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THE VISUAL LEXICA OF (NATIONAL) BELONGING AND NON-BELONGING IN THE ACCOUNTS OF YOUNG KURDS IN FINLAND

Abstract

This study argues in favour of including an analytical focus on in/visibilities in order to gain insights into the racialization processes as experienced by individuals who have become subjected to derogatory categorizations. This paper examines how individuals' experiences of everyday racism relate to their struggles to belong. In this paper, I discuss how the theme of in/visibility emerges in the accounts of young Kurds, who have migrated to Finland at a young age and grown up in the country. What kind of visual lexica of belonging do they employ when narrating their experiences of everyday racism? And relatedly, how do they speak of boundaries of (national) belonging and non-belonging? The results show that "Finnishness" denotes "racial" belonging to the nation. Young Kurds contrast "white Finnishness" with racializing categorizations that indicate non-belonging to the Finnish nation. They have been labelled with such categorizations in social situations in the public space or at work by people they have encountered. However, there is space for young Kurds to contest such racializing categorizations and to negotiate their belonging to Finland by mastering the Finnish language and, in some cases, having Finnish citizenship.

Keywords

In/visibility • whiteness • racialization • Kurds • Finland

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Introduction

> You can still see old men thinking like, many times I have been together with Finnish girls, and some old guy comes next to me and says, 'goddammit boy, don't steal our girls'…
>
> Shoresh[1]

The above excerpt is from an interview with a young Kurdish man, who gave an example of how he had been confronted by a stranger in a local bus in Turku, Finland. Taking the bus with his Finnish girlfriend, an elderly man had reacted to the couple being together and seemingly based his remarks on his observation of Shoresh's and his girlfriend's physical appearances. This brief encounter between the couple and the elderly passenger in a public space illustrates the role one's physical features can play in the construction of their (non)belonging to an imagined collectivity. This is not surprising as such; individuals make sense of the surrounding world and of people they encounter – however briefly – through sensory observations (such as vision) making these sorts of fleeting encounters very much bodily experiences. The lengthier account that Shoresh provided about this encounter showed how he and his girlfriend had been positioned on the basis of one's darker and the other's lighter complexion. These physical attributes became constructed as visible markers of difference. This visibility and what it means in a majority white context needs to be analysed against the socio-historical context in which this encounter took place.[2]

This paper examines how young Kurds make sense of social interactions where they have experienced racializing categorization. In other words, it looks at how they understand their experiences of everyday racism in Finland. How do they narrate about racialized encounters, and how do such experiences relate to their understandings of belonging and non-belonging? What sort of visual lexica of belonging comes across in their accounts? With the term "visual lexica of belonging", I refer to a racializing vocabulary that evokes "racial" belonging to an imagined or real collectivity, and to categorizations that individuals assumed to belong to such collectivities face in everyday social situations. The notion of "visual lexica of belonging" captures the role of language as a conveyer of meaning in social interactions as well as how our visual fields become arranged through socially constructed categorizations that imply individuals' (non)belonging and membership.

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How certain groups or individuals assumed to belong to such groups are portrayed in the media and public debates, and how they are viewed in the light of historical constructions of "otherness" shape the meanings transmitted through racializing vocabulary. In this paper, the focus is very much on the micro-level understandings and experiences of racialized encounters and situations of social interaction. I will employ the empirical data from my PhD dissertation (Toivanen 2014b) that consists of semi-structured interviews conducted with generation-in-between[3] Kurds living in Finland. I will particularly focus on the theme of "in/visibility" that surfaced in the narrations of belonging and non-belonging provided by the research participants.[4]

Leaning on the empirical evidence, I argue that a focus on (in)visibilities can help reveal certain underlying mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion and shed light on how the boundaries of (non) belonging are constructed along the racialized lines in the Finnish context. Such boundaries of belonging (self-made or ascribed) and notions of "otherness" need to be considered constantly shifting and constructed within specific historical and political contexts, since these (in)visibilities gain meaning in relation to the imaginaries associated with certain identity labels and how those are valorised in different contexts.

First, I provide a brief theoretical overview on racialization and intersectionality and their relevance to this study. The following parts feature a discussion on the understanding of Nordic-ness and Finnish identity/ies that rely on the often un-problematized notion of "whiteness". However, the main focus of this paper will be on how the complex in/visibilities enfold in the Finnish context and to discuss how such in/visibilities are manifested in the visual lexica of belonging and non-belonging, as illustrated by young Kurds' accounts of everyday racism.

2 Racialization and intersectionality

Miles and Torres (2005: 71–72) argue that social scientists need to develop a "conceptual vocabulary that explicitly acknowledges that people use the idea of "race" in the everyday world while simultaneously refusing to use the idea of 'race' as an analytical concept". They opt for the term "racialization", which is understood by Miles (1994: 109) as a representative process in which certain biological attributes of individuals become more meaningful than others and in which these attributes are employed to categorize people into different groups. With "biological", he refers to the assumed and/or biological features of individuals. In other words, the racialization process is centrally a process of categorization in which some individuals are constructed as more visible and defined through certain embodied features, such as the perceived skin colour, and in the course of which social relationships become constructed on particular embodied features. The authors understand that such processes are dependent on context, and that the meanings different racializing categorizations gain shift and are constantly negotiated and informed by social, political and historical realities.

