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RESEARCHING IN/VISIBILITY IN THE NORDIC CONTEXT:
Theoretical and empirical views

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1 Introduction

The goal of this special issue of the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* is to provide insights into the ways in which visibility and invisibility of migrants (or those *perceived* as migrants) to and from the Nordic countries can be understood theoretically and empirically. Scholars studying migrants and minorities have employed the terms "visible" and "invisible" in a variety of ways. In the North American context, researchers often use the terms in a descriptive manner (in contrast to an analytical use) when referring to various groups of ethnic or racial minorities or persons of migrant background. In the European context, on the other hand, the concepts of "visibility" and "invisibility" are more rarely employed by scholars, who are more inclined to use terms such as "ethnicity", "nationality" or "culture" when making distinctions between groups of people based on their (supposed) origins. Nevertheless, European scholars – and to a lesser degree, Nordic scholars – have also utilized the vocabulary of in/visibility in different contexts, as we will show in this introduction. What seems to be missing, however, is a broader theoretical consideration of the usefulness of the term in/visibility when researching migrants and minority groups. We wish to contribute to this discussion in this special issue, focusing on the Nordic context.

Not only are the terms "visible" and "invisible" used varyingly in different scholarly traditions, but state institutions and the media also make frequent use of the terms, albeit mainly in the North American context. The diffuse use of the term makes the task of defining in/visibility in a comprehensive manner rather challenging, perhaps even impossible, not least because the words carry different meanings and connotations in different national and linguistic settings. Nevertheless, we argue that an *analytical* focus on how certain groups and individuals become "visible" or "invisible", for example in daily encounters with persons representing the "majority", can shed light on processes of racialization in the Nordic context. Following Miles (1994: 109–114), we understand racialization as a social process through which (real or imagined) embodied and biological features become associated with certain meanings and values. This process results in individuals and groups being assigned to certain identity categories, which mark them as different from the "majority" and influence their everyday life in society.

This special issue aims to critically assess the analytical purchase of the term in/visibility in understanding migration-related phenomena in the Nordic context. We argue that the focus on in/visibility can help analyse how various processes of racialization and practices of "othering" come about and manifest themselves in Nordic societies. The four articles examine in/visibility in different realms: in personal relationships and everyday encounters between individuals (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Toivanen 2014), in events organized in the public sphere (Juul 2014) and at the level of media debates (Huhta 2014). By looking at these various realms, the special issue highlights how racialization is a significant mechanism through which certain groups of people are rendered more or less in/visible. This applies also to the Nordic context, where "race" has been a sensitive topic in scholarship on migration, as the recent debate between Annika Rabo and Rikke Andreassen in the *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* (2014) testifies. Following Andreassen, we maintain that a focus on "ethnicity" or "culture" fails to explain the social realities and inequities that many groups of migrants and minorities face in the contemporary Nordic region. Our focus on in/visibility will illuminate how "race", understood as a socially constructed category, influences group position in Nordic societies in a forceful way – both in the case of groups that are racialized as visible (Toivanen 2014) and in the case of privileged individuals who due to their "whiteness" can pass as "one of us" in everyday interactions (Guðjónsdóttir 2014).

While we highlight the importance of analysing how individuals' physical characteristics – or, to be more precise, the values and meanings associated with these characteristics – influence their

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everyday life in Nordic societies, we also argue that the analytical focus on in/visibility enables scholars to flesh out how ideas attached to embodied features alone do not always explain why individuals are seen as different from/similar to the "majority". The articles show that becoming and being in/visible can also be based on markers of difference such as class status (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Huhta 2014) or speaking a foreign language or having an accent (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Toivanen 2014). An analysis of how these different categories of difference/sameness are intertwined allows scholars to better capture the complexity of racialization processes and how they play out in individuals' everyday lives. Furthermore, we do not wish to simply juxtapose visibility with invisibility – to claim that a person automatically is one but not the other. Instead, we see these concepts located on a continuum: a person who in one context is invisible may become visible in the next, and vice versa (for example, due to the person's accent, see Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Toivanen 2014). In other words, the special issue reveals how the processes through which individuals and groups become in/visible are contextual, shifting in time and in place (see also Leinonen 2012). Therefore, a study of in/visibility benefits from an intersectional approach. This means looking at how attributes such as "race", gender, nationality and class intertwine to produce certain social locations for individuals in particular socio-historical contexts (Yuval-Davis 2011).

