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THE EMERGENCE OF RACE AS A SOCIAL CATEGORY IN NORTHERN EUROPE

After scholars all over the world questioned and rejected so-called scientific racism (e.g. UNESCO 1969), the notion of race became taboo in many European countries. Because of the historical burden and negative connotations of the word ‘race’ in Europe not only researchers but also authorities have discussed ‘ethnic groups’ or ‘immigrants’, rather than ‘races’ or ‘racialized minorities’. In many societies, avoiding the word ‘race’, along with normative whiteness and innocent national self-images, has led to denials of racism.

In the Nordic countries[1] – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden – racism as a social fact and the meanings of race for individuals and communities were avoided as topics of discussion for a long time both in the academia and in public. As a result, these countries have also lacked the vocabulary for discussions on racialized identities and racialized social relations. However, things are changing. This chapter explores the social and cultural transformations through which ‘race’ has become a social category also in the Nordic societies. Examples from research literature and from my ethnographic studies on racism, anti-racism and African diasporas in Northern Europe show how people, who have moved to Northern Europe from other places, and especially their offspring, have started to question whiteness as a ‘taken for granted’ aspect of Nordic nationalities. They speak about themselves in public as racialized subjects, as non-white Europeans and as citizens who have the right to belong to the countries in which they live. Their agency in the field of anti-racism has started to create new identity politics; new solidarities and spaces and vocabularies for racial identifications.

Nordic involvements in race biology

The politics of race blindness and the discourse of Nordic exceptionalism delimit public discussions on racism in all Nordic countries (e.g. Lofsdóttir and Jensen 2012; McEachrane 2014). By Nordic exceptionalism, I refer to self-ascribed innocence underlying naïve national self-images regarding the colonial complicities of these countries and the denials of the existence of racism. Despite the different colonial ties of these countries and their different immigration histories, in every Nordic country the idea of the Nordic nations comprising especially good people who, unlike other nations, are unable to be racists, can be identified (Browning 2007; Loftsdottir and Jensen 2012).

Claims concerning the absence of colonial connections, placing racism *elsewhere*, as a property of other people and nations, and other forms of nationalist self-glorification have shaped discussions on racism also in other European countries , including those with strong imperial involvements (e.g., van Dijk 1992, 109; Lentin 2004; Goldberg 2006; Wekker 2016). Therefore, I am not suggesting that these phenomena should be understood as uniquely Nordic. I have argued elsewere that exploring commonalities and differences in articulations of history and our colonial complicities in different locations 'may help us examine when, how and what for purposes particular ideas and discourses – (Finnish or Nordic) exceptionalisms – are employed' (Rastas 2012, 91). The notion of Nordic exceptionalism refers here to a discourse, which includes some claims concerning the particularity of the Nordic countries, not to any historical or social facts concerning these countries.

In the Nordic countries, the 'innocent' national self-images are partly built on recent history and the branding of these countries as democratic, peaceful societies that have been active, for example, in development co-operation, in peacebuilding projects and in promoting human rights around the world (Browning 2007). When it comes to discussions on racism, this discourse is often defended by claims that the Nordic countries were not involved in colonialism, which is not true. Of what are today understood to be the Nordic countries, only Denmark and Sweden were independent countries during the colonial era.[2] Denmark was a European colonial power and very much involved in the slave trade. There were slaves also on Saint Barthélemy, an island in the West Indies that Sweden acquired in 1784 (Palmberg 2009, 44–45). Recent literature on the colonial complicities of the Nordic countries also reminds us that the minds of the people living in those countries that were not at the heart of the colonial conquest were nevertheless colonized. This happened through several links that connected people around the world 'with the kind of knowledge that arouse in the context of, or even in support of, the colonial projects' (Vuorela 2009, 21. For discussion on colonial discourse and knowledge of 'the others' in the Nordic countries, see, for example, Kuortti, Lehtonen, and Löytty 2007; Löytty and Rastas 2011 [Finland]; Loftsdóttir 2008 [Iceland]; Eidsvik 2012 [Norway]; Andreassen 2015 [Denmark]).

