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I Felt So White: Sámi Racialization, Indigeneity, and Shades of Whiteness.

Introduction

This article explores how whiteness and race are often understated, but relevant categories of identification Sápmi. The Sámi people are an Indigenous people of Northern Europe, living in a large territory called Sápmi by the Sámi themselves. The area encompasses parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. Their traditional lifestyle been historically been connected to hunting, fishing and trading. While other colonized people often have a clear beginning of the colonial process, often with people travelling over oceans, the colonization of Sápmi was more of a gradual process. The topic of race and racism is also an ambiguous and complex issue in Sápmi today. On one hand, the Sámi are often classified as white, and on the other hand, they have been perceived and see themselves as “looking different” and share a history of racialization and scientific racism with other Indigenous people of the world. There is a history of colonization and racialization of the Sámi people, with race biology and racist politics starting from the mid 1800s to mid 1900s, defining the Sámi as a primitive and exotic race of Asian origin, rather than as white Europeans (Kyllingstad 2012).

With concepts from feminist, post-colonial, and anti-racist theory, I discuss how the social construction, categorization, and embodied practices of “race” are part of being Sámi even today. Whiteness studies is a field of research that has emerged, where researchers focus on the social identity and location of whiteness, and the often taken-for granted privilege of whiteness (Frankenberg 1993, McIntosh 2004, Roediger 1992, Lipsitz 1995, Berg, Flemmen, and Gullikstad 2010, Dyer 2016, Rothenberg 2008, Bonds and Inwood 2016) sharing some perspectives with critical race theory (Crenshaw 1995, Delgado and Stefancic 2012). Whiteness in this perspective is more than a skin color. It is a political and cultural term that signifies status, power, and character (Perkins 2004), a place from which people look at themselves, at other and at society, and a cultural practice (Frankenberg 1993), and a social and historical identity and an epistemically and salient and ontologically real entity that have survived it constantly changing boundaries (Alcoff 2006, 2015).

I use autoethnography (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang 2010, Ellis and Bochner 2003, Spry 2013) in combination with qualitative interviews. I am thus inspired by “doubled research practice” (Berg 2008, Gunaratnam 2003) and use this as a strategy to challenge the silence around whiteness in relation to the Sámi people. In this way, I critically investigate the status of whiteness as unmarked majority position. I analyze the racialization of Sámi bodies through the concepts of *comfort/discomfort* (Ahmed 2012, 2014) and argue that the old ideologies about the Sámi as a distinct race still are implicit in everyday life as well as in research, and that there is a need for a theoretical debate about these issues both in academia and in society in general.

A guided tour

I am in Uppsala, participating at a Symposium on race biology and its history in Sápmi. The participants include researchers, Sámi politicians, and other people interested in the topic. On the first day, there is a guided tour of Uppsala University’s collections from The State Institute for Racial Biology, a research institute founded in 1922 with a focus on eugenics and human genetics (it changed its name to “State Institute for Human Genetics” in 1958). I feel like a tourist, walking through the University buildings. At the end of the tour, we end up at the University library, where we sit down at a table in a basement room. The guide fills the table in front of us with dozens of photo albums and books from the days of Herman Lundborg, the head of the institute from 1922 to 1936. The guide informs us that the pictures were taken for research purposes by the researchers involved in the racial biology project.

We all start looking through the albums. At first, it feels like looking at ordinary family photos. We sit silently with the albums, which contain pictures of Sámi people from Sweden. Some of the pictures look like ordinary family photos. There are pictures of children outside their school. There are pictures of men with their reindeer. Women and children outside turf huts. Some have Sámi clothes, while others follow the fashion of that time, with suits, hats, long skirts, and dresses. Other pictures show more clearly that they were taken for research purposes, as the individuals are placed passively in ways that show their face and body clearly, almost like photos of criminals. I hear others comment that some of the albums contain naked people as well, but luckily, I never see those.

Suddenly the woman who sits next to me screams. She then bursts into tears. She swears and says that one of the pictures shows one of her close relatives. Then she laughs and smiles, saying that he is beautiful, and that she is so happy to see him. Then she continues crying. I freeze. Even though I am Sámi myself, it feels like my research role suddenly becomes a straightjacket that sticks to my body and almost suffocates me. I feel uncomfortable. I try to remind myself that I am Sámi too, and that these people could have been my relatives as well, and maybe they are distant relatives of mine for all I know, but that does not help at all. It feels like I have intruded into someone's private life. As a researcher, there are ways that I too have intruded into people's lives and persuaded them to tell me their life stories, stories about their private life, which I have then used for my own benefit. My intention was always to write something that could help people, and that could shed light on the personal losses that many Sámi people have experienced because of colonialism and assimilation. Am I caught in the same academic trap as other researchers, where we merely present others as objects for our own studies, rather than actually making a change in academia and in society in general? One of the organizers of the Symposium wears a gákti, a Sámi traditional dress. Should I have done the same? Would that make me less of an intruder?

I look at another researcher who sits across the table from me and think that he is not even Sámi. Is he as uncomfortable as I am? I try to look professional and continue to look through the albums, but I feel like throwing up. I talk to some of the other Sámi participants after the tour, and some of them say that they have a similar feeling. I try to figure out why I feel so uncomfortable. Is it because her sudden outburst of emotion made me uncomfortable, because I myself am so uncomfortable with showing feelings in public? Is it because I myself am Sámi, and that it could have been my own family? Is it because I am also a researcher, just like Herman Lundborg, and thus in a way complicit in his research practices? Or is it because I have never really been confronted with my own family being defined as non-white individuals in the past? This story illustrates the ambiguous and complex context that still influences the relationship between Sámi people and the Nordic majority population. While the theories of distinct Scandinavian races have been abandoned in politics and academia, I argue that the same ideas still exist in everyday categorizations of Sámi people, and that these in turn still influences the categorization and identity processes in the everyday life of Sámi people today.

Methodology

I combine qualitative interviews and participant observation with an autoethnographic methodology to explore how whiteness/non-whiteness is articulated and performed in a Sámi contextⁱ. The qualitative data consists of interviews and participant observation from two projects, one on Sámi articulation (2010-2014) and one on Sámi urbanity (2014-2017), both focusing on identity issues. While the first project deals with affect and melancholia, the second involves questions related to political activism and Indigenous international networking. According to Anne-Jorunn Berg (2008), whiteness as an unmarked category is a challenge when doing research. To do research on an unmarked and often unarticulated category can be difficult, and we are often left with the question of how to do critical research on whiteness without reifying it. She draws on Yasmin Gunaratnam and suggests a “doubled research practice” (Berg 2008, Gunaratnam 2003). According to Gunaratnam this means that the researcher “is capable of working both with and against racialized categories, and which is able to make links between lived experience, political relations, and the production of knowledge” (Gunaratnam 2003, 23). As a solution to this problem, Berg (Berg 2008, 217) suggests memory works as a way of doing “doubled research,” where researchers can position themselves as racialized by writing themselves as white:

Memory work involves the writing of personal memories of particular episodes related to the topic under investigation. In our project the topic was whiteness. After a period of writing down memories the next step was to analyse the memories as empirical data about this topic. As researcher you produce both the data and the analysis, thus blurring the traditional boundary between the subject and the object of research (Berg 2008, 216).

