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Gray Racialization of White Immigrants: The Polish Worker in Norway

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

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ABSTRACT

The literature on racialization has typically focused on the situation of people of color in the Western world. In this article, we explore the analytical value of extending the concept of racialization to analyze symbolic boundaries that rely on and fortify the ascription of the specific skills and identities of *white* immigrants. The discussion builds on a review of the emerging literature on Polish immigrants in Norway since 2004. It reveals other everyday experiences of Poles and how they see themselves – and how others see them – differently compared to Norwegians and other immigrants and minorities. We examine how these processes of identity ascription are rooted in the Poles' position as 'labor migrants' in predominantly low-waged and low-skilled segments of the Norwegian labor market. We also demonstrate how their location in the productive structure has far-reaching implications that work to construct symbolic boundaries, setting the Polish migrant apart from mainstream Norwegian society. The conclusion suggests a modified racialization concept, 'gray racialization', to conceptualize the discriminatory situation of the Poles as an immigrant and minority population, which we find to better allow for an understanding of power relations and social inequalities than its conceptual alternatives.

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INTRODUCTION

A pioneering work in American migration studies is 'The Polish Peasant in Europe and America' by Chicago sociologists Thomas and Znaniecki, who wrote it in the early 1900s when biological race science dominated Europe and the US (1984 [1918–1920]). Thomas and Znaniecki's analysis of the situation of Polish migrants studied the organization and disorganization of the Polish community without focusing on racial dynamics. Other studies of the same period in the US and Europe, however, show that a broadly shared racial lens influenced the view of Poles and other immigrants from eastern and southern parts of Europe (Kushner 2008; Meer 2019; Ware & Back 2002). These immigrants were ranked according to their assumed race and place in a hierarchy of nations that rated Southern and Eastern Europeans lower than Northern Europeans and the English. This was when, in Europe, race was used to characterize the culture and character of nations, and not only supposedly biologically determined races, for instance, as evidenced in the Nazi-German campaign against Slavic Europe. The Poles, representing both immigrant and minority groups but the majority within their 'own' nation, illustrate the variety in how we – both in lay, political, and academic discourses – conceptualize a group's collective identities and experiences in larger society.

The bifurcation of the study of immigrants and minorities has been institutionalized by establishing migration and racial studies as separate albeit interdisciplinary, research traditions, with the former more dominant in Europe and the latter in the US. However, since the 1990s, there have been frequent suggestions from the US sociologists and European and Nordic migration researchers that the interdisciplinary field of migration studies should relate more explicitly to the sociology of race, ethnicity, and nationalism (Amiraux & Simon 2006; Keskinen & Andreassen 2017; Sáenz & Douglas 2015). In this article, we analyze the case of Poles in Norway, which we observe as a perfect example of the analytical benefits of integrating migration, minority, and race studies, even more so, as the case also relates to the emerging interest in 'white' immigrant minorities and their everyday experiences. As will be shown below, accumulating research on white Polish migrants in Norway has shown that many white Polish migrants experience degrading behavior and negative stereotypes, and that employers and others in the ethnic majority group seem to operate with status hierarchies and stereotypes that are parallel to those experienced by nonwhite minorities. We specifically discuss the extent to which hitherto underused theories of racialization and whiteness may be useful for analyzing how these immigrants from Poland are ascribed specific and one-dimensional skills, moralities, and identities.

The article is organized into four sections. First, we outline some central tenets in the racialization and whiteness literature. Second, we draw on the growing empirical post-2004 research on Poles as migrant workers to show how they have other everyday experiences, and also are seen – and see themselves – as different compared with Norwegians and other immigrants and minorities. Thereafter, in the third section, we argue that this produces symbolic boundaries that are traceable to their marginalized position in the labor market as low-skilled and low-waged labor, making a connection between social and symbolic boundaries. In the fourth and final section, we suggest a modified racialization concept, 'gray racialization', to conceptualize the discrimination of the Poles as immigrants and minority populations.

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I – RACIALIZATION AND WHITENESS THEORIES

Numerous scholars have noted a family resemblance between the concepts of race and ethnicity (Brubaker 2009; Hall 2017; Knowles 2003). Both concepts refer to social boundaries between in-groups and out-groups and the resulting symbolic boundaries that work to generate collectivities separating 'insiders' from 'outsiders'. Race in the 19th and early 20th centuries signified assumptions of behavioral sameness within broad and hierarchically ordered categories of humans, often rooted in theories of biological essentialism. However, today, it refers to social difference and inequality, as signified by skin color and/or phenotype. The concept of ethnicity refers variously to faith in common ancestry, common cultural symbols and social practices, and/or social boundary production between groups.