The discourse of Nordic exceptionalism ignores the fact that many Nordic academics and politicians had important and active roles in establishing ideas of race and racial hierarchies in Europe. According to Mai Palmberg (2009, 45): 'An often overlooked aspect of Nordic history towards the south is the extraordinary role played by pseudo-scientific racism in the Nordic countries. In fact, in the history of eugenics and pseudo-scientific racism in the first half of the 20th century the Nordic countries, and particularly Sweden, were in the forefront'. Among the Nordic scientists whose studies contributed to the classification of humans into races was, for example, Swedish botanist Carl von Linné (Eze 1997, 10–14). The Swedish Society for Race Hygiene (Svenska Sällskapet for Rashygien) was founded in 1909 and the National Institute for Race Biology (Statens Institute for Rasbiologi) was established in 1922 in Uppsala (Bashford and Levine 2010). Among the key figures of the International Society for Race Hygiene were Danish and Norwegian researchers (Kühl 2013, 16).

Nordic scholars' work focused especially on the white race. However, as Rikke Andreassen (2015, 33) reminds us, a static perception of race and racial differences never existed; racial categories were the subject of constant negotiation and changed from context to context. The leading figure of Danish physical anthropology, Søren Hansen, positioned the Inuit in Greenland among the lowest races (Andreassen 2015, 41). According to many race scientists, Finns were considered descendants of the Mongols (Halmevirta 1990), rather than belonging to the white race. Claims that Finns were 'less intelligent, more ugly and more primitive than White Swedes, Danes and Norwegians' (Andreassen 2015, 3) led to forceful counter arguments by Finnish scholars in the 19th and 20th centuries. Through projects aimed at proving that Finns, like the other people in the Nordic countries, are Europeans who belong to the white race, the racial order and ideas linking race with nationhood were also established in Finland (Halmesvirta 1990).

The histories of the racialized minorities in the Nordic countries have yet to be written. Racism was long understood as something that exists outside the Nordic countries, such as in the colonies, in the United States, in South Africa during the apartheid or, if in Europe, in the past during the Nazi regime. In discussions on racism, the old, established national minority communities such as the Roma and the Sami people have been ignored despite the racism that these communities have experienced. The Sami (e.g. Toivanen 2003) and the Roma (e.g. Pulma 2012) have lacked the political power to talk about their situations and their experiences of racism. In research and in political decision-making they have been treated as cultural minorities, not as racialized minorities. In discussions on minority rights, the focus has been on achievements that support positive national self-images, such as how particular minorities' linguistic rights were guaranteed, rather than on problems that remain unsolved (see, e.g., Daher, Hannikainen, and Heikinheimo-Perez 2016). The Finnish Roma, for example, still face discrimination in the labour market, although their situation cannot be compared with the situation of the Roma in Eastern Europe, where discrimination against the Roma is common also in education, housing and health care services. [3]

References to races and accounts based on the old ideas of racial hierarchies were still common, for example, in schoolbooks and in media texts in all Nordic countries in the 1960s – until so-called scientific or biological racism was questioned by scholars and political movements around the world, including in the Nordic countries. Although the ideas of racial hierarchies and races as biological facts included in the old race theories have disappeared from scholarly texts, schoolbooks and official discussions, they are still part of the cultural memory of all Nordic countries. There are very few studies about the experiences of those foreigners and other people who in the 19th century were not able to pass as white in Nordic societies. Based on their memoirs and other available documents, experiences of racism were part of their everyday lives (e.g. Rastas 2014; Andreassen 2015).

White immigrant minorities, such as Finns in Sweden and Russians in Finland, have also experienced discrimination and prejudices, and they still have to deal with negative depictions of their communities and their countries of origin. However, their means of combating their experiences of what, I argue, can also be called racism, are different from those of people who cannot pass as white Scandinavians. During the last decades of the 20th century, non-white immigrants and even children who grew up as 'visibly different' in these Northern European countries have faced overt racism, including being repeatedly called ‘niggers’ or ‘negros’ (Rastas 2012; Adeniji 2014; Gullestad 2004, 2005; Hübinette and Tigervall 2009). Old ideas of races and a racial order have not disappeared from public discussions either; they are openly promoted and supported by extreme racist groups with whom many populist politicians and their supporters collaborate.

The increase of populist politics and racist rhetoric in the 2000s

Because of immigration and its effects on racialized social relations, racism has become a topic of discussion also in Northern Europe over the last decade (e.g. Keskinen and Andreassen 2017). Throughout the 2000s, everywhere in Europe, including the Nordic countries, increasing numbers of immigrants have been seen as ‘a shared European challenge’, and in public discussions immigrants and their descendants have become ‘intolerable subjects’ (Lentin and Titley 2012). Many people see especially refugees and asylum seekers as abusers of the welfare system and burdens on taxpayers instead of as people who need protection or residents and citizens of the countries in which they now live. The presence of Muslim communities is increasingly described as a threat not only to local cultures but also to the security of European societies. Anti-immigrant and Islamophobic discussions have been actively promoted by populist politicians and anti-immigrant groups that have taken advantage of the xenophobic discursive climates in local, national and European political fields.