I am inspired by Berg (2008) and Gunaratnam (2003) in their critical methodological approach. I therefore use autoethnography in combination with qualitative data as a strategy to challenge the silence around whiteness and critically investigate its status as unmarked majority position (Berg 2008, 215). Through a critical analysis of my own lived experience in combination with empirical data, I try to destabilize whiteness as a category, both theoretically and politically. I analyze the racialization of Sámi bodies through the concepts of *comfort/discomfort* (Ahmed

2012, 2014). As Sara Ahmed argues, “comfort” suggests well-being and satisfaction, and is “an encounter between bodies and worlds, the promise of a ‘sinking’ feeling” (Ahmed 2012, 40). Ahmed argues that effects of “non-fitting” is a discomfort, and that discomfort is “not about assimilation or resistance, but about inhabiting norms differently” (Ahmed 2014, 155). To inhabit whiteness as a nonwhite body can be uncomfortable, according to Ahmed. Discomfort involves the failure to fit. When some bodies are excluded from whiteness, the whiteness of the space is reconfirmed (Ahmed 2012, 40-41). Through analyzing my own feeling of discomfort in my research practice, I gain new insight into how whiteness is negotiated in a Sámi context.

As a trained ethnographer, one is always both a participant and an observer of the study’s reality. Some researchers describe the ethnographic process as a kind of subjective soaking, where one abandons the idea of absolute objectivity and scientific neutrality, and in this way attempts to merge oneself into the culture being studied (Narayan 1993, Abu-Lughod 1996, Ellen 1984, Berg and Lune 2012). A feminist-inspired ethnographic perspective also often involves a process whereby the research process is humanized, and in which the researcher is reflexive about their thoughts. An autoethnographic approach is thus a research strategy that encourages writing in a more personal and self-reflexive way (Berg and Lune 2012, 212). Through this approach, I explore how to make the participant observation process more explicit in the analysis.

Autoethnography is an approach in which the researcher analyzes his or her own personal experiences as a way of understanding cultural practices. It is the critically reflexive process of connecting the personal narratives to larger social issues, and the researcher critically analyzes his or her own personal experiences in relation to other people and their practices.

Autoethnography is thus as a method and genre both a research process and a product (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 2010). The autobiographical genre can be described as a “genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis and Bochner 2003, 209). This means that through writing down his or her experiences from the past, the researcher also analyzes these experiences using the theoretical and methodological tools of the social sciences. In a way, ethnographic methodology always has an autoethnographic quality to it. As Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, Kathy-Ann C. Hernandez and Heewon Chang point out:

Research is an extension of researchers' lives. Although most social scientists have been trained to guard against subjectivity (self-driven perspectives) and to separate self from research activities, it is an impossible task. Scholarship is inextricably connected to self-personal interest, experience, and familiarity (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang 2010, 1).

Autoethnographic methods thus have some similarities to ethnography, which involves the researcher participating in people's daily life for an extended period to collect the relevant data for the study (Hammersley and Atkinson 2010). It is often said that as an ethnographer one uses one's own body as a research instrument. Through a combination of ethnographic methods and autoethnographic methods, it is possible to analyze this process more critically. According to Tami Spry (2013), autoethnography is a critically reflexive methodology that produces a narrative of the researcher's engagement with other people in a specific sociocultural context. Spry argues that autoethnography "views the personal as inherently political, focuses on bodies-in-context as co-performative agents in interpreting knowledge, and holds aesthetic crafting of research as an ethical imperative of representation"(Spry 2013, 215).

The link between research, the personal, and the political makes the method especially useful when analyzing the research process of an Indigenous researcher doing research on Indigenous issues. As Spry (2013) reminds us of, citing Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), "natives" have been studied for their rich past, but have not been seen as knowledge producers themselves. Thus research, with its link to imperialism and colonialism, becomes a highly problematic practice in itself. An autoethnography of a Sámi Norwegian researcher such as myself thus becomes a critical examination of both the research practice and my own personal story within academia.

Whiteness and the racialization of Sámi people

Compared with for example Indigenous people the colonization of Sápmi was more of a gradual process. During the Iron Age and early middle ages, the borders between the Sámi and their neighboring ethnic groups were quite stable, and the territorial balance, reflecting the relative equality and reciprocity of the groups. The religious and political changes in the end of the so-called Viking age and forward on in the middle ages created a more asymmetric relationship.

The new situation, with formation of states, also involved a more directly colonization, where neighboring ethnic group to a greater extent started settling in territories that used to be dominated by the Sámi, and introduced their administrative and economic ways of organizing their society. The Sámi territories were also gradually integrated in the state formations, controlled by people in the south (Hansen and Olsen 2004). As the Sámi scholar Veli-Pekka Lehtola states:

It is clear that that the territories originally inhabited by the Sámi came to the possession of the Nordic countries as a result of a long intervention from the 16th to 18th century, caused by the competition between the kingdoms, and the goal was the exploitation and maintenance of these territories by supplanting the Sámi acquisition (Lehtola 2015, 25).

The history of race biology, racism, and phenotypical stereotypes, in addition to the status of the Sámi as an Indigenous people with political relations to other Indigenous people all around the world, make Sámi whiteness an ambiguous issue. The idea that being Sámi has to do with physiognomy and “looking” Sámi persists in the Nordic countries, and is something that both influence how Sámi people are seen and see themselves (Dankertsen 2014). On the other hand, Sámi people today often are seen and see themselves as white Europeans (Kuokkanen 2006), or the “White Indians of Scandinavia” in Harald Gaski’s (1993) words. However, the status of the Sámi as an Indigenous people disrupts and complicates the issue of whiteness in the Sámi context, since being Indigenous is so closely, but at the same time ambiguously, connected to being non-white, both historically and as understood internationally. This also affects how Sámi people see themselves, since international Indigenous solidarity is a part of present day Sámi identity politics, which in turn complicates the extent to which Sámi people identify with whiteness today.

As Diana Mulinari, Suvi Keskinen, Sari Irni, and Salla Tuori (2009) point out, theoretical debates within postcolonial theory have mostly been concerned with the cultures and societies in former colonies in non-European territories, while the Nordic countries in general have presented themselves as outsiders to colonial power relations. Nordic international relations have mostly been concerned with aid, peace building, and cooperation, and the region is characterized by welfare systems, democracy, and economic competitiveness. The authors use the concept

“colonial complicity” to highlight how the Nordic countries have taken and continue to take part in (post)colonial processes through cultural, political, material, and economic ties to the Western world. They also highlight the fact that this self-representation is a lie, ignoring such historical cases as New Sweden, the Danish West Indies, Greenland, slave colonies in West Africa, and Indian colonies like Tranquebar, as well as the colonization of Sápmi. Colonial complicity thus refers to “processes in which (post)colonial imaginaries, practices and products are made to be part of what is understood as the ‘national’ and ‘traditional’ culture of the Nordic countries” (Mulinari et al. 2009, 1-2).

