

“WE BLEND IN WITH THE CROWD BUT THEY DON’T” *(In)visibility and Icelandic migrants in Norway*

Abstract

Placing emphasis on often overlooked migration within the affluent North, this article focuses on Icelanders who have migrated to Norway in the aftermath of the Icelandic financial collapse in October 2008. The article draws on critical whiteness studies and is based on fieldwork and qualitative interviews with 32 Icelandic migrants in Norway. The findings show how the participants construct their belonging through racialization, emphasizing their assumed visual, ancestral and cultural sameness with the majority population. This article, furthermore, reveals how whiteness, language and class intersect – resulting in differing degrees of (in)visibility and privilege among the participants. Despite somewhat different positions, all the participants have the possibility of capitalizing on their Icelandic nationality to receive favourable treatment. The article argues that the preferential treatment of Icelanders and narratives of sameness must be understood in relation to contemporary, intertwined racist and nationalistic discourses that exclude other migrants due to their assumed difference.

Keywords

Migration • Nordic countries • whiteness • belonging • intersectionality

Received 5 February 2014; Accepted 12 September 2014

Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir*

Department of Anthropology, University of Iceland

1 Introduction

The focus of migration research has been predominantly on people moving from the global South to the North. In recent years, migration studies have, however, been criticized for this narrow focus on poor migrants searching for economic opportunities (Castles 2010; Olwig 2007: 87). Michaela Benson and Karen O’Reilly (2009) note that in the migration scholarship, comparatively affluent migrants have for the most part been overlooked, and in the cases where they have been studied, the main focus has been on professional expatriates or international retirement migration. A different critique within social research has called for the study of “the unmarked” (Brekhus 1998) and those concerned with race and racism have pointed out how whiteness is an unmarked position (Frankenberg 1993), where being “white” equals being “normal” (Solomos & Back 2000: 21). These scholars have criticized how “race” only figures when the research focus is on “non-white” subjects but not when dealing with “whites” (Frankenberg 1993: 18; Lewis 2004).

In this article, I address these two strands of criticism as I depart from the primary focus in the scholarship on disadvantaged migrants from the South and explore whiteness and belonging in relation to labour migration between two affluent Nordic countries. My focus

is on the experiences of Icelanders, socially classified as “white”, who have moved to work in Norway after the financial collapse in Iceland in October 2008. When the financial collapse occurred, Iceland’s three major banks fell in the same week, setting off what has been described as a “deep and difficult crisis” (Ólafsson 2011: 4). One of the effects of the crisis has been increased emigration, in which Norway has been the main destination country (Garðarsdóttir 2012: 24). This increased migration has resulted in the number of Icelanders in Norway more than doubling since 2008 (Statistics Norway 2014).

Studying a rather privileged group of migrants (with regard to nationality, “race”, class and religion) is important as it offers new insights into migration experiences and sheds light on both privileges and disadvantages. The advantageous position of one group must be understood in relation to how other groups are marginalized and it ultimately casts light on how global power hierarchies are played out in a local context. The aim of this article is to explore how relatively privileged migrants construct their position in the receiving society and what role racialization and migrant (in)visibility play in this regard. I argue that migrant (in)visibility and belonging to Norwegian society need to be analysed in relation to

* E-mail: gug42@hi.is

the intersections of whiteness, nationality, class and language use. I also maintain that the preferential treatment that Icelanders seem to receive and their narrative of sameness with the majority population must be understood in relation to contemporary intertwined racist and nationalistic discourses in Norway that exclude other migrants due to their assumed difference. I start by briefly discussing the theoretical background of the article: migrant (in)visibility and critical whiteness studies. In the next section, I describe some aspects of the relationship between Iceland and Norway, then I introduce the research methods and participants. The research findings are presented in the following three sections.

2 (In)visibility and whiteness

According to a dictionary definition, the term “immigrant” refers to “a person who comes to a country to live there”.¹ In public discourses in Europe the term is, however, often used in a narrower sense. Anne-Marie Fortier (2003: 243) argues that in Britain and Europe, more broadly “immigrant means black, minority, and foreigner”. Similarly, Marianne Gullestad notes that in common usage in Norway, the term “immigrant” (*innvandrere*) is “racially coded” (Gullestad 2005: 29), as it commonly implies “‘Third world’ origin, different values from the majority, ‘dark skin’, working class” (Gullestad 2002: 50). Anne-Jorunn Berg (2008: 216) furthermore explains that the *innvandrere* category in Norway “has strong connotations to visible differences or marked bodies where the colour of skin is prominent”. The term “immigrant” therefore implies deviating visually from the majority norm: being “visible”. Although the notion of migrant (in)visibility is frequently used to refer to migrants’ marked or unmarked embodiment (Mas Giralt 2011: 331), the term has also been used with a wider reference and can, for example, also refer to visibility in public discourses and to being visible (audible) through language use (Leinonen 2012). (In)visibility varies depending on context. Johanna Leinonen (2012: 214), for example, emphasizes that “hierarchies based on ‘race’, class, nationality, and language intersect to produce different kinds of visibility for different groups of foreigners”. An intersectional approach, which highlights the relationship between “race”, gender, class and other social locations (Anthias 2012: 106; Yuval-Davis 2006: 194), must, therefore, be incorporated into a study of how migrants become (in)visible in different ways in different settings. Whereas this article places emphasis on whiteness, it also considers how visibility is constructed through other social locations such as nationality, class and language use. Although gender may also be important with respect to (in)visibility, it is beyond the scope of the present article.