Over the last decade, nationalist–populist parties have gained growing support and political power in Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark (e.g. Nikunen 2015, 24–25). Their success in elections has promoted hate speech, especially on the Internet. In political debates on immigration, even openly racist ideas are often articulated in the form of ‘culture speak’ (see Hannerz 1999). Some politicians, celebrities, immigrants’ associations and other NGOs have publically disapproved of racist acts towards immigrants and other minorities, which has increased awareness of racist discourses and encouraged the media and so-called ordinary people to express anti-racist opinions. Nevertheless, among politicians and authorities in general, there is little resistance to xenophobic discourses.

In Sweden established parties have distanced themselves from and refused collaboration with the Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna) (Hellström and Nilsson 2010), a ‘culturally racist party’ (Mulinari and Neergaard 2012, 14) that in 2010 won parliamentary representation in Sweden, but the party has been an active agent in Swedish politics and is openly supported by many Swedes. When Norwegian right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik massacred sixty-nine teenage members of the Labour Party at their summer camp in July 2011, Norwegian politicians started to talk about the need to move towards more inclusive ideas of who can be called Norwegian (Osler and Lybaek 2014). Yet, this tragic act of violence did not decrease the widespread xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric in Norway (Wiggen 2012). According to some scholars, some racist imaginaries were circulated even more after the attack (see Svendsen 2015).

In Finland, members of the openly populist Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset), including some of their MPs and their current leader, have been summoned to court because of their racist and Islamophobic rhetoric. Politicians’ racist talks and especially racist violence towards racialized minorities and Finns who have opposed particular racist groups' activities led to large demonstrations in Finland in 2015 and 2016. When a young, white Finnish man, Jimi Karttunen, was killed in September 2016 by a member of the racist Finnish Resistance Movement (Suomen Vastarintaliike)[4] after he opposed them during a street event in Helsinki, even some government ministers took part in demonstrations against racism organized in the biggest Finnish cities. Although the Finns Party´s long-term leader Timo Soini officially announced that the party does not accept racism, during his leadership the party did very little to condemn its members and supporters racist rhetoric (Hatakka 2016). Eventually, his party broke up after an anti-immigration hardliner Jussi Halla-aho was elected as the party´s new leader in 2017. Soini and the other Finns Party ministers were allowed to stay in the government only after they and a group of other Finns Party MPs left their party and formed their own new parliamentary group.

Since the beginning of 2000s, denying the existence of racism has become difficult in Nordic countries, but attempts to discuss racism are often still turned into questions of cultural differences or problems related to immigrants' integration. As expressed by Kitimbwa Sabuni, coordinator of the Afro-Swedish National Association (Afrosvenskarna), what is needed is a move forward from what he describes as the immigration paradigm:

> Over 60% of our association members are people born in Sweden. The challenges in their everyday life are not about immigration, they are more about racial discrimination. Still these issues don't get recognition. In the public discussion racism is treated as if it was about failing of immigration policy and immigrants´ integration, like: if the integration would be better, racism would just hide away. How illogical and paradoxical this kind of argumentation can be? … We are trying to bring race into these discussions but opposition is strong. People are shocked about this and start asserting that we are all one race. But I think that bringing the racialization and race to the centre here is vital for the discussions to move on. [5]

Scholars in the Nordic academia have reacted to the above described events and social transformations. Although most studies about migration and immigrant and other minority communities in Northern Europe are still built on an ethnicity paradigm and do not apply race as an analytical category, scholars studying racism have insisted on verbalizing race as a social category (e.g. Sawyer 2002; Rastas 2005; Andreassen 2014; McEachrane 2014; Hübinette and Mählck 2015; Mainsah and Prøitz 2015). Now that the rapidly increasing population of young people who do not identify themselves as white have started to talk about themselves as racialized subjects in public, it has also become easier for researchers to talk about race.