Finally, the issue also emphasizes the importance of bringing out the perspective *from which* in/visibility is analysed. While it is easy to assume that the "majority" possesses the power to categorize people as visible or invisible, it is also important to examine how migrants and minorities strive to influence their own in/visibility, for example, in the public sphere (Juul 2014) or use it in strategic ways to their advantage (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Huhta 2014).

In this Introduction, we will briefly discuss the ways in which scholars have utilized the concept of in/visibility in research on migrants and ethnic or racial minorities. While our main focus is on the Nordic context, we will provide examples from both North American and European scholarly literature. As the terms "visibility" and "invisibility" have been used quite loosely in research and often without any clear conceptual definition, an exhaustive unearthing of the literature using the concepts is not possible nor even desirable. Instead, our main focus will be on scholarship that is central to our main arguments; in other words, the scholarship that engages with debates on migrants' and other minorities' racialized belongings.

2 Mapping racialized in/visibilities

As the origins of the words illustrate, visibility and invisibility are closely tied to the physical and the embodied, to something that can be seen (or not seen) because of visual cues (or lack thereof). As early as in 1903, W.E.B. Du Bois formulated: "It is a peculiar sensation, (…) this sense of always looking at one's self *through the eyes of others*, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 9, italics added). Du Bois coined the term "double-consciousness" to describe the feeling of being an object of the "white gaze" that made him aware of his "two-ness" as both "American" and "African" (see Smith 2004). His observation exemplifies how it feels to become an object of a racialized gaze, which focuses on physical characteristics of a human being, observable through visual cues, and attaches certain ideas about (non)belonging to these characteristics. Du Bois's quote thus also illustrates how seeing is never an objective process – as we see something, we automatically attach a meaning and value to the object of our gaze. What we see and how we interpret what we see are acts tied to the socio-historical context in which we live (e.g. Classen 1997). Consequently, how we observe, understand and value certain bodily features – such as skin colour – is a socially constructed process. Categories attached to different groups of people as a result evoke feelings of sameness or difference and thus influence the way we make sense of the social world surrounding us. Becoming or being in/visible thus closely relates to the process of racialization.

Nevertheless, in scholarship on migration and ethnic or racial minorities, the word in/visibility has often been used in a way that does not explicitly bring out this close connection between racialization processes and the ways in which people become in/visible in different kinds of social situations. In fact, in the United States, for example, scholars often employ the term in/visibility but fail to provide a clear definition for the concept. In one of the earliest studies using the concept, Charlotte Erickson's 1972 study *Invisible Immigrants* on English and Scottish migrants in the nineteenth century United States, invisibility was associated with being a white European migrant group that quickly "melted" into the "mainstream" society. More recently, in 1999, William E. Van Vugt also viewed British migrants in the United States as invisible because "they could blend in readily with other Americans and engage more immediately in social and civic affairs" (p. 3). In both of these studies, the concept "invisible migrant" went undefined, but in reality the scholars used it to refer to white and English-speaking migrants who due to these characteristics were able to absorb quickly into the U.S. society – which the authors imagined as white and English-speaking.