The link between racialization and indigeneity has a long history in both research and politics, with whiteness as an implicit norm against which other races are constructed and judged. Racial hierarchies have been reproduced and maintained in which Indigenous people have been judged and produced in relation to those defined as white. While some Indigenous groups have a more clearly visible non-white phenotype, the case of the Sámi illustrates how this racialization of Indigenous people is also constructed. In a Sámi context, the link between Indigeneity and non-whiteness becomes somewhat problematic. As Rauna Kuokkanen (2006, 1) points out, the apparent whiteness of the Sámi is something that has intrigued scholars. She quotes Jacob Bronowski from *The Ascent of Man*, who asks:

Why are the Lapps white? Man began with a dark skin; the sunlight makes vitamin D in his skin, and if he had been white in Africa, it would make too much. But in the north, man needs to let in all the sunlight there is to make enough vitamin D, and natural selection therefore favored those with whiter skin (Bronowski 1973, 42).

Rauna Kuokkanen (2006, 1), however, criticizes Standing Rock Sioux lawyer and scholar Vine Deloria (1995, 10), who argues that while the "Lapps" [i.e. the Sámi] are whiter, they do not run around naked, but are heavily clothed because they live in the cold. Kuokkanen (2006, 1) states that Deloria here uses another stereotypical belief, that is that the Sámi live in permanent winter, which is not true, and that their whiteness stems from that fact. While whiteness genetically of course has its climatic reasons, Kuokkanen (2006) criticizes this sometimes taken-for-granted connection between skin color and Indigeneity and states that it is not the skin color that makes one an indigenous people, but their collective status as minorities in

territories from which they descend. She quotes the ILO Convention dealing with indigenous rights, which states that an individual is:

regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country (...) at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions” (ILO 1989).

While this is the often used definition of Indigenous status, the social reality is often different. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith reminds us of, Indigenous identity is often connected with the demands of authenticity and essentialism (Smith 1999). Internationally, this is often connected to skin color and/or physical appearance. The idea that being Sámi has to do with physiognomy and “looking” Sámi is still a relevant social categorization, linked to the history of colonization and racialization of the Sámi people. Even though race biologists and arbiters in the from the mid 1800s to mid 1900s defined the Sámi as Asian and non-white, Sámi people are today often seen as white. An example of this can be found in a text by Reverend Olav Holm, who worked in Divtasvuona/Tysfjord from 1878 to 1884:

I believe the Lapp is all but immune to what, to us, is higher culture, which is the level of our culture at this time. As far as I can see, he lacks the precondition to create a social order that requires diligence, respect for rules, and a basic discipline in all aspects of higher form of social existence... for which the Asiatic nomad is not well suited, no matter how long he has been permanently settled (Holm 1907, 16).

In this quote we can see the traces of race biology and social Darwinism, and how that influenced how non-Sámi people like Holm look at the Sámi. Holm viewed the Sámi as a people originated in Eastern culture. While this might look controversial today, this way of categorizing people was quite mainstream at the time when Holm worked in Divtasvuona/Tysfjord (Evjen and Beck 2015, Evjen 2004). There are many examples of historic changes regarding how ethnic groups have been racially categorized. As Patricia Slade Lander (1991) points out, the fact that the Finnishⁱⁱ language is not an Indo-European language greatly influenced how the Finns were

defined. The Finns were “Mongolians” by J.F. Blumenbach in 1775 as “East Baltic” by Rolf Nordenstreng and mixed between the East Baltic and the Nordic, all trying to define them as non-Western and different from the Nordic (Lander 1991).

The idea of the Nordic master race was something that existed long before the Nazis adopted it. Inspired by romantic ideals and nationalism, many researchers held the Nordic race to be superior. They believed that they could distinguish races biologically, with measurements of living and dead skulls and bodies, and that they could link these phenotypical variations to mental abilities and stages of civilization. The ideological basis of racism from the mid 1800s to mid 1900s only divided people into white and non-white races; its proponents also believed that the European population could be divided into different races, with the Nordic race as the superior one. The French Arthur Gobineau and his work *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races, 1853–1855), is often considered one of the earliest examples of scientific racism. Gobineau claimed that the cause of the downfall of civilizations is linked to racial mixing, and that the “Aryan race” is the superior one. In his view, the aristocracy was the descendants of a warrior race that was the bearers of European high culture, and social and geographic mobility, and the subsequent racial mixing, would in his opinion lead to the downfall of Europe as a civilization. In this work, he divided the humans into three major groups: white, yellow and black. The Sámi was in this system categorized as yellow, not white. Gobineau’s theories were of great importance for the racial ideologues and the development of the field of anthroposociology (Kyllingstad 2014, Gobineau 2015 [1855]).

From the mid 1800s to mid 1900s, researchers also, influenced by the trends in the research communities in Europe at the time, started to define the Sámi as a primitive and exotic race of Asian origin, rather than as white Europeans (Kyllingstad 2012). There was also a contemporary debate on the origin of the “primitive,” “weak,” and “dwarflike” Sámi. Some researchers first believed that the Sámi were the original inhabitants of northern Europe. From the 1860s, this earlier theory was replaced by a theory that the Sámi were not European, but rather immigrants who had come from Asia in the Middle Ages. This debate also had political implications, since it coincided with the ongoing debate on the cultural and territorial rights of the Sámi people and the geopolitical changes in the Nordic countries at that time (Schanche 2000, Kyllingstad 2012).

The history of the racialization of the Sámi people can be traced back to the construction of the Scandinavian nations and the historical construction of Scandinavians as the “master race” at the top of the hierarchy. This racial narrative was also a hegemonic scientific discourse, and prominent Scandinavian researchers contributed to race science for almost 200 years – a fact that deeply contrasts with the Scandinavian self-image today, as countries supporting decolonization, anti-segregation, anti-racism, and social justice (Broberg 1995, Hagerman 2006, Schough 2008, Myrdahl 2010, Hübinette and Lundström 2011, Kyllingstad 2012). According to Tobias Hübinette & Catrin Lundström (2011), this mismatch between the past and the present creates a double-bind that can explain the development of new movements of sometimes quite aggressive Swedish whiteness in recent years:

The dream of a white homogeneous past, constructed around the welfare state, which is now falling apart through a vague idea of “cultural difference”, and a longing for a homogeneous future when mixed positions and hybridity have been erased, constitutes the common undisputed character for this white melancholia (Hübinette and Lundström 2011, 50).