Different fields of anti-racism

Nowadays, not only immigration but also the fight against racism, xenophobia and hate speech are considered shared challenges of the European countries, and authorities and politicians must react to claims concerning racism in their countries. In every Nordic country there are official national bodies (ombudsman) to advance equality, and issues related to racism are included in their mandates. In Europe, racism is monitored and anti-racism is advocated by, for example, the European Commission against Racism and Xenophobia (ECRI) of the Council of Europe, as well as some European INGOs such as The European Network against Racism (ENAR). ECRI examines manifestations of racism and intolerance in each Council of Europe member state. Its findings and recommendations are published in country reports that are drawn up after a contact visit to the country in question and a confidential dialogue with its national authorities.[6] ENAR's Shadow Reports, which are produced to fill gaps in official and academic data, are based on information and data collected by its member organisations. ENAR also publishes thematic reports and fact sheets.[7] Publications on racism are also produced by multicultural centres (e.g. Mångkulturellt Centrum 2014), other institutes and NGOs. The European Union has reacted to the rapid increase of hate speech by, for example, adopting acts such as the Framework Decision on Combating Certain Forms and Expressions of Racism and Xenophobia by Means of Criminal Law (European Commission 2008) and by allocating funding for national and international projects aimed at developing tools for authorities and NGOs to fight against racism and xenophobia.[8]

Public discussions, authorities' activities and research on racism have focused on racist attitudes and the agency of particular groups, especially hate speech on the Internet and groups that are considered to be threats to public safety, rather than on the experiences and situations of those whose lives are shadowed by racism (for everyday racism, see Essed 1991). I argue that one explanation for the absence of sociological studies on race relations in these countries is the lack of official data for researchers to rely on in their studies. The Nordic countries do not collect official statistics based on race. Immigrants and those children whose parent(s) have a foreign background but were themselves born in a Nordic country can be found in these countries' official statistics according to their or their parents' countries of origin, but that does not provide enough information about the existence of and increase in racialized minorities in these countries.

Finding words for descriptions of racialized relations in the Nordic countries has been challenging for various reasons. The word 'race' has been avoided in public discussions and consequently in research as an analytical category because of its historical burden and because in Nordic countries discussions on racism and a shared understanding of race as a social construction are a relatively new phenomena. Moreover, sometimes using racial categories has been opposed by immigrant organizations because words referring to race have been considered imports from the United States and Britain and products of those societies' histories and political movements rather than accurate terms for immigrants' racial identifications (Rastas 2013). For example, Somalis make up the largest African diaspora communities (of particular ethnicities or countries of origin) in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden. In all these countries, a majority of the people of African descent represent the new African diaspora, meaning they are recent migrants from Africa. In the new African diaspora, the processes of identity formation are different from those in the old African/black diaspora communities that have histories connected to the transatlantic slave trade. Moreover, in migrant communities, people do not necessarily embrace political definitions of blackness or Africanness because racialized relations and identities are negotiated not only through local vocabularies and global political movements but also through the ideas and conceptualisations of race relations that people learned in their old home countries.

Although racism has become a common topic of discussion, and even though the Nordic countries are nowadays defined as multiethnic, multicultural societies, in official political and academic discussions race as a social category is still usually ignored or replaced by references to ethnicity (see Andreassen 2014 [Denmark]; Rastas 2013 [Finland]; Adeniji 2015 [Sweden]; Hübinette and Mählck 2015 [Sweden]; Mainsah and Prøitz 2015 [Norway]). We know, however, that although ethnic and racial categorization systems are related, using an ethnicity paradigm to discuss race is problematic (e.g. Bashi 1998) and ignores the experiences of those racialized groups – such as children of mixed parentage or transnational adoptees (e.g. Rastas 2005; Hübinette and Tigervall 2009; Adeniji 2015) – that for whatever reason do not fit into predetermined ethnic categorizations.

So far, few people who identify with racialized minorities in Nordic countries have managed to obtain positions as researchers or as other specialists allowing them to participate in these forums as professionals. Projects and campaigns against racism have often been planned and organized by people who represent white majority perspectives. Representatives from immigrants' and religious minorities' associations are usually invited to participate authorities' and NGO's projects concerning racism as representatives of their ethnic groups or as 'experience experts' representing (all) individuals who face racism in their societies.

However, 'immigrant representatives' in authorities' and some NGO's anti-racism projects often come from associations whose work focuses on diaspora activities emphasizing homeland–hostland relationships, and they have chosen to act as 'promoters of multiculturalism', 'cultural ambassadors' and experts on particular cultures rather than as a representatives of people who are oppressed by racism. This kind of expert role has reproduced their position as representatives of 'other ethnicities' and immigrants instead of as citizens, rather than as people whose expert knowledge of racism, obtained though their positioning in racialized social hierarchies, should be valued. Through their active participation in 'multicultural events' where people have shared their experiences of racism and their other collaborations with local authorities and civil society, immigrants' associations have promoted anti-racism. This collaboration has enabled forums where – in addition to discussions of existing problems and possible solutions that often result in new information campaigns and professional training – people have been able to look for a common language on racialized and ethnicized relations. Nevertheless, although immigrant and diaspora associations have tried to bring problems related to racism into the public discussions, their critical voices have remained rather faint. Furthermore, until recently, non-white people who have grown up in Nordic countries have been absent from most arenas where public discussions on racism have taken place.