Even though the usage of the word "race" itself has become less employed in everyday language (see Goldberg 2008: 151-163), the idea of "race", as discussed by Miles and Torres (2005), is nevertheless more or less explicitly conveyed through racializing categorizations that refer to individuals' alleged "racial" belonging. The racialization of certain categories or identity labels demarcates the boundaries of belonging and how they become constructed (see Lamont & Molnár 2002: 174-175). One way to grasp the meanings embedded in such categorizations is to look at how those play out in situations of social interaction and resonate in the political and societal context in which they become articulated. This relates closely to what Philomena Essed (2002) has conceptualized as "everyday racism", by which she means the everyday, mundane experiences of racism by individuals who are subjected to racist practices and categorizations that become naturalized and normalized by repetition. Indeed, she has argued in favour of bringing the individuals' personal and lived experiences of racism under the scope of analysis, and considering such micro-level, everyday experiences in a larger political, institutional and societal context.

Becoming the object of a racialized gaze and being categorized because of one's appearance makes one very conscious of the meanings associated with visible phenotypical features. Visibility in this sense is understood in terms of the embodied (Alcoff 2006). This being said, there is a risk of over-emphasizing the dimension of physical appearances when analysing how certain groups or individuals become more "visible" than others by treating their embodied features as the sole signifiers of "racial" belonging. It is possible that some particular embodied markers become more significant than others in this process, including not only the colour of one's skin, but also the colour of one's hair and eyes. Furthermore, certain individuals can also become constructed as more "visible" on the basis of a spoken accent or language; religion and a related dress code (for instance, the Muslim headscarf); or other attributes that become markers of difference at a particular place and moment in time. In this paper, constructions of "in/visibilities" are understood as relating to complex racialization processes that are not merely limited to the embodied/physical dimensions of be(com)ing "in/visible".

Moreover, it is important not to overlook the intersecting features that one's assumed "racial" belonging has with gender, social class, generation or other attributes. The intersectional approach is rooted in the understanding that individuals consider the world from particular social positionings constituted by intersecting attributes such as gender, ethnicity, race and class (etc.), which are viewed as mutually constitutive (Yuval-Davis 2011). More importantly, Anthias (2002) suggests that the way individuals construct belonging takes place in the interplay between their intersecting social attributes and in how they and others value those attributes. Individuals' lived experiences (of everyday racism, for instance) shape the feelings they cultivate in themselves as to where they belong or do not belong (see *ibid*). Indeed, individuals' perceptions of who they are shift according to time and situation, depending also on how they are positioned by the members of the collectivities they belong to and in terms of the social categories that are used to define them by members not belonging to same collectivities.

Furthermore, individuals can strategically perform racialized and gendered positionings, and in doing so possibly challenge the boundaries of racialized categories (see Wimmer 2008). The intersectional approach ensures that we understand that individuals resort to different forms of agency to contest racializing categorizations, and it enables considering individuals as more than merely subjected to such categorizations. Therefore, I feel that the intersectional approach to individuals' everyday experiences of racism and the related racializing categorizations can shed light on how they *negotiate* their belonging and non-belonging, and how this takes place in relation to their intersecting social locations, such as "race", ethnicity, gender, age/generation and so forth. I also consider that the intersectional frame can offer a valid starting point as long as individuals' (marginalized and other) positions and intersecting social categories are not considered to have a systematic and

reductionist correlation. In this study, the frames of intersectionality and racialization are broadly employed to analyse young Kurds' narrations on their experiences of everyday racism and the related racializing categorizations.

3 "Finnishness" and the process of be(com)ing "white"

One of the main aspects of Nordic countries'[5] nation-building processes has been the sentiment of alleged cultural, religious and linguistic homogeneity, although numerous ethnic and language groups have inhabited the Nordic region for centuries. There seems to have been less emphasis on discussing the construction of national identities in the Nordic region in relation to "whiteness", although scholarly studies are increasingly catching up with this (Rastas 2005; Hübinette & Lundström 2011; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012)[6]. For instance, scholars have suggested that in Sweden phenotypical features constitute the central core and signifier of belonging to the Swedish nation. In other words, being "white" has become to be constituted with being "Swedish", thus making the bodily understanding of race and the cultural understanding of ethnicity intrinsically conflated (Hübinette & Lundström 2011). This is an argument that can be extended – albeit with an intriguing historical twist – to the Finnish case as well.

