“Where are you from?”

Processes of Identification among Norwegian Women Born to Immigrant Parents

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IV
Abstract

First of all, this thesis is a contribution to Norwegian ethnography. It provides a description and analysis of the family histories, everyday rhythms and activities of a limited number of Norwegian women with different shades of brown skin who all live in the Norwegian capital, Oslo. They are all born to parents who migrated from India to Norway in the early seventies. Drawing on Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004), I see these women’s lives as locally embedded but simultaneously informed by transnational social fields.

Secondly, the thesis finds that the non-white bodies of these Norwegian women are constantly made relevant in their everyday interactions. Therefore, this thesis analytically concerns itself with identity, categorisation, ethnicity, “race” and the body. I argue that skin colour is key to understanding processes of identification among Norwegian women born to non-white immigrant parents, and that this identification is labelled by a lay use of the word ethnic. The word ethnic camouflages processes of categorisation connected to skin colour where the main distinction is drawn between perceived white Norwegians and non-white others. Furthermore, I argue that this categorisation can be linked to a solitarist view of identity. A solitarist view of identity, linked with a narrow categorisation of Norwegian bodies, together with the silence surrounding skin colour and “race”, is problematic for my informants. I, therefore, argue for recognising multiple human identities and for talking about skin colour and “race”, which again can open up and reformulate the current identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context. As such, this thesis challenges the silence concerning “race” and skin colour in contemporary Norwegian society.

Keywords: Minority, women, identity, ethnicity, “race”, skin colour, the body, Norway, India.
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Chapter I: Introduction

I woke up early, got up and checked my calendar. I was going to meet Neela for the first time, after several e-mails. I put on a pair of jeans, one of my nicer t-shirts and a woollen sweater. After having met a few informants and noticed their style, I considered putting on a couple of earrings. I knew they would irritate me, however, so I opted for a necklace instead. [...] At the mall I suddenly realised both Neela and I had been quite unspecific as to where we were going to meet. I tried to recall our exchange on e-mail the day before. Had she mentioned a café at the ground floor? I couldn’t remember. I didn’t have her phone number although I had given her mine at least twice. I started wandering about looking for women in their early thirties with North Indian complexion. A woman with North Indian complexion was sitting at a café and gazing in my general direction. I tried to make eye contact, but she ignored me. I decided it couldn’t be Neela. I turned a corner and another woman with darker skin and black hair hurried past me. I caught sight of a colourful top underneath a pretty, grey winter coat. The woman was wearing some make-up as well as nail polish. A few rings and a flashy wristwatch decorated her hands and arms. She also wore some beautiful, gold earrings and a nose ring. My gut told me this was Neela. She went on the escalator, down to the ground floor and went straight into a café where she started looking through her purse. I had followed her and was only a few feet away when she took her mobile to her ear. My mobile started ringing. She caught my eye and smiled.

Excerpt from field notes early March 2011.

The excerpt above is from the first time I met Neela,1 one of my key informants. As the passage shows, I not only expected but noted that she would have “a North Indian complexion” – specifically, her complexion: cappuccino, her hair: black and her eyes: a dark shade of brown. Additionally, I was not surprised that she wore jewellery and make-up. In sum, she stood out from the crowd at the mall and was visible to me.

We sat down at a café and talked about, among other things, the question “where are you from.” This was neither the first, nor the last, time I discussed this particular question with one of my informants. I seldom brought it up myself, but still found that all my informants had to deal with this question in one way or another. They touched on it during interviews and informal conversation and, sometimes, I even heard it, firsthand, while carrying out fieldwork. The inquirer would always be a stranger – if they were not a stranger they obviously need not ask – and the question would always be answered, albeit in different ways, depending on the woman and the context.

1 All names are pseudonyms.
Some of my informants were particularly troubled with the question – specifically, about why people asked, what it meant and how they should answer it. They discussed these aspects with me openly and willingly. Amneet, for example, told me that she was inclined to ask back, “What do you mean, that I’m from Oslo in Norway or India?” At first I thought that this might come across as rude and that it would not be a very successful strategy. However, I observed her once and realised that she had perfected the approach with which she instigated the question. With her sweet smile and gentle tone she did not seem rude at all, but gave the impression that she was sincerely interested in what the stranger meant.

That approach, then, was far more successful than Neela’s answer; “I’m from Groruddalen”. This only proceeded to be followed up with “No, I mean, where are you really from?” I observed this occurrence several times and in the end, Neela would always have to concede that “I’m from India”, or perhaps, “My parents are from India.”

Once, when a child of about six asked Sarah where she was from, she smiled and said, “I’m from India, but I’m also from Norway. I was born here.” So, in the end, they all had to communicate their Indian ancestry in one way or another.

Sarah thought this was problematic and asked me, “Will I ever be just Norwegian?” When I discussed this question with Nimrat she exclaimed, “It’s only because they are curious, isn’t it, I can’t hold it against them!”

In comparison, sometimes my informants would answer the question in a clever manner so as to direct any preconceived notions and thus stressing either their Norwegian or Indian ties. At other times they would attempt to understand the motivation of the person behind the question, tell them straight out that they have an Indian background and, while doing so, excuse them of asking. Even so, they were all continuously asked this same and, in Amnnet’s words, “tiresome” question.

For the most part, my informants let other facets of their identity overrule their Indian ancestry, be it communal, occupational, class or gender. Still, their tie to India, primarily due to their skin colour, was made relevant by strangers who wanted to know where they were “really” from.
This thesis, while staking out a few questions and analysing them on the basis of new data, only concerns a certain aspect and is thus, at best, a beginning in analysing the identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context.

**Research question**

The main research question is: How can we understand processes of identification among Norwegian women born to immigrant parents? Connected to this I ask how women who are born and raised in Norway to parents who migrated from India identify themselves and are identified by significant others. As I will show, these women are well integrated economically, socially and culturally. I therefore wonder what trajectories exist for them to be identified as Norwegians or, perhaps, to what extent they may be identified as Norwegians. More crudely, I wonder whether it is possible for them and others who resemble them to identify and be identified as Norwegians when they are not white.

The theoretical framework for answering these questions can be introduced through the central concepts of identity, categorisation, ethnicity, “race” and the body. These concepts – that are all closely linked to one another – and their relevance for the project are outlined below. Later on in the thesis, I will build on this thread and expand it to include a discussion about place and transnationalism.

Before I continue it is worth noting that I refer to my informants and others like them who are born and raised in Norway and are Norwegian citizens, as Norwegians. A further discussion of this label is included under a question of semantics.

**Central concepts**

I follow Jenkins and understand identity as “a process – identification – […] It is not something one can have, or not; it is something that one does […] identification doesn’t determine what humans do” (Jenkins 2008 [1996]:5). As such, it must be discovered empirically while acknowledging that whatever is discovered in the field is only a glimpse into processes of identification at a specific time and place. Furthermore, “knowing who’s who isn’t merely a matter of neutral classification. Or, rather, classification is rarely neutral […] [it] is also hierarchal interactionally and socially” (Jenkins 2008 [1996]:6). Looking at identity, then, is closely linked to social classification.
Seeing identity as a continuous process, not a product, allows for multiple human identities. If we all contain multitudes, we can select among our identities, whether consciously or not, and invest in those we share with others rather than those we do not or vice versa, given certain external factors that may limit such investments (Moore 1994:60, 64-66). Building on Moore (1994), I argue for the importance of recognising multiple human identities. This stance is informed by a poststructuralist perspective.

In contrast, a solitarist view sees human beings as members of exactly one group. As such, a solitarist view involves the fallacy of reducing the multiple and shifting identities present in every human being to a single, unchanging essence (Sen 2006). The solitarist view is directly relevant for the title of this thesis, which refers to a question my informants cannot escape. It seems that all those who ask “where are you from” do not allow for multiple human identities. Those who ask are only content with one answer: “India.” In other words, “where are you from” implies that my informants can only be from one place and that the place in question is their parents’ country of origin. If my informants can only be from one place, their multiplicity is reduced to one single, unchanging essence. Furthermore, this solitary identity that is imposed on them – Indian – is connected to their bodies in general and their skin colour in particular. This, in short, is the basis for the analysis developed in chapters IV and V.

Returning to Jenkins, he writes that “identification is often most consequential as the categorisation of others, rather than as self-identification” (Jenkins 2008 [1996]:15). Identification in the form of categorisation of my informants vis-à-vis significant others, albeit seen in relation to my informants’ self-identification, is the prime interest of this thesis. If identification happens in contact with significant others, here understood as others who are relevant for my informants’ identification depending on context (Berger and Luckmann 1967; see also Jenkins 2008 [1996]), then it can be understood as happening in concrete meetings between my informants and others. Anthropological fieldwork, as detailed under the methodology in the next chapter, may be a valuable method for observing and partaking in processes of identification. Both processes of identification and who the significant other is, then, depend on context and must be discovered empirically.

Categorisation has to do with systematic ordering and, as such, classification. According to Douglas, “whatever we perceive is organised into patterns for which we, the perceivers, are largely responsible. Perceiving is not a matter of passively allowing an organ [...] to receive a ready-made impression from without [...]. In perceiving we are building, taking some cues
and rejecting others. The most acceptable cues are those which fit most easily into the pattern that is being built. Ambiguous ones tend to be treated as if they harmonised with the rest of the pattern. Discordant ones tend to be rejected. If they are accepted the structure of assumptions has to be modified” (Douglas 1989 [1966]:36).

Ethnicity can be understood as one form of categorisation, as well as an aspect of a person’s identity, where people are systematically ordered in accordance with their heritage. That being said, there are notable differences between an anthropological understanding of ethnicity and my informants’ use of the very same term.

As I will show, my informants’ use of the word ethnic must be seen in light of the question “where are you from.” The meaning of the word ethnic, then, is contextual. In response to the question “where are you from”, the word ethnic allows for both my informants’ Norwegian-ness and their Indian family heritage. As such, my informants’ use of the word differs from the varying anthropological understandings of the term.

Barth (1998 [1969]) points to the boundaries in order to understand ethnicity and claims that it is on the boundary, when differing ethnic groups meet, that ethnicity is made relevant. To the extent that actors use ethnic markers to categorise themselves and others for social interaction, they form ethnic groups (Barth 1998 [1969]:11-12). According to Barth, we should not focus on the ethnic group itself, but rather on the boundaries (ibid). Barth, in short, argues that it is exactly because of such contact, and even because of the flows of information and members across such boundaries, that ethnic categories are made relevant and, thus, defined and redefined (ibid). Boundaries are not only useful for studying ethnicity; they are a prerequisite for ethnicity to even exist. In other words, for ethnicity to be relevant there must be a minimum of contact between groups who perceive each other as significantly different (Eriksen 2002 [1993]:12). Understood in these terms, ethnicity is an aspect of a relationship, not a quality one group holds (ibid).

If ethnicity is an aspect of a relationship, can “race” be understood along the same lines or is “race” perhaps a quality that one group holds? Either way, if it were that clear cut it would be easy, but unfortunately the line between ethnicity and “race” is, at best, blurry. In Eriksen’s words “ethnicity can assume many forms, […] ethnic groups have a common myth of origin, which relates ethnicity to descent, which again makes it a kindred concept to race” (Eriksen 2002 [1993]:6). The matter is made even more exasperating by the silence concerning “race”
in Norway today (Eriksen 1993:161; Hübinette and Tigervall 2009; Rysst 2012). It seems, in short, that “race” is taboo (ibid). The terms ethnic and ethnicity, on the other hand, have become increasingly popular and have cropped up in the press and casual conversations and such (Eriksen 2002 [1993]:1).

In short, “race” is, like ethnicity, a difficult concept to define. Historically, “race” can be connected to the age of European colonisation when the term served to categorise Europeans and others around the world hierarchically into distinct categories (Wade 2002:2). Since then, both of these aspects of “race” have been revised. Particularly, it has been denied that human beings can be categorised systematically along the lines of “race” and that these divisions point to a hierarchical world order. Today, “race” is mostly seen as a purely social construct (ibid). That being said, although “race” is not seen as biologically grounded, it tends to be understood as a social construct building on ideas of nature and heredity, which again is linked to phenotype (Wade 2002:11).

Phenotype can underlie notions of “race.” Still, phenotype refers to a large number of traits, of which only a few are seen as racial. Specifically, “[of] all the differences between the races of man, the colour of the skin is the most conspicuous and one of the best marked” (Darwin 1871:241), which in part accounts for my focus on skin colour in particular. Still, skin colour cannot be seen as a neutral marker. It is, in Wade’s words, “linked to a particular history” (Wade 2002:4). As such, not only “race”, but skin colour can be understood as a social construct embedded with meaning depending on context.

Perhaps “race” can be understood in much the same vein as gender in Moore’s terms (1999): as dialectically both biologically given and socially and symbolically constructed, bearing in mind that these two are not dichotomous, but rather stand in an unfixed relation to one another. The biologically given is symbolically constructed and the symbolically constructed is at the same time biologically given (Moore 1999).

“Race” might easily lead to implications of racism. Still, “race” and racialised ethnicity need not be directly connected to racism. Racism can be understood as “practices perpetuating oppressive power relations between populations” (Wade 2002:4). The key words, I believe, are “oppressive power relations” (ibid). The words, conversations and situations described herein, may be analysed with reference to notions of “race” or, in the least, racialised
ethnicity. That does not mean they purport “oppressive power relations”. As such they do not necessarily fit within the frames of racism.²

“Race” has severely negative connotations. It is, for example, wrought with the immensely tragic histories of the transatlantic slave trade and the more recent Holocaust during World War II. This I cannot escape when I choose to evoke the word. Therefore, and to remind the reader that the concept is a social construct, I will write “race” just so, between quotes.

Returning to ethnicity, it is important to note that “some ethnic groups are racialised, as when immutable traits are accorded to ethnic minorities” (Eriksen 2002 [1993]:6). If ethnicity is racialised, racialisation points to specific aspects of phenotype, and skin colour is the most conspicuous phenotype in a specific geographical and historical context, can ethnicity and skin colour be two sides of the same coin? I would answer that question with no. Still, the colour of a person’s skin may be the main marker of his or her ethnic membership in certain social contexts.