This mismatch between the past and the present, and the lack of space for discussions of race and whiteness in public discourses, also has implications for how the Sámi as an Indigenous people are constructed in relation to the Scandinavian nations. While the undisputed whiteness of the Swedes and the Norwegians constitutes a taken-for-granted element in the construction of these nations, the Sámi as an Indigenous people that in the past was constructed as a racially inferior people, does not fit into the available categories. The ambivalent, multivocal and often understated negotiation of whiteness among Sámi peoples in Scandinavia shows that racialization is not only about appearance and skin color, but is also a way of categorizing people hierarchically in terms of being “civilized” or not (Kyllingstad 2012).

While it is common in an everyday context to talk about “having Sámi blood” or “looking Sámi” as ways of signaling Sámi identity, people generally define being Sámi as something connected to ethnicity and language rather than race, both in Sámi and majority society. However, as I have shown in previous research (Dankertsen 2014), defining others and oneself as Sámi in terms of “racial” characteristics such as skin color, hair color, height, eye

shape or high cheekbones, is still a highly relevant social practice. However, the right to vote in Sámi Parliament elections in Norway is based on language criteria, not blood or race. Anyone who declares themselves to be Sámi, and who either has Sámi as their home language¹, or has or had parents, grandparents or great grandparents with Sámi as their home language, or is a child of someone who is or has been on the electoral register is entitled to be included in the Sámi electoral register (Valgdirektoratet 2017).

However, this way of officially defining the Sámi people in relation to the electoral roll is not without controversies. An example that illustrates how the understanding of the Sámi as white is complicated and full of fissures, tensions and contradictions, are the recurring controversies regarding the the Norwegian Sámi Parliament and the Finnmark Act.² One of the most controversial debaters is Jarl Hellesvik, former politician and now author and leader of the organization EDL³- Ethnic Democratic Equality (Etnisk demokratisk likeverd in Norwegian), a protest organization against Sámi rights and the Finnmark Act. Even though Hellesvik is himself of Sámi descent, he claims in his book «Samer og samepolitikk» (Sámi and Sámi Politics), that *Norwegian* politics is the best for the Sámi people, and that the Sámi Parliament, Sámi rights, the consultation duty in Sámi matter and the Finnmark Act violates the UN convention against racial discrimination. He claims that the Sámi electoral roll is not based on ideas about shared language, culture or geographical belonging, but on ancestry (Hellesvik 2017). He paradoxically aligns with the Sámi activist and scholar Odd Mathis Hætta's warning and critique of the direction of the work of the Sámi Parliament and the criteria for the electoral roll, where he states that it is no longer the culture and language that is the basis for the Sámi electoral roll, but race and blood (Hætta 2017).

These controversies shows us how there is a delicate balance between on one hand including those individuals with Indigenous ancestry, who have lost their language and culture due to assimilation and colonization, and on the other hand secure a strong basis for preserving language and culture, which in turn often involves some kind of sovereignty and exclusive rights.

¹ They call it explicitly "home language" and not native tongue, mother tongue or first language because of the Norwegianization policy and the fact that many spoke the language in secret at home, even though it was not their first language or officially registered language.

² The Finnmark Act transferred about 96% of the area in Finnmark county in Norway to the inhabitants of Finnmark in 2005. The area is managed by the Finnmark Estate, with a board of directors with six members, three of them appointed by the Sámi Parliament and three by the Finnmark County Council. The Act was established as a result of the Sámi people's fight for their rights to manage their land and culture, since

³ EDL – not to confuse with English Defence League

This controversy has some remarkable similarities with the Cherokee Freedmen's struggle, as analyzed by Circe Sturm (Sturm 2014). The Cherokee Freedmen are descendants of African Cherokee slaves once held by Cherokee slave owners, who have sought full tribal citizenship within the Cherokee Nation on the basis that many Cherokee Freedmen had shared language, lifestyle and culture with the Cherokee, and thus wished to be accepted as a legitimate part of the Cherokee Nation. In the article, Sturm argues that many Cherokee conflate ancestry with race partly because of their awareness of the broader public's racialization of them, where the role of the so-called one-drop rule overdetermines the social and racial classification of the African ancestry of the Cherokee Freedmen. Circe Sturm claims that the Cherokee Freedman's struggle for political recognition shows us that this struggle shows us some interesting tensions and intersections between race and sovereignty, where racial discourse both empowers and diminishes tribal sovereignty. According to Sturm "the categories of 'settler' and 'indigenous' are both associated with certain racial expectations, specific forms of historical experiences, and different degrees of social and political empowerment" (Sturm 2014, 594).

Both the controversies regarding the Sámi rights and the Sámi electoral roll, and the Cherokee Freedman's controversy shows us the complicated processes related to the ambiguous origin narratives and political definition of Indigenous people as groups. It raises important questions regarding who that have the right to define what it is to be Indigenous, how this is defined, what kind of social categories that are relevant, and who that gets to decide what kind individuals that are included and excluded. These controversies over Indigenous identities, race and blood have some similarities with debates regarding the rise of DNA testing. As Kim Tallbear (Tallbear 2013) points out, there are some disturbing similarities between ethnic DNA testing and racial science, which informed white definitions of Indigenous people in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Jenny Reardon and Kim Tallbear states that:

The view that genetic knowledge of human evolution is an objective neutral good that benefits all and not a particular kind of knowledge that fits within a particular way of living and enacting the world in effect denies indigenous people such as the Havasupai the right to control their own genomic resources and identity (Reardon and TallBear 2012, 240).

Rather than being something that Indigenous people themselves can define in relation to culture, practices, belonging, traditions, language or family ties, Indigeneity becomes something that is possible to define "objectively" through hard science, with its ethical consequences. While many DNA projects like this sell themselves as projects with a clearly antiracist agenda, like the Genographic Project, that sell their project with a narrative that race has no biological meaning, and that we all are one people, they do this with a "conceptual and material terrains that leave intact old links between whiteness and property" (Reardon and TallBear 2012, 234). Indigeneity is thus subtly deprived of their subjectivity, becoming mere repositories of DNA (Reardon and TallBear 2012, 234).

The process of racialization may also be affected by other social status cues (Feliciano 2016, Freeman et al. 2011). The changes in the economic and social status of the Sámi may also have had an effect on the classification of the Sámi in racialized terms. This can be understood in relation to how various categories such as class, race, sexual orientation, and gender intersect and have complex and interwoven relationships, where different forms of oppression may overlap and thus create interdependent systems of discrimination (Crenshaw 1989, Crenshaw 1995, Lykke 2005, de los Reyes and Mulinari 2010, Berg, Flemmen, and Gullikstad 2010). Whiteness is a political and cultural term that signifies status, power, and character in a social production of privilege (Frankenberg 1993, Dyer 1997, Perkins 2004). The changes in the racialization of the Sámi can also be compared to the former racialization of the Irish (Stratton 2004, 229), or mixed or fair-skinned people. As Ann McClintock claims:

race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence *in and through* relation to each other if in contradictory and conflictual ways. In this sense, gender, race and class can be called articulated categories. This, then, is the triangulated theme that animates the chapters that follow: the intimate relations between imperial power and resistance; money and sexuality; race and gender (McClintock 1995, 4-5).