Whiteness has commonly been described as an “invisible” position and the norm against which difference is measured (Garner 2006: 259). Sarah Ahmed (2004) stresses, however, that this only applies to “white” people as whiteness has always been apparent to “non-white” people. By looking at whiteness I wish to highlight processes of racialization and racism. The notion of racialization stresses the constructed nature of racial categories and indicates “the processes by which ideas about race are constructed, come to be regarded as meaningful, and are acted upon” (Murji & Solomos 2005: 1). Whiteness as racialization thus signals a constant process of “doing race” (Berg 2008: 214). Steve Garner (2006: 258; 2012: 447) notes that racialization also takes place without explicitly referring to physical differences. He argues that in racializing discourse, reference to “culture” can be as significant as skin colour. Garner’s words echo what numerous scholars have noted, namely

that contemporary racism is often concealed by using terms like *difference* and *culture*. Certain social groups are represented as having natural and fixed characteristics through these “new” racist discourses (Gullestad 2006: 26, 30-1; Solomos & Back 2000: 20).

At the outset, critical whiteness studies were primarily focused on the United States (Steyn & Conway 2010: 285). However, scholars have stressed that what applies in a U.S. context is not necessarily applicable to other settings. As Ruth Frankenberg (1993: 236) notes, “whiteness changes over time and space and is in no way a transhistorical essence”. Whiteness is furthermore not a homogenous category; there are certain hierarchies within whiteness at any given time and place. These hierarchies are determined by, for instance, class or national belonging (Blaagaard 2006: 12; Leinonen 2012: 216; Lundström 2010: 73). Whiteness, therefore, needs to be analysed not only in relation to specific national or local contexts but also with regard to how whiteness intersects with other social locations, such as class, gender, nationality and religion (Blaagaard 2011: 156; Frankenberg 1993; Garner: 2012: 447).

In a Nordic context, research on whiteness as a racial identity has been limited until very recently (Blaagaard 2006; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012: 7). Somewhat contradictorily, the Nordic nations have represented themselves as innocent of racism and colonialism in the past and present, while defining themselves in racialized and exclusionary terms as “white” nations (Gullestad 2006; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012; Keskinen et.al. 2009). The Nordic nations are not only assumed to be “white”; the Nordic region “is in several ways the epitome of whiteness in the Western and Nordic European consciousness” (Blaagaard 2006: 1). Related to this privileged position within the racial order, the “white” majority in the Nordic region may “have most to gain from racial thinking and most to lose from deracialisation”, as Gullestad (2006: 40) suggests. The Nordic societies are, therefore, particularly interesting to examine critically with respect to whiteness and privilege.

3 Iceland and Norway in context

Iceland and Norway have an intertwined history. Iceland was unpopulated until it began to be settled around 870 A.D. The earliest written accounts of Iceland’s settlement suggest that the settlers arrived mainly from Norway but also from other Scandinavian areas and the British Isles. Recent genetic research of the Icelandic population indicates, however, that there were far more people from the British Isles among the settlers than the early accounts suggest (Helgason 2004).² From the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century, Icelandic historians represented the settlers as “strong-willed” and “freedom-loving” “noble men”, who fled Norway because of the “tyranny” of the Norwegian king (Jakobsson 1999). From the early nineteenth century until today, nationalistic discourses have portrayed the Icelandic nation as being shaped by these imagined characteristics of the settlers as well as by the hardships of life in the country forming a nation distinct from all others (Loftsdóttir 2009; 2012).

Iceland was independent until 1262 when it became politically united with Norway. In 1380, both countries came under Danish rule (Agnarsdóttir 2008). Since they were Danish dependencies during the colonial era, Norway and Iceland have constructed an image of themselves as standing outside of colonialism. Scholars have emphasized, however, that the two nations actively participated in “the culture of colonialism” and carefully aligned themselves with the colonial nations, opposed to the “uncivilized ‘others’” (Gullestad 2005: 43; Loftsdóttir 2012: 57).

Today Iceland and Norway take part in various forms of Nordic cooperation, a phenomenon which grew in importance after World War II. Important aspects of this cooperation are a common labour market established in 1954 and a passport union in 1958 (Brochmann & Hagelund 2012: 8). Since the end of the 1960s, periods of recession in Iceland have led to temporary increases in emigration, which has mostly been directed towards the Scandinavian countries (Garðarsdóttir 2012: 6). The financial crash in 2008 resulted in increased emigration in which the largest group moved to Norway, which was one of few countries in Europe where the global financial crisis had little impact, and unemployment levels were low (Garðarsdóttir 2012: 25). Special efforts have also been made by Norwegian companies and municipalities to recruit Icelandic employees. A town mayor explained to the Icelandic press that they were seeking Icelandic employees because they fit well into Norwegian society due to the many similarities between these two “cousin nations” (Vilja Íslendinga 2012).

Since the onset of the crisis, the number of Icelanders living in Norway has more than doubled, rising from 3,849 in the beginning of 2008 to 8,710 in the beginning of 2014 (Statistics Norway 2014). Considering the size of the Icelandic population (approximately 320,000 people), the number of Icelanders living in Norway has risen from around 1.2 per cent of the total Icelandic population to 2.7 per cent. The emigration has a clear gender dimension: among those going to Norway in 2009, 59 per cent were men and 41 per cent women. Although the gender difference decreased slightly in the following years, men continue to outnumber women (Statistics Iceland 2014). With regard to age distribution, there has been a substantial increase in all age groups of Icelanders in Norway since 2008 (Statistics Norway 2014). There are no statistics about the educational or occupational background of those who have migrated, but according to news reports, numerous certified tradesmen as well as unskilled manual workers have emigrated. Professionals from the construction sector, healthcare sector and the IT sector have also moved in large numbers (Friðriksson 2011, Jónsson 2010).