I argue that skin colour is key to understanding the identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context, and that this identification is labelled by a lay use of the word ethnic. As such, the word ethnic camouflages processes of categorisation connected to skin colour.

Skin colour can also be misleading, such as with transnational adoptees. Still, even when skin colour should, perhaps, not be a basis for identification, research on Swedish non-white adoptees finds that their colour is made significant in their everyday interactions with others (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009). Later on in the thesis I will expand on this thread with reference to Hübinette’s analysis of his non-white body and others like him in a Swedish context (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009; Hübinette and Lundström 2011; Hübinette in press).

Skin colour is connected to the body. I understand both skin colour and the body as biologically given and socially and symbolically constructed, bearing in mind that these two are, as said, not dichotomous, but stand in an unfixed relation to one another. Biologically

² Norwegian racism has been heavily discussed (see, for example, Brox 1997; Gullestad 2010 [2002]), for instance during the winter of 2000 and 2001 when the word neger (the Norwegian equivalent to Negro) was subject to public scrutiny (Gullestad 2010 [2002]:175). In relation to this public discussion, the question cropped up of whether or not those who use the word neger are racist. I will not dwell on that discussion, but note it here because the unnamed others in this thesis are not necessarily racists just because I analyse their sayings and doings in lines of “race”. The scope of my analysis within this thesis is not concerned with racism.
given skin colour and bodies, after all, can only be understood symbolically while the
symbolic constructions of skin colour and bodies are grounded in the biologically given.
Again I build on Moore (1999).

Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) suggest that the body may be viewed from three different
perspectives: the individual body, the social body and the body politic. While acknowledging
that these three overlap empirically, the distinctions are useful. This thesis is primarily
concerned with the social body, as a natural symbol for thinking about relationships among
nature, society, and culture (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). I am concerned with how
biologically given traits are understood in a Norwegian context and how these understandings
come into play in social interaction. In addition, there is an element of control here as how my
informants are categorised by others not necessarily reflects or, even, accepts their self-
identification. As such, I am also concerned with the political body, as an object of social and
political control (ibid). That being said, the individual body is present in this thesis both in the
form of mine and my informants’ bodies in general and skin colour in particular, but also
when I touch on the concept of self, which may be seen in relation to individual bodies.

Furthermore, I build on aspects of the successor science project (Harding 1986; Haraway
1988; Hartsock 1998) in understanding the female bodily experience, but also the French
feminists Kristeva and Irigaray (Widerberg 1990; Fürst 1998; Birkeland 2000). I find these
discussions about how to understand the female body and what it means to be in the world
with a female body, as well as the sliding experience between subject and object, fruitful in
understanding the identification of my informants. In other words, we are bodies, and so our
bodies can be understood as subjects, but we also have bodies, as if they were objects. The
experience of both being and having a body can be understood as sliding. What is more, we,
including my informants, cannot escape our bodies. However the body is read and categorised
as an object, then, will limit the possibilities for the subjective body. This hints at the
dialectics of categorisation on the part of others and self-identification and how problematic it
can be if these two do not correspond.

In relation to these central concepts and the negative connotations of “race” in particular, it is
important to note larger historical and political processes that have shaped the specific
situation for migrants and their descendants in Norway today. Here theories concerning post-
colonialism are useful. Following Keskinen, Tuori, Irni and Mulinari, Norway can be seen as
colonially complicit despite the nation states image of itself as “untouched by colonial
legacies” (Keskinen et al 2009:2). According to Keskinen et al, the Nordic countries have “never [gone] through a clear period of critique of colonialism and its presence in everyday environments and encounters” (Keskinen et al 2009:2). This can pose as a background for exploring the identification of children of immigrants as well as subtle and perhaps hidden ideas of perceived non-white and non-Norwegian bodies belonging elsewhere, and not in Oslo. Here my stance is critical. I explore whether this is a complicating factor for the children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context.

I find that, although my informants mostly identify themselves and often strive to be identified by others as Norwegians, their skin colour does not grant them inclusion within the category of so-called ethnic Norwegians. Therefore they are constantly asked where they are from. As such, my informants are seen as others and label themselves and are labelled by others with the word ethnic. My informants are born and raised in Norway, they speak fluent Norwegian, are embedded in Norwegian society economically, socially and culturally, but their complexion is darker than most of their peers as they are varying shades of brown. Is whiteness, then, the main marker of a Norwegian? To what extent can my informants be categorised as Norwegian? Will they, perhaps, never be recognised as fully Norwegian, always belonging elsewhere outside of Norway’s borders as a nation-state?

I use skin colour in a broad sense, to denote skin tone in particular but also other aspects of phenotype. In connection to this, I use whiteness in reference to various shades of pink-tinted skin, while acknowledging that there are other aspects of the body that also are implied in the word white; namely the shape and colour of the eyes, nose and mouth and the colour and texture of bodily hair, primarily on the head. I use white in reference to people who not only have different shades of pale, white skin, but also who have further traits that are associated with whiteness. In connection to this, non-white in this thesis includes people who have different shades of yellow, beige, brown and black skin and, perhaps, almond-shaped eyes or black sleek or frizzy hair. This, in short, is due to the words and categories deployed by my informants, which is further detailed below under a question of semantics.

In sum, this thesis is about processes of identification of children of non-white immigrants on the basis of skin colour, which is referred to as ethnicity in the field, but might more accurately be read as racialised ethnicity.
A question of semantics

The very core of this thesis revolves around who ‘they’ are and who ‘we’ are, with reference to processes of identification in a Norwegian context. As such, it deals with the categorisation of ‘them’ and ‘us’, which, in part, is central to the anthropological undertaking (Moore 1994:5).

According to Douglas, “[as] learning proceeds, objects are named. Their names then affect the way they are perceived next time: once labelled they are more speedily slotted into the pigeon-holes in future” (Douglas 1989 [1966]:36). This process of labelling, then, is not without consequence. Labels are not merely descriptive but speak to underlying perceptions that are linked with power and knowledge that, in turn, define the field we study (Foucault 1980a). Therefore, I will use some space to detail the semantics of this field.

Prieur asks whether researchers who represent the majority pay too much attention to the minority and too little to the majority (Prieur 2007:48). According to Prieur, this attention involves a strong focus on ‘them’ versus ‘us’. Gjellum, among others, claims to work against this trend because his study on ‘them’ also concerns ‘us’ (Gjellum 2011:11-12). I wish to go even further. As I expand on who ‘they’ are and who ‘we’ are, with reference to Norwegians, I question when and if the boundaries between ‘them’ and ‘us’, as they are currently mapped out, are no longer relevant.

While keeping the above in mind I realise that my entire project might be working against my wish to deconstruct the boundaries between ‘them’ and ‘us’. By studying Norwegian women with parents who migrated from India, I am making their migrational background relevant yet again. No matter what else my informants are, I still make their skin colour their prime marker in my thesis. The reason I make it relevant, however, is because it arose in the field. As such, I believe it colours my informants’ everyday lives. By shedding light on this fact, I might contribute to us, as a society, to treat these questions more openly. Hopefully, one day, my thesis and the categories detailed herein will no longer be relevant.

Either way, as this thesis does concern a perceived minority in Norway today, it is important to discuss the terms used to describe my informants and the people they relate to in their everyday lives. I use the word perceived because what we categorise as a minority depends on what we are looking for. What terms are appropriate for people who are born and raised in
Norway, but whose parents are immigrants? A specific term can shed light on the matter at hand, but can also conceal important aspects pertaining to the discussion. According to Prieur the problem with labelling one another reflects the problem of how we should understand one another (Prieur 2007:46).

Statistics Norway (the Norwegian central bureau of statistics, hereafter referred to as SSB) has previously referred to my informants and those with a similar family history as “descendants.” Now they use the term “Norwegian-born with immigrant parents: persons born in Norway with two immigrant parents” (Henriksen, Østby and Ellingsen 2010:11). I use a similar term, but recognise that it can be long and impractical, particularly in everyday speech.

“Second-generation immigrant” has also been used in Norwegian and international research. Both this and “descendants” is, however, problematic because it makes “immigrant” an eternal category that so-called descendants cannot escape, even though they are born and raised in Norway (Hervik 1999, Gullestad [2002]). As such, these terms lock my informants within an unchanging solitarist identity.

Hyphenated terms such as “Norwegian-Indian” are common, but unspecific and therefore problematic within an analytical framework. First of all, which word should come first? Elina insisted that she was Norwegian-Indian, but not Indian-Norwegian, because she is a Norwegian citizen and therefore first and foremost Norwegian. Surya said she probably was Indian-Norwegian because her parents came first and they were Indian before her family moved to Norway. Both Elina’s and Surya’s arguments carry validity. Secondly, hyphenated terms can lead us to believe that the person in question is equally both Norwegian and Indian. Is someone born and raised in Norway both Norwegian and Indian? Does Norwegian-Indian perhaps describe a person with one parent from Norway and the other from India? This highlights how unspecific the term is. Simrit twice proposed the term “ethnic Indian Norwegian” as a more fitting description, but just like the hyphenated term, ethnic Indian Norwegian can be confusing.

Personally I prefer “first generation Norwegian” (Eriksen 2007 [2001]:52), which I have found in a limited number of newspaper articles this past year, as it sheds light on the person at hand and his or her connection to Norway, rather than focusing on his or her parents. This term, however, heaps together individuals who may have nothing else in common but being
first generation Norwegians. It might be valuable for some purposes, but, again, unspecific and therefore problematic in other contexts.

In the end, I have opted for experience-near or emic labels (Geertz 1983; Wikan 1991; see also Rysst 2008:51). In short, I will refer to my informants and others like them who are born and raised in Norway, are Norwegian citizens and speak fluent Norwegian, regardless of their migrational family history, as Norwegians. This is connected to how my informants present themselves, when they are not referring to or detailing their heritage. When the empirical material or subsequent analysis calls for a further clarification with regards to origin, I will call so-called unmarked white Norwegians (Eriksen 2010:75) for ethnic Norwegians, however problematic this term may be. Ethnic Norwegians is the label my informants use to differentiate those who are born to white Norwegian parents from themselves.

Implicit in the question of semantics, is who the thesis is addressing. According to Gullestad (2010 [2002]), Norwegian studies on migrants have had ‘them’ as subject, but ‘us’ in terms of ethnic white Norwegians as recipients as the studies seek to explain ‘them’ and make ‘them’ more understandable to ‘us’ (ibid). Rather, I address my thesis to all those interested in the identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context, among whom, I am certain, are my informants. That being said, I must underline that, while I do speak about my informants and perhaps even to them, I do not speak for them (cf. Moore 1994:10).

Before moving on, I wish to note that all of the above terms, even if they seem neutral, are part of the politics of identity naming. Each label carries not only connotations, but pictures due to history, which can be more or less stigmatising for the people involved. In a postcolonial perspective, the history that we draw on is that of Norway as colonially complicit (Keskinen et al 2009). As such, the terminology matters as the terms we use shape our perceptions and actions.

**Earlier research**

There is an extensive and rich ethnography on India, about hierarchy for example, which I originally thought could be useful. In the end, I found fruitful texts elsewhere. As it stands,
the thesis, through looking at the identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Northern European capital, is more closely linked to the theoretical literature detailed in reference to the central concepts above, including the articles on non-white bodies in a Swedish context, which make for a fruitful case of comparison (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009; Hübinette and Lundström 2011; Hübinette in press).

Although my main argument has to do with identification on the basis of skin colour at a general level, it specifically builds on the lives and stories of Norwegian women currently living in Oslo born to parents who migrated from India. Non-European migrants have been amply studied (see, for example, Fangen and Mohn 2010:141), but still Indian migrants and their children who are born and raised in Norway remain nearly invisible. Kramer (1979) conducted a study among Indian immigrants towards the end of the 1970’s, which, as such, deals with the parental generation of my informants. Since then, however, there has been a generational shift. Not only is it time to get to know the Norwegian-born children of Indian immigrants, much has also changed in Norway and the rest of the world since the seventies. This, in part, was the motivation for delineating my field the way I did.

There is, fortunately, some recent material to build on. Gupta (2006) explores his Hindu informants’ religious beliefs and how their concept of dharma differs from that found in India. There is also one previous thesis in social anthropology about North Indian Hindu women in Oslo that uses discourse analysis to understand ethnicity, gender and migration with particular attention to so-called Indian identity (Jarl 2004). Jarl’s findings were a helpful starting point for my own project, but my focus is on processes of identification, with attention to Norwegian-ness, rather than on Indian identity. Also, religion is not the main marker of my informants. My thesis also differs from Jarl’s dissertation as the latter is written in Norwegian and clearly directed towards a Norwegian audience, meaning certain aspects, such as the significance of the Labour Party in Norwegian politics, are not detailed when mentioned (Jarl 2004:60). Still, Jarl’s empirical details and analysis have been a valuable case of comparison for my own findings, and the reader will therefore find references to Jarl throughout this thesis.

understood religiously, as the result of immigration or occupation waves, or as an expression of the stratification of society on the basis of differing professions. See, for example, Barnett, Fruzzetti and Ostors discussion of Dumont and how to understand caste (1976).
With regard to other migrant groups in Oslo, one thesis concerning Pakistani women as wives, mothers and daughters, another about the meaning of dance in the Tamil community, and a third about so-called ethnic male youth, who have either migrated themselves or are the sons of migrants, and their use of ethnic stereotypes have been of particular help in shaping my own project (Vedeler 2003; Monkerud 2006; Gjellum 2011).

The structure of the thesis

The thesis is, for the sake of clarity, organised into six main chapters. Still, these chapters are connected to one another and should be read as such.