This understanding of race can give nuance to the racialization in Europeans, since it shows us how racialization is intimately connected to other categories of subordination, which is

highly relevant when analyzing the racialization of the Sámi as well. Racialization is thus *more* than the color of the skin. When Moreton-Robertson describes the Indigenous Other in Australia as being represented as “treacherous, lazy, drunken, childish, cunning, dirty, ignoble, noble, primitive, backward, unscrupulous, untrustworthy and savage” (Moreton-Robinson 2004b, 76), these words could just as easily have been an old description of Sámi people. An example is the already mentioned descriptions by Reverend Holm, where the Sámi according to Holm lacks the ability to take part in “higher form of social existence” (Holm 1907, 16, Evjen and Beck 2015). These descriptions show how racialization is also linked to class and marginalization. As Maureen Perkins argues, even though “looking white” can be a free pass to enter the dominant culture without experiencing racism, this white appearance also can be a source of stress. If people deny their ancestral links, this can represent a kind of betrayal: “although white in skin, their true character is coloured or black” (Perkins 2004, 165). Ruth Frankenberg (1993) describes Jewish identities as an example of how cultural identities can be articulated not only in terms of engagement in cultural forms, but also as a belonging to a group that has experienced discrimination and racism. Frankenberg argues that:

the memory of marginalization outlasts the marginalization itself, and the inhabiting of a name that indicates boundedness and marginality may long outlive both the moment of marginalization and the memory of subordination. There is, then, often a trace, a memory of subordination in a name. But there were differences in the content and modes of description attached to names, and these differences too were linked to issues of power (Frankenberg 1993, 229).

While Frankenberg writes that she consider the Jewish women she interviewed to be “white,” the racial naming in the past and present and the historically shifting boundary reproduce Jews as racial others, no matter how they look. While some Jews consider themselves to be non-white, none of the women who Frankenberg interviewed took this position (Frankenberg 1993). However, the example illustrates that whiteness is linked to hierarchies in which whiteness becomes an attribute that some people are more or less excluded from, no matter what their skin color is. The physical similarities between Sámi people and other Nordic people complicate this even further, as do the centuries of genetic mixing and assimilation.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson writes that “whiteness secures hegemony through discourse by normalizing itself as the cultural space of the West” (Moreton-Robinson 2004b, 78). Critical whiteness studies argues that race is something that concerns everyone, and that we have a tendency to think racial identity is something that people of color have and white people do not. As Beverly Tatum writes, “there is a lot of silence about race in White communities, and as a consequence Whites tend to think of racial identity as something that other people have, not something that is salient for them” (Tatum 2003, 94). Being white is something that both informs assumptions and influences social practices just as much as being non-white does. However, it is the privilege of white people not to think actively about their position as white in their everyday life. They take these privileges for granted, but as Ruth Frankenberg points out:

In the same way that both men's and women's lives are shaped by their gender, and that both heterosexual and lesbian women's experiences in the world are marked by their sexuality, white people *and* people of color live racially structured lives" (Frankenberg 1993, 1).

While being white is a kind of privilege (Frankenberg 1993, McIntosh 2004, Roediger 1992, Lipsitz 1995, Berg 2008, Dyer 1997, Rothenberg 2008, Perkins 2004, Bonds and Inwood 2016), sharing some perspectives with critical race theory (Crenshaw 1995, Delgado and Stefancic 2012), some people are considered to be whiter than others. While it is often taken for granted today that the Sámi are seen and see themselves as white (cf. Gaski 1993, Kuokkanen 2006), the history of race biology and racism against the Sámi, as well as their Indigenous status, complicates the whiteness of the Sámi. This illustrates that whiteness is also linked to colonial representations, privilege, and dominance, and that whiteness must be understood as a social and cultural construction that can change over time. According to Aileen Moreton-Robinson, the “binary nature of racial assignment offers contradictory and complex constructions of Indigeneity” (Moreton-Robinson 2004a, ix). Racialization of Indigenous people combined with ambiguity, incoherence, and the exclusiveness of whiteness, complicates the construction of the whiteness of the Sámi.

Race biology, Indigenous status, and (non)whiteness

To explore how the ambiguous representation of the Sámi regarding whiteness and racialization, let us now go back to the conference on race biology in Uppsala. The discomfort that I experienced during the tour of the race biology collection at Uppsala University can be analyzed as a bodily reaction to the taken-for-granted institutional whiteness and colonial presence at Uppsala University. There is thus a similarity to what Sara Ahmed describes: “[a]s a memory, it was an experience of not being white, of being made into a stranger, the one who is recognized as ‘out of place’, the one who does not belong, whose proximity is registered as a crime or threat. As memory, it was of becoming a stranger in a place I called home” (Ahmed 2012, 2). While I have read a lot about race biology before, the discomfort that I experienced as an observer of the race biology collection at Uppsala University can be analyzed as a feeling of becoming a stranger and a research object in a space where I usually, as a University researcher myself, feel at home.

As a blonde and blue-eyed researcher of both Norwegian and Sámi descent, I have never really thought of myself as a racialized body. Through the experience of being both a researcher associated with institutional racism, and at the same time a racialized object, I became a body out of place in both spaces, which in turn cast me out of my comfort zone through the failure to fit, to use Ahmed’s (Ahmed 2012) words. In a sense, my usual experience of being able to sink into the institutional space of academia was replaced by a discomfort related to not really fitting in anymore, and suddenly inhabiting a space as both the perpetrator and the victim, the racialized and the racializing structure. Through feeling uncomfortable in a space where I usually feel comfortable, I gained an insight into the institutional whiteness of western academia. As Ruth Frankenberg writes, “culture is viewed more broadly as constructing daily practices and worldviews in complex relations with material life” (Frankenberg 1993, 228). While race biology and the harsh assimilation policy towards the Sámi in the Nordic countries belong to the past, the material existence of the collections of Herman Lundborg and other collections with skeletons, pictures and artifacts continue to reproduce a silent racial practice through their presence in today’s university buildings. While it is still common in everyday life to hear people talk about “looking” Sámi (both in Sámi communities and the majority society), the idea that the Sámi belong to another race and thus are non-white is no longer an important part of current

discourses on Sámi identity and culture. While race biology research in Sámi communities is something that people know about, and some have even experienced it themselves in the past or heard stories from relatives or neighbors, the present day context differs in many respects. However, though racialization is not a topic in modern Sámi politics or identity (cf. Gaski 1993, Kuokkanen 2006), it continues to have social relevance.

