

RESEARCH

Navigating the Radar: Descendants of Polish Migrants and Racialized Social Landscapes in Sweden

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This article takes interest in descendants of white migrants in Sweden and their experiences of racialization. Although research on descendants in this category is rare, they are sometimes assumed to be unproblematically integrated into Swedish whiteness. The article contributes with an *empirically* based investigation of the subject by analysing in-depth interviews with an up till now almost non-researched group: people who grew up with Polish parents in Sweden. Inspired by critical race- and whiteness studies, it explores how they express being racialized, how the norms of Swedish whiteness surface in their narrations and how they negotiate these norms. The article makes visible a Swedish version of whiteness that requires on the one hand possession of materialized, physical whiteness, and on the other hand performative abilities, performative whiteness. It shows how these whiteness norms works for people in the special position of descendants to white migrants and that they—in contrast to their migrant parents—possess both these levels of whiteness. Still, they navigate a radar that could make them involuntarily visible and question their inclusion into Swedish whiteness. These results indicate that the Swedish version of whiteness is narrow and also raises questions regarding its change over time.

Keywords: Descendants of Polish migrants; Second generation; Racialization; Whiteness; Sweden

Introduction

‘People like me are like day walkers. We can move around society without drawing any attention to us, while people who actually have diverging looks...they will never be able to blend in the same way’. (Susanna, 40, who grew up in Sweden with two Polish parents)

Of the total Swedish population of around 10,000,000, 13.5% are descendants of migrants, that is, they are native-born with one or two foreign-born parents (Statistics Sweden 2019a). One argument in this article is that being a descendant of migrants is a special position,

generating specific experiences. This makes it important to analytically separate this position from the one of migrants, as well as from subjects with native born parents.¹ Here, I focus on experiences of racialization among people in the special position of descendants of white migrants in Sweden.

Previous Swedish research on the racialization of descendants of migrants has primarily focused on those who tend to be racialized as non-white and non-Swedish (see e.g. Leon Rosales 2010; Runfors 2012), while the racialization of descendants of white European migrants is still an under-researched subject. Yet, within Swedish critical whiteness studies it is sometimes assumed that the offspring of white European migrants 'will unquestionably be part of white Swedishness' (Lundström 2017: 85). This article contributes with an *empirically* based investigation of the subject by analysing in-depth interviews with people who grew up with Polish parents in Sweden. How do they themselves express being racialized? How do the norms of Swedish whiteness surface in their narrations and how do they negotiate these norms? Can these negotiations tell us something about contemporary Swedish whiteness?

After introductory sections on theory, analysis, previous research, contribution, background and method, the analysis starts out by discussing various experiences of racialization that came through in the interviews. Thereafter, the article explores how the interviewees talked about passing. Situations where the interviewees wanted to pass and also succeeded to are analysed, thereby making visible norms of Swedish whiteness at different levels. However, in some instances the participants became visible without choosing it, despite a majority of them being read as white, which is discussed in the following section. Finally, the results are summed up and discussed with focus on the sliding scales of whiteness and the complex processes of racialization made visible.

Theoretical lens

The analysis is made through the lens of critical race- and whiteness studies, in which whiteness is seen as the main normative cultural practice against which racialized subjects are shaped. Racialization is hence a concept that denotes processes through which race is constructed, for example when phenotypes and other aspects are attributed socially and relationally produced meaning (cf. Miles 1989; Rattansi 2007). On the one hand, such racialization is analysed as a process of differentiation between those who are ascribed whiteness and those who are not. On the other hand, it is explored as a process of drawing lines in-between people inside the category white (Clarke & Garner 2010; Garner 2017). This means that I discuss both ascriptions of non-whiteness and of whiteness as acts of racialization (see e.g. Frankenberg 1993a; Garner 2017). The same goes for ascribing someone Swedishness or non-Swedishness based on perceptions of the person as respectively white or non-white (cf. Roediger 2005). All these types of racialization structure people's lives, although in very different ways (Frankenberg 1993b). Racialization affects what bodies can do as it 'orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they "take up" space' (Ahmed 2007: 150).