When migrating to Norway, Icelanders encounter a Nordic society that is in many ways comparable to what they know in Iceland. Iceland and Norway are both welfare states that have a similar labour market and educational and healthcare systems. There is a Lutheran state church in both countries, and national belonging and ethnic diversity is conceived of in similar terms, as the two nations are perceived as ethnically and culturally homogeneous, despite the increasing diversity of the people who live in these countries (Gullestad 2006: 41; Skaptadóttir and Loftsdóttir 2009: 205). In nationalistic discourses, both nations furthermore pride themselves on being egalitarian, with high levels of gender equality and little class difference (Brochmann & Hagelund 2012; Gullestad 2002; Oddsson 2010). There is also a hegemonic belief that these two nations are innocent of racism, which conveniently ignores their history of racial categorization (Gullestad 2002, 2005; Loftsdóttir 2013).

Despite their many similarities, the two countries differ to some extent with regard to immigration and ethnic diversity. In Iceland, the proportion of migrants has been much lower than in Norway until fairly recently. In 1996, migrants made up 1.8 per cent of the population, but this number had increased to 8 per cent in 2008 (Statistics Iceland 2009). Until the mid-1990s, the majority of migrants came from the Nordic countries, but by 2008 Poles had become by far the largest group of migrants (Statistics Iceland 2009).

Compared with Iceland, Norway has a long history of ethnic diversity, with a history of indigenous people and national minorities

dating back centuries (Lane 2009: 217). In the late 1960s, migrants started to arrive from new countries in the Global South, for example from Pakistan (Brochmann & Hagelund 2012: 8; Gullestad 2005: 29). The 2004 extension of the European Union (EU), in combination with high labour demand in Norway, has more recently led to a large increase in labour migration from the new EU member states (Brochmann & Hagelund 2012: 9). In January 2011, migrants and Norwegians born to migrant parents amounted to 12.2 per cent of the Norwegian population (Andersson 2012: 418), compared with 1.5 per cent in 1970 (Vassenden & Andersson 2011). The largest migrant group in 2012 was from Poland, followed by those from Sweden, Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq and Germany. Iceland was number 27 on the list, just below the United States and the Netherlands but above Finland and France (Østby, Høydahl & Rustad 2013: 47). The capital of Norway, Oslo, can be described as “super-diverse” (Eriksen 2011: 23), and has by far the largest number of migrants in the country, which in 2011 comprised 28 per cent of the city’s population (Andersson 2012: 419). However, the concentration of migrants varies greatly between different areas of the city (Vassenden 2010: 739). This residential segregation becomes very relevant to the research findings presented below, but first I present the study’s methods and research participants.

4 The study

The present study is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Norway. I carried out fieldwork in Oslo and the surrounding area (the counties of Akershus, Buskerud and Østfold) from mid-January to mid-June 2012, and again for a week in the city of Bergen in April 2013. During fieldwork, I conducted participant observation and in-depth, semi-structured interviews (Esterberg 2002; O’Reilly 2005). Participant observations mainly took place in Oslo and involved taking part in events and meetings organized by the Icelandic Association in Oslo and the Icelandic (Lutheran) Congregation in Norway, as well as other more informal gatherings. When choosing participants for this research, I looked for people who had moved to work in Norway after the crisis in 2008. I emphasized talking with a diverse group of people, both men and women of different ages, working in various occupational fields, and living both alone and with their families in Norway. I approached participants in a variety of ways: friends and colleagues in Iceland directed me to individuals; I met people at Icelandic gatherings; through Facebook; and by the use of snowball sampling (Esterberg 2002: 93-4).

I interviewed 32 people who had moved from Iceland to Norway after 2008. I interviewed each participant once, in interviews that lasted from 1 to 4 hours. All interviews were done in Icelandic. Most interviews were conducted in people’s homes, but eight interviews took place in a cafe or a restaurant and two at the interviewee’s workplace. Some participants I met only during the interview, others I had more contact with, as I interacted with them in different informal and formal gatherings. I interviewed 18 men and 14 women between the ages of 19 and 63. The participants had different levels of education and worked in various fields. Two men worked as managers and eight men and four women were professionals (e.g. nurses and engineers). Five women worked in care work or services (e.g. kindergarten assistants and shop assistants). Four men worked in their certified trade (e.g. carpenters); one man and one woman worked as machine operators and two men were employed as manual labourers. Three women were homemakers, and one man and one woman were unemployed at the time of the interview.

The participants had lived in Norway for between 6 months and just over 3 years, the first ones arriving in early 2009.

This group of people is heterogeneous in many respects, but in addition to being Icelandic they all have in common that they define themselves, and are defined by the surrounding society, as “white”. Being “white” and Icelandic is also what I have in common with the participants, and this helped in establishing rapport with the participants, working as a form of “methodological capital” (Gallagher 2000, see also Lundström 2010). Although the participants and I were all Icelandic and “white”, there were other factors that positioned me differently vis a vis different participants, notably my age, gender, sexuality and class. As Catrin Lundström (2010: 71, 83) notes, emphasizing sameness with research participants risks constructing a “white space” through the interview encounter, in which “white people do whiteness together” and reproduce normativity. It often became apparent in the interviews that the participants perceived our interaction as a safe “white space” to share, for instance, sentiments that “non-white” migrants were a problem, assuming a common understanding between us. I found such situations challenging; on the one hand, I wanted to hear about the participant’s feelings and experiences without interfering, while on the other hand, I did not want to confirm these ideas with my silence. Although I did not dispute people’s statements, I indicated that I did not share their sentiments by asking participants to explain in more detail what they usually expected to be taken as matter-of-fact statements.

I have assigned pseudonyms to the participants, and individual information is limited in the article to protect their anonymity. My presentation of Icelanders as a relatively privileged migrant group may not reflect how the participants identify themselves. Many of them experienced economic difficulties after the financial collapse in Iceland, which was often a factor in their decision to migrate to Norway, and from that viewpoint they may not feel they are in a privileged position. As Nordic, “white”, and largely middle-class and Lutheran Christians, these Icelanders are, however, in an advantageous position compared with many other migrants in Norway.