The status of the Sámi as an Indigenous people also disrupts and complicates *the feeling of whiteness* in a Sámi context, since the history of both the Sámi people and Indigenous people globally is a complex historical process in which Indigeneity has been racialized differently in different times and places. According to Aileen Moreton-Robinson, the “binary nature of racial assignment offers contradictory and complex constructions of Indigeneity” (Moreton-Robinson 2004a, ix). Indigenous solidarity is a part of present day Sámi identity politics, which in turn complicates *the feeling of whiteness* for Sámi people today. We can thus talk about “true” and “false” whiteness, where the social construction of whiteness is more than the color of the skin, and where people sometimes are categorized as non-white, no matter what the color of their skin is.

As a Sámi-Norwegian researcher, I have participated in several international Indigenous conferences. I am often struck by the sudden awareness of my own whiteness among many non-white Indigenous researchers and activists. However, compared to other non-Indigenous researchers, my whiteness is in a sense of another nature, despite my white skin, blue eyes, and blonde hair. I remember attending one conference where I was the only white Indigenous researcher among many non-white researchers. I presented a paper in a session with a non-Indigenous researcher. I was wearing traditional Sámi clothes and presented myself as a Sámi-Norwegian with mixed ancestry. Our presentations were slightly similar thematically, but the response from the audience was remarkably different. While I received mostly compliments, the other presenter seemed to trigger some of the people in the audience, creating a quite emotionally charged discussion. One non-white Indigenous researcher in the audience said something like “you have read about this, we have lived it!” It puzzled me how different the responses were, and it made me wonder if my paper had been received differently had I not presented myself as Sámi researcher, wearing Sámi clothes. Did that in fact made me appear less white?

In an interview with Káre, a young Sámi woman, we talk about international networking and Indigeneity. This interview was a part of the project on Sámi urban youth, where we also

focused on national and international networking. While most of the young people that we interviewed were primarily engaged in organizations and networking with other Sámi youth in the Scandinavian countries, some of them, like Káre, were also interested in international perspectives outside Sápmi. Káre says that she once was at a large international Indigenous conference in the USA. There were Indigenous people from all around the world at the conference, and we talk a little bit about our experiences of meeting other Indigenous people from other cultures.

It was so exciting! But there are Indigenous people other places in the world who are worse off than the Sámi. The Sámi nowadays are almost equal [to the majority]. So it was interesting to look at it in a global perspective (Káre 22)

In this quote, Káre compares the situation of the Sámi to other Indigenous people and acknowledges her own privileged position as a young woman in a wealthy country, where she has the opportunity to live her life as she wants to, and where young people like Káre have the opportunity to learn more about their language and culture. When Káre compares her situation to some of the other Indigenous people, she sees the Sámi as being almost equal to the majority population. This statement is a contrast to the rest of the interview with Káre, where she talks a lot about her involvement in demonstrations against the mining industry and the fight for Sámi territories and land and water rights. I ask her to specify why she thinks it is easier for the Sámi than for other Indigenous people.

At the Indigenous conference, many Indigenous people had similar experiences regarding language, discrimination, and rights to land. Many of the participants said that they looked at Sápmi as a kind of Utopia, and that Indigenous people all around the world should do as well as the Sámi. I met some Aboriginals who said that they would have done anything to be Sámi and not look that Indigenous (Káre 22).

To “not look that Indigenous” is a way of acknowledging that the Sámi experience a kind of white privilege that other Indigenous people do not have. Even though phenotypical stereotypes about the Sámi still exist in the Nordic context, the Sámi are nevertheless often,

while inconsistently, perceived as white, and many easily pass as white provided that they have the requisite linguistic and cultural competence. This is a privilege that a black Aboriginal person does not have. For example, while a Sámi individual can learn Norwegian, pursue education, move to the city and blend in, dark skinned Aboriginal people in Australia do not have the same privileges.

Phenotypical stereotypes

Being Sámi today is something that is usually considered to be determined by language, culture, and family ties. However, the traces of race biology and phenotypical stereotypes often shine through in how people categorize Sámi people in the everyday. This is what Harald Eidheim called “the syndrome of signs which the Norwegians look for” (Eidheim 1969, 47) – where a physiognomy that is considered to be Sámi is one of many signs that people use when they try to find out if people are Sámi. As Eidheim comments, there are “a very great number of such signs and they are unevenly distributed among individuals” (Eidheim 1969, 47), so appearance alone is rarely a sure way to determine if someone is Sámi. There are many Sámi who do not look like the stereotypical Sámi, i.e. short with dark hair and high cheekbones. Furthermore, many Sámi have a mixed ethnic background, and some Sámi are adopted. Still, the idea that being Sámi is something that can be revealed by looking at people’s faces and bodies remains prevalent even today. It shows how the Sámi continue to be racialized as other to the majority Norwegian population.

These physiognomic stereotypes are not only something that non-Sámi people use to determine if others are Sámi or not. Sometimes Sámi themselves use ways of determining whether someone is Sámi that include “looking Sámi” [redacted source]. One of the interviewed participants, Martin, is a Sámi man who grew up in an area and a family that for a long time thought of Sámi language and culture as something to be hidden. In the interview, he says that for a long time he did not know that he was Sámi. His parents and grandparents had never told him, even though they all spoke Sámi at home. Martin tells me that he has met other Sámi with similar backgrounds. He mentions two episodes, one with a fellow student, and one with a colleague, where he did not know that they were Sámi.

I remember when I went to school. There was someone from [municipality with many Sámi inhabitants]. I never realized that he was Sámi. Not before he said hello and goodbye in Sámi. Then I understood. But I never asked. Then I understood that he was Sámi. And the same with a colleague. He often says hello in Sámi. But you can see it in his name. And he looks Sámi too (Martin 39).

In this quote, we can see how Martin uses the physiognomic stereotypes about Sámi people in combination with other signs to describe how he found out that his colleague was Sámi. In this context, “looking Sámi” is thus something that is considered positive, since it helps Martin to categorize his acquaintance as Sámi like himself. When Martin describes his colleague with the words “looks Sámi too,” this can be seen as a way of acknowledging that there are Sámi who do not “look Sámi,” which he also illustrates by combining this with other signs like name and language. The stereotypes of what a Sámi should look like are thus not only negative, but also something that Sámi themselves use when categorizing other people. However, such stereotypes can also be used in bullying and discrimination against Sámi people. Mari, another interviewed participant, tells this story from her childhood:

We were bullied at school because we “were 1.50m and smelled of smoke.” (Mari 31)

The smell of smoke is of course a stereotype linked to the fact that Sámi people in the old days used to live in turf huts or tents that were heated by fires, and therefore could smell of smoke. This is a metaphorical way of classifying people as primitive, a way of putting people in hierarchies in which some people are modern and others are primitive. To be short is also a stereotype linked to being Sámi. However, to me, Mari looked like any other woman when I met her in a coffee shop for the interview. Even though I specifically looked for a young Sámi woman, I could not recognize her as such, since she was wearing jeans and a sweater. The only thing that fit the stereotype was that she was not extremely tall, but again, many Norwegian women are short too. This resembles what Alcoff describes, when she writes that:

When the mythic bloodlines that are thought to determine identity fail to match the visible markers used to identify race, for example, one often encounters these odd

responses by acquaintances announcing with arrogant certainty “But you don’t look like...” or retreating to a measured acknowledgment “Now that you mention it, I can see...”. To feel one’s face studied with great seriousness, not for its (hoped for) character lines or its distinctiveness, but for its telltale racial trace, can be a peculiarly unsettling experience (Alcoff 2006, 7).