Whiteness is a relational category, which means that there are specific constructions of whiteness in different locations and therefore variations of global white supremacy. Nevertheless, the well-researched North American experiences of racialization and whiteness have often been taken as points of departure and generalised to other contexts, as in for example Emirbayer and Desmond (2012). Many researchers have, however, underlined the need to widen the scope of studies on racialization and whiteness norms to cover different countries in Europe (see e.g. van Riemsdijk 2010). In line with this, a field of studies called Nordic whiteness has now developed, mapping out various forms and roots of whiteness displayed in different Scandinavian states (see e.g. Fundberg 2003; Garner 2014; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012; Lundström & Teitelbaum 2017; Mattsson & Pettersson 2007).² This article adds to this field by further exploring the case of *Swedish* whiteness in the ways discussed below.

Both mainstream European migration research and research on racialization have long been dominated by studies on first generation migrants. This is also true for studies on people with Polish background in various European countries (Burrell 2013, 2008; Elrik 2008; Garapich 2008; Morawska 2001; White & Ryan 2008).³ Besides contributing to European migration research in general by focusing on the understudied category of *descendants* of migrants, the article adds to the European research on descendants by exploring the offspring of *white* migrants.⁴ Because the European research that has actually studied offspring to migrants tend to focus those categorized as non-white (see e.g. Ajrouch & Kusow 2007; Andersson 2003; Bredström 2003; El-Tayib 2011; Karlsson Minganti 2007; Partridge 2012; Phoenix 2004; Runfors 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2016; Simon 2003; Valentine & Sporton 2009; Wessendorf 2013). Swedish qualitative research up till now only contains a few ethnographic studies discussing the racialization of white descendants of migrants. These include Marja Ågren's doctoral thesis (2003) and Stellan Beckman's master's thesis (2018) on people who grew up in Sweden with parents from Finland and Susanne Nylund Skog's article (2014) on two descendants of European migrants in Sweden with Jewish affiliation. Concerning people in Sweden with Polish affiliation, ethnographic explorations are quite rare. While some studies on first generation Polish migrants are available (see e.g. Arnstberg 1993; Wolanik Boström 2009; Wolanik Boström & Öhlander 2011, 2012, 2018), their offspring is still to be researched. This article is the first one to explore the racialization of descendants of Polish migrants in Sweden and thereby also contributes with knowledge on the experiences and conditions of this non-researched group.

By analysing how these descendants navigate Swedish racialized landscapes, the article makes visible not only their experiences but also how they are seen, read and positioned by the norms of Swedish whiteness, that is, how they are racialized. While not taking the North American experiences as points of departure these can however be used comparatively to elucidate the backdrop against which these Swedish racialization processes take place. One main theme in the US literature concerns blackness as the main category of otherization and for defining non-white subjects (Glick Schiller & Fouron 1990; Itzigsohn, Giorguli & Vazquez 2005). The main Swedish category of otherization is *not* labelled as black but as 'invandrare' (immigrant) (see e.g. Lundström 2017; Runfors 2012: 10f). These two labels have similarities in that they are used to outline non-whiteness, and thereby also whiteness. Furthermore, they both embrace people with similar features but with different ethnic affiliations. However, the labels also have differences, which can tell us something about the specific constructions of whiteness in Sweden. For example, the category 'invandrare' is used as a label for non-whiteness *indirectly*. This can be seen as an effect of a strong colour-blind ideology in Sweden (Hübinette & Lundström 2014: 425) and of a following refusal to engage with 'race' as an official category (Garner 2014: 418). The label 'invandrare' furthermore differs by being constructed not only by means of skin colour, but also by other phenotypes such as hair and eye colour as well as what is perceived as a foreign accent (see e.g. Hübinette et al. 2012; Mattsson 2005; Runfors 2012). Thus, compared with the category of black discussed in the US literature, the one of 'invandrare' serves to position *a broader range of people as non-white* (Runfors 2016: 1858ff). So, according to existing literature, the backdrop of Swedish racialization processes seems to be a very narrow version of whiteness. This article brings insight into how the contemporary expressions of this whiteness version work for people in the special position of *descendants* to *white, polish* migrants.

