Reflections on racialisation's impact on research: Insights from a study of Muslim radicalisation in Norway

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Abstract
Sociologists have studied the causes and consequences of collectively blaming and negatively portraying Muslims, but less attention has been paid to how collective blaming and negative descriptions affect researchers' categorisations of such vilified groups. Drawing on 22 months of fieldwork with Muslim men in Norway, I elucidate how racialisation can influence interactions in field research when studying a controversial subject with a racialised group. I identify three patterns in which racialisation affects field interactions: accepting a racialising view, defending the racialised group and developing a shared story between a researcher and participants. I argue that, in this case, desires to present positive views of Islam and Muslims, attempts to distance oneself from religious extremism and attempts to categorise radicalised Muslims as neither Norwegians nor Muslims illustrate racialisation's influence. My findings suggest that racialised understandings enter field interactions but remain opaque unless the researcher reflects upon their own and participants' positionality and membership in a racialised group. I conclude that shared experiences of racialisation between a researcher and the participants deepen the researcher's understanding while limiting enquiry.

Keywords
Identity, racialisation, radicalisation, reflexivity, research positionality

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Introduction

A pattern of collectively blaming Muslims, leading to apologetic and denouncing behaviour, has emerged, particularly since 11 September 2001. The following quote by the former Prime Minister of Norway Erna Solberg after the terror attacks in France in 2020 illustrates this pattern: 'We call upon leaders in Muslim countries and Muslim religious leaders in the entire world to distance themselves from extremism and protect freedom of speech' (Norsk Telegrambyrå, 2020). Even before this call, Muslim leaders in Norway were denouncing the attacks. For example, the chair of the Norwegian Muslim Council, Abdirahman Dirye, said in an interview, 'We strongly distance ourselves from the horrific killing and the terrorist attack in Paris' (Gilje, 2020). Scholars have shown how such collective blaming and negative portrayals of Muslims are related to inter- and intra-group conflicts and divisions (Abbas, 2019; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012). However, the literature has rarely addressed how collective blaming and negative portrayals affect researchers' categorisations of such vilified groups. Therefore, in this reflexive article, I elucidate how racialisation can influence interactions during field research when studying a controversial subject, such as radicalisation among a racialised group – in this case, Muslims.

The impact of race on research has been widely debated. Many authors have claimed that race influences the research process and that reflexivity is paramount for a more nuanced understanding of racial order (Emirbayer and Desmond, 2012; Rios, 2015). However, there are few empirical accounts of how racialisation influences interactions between researchers and participants. Some leading scholars have lamented the lack of reflexive empirical accounts of the issue of racialisation and emphasised the need to critically analyse how racial tropes can influence the research process through the presuppositions of everyone involved (Emirbayer and Desmond, 2012; Rios, 2015). This article addresses these issues through a critical examination of field research interactions during a study of how Muslim men in Norway adopt, maintain or reject political violence, including radicalised Muslims and Muslim inmates, conducted in 2015, 2018 and 2019. In doing so, I build upon the critique of radicalisation literature by race and racialisation scholarship in the United States and the United Kingdom. However, I depart from it by focusing on racialised interactions during field research and the Norwegian case.

Although a holistic understanding of portrayals of Muslims in Norway is complex and multidimensional, research suggests that 'negative stereotypes of Muslims are widespread' (Hoffman and Moe, 2017: 14), many Norwegians wary of Muslims (Brekke et al., 2020), anti-Muslim hostility is a 'major problem' and arguably the 'dominant xenophobia' (Ellefsen and Sandberg, 2021: 1–2). Adverse experiences of Muslims in Norway include discrimination in the labour and house rental market (Andersson et al., 2012; Midtbøen, 2016). Muslims constitute the largest faith group targeted by hate crimes in Oslo (Hansen, 2019). Moreover, the motivation for the massive right-wing terrorist attack on 22 July 2011 was, among other factors, to end Muslims' presence in Norway (Bangstad, 2014). The same motivation was evident for the terrorist attack on a mosque near Oslo in 2019 (Libell and Specia, 2020). Within this context, the rise of extreme Islamist milieus in eastern Norway has often led influential politicians to understand extremism as a problem inherent to Muslims. Norway's leading politicians have depicted

Muslims negatively and asked Norwegian Muslims to 'distance' themselves from extremism (Hoel, 2020; Larsen, 2019; Norsk Telegrambyrå, 2020). Accepting this pressure, many Norwegian Muslims have responded with attempts to denounce extremism, as illustrated by the example of Dirye.

Studies of radicalisation concerned with the issue of political violence among Muslims in the West notably lack reflexive empirical accounts of racialisation. In this subfield of terrorism studies, reflexive articles have focussed on the challenges of gaining access and conducting fieldwork among clandestine and dangerous individuals and groups, without specifically emphasising the issue of racialisation. Outside of terrorism studies, social science scholars have provided empirical accounts of the impacts that social or political locations – including racial locations – may have on the research process (Collins, 1986; Eason, 2017). Still, scholars have seldom provided reflexive empirical accounts of how their racial position influences the research in multiple and multifaceted ways.