In the interviews, I asked the participants to reflect on their sense of being Icelandic in Norway and on their interactions with other Icelanders, the majority group, and minority groups in Norway. When analysing the interviews, I used open and focused coding to identify themes (Esterberg 2002: 157-162). The themes presented here have been organized into three sections below. The first section deals with how the participants position themselves in relation to the Norwegian majority and how they believe that this majority sees them. The second section highlights how the participants position themselves with the majority in opposition to other migrants in Norway. The final section deals with how the participants are themselves positioned differently in relation to physical appearance, language competence and class position. This final section further analyses how privilege is associated with Icelandic nationality.

5 “Melting into” Norwegian society

A recurrent theme in the interviews was the assumed sameness of Icelanders and Norwegians. Comparing the position of Icelanders to that of other migrants in Norway, Árni said:

People complain that they [migrants] keep to themselves, but I think it’s completely normal that people do that, we Icelanders do that also you know, it’s just that we blend in with the crowd, but they don’t.³

Like Árni, other participants contrasted migrants and Icelanders, explaining that Icelanders “naturally melt more into society”. The references to Icelanders “melting into” Norwegian society often had a strong emphasis on visibility and whiteness, where participants assumed that both Icelanders and Norwegians are “white”. Jóhann, for instance, explained that “Norwegians really look like Icelanders [...] so therefore one maybe feels able to blend in”. Karen said about Icelanders in Norway: “one naturally can’t see if we’re from another country or not, so people will assume we’re Norwegians”. Pétur also noted that many people assume he is Norwegian because he has “a fair complexion”.

However, the participants’ sense of belonging to Norwegian society was not only associated with visual resemblance and whiteness. In the interviews, people repeatedly talked about how welcome they felt in Norway. When explaining why they were so well received in Norway, the participants often referred to how Iceland was settled by Norwegians at the end of the ninth century. This is exemplified by Helgi’s statement: “there is no nation that resembles us as much as the Norwegians, these are just the same genes, and that is of course what history tells us, we come from Norway”. The participants explained that because of this history, Norwegians see Icelanders as their “kin” or “genuine Norwegians” who are even “more Norwegian than Norwegians”. Many people, furthermore, emphasized that Norwegians and Icelanders “have the same values” and “share a similar culture”.

The participants felt that they belonged to Norway both because they visually resembled the Norwegian majority and because of shared history, culture and kinship with Norwegians. While it is certainly not new to refer to a shared ancestry and culture of Icelanders and Norwegians, references to this assumed sameness takes on a somewhat new meaning in a contemporary Norwegian context. As Gullestad (2002: 59) argues, in contemporary debates in Norway, “the focus on culture and ancestry often provides an overlapping common ground between racism and nationalism”. The acceptance that Icelanders experience and attribute to visual, cultural and ancestral sameness must therefore be understood in relation to how other migrants and minorities are excluded through mirroring racialized discourses about culture and difference.

6 “Extremely white” spaces and “horribly different” people

As highlighted above, the participants used racialized discourses of *normality* and *sameness* to justify the inclusion of Icelanders in Norwegian society. However, many participants also drew on a parallel discourse of *difference* to highlight their own belonging in opposition to the migrant Other. Most participants used the Icelandic word *innflytjandi* (immigrant) to refer to migrants and ethnic minorities in Norway. In the interviews, some people also used *innflytjandi* interchangeably with the Norwegian term *innvandr* (see discussion of the term in Gullestad 2002: 50; Berg 2008: 216). Whereas the word *innflytjandi* can be used neutrally, it is in contemporary public discourse usually reserved for people from eastern Europe and the Global South and less frequently used to refer to migrants from western Europe (especially from the Nordic countries). While some participants used the word *innflytjandi* to refer to themselves or Icelandic migrants in Norway, it was more common for people to reject the idea that this word applied to Icelanders in Norway.

Dagný lived in a rather affluent neighbourhood in Oslo. Although she liked the area, she was concerned that the primary school which

her child attended was “really white”, explaining that one could hardly find anyone in the school that was not “white”. Dagný said that some teachers at the school worried about this and took the children on field trips to the ethnically diverse city centre, so that the children would realize that “there exists something other than [their neighbourhood] of white middle-class people”. Dagný supported this initiative and shared a story of a time when she took her child to the city centre. In one of the shops, Dagný’s child whispered, “Mom, can’t we just leave? I know these people are okay, but I don’t think this is a good idea”. Dagný said her child had felt very uncomfortable, and when I asked what made her child feel that way, Dagný explained that there were “just a lot of *innflytjendur* there”.⁴ Dagný was worried about her child’s reaction and related it to the neighbourhood they lived in, saying:

It’s such an extremely white neighbourhood, –Norwegian, you should maybe not say white, you should maybe rather say Norwegian, it’s such an extremely Norwegian neighbourhood that when they go, for instance, downtown they’re just in a completely different world, completely different. There, most of the women are for instance in these, [...] you know, in gowns. It’s of course by no means burqa, there’s some other name for it.

Dagný first describes her neighbourhood as being “White” but upon reflection she defines it as “Norwegian”. Here whiteness and Norwegianness are conflated, but considering how Dagný describes her “extremely Norwegian” neighbourhood as populated with “white middle-class people” highlights the intersections of “race” and class, and suggests that this issue is more complex. She might feel that the label “Norwegian” fits better as it also implies a class position, and thereby could indicate that “white” lower-class people (migrants or not) are also not to be found in her affluent neighbourhood.

Living in the same neighbourhood as Dagný, Ragna felt right at home in this “white” middle-class space and did not comment on the area being too homogeneously “white” like Dagný did. Ragna said:

When I’m walking around here [in her neighbourhood], I always feel just like I’m somewhere home in Iceland, but maybe when you go downtown, you know, when you get down to Grønland, where there are only foreigners and Somalis– [...] there you’ve just entered something different. A lot of Norwegians just stay in their neighbourhoods, you know, they just don’t go downtown.

