Editorial: Different pathways into critical whiteness studies

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This special issue explores the complexities of critical whiteness studies methodologies. We decided upon critical whiteness studies (CWS) as our nodal point for this special issue since we believe whiteness often stays unchallenged as un-articulated and invisible social, political and economic norms surrounding and penetrating academic knowledge production. Whiteness is a difficult concept to pinpoint since its definition tends to transform over time, space and location, yet at the same time it remains stubbornly hegemonic. To adopt whiteness as a theoretical inspiration is a way of questioning prevalent perspectives, privileges and interests (Pedersen 2012; forthcoming). This implies that whiteness and racialization should also be connected to the material and functioning of contemporary capitalism (Garner 2006; Acker 2000), and that we should question knowledge production and embedded epistemologies. The political force of whiteness seems to be its quality as a neutral marker and its strong affiliation with norms and standards (Pedersen 2008). We are therefore interested in the processes of how whiteness is embedded, assigned, taken up and resisted. We think it is necessary to ask the following questions: how does whiteness play a part in significatory processes as well as in research methodologies and not least in alliances between researchers and their interviewees and/or research subjects/objects (Gunaratnam 2003).

The field of critical whiteness studies is characterised by diverse scholarship, which uses conceptual frames that view whiteness from a social constructionist, phenomenological or existential perspectives. Phenomenological and existential perspectives focus upon the lived/ living experience of whiteness and how whiteness directs, often in the background, towards itself as the norm for our life-world (Ahmed 2007; Puwar 2004; Fanon 1967/1952; Alcoff 2006; Pedersen 2012; forthcoming). These questions bring whiteness forward as other modes of being are seen as not-belonging, non-normative, as *odd*. For us it is not sufficient to stop with the question that something or someone is understood as *odd* but to ask the question in what situation, event, location and context does one be-

come *odd* and who are the ones to understand this as *odd*? Through this questioning whiteness becomes relevant, visible and tangible. It foregrounds whiteness as a privilege that make 'white' people visible for themselves as a racialised category (Toni Morrison 1992, 90). And further social constructionist approaches to whiteness acknowledge that 'there are no white people as such only a (changing) set of idealized norms, practices, and investments that constitute a white racialized ideal' (Hunter et al. 2010, 410). These approaches to whiteness help address differential workings of whiteness as they manifest within specific contexts, experiences and historical movements. Moreover, they provide a set of analytical tools to explore how critical whiteness continues operating as a global cultural hegemony that characterises our everyday lives, experiences, practices, as well as regional, national and supranational politics and policies (Reyes and Mulinari 2005).

The collection of papers presented in this special issue seek to develop critical methodologies for studying whiteness as a social, cultural, political and material phenomenon. It is rooted in ideas of postcoloniality, transnationality and intersectionality. In line with Lopez we argue for postcolonial and transnational approaches to whiteness 'across a range of geographic and cultural incarnations, where the concept of whiteness as a form of

hegemony historically linked to colonialism clashes in the new postcolonial moment with new, competing narratives of national histories' (Lopez 2005:19). Through historical contextualisation postcolonial whiteness is on one hand able to grasp various shades of whiteness that form in contemporary postcolonial contexts, and on the other hand explore how they relate to the hegemonic whiteness that represents the institutionalization of European colonialism.

The neglect or belated discussion of whiteness in some locations might not be as innocent as a *not yet* theorised area as it may be that the insights can provoke unease with different national histories. This neglect or 'forgetting' of colonialism and race-relations might be a formative part of European history in the sense that colonialism was understood as something taking place elsewhere and not in the eye of Europe (Hall 2000; Goldberg 2006). As we need to focus upon colonial centers, the exploration of postcolonial whiteness also entails the inclusion of peripheral geographies in the exploration of processes of racialization and whiteness. By looking at different geographies from postcolonial perspective one can uncover the relational workings of whiteness between peripheries and the centre (Ponzanesi and Blaagaard 2011). And also to approach whiteness as a relational category helps us see that whiteness 'forms part of a sys-

tem of meaning about race, class, gender *[and other intersections (our emphasis)]* rather than something to be studied on its own' (Ware and Blaagaard 2011).