The introduction has set the scene for the rest of the thesis by briefly presenting a case from the field together with the research question and the theoretical framework through outlining the central concepts and some relevant earlier research. The next chapter details the methodology behind the project as a whole in order to account for the bias on part of the researcher, informants and field as such. Chapter III details my informants’ heritage. As these women represent a relatively blank spot on the ethnographic map of Norway, I have included further notes on what it means to have parents who migrated by fleshing out the historical and geographical specific context as well as the life story of one of my informants in particular. Chapter IV expands on the introductory notes of the central concepts to include a discussion of place and transnationalism. It provides further insight into how the identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context is positioned within a larger historical and geographical framework. Chapter V, through examining multiple identities and both questioning and answering “where are you from”, presents the main arguments of this thesis. Finally, the findings and arguments are summed up in the conclusion.

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4 Again, the labels are problematic. Calling these boys ethnic implies that they have ethnicity or are part of an ethnic group while white Norwegians do not have ethnicity and are not part of such a group (cf. Vike’s note about culture 2007 [2001]:138).
Chapter II: Methodology

This is a qualitative thesis based on anthropological fieldwork. Specifically, both verbal and nonverbal data were gathered through participant observation in specific contexts, semi-structured interviews and life story interviews.

Trajectory of the fieldwork

My fieldwork started with a category: Norwegian women born to parents who migrated to Norway from India. This is quite different from Malinowski’s preferred start “suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village, while the launch or dinghy which has brought you sails away out of sight” (Malinowski 1922:4). Instead, my fieldwork started during a lunch in May 2010 with my friend Lilly, who is born and raised in Norway to parents who migrated from India. We were discussing how she, who is born and raised within Norway’s borders, has to legitimise her presence here while I, who have spent more than half my life abroad, am assumed to belong. Why can I easily be identified as Norwegian, but not Lilly, when she is clearly better culturally integrated than I?

As my project evolved, I became further motivated by the specific details concerning the identification of Norwegian-born daughters of immigrants from India. Not only does their case present a blank spot on the ethnographic map of Norway, their case also sheds light on what it takes to be identified as Norwegians, considering how well integrated they are economically, socially and culturally.

I started contacting possible informants in October 2010, going through friends and acquaintances. This can be quite strategic for gaining access to and the confidence of informants. I, of course, belong to a specific segment of the population. For example, I’m currently pursuing higher education, both my parents have higher education and they currently live in the western part of Oslo, in a quite expensive area, while I live in the east. Therefore, on the other hand, only going through friends and acquaintances might heavily affect my material. I tried countering this by activating different parts of my network, including acquaintances from previous places of work and school. I also searched the Internet using keywords. These two tactics provided the initial access.

5 The interviews could also be called semi-formal (Bernard 2002 in Madden 2010:67).
Continued access to the field, however, was not given at any time. This was the single most difficult aspect of my fieldwork, which was highly related to the field itself (Rysst 2008:41). I continuously had to plan, organise and reorganise meetings, visits and so on.

I met and discussed the project further with Lilly in October 2010 and then Nimrat and Amneet in December that year. In January 2011 I started out by contacting, visiting and interviewing Sarah. By the end of March 2011 I was in touch with ten women, three of whom I was meeting regularly: Sarah, Neela and Surya. Except for a few nights where I stayed with one of my informants, I slept at my own apartment and travelled back and forth between my informants and their respective social arenas of everyday life. In other words, I was planning meals, meetings and interviews with each of them at various times and places. Still, as my interest was with processes of identification, my prime concern was with tagging along in various contexts where the women’s identity was made relevant or called into question vis-à-vis significant others. How much time I could tag along or claim completely, however, varied not only from woman to woman, but also from week to week.

Whether I only had a few meetings during a week or more, I soon came to realise that planning and organising also was part of my fieldwork. The planning and organising could provide valuable material for analysis. For example, I had to get an idea of each woman’s time schedule in order to know when I could invite myself over and tag along. This gave me information about the rhythm of their everyday lives.

Although I started contacting informants in October 2010, the foci of my fieldwork lasted from January to September 2011, with a short break in April and altogether two weeks summer vacation in June and July. More time could always be useful (Stewart 1998:20-21), but I have tried to weigh the focus of my fieldwork against the time available in order to make the most of it.

This trajectory, together with the following descriptions of my informants and fieldwork as such, are included here to account for the biases of myself and, in part, my informants.

**Informants**

There are a total of 93 000 Norwegians born to parents who migrated to Norway as of 1.1.2010 (Henriksen et al 2010:15). For the most part, the people in this category are still
young. As of the same date, a little less than 85 per cent of this category was under 20 years old. SSB notes itself that it is of interest to observe whether or not these people will follow the same patterns as the population at large or if it the various subgroups, categorised on the basis of their parents’ country of origin, will follow the patterns of their parents, with regards to education, employment and such (Henriksen et al 2010). While this thesis is not a quantitative study of this category at large, it does discuss questions that can be of interest with thoughts to the category as a whole.

According to the SSB, there are 475 Norwegian women born to parents from India, in the age group 20-66 as of 1.1.2011 (SSB 2011). Most of these women live in Oslo, only 3 are between 45 and 66, and there are none who are older than 66 (personal communication with SSB). This, of course, is connected to the history of migration from India to Norway.

I have been in touch with a total of seventeen women, all above 25 years of age and all with parents who migrated to Norway from the northern parts of India. Jarl studied female migrants from India and their daughters, the latter in the age group 18-28 (Jarl 2004:29). The age groups we study, then, are separate although they overlap in part. The age group I focus on is also based on my own age as the fieldwork depended on me forming relations to my informants. Most of the women could, with thoughts to age, be my friends if we had met in other social settings.

Of the seventeen I have been in touch with, I have a lot of notes on Sarah, Neela and Surya in particular. Sarah and Neela were the ones who greeted me most enthusiastically. Both invited me into their homes willingly. After some time, I was also allowed to follow each of them at their respective places of work. Only seldom did they question my project. Our relationships closely resembled friendships, I believe, and although they are the ones I have the most notes on, they are also the ones I find most difficult to detail on paper. This, I think, is due to my sense of obligation as a friend to not expose their lives more than necessary. Both have, however, in each their way told me to write whatever I wish, and, bearing that in mind, I will introduce them both in more detail later on in the thesis.

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6 Silje Vatne Pettersen, coordinator at SSB. E-mail 21.7.2011 and 19.8.2011. SSB does not have detailed information about this category available on its website, because the category is considered too small and detailed information may be traced back to the individuals in question.

7 Indians who settled in Oslo came from northern regions, primarily Punjab. As for the age group, 25 is used as a marker in statistics, where, for example, 18-25 denotes young adults (see, for example, Fangen and Mohn 2010:146).
Surya, on the other hand, allowed me to tag along with her at work and I visited her at home, but our relationship must be like that between professional business associates. She agreed to partake in the project and insisted on seeing it through, but even the last time I saw her she commented how strange my project seemed and asked me what on earth I was looking for. As such, she continuously challenged me and helped me sharpen my understanding of my own project.

A further seven women also agreed to participate in the project. These seven I call Nimrat, Amneet, Preet, Eveleen, Gurnoor, Simrit and Elina. I met each of them in person, over a cup of coffee, and explained the project as best I could. Madden uses the term “pleading” (Madden 2010:59) in reference to such opening conversations, a term I find quite fitting. Each of them agreed to two interviews – one semi-structured background interview and one life story interview – but claimed they were too busy for further involvement. I suppose they could imagine what interviews entailed and therefore said yes to those, while any further involvement seemed diffuse and stressful. Again, Madden is on the spot, reminding us that interviews are “utterly pervasive” and that we find them on “television shows […] in courtrooms” and so on (Madden 2010:67). In other words, interviews may seem familiar even to those who have never been interviewed before. As for further involvement, I suppose I did a poor job of explaining participant observation to them. Still, I visited most of these women at home, in some cases I also met their husbands, children, friends or even parents and quite a few I also joined for breakfast, lunch or dinner in connection to one or both of the interviews. My contact, visits and interviews with these women puts the notes on the first three in relief and grants me vantage points I could not have discovered myself.

These first ten women make up my key informants.

I also talked to, e-mailed and/or met a further seven women to discuss my project. One lived in Bergen, another was born and raised in India, a third was too closely related to one of my key informants and I felt it would be a breach of confidentiality to involve her, and four women claimed they were too busy to participate at all. Of these seven, the notes I have on the women I call Lilly and Raveena might be of interest.

My key informants all do very well on parameters such as education, employment and salary. They have all completed or are about to complete higher education. This might be due to the gendered nature of my material. According to the SSB, more women than men pursue and
complete higher education, both among Norwegians born to immigrant parents and among the
population at large (Henriksen et al 2010:56-57, 61). Those who are still studying either
volunteer with respectable non-governmental organisations or have paid part-time
employment. Most of those who have finished their education have high standing jobs; about
half in the private and half in the public sector. A couple are self-employed. All but one of my
informants are homeowners. The last lives at home with her parents and younger sister. This
contrasts the living arrangements among Jarl’s informants, of whom most still lived with their
parents (Jarl 2004:29, 84-86). This, however, could be due to the difference in age noted
earlier.

My informants’ annual incomes reflect all these facts. As such, my informants do better than
other migrant groups and their descendants based on their country of origin and, even, better
than the population at large (Jarl 2004:17-19). Unfortunately, I do not have access to statistics
that could shed more light on the category of Norwegian women born to parents who
migrated from India as a whole. Again, I have to underline that the women I met cannot be
seen as representatives of any larger group.

Based on their education, employment and salaries, I would say all my key informants belong
to the middle class. They are healthy, meaning they eat healthy food and all but one of them
exercises regularly. Eveleen, who does not exercise, is quite thin and still pays attention to her
diet and goes for regular walks with her children. All but one dress classy with, for example,
nice jeans, a pretty top, high heels and some jewellery. Their style could be called preppy
urban. In other words, they follow the fashion of their peers. Surya, who stands out from the
rest, more often dresses in a salwar, an Indian tunic, over a pair of pants. Her style could be
characterised as ethnic, although I recognise that the label is problematic as it implies that, for
example, Indian dresses are ethnic while Norwegian dresses are not. I saw Surya in a summer
dress that could have been bought at H&M, but other than that I never saw her in jeans.

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8 Most of the statistics that are available either focus on migrants, meaning the parents of my informants, or they
group together Norwegians born to immigrant parents, although the parents in question have migrated from a
wide range of different countries. When it comes to higher education, however, approximately 65 per cent of
Norwegian women born to parents who migrated to Norway from India in the age group 19-24, were pursuing
higher education in 2009 (Henriksen et al 2010:57). Other than that, statistics on the parental generation show
that migrants from India are on the higher end when it comes to employment and salaries, as opposed to other
migrant groups (see, for example, Henriksen et al 2010:105).

9 Jarl notes a difference in clothing habits between girls in the Indian diaspora in Norway and in England, where
the girls in England more often wear so-called Indian clothing (Jarl 2004:41). For a further analysis of clothing
My youngest informant does, at the time of fieldwork and writing, not have a boyfriend. According to her, she is currently investing in her studies and does not want to enter a relationship she does not have time and energy to invest in anyhow. Of my remaining nine key informants, two have boyfriends and seven are married. In comparison, most of Jarl’s younger informants had boyfriends or were engaged (Jarl 2004:119). My informants’ boyfriends are both ethnic pale, white Norwegians, one of whom, according to his girlfriend, is Christian. The other boy is non-confessional. Among the husbands, three have the same backgrounds as their wives: They are born to parents who migrated from India to Norway in the early seventies and are either Sikh or Hindu, like their wife. One couple has the same migrational family history, but she is Sikh and he is Hindu. This couple performed both marriage ceremonies when they got married. Two of my key informants have married ethnic white Norwegians. The last woman is married to a man who migrated to Norway from India to study at 18.

Sikhism and Hinduism are predominant in Northern India and, as most of the migration to Norway has been from Northern India, Sikhs and Hindus are respectively the largest and second largest South Asian religious groups in Norway (Jarl 2004:16-21; Gupta 2006). Half of the women I have been in contact with are Sikhs, the other half Hindu. None of them wear immediately recognisable religious artefacts or clothing, such as turbans. A couple of the Sikh women wear Sikh bracelets, but these are not conspicuous. Of the Sikh women who are married, none of their husbands wear turbans either.10 Gupta’s book (2006), mentioned under earlier research, is an excellent study in how Hindu youth in Norway individualise their religion. Similarly, I found that the Hindu and Sikh women I met individualised their religion. They did not necessarily perform rituals or visit their respective temples frequently, but most of them told me about times when they prayed. One of my informants was more concerned with her religion, including following rituals and such, but she did not visit the temple frequently either. In a Norwegian context coloured by frequent debates in the media about Islam in general and Muslim headscarves in particular, the absence of religious ornaments and artefacts first on my informants’ bodies and secondly in their homes, then, is significant as it indicates that the identification of children of immigrants is not founded on primarily religious notions. In other words, the religious aspect could be detriment to identifying non-

10 Amritdhari Sikhs, women and men who have undergone amrit (a form of baptism or initiation), are required to wear the five Ks: kachha (pair of shorts), kes (hair), kangha (comb), kirpan (sword), and karha (steel bracelet) (Jacobsen and Myrvold 2011:6). None of my informants or their husbands had undergone amrit. One told me she considered it, but she said she was not ready yet.
white bodies in a Norwegian context, but based on my informants’ seemingly secular appearance, regardless of whether or not they are secular, skin colour is more important to take into account. Therefore, I will focus on skin colour and not pay further attention to religion within the framework of this thesis.\footnote{This is also because my informants are more concerned with their so-called Indian-ness rather than their religious affiliation (cf. Jarl 20004:10).}

The above highlights how my informants make for a case in point to examine how Norwegian women born to immigrant parents manage their identities. In short, they are born and raised within Norway’s borders to ambitious and hardworking parents, meaning that they are well integrated economically as well as socially and culturally. With the exception of Surya, they do not stand out from the majority population with regards to clothing. Nor do they wear immediately recognisable religious clothing or artefacts. How, then, do they identify and how are they identified by others?