Now that many immigrant communities have long histories in Nordic societies and their members – especially their offspring – have become active citizens of these countries, things are changing. As noted by the coordinator of the Afro-Swedish National Association in the quote above, over 60% of the members of this association, which was already founded in the 1990s, are people born in Sweden. Compared with their parents, many of whom have an immigrant background, people who belong to the rapidly growing new generation of non-white people born and/or growing up in the white landscape of the Nordic countries are in a better position to speak about and fight for their rights as racialized subjects – and as citizens of the countries in which they live. They are not comfortable with the roles offered to them by many anti-racist projects led and controlled by white people with a majority background. Despite their (possible) transnational and diasporic identifications, Nordic citizens with transnational roots are tired of being called immigrants or ‘multicultural people’ or representatives of their parents’ ethnicities. To fight against the racism that shadows their everyday lives and well-being, they have started to talk about themselves as racialized subjects by using racial(ized) terms such as ‘black’, ‘Afro-/African-Swedes/Finns/Danes/Norwegians’, ‘brown girls’, ‘brown people’ or just ‘racialized people’. Furthermore, they have actively started to search for and create forums and communities of people with whom they can negotiate their multiple identifications and share their experiences of racism and of living surrounded by normative whiteness. These groups or communities of mainly young people and young adults have an essential role to play in the emergence of race as a social category in public discussions in Northern Europe.

Online and in the streets

The word ‘community’ is understood here as a form of social action (e.g. Crooce 2007, 27–40), referring both to products and to social and cultural processes that have transformative power within and beyond them. The new and emerging communities of people who in the Nordic countries identify with racialized minorities are products not only of social and cultural transformations related to demographic changes in these societies but also of the digital connectedness that enables new local, transnational and global forums for identity politics, resistance and social action. Even those communities that are local, in that they have been founded as forums for people within particular nation states, soon become transnational because their founders and many of their participants are diaspora subjects.[9] They have real ties to people in other countries and real and imaginative ties to various global diasporas that are based not only on race but also, for example, on ethnicity or religion. The emergence of political, collective racialized identities and their articulations have been inspired and empowered by discussions on social media communities, blogs and online journals founded in other countries.[10]

Some social media communities have soon turned into quiet communities of passive members. There can be many reasons for that. Some people do not find white people’s presence (if that is allowed) comfortable, sometimes people do not agree with other people’s separatist ideas or other strategies for anti-racism. Some groups have promoted the founder’s own interests rather than becoming communities where people can discuss and plan the group’s objectives and activities. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Paul Gilroy reminds us how ‘the routine effects of the online network are often mistaken for the stirrings of an actual movement. The movement from virtual to actual solidarity isn’t automatic or even easy’ (Yancy and Gilroy 2015).

In the 2010s, dozens of blogs, Facebook groups and other social media forums based on individuals’ racial identifications have been founded in Nordic countries by people who identify with blackness or non-whiteness. Compared with the many diaspora and anti-racist associations founded by immigrants and other racialized minorities in Nordic countries in prior decades, these digital forums have attracted many followers within a short period of time, and they have generated plenty of discussion on racism and racialized relations in these countries.

For example, in Finland, a blog entitled *Ruskeat Tytöt* (*Brown Girls*), founded by writer and journalist Koko Hubara in 2015, has become a frequently cited publication not only among those who talk about themselves as racialized minorities but also among white people. Hubara’s awardwinning blog focuses on matters of gender, race, ethnicity and identity in the Finnish context. The AfroFinns Facebook group, which seeks to ‘foster a more unified and stronger black community’[11] on a national level, got plenty of followers within just a few months in 2015 when it was founded by one person. However, instead of becoming an arena for active discussions, it has become a notice board for ads of particular events and an archive for videos and journal articles. Nevertheless, these groups can be useful forums for spreading information on anti-racist events among black communities and cultures on a national level. Knowledge of black artists’ works and what is happening in other countries is also circulated in these groups. White people are welcomed to join some of these groups, but many communities have been founded only for ‘people of colour’ or ‘racialized people’. Such forums are safe spaces that allow people to discuss their experiences and ideas without being forced to ‘explain the same things over and over again’ to white people (including researchers!) who according to many ‘do not understand the reality of non-white people’.[12]