Our decision to emphasis one aspect of studying racialization processes is also reflected in our acknowledgement of the difficulties of engaging with intersectional and multidimensional perspectives (Christensen and Siim 2006). According to Brah and Phoenix intersectionality signifies 'the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axis of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific context' (2004: 76). This definition is quite telling because it denotes racialization processes that are social in nature and can take different shapes and forms in diverse contexts. By focusing on whiteness, we can critically investigate the traps that can arise in intersectional analysis due to particular embeddedness and/or specific location that can render whiteness invisible. At the same time we have to take into account that whiteness is not simply an add-on concept, but a concept that can become visible through intersectional analysis within specific contexts. As Ware argues 'starting with 'whiteness' as something already defined and findable is likely to be misleading as it suggests an essentialism that's not useful' (Ware and Blaagaard 2011,

155). To engage in studies of racialization and whiteness it cannot be enough emphasised that *critique* and being *critical* is the driving motivation.

All that we have argued above is important not only in terms of understanding whiteness more clearly but also to contribute further towards a critical whiteness scholarship that goes beyond epistemological ignorance in relation to race in terms of whiteness (Swan 2010). Not only can we as academics be the researchers of racism but we can also be the producer of racist theories, as Balibar insightfully argues: '[t]here is in fact no racism without theory (or theories)' (Balibar 1991, 18). This means that academics are accountable for the knowledge that they produce, rather than hiding behind 'objectivity' of *re*presenting the world as it is out-there. This special issue thus attempts to 'ask the other question', as Mari Matsuda (1991) encourages us to do in our research and thinking. How can we open up for new questions, and even more importantly, which methodologies can assist in exploring our own blind spots and thereby be more reflexive on the power structure which permeate any human interaction not only scientific methodologies (Lykke 2010, 82)? Matsuda's methodology of "ask[ing] the other question" searches in the sphere of 'both the obvious and non-obvious relationships of domination, helping us to realize that no form of subordination

ever stands alone' (Matsuda 1991, 1989). For us to ask the other question is to focus on processes in order to analyse social, economic and political phenomena. We are interested in what is disrupted and disturbed more than simply supposing that it is the disruption and distortion that is the problem. Through the experiences and views of researchers that are very differently positioned within hegemonic whiteness, this special issue attempts to uncover the embedded epistemological ignorance of white privilege within academy and the broader knowledge production.

The articles presented in this special issue address the methodological challenges in critical whiteness research by looking at not often explored geographies, locations and translations[1] of CWS. They contribute to the still evolving scholarship that explores changes that travelling concepts of whiteness and race (with accompanying intersections) undergo as they enter different social, political, economic, disciplinary or theoretical contexts (Knapp 2005; Essed and Trienekens 2008; Michel and Honegger 2010; Gronold and Lund Pedersen 2009; Richter and Caporale 2009; Samaluk 2009; Huijg 2011). As such they offer novel critical voices on analysing whiteness that is otherwise still dominated by North American and British analyses of racial hierarchies and meanings and their respective local histories/geographies. As Nayak argues 'new geographies of whiteness can displace the construction of critical whiteness studies as a Western pursuit and open up researchers to a global interpretation and postcolonial understanding of such race markers' (Nayak 2007, 737). This issue accordingly presents lived experiences, views, positions and different contextualizations of whiteness within often 'forgotten' geographies. It offers original methodological insights in researching white privilege that have to do with lived experiences, positionality, translations and applications of CWS to different geographies and the innovative application of theories within and across disciplines. In this special issue we are thus not only concerned with what is lost in translation but mostly what is gained in this process. Similar as Pereira, Scharff and Marhia (2009) argue that a lot of insights and knowledge can be found through translation and travelling theories, we argue that translation and travelling of CWS to other geographies offers novel insights on whiteness as a global and relational hegemony.

The article by **Valeria Ribeiro Corossacz** titled **What Makes a White Man White** explores how upper middle class men in Rio de Janeiro self-identify as white. By pointing to complexity and intersectional nature of racial identification in Brazilian context this article offers an innovative translation of whiteness as unearned privilege and a

site of power. By historically contextualising Brazilian nation formation Ribeiro **Corossacz** teases out racist consequences of colonialization that have been inherited from epistemologies of the 'Old world' and are crucial in understanding postcolonial whiteness in contemporary Brazil. As Goldberg argues 'the globalization of the racial is predicated on the understanding that racial thinking and its resonances circulated by boat in the European voyages of discovery, imported into the impact zones of colonization and imperial expansion' (2009, 1275).