The idea that Sámi identity is linked to visible differences is something that still exists in Nordic everyday life, even though it can be somewhat taboo to talk about it in public. In an interview on Sámi articulations, Susanne, one of the interviewees, talks about the changes in her own ways of articulating a Sámi identity, and gives the following example:

When I was younger, I wanted to go out in the world, and the Sámi [culture] wasn’t really... Well, I was taught that the Sámi culture is a home culture. The culture that you have at home. I had my safe base there, but when we went out, we couldn’t even speak Sámi at the grocery shop. Therefore, when one went out, one didn’t really identify oneself as a Sámi, even though the Sámi traits spoke their distinct language... (Susanne 38)

In this quote, we can see that Susanne links her Sámi heritage to her physical traits. Even though she tried to hide her identity in public when she was younger, she felt that her looks could easily be categorized as Sámi. She explains that the physical features “spoke their distinct language,” which can be understood as a way of explaining that her face is a visible manifestation of her Sámi heritage that she cannot hide in public. It represents to her the “real” identity that can be read by others, even though she tries to hide it. We can thus say that the Sámi in Susanne’s community were singled out as racial others and as racially inferior to the non-Sámi individuals in the community, even though the Sámi were not at this time considered to be a distinct race. This links her experiences of racism in her childhood and youth with race biology and the racialization of the Sámi that took place during the time when scientists construed the Sámi as a biologically determined category rather than a cultural community and ethnic group. Because of racism and assimilation policies, there are many individuals with close or distant Sámi ancestry who either try to hide their Sámi ancestry and pass as Norwegians, or do not even know about their Sámi family history. Racism requires racialization, and how racism is

articulated and performed in Sámi contexts, underscores the reality of Sámi racialization. In the following quote from Susanne, we can see that she refers to the history of racism and assimilation and at the same time she looks for physical signs that can help her categorize people as Sámi:

There are two ladies, one of them you can see it when looking at her. I am like a giant next to her. But they are very... They don't like it when I mention Sámi culture. That I can laugh and joke about my Sámi identity. And that I dare to feel my feelings. Touch it, feel it, I don't know how to describe it. It is something that makes them very uncomfortable. Maybe they have been bullied, or that the Norwegianization [assimilation] process has been so powerful. They are Norwegian all over. Not mentioning anything Sámi at all. (Susanne 38).

In this quote, we can see that Susanne describes the assimilation policy towards the Sámi and how it may have influenced the two women whom she describes in the quote. The assimilation policy has removed everything that can be categorized as Sámi in the woman Susanne describes, with the exception of her body. Susanne is trying to find traces of the Sámi ancestry of this woman in her body – she can see it when she looks at her face and body. At the same time, Susanne describes the other woman as “Norwegian all over.” Being Sámi and at the same time being able to pass as “white” means that one can pass as Norwegian, provided one has sufficient linguistic and cultural competence. As Harald Eidheim points out from his fieldwork in a coastal Sámi community in the 1950s: “the merchant’s daughter would not think of marrying a man from a stigmatized Lappish community, who in addition has a Lappish physiognomy and makes grammatical errors” (Eidheim 1969, 65). At the same time, the idea that it is possible to find the “mythic bloodline,” to use Alcoff’s (Alcoff 2006, 7) words, in peoples’ faces and bodies is quite common in the Nordic countries, both among the majority population and among Sámi themselves. Sometimes, when people think that they can find bodily traces of Sámi ancestry in individuals passing as non-Sámi, this can be communicated in a way that resembles a kind of betrayal. This can be traced in the Norwegian saying “Oh, I am sure that the kommagⁱⁱⁱ tip will show,” which is a way of accusing people of trying to hide their Sámi ancestry.

However, in the quote from the interview with Susanne, I think Susanne is trying to find out if the women are Sámi out of general curiosity, combined with a genuine feeling of solidarity. She herself knows so well how painful it can be to be shameful of who you are, and to grow up in a community where Sámi language and culture were things to hide. I think this is what she refers to when she says “*that I dare to feel my feelings,*” to explain that she dares to discuss her feelings related to assimilation and racism, while the other two women do not. In the previous quote, Susanne explained that in the community she grew up in, “*one didn’t really identify oneself as a Sámi, even though the Sámi traits spoke their distinct language.*”

The racialization of Sámi people has become somewhat of a taboo in academic discourses, a taboo that can be traced back to both the painful experiences of race biology in the beginning of the 20th century and the aftermath of the Holocaust. According to Eileen Muller Myrdahl, even though it is often said that there is no such thing as “race” in Norway: “nonetheless there are ‘Norwegians’ and there are Others, and the demarcation between the two returns again and again to perceptions of phenotype, culture, geography, and religion” (Myrdahl 2010, 6). This has created a lacuna in academia and politics when it comes to discussing the fact that the Sámi are still being racialized in the Nordic countries. Even though most people would not see that much difference between a Sámi and non-Sámi in the Nordic countries, they are nevertheless understood in everyday life as looking slightly different. Though it can also result in discrimination and bullying, the racialization of the Sámi is also often used as a sign of Sáminess and used in processes of social inclusion and exclusion. While some Sámi have painful experiences of being excluded because they do not look “Sámi enough” or have experienced discrimination because of “looking Sámi,” we must not forget that some also have positive experiences related to being included as Sámi because of allegedly “looking Sámi.” The gap between “the good” and “the bad” aspects of these issues creates a situation where there is little or no space in academia for discussing the racialization of Sámi peoples. However, if there is no space in Nordic academia for discussing perspectives on racial formation regarding the Sámi, there will also be no opportunities to interrupt these racializing processes.

Since I participated in the symposium in Uppsala on race biology, I have discussed these issues with several Sámi colleagues. We were in a sense inside the belly of the beast, to use May-Britt Öhman’s words, and the discomfort that many of us experienced back then, and continue to feel as researchers when discussing these issues, reflects this lack of discursive space in

academia regarding the past and present racialization of the Sámi. As Sámi researchers within Nordic academic structures, we experience both the strangeness of being racialized without knowing it, and at the same time being a part of the academic community that once racialized us through research on race biology in Sámi communities.