Background and Method of Investigation

By 2018, almost 2,000,000, or about 19%, of the registered Swedish population of about 10,000,000 were born abroad. Of these as many as 93,000 people, or 4.75%, were natives of Poland. This makes people from Poland the fourth largest national category of people in

Sweden born abroad after persons from Syria, Finland and Iraq (Statistics Sweden 2019b). Turning to their offspring, people born in Sweden with one or two parents from Poland number around 47,000 and make up almost 3.5% of the 1,350,000 persons in Sweden who are native-born with one or two foreign-born parents (Statistics Sweden 2019c).

The descendants interviewed for this study all volunteered, either after seeing an advertisement for the project (on Facebook, at The Slavic Institution, Stockholm University, or on a Swedish podcast reporting on Poland) or by being informed about the study by somebody who knew about it.⁵ In the advertisement, the project was framed as a study on growing up in Sweden with Polish parents. This seemed to attract people who wanted to share experiences on the subject and/or who wanted to reflect over what these experiences had meant to them. When Sebastian made contact via e-mail he, for example, wrote: 'I am interested in the possibilities this study offers for personal reflections. I would be pleased to participate'. The interviewers were white, ethnically Swedish women trained in ethnology. This seemed to be viewed positively by the participants, as many said they welcomed the opportunity to talk about their experiences in a more systematic way together with a trained researcher that was not part of the Polish community.⁶

After receiving information about the project, orally as well as in writing, 31 people gave their informed consent and signed up for an interview. The process of volunteered participation resulted in a sample of 23 women and 8 men, where 20 participants were born to two Polish parents and 11 were born to one. Among the latter, many grew up without their non-Polish parent present and only three came of age with a Swedish parent in home. Regardless, most underlined that they signed up because they had a 'Polish upbringing'.

It is not possible to characterize the sample of interviewees in relation to the total population of descendants of Polish migrants in Sweden, as there is no existing statistical or other description of this group. However, all but six of the interviewees came of age in Stockholm and hence in one of the three larger cities in Sweden where most Polish migrants have settled down (see e.g. Lubirska 2011: 78). They were between 18 and 42 years of age at the time of the interview, about half being 26 to 30 years old. Almost all are the children of migrants who arrived in Sweden during the 1970s (10 interviewees), 1980s (12) and 1990s (7), that is before or some years after the fall of the Soviet regime. None are the offspring of the many migrants who have arrived since Poland's entry into the EU in 2004, as these descendants have not yet reached adulthood. According to the meagre knowledge available on first generation Poles in Sweden arriving 1970–2000, migration from Poland to Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s was fuelled by the uncertain political and economic situation in the country (Iglicka 2000: 66ff). The people who left during the 1980s are described as having relatively high levels of education, a level that somewhat diminished among those who left during the 1990s (Iglicka 2000: 64ff; Vigerson 1994: 220). These characteristics are mirrored in the interview sample, where as many as 26 out of 31 participants proved to have at least one parent with higher education received in Poland and even more described their parents as strongly encouraging them to get an education. However, two-thirds of the parents did not have occupations matching their education in Sweden and experienced social declassification. The majority of the descendants nevertheless strived towards middle class positions (Runfors 2020). Furthermore, they often positioned themselves and their parents as diverging from the many Poles arriving to Sweden after Poland's entry into the EU in 2004 and who are to a large extent employed within construction and cleaning (Bengtsson 2016: 61).

The interviews were performed in 2018 and conducted face-to-face, a couple of them via Skype. They were qualitative and open in their character, organized around four themes presented to the interviewees. The first theme was *biography* (places of residency, education and work history, family, relatives and migration history and transnational relations, languages, circles of friends and spare time activities) followed by the themes of *place* (relations to

different places, now and over time), *future plans* (life in five- and ten-year projections) and *the position as a descendant of Polish migrants* (e.g. experiences of growing up with Polish parents, experiences not shared with native born people of non-Polish parents, experiences not shared with Polish born parents, experiences of being categorised and/or stereotyped). The interviews all lasted between two and four hours, were voice recorded and, with one exception, performed in Swedish.⁷ The quotes used are chosen to illustrate central themes within the material as a whole. They are cited from transcriptions of the voice recordings, translated from Swedish into English, and sometimes slightly edited to increase readability.⁸ The preponderance of quotes from females reflects the higher share of woman in the sample, not any gender differences in experiences of racialization. To ensure anonymity the interviewees are all given pseudonyms.