**Participant observation and interviews**

I underwent fieldwork in Oslo, the Norwegian capital and the city I have called home for the past six years. Such fieldwork could be classified as fieldwork at home, which has been subject to several discussions concerning methodology and ethics including the theoretical implications of these aspects. In particular Howell (2001) has asked whether it is possible to perform fieldwork with participant observation at home. According to Howell (ibid), the anthropologist gains access to few and limited venues. This equals less interactional data, which again leads to a greater reliance on interviews. Frøystad (2003), however, insists that this pertains to fields in all complex societies, not just the anthropologist’s own. More importantly, Frøystad (ibid) shows that it is possible to undergo fruitful fieldwork with participatory observation in complex societies, whether or not if the society is home for the anthropologist. Several anthropological undertakings confirm this, one of them going as far back as 1954, when Powdermaker (1966) underwent fieldwork in Mississippi, a complex society that at the time was further complicated by the segregation between people with fairer and darker skin. Since then, numerous fieldworks have been carried out in complex societies, many of which have been within the anthropologist’s own country, city or even suburb. For two more recent studies see Rysst (2008) and Gjellum (2011) among others.
Labelling a field as home calls for a reflection of what ‘home’ is. In short, defining home lies at the very core of the anthropological pursuit. This is connected to the history of anthropology, where the anthropologist traditionally travelled far away to study so-called primitive people. By definition, far away is far away from home and, as such, anywhere but home. If anthropology is what anthropologists do, then what have anthropologists done, traditionally, other than travelling far away from home? Will anthropology lose its essence if the anthropologist does not travel but stays at home?

Connected to this, the question has been raised whether so-called home blindness also threatens the capacity for analytical distance. Again, we can shed light on this question by asking what home is. According to Strathern (Strathern 1987 in Norman 1999:121) the anthropologists is only at home among other anthropologists, while Cohen and Rapport claim that “anthropologist are never ‘at home’” (Cohen and Report 1995 in Norman 1999:121).

Keeping the above in mind, I would argue that fieldwork at home is not a fitting description of my fieldwork. First of all, ‘home’ gives a false idea of who I am, that I am born and raised in Oslo. I am born in Oslo to ethnic white Norwegian parents, but have lived more than half my life outside of Norway’s borders. Secondly, ‘home’ does not encompass all the varying people and places I attended to during fieldwork, that to varying degrees were unfamiliar and exotic to me. That being said, I do not believe it is of the essence to exoticise ones fieldwork to produce good anthropology. I find that it is more important to raise ones level of awareness (Wadel 1991; Stewart 1998), exercise continuous empathy (Wikan 1992), write lengthy and descriptive field notes (Geertz 1973; Sanjek 1990; Howell 1994), and to employ an analytical and critical stance. I use the terms analytical and critical in the same vein as Powdermaker uses the term detachment; as “necessary to construct the abstract reality” (Powdermaker 1966:9). I do not see this as equivalent to exoticising.

Fagerlid asks what happens to the anthropological project when the informants’ world view includes academic reflections (Fagerlid 2005; see also Aarset 2006). This is relevant to my study, as my informants were well educated and several had knowledge of anthropological literature. I therefore find this question fruitful when discussing the methodology of my project. At a dinner, for example, Sarah asked me what theories I thought I would use in my thesis and we ended up discussing the French feminists Kristeva and Irigaray, among others. This entails that, while writing, I am not only engaging in a discussion with other anthropologists and, perhaps, other academics. Rather, I may very well be continuing the
discussions I had with my informants in the field. In other words, my informants may respond to this text. The challenge is not to let this limit my analysis.

Fieldwork means many things (Fangen 2004:31). To specify, I mainly used participant observation in private homes, places of study, workplaces and in the streets by foot, by public transport and private cars to and from these homes and workplaces. The homes were mostly apartments in the central borough of Oslo, but also houses in the western and eastern suburbs. The workplaces I attended were all quite different from one another. For example, I met one key informant at her office, which was quite typical in the sense that it was a rectangular room with one window and otherwise a desk and a chair. A bookshelf covered one of the walls while pictures of family and friends decorated another. I met another informant at a couple lecture venues and I met a third at a few schools about an hour from Oslo where she had assignments. I also frequently attended cafes and restaurants in the city centre and in the east of Oslo, shopping malls, including Oslo’s main mall Oslo City and a larger mall in the eastern suburbs, with my informants. In addition, I visited the Sikh temple at Alnabru (in the east of Oslo), the Hindu temple in Slemmestad (about half an hour southwest of Oslo), a large banquet hall in eastern Oslo for a wedding party, and a celebration of an Indian philosopher and multi-artist at a school in the western part of Oslo. In short, my field was multi-sited (Marcus 1995) where I followed specific people chosen due to specific traits.

Tied to these venues are the roles I took and at times was ascribed, as intruder, kindly persistent researcher, guest, acquaintance and friend. At times these roles were clear, at times not. Connected to this, my experience of these roles was not clear-cut from one another, but rather sliding. I think this could particularly be tied to the fact that I mainly went through friends and acquaintances to find informants, and so most of my informants were, to some degree, at least an acquaintance to start with. As such, and with thought to my ties to the city itself, I was both insider and outsider (Stewart 1998:22-26).

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12 The people I met at these arenas, other than my informants, assumed that I was interested in Sikhism, Hinduism or Indian culture. This was not altogether wrong and when a person, for example, enthusiastically gave me a tour of the Hindu temple, I was more than happy to play along, like a tourist. This, in part, contrasts Jarl’s experience (see for example Jarl 2004:26-27).

13 Macdonald comments on how “good anthropology has always entailed a degree of multi-sitedness” (Macdonald in Bryceson, Okely, Webber and Ardener 2007:21). So, although the multi-sited fieldwork might have gained relevance in a world where people, objects and information travels ever faster, perhaps multi-sitedness has always been central to the anthropological project.
The semi-structured interviews would start as exactly that; interviews. My informant and I would agree to a time and place and I would arrive with a list of questions designed to get a quick overview of the informant’s nearest family and current everyday life. See the appendix for the questions I had jotted down. At the start of each interview, I would ask a question and my informant would answer. Gradually, however, the interview would become a conversation where I also shared information about myself. This varied a bit with how talkative my informant was and with the connection we had. I must admit that the conversation was more fluid with some compared to others. This could be because some simply had more to tell, but I also find Madden’s note that “we all know fellow humans who are ‘difficult to talk to’ or who are shy” (Madden 2010:64) useful to keep in mind for a new and self-critical fieldworker. Most of my informants, however, had much to tell (cf. Jarl 2004:24).

With the life story interviews, again, I would start probing with a few questions. In Powdermaker’s words, both types of interviews “lasted at least an hour; many went on for a whole afternoon” (Powdermaker 1966:157). Most of the time, the woman would keep talking so, listening through my tapes, the interview seems more like a monologue. Again, it must be noted that not all my informants were as talkative so in one case in particular the life story interview was more of a question and answers session.

Both types of interviews I preferred to conduct at my informants’ homes. A couple were also conducted at my apartment and two were conducted at the informant’s place of work or study. As such, the interviews cannot be seen as entirely separate from the participant observation as the interview appointment also could involve a house visit, drinking tea or coffee, having lunch, meeting family, overhearing a conversation or phone call, watching a YouTube video and so on. Again, my roles as interviewer, guest, acquaintance and even friend were sliding.

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14 I refer to Powdermaker to highlight the links between my fieldwork in a complex society in 2011 and other fieldworks in general, but Powdermaker’s fieldwork in Mississippi specifically, bearing in mind that her fieldwork took place in a complex society as early as 1954.

15 I saw my fieldwork as an excellent opportunity to test out varying methods I had read about, among them interview techniques. I was curious as to how the interviews would be with and without a tape recorder. At the same time I strived for a level of consistency so that the interviews I wished to compare could, in fact, be compared without accounting for too large discrepancies with thought to interviewing technique. I therefore opted to use a tape recorder in addition to pen and paper (Madden 2010:131-132) for the life story interviews, but not for the semi-structured background interviews. By the time I conducted the life story interview with each, I had met her at least twice before and the initial shyness, if any, was gone. I did not find that any of my informants held back anymore when I used a tape recorder, than what they did when I did not use a tape recorder. For example, two of my informants started crying during their life story interviews. They did not try to hold their tears back knowing that they would be caught on tape. This could be material for a discussion about interview techniques, but I will leave it here for now.
I encountered quite a few methodological challenges. Mainly, I had to work at access and prolonging my visits (Rysst 2008:41). Access was connected to finding informants and persuading them to meet me, again and again. With thought to prolonging my visits, I would work hard, for example, to meet my informants at their work and then follow them grocery shopping before joining them for dinner when I initially was only invited for dinner. After the meal I would stay for as long as I felt welcome and, at times, even longer. I would also tag along after meeting for a coffee or lunch and, quite often, I felt I intruded. As long as my informants did not ask me to leave, however, I stayed on. I had to work on my own emotions with regards to crossing social boundaries in these instances.

The empirical material detailed herein, other than that relating to interviews, is, to a large extent, serendipitous. In other words, while doing her utmost to follow her informants in every possible social arena, no ethnographer could have planned to participate in or observe the exact scenarios described in the following chapters.

Other methodological problems I encountered and what choices I made have been hinted at, in varying degrees, under the trajectory of the fieldwork and during the introduction of informants. I will not elaborate this theme any further in this thesis.

Lastly, while my informants are not representative and both they and I may be biased, and the fieldwork is limited both with thoughts to how much time and space it covered, I believe the qualitative approaches, detailed above, were essential to discover the more problematic aspects of the identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context. Although I draw on other sources to complement and contrast my findings, the ethnographic fieldwork remains the primary support for the arguments detailed herein.

A note on gender

Clearly, gender was not a pattern that emerged in my findings, but shaped them from the onset. All of my key informants are women, which is due to an active choice I took in fashioning the project and finding informants. Mostly, this choice was anchored in my readings of Kristeva and Irigaray (Widerberg 1990; Fürst 1998; Birkeland 2000), and the notion of writing about women by women for women (cf. Moore 1994), founded in a feminism that sees the female experience as something separate, something else, than the male, which must be captured in women’s own words about women’s own experiences. This,
then, is connected to the female body being different from the male body, with breasts, wombs and vaginal lips, which give a different way of being in the world from the onset. As mentioned under central concepts, we both have and are bodies. Because we are bodies, however, we cannot escape our bodies. Our experiences can be none other than what our bodies allow. While acknowledging that the category of women is vast and varied and that the experiences of being in the world with a female body may be equally differentiated, there may be a universal particularity that can be seen to unite these experiences (Moore 1994:19). This, in short, is my starting point for me as a woman focusing on women.

My analysis and conclusions can only build on the women I met and I can compare and contrast them, of course, but I cannot compare and contrast them to men, mainly because the men who are present in my material are largely present as objects referred to and described by my female informants. Gullestad notes a similar limitation on her material, stating that the men “are strongly present, but more as objects, seen through the eyes of their wives, girlfriends, and daughters than as subjects in their own right” (Gullestad 2001 [1984]:58). She goes on to make an excellent remark about this limitation, connecting it to the “boundaries around the husband/wife relationship. Urban fieldwork in western societies imposes limitations on studying the most “private” spheres of life.” (Gullestad 2001 [1984]:59.) I would also connect it to my project as such, as I approached women and involved them, but never proceeded to involve men or to embed myself in their lives. Had my project been fashioned differently, the boundaries around the husband/wife relationship would, perhaps, not have been so evident in my material.

I can, however, see my female informants and the patterns that emerge from their everyday activities and life stories in light of their concrete relations and society at large, which includes both men and women. The gendered material I build on is to a large extent detailed in the accounts concerning fieldwork, but I would like to expand on this theme by paraphrasing Lien (Lien, Lidén and Vike 2001). My data includes female forms of sociality as well as social interaction in family situations where men, women and perhaps children are present. I have little data on male forms of sociality, but know enough to note that these forms of sociality can, to various degrees, differ from the female and family forms (Lien, Lidén and Vike 2001:89). Therefore this thesis is not about the identification of Norwegians, but, more to the point, about the identification of female Norwegians, without accounting for exactly what relates to gender, as such.
While I am at it, I would also like to note that this thesis is set within a heteronormative framework. This was not an active choice from my side. Rather I set out to find lesbian, bi, trans or queer Norwegian women with parents from India to see if this could shed any light on the notes I had on the heterosexual women I encountered. Mainly, I went through the national queer organisations Queer Youth Norway and LLH – The Norwegian LGBT Association. Unfortunately, my pursuits proved fruitless.

**Reflecting on language**

Most of the women were not only fluent in Norwegian and English, they also spoke Hindi, Punjabi and/or Urdu. Of the above, I only know Norwegian and English. Furthermore, any language also includes linguistic markers such as age, class and educational status (Madden 2010:60-61), which means both my Norwegian and English is marked. As it turned out, there were not too large discrepancies in my Norwegian, primarily, and that of my informants, which might first and foremost be due to all of us either having completed or currently pursuing higher education.

A few of my informants would either mix between the above or switch entirely when talking with their spouse or parents. Perhaps this provided a sense of privacy in my presence that, even if they did not think much of it, I certainly valued. It helped me feel like less of an intruder. I remember the first time I met Amneet’s husband in particular, as he politely greeted me, exchanged a few phrases in Norwegian with Amneet, before he moved closer to her and, I believe, asked something in Punjabi. She responded in Punjabi, before turning to me and continuing our conversation in Norwegian. The rest of the evening we all spoke Norwegian. Another poignant example of the dynamics of language was when Neela handed her credit card to her husband and reminded him of the pin code in Punjabi. I understood what she was saying without understanding the details and in similar veins, I think, I usually got the gist of things.

Most of my talks, in-depth conversations, interviews and life story interviews were in Norwegian. I seldom used English myself, but several of the women and others I met in the field would switch entirely or simply insert words from one of the before mentioned languages in specific contexts. Neela, for example, inserted more and more Hindi while
referring to Bollywood movies and various forms of Indian music and dance the longer I knew her. This could be seen as a marker of her migrational family history.

In this thesis, fieldnotes and quotes are translated to English. With thought to anonymity, the process of translation might grant my informants some privacy. Although I have done my utmost to keep the flavour of the original language in hopes that my informants will not be alienated, none of the quotes will be immediately recognisable simply because they are translated from Norwegian to English. In addition, I find that translating from Norwegian uncovers certain aspects of my material that I otherwise could have taken for granted, such as what the Norwegian word for immigrant actually means (see chapter V). Terms given in Norwegian are in plain italics while terms in Hindi, Punjabi or Urdu are given in italics and underlined.