Jon Røyne Kyllingstad (2012) discusses the Anatomical Institute at the University of Oslo and the three physical anthropologists Halfdan Bryn, Alette Schreiner and Kristian Schreiner, who in the inter-war period were the most distinguished researchers on the study of “the Sámi race.” The University of Oslo still has parts of the Schreiner collection from this time. Today the Norwegian Sámi Parliament manages the collection, and some of the skulls and skeletons have been returned to their Sámi communities and buried. Two of these are the skulls of Mons Somby and Aslak Hætta, who were beheaded in 1854 following the Kautokeino riot in 1852. Their skulls were handed over to the University of Oslo in 1855 for research purposes. In 1996, the skull of Mons Somby was released to the Sámi Heritage Council and buried. They tried to find out if the skull of Aslak Hætta was also in the Schreiner collection. It was discovered that Hætta’s skull was exchanged for two Inuit skulls from the University of Copenhagen, and his skull was found at the University of Copenhagen. Obviously, there are no pictures of Aslak Hætta, but when I search online for his name, I find a picture of his brother, Lars Hætta, in the Sophus Tromholt picture collection that belongs to the University of Bergen Library. I recently found out that Aslak Hætta was my great-great-great grandfather’s second cousin. He is thus a very distant relative of mine. I feel my skull with my hands and try to imagine how my own skull would have looked like as a research object. Would it be of any use to the researchers? Do I look anything like my distant relative, whose skull was so interesting for the researchers at that time?

As a white, blue-eyed, and blonde researcher in a Western country, I have never really thought about my racial identity. I have never really felt that *had* a racial identity. My light skin, my blond hair, my blue eyes, my relatively tall body. What would Hermand Lundborg have said about me? Am I a degenerated Half-Lapp? Not Sámi at all? I look nothing like the stereotypical Sámi person that Herman Lundborg and his colleagues were looking for: short, dark hair, brown eyes. If I smile, at a stretch my cheekbones can be characterized as “high.” I smile to myself in the mirror, just to see whether it shows that I am Sámi. There is nothing about my face or body that makes me look Sámi. I remember being in at family celebration once on my Sámi father’s side and feeling very tall and blonde. Does my family look more Sámi than I do? Am I not good

enough to be Sámi? Should I just forget about my father's ancestors and be content with being Norwegian, and thus be a kind of traitor – a person who abandons my Sámi heritage?

Even though being white is something that is taken for granted, as an *unmarked* category. When being white is something that is understood as “normal” and “neutral”, the others who do not fit into that category, stick out. This means that whiteness is very much a racial identity, but the privilege of not acknowledging it in one's everyday life shows us how racialization works. The assumption of being unmarked racially is a topic that has been challenged and written about extensively by critical race scholars (Frankenberg 1993, McIntosh 2004, Roediger 1992, Lipsitz 1995, Berg 2008, Berg, Flemmen, and Gullikstad 2010, Dyer 1997, 2016, Rothenberg 2008, Bonds and Inwood 2016). As Linda Martín Alcoff points out:

The truth of one's gender and race, then, are widely thought to be visibly manifest, and if there is no visible manifestation of one's declared racial or gendered identity, one encounters an insistent skepticism and an anxiety. Those of us who are of mixed race or ambiguous gender know these reactions all too well (Alcoff 2006, 7).

I have had comments from Norwegians and sometimes other Sámi to the effect that “you don't look that Sámi?” as if being Sámi is a race that one belongs to simply by fitting into the phenotypical stereotypes of what it is to be Sámi. These stereotypes can be traced back to the race biology researchers from the mid 1800s to mid 1900s (i.e. the end of the Swedish Institute for Racial Biology). While probably no one today would classify Sámi people as non-white, the traces of race biology can be found in the way non-Sámi people categorize Sámi people, and the way Sámi people describe themselves and other Sámi people. We can thus say that even though Sámi people are often considered white, *this whiteness is socially constructed in everyday life as a different kind of whiteness.*

Conclusions

Whiteness is often taken for granted in the Nordic context. However, the history of racialization of the Sámi in the past, in combination with the focus on Sámi Indigenous status and politics in the present, makes whiteness an ambiguous issue for Sámi people today. It shows us that whiteness is a political and cultural term that signifies status, power, and character, as a social

production of privilege. The assumption of being unmarked racially is a topic that has been challenged and written about extensively by critical race scholars (Frankenberg 1993, McIntosh 2004, Roediger 1992, Lipsitz 1995, Dyer 2016, Berg 2008, Rothenberg 2008, Bonds and Inwood 2016) in which whiteness is more than visual appearance. Whiteness thus becomes a relational category (Frankenberg 1993), rather than an issue of skin color: those who do not fit into the racial order are produced as racial others.

Through my research career I have not only changed my perception of what research is and what Sámi identities are, I have also gained a new understanding of what it is to be a Sámi researcher. I explore how Sámi racialization is a part of the process of being and becoming a Sámi researcher. Through an (auto)/ethnographic approach in which I critically examine my own experiences as a Sámi/Norwegian researcher in relation to qualitative data, I discuss how ideas of phenotype still haunt academia and Indigenous research. Through the concepts of *comfort and discomfort* (Ahmed 2012), I analyze my own experiences in relation to the qualitative data from the two research projects. Through this approach, I create a dialogue between the qualitative data and my own experiences and thus gain new insight into how whiteness is negotiated in a Sámi context. I argue that a doubled research practice approach (Gunaratnam 2003, Berg 2008) in combination with analyzes of discomfort (Ahmed 2012) is a useful approach when studying whiteness, since this approach makes it possible to remove whiteness from silence.

Whiteness is something that has little discursive space in the Sámi context. In this article I have shown that the racialization of the Sámi in the past still has implications for the construction and negotiation of what it is to be Sámi today. While the Sámi today are often seen as white, in the past they were defined as racialized individuals, and the understanding of the Sámi as white is complicated and full of fissures, tensions and contradictions. While race biology and political processes where Sámi people were seen as non-white belong to the past, in this article I have shown that the ideas from this era still haunt Sámi lives and how they are perceived and see themselves in a Nordic context. While most Sámi see themselves as white Nordic people today, the categorization of the Sámi in terms of physiognomic signs continues to link them to the racist past. This makes whiteness somewhat ambiguous for Sámi peoples, as they are linked to racial marginalization in the past regardless of how they look. This history is still a painful memory in many Sámi communities. While the racial subordination of the Sámi people mostly belongs to the past, the continuity of racist practices in which ideas about culture, ethnicity, and

race are mixed in dualistic terms and where whiteness is something that belongs to those in power, the whiteness of “white” Indigenous people such as the Sámi is ambiguous.

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ⁱⁱ The Finnish and the Sámi language are both defined as Finno-Ugric languages.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kommag – the Norwegian word for specific type of Sámi shoes, from North Sámi *gabmagat/gámmagat*, plural of *gáma*, meaning shoe.