Expressions of Racialization

In line with Anoop Nayak's (2006, 2007) call for not taking the whiteness/non-whiteness of the subjects we study as point of departure, the first question posed here concerns how the descendants voiced being racialized. With the exception of two who had fathers born outside Europe, all participants expressed being read as white.⁹ This came through in the interviews among other things through the participants' own categorizations of themselves in relation to whiteness. Although people categorized as white most often do not think of themselves as such, but rather as neutral (see e.g. Ahmed 2011, 2007; Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993a), these interviewees expressed an awareness of their own ascribed whiteness by for example explicitly talking of themselves as white, as when Dominika said:

The social climate towards immigrants has been getting tougher, especially for dark-skinned people. Although they are in same situation as me... they grew up with two parents [born abroad]... they are called 'svartskallar' [another expression for 'invandrare'] and experience a lot of shit because they have a different skin colour. I have been able to escape that *because I am white*. [My emphasis].

Just as in Dominika's case above, the instances when the participants explicitly positioned themselves as white most often occurred when they contrasted their own situation to the ones of 'dark-skinned people'. This indicates recognition not only of the position they themselves are attributed, but also of skin colour as a factor influencing lives.

Another mode in which expressions of being able to inhabit a white position surfaced was when the interviewees gave voice to experiences of being visibly invisible in the anonymity of public space: 'It does not show on me' as one expressed it. As Ahmed points out, most spaces 'are orientated around whiteness, insofar as whiteness is not seen', which 'makes white bodies feel comfortable and invisible, while non-white bodies in contrast feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible and different when they take up this space' (Ahmed 2007: 157). When the interviewees expressed being visibly invisible, they, in line with Ahmed, can thus be seen as expressing being read as white in the sense of being in possession of bodies without visible markers of otherness.

Yet another way in which the interviewees expressed being read as white was in their descriptions of their lives. There were few signs of encountering racial power structures pointing away from education and towards lower class positions. Rather, many strived for, or had already conquered, middle class positions, most often by the means of education (Runfors 2020). Nor were there any signs that their bodies prevented them from moving around smoothly in physical space. So, beside their self-positioning as white and their experiences of invisibility, their biographical accounts can be read as expressions of being ascribed whiteness.

Possessing as well as Performing Swedish Whiteness

Closely linked to the experiences of being visibly invisible were those of being read as Swedish, such as when Oliwer said: 'I have blue eyes and light skin. It is hard to distinguish me from other Swedes'. To blend in and take place in space without standing apart is often labelled as passing. As pointed out by Bremer (2017: 130), passing is about subjecting yourself to dominating norms and letting these govern you, as well as about trying to govern how others perceive you. In this case, it is a question of passing the norms of Swedish whiteness. As we saw in the previous section, passing as white was often expressed as going unnoticed, of being visibly invisible. Going unnoticed was in turn mostly expressed as passing as Swedish, such as in the quotes above, or as when Ewa said: 'When it comes to appearance, Poles are sort of not recognisably as different in that way. So, I have never encountered... It's like nobody assumes I am not Swedish'. Or when Veronica stated: 'I think that people perceive of me as very Swedish, until I tell them something else. I do not think people really recognize...as my appearance does not stand out...as I do not look that different'.

The interviewees' equalisation of passing as white and passing as Swedish mirrors an intersection of whiteness and Swedishness that is typical for the Swedish version of whiteness (cf. HübINETTE & Lundström 2011: 44). Their negotiations with this specific whiteness however tell us that being light skinned was only experienced as the key requirement for passing and that other types of blond phenotypes were voiced as necessary complements.

