and power', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 3-8, DOI: 10.1177/1350506813507716.

Andreassen, R, Henningsen, A & Myong, L 2008, 'Hvidhed'. *Kvinder, køn og forskning*, vol. 8, pp. 3–6.

Bang Svendsen, SH 2015, 'Feeling at loss: affect, whiteness and masculinity in the immediate aftermath of Norway's terror' in *Affectivity and race: studies from Nordic contexts*, eds. R Andreassen & K Vitus, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 133-150.

Bang Svendsen, SH 2014, 'Learning racism in the absence of "race"'. *The European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 9-24, DOI: 10.1177/1350506813507717.

Bangstad, S 2014, *Anders Breivik and the rise of Islamophobia*, Zed Books, London & New York.

Bartky, SL 1990, *Femininity and domination: studies in the phenomenology of oppression*, Routledge, New York.

Berg, A-J 2008, 'Silence and articulation: whiteness, racialization and feminist memory work', *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 213-227.

Danbolt, M 2016, 'New Nordic exceptionalism, in Jeuno JE Kim and Ewa Einhorn's *The United Nations of Norden* and Other Realist Utopias'. *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture*, vol. 8. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3402/jac.v8.30902.

Goldberg, DT 2006, 'Racial Europeanization', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 331–364.

Gondouin, J 2016, 'Feminist global motherhood: representations of single-mother adoption in Swedish media' in *Critical kinship studies*, eds. C Kroløkke *et al.*, Rowman & Littlefield, London & New York, pp. 101-116.

Gopal, K 2000, 'Janteloven – modviljen mod forskellighed. Danske forestillinger om lighed som enshed', *Tidsskriftet Antropologi* vol. 42, pp. 23-43.

Gullestad, M 2004, 'Blind slaves of our prejudices: debating "culture" and "race" in Norway', *Ethnos*, vol. 64, no. 2, pp. 177-203.

Gullestad, M 2002, 'Racisme i Norge', *Sosiologi i dag*, vol. 32, no. 4, pp. 5-33.

Habel, Y (2012), 'Challenging Swedish exceptionalism? Teaching while Black' in *Education in the Black Diaspora: perspectives, challenges and prospects*, eds. K Freeman & E Johnson, Routledge, New York & London, pp. 99-122.

Harding, S 1987, 'Conclusion: epistemological questions' in *Feminist methodology*, ed. S Harding, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, pp. 181-190.

Harding, S 1993, 'Rethinking standpoint epistemology: what is "strong objectivity"?' in *Feminist Epistemologies*, eds L Alcoff & E Potter, Routledge, New York, pp. 49-82.

Haug, F *et al.* 1987, *Female sexualization: a collective work of memory,* Verso, London & New York.

Haug, F 2008, 'Philosophy and overview of memory work' in *Dissecting the mundane: international perspectives on memory-work*, eds. AE Hyle, MS Ewing, D Montgomery & JS Kaufman, University Press of American, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto & London, pp. 21-44.

Hemmings, C 2012, 'Affective solidarity: feminist reflexivity and political transformation', *Feminist Theory*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 147-161, DOI: 10.1177/1464700112442643.

Hervik, P 2015, 'Race, "race", racialisering, racisme og nyracisme', *Dansk Sociologi*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 29-50.

Hervik, P 2011, *The annoying difference: the emergence of Danish neonationalism, neoracism, and populism in the post-1989 world*, Berghahn Books, New York & Oxford.

Hill Collins, P 2000, *Black feminist thought: knowledge, consciousness and the politics of empowerment*, Routledge, New York.

hooks, b 1992, *Black looks: race and representation*, South End Press, Boston, MA.

hooks, b 2000/1984, *Feminist theory: from margin to center*, Pluto Press, London.

Horsti, K 2016 (published online before print), 'Digital islamophobia: The Swedish woman as a figure of pure and dangerous whiteness', *New Media & Society*, DOI: 10.1177/1461444816642169.

Hyle, AE, Ewing, MS, Montgomery, D & Kaufman, JS (eds) 2008, *Dissecting the mundane: international perspectives on memory-work*, University Press of America, Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto & London.

Hübinette, T & Lundström, C 2014, 'Three phases of hegemonic whiteness: understanding racial temporalities in Sweden', *Social Identities*, vol. 20, no. 6, pp. 423-437. DOI: 10.1080/13504630.2015.1004827.

Hübinette, T & Lundström, C 2011, 'Sweden after the recent election: the double-binding power of Swedish whiteness through the mourning of the loss of "old Sweden" and the passing of "good Sweden"', *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 42-52. DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2010.547835.

Hübinette, T & Mählck P 2015, 'The racial grammar of Swedish higher education and research policy: the limits and conditions of researching race in a colour-blind Context' in *Affectivity and race: studies from Nordic contexts*, eds R Andreassen & K Vitus, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 59-76.