The history of slavery and immigration is pivotal to the respective uses of race and ethnicity as categories pinpointing bodily versus ancestry-related types of difference in the US social sciences. In European social sciences, the earlier dominance of ethnicity as a category of difference in analysis of migration and diversity is now increasingly confronted by theories of race and racialization. Among the reasons why migration and diversity scholars in Scandinavia now turn more often to theories of race, racism, and racialization is that theories of ethnicity rarely attend to the unequal definitional power of majority and minority groups. For scholars focusing on power relations, the scientific vocabulary of race, racism, and racialization more resembles the language of class in its common attention to how master categories of difference structure social space and interaction.

The concepts of race and ethnicity are thus categories pointing at slightly different but overlapping collectivities in an increasingly complex world marked by migration. The related concepts of racialization and ethnicization pinpoint processes that result in the hardening of symbolic boundaries and hierarchies between groups. Citizens start to interpret each other as dominantly different and/or unequal based on their ethnicity and phenotype, and this marks social interaction and inequality structures in society as a whole or in more restricted arenas or institutions, such as the media, neighborhoods, education, and workplaces.

RACIALIZATION OF WHAT?

One of the founding definitions in British racialization studies is that racialization refers to 'those instances where social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human *biological* characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities' (Miles, cited in Murji & Solomos 2008: 11). Although phenotype seems to be the prime signifier of difference in this early definition, Miles (2009: 190) also included *invented somatic (and cultural)* variations as vehicles of racialization. Another central British race theorist, Hall (2017), similarly argued that race was a gliding signifier, implying that the concrete meanings of race varied across space and time. However, much of the empirical work of Hall and his former colleagues at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (i.e., Gilroy 1987) focused on black citizens of Caribbean background. This specific empirical focus led other researchers to criticize them for not including other empirical examples, such as Muslims and Asians, in their analysis (Modood 1992; see also Alexander 2009). In Scandinavia, social scientists who have used racism and racialization theory in analysis of migration-related diversity and inequality (Gullestad 2002; Hervik 2019; Mulinari & Neergård 2017) have also mainly focused on nonwhite and/or Muslim immigrants and descendants.

In addition to the debates on whether racialization refers mainly to somatic characteristics and nonwhite minorities, another central debate concerns whether the concept of racialization mainly refers to empirical cases in which social structure and categorization of differences *previously was not marked* by racial meaning (cf. Omi & Winant 2015: 109–112). If racialization signifies the process through which *new* categories of citizens are ascribed race-like qualities (ordered hierarchically and ascribed essentialist and monolithic identities determined by ascribed identities), this opens up the concept for use in analyzing a broader sample of immigrant minorities. In Britain, Fox, Moroşanu, and Szilassy (2012: 681) stated that 'racialization occurs when the category of race is invoked and evoked in discursive and institutional practices to interpret, order, and indeed structure social relations'. That race is invoked and evoked refers to individuals being ascribed race-like qualities and not necessarily to the explicit use of the concept of race. To review the situation for groups not previously racialized, we must therefore pay close attention to whether race-like qualities, such as specific skills, moralities, and inherent cultural preferences, are ascribed to them.

Several British racialization researchers (e.g., Kushner 2008; Nayak 2008) thus agree that it is the social process of racialization itself – racial meaning being encoded into social relations and categorization of difference – that is centrally important. Reference to somatic difference is not a necessary condition for viewing social relations as racialized. Indicators such as changes in the law, media portrayals, everyday interactions, and general opinions are equally central to the potential racialization of immigrant minority groups. This opens up an extension of the racialization concept to analyze minority groups other than those defined by phenotype characteristics, including white immigrants such as the Poles discussed in this article.

SHADES OF WHITENESS

Whiteness theory developed as a branch of US race and racism theory in the 1990s when scholars, such as Frankenberg (2009) and Roediger (2009), started to theorize whiteness as the unspoken normative and hegemonic center for categorization of ethnic and racial others and for the representation of national culture. In one of the early adaptations and revisions of the whiteness perspective from the US to Europe, Ware and Back (2002) warned against tendencies to freeze the whiteness concept as a racial category when one should instead pay more attention to social relations and intersections with class and gender differences, a position developed further in recent whiteness studies (Garner 2017; Hughey & Byrd 2013). We demonstrate that this is imperative for understanding the racialization processes of the Poles in Norway.