When the descendants expressed having bodies without *visible* markers of otherness, such as skin colour and other phenotypes, they expressed being in possession of physical aspects of Swedish whiteness, what I, with inspiration from Signe Bremer (2017: 96f), label as materialized whiteness, or more specifically *materialized Swedish whiteness*.

Besides being in possession of materialized Swedish whiteness, yet further qualities required for going unnoticed came through in the narrations. Many interviewees pointed to the importance of speaking Swedish without a foreign accent as an additional but crucial aspect for passing as Swedish, and hence for passing the norms of Swedish whiteness. As Renata said: 'If they hear my family name, they understand. But if they just hear my first name and if they talk to me...then nobody knows'.

All but two of the participants who spent part of their childhood or adolescence outside Sweden spoke what in the interviews sounded like perfect native Swedish. This can be understood as a result of coming of age in Sweden and hence of their position as descendants of migrants. It can however also be seen as a result of them being in possession of fair skin and phenotypes. Because in contrast to descendants racialized as non-white (see e.g. Runfors 2009, 2011, 2012, 2016), these interviewees had not been confined to so-called immigrant neighbourhoods during their childhood and due to this had not been separated from native speakers. Most participants were hence able to perform Swedish whiteness in their speech, which made them 'audible invisible' (Guðjónsdóttir 2014). This speech capacity distinguished them from their Polish parents. Because their parents had, in all cases but two, left their native county for Sweden as adults and spoke Swedish with an accent. Just as the descendants underlined their own native Swedish as something that contributed to making them invisible, their parents' broken Swedish was remarked on as communicating that they were migrants.

However, the interviews revealed more aspects needed to fully perform Swedish whiteness. Based on an ethnographic study of Russian women in Stockholm, among other places, Maria Lönn (2018: 23ff) argues that a body with white pigmentation and certain phenotypes is not enough to be perceived of as fully white in Sweden. It also requires, for example, the embodiment of various norms, in mimicry, in ways of dressing and moving the body. In the face-to-face interview encounters and from the observations then made by the interviewers, it was made very clear that the descendants could pass Swedish whiteness in ways mentioned by

Lönn above. They could hence pass not only in the capacity of speaking non-broken Swedish, but also in their ways of moving their bodies, their ways of dressing and their ability to act in accordance with dominating norms. Not least was this mirrored in comparative comments the participants made regarding their migrant parents. 'You instantly hear, but also *see* that my mom is not from here,' Veronica said, pointing not only to speech but also to clothing and body language as making her Polish mother stand apart in Sweden. It was often mentioned that the Polish parents deviated from Swedish norms in their behavior by being to direct and extroverted. 'Strong opinions, very honest, sometimes maybe too honest', Paulina says when describing her mother:

It is very much connected with being Polish, that you are very, straightforward, very... honest. It pretty much clashes with Swedish culture, where you have to hold back a bit. /.../ I have to explain to her; 'you can't be this way. /.../ You can't say exactly what you think. It just doesn't work the same way [in Sweden].

Although many participants said that they *themselves*, due to their Polish upbringing, were raised to be outgoing and assertive, several also described how they, in contrast to their Polish parents, had knowledge on Swedish norms—as indicated by Paulina above—and could adjust and act accordingly if they wished. Hence, besides materialized Swedish whiteness, that is possessing physical traits in skin colour and other phenotypes, the interviews mirror the need of non-physical qualities to pass the norms of Swedish whiteness. They illustrate the need of performative abilities, in speech, in ways of dressing, in body schemes and in the enactment of various norms. Such abilities separated the descendants from their migrant parents, because in contrast to their Polish parents, the interviewees displayed the skills to enact such *performative Swedish whiteness*, as I label it.

Instances of Becoming Visible

Being able to pass in public space gives choices that persons who do not possess Swedish whiteness and who cannot perform it do not have, namely, to move around in society without friction and to decide when to go unnoticed. This was illustrated when Susanna said:

Sometimes I choose to be Polish. I can choose to play the role of the immigrant. It is a bit unfair in relation to those who cannot due to their looks or their accent. ... I myself can choose to be exotic. I can entertain people with little anecdotes from Poland. And people sit there and are delighted, delight mingled with terror. Then I become the other, the exotic. Or I choose not to [be Polish] and go very Swedish and talk about midsummer.