In this article, I show how racialisation informed the views and actions of myself, a researcher and a Muslim man, and my study's research participants, Muslim men in Norway, during field interactions. I focus on the dimensions of my social identity as a Muslim, which was more salient than other social identities during research among Muslim men in Norway. Other social identities that influenced field interactions are only discussed when they aid the analytical and conceptual points. I identify three patterns in which racialisation influences field interactions: accepting a racialising view, defending a racialised group (in this case, Muslims) and developing a shared story between the researcher and participants. The argument here is that desires to present positive views of Islam and Muslims, attempts to distance oneself from religious extremism, and categorising radicalised Muslims as neither Norwegians nor Muslims illustrates racialisation's influence on field interactions. The findings suggest that racialised understandings enter field interactions but remain opaque unless the researcher reflects upon their own and the participants' positionality and membership in a racialised group. I conclude that shared racialised experiences between a researcher and participants can deepen the researcher's understanding while limiting enquiry.

Through my investigation, I aim to offer insights into the complex ways in which racialisation influences interactions in field research and, through these insights, to illustrate how power is embedded in knowledge production. I also contribute to the debate on reflexivity and research positionality by emphasising how a researcher's specific social position can function in multiple ways during fieldwork.

Radicalisation, racialisation and Muslims

Radicalisation is a contested, value-laden and relative concept (Kundnani, 2012; Sedgwick, 2010). No universal definition of radicalisation exists, and the term's meaning might depend on the context in which it is applied and the actors who use it (Sedgwick, 2010). Scholars, security agencies and policymakers with different analysis, security and integration agendas might infer different meanings of the concept. For instance, security agencies may employ the concept when referring to threats to a state and its citizens, while politicians and practitioners whose work addresses integration may use the term

for democracy and citizenship issues (Sedgwick, 2010). A concrete application of the concept is essential. In this study, the term radicalisation is understood as the process through which individuals and groups adopt and maintain the support and use of political violence. The term 'radicalised' refers to individuals who support and legitimise violence by non-state actors or are willing to use violence themselves to achieve political change.

Some race scholars have illustrated how state measures to counter radicalisation and violent extremism lead to anti-Muslim political culture, which alienates and racialises Muslims by making them 'suspect communities' (Kundnani, 2009), 'securitised citizens' (Hussain and Bagguley, 2012) and 'internal suspect bodies' (Abbas, 2019). They challenge the narrow and limited focus on theology and sociopsychological factors by radicalisation scholars, which aids the state-centric focus and discrimination of Muslims. Mamdani (2002) and Kundnani, (2009, 2012) have, for example, elucidated how being Muslim has been turned into political identities, such as 'moderate' and 'extreme' Muslims, or 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, through state interventions to counter extremism and explanations of the link between Islam and terrorism. This categorisation removes focus from underlying historical, social, political and economic factors in adopting and maintaining political violence that may involve the actions of Western governments or their allies. Furthermore, it creates biases by portraying Muslims as the extreme 'other' and inherently radicalised due to their faith. Muslims are represented as a threat to national security, are discriminated against and have their civil liberties restricted.

Race and racialisation scholars have also noted that the securitisation of Muslims is not just an issue of media reports and public policy. The result of these societal processes is enactments by individuals and groups in specific local contexts. For example, Hussain and Bagguley (2012) showed how racialised images of Muslims are found among both the majority and ethnic minorities in West Yorkshire. Similarly, Abbas (2019) illustrated how state measures to counter extremism influenced Muslim–Muslim relations in Bradford and Leeds. I complement the existing literature by providing a reflexive account of how collective blaming and negative portrayals affect researchers' categorisations of Muslims in and around the capital of Oslo, thus contributing by analysing racialised interactions during field research in the understudied context of Norway.

Racialisation is a disputed concept that is understood and utilised differently (Murji and Solomos, 2005). Using the concept of racialisation, I focus on 'the process by which ideas about race are constructed, come to be regarded as meaningful, and are acted upon' (Murji and Solomos, 2005: 1). This process can include claims about somatic characteristics, cultural inferiority and religious beliefs, which can be intertwined and used to define and understand particular social issues and problems (e.g. criminality or extremism; Garner and Selod, 2015; Murji and Solomos, 2005). This approach implies 'giving up the conjoined twin false binaries underpinning the fixation that religious affiliations are never to do with the body, and that "race" is only to do with the body' (Garner and Selod, 2015: 1).

I appeal to two reasons for using the racialisation concept instead of concepts such as Islamophobia. First, it enables a focus on individuals and groups – in this case, Muslims – who experience racism and discrimination, rather than focusing merely on religion and politics (Meer and Modood, 2009). Second, the concept can channel attention towards cultural and structural processes of racism and discrimination, rather than implicitly

viewing racism and discrimination through terms such as *phobia*, as 'a collection of pathological beliefs' (Meer and Modood, 2009: 341).