In the early 20th century, racial theorists fiercely speculated whether Finnish people descended from the "yellow Mongolian race" or whether they belonged to the "white race" (see Huhta 2014). Unsurprisingly, Finnish scholars tried to prove that the Finns were indeed part of the "white stock" (see Kivisto & Leinonen 2011). The arguments for Finns' belonging to the "eastern stock" were based on linguistic (the origins of the Finnish language), physical ("mongoloid look") and later on genetic premises. The early 20th century "racial" controversy stirred perplexed and not the least complexed sentiments about the "racial" belonging of "Finns" casting a suspicion on the nation's "Europeanness" and/or "Westerness" (see Anttonen 2005; Dutton 2008).

In the latter decades of the 20th century, the understanding of "Finns' origins" had shifted westward with politicians and scholars arguing for closer cultural proximity with the "West"[7] and relatedly a stronger distinction from the "East". On the other hand, the nation's collective memory vis-à-vis its colonising neighbours and the country's geopolitical position between the "West" and the "East" during the Cold War have also informed this shift in political and academic discourses. Linking this to Post-Cold war political developments, Harle and Moisio (2000) suggest that the "Western-ness of Finns" has been further emphasized in national identity politics with the country's joining of the European Union, which has been portrayed as a "return to Europe"[8]. Although the discursive construction of "Western-ness" does not explicitly refer to "racial belonging" as such, it implicitly conflates the concept of "race" and an idea of "whiteness" with (Western) culture and civilization (see Bonnett 2008: 17-28; Keskinen *et al.* 2009). In this sense, it seems that the "racial" vocabulary has been replaced with a more "culturalist" vocabulary. In the latter, the notions of "Western" and "Eastern" civilizations, which nevertheless remain often undefined, implicitly contain a racialized understanding of "whiteness" equated with "Western" civilization/culture (see Lentin 2005).

The underlying understanding of "Finnishness" as "white" has been somewhat discussed in the Finnish scholarship on migration (see Ruuska 2002: 66-71; Huttunen 2002; Rastas 2013: 171-174). Rastas (2005: 148) has suggested that the term "race" has not been used widely in Finnish research on racism due to its historical baggage. Regardless, the use of racial naming has not been absent in the historical constructions of "Finnishness" and "otherness". One example of this is the naming of the Roma minority as "blackies" (mustalainen), in contrast with the "ethnic Finns" as "whiteys" (valkolainen) (see Rastas 2005). However, since the 1990s mainly the racist and extreme right-wing movements in Finland have taken up the "whiteness of Finnishness" instead of it having become a part of the political rhetoric or academic theorizations (see Puuronen 2001). The contemporary silence on the racialized dimensions of "Finnishness" stands out in contrast to the central role "race" (along with language and other attributes) played in earlier 20th century ideas regarding "Finnishness" (Leinonen 2013). This contrast begs the question whether (and if yes, how) the idea of "race" is conveyed in the contemporary constructions of "Finnishness" and to what extent the understanding of belonging to the "Finnish nation" lies on certain phenotypical features such as "white" skin colour or other phenotypical attributes associated with "whiteness". The latter question also incites a reflection on the (racializing) categorizations that become contrasted with "white Finnishness".

4 "Race", "in/visibilities" and the visual lexica of belonging in Finland

The usage of the term "race" – in the analytical sense of the word – seems quite controversial in Nordic migration scholarship, as demonstrated by the recent debate by Annika Rabo and Rikke Andreassen in the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* (2014). Challenging the silence around "race" in contemporary Swedish society, Tobias Hübinette and Carina Tigervall (2009) have studied the racialization processes concerning the "non-white bodies of adoptees" in the Swedish context. They show how transnational adoptees' belonging to Sweden becomes contested on the basis of their "non-white bodies". In fact, they argue in favour of including the category of "race" as part of Swedish migration research to understand the racialization processes in Swedish society where "non-white appearance is used more and more to differentiate between 'Swedes' and 'non-Swedes'" (ibid: 350).

Similar voices have also emerged in Finnish scholarship on migration. Rastas (2005; 2013) has published extensively on the racializing categorizations and articulations of racial difference in Finnish society. Although she suggests that there are certain challenges in using racial categories as analytical tools[9], she points towards the difficulty of speaking about racially fashioned categorizations and racially coded experiences without the notion of "race". Referring less explicitly to "race", Irni (2009: 181) looks at the link between "Finnishness" and "whiteness" that is quite persistently taken for granted even in attempts aiming to question racism and the history of monocultural Finland. She discusses the racialization processes in Finnish discussions dealing with the ageing population and suggests that the intertwining features of nationality, ethnicity and "race" render some groups and individuals more "visible" than others in the Finnish context. She poignantly remarks that the term "visible migrants", employed in studies dealing with migrants' labour market position, serves to normalize the link between "Finnishness" and whiteness (ibid: 182).