However, interview utterances, such as 'It does not show on me' and 'then nobody knows', tell us that there nevertheless are aspects that could mark the descendants as other if they became known and that have to be actively obscured if passing Swedish whiteness is to work. Moments when the participants became visible without choosing to and without wanting came through when they talked of 'standing out', as they often expressed it. Standing out (in Swedish 'att sticka ut') is a very telling expression as it visualizes a uniform entity, from which something differs and therefore also juts out and becomes impossible to conceal. Standing out is thus the opposite of blending in, to pass and comfortably take place in space.

As Ahmed (2007: 161f) points out, not only bodies but also names can operate as signs that cause friction in passing by functioning as stopping devices. This was reflected in the interviews where the thing most commonly mentioned as causing the participants to stand

out were Polish names. For the majority this concerned only the family name, as all but seven had forenames that are common in Sweden. As Susanna said: 'I can pretend that I am Swedish. If my last name is not known, I pass as Swedish'. Otherwise, the narrations on jutting out most often referred to childhood. 'Your parent came to school. Your mates heard her speaking. Then you were teased during breaks. It started there somehow. You understood that this is *not* something to be proud of', Jakob recalls. In these narrations, the Polish parent(s)—their accent, body schemes and behaviour—became markers of otherness when displayed in Swedish public space. For the participants, the otherness ascribed to the parents had to be explained and handled. However, it also othered the participants themselves.

According to the interviewees, nearly all the Polish parents were raised as Catholics. The descendants, however, seldom explicitly stated Catholicism as a marker of otherness, while the upbringing they received was.

It was rather tough to... not be Swedish. To not be allowed to be outdoors and play with your friends or do this and that. My mom was very "No, you need to be home at four o'clock, by five you shall be showered and then we will sit together and do your homework until it's time for bed", sort of.

The 'strict' upbringing many narrated, which some referred to as a 'Catholic rearing', was thus repeatedly mentioned as another aspect making the interviewees stand out in public space during childhood. Standing out was handled differently by different persons and also in diverse ways during different periods in life. As indicated, there were fewer narrations on standing out in the descriptions of adulthood. As full-grown, the negative feelings attached to standing out often seemed to be mixed with feelings of pride over being 'unique', as some expressed it. This can be understood in relation to the autonomy acquired by growing up. As adults, the interviewees probably had more opportunities to avoid being marked by their parents and to make their own choice on when to stand out or not.

Yet, many narrated situations when passing became disrupted due to their Polish connection becoming known. They described how these situations spurred questions on whether they identified as Polish *or* as Swedish and to what degree. This often made them end up in non-chosen, non-wanted situations where they felt uncomfortable, as voiced by Sylvia:

I find it hard to see myself as only Polish or only Swedish. I think of myself as both. When I am in Poland, I feel togetherness and I feel a home feeling at the same time a part of me feels like I do not belong there a hundred percent. The same applies in Sweden. Sometimes here in Sweden people with my background are seen as foreign, while in my parents' home country you are seen as Swedish.

The narrations on disrupted passing often illustrated how the participants' multi-faceted identities were put into question, as when Paulina voiced the complex position of having grown up in Sweden raised by parents who came of age in Poland:

Do not deny my [Polish] background. It is who I am. And I have the right to be that person. Of course, I am also Swedish! This [Sweden] is where I feel I belong. But it's a bit sensitive. I think the only one who can decide on these things is me. /---/ Sometimes I feel that ethnic Swedes...they do not grasp what it entails to have parents born abroad. They think we are the same. They do not grasp all those small things we experience in our everyday life and have experienced since we were small children.

So, despite possessing materialized Swedish whiteness and despite being able to enact performative Swedish whiteness, the choice of passing or not was sometimes out of the hands of the descendants themselves. When their Polish affiliation became known, through for example a Polish parent or Polish name, they could become involuntarily visible and their belonging to Swedish whiteness could be put into question.