These two examples highlight how scholars utilizing the vocabulary of in/visibility need to clarify how they understand the concept. In Erickson's and Van Vugt's studies, in/visibility was associated with phenotypical and linguistic attributes that afforded British migrants a high position in the racial hierarchy of the United States. By doing so, the studies represented "whiteness" as an un-problematized normality and positioned those individuals or groups who deviated from the norm as visible – and also perhaps "inassimilable" – in the U.S. society. There is, of course, a long history of scholarship on how belonging is entwined with changing ideas regarding "races" in the U.S. context. Historians have analysed how the "visual lexicon" of who can be part of the "American nation" has changed over the course of the twentieth century (e.g. Jacobson 2001) – or how it has, in many cases, stayed surprisingly stagnant, considering the diverse population of the United States. Scholars of Asian American Studies, for example, have shown how people of Asian origin are continually categorized as culturally and racially other, as the "foreigner-within", due to physical differences from the "white" majority (Lowe 1996). Eleanor Ty (2004: 25), who has studied narratives of Asian Americans trying to carve out identities for themselves within the discursive and ideological space which labels them as a "visible minority", shows that this labelling results in persons becoming "psychically and socially marked as other, as visibly different, and less than the norm, which is white." This "white normality" is reproduced not only in everyday encounters but also, for example, in the popular media: in who gets to represent "Americans" in literature, movies and video games (Ho 2011; Leonard 2003; Szmańko 2008).

In the European context, scholars in migration and minority studies have employed the terms visibility and invisibility less frequently. When using these terms, researchers have focused on Muslim populations in Europe and their growing visibility in the public space. In addition, the increasing visibility of Muslim minorities in debates over migration and belonging has attracted scholars'

attention. Research has revealed how powerful the images of "threatening" Islam are in public consciousness in Europe (AlSayyad & Castells 2002; Goldberg 2008: 163-169; Göle 2011; Jonker & Amiraux 2006; Yılmaz & Aykaç 2011). For example, the racialization of Muslim symbols such as the headscarf has attracted scholars' attention (Al-Saji 2010). Particularly since September 11, 2001, Islam and Muslims have become hypervisible in public debates and media coverage, to the degree that the whole concept of a "migrant" has often been equated with stereotypical images regarding "Muslims" (Allievi 2005).

However, despite the increasing public and scholarly focus on the visibility of Muslims in European societies, the term "in/visibility" is more rarely used by European researchers in reference to migrants, as compared to North American scholarship. The relative scarcity in the use of the term may be related to the association of the term "visibility" of human beings with the notion of "race" – with being visible or invisible in racial terms. David Theo Golberg (2008: 158) convincingly argues that in post-World War II Europe, "race has been rendered invisible, untouchable", as the Holocaust has been the (sole) reference point for the word "race". "Race" is something that belongs to the past; it is "unmentionable, unspeakable if not as a reference to an antisemitism of the past that cannot presently be allowed to revive" (ibid). The differing usage of in/visibility in European and North American scholarship may thus be at least partially explained by the hesitancy to talk about "race" in Europe. While scholars have analysed visible signs of religious affiliation (such as the Muslim headscarf) as symbols signalling "otherness", the ways in which people are grouped and viewed differently due to their visible physical characteristics is a topic that many European scholars still avoid writing about. An exception to this is scholarship on racism in European societies, which points out more explicitly how physical attributes such as one's skin colour influence individuals' everyday life. In particular, scholars studying migrants and minorities from a generational perspective have noted that many groups of children and grandchildren of migrants face exclusionary practices and discrimination on the basis of their physical characteristics. While they may attempt to claim belonging based on their citizenship, language skills and other attributes, their "racial belonging" is still questioned in everyday interactions. This has been demonstrated also by many Nordic scholars (Haikkola 2010; Hübinette & Tigervall 2009; Rastas 2005; Sawyer 2002; Toivanen 2014).