Hübinette, T & Tigervall, C 2009, 'To be non-white in a colorblind society: conversations with adoptees and adoptive parents in Sweden on everyday racism', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 335-353, DOI: 10.1080/07256860903213620.

kennedy-macfoy, m 2013, 'Queendom: on being Black, feminist Norwegian women', in *Afro-Nordic landscapes: equality and race in Northern Europe*, ed M McEachrane, Routledge, London & New York, pp. 39-56.

kennedy-macfoy, m & Pristed Nielsen, H 2012, '"We need to talk about what race feels like!" Using memory work to analyse the production of race and ethnicity in research encounters', *Qualitative Studies*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 133-149.

Keskinen, S, Tuori, S, Irni, S & Mulinari, D (eds) 2009, *Complying with colonialism: gender, race and ethnicity in the Nordic region*, Ashgate, Farnham.

Keskinen, S 2014, 'Re-constructing the peaceful nation: negotiating meanings of whiteness, immigration and Islam in media and politics after a shopping mall shooting', *Social Identities*, vol. 20, no. 6, pp. 471-485, DOI: 10.1080/13504630.2015.1004828.

Keskinen, S 2013, 'Antifeminism and white identity politics: political antagonisms in radical right-wing populist and anti-immigration rhetoric in Finland', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 3, no. 4, pp. 225-232, DOI: 10.2478/njmr-2013-0015.

Lewis, G 2013, 'Unsafe travel: experiencing intersectionality and feminist displacements', *Signs*, vol. 38, no. 4, pp. 869-892, DOI: 10.1086/669609.

Lewis, G & kennedy-macfoy, m 2014, 'Race and anti-race in Europe', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 3-8, DOI: 10.1177/1350506813511883.

Loftdottir, K & Jensen, L (eds.) 2012, *Whiteness and postcolonialism in the Nordic region: exceptionalism, migrant others and national identities*, Routledge, London & New York.

Lorde, A 1984, *Sister outsiders*, Crossing Press, Berkeley & Toronto.

Lundström, C 2014, *White migrations: gender, whiteness and privilege in transnational migration*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Myong, L & Trige Andersen, N 2015, 'From immigration stop to intimizations of migration: cross-reading the histories of domestic(ated) labor migration and transnational adoption in Denmark 1973-2015', *Retfærd*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 62-79.

Myong, L & Kaisen, JJ 2015, 'The emergence of adoption critiques among transnational adoptees in Denmark', *Loving Belinda*, Forlaget * [asterisk], pp. 92-98.

Myong, L 2009, *Adopteret – Fortællinger om transnational og racialiseret tilblivelse*. PhD Dissertation, University of Aarhus, Copenhagen.

Mørck, LL & Khawaja I 2009, 'Researcher positioning: Muslim otherness and beyond', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 28-45.

Park Nelson, K 2016, *Invisible Asians: Korean American adoptees, Asian American experiences, and racial exceptionalism*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey & London.

Prøitz, L & Mainsah, H 2015, 'Two journeys into research on difference in a Nordic context: a collaborative auto-ethnography', in *Affectivity and Race: Studies from Nordic Contexts,* eds R Andreassen & K Vitus, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 169-186.

Rastas, A 2012, 'Reading history through Finnish exceptionalism' in *Whiteness and postcolonialism in the Nordic region: exceptionalism, migrant others and national identities*, eds K Loftdottir & L Jensen, Routledge, London & New York, pp. 89-104.

Sawyer, L 2002, 'Routings: race, African diasporas, and Swedish belonging', *Transforming Anthropology*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 13-35.

Sawyer, L & Habel, Y 2014, 'Refracting African and Black diaspora through the Nordic Region', *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 1-6, DOI: 10.1080/17528631.2013.861235.

Schlichtkrull, MJ-Y forthcoming. "Den bedste løsning? Om transnational adoption i *Sporløs*". *Adoptionskritik på dansk*.

Skeggs, B and Wood, H 2008, 'Spectacular morality: "reality" television, individualisation and the re-making of the working class"', in *The media and social theory,* eds D Hesmondhalgh & J Toynbee, Routledge, London, pp. 177-193.

Smedegaard Nielsen, A 2015, '*If* it had been a Muslim: affectivity and race in Danish journalists' reflections on making news on terror' in *Affectivity and race: studies from Nordic contexts*, eds R Andreassen & K Vitus, Ashgate, Farnham, pp. 43-58.

Su Rasmussen, K 2003, 'Hvad er dansk racisme?' Unpublished lecture, downloaded from: http://www.minority-report.dk/dansk/deltagere/kim_su_rasmussen.html [Last accessed 11.03.2016]

Stokke, C 2012, *A multicultural society in the making: how Norwegian Muslims challenge a white nation*. PhD dissertation. Norwegian University of Science and Technology.

Uttal, L 1990, 'Inclusion without influence: the continuing tokenism of women of color' in *Making face, Making soul*, ed. G Anzaldua, Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, pp. 42-45.

Warring, A 1998, *Tyskerpiger under besættelse og retsopgør*. Gyldendal, Copenhagen.