Referring to "visibility" therefore implicitly suggests that certain migrant groups deviate from the normalized "whiteness". Critical race scholars have suggested that "whiteness" need to be acknowledged

as a racial category and that for a long time it has been the invisible norm against which visibility of racialized groups has been measured (see Keating 1995; Dyer 1997; Lewis 2004). However, there is a risk of understanding "in/visibility" merely in terms of the black/white dichotomy or in terms of "race", and simultaneously overlooking other mechanisms through which migrant groups/individuals are racialized and constructed as "visible". In her study on U.S. migrants in Finland, Leinonen (2012: 213) suggests that, "the politics of visibility is an important mechanism of labelling foreigners as 'immigrants' in Finland". Furthermore, she approaches visibility not only in visual terms: she argues that audible visibility through language use and the visibility at the level of discourses can allocate individuals to the highly racialized and classed-based notion of "immigrant".

This paper approaches racialization through the lens of "in/visibility" in an effort to understand how different kinds of "in/visibilities" – besides the physical/embodied – intersect and intertwine. I argue that in the Finnish context, also other kinds of "in/visibilities" matter; for example, having a "foreign-sounding" name or an accent and a differing dress-code can make individuals "in/visible" and subject to racializing categorizations in a more implicit way. The audible and discursive in/visibilities are significant dimensions to be taken into account, since they are often intertwined with how individuals become constructed as physically in/visible. This approach moves beyond the dichotomic usage of "in/visibility" that operates in the axis of "white" and "black" and invests the term "in/visibility" with more analytical value to understand the complexity of racialization processes at play. It enables understanding of how the idea of "race" is implicitly conveyed through racializing categorizations and encounters, although the word "race" would not be articulated. I refer to such racializing categorizations that constitute part of the experiences of everyday racism among the research participants of this study as "the visual lexica of belonging"[10].

5 The study – methodological considerations

Greater migration waves to Finland date back to the early 1990s, resulting to an increasing number of migrants' children born in Finland to reach adult age in the 2010s. In late 2012, the number of individuals with a migrant background and their children amounted up to 5% of the total population in Finland, whereas only two decades earlier in 1990 the number stood at 0.75%. Among young adults between 20 and 30 years old, the same figure stood at 10% in 2012 and is likely to increase in the following decades (Statistics Finland 2013).

The emergence of Kurdish-speaking communities in Finland is rooted in the Kurdish diaspora movements from the Middle East that sent thousands of families to seek refuge in Europe and North America (see Hassanpour & Mojab 2005). In the 1990s, significant numbers of Iraqi and Iranian Kurds arrived through the organized resettlement of Iraqi refugees under the auspices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Wahlbeck 2005: 1004-1005). The Iraqi Kurds form the largest part of Kurds in Finland, although there are also Kurds from Iran and Turkey residing in the country. In 2013, the number of Kurdish-speakers in Finland was 10,075. Kurdish-speakers thus formed the sixth largest foreign language group (i.e. non-Finnish or Swedish speaking) in Finland after Russian, Estonian, English, Somali and Arabic speakers. The age cohorts below 30 form more than half of the Kurdish-speakers in Finland (Statistics Finland 2013).

As Wahlbeck noted already in 1999 (p. 40), the identity as "Kurdish" seems to be a rather salient category of identification for the members of the first generation. This seems to be the case for the generation-in-between Kurds as well (see Toivanen 2014b: 105-113). It needs to be noted that Kurdish-speaking populations have been a racialized minority already in their societies of departure. Kurds occupy a position of the internal "other" in their home societies (except currently in Iraqi Kurdistan), which has played a role in the formulations of Kurdish identities (see Vali 1998: 84; Toivanen 2014b: 66-76). Kurds also form one of the largest refugee-originated, Muslim populations in Finland. As elsewhere, the discursive visibility of Muslims and refugees in the politicized media debates relates to how individuals and diaspora communities of Middle Eastern backgrounds (including Kurdish) have become racialized in Finland. Unfortunately, a lengthier discussion on such contextual dynamics is outside the scope of this paper (see Toivanen 2014a/2014b).

The data for this paper draw from my doctoral study that looks at the negotiations of belonging among the generation-in-between young Kurds living in Finland (Toivanen 2014b). The participants in this study belong to the "generation-in-between" that is currently aged between 20 and 30. They migrated to Finland at an early age in the 1990s and early 2000s and have grown up bilingual (or trilingual), gone through the Finnish schooling system and lived most of their lives in Finland. The data consist of 25 interviews conducted with 23 young Kurds who had migrated to Finland during their childhood and teens in the 1990s and early 2000s from Iraq, Iran and Turkey. The interviewees were aged between 19 and 28 at the time of data collection (2009–2011). All the interviewees had completed secondary education in Finland and were at least bilingual in Kurdish and Finnish. All of them had lived in Finland for more than 10 years, and they had varyingly arrived to the country between the ages of 1 and 15. I have anonymised the interviewees' names for ethical reasons.