**Ethical considerations**

Participant observation poses certain ethical challenges as the researcher strives to embed herself in the social lives of her informants (Thagaard 2003; Frøystad 2003; Fangen 2004). In order to counter some of these challenges, I decided to use written informed consent and be clear with each of my informants on the terms of their participation (cf. Jarl 2004:28). Each was informed that she could withdraw at any time (Thagaard 2003:23). One woman I was in contact with during early stages of the fieldwork, made use of this and withdrew due to personal reasons. I found that written informed consent made access somewhat smoother. The women would have my ambitions in writing and, if anything was unclear, they could refer to the paper and ask questions about my project in general or about their own involvement in particular. Neela told me that the written informed consent added to her trust, which is exactly what I relied on to access the field. As such, the written informed consent, as an ethical contract, functioned as a social contract. This, I believe, was a successful strategy because my informants all belong to the middle class and are, to various degrees, familiar with research methods in general and such contracts in particular. Lilly and Raveena did not give consent in writing, but gave oral consent.

This thesis builds on data that also involves others than my key informants. I met several other people, partook in and overheard conversations and participated in arenas where I could not or would not inform everyone present about my project. I could not when there were too
many people present, such as at the Hindu temple when I visited for a major celebration during spring. I would not when the woman I was with did not introduce me as such; this would be a breach of confidentiality.

One particular challenge with conducting fieldwork within the city I had been living for the past few years was what to do if and when I met friends and acquaintances while in the field. A couple of times I had trouble explaining my presence at social gatherings without outing the informant I was with. Fortunately, Sarah and Neela tended to introduce me themselves. At times I was introduced merely by name with no mention of my project, at other times I was introduced with regards to my project. I let my informants decide what they preferred at any given time and would give noncommittal answers if asked directly myself.

I also had to figure out what to do with new technological forms of network and communication such as Facebook. Facebook could, after all, be a brilliant way to examine my informants’ networks, but by befriending them in such a public manner I would breach the guidelines the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) provided for my project. I would be making our contact visible for third parties to see. Therefore I chose not to befriend my informants on such social medias. Still, I viewed the profile pages of all but one of my informants on Facebook, quite a few together with the informant in question. I also went through their networks to see who knew whom. As it turned out, far from all my informants knew one another. In addition, I checked the so-called tweets from those who used Twitter. While Facebook was primarily useful for uncovering networks, Twitter made me aware of certain subjects my informants were interested in.16

All of the names mentioned within these pages are pseudonyms. After all, there are only 475 women born in Norway to parents from India in my age group at the time of writing. This means the category is somewhat translucent and the individuals detailed herein may be recognised (Jarl 2004:28). I have therefore altered further personal information that might otherwise identify my informants (Fangen 2004:84, 160, 230). Still, the information that has been altered, including names, has been altered in such a way that, I hope and with thanks to my advisors, it does not affect the final analysis. The women themselves have also been

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16 I discuss the challenges and possibilities of social medias in general and Facebook in particular for anthropological fieldwork in an article about ethics in the forthcoming *Betwixt & Between* (Christophersen in press).
consulted in certain instances, to make sure the anonymisation is more than adequate (cf. Jarl 2004:28).

Anonymity, however, is not only to secure my informants’ privacy, but also because, at the end of the day, this project is about categorisation and not necessarily directly about any of the given women in my text (Fangen 2004:160). Although I could never have completed this project without each individual woman’s involvement, the analysis is not about them personally. Hopefully, the analysis detailed herein can work at a more general level.

Figure 3: “From Siebkes street.” Photographer Åsmund Lindal, date unknown. Oslo byarkiv. Reprinted with permission. Retrieved from http://oslobilder.no/BAR/A-70013_Uf_0001_015
Chapter III: The parents who migrated

Stranger: Where are you from?
Neela: Oslo.
Stranger: No, where are you really from?
Neela: I am from Oslo. My parents came to Norway from India before I was born.

Excerpt from field notes late May 2011.

This chapter details the heritage of my informants. As these women present a relatively blank spot on the ethnographic map of Norway, I have included further notes on what it means to have parents who migrated, including my informants’ life stories, even though these notes deviate somewhat from the research question concerning the identification of children of non-white immigrants within a Norwegian context. This, then, is in line with what Geertz coined “thick descriptions” in terms of lengthy descriptions I have constructed on the basis of my informants’ constructions of what they are up to (Geertz 1973:9).

A historic and geographic specific context

The family migration story is common to all my informants. The father came in the seventies, in search of work, and rarely intended to stay. Perhaps he was already married and brought his wife along, or perhaps he got married in India at a later date and then brought her along. In retrospect, this common migrational family story might not be so surprising. In a sense, this is what decides the category of Norwegian women born to parents from India (Jarl 2004; Gupta 2006; Henriksen 2007).

The migration of people from India to Norway is connected to historical processes in India, Norway and the rest of the world. Before the 1960s, Norway was a poor country of emigration (Fuglerud 2001; Henriksen et al 2010:25). This, however, changed dramatically when oil was discovered in the North Sea. The discovery coincided roughly with a specific period marked by decolonisation, the migration patterns from the so-called third world to the west after World War II, and the fall of the iron curtain in 1989 (Brochmann and Hagelund 2010). This period was also accentuated by the shift from a bipolar world order during the Cold War, to a unipolar order with the USA as the leading power, to what is gradually becoming a multipolar world order today, where India, amongst other countries, is demanding its say on the world stage.
In the early 1970s, sizable numbers were migrating to Norway from Asia, Africa and Latin America in search of work (Henriksen et al 2010:19). Among these numbers were the parents of my informants. Figure 1, a photograph of an immigrant couple in 1975 in Karl Johan – Oslo’s central shopping and pedestrian street that leads from the main train station to the castle – could very well be of one of my informants’ parents. Then, the oil crisis led to the immigration ban in 1975. Bø remarks how the subsequent restrictive visa policies took on a racial aspect where well-educated white Europeans were still allowed entry while others were directed towards the family reunion and asylum system (Bø 2002; Brochmann 2003).

In particular, the migration story of the uncle of one of my informants, highlights this specific time period. He biked all the way from India through Pakistan, Afghanistan, the Soviet Union, Finland and Sweden before he ended up in Drammen where his bike was stolen. This very same route would be next to impossible today due to new geopolitical borders as well as the current situation in Afghanistan.

Some of my informants’ parents were from rural villages in India while others were from urban megacities. Some had higher education, others not and still others pursued higher education in Norway. Some had family and friends in Norway or elsewhere in Europe or the USA already, others did not. They were, however, all from the upper castes and they all came to Norway to work. The parents’ backgrounds are not detailed further as that would make each of my informants recognisable and, thus, be a breach of confidentiality.

It was perhaps a series of peculiar circumstances that brought each individual to Norway, but these circumstances were generally related to Norway being a lucrative destination for the first time in recorded history, for the reasons noted above. After 1975 and Norway’s ban on immigration, my informant’s parents would not have been able to enter the country the way they did. In other words, my informants’ parents hit a very specific window of opportunity. My informants’ family life stories are not only contingent on historical and geopolitical processes; they are also influenced by juridical developments. Drawing on Barth (1964), these larger structures all play part in what possibilities were, and currently are, available to my informants and their parents at any given time.

Most of my informants’ parents came to Oslo, the capital, or nearby cities. Norway has traditionally been seen as quite homogenous (cf. Vike 2007 [2001]:137). With 323 787 km² and a population of about 4 920 305, it is fair to say that it is a sparsely populated country.
A considerable percentage of the population is congregated in Oslo. As of the 1st of January 2011, 599,230 people live in Oslo, which is about 12.2 per cent of the population at large (ibid). Oslo is not only the capital but also the most densely populated city and can be seen as the most urban. This is in part because the capital has been the hub of recent migration. Migration can be understood here in a wider sense, in terms of urbanisation, as not only consisting of Europeans, Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans, but also Norwegians from other parts of the country that have moved to the capital in pursuit of higher education and work. In connection to this migration, Oslo in particular and Norway in general, is no longer as homogenous as it once was (Eriksen 2010:80).

As the above implies, Norway was and still is receiving migrants with a wide variety of backgrounds, be it national, ethnic, “racial”, class or religious. To put my informants’ parents’ backgrounds in relief, they can be compared to Pakistani migrants who in many respects have a similar migrational history from Pakistan to Norway. Most Indians who travelled to Norway came from urban areas or had higher education compared to the Pakistani migrants (Jarl 2004:18-19). Then, around 1994, the average annual income among Indian migrants in Norway was right in the middle between Pakistani and Norwegian families (ibid). In other words, on average, Indian migrants had a better socioeconomic starting point when they arrived in Norway, and subsequently had a significantly better economy than their Pakistani counterparts in the 1990’s. When it came to bearing children, Indian women had an average of 2.1 children in 2000, which was much closer to the contemporary average of 2 amongst Norwegian women than the 3.7 children born by Pakistani women (ibid). 17

In sum, my informants’ heritage is connected to larger historical and geopolitical processes. As such, the current identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context, seen here through the lenses of my informants’ lives, has not developed in a vacuum.

17 Here I must also mention that some of my informants’ parents and their ancestors lived in what is today within the borders of Pakistan, before India and Pakistan were divided in 1947. Questions concerning the partition and how it currently affects relations within and between Indian and Pakistani migrant groups could be the subject of a separate study. Jarl briefly touches the subject when detailing Pakistani migrants as significant others to Indian migrants (Jarl 2004:58-59). Lavleen Kaur, a research fellow at the Department of Criminology and Sociology of Law at the University of Oslo, is currently examining such questions among Indian and Pakistani migrants in Norway (Kaur forthcoming).
Immigrated parents

On a more personal level, the fathers of my informants did not see a lucrative future in the towns or cities of their ancestors in India. Sarah’s father, for example, came to Norway to work in the early 1970’s. He had heard from a friend that there were ample opportunities in Norway and that he could earn enough money within a few years to start a better and fuller life at home in India afterwards. According to Sarah, he never intended to stay. After a few years he went back to India and married the woman who would become Sarah’s mother. This was an arranged marriage, Sarah told me in a side note during her life story interview. Sarah’s mother joined her husband and moved to Oslo so that he could continue working. Soon enough, she also found work. Still, they never intended to stay. After a few years, Sarah was born. Then, with only a couple years in between, Sarah’s younger brother and sister were born. So, Sarah and her siblings were all born at a hospital in Oslo. They went to kindergarten, school and attended extracurricular activities and such in a specific suburb in the east of Oslo where mostly ethnic white Norwegians lived, apart from a few families from Pakistan. Sarah and her siblings spoke Norwegian, watched Norwegian children’s television and played with friends born to Norwegian parents. Later on, they attended higher education in major cities in Norway.

Today, Sarah and her younger siblings live and work in Oslo. They have near daily contact with one another, as well as with their parents who also live and work in Oslo, albeit in a different part of the city. Sarah’s parents have continued speaking Hindi between themselves and to their children, even though their children answer in Norwegian. Sarah’s parents have also continued speaking mainly Hindi with other Indian migrants. That being said, they both speak Norwegian, albeit with an accent. Both visit the Hindu temple in Slemmestad for major celebrations. Sarah’s mother continues to be vegetarian, while she, her siblings, and her father all eat meat. The last few years, as flights have become increasingly cheaper, Sarah’s parents have travelled to visit relatives in India more often. During my fieldwork, I saw that upon returning to Norway after such a vacation, Sarah’s mother had ample spices and clothes in her suitcase, including two beautiful blue and lilac sarees for Sarah and her younger sister.

Sarah’s parents not only carry their language and traditions with them, India has become an increasingly concrete part of their lives, especially of late. Still, they continue living their everyday lives in Norway. While chatting with Sarah’s mother one evening, she told me that
an elderly couple, who, until recently, lived nearby, had moved to India. They were retired and wanted to spend their time in a warmer climate. Sarah’s mother, however, told me she could never move to back India. “Why?” I asked. She smiled to me and asked rhetorically, “My children are here, my grandchildren are here, why should I move to India when the people I love are right here?” In Anwar’s (1979) words, Sarah’s parents gradually abandoned the myth of return. Jarl’s findings confirm this as a general trend among migrants to Norway from India (Jarl 2004:16).

Neela’s family story mirrors Sarah’s. Neela’s father also came to Norway in the early seventies looking for work. He also returned to India to find a wife, before they both moved back to Norway. Like Sarah’s parents, they never intended to stay, but, like Sarah’s story shows, life went on and soon the family was embedded in an everyday life in Norway, which was all that the children – Neela and her two younger brothers – knew. The parents had continued using Punjabi as their main language, but Neela and her siblings grew up speaking Norwegian between themselves and with their friends. While growing up, their main language was Norwegian, their friends were largely Norwegian and their points of reference were mainly Norwegian. This, after all, was before cable television. For most of Neela’s childhood, there were no other channels to watch other than the Norwegian Broadcasting Cooperation’s national television channel NRK (Eriksen 1993:13). This was also before the Internet, mobile phones and cheap flights could seemingly bring India closer. Returning to India became less and less of an option. This is how Neela explained the process of staying during one of our lengthy conversations in her living room. After shifting through the other life story interviews, I find that Neela’s explanation fits. As she said, “Life is what happens to you while you are busy making other plans.”

Surya’s father, on the other hand, was already married when he started looking at possibilities abroad. He came to Norway together with Surya’s mother, with both of them looking for work. Surya’s uncle on her father’s side already lived and worked here and Surya’s parents soon settled in. Surya never mentioned whether or not her parents intended to stay, but either way, they did.

Similarly, Eveleen’s father had relatives in Norway. He also, however, had extended family in the USA. He first travelled to the USA to try his luck, but soon decided to move to Norway instead. Upon arriving in Norway, he enrolled at a Norwegian folk high school – a one-year boarding school where students choose between a wide range of subjects, from music, dance
and winter sports to language and politics. Eveleen’s father learnt Norwegian during his stay at the folk high school and, upon completion, moved to be near his brother and obtained a well paid job in the private sector.