The obvious critique of such usage of the concept of racialisation is that (a) religion cannot be raced and (b) the extensive usage of the concept makes it an empty signifier (Barot and Bird, 2001; Garner and Selod, 2015). I argue that religion can be raced, and Islamophobia is a form of racism. Race, empirically and historically, is a social construct and an 'abstract signifier' (Lentin, 2008: 490), often based on somatic but also cultural characteristics, which functions in varying ways in different temporal, territorial and sociohistorical contexts. Analytically, the understanding of the concept should not, therefore, be limited to somatic characteristics. Muslims have historically been ascribed as inherently extreme based on attributes such as language, physical appearance and religious practices and allocated a place in a racial hierarchy with white Europeans (Caucasians) on the top. 'Islamophobia is therefore a specific form of racism targeting Muslims, and racialization is a concept that helps capture and understand how this works, in different ways at different times, and in different places' (Garner and Selod, 2015: 12).

I utilise the 'Muslim' category to elucidate how suspicion, hostility and stigmatisation of a social group affect interactions between a researcher and participant who self-identify with that group in different ways during research on a politicised issue. My analysis challenges the racialised image of Muslims while simultaneously showing how and in what ways the racialised image affects self-identifying Muslims. Thus, I illustrate how the category of Muslim is both a category of practice and analysis in different ways (Brubaker, 2013).

Self-identification is a process dependent on self-ascriptions and ascriptions by others (Barth, 1998; Du Bois, 2008 [1903]; Jenkins, 1997). Whether racial or ethnic minorities accept or oppose how others identify them, their self-identification is shaped by how others view them in social contexts. As Jenkins (1997) claimed: 'the very act of defying categorization, of striving for an autonomy of self-identification, is, of course, an effect of being categorized in the first place' (p. 71). I build on this understanding to examine how the interactions between a researcher and participants who self-identify as Muslims are informed by the racialised gaze of the mainstream. In doing so, I also build upon the substantial reflexive accounts of minority researchers and argue that my work complements the knowledge they have already contributed

Reflexivity in the social sciences

A prevailing view in social sciences holds that a researcher is an 'instrument' in knowledge production and reflexivity is a 'crucial strategy' for validation and quality control (Berger, 2015: 219). From this perspective, reflexivity is 'viewed as the process of continual internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of a researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome' (Berger, 2015: 220). Numerous studies have emphasised the effects of a researcher's position on the research process, implying that individuals in different social or political locations have access to information that others do not due to their group identity and life experiences. Berger (2015) illustrated how a researcher's different positions can influence what they see and do not see at different stages of the

research process and described the benefits and constraints of varying insider and outsider positions. Mason-Bish (2019), through her study of elites, demonstrated how the interaction between a researcher's position and participants' positions can influence each phase of a qualitative research process.

Reflexive accounts provided by minority researchers document the complexity of marginalised people's multiple understandings and realms of existence. Collins (1986) argued that her experiences as a Black woman – along with her knowledge of sociological paradigms and her 'critical posture' towards them – provided her with 'a better position to bring a special perspective not only to the study of Black women, but to some of the fundamental issues facing sociology itself'(29). Eason (2017) and his family's experiences in an American prison town during his ethnographical fieldwork provide an illustrative example. Their subjective experiences provided nuances in understanding how structural constraints enforce a rural disadvantage on Black people: racial profiling, discrimination and residential segregation.

Nevertheless, empirical accounts of how racialisation influences interactions in field research in multiple ways are sparse, particularly when studying Muslim radicalisation in the West. Accordingly, I am concerned with how racialisation influences the interactions between participants and myself as a scholar who belongs to the minority group I study. An analysis of researchers' experiences in the field can enhance understanding of the mechanisms that link to and influence researchers' and participants' treatment and experiences. This understanding guided my analysis.

Methods and data

This self-reflective article draws on 22 months of fieldwork among Norwegian Muslim men. The fieldwork was conducted in and around the capital, Oslo, in two separate periods (2015 and 2018–2019). To nuance my analysis of how Muslims make meaning of adopting, maintaining and rejecting political violence, I included radicalised and non-radicalised participants with varying backgrounds in the study. My research comprises 92 semi-structured interviews with 84 Norwegian Muslim men. The data include 18 radicalised Muslims (motivators, recruiters, financiers, attempters of violent and potential terrorist activities and foreign fighters) and 66 non-radicalised. The non-radicalised participants included 29 Muslim inmates incarcerated for gang membership, drug dealing and convicted murders and 37 self-defined practising Muslims who were neither radicalised nor incarcerated. Due to limited access, security concerns and a guarded environment, it was impossible to interview the same number of radicalised and non-radicalised participants. Twelve participants were interviewed twice, in 2015 and 2018–2019, due to their roles as ideologues, leaders and motivators. On two separate occassions, interviews were conducted in pairs according to the participant's wishes. I contacted relevant participants through field interactions at mosques, study circles and other meeting places, which I expanded upon through purposive and snowball sampling. To be included in the study, the participants had to be second-generation Norwegian Muslims between 18 and 36 years of age. According to the literature, this is a common demographic for individuals vulnerable to experiencing a change in identity (Precht, 2007). However, in line with the study's focus, participants who fell outside the selection criteria were included.