In this regard Ribeiro **Corossacz**'s article shows how despite subsequent changes and critique of racialised system, this colonial baggage influences the imagination in contemporary Brazil, where whiteness still signifies privilege, modernity, beauty and the norm upon which the other is defined, problematised and studied. In her article she discusses how her interviewees (white upper middle class men) questioned her research, were turning their narratives towards 'problematic' groups or suggesting a more 'legitimate' research object. Despite color evasive discourses narrated by her interviewees, Ribeiro **Corossacz** demonstrates how whiteness in the Brazilian context relates to a social class that is produced through historical-cultural factors, and is used to legitimise privilege. But what may seem as class from one point of view can also look like race or

gender from another (Acker 2000). In this regard Ribeiro **Corossacz** analysis is very powerful in exposing the privileged social position of white men that is earned through symbolic value of whiteness that equips them with the 'certificate of qualifications for life'. Whiteness thus grants privilege and superior starting positions in life and is sustained exactly because it 'does not want to be named'. This concept of whiteness as the unnamed privilege is exposed also in our next article that is effectively 'reversing the gaze'.

In her article **Methodological Reflections on Being an East Asian Researcher Researching the White Majority, Sayaka Osanami Törngren** exposes the often-overlooked issue of non-white researchers researching white subject. This is a welcome contribution not only to critical whiteness studies, but also critical race studies in general. Importantly, the author calls upon other minority researchers to interrogate research practices in critical race and whiteness studies. The contributions of minority researchers, alongside those of critical majority white researchers, can help inform, interrogate, deepen and reshape methods in this field and offer different insights on workings of whiteness. As Gronold and Lund Pedersen (2009) argue, white scholars face various challenges and dilemmas in transferring the knowledge on whiteness in pre-

dominantly white classroom at the white academy. Contributions from minority researchers provide necessary counter-voices that can be effectively used in the knowledge transfer that challenges white hegemony within academy. The article exposes how returning the gaze revealed lines of exclusion, as well as the ways in which lines of inclusion were proposed in responses. In this article we can as well trace how inclusion and exclusion of different minority groups is connected with colonial past that clashes into post-colonial moment and forms the ground for mythical imagination that defines Swedishness and whiteness/blackness and their various shades. The article reveals how the researcher is positioned in the hierarchy of acceptability in comparison to other minority groups according to her race, nationality, gender, age and class. Examples presented in the article help us observe 'the many shades of difference that lie within this category – that some people are 'whiter' than others, some are not white enough and many are inescapably cast beneath the shadow of whiteness' (Nayak 2007, 738).

Furthermore, this article demonstrates the transnational character of whiteness in which 'Swedishness is strongly connected to the visible white Europeanness'. Although informants in the research had origins from different parts of Europe and Latin America, they all embodied white European heritage.

Although there are without a doubt shades of whiteness that can define informants originating from these diverse localities very differently, **Osanami Törngren**'s research shows that these different interviewees used a common parameter for exclusion, which was built on embodied white European heritage. Also research focusing on inward European migration in the UK gives similar results, which shows that although Central and Eastern European migrants in London are constructed as the 'Other' through various intersections, they often narrate a common 'We' that creates imagined sameness with other white Europeans also by problematising black and non-Christian identities (Samaluk 2009). As Ponzanesi and Blaagaard argue in their introduction to the special issue on Postcolonial Europe, 'the European is what the other is not, therefore unmarked by race, ethnicity and religion but in reality implicitly constructed upon the idea of maleness, whiteness, and Christianity' (2001, 3). The hierarchy of acceptability in **Osanami Törngren**'s article is further pronounced by comparing visible and audible difference. The findings point out that embodying a different 'look' was more exclusionary than embodying a different accent or name.

By reading **Ribeiro Corossacz**'s and **Osanami Törngren**'s articles we discovered the acute commonalities of exclusion. In the former

we could see the normative perceptions of who is supposed to being researched, whilst in the latter we can see the normative understanding of who is supposed to be a researcher. The articles thus offer both sides of the same coin that point to embedded global epistemologies that help maintain the existing privileges that are embodied in whiteness. As Goldberg (2009) argues, racism is relational, firstly because it forms in relation to specific historical context and secondly because racist arrangements in one locality depend on racist arrangements everywhere else.