However, in the Nordic context, too, there are opposing views on whether the word "race" should be incorporated into scholarly vocabulary, as the debate between Rabo and Andreassen (2014) exemplifies. While each Nordic country has a distinct history of nation-state formation, scholars have also shown that the way the Nordic nations imagine themselves relies on ideas of cultural, religious and (to a certain extent) linguistic homogeneity (e.g. Brochmann & Djuve 2013; Häkkinen & Tervonen 2004; Kivisto & Wahlbeck 2013; Mulinari et al. 2009). Nonetheless, Nordic scholars are increasingly paying attention to how ideas regarding "race" have influenced the construction of "nationhood" over time (Blaagard 2006; Keskinen et al. 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012; Rastas 2004; Sawyer 2000, 2002; Urponen 2010). In addition, recent studies, including some included in this issue, show that an individual's belonging to the nation may be questioned due to her or his visible physical characteristics (Hübinette & Tigervall 2009; Ruohio 2009; Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Toivanen 2014). Thus, even if choosing not to employ the term "race" as part of one's theoretical vocabulary, the fact remains that people's lives in the Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe are influenced by the way they are "seen" by the majority. "Racial" meanings can be implicitly conveyed as the unspoken subtext in terms such as "ethnicity", "immigrant" or "refugee". The association of these categories with "non-white bodies" and "non-Western origins" has been identified by many scholars (e.g. Silverman 1992; Silverstein 2005; White 2002). For example, Marianne Gullestad (2002: 50) notes that in Norway, the term *innvandrer* ("migrant") typically invokes images of persons who have a "'Third World' origin, different values from the majority, 'dark skin'". Similarly, Finnish scholars have pointed out that "migrants" are seen in Finland as a uniform, undifferentiated mass, originating from non-Western parts of the world and associated with pre-modern gender and family systems (e.g. Huttunen 2004; Rastas 2005; Säävälä 2009; Tuori 2007; Vuori 2009).

Furthermore, several researchers have also started to inquire how "whiteness" operates in the Nordic context (Blaagard 2006; Hübinette & Lundström 2011; Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012), inspired by critical race and whiteness studies, a field that was initiated in the United States in the 1990s as a reaction against conservative and colour-blind politics of the time. Critical whiteness scholars argue that "whiteness" is the invisible norm against which others are defined and judged, and their goal is to analyse whiteness as a socially constructed category and as a system of privilege "mapped on the domination of 'others' – that is, people of color" (Andersen 2003: 24). Whiteness scholars have mainly focused on English-speaking countries, in particular the United States. However, the concept also has analytical value in the Nordic region, which is, as argued by Blaagard (2006: 1) "in several ways the epitome of whiteness in the Western and Nordic European consciousness". It is important, however, not to simply import U.S.-based theories into the Nordic context: whiteness operates differently in varying historical and societal circumstances. While U.S. discussions have revolved mainly around the black–white binary, the situation is different in the Nordic countries and elsewhere in Europe. As Gabriele Griffin and Rosi Braidotti argue (2002: 227), "(t)he black–white dynamic leaves untouched the whole issue of diversity among groups seemingly of one color, the intra-group differences that account for many of the most serious racial and ethnicized conflicts in Europe." Whiteness is a socially constructed category just like any other racial category: different groups of European migrants, for example, are not equally "white" or "assimilable" (McDowell 2008). Consequently, it would be a simplification to argue that being regarded as "white" equals being "invisible" in Nordic societies.

We recognize that the relationship between in/visibility and racialization processes is very complex. This is evidenced by the articles included in this issue that show how ideas regarding "race" do not alone determine who ends up being labelled as visible and who does not. For example, while many groups of migrants can be considered "privileged" partly due to their perceived "whiteness", their position in society is not simply determined by their skin colour but also by other factors such as their nationality, class status and language skills (Leinonen 2012; Guðjónsdóttir 2014). The question of "audible visibility" will be explored in this issue by Guðjónsdóttir (2014) and Toivanen (2014). They highlight how language use may influence an individual's in/visibility in everyday encounters, and this visibility can be valued positively or negatively depending on factors such as the nationality and class status of the person in question (see also O'Connor 2010; Leinonen 2012; Toivanen 2013). In other words, the equation of one's "racial" belonging with visually observable features provides insufficient tools to analytically understand the complexity of different racialization processes through which certain groups and individuals become marked as more or less visible. This highlights the need to study in/visibility intersectionally: a person becomes

visible in everyday encounters, in public spaces and also in public debates because of an intertwined set of factors, such as her or his nationality, language skills and public behaviour. This is a question that has been less studied by scholars, and it will be explored in the articles included in this issue (Guðjónsdóttir 2014; Huhta 2014; Juul 2014; Toivanen 2014). Together, the papers highlight how in/visibility of migrants and minorities should be understood as a continuum rather than as a dichotomy: not only is group in/visibility tied to specific socio-historical circumstances but also each individual's in/visibility may vary according to the social setting that the person occupies.