The participants varied in marital status, education, employment and ethnicity. The interviews covered their perceptions about why they adopted, maintained or rejected political violence; perceptions, behaviour and interactions with denominational others; experiences of being a minority; experiences with racism or discrimination; and religious and political stances. The research also included field conversations and participatory observations. For this article, I drew upon my 65,438-word field notes through several rounds of thematic coding and critical analysis to trace and interpret field interactions. Data protection officials at Norway's Social Science Data Services approved this project. Ethical considerations were taken by preserving confidentiality and requiring consent. Pseudonyms and fictional names were applied. After detailed explanations about the research project and participants' rights, I obtained consent.

Analysis

Accepting a racialising view

Some race and ethnicity scholars (Du Bois, 2015; Rios, 2015) have argued that racialisation impacts all of us, including sociologists. Drawing on the definition of racialisation by Murji and Solomos (2005: 1) applied in this article, this could mean that our attitudes, perceptions and cultural frames are involved in constructing and viewing race as a meaningful guide for our interactions and actions. This involvement can occur even without us knowing (Rios, 2015). The result can have dire consequences, because when a researcher's understanding of participants as 'others' corresponds to the historical and contemporary essentialised image of the participants' group – in this case, Muslims – it may lead to racialisation rather than nuanced and rigorous science.

Unintentionally and to my surprise, I conformed to the portrayal of Norwegian Muslims as others. An illustrative example is the following passage of a conversation about my research with a non-Muslim Norwegian psychologist with a majority background who worked with vulnerable youth, including Muslim minorities.

Psychologist: So, have you talked to any Norwegians during your research?
Me: Yes. Most of the participants are Norwegians.
Psychologist: Yes. Most of them are Norwegians, but (uncomfortable silence).
Me: (uncomfortable silence) I know what you mean. Yes, I have also talked to a few Norwegians.

Conforming to her understanding and changing my stance, I implied that individuals like me, born and raised in Norway, were not Norwegian due to their skin colour or ethnic heritage. This encounter illustrates the lack of recognition and communication between the majority and the minority. The interaction also emphasises the need for researchers to resist the tendency to accept the othering of Muslims. Unfortunately, my conformity to the portrayal of Norwegian Muslims as the extreme others also tended to influence the interactions between the research participants and myself, the researcher, before I developed a more comprehensive understanding.

At the beginning of this research, my view of the participants created a distance between us. When I became aware of this distancing, I reflected upon the portrayal that had guided my first interactions with and interpretations of radicalised Muslims. When the news media focussed on Syria, Iraq and the Islamic State, I found its portrayal of Muslims as 'others' a challenging influence to resist. Although I was aware of my pre-conceived notions and my attempts to counter them, I continued to observe their impact on my study's field interactions. Reflexivity became apparent as an ongoing process in field research. My first meeting with some of the radicalised Muslims who had seen me praying before I approached them illustrated some of my preunderstanding of them.

> I use prayer time to reflect on approaching members of a group known for their violent tendencies. The prayer time helps me calm down my nervousness about making a good impression, gaining access and the indescribable weakness and helplessness I feel in my mind and body when approaching them.

As my field notes suggest, I was somewhat scared of the participants. Some readers might argue that in the case of this study, my categorisation of radicalised Muslims as dangerous may be legitimate due to their actions – readiness to use violence, attempted recruitment into civil war and attempted or fully realised participation in the war. Thus, readers might argue that such categorisation should not be understood as an impact of racialisation. I agree that this categorisation alone does not necessarily reflect the influence of racialisation on the study's field interactions. However, being radicalised with violent tendencies, including support for or attempted participation in civil war, is not a criterion for not being viewed as Muslim or Norwegian. Unfortunately, the radicalised individuals I studied were not merely categorised as dangerous or potentially violent. Instead, the sense of danger and violence ascribed to them, along with the societal pressure on me as a Muslim to denounce extremism, often effectively led me to remove radicalised Muslims from the social categories of *Norwegians* and *Muslims*. The following field notes present an example:

> I notice the captivating war *nasheed* (Islamic vocal music) playing in the jihadist's car, the chorus chants '*jundullah, jundullah*' (the soldier of Allah, the soldier of Allah). The *nasheed* is very catchy, and I cannot get it out of my head for the rest of the day. It is something special with the culture and the way of being of the jihadists. On the surface, they look like true Muslims, dressed as 'Muslim' as it is possible to dress.

Here, the use of 'surface', 'look like', 'true Muslims' and 'dressed as Muslim' is important to note; they provide insight into my preconceived notions about some participants and their impact on me. This categorisation also provides insights into the essentialised image of the somatic characteristics of Muslims, which I, even as a Muslim, concurred with. I was critical of the participants and did not believe in their portrayal as Muslims. I understand myself othering the radicalised participants from the social category of Muslims as a response to and acceptance of the call for racialisation, namely, the mainstream view that extremism is inherent in my religion, which I must denounce. Through

the othering of the radicalised participants, I adapted to racialisation by disassociating my religion from extremism.