Relationality is also evident in **Kristín Loftsdóttir**'s self-reflexive account presented in this issue entitled '**The White Flesh of a Fish'- Reflections about 'Whiteness' and Methodologies.** Her examples from different localities around the globe show that 'within a racist system of the world everyone are racialised', yet specific racialization depends on contextual, historical and intersectional workings of whiteness in specific localities. Her account speaks about the reproduction of colonialism and racism through social constructions of whiteness in predominantly non-white society (Niger). In this locality whiteness is associated with ''Westerners', thus dividing the world into powerful 'white' north and poor 'black' south'. Self-reflexivity enables her to understand how it feels to be racialised as well as to prob-

lematise the persistent invisibility of whiteness to 'White Western' beneficiaries that are present in Niger in the name of development, tourism or research. Thus she argues for an auto-ethnographic method, which entails a critical self-positioning that enables white researchers to 'see' whiteness. Additionally she argues for extended case method and ethnographic analysis. Her example of Iceland shows one a context that is characterised by a predominantly white society, where most people never reflect on their social categorizations as 'white', and where deeper insights on workings of whiteness can best be gained indirectly, through an extended case study. As she is guiding us with the companion of Balibar in her position paper:

> Focusing on a specific case embodied in 'social drama' can be seen as particularly important with issues like racism, which as stressed by scholars, increasingly became coded under different labels, making it more difficult to target (Balibar 2000; Harrison 2002).

The extended case study can be an important method because it opens up the possibility to think about race differently or resist prevalent hegemonies. It may also open historical and temporal aspects of racialization processes taking place in a specific locality. This is particularly useful for understanding how at different points in history differ-

ent groups have been constructed as more or less 'white/civilised'. And lastly Kristin Loftsdóttir argues for the usefulness of ethnographic analysis that can provide 'deeper understandings of the lived realities of people, and how 'whiteness' is expressed in particular localized circumstances while intersecting with other aspects, often in contradictory ways'. This helps avoid the essentialised notion of whiteness as something fixed, but rather as mutable and adaptable category that is closely linked to colonialization processes within diverse localities.

Our next article offers an interdisciplinary reading of discursive conditions structuring particular understandings of belonging and difference in postcolonial Swedish context. The main argument of **Malinda Andersson**'s article, **Seeing through the White Gaze: Racialised Markings of (Un)Familiar Bodies in Swedish Transnational Adoption Policy,** is that the non-white bodies of the transnational adoptees are treated as a foreign and "non-Swedish" presence both within the adoptive family and within the white nation. The focus of this study is the relationship between race, family, nation, Swedishness and Whiteness. Drawing on postcolonial and feminist perspectives, **Andersson**'s contribution shows the consequences of mythical imagination on social policies within specific nation or 'nation family', where she argues that

ideas of 'one single point of origin' are crucial. As **Andersson** is arguing in her paper 'the stability of the adoptive family is threatened by the fact that the child resembles *another family*, and *another nation*'. The author thus contributes to the 'growing examination of the material effects of whiteness as an oppressive social relation enacted through state welfare' (Hunter et al. 2010, 409).

The analysis of the Swedish context is interesting because it challenges the image of Sweden as progressive nation in terms of equality. The image management of many European countries often obscures inequalities and masks everyday racialised practices that are deeply rooted in imagined national community. This holds particularly true for the image of the Nordic countries as paradigmatic example of gender equality in social science as expressed from both an insider and outsider point of view (Tuori 2007). This equality is conditional, based upon an idea of homogeneity within the population. This not only frames the Nordic countries in a particular way, but also seems more generally to be a major tendency within much gender equality rhetoric, where it is the foreigner/minorities who are positioned as the one in need of civic integration with regard to gender equality. Gender equality appears as a qualifier for approximating whiteness (Ahmed 2007; Pedersen 2012; forthcoming). This assumption was proven on several

occasions in the different Nordic countries together with the curious silence about the colonial past and history (Tuori 2007; Keskinen et al. 2009).