6 Finnishness = whiteness?

The boundaries of national belonging in young Kurds' accounts include a racialized dimension – "Finnishness" is associated with lighter complexion, including fair skin colour and hair colour, thus equating "Finnishness" with "whiteness". Identifying oneself with "Finnishness" is a limited option for young Kurds mostly due to their physical appearance (see Toivanen 2014a; 2014b). Indeed, their narrations suggest that they do not seem to fit into to the idea of "white Finnishness" or to the "white landscape of Finland", to quote Laura Huttunen (2002: 130). Furthermore, "Finnishness" is contrasted with categorizations such as "immigrant" and "foreigner". Scholars have suggested that the categories of "immigrant" (*maahanmuuttaja*, in Finnish) and "foreigner" (*ulkomaalainen*) have become associated with racialized connotations in the Finnish context (Huttunen 2004: 138; Rastas 2009; Leinonen 2012).

The usage of the term "immigrant" needs to be situated within a larger discursive framework in which migrants are considered to represent a threat to the "national culture". For instance, Huttunen (2002: 13-14) has argued that there are two distinct discourses related to immigration and globalization in Finland. The first one focuses on the nation's need to open up to the surrounding world and to become more international, and it can be considered as part of a collective narrative on the role of Nordic countries in global perspective. The second discourse, in contrast, portrays immigration as a phenomenon that needs to be controlled and tamed, and the incoming migrants as objects that need to be incorporated into the "mainstream" society. Migrants are thus not seen as part of the positive internationalization of Finland, but as the unwanted side-

effect of Finland's opening up to the ever-globalizing world. The category of an "immigrant" has thus been constructed not only as different from "Finnishness" but in opposition to it (see Lehtonen, Löytty & Ruuska 2004: 261-263).

Young Kurds did not refer to themselves as "immigrants". Instead, they contested being labelled as "immigrants" on the basis of having grown up in Finland, speaking Finnish and for some having Finnish citizenship. Their encounters in the public space showed how they had been positioned as the "other" on the basis of their phenotypical features. However, one can say that there is more to these encounters than "meets the eye" (pun intended). To argue in favour of incorporating an analytical focus on in/visibility that transcends "race" and takes other dimensions into account, let us return to Shoresh's account that I referenced in the beginning of this article. Reading Shoresh's narration from an intersectional perspective, the racialization processes at play reveal a more dynamic and complex dimension. The elderly man addresses Shoresh as a "boy" and tells him not to "steal our girls". His reference to "our girls" can be interpreted as referring to the girl's ethnic background as "Finnish" and belonging to the "Finnish nation", a collectivity he seems to be identifying himself with and to some extent be protective towards. Indeed, feminist scholars have suggested that women within a nation are perceived as "symbolic border guards and as embodiments of the collectivity", which renders gender relations a relevant component in a nation's formation of self-image, and significant for the ways in which those not belonging to the nation are treated (Yuval-Davis 1997: 23). Hence, at issue is not only how the fellow passenger interprets Shoresh's and his girlfriend's phenotypical features, but also how they intersect with other attributes, in this case gender and belonging to a particular age cohort ("boy", "girl"), different from that of the fellow passenger. However impossible it is to comprehensively analyse this brief encounter and read into the elderly man's motives for his reaction, this example suggests that "in/visibilities" become constructed in relation to individuals' (perceived) social locations and how their intersecting attributes are valued.

Besides "immigrant", the term "foreigner" was a category containing a racialized connotation of non-belonging to Finland in young Kurds' accounts. The category was considered to be all encompassing in a sense that all persons deemed "foreigners" were lumped into the same group, regardless of their backgrounds and years of residence in Finland. Shilan's account shows the homogenizing effect of being labelled "foreigner" and how she associates this with a certain level of embodied visibility:

> S: Like, of course…Since I have lived here for the most of my life and sometimes I feel that damn, have I become too Finnish or what…Why then do I think like some other Kurd? And I have heard many times that I have become too Finnish, because if you speak with me on the phone, and *cannot see my face*, you cannot tell if I am Finnish or foreigner…Like we are all foreigners. I mean, if there is a Finn who comes to us, he doesn't say that you Russian, you Kurdish. *Instead he says that "you foreigners", so it is like the culture, a country that is called a "foreigner"…*
> M: So everybody is included in it?
> S: Yes, everybody, the Somalis, Russians, Kurds, Turks…
> Shilan (emphasis added)

In most cases, the category of "foreigner" was explicitly linked to embodied signifiers such as hair colour or "facial features", including complexion and eye colour. The category of "foreigner" seemed to entail a negative connotation, even when it was not associated with one's embodied attributes, as shown by Shilan's account. However, it needs to be noted that the category has been invested with new meanings when employed by young Kurds to refer to themselves. When the content was reversed, it was associated with positive meanings such as being talkative, open and courageous in contrast to being silent and shy, attributes associated with "ethnic Finns". Haikkola's study (2010) on young people of migrant parentage in Finland reveals similar tendencies.