Likewise, I removed the radicalised participants from the social category of Norwegians. Several times during the fieldwork, I was surprised by how 'normal', 'ordinary' and 'Norwegian' many of the radicalised Muslims studied were during our interactions. For instance, when shaking hands with the first foreign fighter I met, I was surprised to notice how 'Norwegian' his behaviour was, as if becoming a foreign fighter should have made him less Norwegian, and the negativity associated with being a foreign fighter could not be associated with being Norwegian and the purity that being Norwegian should provide. Some radicalised participants talking about their daily lives and interests said they enjoyed hiking in *marka* (forested and hilly areas surrounding Oslo), while others shared stories about their fishing trips. These are activities that are commonly considered part of the Norwegian cultural heritage. In addition, a few complied with the accepted norms in Norwegian society, for example, by shaking hands with the opposite gender when greeting. Similarly, I was surprised by the radicalised participants' feelings of belonging and exclusion that were enacted simultaneously. Although this enactment was familiar, it seemed puzzling that these men felt they belonged to Norway. For example, I was stunned by a returned foreign fighter, Abdul, who believed that practising Muslims could not live in Norway but responded to the correctional officer who told him to return to where he came from by saying, 'I am also Norwegian'. Along the same lines, I was shocked by Zubayr, who motivated others to join the Islamic state and leave the land of unbelievers but was concerned about his teenage children being a minority in Norway: 'My children do not know anything other than Norway. However, they are experiencing problems establishing and adopting the Norwegian identity due to racism and discrimination'. By indicating that trajectories towards political violence may not merely involve experiences and feelings of exclusion, the radicalised participants feeling of belonging to Norway further strengthens the argument that radicalisation is a complex process.

I understand my surprise at the participants' behaviour as a result of my consciousness accepting the anti-Muslim narrative that Muslims are inherently extreme and pose a threat to the nation; therefore, being Norwegian and Muslim are incompatible. While the latter is intrinsically violent and extreme, the former is moderate and liberal. Thus, radicalised Muslims cannot be Norwegians. This way of viewing the participants as 'others' – not Norwegians and Muslims – distorts rather than elucidates a nuanced and fruitful understanding of the underlying mechanism in the radicalisation of Muslims. Consequently, the issue of Muslim radicalisation is understood not as ours and related to our society but as primordial and fundamentally associated with the other.

My field interactions reflect knowledge about ideas, meanings, attitudes and perceptions in our cultural and social contexts (Sandberg, 2010). I understand them to have resulted from a peculiar and indescribable feeling that racialisation had provided me – helplessness over being perceived as a threat and fearing myself. Such fear reflects thoughts and ideas about the inherently radicalised imagined Muslim, providing me with a fear of the racialising portrayal of myself, the Muslim man. The racialising constructs present the worst depiction of me, making me fear myself. This fear and sense of help-

lessness, unfortunately and unintentionally, influenced my research through my perceptions of the study's participants.

In essence, my self-identification as Muslim, shaped by the racialised portrayal of Muslims by the mainstream, guided my view and portrayal of the radicalised participants as not Norwegians nor Muslims during field research. My categorisation of the radicalised participants thus reflects an acceptance of the view that Muslims are inherently extreme and must denounce extremism to prove their innocence.

Defending the group

At times, I cannot help but reflect on the research's impact and how it may be perceived. Will the study's conclusions adversely affect Norwegian Muslims? Or, if the findings indicate that the participants are discriminated against or viewed with hostility will the findings be viewed as reliable, or will they be questioned due to my religious background? The former concerns were also found among the participants. The non-radicalised Muslims in this study may have perceived me as a researcher whose research would lead to the further racialisation of Muslims. Some participants viewed or presented themselves as representatives of Islam and their groups, and their political agendas were evident during the research process. This portrayal, linked to the negative focus on Islam and Muslims, led some participants to conceal their views and positively portray Islam and Muslims, as they did not want to promote a negative perspective.

Shabbir, a Norwegian Muslim of South Asian descent in his early thirties, moderated his answers during the interview to avoid harming the image of Islam. After I turned off the recorder, he remarked, 'It is tiring to try to be politically correct'. During the interview, which took place at a restaurant, he spoke in a low voice, cautious of not offering a negative image of Islam and Muslims to the assumed non-Muslim Norwegians with a majority background sitting around us. At the beginning of the interview, he asked if I wanted to interview in Urdu or Norwegian because he was afraid that the conversation might be overheard and negatively portray Muslims. I replied, 'Whatever you are comfortable with'. He answered in Urdu, 'I was just asking because [non-Muslim, Norwegian majority] people are sitting here'. This encounter demonstrates how the non-radicalised participants, who may have been aware of the racialisation of Muslims, defended their group. Likewise, my interview with Osama, a Norwegian Muslim of North African descent in his mid-twenties, presents a case in point. At the beginning of the interview, we talked about his identity as a Muslim, experiences as a Norwegian Muslim and religious practice. Although I asked no questions about support of violence or extremism, Osama said, 'I am not, I am against extremism just so we are clear on that right away'. Answering the call to denounce extremism that the non-Muslim Norwegian public frequently invokes, he disassociated himself from extremism and violence to portray Islam and Muslims positively.