According to Henry Mainsah (2014), who has studied how young African Norwegian women negotiate identity and community through digital social network communities, these women’s ties and ways of belonging are envisioned at both the local and the transnational levels, as well as at the intersection between online and offline spaces. A good example of how global online communities inspire people to go into the streets is the Black Lives Matter movement, which spread to the Nordic countries in 2016 when hundreds of people participated in Black Lives Matter demonstrations in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. In Finland, a demonstration by a small group of people in October 2016 did not receive as much media attention as bigger demonstrations in other countries. Nevertheless, as a public event known to be an initiative of black people, it was a political statement and arena for people, who in other contexts talk about themselves in other terms (e.g. as Muslims, as members of Somali or other ethnic communities or just as Finns), to stand up in public as ‘black people’ or as allies of black people.[13] Black Lives Matter demonstrations were not only about bringing questions of race relations into public discussions in the Nordic countries but also about bringing the perspectives and voices of non-white people into local anti-racism activism.

The Internet has made it easier to learn about and join new forms of diaspora and transnational networks that empower people to talk about and contest racism and normative whiteness in existing Nordic anti-racism forums that, as explained above, have been controlled mainly by people who do not self-identify as racialized minorities. For example, in February 2016 the Afro Empowerment Center Denmark organized an event entitled ‘Let’s Talk about Race’. On Facebook the Center is described as follows:

> Afro Empowerment Center Denmark is a proud member organization of the European Network for People of African Descent. This organization is comprised of PAD organizations across Europe working specifically in Human and Civil rights pertaining to PAD. This is a space that inspires and intellectually challenges us. The prior network seminars produced The Demand Catalog for People of African Descent and Black Europeans. www.aec-denmark.dk/Demand-Catalog-PAD-BE_full-length.pdf. ENPAD is a network of black-led anti-racist and Afrikan empowerment organizations from different European countries. In the light of Black Lives Matter

> and the grievances/discrimination in Europe regarding People of African Descent it is more than necessary for us to work interdisciplinary, on several levels and united. [14]

In *Skandik Afrik – Africans in Scandinavia* online magazine, the event was described as 'something special' and 'first of its kind' in Denmark (Brown 2016). These local activities and communities, which are inspired by global, European and Nordic organizations and movements, have helped to establish the idea of race as a social category that also has power in Northern Europe. Furthermore, they have raised discussions on the importance of acknowledging situated knowledge in fight against racism. In anti-racist forums, both in online discussions and at events where anti-racism activists with different racial backgrounds collaborate, white Nordic anti-racism activists have found themselves in a new situation. They are asked to reflect on their privileged position and the limits of their knowledge and to learn about and respect ideas of 'black-led anti-racism'.

White collaborators, or allies, are often invited to events promoting anti-racism that are organized by or together with non-white people, but there are also forums and events where white people are not welcomed: closed discussion groups on the Internet, thematic events and small gatherings. In Sweden, which has the biggest immigrant communities and largest numbers of non-white citizens, there are more communities and activities for 'black/racialized people only' than in other Nordic countries. For example, the African–Swedish organization Black Coffee, which was founded in January 2015, already has local groups in many Swedish cities. According to Araia Ghirmai Sebhatu, co-founder of Black Coffee, it is a separatist antiracist organization, a movement using the Internet as a tool and a platform aimed at connecting all African–Swedish people who accept that 'the movement generates from a critical foundation' and that its ideology is black anti-racism and black feminism. 'Black feminism' refers here to discussions on intersectionality: 'how resources, power and privileges are intervened with race, gender and class'. Black coffee activists organize panels, lectures, book clubs and other events, or just drink coffee. According to Araia Ghirmai Sebhatu: '[T]here is something deeply radical when Africans in Sweden gather together in public spaces, even if it's simply for coffee. We choose each other. Black people actively choose to be with only black people. That´s how coffee becomes politics'. To him, a separatist movement is an effective strategy against the normative whiteness of his society.[15] In Sweden, there are also other forums and activities from which white people are excluded, such as the workshops 'only for persons who are racialized'[16] that are arranged by activists Wendy Francis and Nora Dome Nelson, who also launched the podcast Arga Flickor (Angry Girls)'.