Nordic scholars, inspired by the American whiteness studies tradition, have argued that broadly shared and deep-seated cultural ideas of the Nordic nations lie behind how immigrants and ethnic/racial minorities are interpreted and treated in political discourse and social interaction (cf. Lundström & Teitelbaum 2017). In the US, the norm of whiteness refers back to the Anglo-American occupation of the country and to whites' self-ascribed superiority toward native tribes, African Americans, and immigrants from other parts of the world. In the Nordic countries, scholars have argued in parallel that the norm of whiteness relates to the Nordic history of racial science, the supposed primacy of the Northern type in racial hierarchies, and contemporary images of the Northern region as being superior regarding welfare, democracy, and gender equality (Hübinette & Lundström 2014; Keskinen & Andreassen 2017).

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Another theme in the US literature on whiteness is how whiteness, like the general category of race, is fluid and changes references over time. Research on the identity work of young people in diverse youth arenas in Norway in the 1990s showed that everyday terms like 'foreigners', 'immigrants', 'potatoes', and 'over-integrated' were impregnated with ethnic and racial references. More than 25 years ago, these terms referred to a mix of visible, behavioral, and cultural differences used to distinguish people with immigrant backgrounds from white-majority Norwegians (Andersson 2005). Contemporary research on how white Swedish and Icelandic immigrants in Norway see themselves and are represented in the media and politics shows that they neither tend to be represented as 'real immigrants' nor tend to see themselves as such (Guðjónsdóttir & Loftsdóttir 2017; Tolgenbakk 2014). Their whiteness safeguards them from being included in the immigrant category, which is typically associated with nonwhiteness and having a background from outside Europe. However, others may find themselves in a more ambiguous position in the Nordic hierarchy of ethnicities and nationalities. One important case in the Nordic context is the Sami population, a minority but not an immigrant population. They have experienced, and still experience, systematic discrimination and outright racism that have been ascribed to their ethnicity and, more or less explicitly accentuated, their ascribed phenotypical differences from the white Nordic majority population.

In general, whiteness scholars have seemed to agree that whiteness, like the general category of race, is a gliding signifier that can vary across social contexts and times. Whiteness has its own internal hierarchy whereby some groups in some contexts are regarded as being whiter than others, and whiteness intersects with gender, class, ethnicity, and religious differences. Thus, it is pertinent to ask questions in studies focusing on the racialization of white immigrants about how a certain type of whiteness works as a hegemonic norm for interaction within organizational and institutional cultures in various arenas of society. In other words, how does hegemonic whiteness unfold, and what are its limits as an explanatory framework for understanding power hierarchies and symbolic boundaries in low-paid workplaces?

In this article, we approach these questions by analyzing the fine-grained border-drawing practices that work to establish distinctions between majority and minority 'whites', such as Norwegians and Polish immigrants. We address both social and symbolic boundary-making (Lamont & Molnar 2002), and how these processes reflect, interact with, and fortify each other. As we interpret Lamont's (2000) concepts, we understand her definition of social boundaries to focus on measurable and objectified forms of social differences between groups based on markers such as class, ethnicity, race, or religion. Social boundaries are measured according to vertical scales of inequality of opportunities and distance between groups. Symbolic boundaries, however, point to the imagining and representation of outsider and insider groups through culture and the media. In migration studies, central authors have written about how symbolic boundaries between groups may be vague, blurred, or fixed (Alba 2005; Wimmer 2008), and what such boundary characteristics mean for integrating immigrant groups into the wider society.

II – POLES IN NORWAY

Poles have a long history of immigration to Norway (Friberg & Golden 2014); however, their current position as the largest immigrant/majority group is more recent. When the 2004 enlargement of the EU gave Poles free access to Western European labor markets,

the population of Poles in Norway increased from fewer than 6000 in 2000 (Bjertnæs 2001) to more than 100,000 registered as Norwegian residents today. Some research publications have discussed their complex relation to larger Norwegian society, and how they, as immigrants and a minority in many regards, are treated, seen, and seen by themselves, as standing apart from mainstream society. In this section, we draw on these studies to illustrate the making of symbolic boundaries between immigrant and majority white populations, and to problematize conceptual strategies to capture these processes. Thus, this section does not seek to extensively review the flourishing research literature on Poles in Norway but focuses on key contributions that appear instructive for understanding the making of symbolic boundaries between majority and immigrant white populations. We find three interrelated aspects that emerge in the literature of particular interest: (1) The Poles' precarious position in the Norwegian labor market, (2) the construction of the Pole as 'different' and as 'stranger', and (3) the Poles' negotiations of their 'Polishness'.