Similarly, many participants did not want to contribute to research that could enhance the negative focus on Norwegian Muslims. Some participants asked detailed questions about the study, and I sensed scepticism. One of the gatekeepers tried to explain the participants' doubts about participating, saying, 'This scepticism exists because Muslims feel that they are being persecuted and stigmatised by the security services and media,

along with other parts of the Norwegian society'. For instance, a statement by Hasan – a Shia youth leader of Middle Eastern descent in his late thirties, who attempted to deny access to his group – illustrates his self-defence and attempts to distance his group from the image that the non-Muslim Norwegian majority could have of the group.

> Any Shia Muslim or believer believes that his beliefs are the absolute truth, and he adheres to this creed wholeheartedly. However, the Norwegian people may understand this as radical, and so far, the focus [in the media] has been on radicals who follow the jihadi-Salafi creed. Don't you believe that your research will put a negative focus on Shia Muslims?

These attempts at censorship can be viewed as deletions that often occur during interactions or specifically during interactions with a researcher. However, I understand the participants' hesitancy to share experiences and thoughts and their need to defend the group from research – which according to their assumption, might increase societal biases – as a consequence of racialisation, because it is a response to being negatively categorised. This opposition against societal biases may hinder internal criticism and self-confidence because, as Du Bois (2008: 121) explained, racialisation is a 'moral hesitancy that is fatal for self-confidence'. Meer (2019: 54), analysing Du Bois's double consciousness, explained that this is fatal for self-confidence 'because internal criticism is impeded or sacrificed within the minority group since the starting point of representation takes the form of a combative defence against societal biases'.

In summary, participants' awareness about how the mainstream portrays Muslims shaped their interactions with me, the researcher, resulting in concealments and positive portrayals of Islam and Muslims. Their defence of Islam and Muslims to avoid further racialisation of the social group they self-identify with is understood as a response to being categorised as extreme 'others'. Unfortunately, this opposition against societal biases may hinder internal criticism, self-confidence, self-image and self-development.

Developing a shared story between the researcher and participants. The participants perceived me as someone whose research would further racialise their group and as someone who shared their experiences. While discussing their religious backgrounds or experiences as a religious minority, some participants said, 'You know how it is', implying that they did not need to elaborate on their experiences, as I already understood them. These participants seemed to believe that I knew what they meant when they shared their perceptions of discrimination and racism and that I had shared similar experiences and knew a lot about the themes I was researching since I was a Muslim. The following interaction with Mohammad, a Norwegian Muslim man of North African descent in his forties, exemplified this belief:

Mohammad:	What are you researching?
Me:	I am researching radicalisation among Norwegian Muslim men.
Mohammad:	Then you know a lot from before, but is your research objectivity not questioned?

The belief that I was familiar with the participants' experiences and that I had shared similar experiences – whether accurate or not – facilitated conversations about the intricacies of racialisation and radicalisation. Although I am a middle-class man and an academically privileged PhD fellow, negative experiences construct, situate and constrain me, for instance, through questions and thoughts, such as, 'In which part of the city should I live so that my daughter, who shares my dark complexion and "Muslim" name, will be protected from the dehumanising experiences of racism?' Furthermore, because I had a long beard during fieldwork, I experienced racialisation narratives for looking like and fitting the essentialised image of a Muslim. In 2015, I experienced a college librarian being scared of me and worrying that my backpack and small suitcase, filled with books, contained bombs. As I asked for the items that I had stored with her colleagues approximately 40–45 minutes previously, she sighed with relief that was plain on her face and said, 'Thank God you came. Now I am relieved'. When I asked her what she meant, she said, 'I wish I did not assume that, but that is how things are due to current events'.

On some occasions, I shared my experiences to start a conversation about racialisation and illustrate what I meant when I asked questions about the participants' experiences. In other instances, in discussing their experiences of racialisation, the participants asked me about my own experiences, assuming that we shared them. My familiarity with such experiences provided insights that were not told, but rather, shared and experienced. For example, I could relate to the participants' experiences of othering and the indescribable feeling of being perceived as a threat. For some participants, this included fear of borrowing academic books about Islam and societal issues from the prison library because doing so might portray them as radicalised or not deradicalised in the correctional officers' view. Such portrayals could influence the length of their imprisonment or their treatment during incarceration. Another participant's experience of othering involved fearing child protection services and answering a kindergarten teacher's question about whether his 4-year-old son was fasting, 'Give my son some time. He will eat. He is not fasting, but had a late breakfast today. Fasting is not prescribed for children in Islam'. In other instances, this feeling manifested in participants' experiences of hiding their faith to avoid discomforting others or to remain a viable candidate for a job vacancy.