Shilan, like many other research participants, made reference to the repetitive and continuous nature of being positioned as the "other", indicating that such experiences of everyday racism were not isolated. As Essed (2002: 207) notes, "One event triggers memories of other, similar incidents, of the beliefs surrounding the event, of behavioural coping and cognitive responses". Rebuar's account also makes reference to the regularity of such incidents ("we have these kinds of situations quite often"). Furthermore, as we shall see, his account of a brief social interaction at work shows how when he was categorized as a "foreigner" by a customer also his colleague's Finnish background was questioned. His account illustrates the effect of – for the lack of a better phrasing – "colour spill-over":

> So, we have these kinds of situations quite often, but *it's because of our hair*. But it is good that my Finnish friends, who work as […], and who are completely Finnish with dark hair, so it has happened that somebody has yelled at them: "you foreigner"… Like there was one evening when I was working with my friend and then this one man comes and he says to me: "look, you are a foreigner", and then looks at my colleague, who is blond and says, "you are maybe also a foreigner, maybe a Russian. Yes, you are a Russian". Then my colleague looked at him and said "goddammit, my granddad died in the Winter War and you tell me that I am Russian? Now get lost". Then the guy just said, oh okay, and left.
> Rebuar (emphasis added)

Rebuar's example shows that his colleague was deemed a "foreigner" through mere association with somebody else viewed as "foreigner". However, his colleague protested at being categorized as "Russian" and referred to his grandfather's participation in the Winter War. This appeared to function as a quite efficient argument on behalf of his "national belonging" to Finland, especially because the Winter War has been depicted as one of the central construction blocks in the collective memory of Finnish nation-building. The contestation of one's "Russianness", therefore, can be read against the 20th century historical constructions of Finnish national identity/ies as oppositional to "Russianness" (see Raittila 2004). This example shows the complexity of different in/visibilities (embodied and discursive) as articulated through the racializing categorizations such as "foreigner". The meanings embedded in such racializing categorizations are drawn from the larger socio-historical context in which they are articulated and from the representations of racialized groups (including both racialized minority/ies and majority/ies) in such contexts. In the narrations above, the construction of "Finnishness" as something inherently "white" demarcated the boundaries of (national) belonging.

7 Terrains of resistance and negotiation

Research on the identity formation of young people of a migrant background in Finland indicates that young people of Somali or Middle

Eastern background are differently positioned in social interactions in the public space in comparison to young people of Estonian and Russian backgrounds (Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004; Rastas 2005; Haikkola 2010; Hautaniemi 2011; Toivanen 2014a). Rastas' studies (2002, 2005) on individuals of African diaspora(s) is quite revealing in this regard. Her studies focus on international adoptees and children/adolescents who have one parent of a migrant background showing how their belonging to the category of "Finnishness" is questioned because of their darker complexions. This seems to be the case even though many of her research participants are Finnish citizens, speak Finnish as their mother language and have been raised/born in Finland[11]. Their position within the racializing categorizations locates them outside the boundaries of "Finnishness". On the other hand, studies also indicate that young people of migrant parentage have some space to contest experiences of exclusion and to find alternative ways to identify themselves (Crul, Schneider & Lelie 2010; Haikkola 2010). Similarly, young Kurds' accounts reveal situations of social interaction where the respondents had space to contest and negotiate such racializing categorizations – at least to some extent.

Rastas (2007: 134) discusses the usage of the "n-word" and demonstrates how it emerged as the primary racializing category to construct "difference" among her research participants. In the interviews she conducted with children and teenagers of African descent, the "n-word" seems to be equated with being "non-Finnish" or "less-than-Finnish". Furthermore, she notes that the word was used for individuals who were not necessarily of African descent – an observation that resonates in young Kurds' narrations. Some of the research participants had been labelled with the "n-word" during fleeting encounters with random people they had encountered at work or in public spaces like on the street. It had functioned as a way of designating somebody as "non-Finnish" and thus became equated in some cases with the categories of "foreigner" and "immigrant". These accounts also suggested consciousness of the prevailing "racial" or "ethnic" hierarchies between members of different migrant groups, and whether it was beneficial to identify with such a label or not. Hemida's narration shows how she did not contest the racist naming, but instead explained her non-reaction to the racist treatment she was subjected to with her non-belonging to "them", meaning the "Finns". In fact, she positioned herself outside the "Finnish nation" by referring to herself as a "stranger", thus partially justifying such behaviour she had encountered:

> At one point, I was working in a clothing store, and then one Finn came in and said, "*look, a nigger*. I don't want service from you", and I told him/her that I understand, it's okay and asked for my colleague. I wasn't angry at the time, everybody doesn't need to like me, and they are probably not used to it, they haven't travelled…Somehow I just tell myself that I need to understand and that not everyone needs to accept, that I am a stranger and in their country.
> Hemida (emphasis added)

Essed (2002: 204) distinguishes between racism and everyday racism to highlight that the latter concerns mundane practices that are not necessarily extreme in character, but nevertheless consequential in terms of individuals' well-being and how they make sense of their positions in society. Previous studies have also shown that there is an explicit link between the racism experienced and feelings of non-belonging to the society which migrants' children have settled (Rastas 2005; Potter & Phillips 2006; Crul, Schneider & Lelie 2010). Hemida's account of being a "stranger" in Finland despite having lived most of her life in the country possibly points towards feelings of non-belonging that stem from experiences of everyday racism. However, some interviewees described how they had contested being called the "n-word". In such instances, the interviewees' argumentation against this labelling was based on the visual premises of their "non-blackness". For example, Sirwan had resorted to such argumentation:

> I have heard such things too, somebody said that look, the niggers are letting you in and out here. I said that *you should go to the eye doctor* tomorrow, and tell him/her that you *are colour-blind, because you see me as black*, that's one thing.
> Sirwan (emphasis added)

Scholars have suggested that it is challenging to discuss skin colour as detached from migrancy in Finland, although the younger generations of migrant parentage and transnational adoptees are contesting the racialized boundaries of different categorizations (Rastas 2013). This is likely to become increasingly problematized as the growing number of Finns of migrant parentage challenges the association of "Finnishness" with "whiteness". This sort of "colouring talk" (see Rastas 2005: 156-158) and the consciousness of its politicized meaning were also evident in the interviews, as Bijar's account demonstrates. He also expressed his views on the resilience of the racialized understanding of "Finnishness", which he thought was unlikely to change any time soon:

> MT: So, you said earlier that there are some things about the appearances that set some boundaries…Can you tell more about that?
> B: *You cannot go beyond your hair colour*. The hair colour is unfortunately such a thing that even if we lived for another one hundred and ten years, Finland wouldn't change in terms of niggers. I say niggers so that you understand. The word comes from the word "Nigeria", and it's the country, so nothing bad in that sense, but nowadays it's a taboo and you are not supposed to say it.
> Bijar (emphasis added)

The use of the "n-word" is still rather common in everyday language in Finland, even though it carries an evident negative connotation and is quite widely considered to be a politically incorrect term. The participants of this study were, however, able to contest being labelled with the "n-word" by referring to their complexion. Paradoxically, it had in the first place evoked the reaction of being labelled with the derogatory term. However, one embodied feature that was frequently referred to and hard to by-pass was the hair colour. It seemed to be a "giveaway" of their non-belonging to "Finnishness" and an embodied marker signalling "visible" difference.

On the other hand, in many cases the reactions of the interlocutors changed once the respondents started to speak fluent Finnish. In this sense, it seems that the audible invisibility overcame to some extent the physical visibility and re-positioned the interviewees at least as partially belonging to Finland. Diyako's account is revealing in this regard:

> M: So, have you had other situations like that where a Finnish person…
> H: Speaks to me in English? Yes, even when I say that I speak Finnish.
> M: So have you noticed any reaction when you have started to speak in Finnish?

> H: Yes, first there is a surprised expression and a smile, like I wouldn't have expected. Because *you can see from me straight away that I have very strong Kurdish features, dark eyes, face, eyebrows*, that I wouldn't have expected you to speak such a good Finnish.
> Diyako (emphasis added)

Besides the racialized understanding of "Finnishness", language has been a central construction block of national belonging in Finland. In this sense, speaking fluent Finnish can possibly offer an alternative way to "justify" one's belonging to Finland. Besides mastering the Finnish language, the interviewees used justifications such as having lived in Finland for a considerable time and having become familiar with the "Finnish system" as an argument to counter the labelling as someone not belonging to Finland. This was particularly evident in positions that young Kurds adopted in relation to recently arrived migrants. Argash, who referred to himself as a "new Finn", presented one such example. He explained the meaning of such self-naming:

> *K: I feel myself both as "new Finn" (uussuomalainen, in Finnish) and Kurdish.*
> M: Okay, how do you understand this "new Finn"?
> K: Well, "new Finn" means that you have lived here for a long time, you know the culture in Finland, you are integrated to this society, that's a "new Finn"…Yes, if you are integrated and get along with Finns, you have completed the conscription, then you are rather a "new Finn" than an "immigrant". Because there are "immigrants", who just come to live here, don't know anything of the Finnish culture or this society, and then there are those, you understand and know about them… Like I have applied for many jobs, since I don't have any and a couple of times, I have called two places and they asked me if I am Finnish or Swedish-Finnish, and I said that neither, but maybe a "new Finn". That I have grown up here, came as a child, and that I feel like a Finn, that I am a "new Finn", not Swedish. But not originally from Finland.
> Argash

The understanding of "new Finn" seemed to include a civic notion of belonging to Finland, which in several accounts was justified on the basis of one's residence in the country and participation in Finnish society. In this regard, the justification of not being a burden to the "Finnish state", which echoed the integration discourse, provided a justification to articulate one's belonging to the country. Yet, complete belonging to the nation remained out of reach, and even when one had acquired Finnish citizenship, the physical appearances "betrayed" one's non-belonging to "Finnishness". Gavan contrasted the exclusiveness of racial belonging to the Finnish nation with the civic notion of belonging to Finland that could be acquired through citizenship:

> S: And if I have a Finnish citizenship, it is valid anywhere in the world. And if I show it, they see that I am a Finnish citizen, but *from the colour of my face and hair, they see that I am not Finnish*. It is just a paper, and for me the paper is not that important.
> M: So there are…
> S: Emotions involved, at least should be. If I say that I am Iranian, then anyone believes it, because I look like Iranian, but if I say that I am Finnish, okay, it means that you have had the Finnish citizenship, that's all. This is how they think that I cannot be Finnish with this *type of body and face and hair colour*.
> Gavan (emphasis added)

His account resonates with the articulations of belonging among young Kurds in Sweden as demonstrated by Eliassi (2010: 136). In his study, the respondents distinguished between being "Swedish on paper" (as acquired through citizenship) and "authentic Swedish", viewed as an inherited, ethnic membership to a collectivity. This is also reminiscent of Jacobson's study (1997) on young Pakistanis in Britain, who understood the citizenship as the primary criterion of civic belonging to Britishness. They contrasted it with "racial" belonging, which meant having British ancestry or "blood". The young British Pakistanis also made a third distinction evoking the cultural boundaries of Britishness that were understood as a matter of culture, values and a lifestyle that one adhered to. Similarly, such notion of civic belonging to the state and to some extent the notion of cultural belonging (for instance, in the form of mastering the Finnish language) can offer alternative spaces of belonging for Finnish citizens of migrant parentage. Yet, the racialized boundaries of national belonging in Finland as manifested in the visual lexica of non-belonging seem quite resilient.

8 Conclusion

The focus of this paper ties in with the broader themes of this special issue, which examines through different case studies how certain groups and members of collectivities become constructed as more or less "in/visible", and relatedly what sorts of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion such "in/visibilities" entail. The paper contributes to an understanding of the complexity of racialization processes as experienced by individuals who have lived in Finland through their childhood and teenage years into adulthood, and who are part of the Kurdish diaspora movements originating in the Middle-East region.
More specifically, this study focused on the racializing categorizations and experiences of everyday racism as present in the accounts of generation-in-between Kurds. The research participants talked about categories such as "foreigner", "immigrant" and the "n-word" that they had been subjected to in fleeting encounters in the public space or at work. In such racialized encounters, their non-belonging to Finland became articulated and questioned through what I have referred to as the "visual lexica of belonging". The logic of "racial" belonging to the collectivity of "Finns" and the understanding of this as being inherently about being "white" becomes evident, when we pay attention to how the visual lexica of belonging are employed to construct certain groups and individuals as more visible than others in everyday interactions.

This study shows that the visible embodied features, including skin complexion, hair colour and other phenotypical features function as significant markers of belonging and non-belonging to the "Finnish nation". Such phenotypical features signal young Kurds' non-belonging to the collectivity of "Finns", regardless of their duration of residence, language skills and citizenship status in Finland. However, young Kurds' accounts show that there is some space to contest racializing categorizations and to re-negotiate the meanings of "Finnishness" either through their membership in the community of Finnish-speakers or through civic notions of belonging to the state. The study also raises questions over the shifting understandings of "Finnishness" and how the individuals not deemed to belong to the "Finnish nation" stretch the boundaries and give new meanings to "Finnishness".

This paper argues in favour of including an analytical focus on different "invisibilities" as part of migration scholarship that deals with how individuals and groups become racialized by people they

encounter in everyday, mundane situations of interaction. I do not approach visibility, however, merely in terms of "race" or one's alleged racial belonging. The audible visibility through language use and discursive visibility at the level of representation are intertwined with how certain groups come to be constructed as more "visible" than others in everyday encounters and social interaction situations. Relatedly, this observation makes it critical to ponder over the interconnections between belonging and the mundane experiences of racism and how the latter play out in the everyday lives of individuals of migrant parentage living in the Nordic societies.

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Notes

1 I have employed Kurdish pseudonyms to anonymise the interviewees.
2 I will contextualize this encounter and analyse the meanings of such visibility more lengthily in the section on "whiteness", "Finnishness" and the visual lexica of belonging.
3 By the term 'generation-in-between', I refer to individuals, who have migrated in their childhood and during their teenage years and grown up in the society of settlement (see Alitolppa-Niitamo 2004).
4 The theme of "visibility" did not constitute one of the interview themes.
5 I refer to the independent states of Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland.
6 The first conference on the study of "whiteness" in the Nordic countries was organised in October 2013 at the University of Turku (Finland). It was titled "Traveling whiteness: interchanges in the study of whiteness".
7 I have chosen to use quotation marks, when speaking of West and East, thus referring to the social construction of such entities that commonly are used to refer to cultures and civilisations rather than geographical locations.
8 Anttonen (2005: 130-133) also discusses the westward movement of "Finnishness".
9 These namely deal with the political ramifications of employing such racializing terms with the unintended consequence of re-enforcing them.
10 Nagel & Staeheli (2008: 83) refer to the "'visual lexicon' of cultural difference" to discuss the visible presence of minority groups in the public sphere and how it relates to interpretations on their integration and belonging in the United Kingdom.
11 Ruohio's (2009) research on international adoptees in Finland reveals similar findings.

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