Ragna describes the similarity of Icelandic society and this “white” middle-class area in Oslo, while contrasting it with Grønland, a neighbourhood in the city centre where nearly half of the residents have a migrant background and many are Muslims (Vassenden & Andersson 2011: 580). As Lundström (2010: 71) notes, “similarity may be created through ‘other’s’ difference”. Here Ragna constructs Norwegians and Icelanders simultaneously as *the same* and as *the norm*, defined in opposition to the “foreigners” in Grønland (in particular Somalis), who are “different”.

Both Dagný’s child and Ragna feel discomfort in public spaces where many “non-white” migrants or minorities are present. This feeling was shared by many other participants. Even though Örn expressed his feelings in a more explicitly racist way than did the other participants, his views still reflect some of the themes that came up in the interviews. Örn stated that he never set foot in Grønland, explaining that:

I don’t want to go there, it’s just impossible to be there. [...] There are just so many of these Somalis and such trash, I just don’t feel

like being there [...] You know you’re just not entirely safe there, there’s a lot of crime there and drug addiction. All Norwegians disappear from there. [...] There are no sensible families there, only from Pakistan or Somalia.

Here Örn contrasts “sensible” Norwegians with Somali “trash” and connects Grønland with crime and drug addiction. Örn thereby associates Grønland with deviant or “abnormal” behaviour and dissociates the area with “Norwegians” and “sensible families”. In his words, Örn refers simultaneously to nationality, “race” and class, implying that there are no “normal” people left in the neighbourhood, meaning “white”, middle-class Norwegians.

Later in the interview, Örn talked again about *innflytjendur* saying: “These people from Somalia stand so horribly out; it’s just uncomfortable, uncomfortable for Norwegians that they’re there. They never admit it, but that’s how it is”. When asked what was so uncomfortable about Somalis’ presence, he answered that they are “just different, that’s the only reason, and they don’t want to take part in society, just huddle together and then there are the burqa ladies just walking around there and they just stick out”. Örn singles out Somalis (especially veiled Somali women) as “standing horribly out”, “sticking out” and being “just different”, in other words, being hypervisible and deviating from the majority norm. Like Dagný, Örn highlights a particular way of dressing by Muslim women as the most significant (and visible) marker of difference. Many participants described veiling by Muslim women as being incompatible with Norwegianness. Tinna, for instance, said “I was surprised at how many people wear a headscarf, I just thought: ‘Wow, where are we? Aren’t we definitely in the Nordic countries?’” Confronting the racial diversity of Oslo, the participants take a hegemonic position and judge who fits and who does not. In their narratives, the participants take part in constructing Norwegian society as “white” with certain cultural (Christian) values and middle-class norms. Through these narratives a space is carved out for the inclusion of “white” Icelanders, while “non-white” people are marked as non-Norwegian and not belonging to Norwegian society.

7 Differing degrees of (in)visibility and whiteness

As previously described, most of the participants felt they “melted into” Norwegian society, becoming largely “invisible” as migrants. However, this section highlights that this was not always the case and demonstrates how some participants became visible or audible as non-Norwegians. A case in point is Heiðrún who had a somewhat different experience from the other participants. Although Heiðrún sees herself as “white”, she explained that she is “really dark compared to an Icelander”, and because of her relatively dark appearance she said:

I’ve received a lot of nasty comments because I’m *innvandrer*, until people discover that I’m Icelandic and then the attitude changes to the opposite. I’ve been mistaken for a Turk, I’ve been mistaken for a Spaniard, which is maybe okay, Spaniard or Italian, that’s been sort of okay. When I’ve been mistaken for a Turk I’ve been looked down on. [...] The worst days are in the summer when there’s been sun and you’ve gotten really tanned. One time I was mistaken for an Egyptian and then I was really trashed by some group of boys [...] and then of course it came out that I was Icelandic and then it was just [their reaction]: “oh, yes, well...” and it was just a completely different attitude. Norwegians are

a bit racist [...] but I personally feel that [...] having more rights than another nation is absolutely ridiculous, just because you come from some island far out in the ocean.

Being considered visibly different from the “white” Norwegian norm means that Heiðrún does not “blend in with the crowd” as Árni phrased it. The majority gaze falls upon Heiðrún and she does not pass unnoticed and without harassment, as most of the Icelanders usually did. Whereas Heiðrún has met hostility because of her visual appearance, a few participants had faced similar attitudes when they spoke English. Daniel, for instance, said:

When I arrived I was naturally speaking English and [...] there are of course always some people who are assholes. [...] There were probably some who thought I was Polish. Then naturally you know when you say you’re Icelandic, then it’s just: “Great”. Everyone thinks that’s okay.

Here audibility marks Daniel as not belonging in a similar manner as visually marked Heiðrún. Speaking English did not necessarily result in unfriendly interactions; it is noteworthy that it was not the people working as managers or professionals who had such unpleasant experiences, but the men who worked as manual labourers and certified tradesmen. Heiðrún, Daniel and the others who met such hostility had finished compulsory or vocational education and worked in services, certified trades or as manual labourers. Their educational level and labour market position underscore how class intersects here with physical appearance and language.

Whereas the use of English identified Icelanders audibly as non-Norwegians and sometimes resulted in unfriendly interactions, the use of Icelandic did not necessarily have the same results. For example, Ásdís remarked that when Norwegians hear her and other Icelanders speak Icelandic, they are curious to know where they are from and “their world just lights up when they learn we’re from Iceland, they just love us”. Being audible as a foreign language speaker can, therefore, in some cases facilitate positive encounters, rather than indifference or hostility, as long as the person speaks the right sort of language (Nordic).