I) THE POLE AS 'THE LABOR MIGRANT'

The key contextual framework for the Polish immigrant minority in Norwegian society is their relation to the labor market. While motives of migration are always multifaceted and extend beyond pure economic consideration (Benson & O'Reilly 2009; Trevena 2013), it is clear that the unprecedented migration flows from Poland to Norway – and from Eastern to Western Europe at large – follow from the larger regional economic imbalances across Europe. The Poles coming after 2004 arrived in Norway largely to work, and the outcomes of their work and income defined their experiences. In reflection, the main conceptualization of Polish immigrants in Norwegian society is that of the *labor migrant* (see also Lulle & King 2016). This classification effectively sets them apart from the other and, importantly, largely nonwhite immigrant populations of asylum seekers, refugees, and family reunions.

While Polish immigrants generally improve their wages and overall material living conditions by leaving their home society, they are less successful than most of the population in Norway. In the Norwegian labor market, Poles have predominantly found work in blue-collar positions in labor-intensive industries, such as construction, hospitality, cleaning, shipbuilding, agriculture, and food processing. Wage levels in these industries are generally low. Moreover, typical immigrant jobs are characterized by informal job contracts, employment instability, poor working conditions, and exposure to health hazards, and they offer few opportunities for promotion. This exposed position is reinforced by nonstandard employment arrangements, for instance, as posted workers or employees of staffing companies on zero hour, standby, or even fake contracts (Rye 2017; Rye & Andrzejewska 2010).

This concentration of immigrant workers in the least attractive segments of the labor market is self-reinforcing and has led to the development of 'immigrant niches' (Waldinger 1994; Waldinger & Lichter 2003), in which immigrants cluster in certain jobs, workplaces, or even entire industries. Such occupational concentration of migrants within low-skilled sectors is augmented by employers explicitly targeting workers from groups that lack power and their perception that migrants are particularly well suited to certain jobs or exhibit an exceptional work ethic (Holmes 2013; MacKenzie & Forde 2009). This appears to have happened in several Norwegian low-waged and low-skilled industries. An illustrative example is the agricultural industry, in which nearly all manual work is being performed by immigrants, and overwhelmingly by Poles, over the last 20 years (Rye 2016, 2017). Similarly, research from the Norwegian

fisheries and hotel industries has shown how employers stereotypically equate manual labor skills with specific nationalities (Friberg & Midtbøen 2018, 2019).

As a result, Polish labor immigrants often find themselves clustered in 'precarious' work conditions (Kalleberg 2018; Standing 2011) that translate into equally precarious conditions in life in general. Regarding social class, Poles in Norway find themselves in the working class and are often in the very lowest echelons of this. Moreover, many experience downward social mobility – compared to their homeland situation – regarding education and work (Rye 2019; Przybyszewska 2021).

Opportunities for upward social mobility are few. For instance, as most Poles do not master the Norwegian language, they are effectively barred from most jobs that require interaction with Norwegians, such as customer relations. In the hotel industry, Swedish immigrants may work as receptionists, while Polish migrants are employed in lower-paid jobs, such as chambermaids, which are out of the view of guests. Opportunities to practice Norwegian are scarce. In many workplaces, communication is entirely in migrants' native language, and 'labor migrants' are not entitled to state-sponsored language programs, as is the case for asylum seekers and refugees. Przybyszewska (2021) emphasized how this combination of poor language skills and the development of migrant-dominated work environments, or immigrant niches, reinforces the longer-term exclusion of Poles.

As a result, we argue that, at the group level, Polish immigrants in Norway clearly stand out from the majority population on account of their systematically less favorable work–life situations and chances for social mobility. The larger part of them are stuck in the Norwegian working class due to deep-rooted structural dynamics at work in the labor market (Slettebak & Rye 2022). Poles are not only *seen* as different; they really *are* different in a material sense, and they represent a set of distinctive life conditions in Norwegian society. As Friberg (2012a) notes, their situation resembles those of the postwar regimes of 'guest workers' who were doing less attractive work on less attractive terms, both in the workplace and in society at large.