Concluding Discussion

While the offspring of white European migrants are often just assumed to be integrated into Swedish whiteness (see e.g. Lundström 2017: 85), this article empirically has explored contemporary expressions of Swedish whiteness in relation to the, in Sweden, so far almost non-researched category of descendants of Polish migrants. It shows how these descendants themselves negotiate Swedish racialized landscapes and thereby makes visible how they are seen, read and positioned by the norms of Swedish whiteness. By doing this, the article contributes to a field of studies that does not take the well-researched North American experiences of racialization and whiteness as a starting point, but instead tries to make visible the specific Swedish version of whiteness. It shows how this version of whiteness works for people in the understudied category *descendants* to *white* migrants, as compared to descendants read as non-white but also compared to white first-generation migrants.

Critical whiteness studies often state that people categorized as white see themselves as neutral and as humans without race (see e.g. Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993a). As put by Sara Ahmed, for example, 'whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it' (2007: 157). But as shown, a majority of the studied descendants expressed an awareness of their own ascribed whiteness.

Experiences of being read as white were furthermore expressed as being visibly invisible. In critical whiteness studies, invisibility is often discussed as a result of being read as white (see e.g. Ahmed 2011, 2007; Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993a). Here it was rather expressed as a result of being read as *Swedish*, where equal signs were put between passing as white and passing as Swedish. As pointed out by Leinonen and Toivanen (2014: 161f), the visibility or invisibility of individuals is shaped in interaction with the majority and its dominating norms. The interviewees' experiences of invisibility and passing as Swedish can in line with this be said to illustrate the norms of Swedish whiteness, where physical traits such as light skin colour but also light phenotypes—what I call *materialized Swedish whiteness*—were voiced as necessary for successful passing. The narrations thereby reflect the strong linking of white skin and light looks with Swedishness in the racialized social landscapes in Sweden, as well as the linking of non-white looks with non-Swedishness/immigrantness. It moreover also mirrors how Swedishness is racialized.

However, the descendants passed not only by possessing light skin and phenotypes, but *also* due to their capacity of speaking non-broken Swedish, their ways of moving their bodies, their ways of dressing and their ability to act accordance with dominating norms. The article hence illuminates how current dominating norms prescribe not only materialized Swedish whiteness, but also *performative Swedish whiteness*. The article furthermore shows that the participating descendants in this respect were in a very different position than their Polish parents. Even if the Polish parents had bodies that might be read as white and hence possessed materialized Swedish whiteness, according to interview statements they often could not fully enact Swedish whiteness in speech, clothing, body schemes and the performance of norms. The Polish parents thus could not enact performative Swedish whiteness. The norms of Swedish whiteness hence draw lines between people with white complexion and transforms aspects other than looks into markers of otherness. This illustrates Roediger's (2005) main argument, namely that the gradations of whiteness that light skinned people

are ascribed is often interlinked to their (perceived) ability to perform the majority culture. It also illustrates Ahmed's claim (2007: 150) that whiteness is accumulated over time. Not least does it underline the importance of analytically separating the category migrant from that of their offspring.

The interviewees awareness of being racialized as white is a bit surprising in relation to the above-mentioned claims within critical whiteness studies. It is also surprising in relation to the Swedish ideology of colour-blindness, which declares that skin colour should not be given any significance (Hübinette & Lundström 2014: 425; Lundström & Teitelbaum 2017: 153f) and turns whiteness and race into subjects avoided in most contexts outside anti-racist movements and parts of academia (Leinonen and Toivanen 2014: 162ff). One way of understanding the awareness expressed by the interviewees is in relation to their position as descendants. More than two-thirds had parents who initially settled in neighbourhoods that were ethnically mixed, which means these participants during childhood made contact with the children of migrants labelled as non-white. This presence of the racialized non-white other not only seemed to confirm the interviewees own ascribed position in a racial hierarchy, but also to generate attentiveness to how the body they possess influences their opportunities or constraints.