With the examples above, I have tried to show how people who identify with racialised minorities have made race as a powerful social category visible in Nordic countries. They have done this by searching for and joining communities based on racial identifications, by talking about themselves and about others with words referring to race or racialized relations, and through the anti-racism activities they have organized and participated in as racialized subjects. Many people have tried to do these things in Nordic countries (e.g., Kennedy-Macfoy 2014), but until recently individuals' attempts to talk about racism and the many meanings of race have been silenced by denials of racism. The political climate and the increase in open, brutal racism have now made these denials impossible. Moreover, it is more difficult to ignore established communities and the voices of 'our children' – people who were born in and grew up in Nordic countries – then the voices of people whose ‘right to belong here’ is easier to question. These empirical examples also make visible the necessity of considering not only local but also various transnational and global contexts in research on racialized identities. Now, even in those Northern European locations where there are still few non-white people, individuals are (finally) able to find supportive (digital) communities that allow political collective racialized identities to exist.

Through their agency as racialized subjects, people have raised discussion not only about their own experiences of racism but also about the nature of racialized social relations. As Richard Dyer (1999) has stated, whiteness can be seen where its difference from blackness is inescapable and at issue. When that happens, and when these messages can no longer be silenced, whiteness can no longer just be a ‘state of affairs’ of the white landscape. Instead, it must be discussed as a position in racialized power relations – not only as a privileged position but also as a standpoint (see Frankenberg 1993) that can make understanding and knowing about racism difficult for those who are categorized as white. Thus, along with the emergence of ‘race’ as a social category through discussions on blackness, non-whiteness and whiteness the white majority of the Nordic countries is being put into a new situation: we are asked to question our knowledge of our society and ourselves, our naive national self-image and ideas about ourselves as people ‘who cannot be racists’.

Conclusions: The politics of naming racialized relations

The rapid appearance of race as a social construction in public civil society discussions, in political fields and in media in Northern Europe in the 2000s can be explained by the changing demographics and political climate, as well as by the global circulation of ideas and the virtual communities enabled on the Internet. However, I argue that within the Nordic academia and among authorities there is still a lack of knowledge and understanding of the meaning of race and, consequently, of racism. In these fields, tools for identifying race and its effects in Nordic societies have not yet been founded or even sought. The word ‘race’ and other words referring to it are still avoided. Yet, as long as some people become racialized and face racism because of their colour, and a line is drawn between those who are categorized as ‘white’ and those who are not, it has to be verbalized.

We should work harder to find and create tools to enable the meanings of race in our societies to be identified and examined. Academics in the Nordic countries, including myself, have been critical about collecting data and producing population statistics based on individuals’ racial and ethnic identifications, but we do not necessarily have to copy the principles and practices used in other countries.[17] I am afraid that as long as there is no available equality data on racial identifications and relations, racism will remain an under-researched topic in these societies, with negative consequences for non-discrimination policies and laws. In many countries, people from minority communities have also opposed or been ambivalent towards equality data collection, but some surveys suggest that we may see changes in that (ENAR 2014, 24).

The politics of naming in the subtitle above refers to the practices and struggles over categorization and questions related to how heterogeneous groups and communities and their shifting identities are conceptualized in everyday encounters and in academic and political forums.

It is easy to get lost in translation since most concepts referring to race as a social category are imports from the United States or Britain. Even local meanings of particular concepts are constructed through various crossings of borders of time, geography and linguistics and between academic, political and other discourses.

Relying on racial vocabularies, such as words referring to colour, can be uncomfortable for various reasons. We can never totally escape the risk of essentialism or the racist ideas embedded in them. The meanings of words referring to races need to be negotiated repeatedly because words always carry traces of their earlier meanings and because our societies transform both socially and culturally.

I became aware of the importance of the politics of naming for knowledge production and for the well-being of many people when I studied children's experiences of racism at the beginning of the 2000s. I found out how not having words for their particularity as racialized subjects, and in case of many children the lack of supportive communities, made it very difficult for young people to deal with their experiences and their situations (see Rastas 2005, 2009). Things have changed during the last decade, especially among young people: words such as 'black' don´t get stuck in their throats anymore because they can now expect the meanings of these words as social constructions and expressions of political identities to be understood within their own societies. Yet, the popularity of expressions such as 'brown' or 'racialized people' suggests that individuals in Nordic countries are not comfortable with, or do not necessarily want to rely on, words that may be misleading or may hide the complexity of racialized relations and identities. For example, people may reject the prefix 'Afro' or 'African' because, in addition to referring to race/colour, it can also suggest individuals' ties to or knowledge of African cultures, something that many people with parents of African descent do not have. Although the word 'black' has become a collective racial(ized) identity for many young people, it is still avoided as a self-identity among, for example, many North-African and Somali immigrants (Rastas 2013; see also Besteman 1999).