The words of Heiðrún, Daniel and Ásdís show that revealing one’s Icelandic nationality may change the tenor of encounters with Norwegians quite dramatically. Many of the Icelanders explained how their nationality was an asset in Norway. Ragna said that as an Icelandic, “the cards have been dealt in your favour, then it’s just a question of you playing your cards right”. The Icelandic nationality could, therefore, be understood as a certain kind of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1985: 724; 1991: 72), which manifests itself in the respect and recognition Icelanders receive from the majority population. This particular kind of capital could be termed “national capital” (Lundström 2010: 79), where national belonging gains a specific meaning in the context of racialized and nationalistic discourses of culture and ancestry in contemporary Norwegian society (Gullestad 2002). The Icelanders sometimes tactically capitalized on their national belonging. Many Icelanders, for instance, stated clearly in their housing advertisements that they were Icelandic because they had realized that they got more positive replies that way. Although Heiðrún criticizes how certain “nations” (*þjóðir*) are accorded more worth than others, she also made tactical use of the symbolic capital related to her identification as Icelandic. An example of this is how Heiðrún dealt with customers who were rude to her because she was “a foreigner”, saying: “I get it across as soon as I can where I’m from

and it’s a completely different attitude that one receives”. For Heiðrún, who cannot always draw directly on the symbolic capital of whiteness (Lewis 2004: 628), the symbolic capital of national belonging may be particularly important. Being identified as an Icelandic, Heiðrún is categorized differently, from being “non-white” or “not-white-enough” to being Icelandic, which translates to “white” and sharing ancestry and culture with the majority.

A final point to note is how the words of both Heiðrún and Daniel above hint at a hierarchy of whiteness (Leinonen 2012: 216; Lundström 2010: 73). Heiðrún explains that being categorized as a Southern European is “sort of okay”, although it is not as favourable as being categorized as an Icelandic. Daniel associates the hostility he has met in Norway with him being misrecognized as a Pole, while experiencing friendliness when people discover he is Icelandic. Other participants similarly discussed hierarchies of national belonging and whiteness. Talking about being a migrant in Norway Reynir said: “as horrible as it is, I think it’s an advantage to be white and even more so to be Icelandic or Scandinavian”. Describing his interactions with Norwegians, Valdimar, furthermore, noted:

If you ask anyone where you should, for example, rent an apartment, then it’s very clear that you should not, if you’re a white man that is to say, and especially from the Nordic countries, then you’re not going to rent an apartment in some neighbourhood where there are foreigners, that’s what everyone advises you.

The hierarchies of whiteness become clear in these quotations. They indicate how whiteness is not only defined in opposition to “non-whites” but also in relation to those who are considered as less “white”. These narratives underscore how ideas of “whiteness” are firmly intertwined with being “Nordic” and they, furthermore, seem to confirm the idea of the Nordic region as the epitome of whiteness (Blaagaard 2006).

8 Conclusions

In this article, I have focused on how Icelandic migrants construct belonging through racialization. The participants conceive of Icelanders and Norwegians as “white” and “same”, with reference to physical appearance and assumed shared ancestry and culture. I argue that these constructions of sameness must be understood in relation to contemporary nationalistic and racist discourses that give significance to ancestry and culture in order to exclude “non-white” migrants from belonging (Gullestad 2002). Referring to ancestry, kinship and culture to justify one’s belonging is therefore not an innocent act in an environment where certain people are excluded through these same references.

Due to their assumed similarity to the Norwegian majority, Icelanders feel that they “melt into” Norwegian society, becoming largely “invisible” as migrants. Applying an intersectional approach that takes into account contradictory locations (Anthias 2012) casts light on Icelanders’ differing degrees of (in)visibility and privilege, as the participants are differently positioned with regard to shades of whiteness, class and language competency. Despite the different positions of individual Icelanders in Norway, their nationality works for all of them as a form of symbolic capital in Bourdieu’s (1985; 1991) sense, materializing in respect and recognition from the majority group. Icelandic nationality becomes particularly useful for Icelanders who due to (dark) physical appearance or (English)

language use become visible (or audible) as non-Norwegians. When these participants reveal their Icelandic nationality, hostile encounters are transformed into more pleasant interactions.

Having drawn a parallel between Icelanders and Norwegians, the participants often place themselves in the hegemonic majority position and gaze at the “visible other”, finding certain migrants unsuitable for Norwegian society. Norwegian Somalis are in particular represented as hypervisible and the ultimate Other. Through their narratives, the participants reproduce the image of the Norwegian nation as “white”, excluding “non-white” people. “True” Norwegianness, furthermore, emerges in the narratives of some participants as not only “white” but also middle-class, which opens up space for the inclusion of “white” middle-class Icelanders. Studies on racialization and racism often analyse how the majority group racializes minority groups but less frequently explore how minority groups use racism against other minorities (Fox 2013). The way in which the Icelandic participants racialize themselves as “white” and other minority groups as “different” draws attention to the differing power positions that migrants hold and underscores the need to study relatively privileged migrants and how they reproduce the hierarchical order in the receiving society.

Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir is a PhD candidate in anthropology at the University of Iceland. Her dissertation focuses on migration from Iceland to Norway in the context of Iceland’s financial crash in 2008, emphasizing the intersections of gender, race, nationality and class, and highlighting the experiences of the Icelandic migrants themselves.