However, the attentiveness can also be understood as an effect of the interviewees' experiences of having to negotiate othering processes *themselves*. Here I want to return to the quote that opened up the article and where Susanna said: 'We can move around society without drawing any attention to us'. However, she also indicated that this invisibility requires hiding something by stating that she and those like her 'are like day walkers'. As shown, the choice of passing sometimes seemed out of the hands of the descendants. It was for example described as disrupted when the anonymity of public space was broken and markers of Polishness surfaced, such as having a Polish parent or a Polish name. So, besides possessing materialized Swedish whiteness and being able to enact performative Swedish whiteness, the norms of Swedish whiteness in addition also seem to require *concealing* aspects that might mark you as something other than Swedish if they become known. As a result, the interviewees seemed to constantly consider whether to display their Polish affiliation and hence how to act. They voiced having to navigate a sort of radar that could detect them and make them involuntarily visible. Because becoming socially visible by having their Polish affiliation revealed could have unwanted consequences, even though they both possessed Swedish whiteness and could perform it. These consequences included being put under pressure to take a stand on issues of Polishness versus Swedishness and indirectly having their full inclusion into Swedish whiteness questioned. This questioning might in the long run reduce their mobility. Because, as Ahmed says, 'When someone's whiteness is in dispute, then they come under "stress", which in turn threatens bodily motility, or what the body "can do"' (2007: 160).

The descendants' negotiations tell us about the specific experiences of descendants of white Polish migrants, but also of the sliding scales of Swedish whiteness and complex processes of racialization, where people who materialize as well as perform Swedish whiteness still do *not* always pass all its norms. The article thereby contributes with a small, empirically based piece to the jigsaw on how racialisation processes work in a colour-blind society as Sweden. It indicates that the Swedish version of whiteness continues to be a very narrow one and that offspring to Polish migrants are today *not* fully an unquestionable part of white Swedishness, as sometimes assumed within Swedish critical whiteness studies (see e.g. Lundström 2017: 85).

The analysed material, however, evokes questions regarding this narrowness and its change over time. The participants who grew up in late 1990s and after narrated being othered to a lesser extent during childhood than the few older ones, who grew up in the 1980s and early 1990s. This brings around questions on whether norms of Swedish whiteness have actually broadened during the last decades? However, queries on the opposite, whether these norms

are currently becoming even more narrow, are also triggered. Such a development was indicated throughout the interviews in small comments that mirrored experienced changes in social climate during the last decade due to the spread of far right-wing political views as well as in fears of how the following eagerness to define who is Swedish and not would impact on the participants themselves. These questions need to be further explored.

Notes

- ¹ As the reader may have noticed, I avoid the concept of second-generation immigrant. This as it ascribes immigrantness to people who have not migrated themselves and hence is both misleading and contradictory.
- ² Whiteness in the Nordic countries has been analysed, for example, in the special issues of *Social Identities* (2014, 20:6) and *Scandinavian studies*, (2017, 89:2), while the adjoining subject of in/visibility in Nordic contexts is explored in *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* (2014, 4:4).
- ³ See also the special issue of *Social Identities* (2010, 16:3) on Eastern European migration after 2004 and *Polish Migration* at UCL School of Slavonic and East European Studies (<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/research/polish-migration/publications-polish-migration>), which gathers publications on Polish migration but names very few studies on the descendants of the emigrant Poles.
- ⁴ In fiction, experiences of growing up with a Polish parent in Stockholm during the 1970s and 1980s are portrayed by Zbigniew Kuklarsz (2005).
- ⁵ The study is funded by the Foundation for Baltic and East European Studies, 2018–2020, grant 939/3.1.1/2016 and has received ethical approval by the Swedish Ethical Review Authority, ref. no: 2018/512-31/5.
- ⁶ Of the 31 interviews, 13 were conducted by me, 10 by PhD Jenny Ingridsdotter and 8 by master student Kristina Spjuth.
- ⁷ This interview was conducted in English by the request of the participant.
- ⁸ Omitted parts in the quotations are marked with /.../, while ... indicates that the participant made a pause in the narration. Italicized words specify words underscored by the interviewee.
- ⁹ The two who expressed being racialized as non-white expressed occasionally being positioned as non-belonging, both in Sweden and in Poland. Their experiences will be analysed elsewhere.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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