During every life story interview, the parents’ move from India to Norway was presented as the fathers’ choice. When I asked why the parents moved to Norway, my informants answered something along the lines of, “My father came to Norway for work.” This choice was often described as courageous. “He didn’t know anything about Norway, and still he went. I think he was quite courageous to travel across the world like that. Today we know much more about what is going on in the rest of the world, back then they didn’t really know a thing, at least not about Norway,” Neela expanded. The mother, however, simply came along, more like luggage.18 “She married him,” Gurnoor explained, “so she had to come here.” Still, as the life story interviews evolved, the women conceded that their mothers also found work in Norway. Most of my informants, therefore, had a dagmamma (literally, ‘day mom’, an occupational description of a woman who takes care of other people’s children during working hours) or attended kindergarten from an early age (cf. Jarl 2004:31, 36).

The above stories also highlight the importance of childrearing in shaping the lives of migrant families. According to Levitt and Glick Schiller, “children are the central axis of family migration and often a critical reason why families move back and forth and sustain transnational ties” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1016). Based on the stories above, however, I would contend that children can also be the main reason why families do not move back and forth, but rather stay in one place.

**Self-made women**19

The American myth of the self-made man has won forward as a classic migration story (Chock 1995:239-241). According to the myth, the father, the antagonist, is a pioneer with enormous will and great courage who has made immense sacrifices in pursuit of a better future (ibid). In other words, he has overcome difficulties so that his children will have better opportunities than he himself had growing up. The children are expected to make the most of

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18 Most of the parents’ marriages were arranged, which correlates with Jarl’s findings (2004:30). None of my informants’ marriages were arranged, although a couple let their parents do some sort of arranging after they themselves were, for all intents and purposes, engaged.

19 The title refers to the title of Chock’s article “‘The Self-Made Woman’: Gender and the Success Story in Greek-American Family Histories” (1995).
this (cf. Jarl 2004:102-104). Among other things, they are expected to study hard and get a good education aiming at a high status job (ibid). This, I believe, is an important aspect of what it means to have parents who migrated.

Here I will expand on what it means to have parents who migrated, with thought to my informants’ verbal and non-verbal negotiations with their parents, through Sarah’s life story in particular, with remarks and incidents from my other informants as well. The following account cannot be seen as an attempt to detail the real Sarah, rather it draws attention to different facets of her life. It is based on her personal biography as she presented it during her life story interview. In other words, the following may be seen as pertaining to her self-presentation to me as a significant other, rather than her self-representation or “sense of self” (Spiro 1993:122) in the sense of how she represents herself to herself. The latter, particularly with thought to method, is difficult to get a hold of (ibid). Still, Sarah’s self-presentation and her self-representation may not be completely divergent.

Included in the stories about growing up is going out, drinking alcohol, deciding what studies to pursue, dealing with the subsequent possibilities for employment, having boyfriends, getting married, having children, and living with the extended family or not. All of these aspects are part of my informants’ self making as daughters of immigrants, living in Norway today. As such, my informants are continuously making choices that shape themselves and their lives, against a backdrop of general notions of Indian-ness and, in particular, their parents’ wishes for what a good life actually entails (or, rather, what they believe their parents’ wishes entail) (cf. Jarl 2004).

During conversations and the life story interview, Sarah recalled her childhood with a smile. She was the firstborn and had received all the love and attention she could wish for. Figures 2 and 3 are from a project documenting the living conditions among migrants in Oslo in the beginning of the eighties. The children pictured might very well be among the first children born to immigrant parents in Norway and they could just as well be of my informants when they were younger. Sarah started at a primary school in her neighbourhood, together with some of the nearby children she used to play with, and fitted in perfectly. According to Sarah, this was before teachers were made aware of the perils of migration and so none of the teachers made a big deal of her heritage. Most of the class was white, except for her and two boys born to parents from Pakistan. A few of her classmates expected Sarah’s parents to be strict, but she was allowed to join sleepovers and class trips just like the rest of the class. Still,
these and similar comments from her classmates were the first hints of expectations tied to her migrational family background.

Amneet is younger than Sarah and therefore started school later on. Her teacher, then, introduced her to the rest of the class by first stating, “Amneet is from India,” and subsequently asking, “Has anyone heard about India?” According to Amneet, this was meant as an act of recognition, but it made her feel uncomfortable. Why should she be introduced as an Indian child when she was born and raised in the neighbourhood, just like all her other classmates?

Moving on, Sarah’s adolescence was, in hindsight, coloured by conflict with, primarily, her father (cf. Jarl 2004:46-48). Sarah, as I came to know her, was both curious and energetic and would not take no for an answer. I could therefore vividly picture the quarrels she recounted where she wanted to go out, but her father said no. In particular, he did not want her hanging out at the local youth club. It should be noted, however, that Sarah was the oldest of her siblings. When I talked to her younger sister it became clear that she never had the same arguments with their father about, for example, going out. Sarah claimed she laid the groundwork so that her younger siblings could enjoy more privileges, like hanging out at the local youth club, when they grew up (cf. Jarl 2004:44).

Sarah also told me that she was in love with one of the boys in her class all through primary school and junior high, but she was absolutely positive that her parents would throw a fit if she told them about her crush. During our conversation she conceded that she never actually discussed this with her parents, but rather assumed what they would think. Jarl writes that “[Indian] girls cannot have a boyfriend” (Jarl 2004:48 own translation). It is not clear whether this is simply assumed among her younger informants, as with Sarah, or if it is made clear by the parental generation. When Sarah was 16, however, she met her first boyfriend. She never introduced him to her parents, but it lasted for more than a year. Perhaps she had started internalising the expectations of what parents from India could accept and what they would not.

Sarah’s father wanted her to study medicine to become a doctor, but Sarah had other plans. For a while, her parents constantly complained that she was wasting her life. This was confounded by Sarah’s choice to move away from home although she studied in the same city and could, technically, have stayed with her parents. According to Sarah, however, this was
never really an option. If she had stayed at home, she explained, her relationship with her parents would have been ruined today. She needed her own space to make her own choices and lead her own life. At first it was difficult as her mother kept calling and asking her to move back, but gradually her parents came to terms with her wishes.

In comparison, Eveleen never had any quarrels with her parents about hanging at the local youth club or staying out late. She was relatively free, she says, but remarks that she always was equally responsible. She attended parties and started drinking alcohol at an early age, but always found her way home and never let the partying affect her studies. In her words, her parents never really had anything to worry about.

As Eveleen’s remarks indicate, studies are important (cf. the high percentage of Indian migrants and their descendants who pursue higher education, detailed in the methodology; Jarl 2004:57). As with Sarah, Eveleen’s father wanted her to study medicine and become a doctor, but, like Sarah, Eveleen had other plans. Both Eveleen and Sarah were the first Norwegians born to parents from India who studied their respective fields. As soon as they started working and proved it was possible to achieve both high salaries and status through their chosen fields, their parents and their parents’ peers started paying Sarah and Eveleen respect through phrases of admiration and such. When I joined Sarah’s extended family for a Sunday dinner, I noted how proud Sarah’s parents were of her achievements. The importance of their pride, to Sarah, became clear during her life story interview.

I found that several of my informants were proud to be “the first Indian” to pursue one education or other. Some of them had fought with their fathers in order to follow their dreams. Amneet, for example, also told me how her father had wanted her to be a doctor. Medicine, then, figures as the epitome of making the most of the father’s sacrifice (cf. Chock 1995). She had achieved very good grades and could have pursued this path, but opted not to. Her father was very disappointed, she told me, but today he is proud that she was the first to enter another field. She has a good salary and so he has nothing to complain about, she said. After all, his main concern had always been that she should simply “do well”. Nimrat, on the other hand, mocked herself as she said, “Yeah, I’m the cliché, aren’t I, the Indian girl who got good grades and became a doctor, but, you know, I really wanted to become a doctor. I don’t see anything wrong in that. I have friends from primary who’ve also studied medicine. They don’t have to answer to a cliché.”
Gurnoor, however, is still young, still studying and has not yet been able to prove that her choice of studies will pay off. Taken with the performing arts, she has opted to study theatre. “They don’t understand,” she told me, “but I have given up trying to explain. My father always wanted me to study medicine, but I was never any good at math or science. He kept telling me I just had to work harder, like my brother, but that isn’t true. Some people are good at math, some are not. I am not. I am good at this [theatre] and this is where my heart is, you know. I have to do this.” Unable to convince her father of her choice, she could at least convince me.

Returning to Sarah’s life story, she, in her words, purged her life of anything Indian when she moved away from home. She rid herself of Indian clothes, ornaments, items, music and food. This lasted at least a couple of years. In the end, she missed her mother’s cooking, called home, and asked for some of the recipes. She then taught herself how to cook some of her favourite Indian dishes. During fieldwork, when I joined her grocery shopping and for dinner, it was clear that she now enjoyed this daily activity, trying out new recipes with both traditional Norwegian and Indian ingredients.

Similarly, Neela told me she had cleansed her current home for anything that could remind her of what she called “exotic India”, but then she missed it. Together, we went up into her attic and found statues of Hindu gods that we subsequently placed around her living room. The statues were mainly of Shiva and Ganesha and we ended up putting them next to the photographs of primarily family, but also friends, that were placed around in the corners of the living room. “It is nice, isn’t it,” she asked me without waiting for an answer, “and it is part of me after all.”

Sarah and Neela’s shift in how they relate to anything Indian, may be connected to different stages of their lives. On the other hand, it may be that sprinkling their lives with references to India finally is a possibility within the nation-state of Norway. This shift may be linked to larger processes of globalisation where India has become a tourist destination for Norwegians. India is imagined as an exotic destination, advertised through pictures of the Taj Mahal, tigers, temples and mountains with the caption “Incredible India” (Incredible India 2012). In

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20 As mentioned in the methodology, there is a stark difference between Jarl’s informants and mine as only one of my informants lived with her parents (Jarl 2004:84-86). That being said, I got the impression that this had been cause for conflict in my informants’ lives previously, but now that they were older this was no longer a cause for contention. In other words, by now they had already moved out to live alone or with friends or they were married. This in particular highlights the bias of my informants’ age as opposed to Jarl’s informants (2004).
other words, when Sarah and Neela involve “exotic India” in their lives, it may be because India figures as a positive frame of reference in a Norwegian context.

Neela was the one who taught me what she felt to be the appropriate way to carry a saree. We were attending a wedding and I proudly whisked out my green and gold saree, bought during my semester in India in 2008. I took it on after the best of my ability, but in the end I had to turn to her for help. She took one look at me and decided I had to take everything off; even my underskirt was all wrong in her eyes. Neela had already put on her own saree and I noticed that she had tied her underskirt much higher than I had, meaning her saree was fitted much higher as well. She explained to me that some women in India might wear the saree low, exposing their midriffs, with tops that look like bras. It had become fashionable, and she had noticed the same among Indian migrants in other countries as well, particularly England and Spain. “But it is quite vulgar; I don’t think it looks good. The saree should be worn high,” she stated with a clear sense of authority.

Neela, in contrast to Sarah, also had seemingly unending knowledge of Indian films, music and dance. Often, she would put on some music and demonstrate a few moves from one of the latest Bollywood movies. I would try my best to copy her, but could not match her sense of rhythm or the ease with which she carried out those gracious moves. Sarah, on the other hand, watched several of the same television shows as I, including, amongst others, the American situation comedy Modern Family.

My informants cannot escape their parents’ background, but they can, for the most part, choose how to relate to it. Taking this even further, Raveena enjoyed being associated with her parents’ country of origin through the label “Indian princess.” To her the term was magical. Sarah, on the other hand, hated it. She specifically told me a story of a boy she dated who kept calling her his “Indian princess.” She said it was reason enough to break up with him. In a similar vein, Lilly would at times mock her Indian-ness, primarily with reference to how she was not anybody’s maid just because she was Indian. “I am not your Indian maid, I’m not going to clean up after you, Maria,” she laughed after I had spilled coffee all over her table one afternoon. Amneet also mocked the traditional Indian one evening, saying I should visit a family in Drammen instead, who lived four generations in the same house. “They are the Indians,” she laughed and her husband agreed, with a big smile on his face. “Yes,” he
concurred, “that is where you should be, those are the people you should be studying.”

This conversation took place just minutes after Amneet’s friend had called to ask for a traditional Indian recipe. Amneet did not really know how to cook, but seemed eager to help her friend and therefore phoned her mother for a recipe that she could pass along.

That being said, the circumstances can at times be difficult to manoeuvre. As such, there might be clear contextual limitations to how my informants relate to their parents’ background. Eveleen, for example, was very frustrated by how she was treated at the health clinic with her newborn child. They asked her about her diet in general and specifically what she had for dinner, if she had diabetes, if she spoke Norwegian at home with her children or not. Eveleen told me this jokingly, as to make fun of the staff at the clinic. It was as if she did not really let it get to her, but it was clear to me that she resented it. “They see me and think I’m an immigrant,” she said. In other words, she could joke about the incident with me, but she could not escape the negative implications of her migrational background when confronted with stereotypes at the health clinic. A couple of Jarl’s informants similarly claimed to be “always seen as immigrants” (Jarl 2004:57 own translation).

Today, Sarah is in her early thirties, seems happy with her career so far, is married to an ethnic white Norwegian man, whom she met at a party, and together they have one son and one daughter. Their children are born with only a short interval, right before Sarah turned thirty. All four live in an apartment in a popular and central borough in Oslo, where they wake up in the morning, get dressed, and eat breakfast before either Sarah or her husband follows their children to kindergarten, depending on who is least late for work.