My familiarity and relatability with the participants' experiences might also have helped provide insights into their 'specific anomalies' (Collins, 1986: 29), examples of which are scarce in terrorism studies. These commonalities certainly helped raise questions during field research, such as 'Why has the impact of relatively similar experiences of racialisation, to some degree, been so different in our lives? What other narratives, factors, networks and mechanisms influenced participants' stories?' However, as Lee (1995) noted, perceived familiar and relatable experiences might limit the research enquiry. Therefore, I had to ensure that conversations with the participants did not become a process of merely confirming my experiences or relating to participants' experiences instead of listening to them. I tried not to limit enquiry when I received answers such as 'You know how it is', and I did not allow my experiences to guide the participants' responses by limiting the influence of having experiences of racialisation on the participants. Thus, I often had to tell the participants that I was seeking their experiences and perspectives despite already having some knowledge of these issues.

I must emphasise that acknowledging our – that is, the participants' and my – inter-subjective racialised experiences does not constitute an argument for the essentialisation and generalisation of Muslims and other minorities in Norway or anywhere else. Furthermore, I am not arguing that I could relate with every participant because of my status as a Muslim, nor am I arguing that we are all the same, as a passage from my interview with a Norwegian–Somali inmate in his early twenties illustrates. He said, 'I am from Somalia. I was born there, and I will be buried there'. I asked, 'Why do you want to be buried there?' and he replied, 'You are born here, right?', emphasising the difference between us. With this question, he implied that I could not understand his feelings because I had been born in Norway. As 'others', the participants and I shared something – whether imagined or real – through our experiences of discrimination and racism, and feelings of alienation or outsider status. Not all of our negative experiences were equivalent, but the structure and the culture in society that influences such experiences may have the same function for minorities in constructing, situating and constraining them. Thus, individuals from a minority background might be more able to relate and empathise with each other's experiences due to similar experiences or shared categorisations imposed on them by others.

In sum, the interactions between the researcher and the participants, both self-identifying as Muslims, were informed by the development of a shared story based on similar and shared subjective experiences with racialisation. Our intersubjective experiences of being racialised deepened my understanding while limiting my research enquiry. This influence illustrates the need for scholars of race and ethnicity to critically reflect on the stories that develop during field interactions and how they influence research.

Concluding discussion

In many of the reflexive accounts provided in the literature on reflexivity and research positionality, scholars have focussed on the specific influence that one or several of their social identities may have on field dynamics. My field interactions illustrate the need for scholars to be reflexive about the multiple and multifaceted ways in which a specific social identity or social position may influence the research. Furthermore, much of the reflexive work on racialisation has revolved around the insider-versus-outsider dichotomy and how it shapes fieldwork, providing considerable knowledge about how a researcher's dual identity as a researcher and a member of their research group may influence the research process. Studies have also examined how racialising structures influence research. Still, the literature has rarely offered insights into the complex ways in which minority scholars and participants with whom they share a racial background can be affected by racialisation in multiple ways when conducting research. Thus, my findings complement the existing literature by showing how racialised understandings enter field interactions but remain opaque unless a reflexive approach is taken: an approach in which the researcher reflects upon their own and the participants' positionality and membership in a racialised group.

Brubaker (2013: 5) noted that 'scholars do not stand outside the process through which populations of immigrant origin have been transformed into Muslims. They have not simply registered this shift; they have contributed to producing it'. The racialised

interactions between me, the researcher, and the participants, self-identifying Muslims, illustrate the power embedded in knowledge production. Scrutiny of a transparent and vulnerable account of how racialisation influenced mine and the participants' self-identification and interactions was necessary to not reinforce the power relations in the sociocultural and political context. As highlighted through the analysis, this was particularly important considering the inherent risk of bias and racialisation in researching individuals and groups that experience racial exclusion and discrimination.

The process of reflexivity resulted in an explicit awareness that the researcher, who interprets, describes and narrates research data, 'rely on the same culturally shared categories of memory, account, narrative and experience' (Atkinson and Coffey, 2003: 14) as others in society. This realisation led to a reflective and continuous critical view of how the sociocultural context influenced the participants, me, the researcher, and, consequently, the knowledge production. Specifically, building on cultural sociology and ideas from ethnic and racial studies, in my project on how Muslim men in Norway make meaning about political violence, I adopted perspectives that emphasise context and the meaning the data conveys about both self-ascriptions and ascriptions by the others.

I identified three patterns in which racialisation influences field interactions: accepting a racialising view, defending the racialised group and developing a shared story between the researcher and participants. This article's findings suggest that racialisation influenced the study's interactions. Knowledge of and experiences with racialisation deepened my understanding of shared experiences with the participants while limiting my research enquiry. My experiences in the field illustrate how Muslims, researchers and participants – influenced by racialisation – perceive themselves and members of their group, especially people on the group's fringes. As a researcher and a Norwegian Muslim, my view of some participants – radicalised Muslims – may present a cultured and structured story about all Norwegian Muslims. The testimonies of the non-radicalised participants in defence of Islam and Muslims against societal biases illustrate how the story might affect their perceptions, interactions and opportunities. Thus, this study's findings illustrate the structural and cultural influences on individuals involved in research, providing insights into the racialised society in which Muslim radicalisation occurs and is maintained. Desires to present positive views of Islam and Muslims, attempts to distance oneself from an extremist understanding of the religion, and categorisations of jihadists as not Norwegians or as Muslims only on the surface illustrate this influence. These actions can further fuel radicalisation by leading to a double marginalisation of radicalised Muslims – marginalising them from wider society and from the Muslim community.