References

- Agnarsdóttir, A 2008 ‘The Danish empire: the special case of Iceland’, in *Europe and its empires*, eds MN Harris & C Lévai, Pisa, Pisa University Press, pp. 59–84.
- Ahmed, S 2004, ‘Declarations of whiteness: the non-performativity of anti-racism’, *Borderlands*, vol. 3, no. 2.
- Andersson, M 2012 ‘The debate about multicultural Norway before and after 22 July 2011’, *Identities*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 418–427, DOI: 10.1080/1070289x.2012.684442.
- Anthias, F 2012, ‘Transnational mobilities, migration research and intersectionality’, *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 102–110, DOI: 10.2478/v10202-011-0032-y.
- Benson, M & O’Reilly, K 2009, ‘Migration and the search for a better way of life: a critical exploration of lifestyle migration’, *The Sociological Review*, vol. 57, no. 4, pp. 608–625, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-954X.2009.01864.x.
- Berg, AJ 2008, ‘Silence and articulation—whiteness, racialization and feminist memory work’, *NORA—Nordic Journal of Women’s Studies*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 213–227, DOI: 10.1080/08038740802446492.
- Blaagaard, BB 2006, ‘Relocating whiteness in Nordic media discourse’, in *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: a Postcolonial exhibition project in five acts*, NIFCE, Nordic Institute for contemporary art, Helsinki. Available from: <http://www.rethinking-nordic-colonialism.org/files/pdf/ACT5/ESSAYS/Blaagaard.pdf> [Last accessed 14.07.2014].
- Blaagaard, BB 2011, ‘Workings of whiteness: interview with Vron Ware’, *Social Identities*, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 153–161, DOI: 10.1080/13504630.2011.531911.
- Bourdieu, P 1985, ‘The social space and the genesis of groups’, *Theory and Society* vol. 14, no. 6, pp. 723–744.
- Bourdieu, P 1991, *Language & symbolic power*, Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Brekhus, W 1998, ‘A Sociology of the unmarked: redirecting our focus’, *Sociological Theory*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 34–51, DOI: 10.1111/0735-2751.00041.
- Brochmann, G & Hagelund, A 2012, *Immigration policy and the Scandinavian welfare state 1945–2010*, Palgrave, London.
- Castles, S 2010, ‘Understanding global migration: a social transformation perspective’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 36, no. 10, pp. 1565–1586, DOI: 10.1080/1369183x.2010.489381.
- Eriksen, TH 2011, ‘Hva betyr “vi”’, in *Kulturell kompleksitet i det nye Norge*, eds TH Eriksen & HE Næss, Unipub, Oslo, pp. 9–41.
- Esterberg, KG 2002, *Qualitative methods in social research*, McGraw-Hill, Boston.
- Fortier, A-M 2003, ‘Global migranhood, whiteness and the anxieties of (in)visibility: Italians in London’, in *The social construction of diversity: recasting the master narrative of industrial nations*, eds C Harzig & D Juteau, Berghahn Books, Oxford and New York, pp. 227–246.
- Fox, JE 2013, ‘The uses of racism: whitewashing new Europeans in the UK’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 11, pp. 1871–1889, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2012.692802.
- Frankenberg, R 1993, *White women, race matters: the social construction of whiteness*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis.
- Friðriksson, Ó 2011, ‘Atgervisflótti til nágrannalanda’, *Morgunblaðið*, 28 November, p. 6.
- Gallagher, CA 2000, ‘White like me? Methods, meaning, and manipulation in the field of white studies’, in *Racing research*,

Acknowledgements

I warmly thank the men and women who participated in this study. I benefitted greatly from helpful comments on previous drafts of this article from the editors of the special issue, the editor and the anonymous reviewer of NJMR, Kristín Loftsdóttir, Helga Ólaf, Margrét Einarsdóttir, my colleagues in the academic writing group and the participants at the PhD seminar in Bergen organized by the Network for Research on Multiculturalism and Societal Interaction. The research received a doctoral grant from the University of Iceland Research fund and a grant from the Memorial fund of Eðvarð Sigurðsson. The study is a part of the research project *Icelandic Identity in Crisis* funded by the Icelandic Center for Research (Rannis) and the University of Iceland Research Fund.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/immigrant>
- 2 This genetic research suggests that 62.5 per cent of the Icelandic female settlers came from the British Isles and only 37.5 per cent from Scandinavia, while 80.5 per cent of the male settlers came from Scandinavia and 19.5 per cent from the British Isles (Helgason 2004).
- 3 All the quotes have been translated from Icelandic by the author.
- 4 *Innflytjendur* is the plural of *innflytjandi*.