There are other families who live nearby with children in the same age group, mostly ethnic white Norwegians, and they all have frequent play dates in the afternoons, before dinner. In addition, Sarah is active in her neighbourhood through volunteering as the leader of the local dugnad. There is no literal translation to English, but dugnad refers to a Norwegian form of volunteer work for a community with the community in question, which is embedded by a sense of duty and often controlled socially. Being the leader of her local dugnad, Sarah has

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21 This resonates with Jarl’s findings that her informants saw themselves as modern and liberal while they referred to other women born to parents who migrated from India as more traditional and conservative (Jarl 2004:22, 50, 70-72). One explanation is the bias on part of our informants as both Jarl and I went through friends and acquaintances and both of us, as university students, may be seen to belong to a specific segment of the population. Another explanation could be that our informants positioned themselves with reference to existent discourses on immigrants when meeting Jarl and me, who could both be seen as representatives for the white majority without migrational family histories.
regular meetings with her neighbourhood council and, at times, hosts such meetings in her own apartment.

Other than the people in her locality, she has an expansive network of friends and acquaintances. Some have the same migrational background as she does, a couple of whom she met at secondary school, and the rest through various so-called Indian gatherings that she attended as a child together with her parents. Most of Sarah’s friends and acquaintances, however, are ethnic white Norwegians, who all pertain to differing stages of her life, be it school, university or work. She met her closest friends at university.

Sarah hosts and attends dinners primarily at the weekends, meets friends for a cup of coffee or maybe a glass of wine during the week, and otherwise stays in touch through phone calls, text messages and social medias such as Facebook and Twitter. Each and every day I met her she would also have some sort of contact with her siblings or parents (cf. Jarl 2004:97). During the course of our relationship, I overheard her discussing a variety of topics with the people in her network, ranging from private household quarrels to art, literature and national politics.

Neela, like Sarah, is married to an ethnic white Norwegian man. After having convinced her parents to take her to India so that they could find a husband for her and having given up and returned to Norway, she met a man at her local gym. First, she thought of him only as a friend. Soon, the relationship developed to something more and eventually they got married.

Today Neela and her husband live in a sizable house to the east of Oslo with their three children, one daughter and two younger sons. Her children often play with other children living in the same neighbourhood and I often noticed that their neighbours would drop in on Neela and ask her advice in various matters, from the strictly personal to the more practical. She kept an open house and the people in her locale seemed to appreciate it. With regards to ethnicity, the neighbourhood was a little varied, but the majority was comprised of ethnic white Norwegians.

Surya is the only one of my informants whose husband is not born and raised in Norway. Her husband migrated to Norway from India to study at 18 and they met by chance through a friend in common. He has the same religious affiliation and the same caste as she does. She told me this nearly apologetically and said it was pure luck and that she never went out looking for someone with the same religion and caste, but – seeing how things went – claimed
it was quite fortunate after all. They share the same values, she explained, which meant they could understand each other when, for example, it came to child-rearing. Together they have one daughter.

I never met Surya’s family, but only observed them at a distance at a few events we both attended. When I visited her at home, her husband was working late and her daughter was away on vacation with a couple of friends. Surya was the one who lived in the biggest house the furthest west in Oslo, an area that traditionally is associated with rich and high-status people, partly because it is very expensive. Her house was meticulously clean and tidy when I came to visit.

Although my informants cover several parts of Oslo between them, none of them currently live in what has been referred to as Oslo’s immigrant ghetto: Groruddalen (Alghasi, Eide and Eriksen 2012). A majority of my ten key informants, including Sarah and Neela, grew up in different neighborhoods in Groruddalen. According to Eveleen, it was the perfect place to grow up with “thirty per cent immigrant children and the rest Norwegian.” Today, she claimed, there were too many immigrants there with “at the most thirty per cent Norwegian children.” Neela also said she enjoyed growing up in Groruddalen, but she did not want to move back because she did not want her children growing up in Norway only to speak *kebabnorsk* literally meaning ‘kebab Norwegian’, which refers to a broken slang with inserted words from a variety of languages, but primarily Arabic. This illustrates not only the evolving historical and geopolitical circumstances of my informants’ lives, where their parents were among the first non-European immigrants to enter Norway’s borders, but also aspects of the self-made woman who is the daughter of immigrants and has realised the potential in the possibilities granted by her parents (cf. Jarl 2004:18).

Moving out of the so-called immigrant ghetto to areas dominated by mostly ethnic white Norwegians and characterised by more expensive housing, can be seen as a manifestation of their social mobility, as Groruddalen is not only associated with immigrants, but also the working class (Alghasi, Eide and Eriksen 2012). In other words, for those of my informants who grew up in Groruddalen, their life stories may be seen as encompassing a literal move away from the immigrant working class towards the ethnic white Norwegian middle class.

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22 I used to deliver mail here on Saturdays and also know that several celebrities live in the same area. Also, by looking at real estate advertisements I can say that this is not the most available area with regards to listed prices.
This, in brief, is an outline of the life story as well as the current context and rhythm of one informant’s life, compared and contrasted with some of the stories of my other informants as well. Sarah may not be typical, for that I would need a more expansive set of data detailing a representative group of Norwegian women born to parents who migrated from India, but she nonetheless represents herself. Her story is one story about what it meant to grow up with parents who migrated from India to Norway in the seventies.

Concluding remarks

Building on the notes I have on Sarah she may be described as: Daughter, sister, girlfriend, wife, mother, urban, middle class, interested in theatre, music, literature and art, Hindu, seemingly secular, loyal, rebellious, strong-minded, curious, confident, ambitious, a pioneer, both career-oriented and family-oriented, the daughter of immigrants and a self-made woman.

All of these words can, in part in various contexts, describe Sarah. None of them, however, pertain to being either Norwegian or Indian. Still, Norway and India pose as pervasive points of reference, demanding a say in the varying aspects that colour Sarah’s life. Sarah would, like my other informants, attempt to categorise herself and her life in terms of Norwegian-ness and Indian-ness in conversations and interviews. In other words, ideas, actions and things are sorted into what is Norwegian and what is Indian (cf. Jarl 2004).

Jarl finds similar processes among her informants and uses the example of alcohol to illustrate this (Jarl 2004:41-42). According to her, consuming alcohol is categorised as Norwegian and not Indian (ibid). Although a few of my informants mentioned alcohol as something Norwegian, they were not as concerned with this as Jarl’s material implies. One of my informants had a beautiful and well-stocked bar cabinet in her living room, another brought wine when she went to visit her parents for dinner and one of my informants’ parents had wine visibly displayed in their kitchen. This could be because my informants are older so, as with having a boyfriend or moving out, alcohol is no longer an issue of contention.

Rather, my informants were very concerned with whether or not they could or should have been or be samboere, literally in Norwegian ‘together-livers’ in plural, which refers to a couple who live together without being married. In Norway you can register as samboere and obtain legal rights that closely resemble the rights of a marriage contract. You can also be unregistered samboere. Several of my informants told me being samboere was not an option
for an Indian simply because it was not Indian. Sarah had, however, been a *samboer* (*together-liver* singular, referring to one person in a couple who lives together) twice, albeit after heated arguments with her parents. Amneet, told me she wished she had been *samboer* with her husband before they got married, so that they could have “taken things more slowly”. Preet, on the other hand, stated that she could never be a *samboer*. *Samboere* does not even figure as a theme in Jarl’s material, although she notes a high concern for marriage that is not unrelated (Jarl 2004:89).

Either way, my informants seem to operate with the terms Indian and Norwegian as two ends of a scale. There can be sliding differences between them, but the two ends are still contrasted with one another. ‘Traditional’ or ‘conservative’ in a non-political sense, but rather as a family-value orientation, is connected to the Indian end of the scale. On the other end, Norwegian is connected to notions of ‘modern’ or ‘liberal’ (cf. Jarl 2004:69 see the footnote in particular, 120-121).²³

As a Hindu and a loyal and loving daughter, is Sarah clearly Indian? Being a rebellious teenager and now a confident and ambitious woman craving both a career and a family with children of her own, is she primarily Norwegian? Because she drinks alcohol and eats meat, is she not truly Indian, nor really Hindu? Perhaps she is not truly Norwegian when she puts on a *saree* to celebrate her mother’s birthday together with hoards of people, all with family trees that can be traced back to India?

Such literal attempts at categorisation of herself and her life is understandable, but equally impossible. As already stated, none of these facets are immediately, entirely or exclusively Norwegian or Indian.

Such process of categorisation, which can be understood in terms of puzzle solving (Chock 1995:241), could be seen as more complex than a solitary understanding of identity. Sarah and the other women recognise (at least) two forces that contribute to their self-making. Notions of both Norwegian-ness and Indian-ness carry limitations and possibilities for how they can live their lives, identify themselves and be identified by others.

It should be noted that Indian and ‘traditional’ and Norwegian and ‘modern’ do not overlap empirically. While my informants operate with these two scales as overlapping, they are

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²³ Jarl sees these as mutually exclusive and dichotomous (Jarl 2004:120-121), but I find it more fruitful to understand them as two ends of a scale where the difference can be sliding rather than mutually exclusive.
continuously confronted by how they do not overlap. For example, by talking to ethnic white Norwegian friends who also lay great value in fostering good relations with their parents, getting married and having children, it should become clear that traditional family values are not, by definition, Indian. Still, my informants continue to use Indian in reference to the importance of family. By contrasting Indian-ness and Norwegian-ness as two ends of a scale, they are in fact concealing a great deal of what being Indian or Norwegian might entail (DasGupta and DasGupta 1996:384; see also Jarl 2004:78). In other words, a Norwegian can be traditional just as an Indian can be modern.

Still, contrasting between Norwegian-ness and Indian-ness may be connected to a desire for one primary, unified and non-contradictory identity. As the term puzzle solving implies, the pieces should all fit together in the end.

Instead of contrasting Norwegian-ness and Indian-ness, as if they were dichotomous or two ends of one scale, perhaps Sarah and my other informants would be better off if they could open up to the idea of identities as multiple and, with that, full of contradictions and even paradoxes. I suggest that the pieces do not fit perfectly like pieces in a puzzle after all.
Figure 4: Distribution of skin colour variation (Encyclopedia Brittanica 2000). Retrieved from http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/media/106500/The-global-distribution-of-human-skin-colour-is-a-well
Chapter IV: Place and transnationalism

Hvor er'u bor hen a?
Eyh la meg ta deg med til byen min, b-byen min b-b
Hvor er'u bor hen a?
Eyh la meg ta deg med til ah... ta-ta deg med til Oslo

Where ar'ya livin’ man?
Eyh let me take you to my city, my c-city c-c
Where ar'ya livin’ man?
Eyh let me take you to ah... take-take you to Oslo

“West Side Black”, by the Norwegian rap group Karpe Diem (own translation).

This chapter provides further insight into how the identification of children born to non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context, is positioned within a larger historical and geographical framework. As I will show, the women themselves contrast white bodies and Norwegian-ness with brown bodies and Indian-ness. Therefore, with thoughts to how they themselves categorise bodies and how their own bodies are categorised by others, their connection to India, in a transnational perspective, is worth pursuing.

The importance of place

Norway has a population of approximately 4.9 million, of which 13.1 per cent are immigrants and Norwegians born to two immigrant parents (SSB 2012). Immigrants and their descendants have tended to congregate in the capital, thus 27 per cent of the population in Oslo has a so-called immigrant background (Henriksen et al 2010:15). Broken down by region, most immigrants by far come from Europe and the new EU countries in particular, while Asia figures second (SSB 2012). My informants are among the percentages from Asia.

As mentioned in the methodology, I spent my fieldwork primarily in private homes, but also at places of study, in workplaces and in the streets by foot, by public transport and private cars to and from these homes and workplaces. I visited apartments in the central boroughs of Oslo, and houses in the western and eastern suburbs. This supports Jarl’s previous findings that Indian migrants and their children do not live together in the same neighbourhood, but rather live spread out in many different areas (Jarl 2004:91). I walked up the paths my informants trailed every day. For example, I joined Gurnoor on her journey on the tube to her
place of study and Neela on the drive from her house to her office. Sarah and I went shopping in the centre of Oslo and Neela and I ate lunch at a café, close by her office, which she frequented. I also accompanied one informant who spent most of her free time refurbishing a newly acquired hytte, which can be translated to cabin, outside of Oslo.

These places are all part of the local context of my informants’ everyday lives. In short, these are the locales where my informants carry out their daily activities and, as such, live their lives.

Thinking back to the semantics of the field, deciding upon the terms that are appropriate for referring to my informants, my main problem lies in the continued denial or, at best, underestimation of their immediate surroundings. Can the term Norwegian-Indian sufficiently remind the reader of the women’s locally embedded lives? Does descendant, perhaps, include how important these immediate surroundings are for informing my informants’ daily activities?

Other than private homes and workplaces, I also visited the Hindu temple in Slemmestad for a wedding, and a large banquet hall in eastern Oslo for a separate wedding party. These places do not form the context of my informants’ daily rhythm. Still, as they form the backdrop for wedding ceremonies and parties, they are an integral part of some of the key events during my informants’ lives and are important places to take into account.

Again, the semantics are problematic. If I exclude the term Indian when describing my informants, how can I account for these settings, where I mostly heard Hindi and Punjabi, where most people were dressed in traditional Indian clothing, and the tables were laden with food associated with the northern regions in India?

The problem is to find a term that allows my informants to be fully Norwegian, while at the same time acknowledging their ties to India, which may, to various degrees, impact how each of my informants lives her life and, in relation to this thesis, identifies. In other words, the problem is how we, as human beings, can talk with, to and about each other in terms that open up for our multiple identities, rather than confining each of us to a solitary understanding.

Connected to this is the categorisation of bodies. If we open up from a solitary understanding of identities, we can also open up the categories pertaining to our bodies. As such, a body does not have to be either or.
Transnational social fields

Underlying my thesis is the concept of the nation-state with clearly defined borders. This, in short, is the territorial framework for understanding the concept of migration and, with that, transnationalism.

The identification of my informants, and the thereto connected categorisation of their bodies, in a Norwegian context cannot be understood without reference to my informants’ transnational social fields. All of my informants have family and friends spread out over different countries and even different continents, be it Canada, USA, Great Britain, France, Australia or India. Even Preet, who only understands a little Punjabi and Hindi, but does not speak either language herself, has sporadic contact with her grandparents in India. Most of the other women have considerably more contact with family and friends abroad. As such, their lives are not contained by Norway’s boundaries as a nation-state, instead they are part of transnational social fields (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004).