Recognising the limitations of this study is essential. The data were limited to Norway within a particular timeframe, and my social position included sharing a similar racial background with the participants and ties to the studied community. However, the findings can still enhance the knowledge of the various racial positions that people involved in research can take and how racialisation can influence individuals belonging to a racialised group – in this case, Muslims – during research. The findings facilitate the researchers' understanding of racialisation's impact, emphasising reflexivity. In future research, non-Muslim, white scholars who study Muslims, particularly scholars who study Muslim radicalisation, could provide reflexive accounts of racialisation's influence on them,

because such influences affect everyone. The suggestion that 'only when we see the jihadists not as agents of evil or religious fanatics, but as humans, that we stand a chance of understanding them' (Hegghammer, 2008: 17) can be enhanced with reflexivity. Reflexivity can help us understand how racial biases, preconceptions and experiences influence fieldwork in different ways. If implemented with nuance and continuous self-examination, reflexivity may lead to a fruitful understanding of racialised and racialising experiences during research, providing meaningful data and improving analysis.

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Author biography

Uzair Ahmed is a research fellow at the Center for Research on extremism at the University of Oslo. Drawing on fieldwork, including interviews with radicalised Muslims, in his upcoming work, Ahmed elucidates how Muslim men in Norway make meaning about adopting and rejecting political violence. His research interests are race and ethnicity studies, religion, cultural sociology and qualitative methods.

Resumen

Los sociólogos han estudiado las causas y consecuencias de la culpabilización colectiva y la presentación negativa de los musulmanes, pero se ha prestado menos atención a cómo la culpa colectiva y las descripciones negativas afectan a las categorizaciones de estos grupos vilipendiados por parte de los investigadores. A partir de un trabajo de campo de 22 meses con hombres musulmanes en Noruega, se analiza cómo la racialización puede influir sobre las interacciones en la investigación de campo cuando se estudia un tema controvertido con un grupo racializado. Se identifican tres patrones en los que la racialización afecta a las interacciones de campo: aceptar una visión racializante, defender al grupo racializado y desarrollar una historia compartida entre el investigador y los participantes. Se argumenta que, en este caso, los deseos de presentar puntos de vista positivos del Islam y los musulmanes, los intentos de distanciarse del extremismo religioso y los intentos de categorizar a los musulmanes radicalizados como ni noruegos ni musulmanes son ilustrativos de la influencia de la racialización. Los hallazgos sugieren que las concepciones racializadas entran en las interacciones de campo pero permanecen opacas a menos que el investigador reflexione sobre su

propia posición y la de los participantes y sobre su pertenencia a un grupo racializado. Se concluye que las experiencias compartidas de racialización entre el investigador y los participantes profundizan la comprensión del investigador al tiempo que limitan la investigación.

Palabras clave

identidad, posicionamiento de la investigación, racialización, radicalización, reflexividad

Résumé

Les sociologues se sont intéressés aux causes et aux conséquences de la réprobation et de la description négative collectives des musulmans, mais ont prêté moins d'attention à la manière dont cette réprobation et ces descriptions négatives collectives affectent les catégorisations des chercheurs concernant ces groupes vilipendés. En m'appuyant sur 22 mois de travaux sur le terrain auprès d'hommes musulmans en Norvège, j'analyse la manière dont la racialisation peut influencer les interactions dans la recherche sur le terrain lorsqu'on étudie un sujet controversé avec un groupe racialisé. J'identifie trois situations dans lesquelles la racialisation influe sur les interactions sur le terrain: lorsqu'on accepte un point de vue racialisant, lorsqu'on défend le groupe racialisé et lorsque se développe une histoire commune entre le chercheur et les participants. Dans ce cas, je soutiens que le souci de présenter un point de vue positif sur l'Islam et les musulmans, les efforts pour prendre ses distances avec l'extrémisme religieux et les tentatives pour catégoriser les musulmans radicalisés comme n'étant ni Norvégiens ni musulmans sont révélateurs de l'influence de la racialisation. Il ressort de cette étude que les conceptions racialisées interviennent dans les interactions sur le terrain mais restent opaques à moins que le chercheur ne réfléchisse à sa propre positionnalité et à celle des participants, ainsi qu'à leur appartenance respective à un groupe racialisé. Je conclus que les expériences partagées de racialisation entre un chercheur et les participants approfondissent la compréhension du chercheur en même temps qu'elles limitent l'enquête.

Mots-clés

identité, positionnalité de la recherche, racialisation, radicalisation, réflexivité