This shifting nature of in/visibility draws attention to the question of power: who is in the position to observe and label someone as different or similar, and who are the objects of observing and labelling. The relationship between power and in/visibility is a complex one. Writing about the United States, bell hooks (1989) has, for example, pointed to the "hypervisibility" of racialized groups as cultural and racial stereotypes and their simultaneous invisibility and "powerlessness" in society and culture (see also Yamamoto 1999). In other words, the physical visibility of migrant/minority bodies can result in structural invisibility and inability to influence stereotypes and representations regarding one's own group.

Furthermore, scholars using the vocabulary of in/visibility tend to see visibility as an "imposed" condition – as something that is undesirable for those who are labelled as visible, whether in everyday encounters or in public debates. However, in some cases, visibility may be a source of positive distinction. An example of "positive visibility" can be found in Haikkola's study (2010) of young people of migrant background in Finland, who despite having grown up in the country still use the category of a "foreigner" to distinguish themselves from "Finns". As their belonging to Finland is often questioned in everyday interactions, they choose to associate positive characteristics with being a visible "foreigner" in Finland. These positive characteristics included, for example, being sociable and having closer family relations than those belonging to the "majority". Guðjónsdóttir (2014) shows how a privileged group of migrants, Icelanders in Norway, strategically accentuate their national origin in social interactions because being an Icelandic person creates invariably positive reactions among Norwegians. Thus, while Icelandic migrants may become visible in everyday situations, for example, through their language use, this visibility is a positive quality for this group of migrants when it is combined with a "desired" nationality.

It is thus important to remember that migrants and minorities can, at least to a certain degree, also contest or downplay the identities imposed on them or use them to their advantage. Certain kinds of in/visibilities can be performed (cf. Butler 1990) and strategically played out by migrants or those perceived as migrants, if that is seen as benefiting the individual or community. For instance, in her research on the visibility of Muslims in Europe, Göle (2011: 387) approaches visibility as a form of agency that can be performative in the case of "culture, aesthetic forms, dress codes, or architectural genres". Efforts to emphasize one's visibility can be aimed at claiming recognition in the public space through manifestations of difference. Thus, paying attention to the performative dimension of in/visibility allows the analysis of different forms of agency that individuals and groups have when making claims for greater public visibility, when trying to control group's public image or when trying to remain invisible from the "public eye" (Fortier 2003; Huhta 2014; Juul 2014). As these examples suggest, employing the term in/visibility is invested with ambivalence that the researcher has to deal with. Becoming or being in/visible does not simply suggest that the person or group has been imposed to (negative) visibility in the form of harmful stereotypes and representations. In/visibility can also be understood in connection to claiming recognition in society, or as Brighenti (2007: 329) puts it: "recognition is a form of social visibility, with crucial consequences on the relation between minority groups and the mainstream".

Thus, it is important to examine the different forms of agency that individuals and communities possess when they claim recognition in society, for example, through visible displays of their origins in the public sphere (Juul 2014) or through active attempts to control the group's public image in the media (Huhta 2014). It is also important to note that there may be significant disagreements within migrant communities or minority groups about the exact nature of the desired in/visibility. For example, political and religious frictions may create tensions within communities (Huhta 2014), and these frictions can also be transnational in scope, as migrants and those remaining in the home country may have different understandings of how to construct desired in/visibility in the public and/or private sphere (Juul 2014). Together, the articles highlight how in/visibility is a condition that is sometimes imposed on migrants and minorities, for example, in the media or in everyday interactions with persons belonging to the majority; in other instances, it is something that the individuals or the groups strive for.

3 The contents of the special issue

The articles included in this issue focus on the question of in/visibility through four different cases: Finnish migrants in the early twentieth century United States (Huhta), Icelandic migrants in Norway (Guðjónsdóttir), Serbian Vlachs in Denmark (Juul) and Kurds in Finland (Toivanen). The contributors represent various fields of study, including anthropology, geography, history and sociology. They also employ various research methods including archival research, interviewing and participant observation. This interdisciplinary set of articles sheds light on the social processes through which individuals and groups become in/visible in different realms, such as the media and the public space, and highlight how there are various actors and audiences involved in these processes. The articles show that racialization is a significant mechanism in rendering people in/visible in the Nordic context, but that "race" alone does not explain why certain groups are more in/visible than others. Finally, the articles highlight the deeply contextual nature of in/visibility: the processes through which certain groups become more or less visible are always tied to the specific socio-historical contexts in which they occur.