As a researcher, I find the notion of 'racialized people' problematic when it is used to refer only to non-white individuals, which is usually the case especially in Sweden and in Finland when activists, artists and students use the term. White(ness) is also a social construction, a product of processes that in research on racism are theorized as racial formation (Omi and Winant 1994) and racialization (e.g. Miles 1989). When people are categorized as 'white' they also become racialized, although the consequences are different. The criticism against the normative whiteness expressed by racialized minorities has also raised confusion, mainly because, as explained above, many white people have been put into a new situation that they have found uncomfortable, uneasy and even painful, but also because in anti-racism forums the word 'white(ness)' is sometimes used in such a way that its meaning as a social category fades away. In Nordic contexts, I would rather talk about racialized minorities than racialized people.

Nevertheless, in research on racism we cannot rely only on researchers' definitions of racial categories. Even when we refuse to use particular words – including individuals' and communities' emic categorizations – as research categories in our analyses, we should acknowledge them and trace the shifting meanings of the terms that people use in discussions of their particularity as racialized subjects and their positioning in racialized social relations and hierarchies. That, I argue, can also be a good method for examining the rapid transformations of racialized relations, their local articulations and their transnational and global dimensions.

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[1] The notion of ‘Nordic countries’ is used here as a regional and a political concept. The word ‘Scandinavia’ is sometimes used as a synonym for the Nordic countries. Although in some discussion Finland and Iceland are also included among Scandinavian countries, as a regional concept it refers only to Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The now autonomous territories of the Faroe Islands and Greenland are still part of the Kingdom of Denmark.

[2] Norway regained its independence in 1905 after 500 years of political union with Sweden and Denmark. Iceland was under the rule of Norway and then Denmark until it first became an independent state in 1918 under the Danish crown and then in 1944 obtained its full independence as the Republic of Iceland. Finland became an independent country in 1917 after a declaration of independence from the Russian Republic. Most parts of what is now known as Finland were under Swedish rule until 1809 when the Kingdom of Sweden lost Finland in a war with Russia and the new, autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland became part of that country.

[3] For the situation of the Roma in Europe see, for example, the latest country monitoring reports of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), available at http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/library/publications.asp .

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[4] This organizations is part of the openly racist Nordic Resistance Movement, a national socialist organization that is also active in Sweden and Norway.

[5] Interview with Sabuni, by phone on 23 November 2016, was made by Liban Sheikh, who worked as a research assistant on the author´s research project on contemporary African diaspora formations.

[6] All the Nordic countries are member states of the Council of Europe. ECRI’s country reports are available on ECRI’s website, see http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/countrybycountry_en.asp.

[7] For ENAR’s publications, see http://www.enar-eu.org/Publications.

[8] Denmark, Finland and Sweden are members of the European Union, whereas Iceland and Norway are not.

[9] For example, the founder of *Ms Afropolitan* blog, Minna Salami, was born in Finland, grew up in Nigeria, studied in Sweden and now lives in London.

[10] My ethnographic fieldwork in anti-racist forums and among African diaspora communities in the Nordic countries has included netnography (Kozinets 2010).

[11] See https://www.facebook.com/AfroFinns/.

[12] The quotes here are my summaries of what members of these communities have said to me and in public at different anti-racist forums.

[13] According to the event’s Facebook page, Black Lives Matter Helsinki was organized by the Rasismivapaa Suomi (‘Finland Free of Racism’ [my translation]) Facebook group, founded in 2013, which is open to anyone. See https://www.facebook.com/events/1093799630706463/.

[14] https://www.facebook.com/AEC.CPH/posts/963026157139975.

[15] Quotes are transcribed from a recording of the panel discussion, ‘Anti-Racist Activism and Challenging Normative Whiteness’, in which I also participated, during the Anti-racist Forum at Cultural Centre Caisa in Helsinki on 1 October 2016.

[16] This is my translation; the original text in Swedish is on their website: ‘Workshopen är exklusiv för personer som rasifieras’, see http://www.argaflickor.com/boka-oss.

[17] Problems related to ethnic and racial statistics are not only ethical and political, but also relate to the reliability of the research. Within the limits of this article, I am not able to discuss these questions. For discussion in Finnish, see Rastas 2013.