Concurrently, the Poles' position in the Norwegian labor market also distinguishes them from other and predominantly nonwhite immigrant populations. Most importantly, they are, by definition (though may not in practice), integrated into the labor market; thus, they also have income and do not rely on welfare provisions from the state, as is often the case for newly arrived asylum seekers and refugees.

II) CONSTRUCTING POLES AS 'DIFFERENT' AND 'STRANGERS'

Our reading of the research literature on Poles in Norway demonstrates how the social boundaries between Poles and Norwegians, originating in the labor market, are reflected in the construction of corresponding symbolic boundaries between the populations. The Poles appear to be seen by majority society, for instance, in media accounts (see below), as a group that is different from the majority; however, their distinctiveness is multifaceted, and we will argue that it is open to flexible interpretations. At the core lies the complex interactions between Poles' statuses as working-class members, whites, immigrants, and non-Norwegians.

The debate about race and class in racism and whiteness literature emphasizes that there are different theoretical positions on the independent status of race/ethnicity as an indicator of inequality, but that most researchers acknowledge the intersecting relationship between these and other categories of difference and inequality.

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This is evident in several studies on how Poles are symbolically represented in Norwegian discourses. For instance, Dyrlid (2017) showed how the characteristics of the 'typical' Polish migrant worker are reflected in dominant Norwegian media discourses, and how these representations contribute to conceptualizing the Pole as a vulnerable and dangerous 'other'. Analyzing Norwegian media accounts, she identified three framings of Polish migrants: (1) as victims of exploitative work, (2) as hardworkers with superior work ethics, and (3) as a financial threat to the Norwegian welfare state, because their work engagement entitles them to 'generous' welfare benefits. She emphasized that all these framings, and particularly the last, construct the Poles as strangers in Norwegian society. Other studies in Europe have also emphasized negative public portraits of the Poles, even as 'intruders from the uncivilized outskirts of Europe threatening the Old Continent's social and economic orders' (van Heuckelom 2013: 218).

Dyrlid's findings that Poles are seen as 'good workers' are echoed in other research interviews with Norwegian employers of Polish migrants. For instance, farmers praise Polish migrant farm workers for their excellent work ethic, which they find to be far superior to that of Norwegians (Scott & Rye 2021). Friberg and Midtbøen (2018) similarly showed how managers in coastal fish processing industries and hotels in the capital region find eastern Europeans to be particularly well suited to manual jobs. Here, Polish migrants and their particular 'work culture' are perceived by Norwegian employers to be well suited for work in their firms' temporary external workforces but unfit for permanent positions, unless they assimilate to a 'Norwegian work culture' (Friberg & Midtbøen 2018: 1924). Employers typically described Poles as hardworking and respectful of authorities, while Norwegians were described as opinionated and having a 'slack' attitude. Moreover, they appeared to construct ethnicity as a skill in its own right; that is, being a Pole is, *per se,* evidence (from the perspective of a recruiter) that the candidate is qualified for a given job in the immigrant niche.

Interestingly, these accounts of Poles and other Eastern European migrants emphasize their social distance and difference from both Norwegians and other immigrant categories. In the national hierarchy of workers in manual industries, Poles (and other Eastern Europeans) are ranked lower than Norwegians but higher than migrants from more distant countries (Scott & Rye 2021) by employers. Similarly, they also avoid negative implications of the equalization of 'nonwhite' with 'non-Norwegian' that appears dominant in Norwegian societal discourse (Fuhrer 2021).

Thus, it appears clear that while Poles are treated differentially and perceived as 'others' as a social category, and many ascribe their problems at the labor market and society at large with systemic discrimination of them as Poles (e.g., Przybyszewska 2020), informants rarely report outright racist incidents in encounters with researchers (e.g., Stachowski 2021). It is the general low social status and lack of social appreciation that follows from being ascribed the position of a 'Polish migrant worker' that they problematize.

As a result, we witness a social construction of the Pole as the 'labor migrant' reflecting their class (manual worker), race (white), immigrant status (migrant), and nationality (Polish) – a totality of difference from the imagined average Norwegian that accentuates their genuine 'otherness'. The image of the Pole as a stranger appears solid and affects the entire minority population of Poles. Everybody knows what the derogatory term 'Polakkarbeid' [lit. translation to Eng.: 'A Poles job'] means – that is, less attractive manual and low-paid work tasks (Dyrlid 2018). This stereotypical image of the Pole is

also explored in Norwegian popular culture. For instance, the widely popular televised drama 'The fight for existence' (Kampen for tilværelsen) followed a highly educated Polish man coming to Norway to find his father. He ended up with other Polish workers being exposed to degrading attitudes and living in precarious conditions.