- researching race. *Methodological dilemmas in critical race studies*, eds FW Twine & JW Warren, New York University Press, New York, pp. 67-92.
- Garðarsdóttir, Ó 2012, *Fólksflutningar til og frá Íslandi 1961–2011 með áherslu á flutninga á samdráttarskeiðum*, Velferðarráðuneytið, Reykjavík.
- Garner, S 2006, 'The uses of whiteness: what sociologists working on Europe can draw from US research on whiteness', *Sociology*, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 257-275, DOI: 10.1177/0038038506062032.
- Garner, S 2012, 'A moral economy of whiteness: Behaviours, belonging and Britishness', *Ethnicities*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 445-464, DOI: 10.1177/1468796812448022.
- Gullestad, M 2002, 'Invisible fences: egalitarianism, nationalism and racism', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 45-63, DOI: 10.1111/1467-9655.00098.
- Gullestad, M 2005, 'Normalising racial boundaries: the Norwegian dispute about the term neger', *Social Anthropology*, vol. 13, no. 1, pp. 27-46, DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-8676.2005.tb00118.x.
- Gullestad, M 2006, *Plausible prejudice: everyday practices and social images of nation, culture and race*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo.
- Helgason, A 2004, 'Uppruni Íslendinga: vitnisburður erfðafraeðinnar', in *Hlutavelta tímans: menningararfur á Þjóðminjasafni*, eds Á Björnsson & H Róbertsdóttir, National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavík, pp. 48-55.
- Jakobsson, S 1999 'Óþekkti konungurinn: sagnir um Harald hárfagra', *Ný saga*, vol. 11, pp. 38-53.
- Jónsson, Ál 2010, 'Íslendingar eftirsóttir', *Morgunblaðið*, 15 December. Available from: http://www.mbl.is/greinasafn/grein/1360616/?item_num=0&searchid=32ba17d52943d7bcce7a2938384fbd1fea89ccf0 [Last accessed 15.07.2014].
- Keskinen, S, Tuori, S, Irni, S & Mulinari, D (eds) 2009, *Complying with colonialism: gender, race and ethnicity in the Nordic region*, Ashgate, Aldershot.
- Lane, P 2009, 'Mediating national language management: the discourse of citizenship categorization in Norwegian media', *Language Policy*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 209-225, DOI: 10.1007/s10993-009-9139-6.
- Leinonen, J 2012, 'Invisible immigrants, visible expats? Americans in Finnish discourses on immigration and internationalization', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 213-223, DOI: 10.2478/v10202-011-0043-8.
- Lewis, AE 2004, "'What group?'" Studying whites and whiteness in the era of "color-blindness", *Sociological Theory*, vol. 22, no. 4, pp. 623-646, DOI: 10.1111/j.0735-2751.2004.00237.x.
- Loftsdóttir, K 2009, 'Kjarnmesta fólkið í heimi: þrástef íslenskrar þjóðernishyggju í gegnum lýðveldisbaráttu, úrás og kreppu', *Ritið*, vol. 9, no. 2-3, pp. 113-139.
- Loftsdóttir, K 2012, 'Belonging and the Icelandic others: situating Icelandic identity in a postcolonial context', in *Whiteness and postcolonialism in the Nordic region: exceptionalism, migrant others and national identities*, eds K Loftsdóttir & L Jensen, Ashgate, Surrey, pp. 57-71.
- Loftsdóttir, K 2013, 'Republishing "The Ten Little Negros": exploring nationalism and "whiteness" in Iceland', *Ethnicities*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 295-315, DOI: 10.1177/1468796812472854.
- Loftsdóttir, K & Jensen, L 2012, 'Introduction: Nordic exceptionalism and the Nordic "others"', in *Whiteness and postcolonialism in the Nordic region: exceptionalism, migrant others and national identities*, eds K Loftsdóttir & L Jensen, Ashgate, Surrey, pp. 1-11.
- Lundström, C 2010, 'White ethnography: (un)comfortable conveniences and shared privileges in field-work with Swedish migrant women', *NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 70-87, DOI: 10.1080/08038741003755467.
- Mas Giralt, R 2011, 'In/visibility strategies and enacted diversity: sameness and belonging among young people of Latin American descent living in the north of England (UK)', *Children's Geographies*, vol. 9, no. 3-4, pp. 331-345, DOI: 10.1080/14733285.2011.590712.
- Murji, K & Solomos, J 2005, 'Introduction: racialization in theory and practice', in *Racialization: studies in theory and practice*, eds K Murji & J Solomos, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 1-27.
- Ólafsson, S 2011, *Iceland's financial crisis and level of living consequences*, Social Research Centre, University of Iceland, Reykjavík.
- O'Reilly, K 2005, *Ethnographic methods*, Routledge, London, New York.
- Oddsson, GÆ 2010, 'Class awareness in Iceland', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, vol. 30, no. 5/6, pp. 292-312, DOI: 10.1108/01443331011054253.
- Olwig, K 2007, 'Privileged travelers? Migration narratives in families of middle-class Caribbean background', in *Going first class? New approaches to privileged travel and movement*, ed S Amit, Berghahn Books, New York, Oxford pp. 87-102.
- Østby, L, Høydahl, E & Rustad, Ø 2013, *Innvandrerne fordelt og sammensetning på kommuneniva*, Statistics Norway, Oslo.
- Skaptadóttir, UD & Loftsdóttir, K 2009, 'Cultivating culture? Images of Iceland, globalization and multicultural society', in *Images of the North*, ed S Jakobsson, ReykjavíkAkademian, Reykjavík, pp. 205-216.
- Solomos, J & Back, L 2000, 'Introduction: theorising race and racism', in *Theories of race and racism: a reader*, eds L Back & J Solomos, Routledge, London, pp. 1-32.
- Statistics Iceland 2009, 'Immigrants and persons with foreign background 1996-2008', *Statistical Series*, vol. 94, no. 4. Available from: <https://hagstofa.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?ItemID=9077> [Last accessed 17.07.2014].
- Statistics Iceland 2014, *External migration by sex, countries and citizenship 1986-2013*. Available from: <http://www.statice.is/Statistics/Population/Migration> [Last accessed 17.07.2014].
- Statistics Norway 2014, *Population, by sex, age and citizenship*. Available from: <https://www.ssb.no/statistikkbanken/selectvarval/Define.asp?subjectcode=&ProductId=&MainTable=FolkKjStatsb2&nvl=&PLanguage=1&nyTmpVar=true&CMSSubjectArea=befolkning&KortNavnWeb=folkemengde&StatVaria nt=&checked=true> [Last accessed 17.07.2014].
- Steyn, M & Conway, D 2010, 'Introduction: intersecting whiteness, interdisciplinary debates', *Ethnicities*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 283-291, DOI: 10.1177/1468796810372309.
- Vassenden, A 2010, 'Untangling the different components of Norwegianness', *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 16, no. 4, pp. 734-752, DOI: 10.1111/j.1469-8129.2009.00438.x.
- Vassenden, A & Andersson M 2011, 'Whiteness, non-whiteness and "faith information control": religion among young people in Gronland, Oslo', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 34, no. 4, pp. 574-574-593, DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2010.511239.
- 'Vilja Íslendinga í vinnu í Noregi' 2012, *Morgunblaðið*, 6 October. Available from: http://www.mbl.is/frettir/innlent/2012/10/06/vilja_islendinga_i_vinnu_i_noregi/ [Last accessed 15.07.2014].
- Yuval-Davis, N 2006, 'Intersectionality and feminist politics', *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 193-209, DOI: 10.1177/1350506806065752.