With respect to this, Anderson's article demonstrates once again the need to approach whiteness through postcoloniality. The quotation of Allan Pred that **Andersson** uses in her article is very telling in this regard: '[t]he spectre haunting Europe, is the spectre haunting Sweden.' Being promoted as a progressive country does not mean that racism does not constitute national imaginary. This image can only obscure the reverse gaze. **Andersson** shows how this is in policy documents articulated by non-defined 'Nordic', 'Scandinavian' or 'Swedish' appearance. This article shows how CWS in combination with postcolonial theory enables scholars to unpack what is the informal, unwritten and unspoken criterion that defines individual's belonging to the imagined 'family of the nation'. Furthermore, her article shows dehumanization of colonial subjects within policy documents, where children with 'non-Nordic' looks are exoticized and dehumanised. This also establishes a connection with **Osanami Törngren**'s article, in which she recalls an encounter where she was perceived as 'small and cute', and how this perception seemed to grant her interviewee a privilege to treat her in a patronising way. Reading the two

articles together thus gives us a broader picture and understanding of the workings of whiteness within postcolonial Swedish context.

Despite this apparent focus on national contexts articles demonstrate that whiteness is not confined to a specific locality. As Ware argues with the inspiration from Stuart Halls' concept of 'forgetting' mentioned earlier in this text; 'each country has a different relationship to its own colonial history; patterns of racism in the current period - questions of immigration controls, persecution of minorities, attitudes to Islam - all this needs to be analysed within national contexts without losing sight of how Europe itself is constituted' (Ware and Blaagaard, 2001, 160). Such interpretation enables the interrogation of whiteness as relational and transnational phenomena that can provide imaginary connection between individuals and groups from different locations and can have serious social, economic and political consequences.

Also **Andersson** is locating her analysis to a broader context. She argues that by means of 'blood and roots' the skin color of adoptees ascribes a symbolic belonging to another family, another nation that is not part of 'white imagined communities'. This resonates with **Osanami Törngren**'s point that her 'looks' was more excluding than her accent or name. Furthermore the plural in **Andersson**'s use of the term 'white imagined communities' is very tell-

ing in that workings of whiteness are not just confined to a specific nation state, but are effectively transnational. As Ware argues, 'in Europe we are talking about the majority white population, who - broadly speaking - draw on similar sets of resources in terms of thinking about what it means to be white (and European) (Ware and Blaagaard 2011, 159). This imaginary sameness connecting people and groups beyond national borders is visible in the resurgent of what seems to be a close relative of what is known under nationalism and fascism. However, this modern version is not confined only to a solitary nation but has as Paul Gilroy argues become effectively pan-European[2]. Furthermore the articles of this issue have shown that 'white imagined communities' and 'Europeanness' is not necessarily confined solely to imaginaries that are forming within Europe, but may also be transnational. As Knapp argues, 'European constellation of nation-states also represents a long history of transnational interlacements, including those with the extra-European world, based on violence, hegemonic interest and exchange' (2005, 263). As we can see in all presented articles, these can be ascribed through national or regional markers, such as Scandinavian, Nordic, European, Central and Eastern European, Latin American, etc…

This special issue demonstrates that in order for CWS to interpret the workings of transnational 'white imagined communities', it needs to go beyond narrow and problematic national, regional and continental divisions. These 'forgotten' geographies of whiteness thus tell us that CWS should embark onto decolonialization project more seriously. This is not just important in order to understand the workings of whiteness within specific localities, but also to expose commonalities across global and transnational manifestations of whiteness that importantly affect these different localities. It is crucial to have the variety of voices and translations that enable us to understand specificities but also commonalities of workings of whiteness in different yet relational geographies. Although articles in this special issue are located within different contexts defined by particular nation states and thus offering various insights, they are also very much relational. They all indicate to the importance of understanding the colonial origins, power-relations and renewed postcolonial moments that provide the connecting point for relational imagined communities that are on one hand still very much tight to the nation state and on the other hand transnational in their scope and effects.

ments on this editorial.

Endnotes

[1] By translation we do not simply mean the translation into one language to another, but also broader implications of translation that have to do with theoretical, analytical, epistemological, political and ethical implications of issues of language difference and translation from one context to the other (Pereira et al. 2009).

[2] See the entire interview with Paul Gilroy conducted by Rosi Braidotti on London's riots at http://www.rosibraidotti.com/index.php/press/videos/london-riots-conversation-rosi-gilroy

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