III) NEGOTIATION OF POLISHNESS

Third, the dominant discourses in Norwegian society that position Poles in-between the white majority population and nonwhite immigrant populations from beyond Europe are resisted by Polish migrants. They seek to avoid both the material aspects of working-class jobs, such as hardwork and low wages, but as much the low social status and stigma attached to these positions in the labor market. Several authors (Dyrlid 2017; Przybyszewska 2021; Stachowski 2021) have shown how Polish migrants continuously engage in such identity management, demonstrating how the 'labor migrant' label becomes both confirmed and contested. Looking for work, they benefit from the good reputation of the Polish work ethic and find manual work that is economically attractive relative to opportunities in Poland – albeit work that often implies downward professional mobility. Stachowski (2021) argued that, paradoxically, by becoming an 'ideal worker' and enhancing employability by appealing to their 'cultural kit', migrant workers contribute to their marginalization by becoming exactly the kind of workers that employers need: hardworking, flexible, and making few demands. The reflections of the migrants he interviewed reveal a high degree of awareness of constituting a distinct segment of a company's personnel, separated from Norwegian workers and treated differently from them. One of Stachowski's (2021) sources claimed that 'when you are a foreigner, you can feel that you are worthless compared to Norwegians [...] through the treatment, the negligence of all your rights by the employer'. This is referred to as mistreatment through misguidance and the withholding of information about migrant workers' rights.

Reactions toward Poles being ascribed a better work ethic and being better suited to manual than professional work are marked by ambivalence. On the one hand, Polish workers use these stereotypes and even contribute to reinforcing them in their tactical use of the cultural capital available to them when negotiating conflicting expectations in different jobs (Friberg 2012b).

On the other hand, negative experiences and emotions related to social misrecognition abound. Przybyszewska's (2020) research on the downward social mobility facing many Poles working in Norway showed how this impacts their well-being. Many struggle with severe emotional problems due to Norwegian views of their manual work as 'dirty' and 'polluted'. This also transfers as a means to describe themselves, in ways echoing Travena's (2013) description of Polish migrants in the UK: 'low self-esteem seems to be almost a national trait among Poles' (183).

This ambivalence related to the critique versus embrace of the stereotype of Poles in Norway does not seem to imply a collective mobilization confronting their position as 'others' in Norway. It seems as though at least the first waves of Polish migrants after 2004 acknowledged their position as strangers and visitors, including the acceptance of lacking the same entitlements as 'native' Norwegians (Rye 2012). This is clearly related to the relatively recent presence of Poles in Norway. Their otherness in Norway is balanced, and compensated for, by their belonging to Poland. Most Poles keep strong ties to their homeland, travel there often, and successfully maintain everyday social relations and emotional attachments with social networks 'at home' through

digital media. Illustratively, a relatively few Poles apply for Norwegian citizenship; thus, they seem to uphold multilocal belongings and identities (Rye 2012) and, to a certain degree, accept the role of 'guests' in Norway.

III – THE MAKING OF SYMBOLIC BOUNDARIES

We find the case of Polish immigrant workers in Norway to represent an instructive case for conceptualizing the position of white minorities in larger society, and how social and symbolic boundaries are (or not) drawn between minorities of different shades of whiteness and the majority population.

On the one hand, 'the Poles' are seen as 'others', 'strangers', and 'guests' in Norway in the dominant discourses in Norwegian society. As such, they are socially constructed differently from the majority population, with implications for their everyday experiences in the labor market and in mainstream society, and for how they are seen – and see themselves – as different compared with Norwegians and other immigrants and minorities in the society. On the other hand, the Poles appear more similar to Norwegians than other 'others' in Norwegian society. Most importantly, Polish immigrants are largely integrated into the labor market and make a living, even if modest. They share a common European cultural tradition, and they are (in the very literal sense) more similar in their phenotypical likeness to the majority; they *are* 'white'.

Our question is 'Are such in-between immigrant minorities best analyzed using theories of racialization, and if so, why should that be?' We find a fruitful analytic to be found in the intersection of whiteness, social class, and inequality theories.