Aleksi Huhta's paper examines debates on the visibility of Finnish migrants in the U.S. and Finnish American press after the strike that occurred in 1907 in the Mesabi Range in Minnesota. His article, titled "Debating visibility: race and visibility in the Finnish-American press in 1908", analyses how different groups of Finnish migrants tried to change the negative public image that Finns had in the English-language press after the strike, in which Finns had been the most active group. The paper shows how there were deep fractions within the migrant community along political and religious lines, and therefore, there was no single understanding of what constitutes "desired visibility" of Finns. Moreover, the paper shows that Finns' worry about their public image in the United States contained concerns about their "racial" position; at the same time, the way they understood "race" was not only about "biological" origins but also about ideas regarding the group's "civilizational" level, its class status and its behaviour in the public space.

Guðbjört Guðjónsdóttir's paper, "'We blend in with the crowd but they don't' – (In)visibility and Icelandic migrants in Norway", contributes to the growing field of whiteness studies in the Nordic region. Her paper focuses on Icelandic migrants in Norway in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis and looks at how they construct migrant belonging through racialization. Her paper illustrates that migrants from Iceland often chose to display their "non-Norwegianness", as being an Icelander evoked positive stereotypes among members of the host society. Their advantageous national origin, combined with perceived visual, cultural and ancestral similarities with the "white mainstream", brought about certain privileges, such as preferential treatment in the housing market. In short, her paper skilfully shows how "whiteness" intersects with class, nationality and language to produce in/visibility and certain privileges for Icelandic migrants.

Kristine Juul's paper "Performing belonging; celebrating invisibility? The role of festivities among migrants of Serbian origin in Denmark and Serbia" discusses the performative dimension of in/visibility. She approaches the topic through the case of Serbian Vlach migrants in Denmark and their efforts to become more or less visible in the public space. On the one hand, her paper shows how Serbian Vlachs celebrate their invisibility in Danish society, which they interpret as a sign of successful integration. On the other hand, the Serbian Vlach community strategically displays certain (easily palatable) cultural traditions in the public space through public celebrations to showcase their belonging to Danish society. Juul's paper also analyses the question of in/visibility within the transnational Serbian Vlach community. She demonstrates how migrants organize highly visible celebrations in the home villages to display their success stories. These celebrations are kept invisible from the Danish public and simultaneously build hierarchies within the transnational community, as those remaining in the home country cannot afford to fully participate in the extravagant festivities.

Mari Toivanen's paper, "The visual lexica of (national) belonging and non-belonging in the accounts of young Kurds in Finland", argues in favour of including an analytical focus on in/visibility to gain insights into the racialization processes in the Finnish context. Her study illustrates how the racializing categorizations experienced by young Kurds in everyday encounters convey an understanding of the boundaries of national belonging and "Finnishness" as "white". Her paper looks at different visibilities as manifested in racializing categorizations and what kind of visual lexica of belonging they suggest in the Finnish context. Furthermore, her study suggests that there are alternative spaces of belonging that transcend the racialized understanding of "Finnishness" as "white", thus pointing towards agency possessed by young Kurds in negotiating belonging in Finland.

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Mari Toivanen received her Master's Degree from Paris IV Sorbonne in 2008 and her Doctoral Degree from the Department of Social Research at the University of Turku in 2014. Toivanen's Ph.D. research focused on various aspects of negotiating belonging among young Kurds in Finland, thus contributing to the growing body of academic literature on identity issues among young adults with migrant background in northern Europe. Her research interests include belonging, home, transnationalism, Kurdish diaspora and migrant generations. Currently, Toivanen is a Coordinator in the Network for Research on Multiculturalism and Societal Interaction (University of Turku, Finland).

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