DIFFERENTIALIST AND INEQUALITY RACISM

Wieviorka (1999) has earlier suggested a fruitful analytical distinction between two expression of racism; 'differentialist racism', which may be rooted in color-based or cultural conceptualization, and 'inequality racism', which he claims originate in labor market relations. Differentialist racism essentializes the other by locating him or her outside the normal order of society, representing the other as too different, and polluting the purity of the nation. Inequality racism, on the other hand, is less encompassing but relates to structures at the labor market by which the most attractive (skilled) positions are reserved for native 'whites', while other and less attractive positions are filled by immigrants or members of other marginalized groups, these defined in terms of ethnicity or race.

The everyday experiences, symbolic representations, and self-perceptions of Poles appear, as largely rooted in their marginalized position in the Norwegian labor market, and may be analyzed as an example of inequality racism. The large majority of Poles in Norway belong to the working class and find themselves among the least privileged in Norwegian society, both in terms of access to material and immaterial resources and social opportunities. They are exposed to exploitation and inequality-generating conditions concerning wages and job security. Also, they are circumscribed by race-like cultural stereotypes that suggest them to be one-dimensional men and women with a work ethic that is specifically suited to certain types of manual labor. Such stereotypes are derived from employers' observations when comparing the Poles to other labor groups who are either unwilling to work or lazy (Norwegians) or who are assigned specific skills suitable for other unskilled jobs according to a mix of ethnicity

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and gender characteristics (Orupabu & Nadim 2019). In the cleaning industry, for example, immigrant men with African and Asian backgrounds have started to replace Norwegian and Polish women as preferred workers.

As such, the Poles, together with other groups of newly arrived immigrants, represent in many regards a 'new' working class in Norwegian society, defined by their otherness that also sets them apart from their Norwegian labor-class counterparts (Rye 2021). Compared with other immigrant minority groups in Norway, the Polish group is nonetheless in a relatively good position. In surveys on attitudes toward immigrants, for example, Polish immigrants are seen to contribute more to the welfare state and less to criminality than immigrants from Somalia and Pakistan (Brekke, Fladmoe & Wollebæk 2020: 53–55). This in-between position, as seen from the majority perspective, is also reflected in broader societal discourses, as anti-immigration sentiments in Norwegian society largely appear to be directed toward Muslims and non-European migrants and are often interpreted in the context of cultural (religious) differences, integration issues, and the economic burden on the welfare society. Again, the Poles start out from less exposed positions than other immigrants.

SHADES OF WHITENESS

We argue that Wieviorka's description of what he calls inequality racism provides a broader canvas for contemporary ideas of ethnicity as a skill in the Norwegian labor market. Ascribing skills or even specific jobs to particular national backgrounds clearly has a race-like character. Compared with Norwegian upper- and middle-class perceptions of the native working class, there are similarities and differences. Both the Polish and Norwegian working classes are similarly ascribed essentialist qualities, such as being prone to indulge in low culture, vulgar behavior, and cheap clothing. The main difference is that white Norwegian working-class members are indisputably included in the image of what counts as Norwegian. The Poles can at best hope to pass as Norwegians and must work to suppress the stigma of otherness by relying on hegemonic middle-class norms of Norwegian-ness. Whiteness as a symbol for Norwegian-ness intersects with other symbols such as knowing how to act Norwegian or to have a Norwegian ethnic ancestry. This also intersects with classed and gendered boundaries, prescribing specific cultural repertoires to different groups.

Whiteness is thus internally differentiated by dimensions such as class, ethnicity, gender, and nationality. The Poles in Norway are inscribed into whiteness, but into a low-status and fringe segment of whiteness. This position differs from that of people of color who cannot escape their visible stigma and who risk being attacked, excluded, and ignored in a wider array of social contexts due to their phenotypical differences from white Norwegians (Führer 2021). A survey of self-reported discrimination among foreign adoptees who are Norwegian in all senses of the term (citizenship, culture, and ethnicity) showed that 55% had experienced discrimination in at least one arena in the last year (Leirvik et al. 2021). Discrimination most often happens in public spaces, documenting clearly that whiteness protects from everyday racism and microaggressions predicated on visual markers of otherness.

IV – GRAY RACIALIZATION

Our conclusion is that the racialization concept appears to have a clear analytical value for understanding the Poles' experiences as an immigrant minority in Norwegian society, as it helps identify:

1. A hierarchical ordering of categories of workers, in which the Poles are perceived to be appropriate to fill less rewarding positions on the labor market than Norwegians (but above nonwhite immigrants), typically manual jobs in the low-waged and low-skilled industries.
2. The attribution of cultural homogeneity from aggregate/group level to individuals, where Polish is often seen to be the imperative and only identity.
3. Social inequality as an outcome and a distinct position in the wider ethno-racial hierarchy.

Racialization is theorized as the process through which majority populations invoke and evoke race-like qualities to minority groups. Such qualities, by definition, point to an implicit hierarchy in which material and cultural markers indicate a group's position within the hierarchy. The main difference from the concept of ethnicization is that the latter mainly points at horizontal difference markers. In reality, however, the 'race-like' qualities often overlap with markers of culture and ancestry as symbolic differences and inequality markers. However, the processes of racialization of white Poles appear to take on some distinct traits, setting their experiences apart from those of nonwhites, and thus adding nuance to the academic literature on racialization. We therefore suggest the concept of 'gray racialization' to emphasize three particular aspects of the racialization of whites, such as the Poles in Norway.

First, gray racialization appears to be predominantly generated by and restricted to structures in the labor market. The Poles' experiences are largely defined by their precarious work situation in low-wage and low-skilled industries, generally characterized by low-wage levels, poor working conditions, and many other burdens that come with work in the secondary labor market. Polish workers are more exposed than members of the Norwegian working class who are never questioned about their Norwegianess, and who are not characterized by the coupling of skills and nationality. However, phenotype (blackness) represents a more 'durable' social identifier than labor market position (working class); the white Pole may find better work, thus turning whiter and more Norwegian, whereas the black manager is still seen as black by Norwegians, other whites, and nonwhites. In other words, the Poles may easily operate in the shades of gray between black and white, which are less available for other immigrants, and borders are both vague and blurred (Alba 2005; Wimmer 2008).

Second, and following on from the above, when compared with people of color who can never pass as whites at work or in other everyday situations, the racialization of Polish migrants is less encompassing. Both white people (Poles and other Eastern Europeans, Sami people, and *any* marginalized populations) and people of color are exposed to othering in contemporary Norway, but people of color cannot escape their ascribed otherness, as it is anchored in their phenotypical characteristics. However, as racialization of the Poles is embedded in invented somatic and cultural variations (Miles 2009) – and not phenotypical identifiers – the Polish migrants in Norway have a larger repertoire of strategies to counter marginalization. While the social category of 'black' appears more solid, symbolic boundaries between shades of 'white' seem at least somewhat negotiable regarding the Poles in Norway.

The larger flexibility of the social construction of the Poles is even more evident from an intergenerational perspective, as the offspring (second, third generations) of Eastern Europeans may assimilate easier into the white majority population, in ways phenotypical characteristics may not allow black minorities to do.

Third, the othering of the Poles takes place in a sociohistorical context other than that of other immigrant groups. The Poles may share experiences of social stigmatization, discrimination, and unequal life situations and chances; however, they do not share the historical origins of the othering of blacks and other nonwhite minorities or their long-term prospects in Norwegian society. This is also reflected in the lesser use of outright racist language and other discriminatory practices, as stigma is not expressed by reference to race (cf. Fox, Moroşanu & Szilassy 2012) but rather nationality.

We agree with Hall and others who maintained that race is a gliding signifier, and that racialization may thus play out differently and be based on a range of indicators of difference and inequality. For the Poles in Norway, the gray racialization processes take the form of, in Wieviorka's terms, 'inequality' rather than 'differentialist' racism, possibly due to the absence of distinctive phenotypical traits that allow the Poles to take on different shades of differences, both across contexts and between individuals.

Our main argument is that the concept of racialization should be used with 'comparative care' to show how and by which indicators a group is racialized within a specific context and time. We think that it is crucial to try to specify the driving mechanisms of racialization and to approach racialization as a process different from the horizontal process of differentiation based on ancestry alone, as signified by the concept of ethnicization. While both of these concepts point to overlapping social and symbolic group boundaries, only the racialization concept explicitly relates to power relationships.

This may also invite better integration of the migration and race literatures, preferably in an intersectional perspective that emphasizes the 'classed' dynamics of racialization and whiteness, in line with Miles' original employment of the concept to study labor migrants, and in line with whiteness literature focusing on intersectionality. As argued in this article, the social and symbolic position of Polish workers in Norway should be discussed in the context of the social (dis)organization of the labor market and how its workings systematically sort labor migrants into socially and symbolically less advantaged positions. However, these are social phenomena inherently defined by a process of racialization parallel with, though not identical to, those experienced by nonwhites in Norway and beyond.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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