Migration is one of many social processes that transcend national boundaries, which can be analysed through a transnational lens. Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc-Szanton, for example, “have defined transnationalism as the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement […] Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously” (Glick Schiller et al 1992:1-2).

As I have pointed out, my informants are not migrants. They live in the same country where they were born and raised: Norway. Still, the definition above is applicable to my informants’ parents. The problem is how to account for what it means to have parents who migrated.

According to Levitt and Glick Schiller, “generational experiences are shaped by common experiences during youth that create a shared worldview or frame of reference which influences subsequent social and political activism” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1017). In other words, the migration undergone by my informants’ parents may be significant to understanding my informants, including how they identify and are identified by others.
Factoring in my informants’ parents should not be misunderstood as a form of primordialism in the sense of the country of origin (cf. Jenkins 2008 [1996]:87). Origin is not given emphasis rather than context, instead both are accounted for.

Although my informants primarily move in relatively small geographic areas, which can be narrowed down to certain suburbs in Oslo depending on the woman, they also relate to people and places across borders, particularly in India. In other words, their local lives are influenced transnationally. Eveleen, for example, talked to her cousin, who lived in Great Britain, on Skype every week and, while I was visiting, their children used Skype on their mothers’ iPhones to play together. Eveleen also told me that she used Skype to keep in touch with her grandparents in India. She did not travel much, however, and when she went overseas for a vacation she preferred visiting Europe’s big cities. Surya, on the other hand, travelled to India at least once every year in lieu of her work, but when she was in India for business she would also make sure to visit family. Raveena was also planning a visit to India during my fieldwork and I was scheduled to join her, but this fell through at the last minute.

Preet never mentioned any such relations herself, they only surfaced after my insistent probing during her last interview. Her mother, I found out, kept in touch with a cousin in Great Britain and Preet would sporadically talk to her grandparents in India. Other than that Preet and her family appeared to focus their energy on relations within Norway’s borders.

Surya was the only one of my informants who had a Hindu shrine at home and who voluntarily mentioned and explained her religion and religious practices to me. Among other things, she fasted regularly. One of the Sikh women also had a picture of the first Sikh Guru in her bedroom, which could, perhaps, figure as a shrine. Other than that, most of my informants told me about times when they prayed. However, I never saw any of them in the respective temples during my visits there, one visit being in connection to a major religious holiday. This could be connected to what Gupta calls a “shift in dharma” in his book about young Hindus in Oslo (Gupta 2006).

In sum, my informants keep in touch with people and places across national borders, to varying degrees. In other words, being the daughter of an immigrant does not automatically mean that you will call and visit your extended family across national borders, nor does it mean that you will learn the same language, eat the same food or worship the same deities as your grandparents.
Still, my informants are part of transnational social fields since the day they are born, due to their parents’ transnational ties. My informants stay in touch with their parents and their parents are to a large extent embedded within networks that cross borders. In other words, while my informants may not actively pursue relations or information transnationally, they stay informed and connected through their relations with their own parents. According to Levitt and Glick Schiller, “there may be one central individual who maintains high levels of homeland contact and is the node through which information, resources, and identities flow” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1009). For several of my informants, the node was their mother. Neela’s mother, for example, would call Neela for a chat, during which she would mention who, in the extended family, was up to what. In some families, the father also seemed to be central to the flow of information about, say, a grandfather’s health, the death of an aunt or the pregnancy of a cousin. Sarah’s father, for example, started talking about his own father’s ailing health when I met him. So, even if Sarah did not stay in touch with her grandfather, she was still informed about, at least, certain aspects of his life.

Shortly before I commenced my fieldwork, Amneet travelled to her grandparents’ town in northern India to get married. She and her husband hosted a grand party with family and friends coming from four different continents, but primarily from Norway. They had been planning the party for more than a year and the itinerary included a visit to several sites, including the Taj Mahal. Several of Amneet’s friends had been putting money aside to be able to fly over for the big event. For Amneet’s three closest friends, this was their first visit to India. Amneet told me she thought it was great to, in her words, “finally show them where I’m from.”

Amneet’s happy recollections from the wedding where she was showing her friends “where I’m from”, contrast starkly with her memories from the first time she visited India with her family. It was the summer she turned ten. “I didn’t understand India,” she told me, “nobody explained it to me. It was all so different, confusing, and chaotic even. I stayed next to my mom the entire time. When I came back home I was relieved. I preferred Norway.” Similarly, and with thought to identity, Nimrat told me that when she and her family travelled to India, “I don’t feel Indian at all, actually, when I am in India, I feel much more Norwegian.” India could be strange, confusing and chaotic such as when Amneet first visited her parents’ country of origin. In another context, such as Amneet’s wedding, it could be home, filled with romantic symbols such as the Taj Mahal. When I asked Amneet why she wanted to celebrate
her wedding in India, she told me it was cheaper to host more than a hundred people in India than in Norway, but she also told me it was romantic. Furthermore, her husband’s father came from a city not too far away from the town of her own grandparents. According to Amneet, this area in northern India was a place she and her husband had in common.

In other words, my informants’ involvement in transnational social fields fluctuates. The extent to which they relate to people and places across national borders changes during different stages of their lives. As such, transnationalism can be understood as a process (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1012). I found that times centring around marriage, in particular, and child-rearing, in part, raised my informants’ awareness of and attention to their transnational ties, as Amneet’s stories illustrate above.

Neela also activated her transnational social field when she wanted to get married. Her story is particularly interesting here, because she went through quite a quest. When she was in her mid-twenties she convinced her parents to take her to India so that they could find a husband for her. Her parents called it old fashioned, but Neela insisted as she did not have any prospects for a boyfriend in Norway and, in the end, they all travelled to India. Her parents advertised for a suitable match in the newspapers and sifted through a mountain of letters before Neela went on a few dates with some of the potentials. She did not connect with most of the men she met, however, and the few that did light a spark were not interested in moving to Norway. Neela, on the other hand, was not interested in moving permanently to India. Therefore, after a couple of months, she and her parents gave up and travelled back to Norway.

As mentioned under self-made women, Neela previously cleansed her current home for anything that could remind her of what she called “exotic India.” Then, during my fieldwork, we went up into her attic and found statues of Hindu gods that we subsequently placed around her living room. She subsequently commented that, “it is part of me after all.”

While Neela is constantly part of the same transnational social field, the way she relates to and uses this field fluctuates. It seems she can draw upon the resources of this field when she opts to, as if it were a reservoir and that, as a reservoir, it can be enriching rather than a burden. This, I believe, may be connected to her and my other informants’ transnational social

24 Although the statues were of Hindu gods, she did not use them in worship. Although the ornaments are religious per se, they are employed for decorative reasons and, perhaps, for identity claims. Here I can note that Neela also decorated her home with Christian ornaments for Easter during my fieldwork (cf. Jarl 2004:33).
field primarily tying them to people and places in India, which, as mentioned under self-made women, is imagined as an exotic and alluring tourist destination by Norwegians. Furthermore, the reservoir becomes important when Neela plans for a key event in her life; her wedding and subsequent marriage.

Similarly, all my married informants had what they called, in their words, “an Indian wedding.” The meaning of this differed. For some, like Amneet, it entailed flying family and friends to India to perform the marriage ceremony in the town of her ancestors. She confessed that she did not know what half of the rituals she underwent actually meant, but she had committed herself to doing it, in her words, “properly” so she did what she was told. For Simrit, it meant that she and her husband had both a Sikh and a Hindu marriage ceremony at the respective temples in and outside of Oslo. Elina had a Hindu ceremony, but it was performed in the countryside rather than at the temple. For Neela, it meant having both a Hindu and a Christian ceremony, the first at the Hindu temple and the latter at her husband’s church. For all of them it meant that family and friends were invited from across national borders. Preet, however, is not married. I am curious as to whether or not she will have some form of “Indian wedding” if and when she gets married.

Although an Indian wedding means many things, in one way or another, it entails that the wedding is performed with reference to my informants’ transnational social fields.

The fluctuations in my informants’ engagement with their transnational social fields, not only involve actual ways of being in these fields, it also involves the extent of my informants’ belonging. Building on Levitt and Glick Schiller, ways of being can be understand as “the actual social relations and practices individuals engage in” while ways of belonging encompass “practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1010).

Recalling Amneet’s story of her first visit to India, she was being in her transnational social field, but she was not connecting with her ancestral home. In Levitt and Glick Schiller’s terms (ibid), she was being but not belonging. Similarly, Preet could eat traditional Indian food and even confess to Sikhism and have a picture of the first Sikh Guru in her bedroom without signalling a conscious identification with her parents’ country of origin.
Being and belonging to transnational social fields, then, is not a linear process, nor is it given. As such, being and belonging resonates with processes of identification, which is not linear either. I would argue that my informants’ being and belonging in their transnational social fields is not entirely separate from how they identify and are identified by others. In other words, it is not separate from their processes of identification.

In the next segment, I will highlight the links between skin colour and places. In short, skin colour can be tied to specific places (see the map in figure 4). Therefore, different shades of brown can be understood as an immigrant marker in a Norwegian context. This marker, however, is not only made relevant for immigrants, it is also made relevant for their children. Due to their skin colour, one of the least modifiable aspects of their respective bodies, my informants are visibly tied to differing places in India. This tie does not depend on actual contact with concrete places and people, nor does it depend on their experience of belonging to these places or people. In other words, my informants’ skin colour is part of their transnational social field. Still, skin colour does not fit with Levitt and Glick Schiller’s (2004) distinction between being and belonging. Skin colour, as both biologically given and socially and symbolically constructed (cf. Moore 1999), is not dependant on my informants’ being or belonging in their transnational social fields. It is not “the actual social relations and practices individuals engage in” or the “practices that signal or enact an identity which demonstrates a conscious connection to a particular group” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1010). Nor is their skin colour dependant on their own identification. Rather, it simply is. Ever present, ready to be made relevant no matter the context.

**Different shades of brown**

In a biological view, skin tone variation is a result of evolutionary processes. According to the UNEP, “[t]he twin role played by the skin – protection from excessive UV radiation and absorption of enough sunlight to trigger the production of vitamin D – means that people living in the lower latitudes, close to the Equator, with intense UV radiation, have developed darker skin to protect them from the damaging effects of UV radiation. In contrast, those living in the higher latitudes, closer to the Poles, have developed fair skin to maximize vitamin D production” (UNEP 2012).
This is a helpful starting point for understanding the interlinking between skin tones and places, illustrated by the map of so-called indigenous skin tones in figure 4. That being said, the end result, in this case protection from UV radiation and optimised vitamin D production, cannot be seen as the reason behind why mutations in skin tones took place to begin with.\textsuperscript{25}

Furthermore, skin colour is not as straightforward as dark versus fair, where dark can be connected to the lower latitudes and fair can be connected to the higher. This is mainly due to two reasons. First of all, people have feet, as Eriksen (2004) has pointed out, and so they can move. In other words, people are not physically connected to one place like, say, a tree. Secondly, not all movements from high-UV areas to low-UV areas have been voluntary. Therefore, the sepia rainbow now found in many countries around the world cannot be understood in a perceived neutral language concerning UV radiation and vitamin D production. In Wade’s words, these colours of the skin are “linked to a particular history” (Wade 2002:4). To be plain, all these different shades of brown are wrought with profound social consequences.

Frøystad (2006) discusses the tangible yet illusive issue of complexion, among other markers, in an urban Indian setting. According to Frøystad, the upper castes are associated with a fair complexion (Frøystad 2006:160, 164-165, 178), where fairer skin is considered to be more beautiful and desirable (Jarl 2004:116). Most of the Indians who migrated to Norway come from upper castes (Jarl 2004:16; Gupta 2006; my own findings), but the notion of fair is relative and depends on context. What is fair in India may be far from fair in Norway.

What does the above mean for my informants in their everyday lives? Relevant for this thesis, it means that they have a complexion that differs from the majority. The majority can be described in various shades of pink tinted white, from alabaster to milky, perhaps even a little freckled. Some may even be closer to orange due to hours spent in the sun. My informants are brown, in differing shades largely depending on the time of year and access to the sun, with black hair, either curly or straight, and have varying degrees of brown eyes. This, of course, is connected to their parents migrating from India to Norway, which is the basis for the category that decides this thesis. Nearly all of my informants commented on their complexion in reference to their Indian heritage. Similarly, three of Gupta’s twelve informants commented

\textsuperscript{25} The UNEP has somewhat gotten it backwards – the twin role played by the sun has not lead people to develop fairer or darker skin, rather people have developed fairer or darker skin which has given them an advantage in differing latitudes. Still, this is a good place to start and, as such, it is a useful quote.
on how their black hair set them apart (Gupta 2006:30). One also commented on skin colour (ibid).

First time I met Sarah, I noted that her skin was light brown, nearly beige with a hint of grey as it was early January, her hair thick, black and sleek to her shoulders and her eyes dark brown. My skin seemed even paler than its regular freckled white when I stood next to her. The difference made me feel nearly translucent. She was just a little shorter than me and somewhat larger, but still fit and not at all overweight. I met her at her apartment quite early in the morning and her youngest was screaming in the background when she answered the door. She was wearing a short, dark dress and black tights, her feet were bare, her eyes accentuated by make-up, her nails coloured with sharp, red nail polish and her arms decorated by a couple of rings and a bracelet. She flashed a vivacious smile at me, before she turned around and hurried back into the apartment to wherever the screams were coming from. While she hurried away from me she said something along the lines of, “Come in, come in, I’m sorry this place is such a mess, do you want a cup of tea, coffee perhaps?”

Again, I noted that Neela was brown when I first met her. She was a slightly darker shade than what Sarah was in January because it was already March, but there was still this hint of grey in her skin that, with the sun, transformed into a golden lure during the summer months. Neela’s hair was black and curly, to just under her shoulders and her eyes were light brown with a touch of green. She wore comfortable, but neat clothes in the form of dark pants and a colourful top. Not only did she wear eye make-up and nail polish, she was also using foundation and lip-gloss.26 A few rings and a flashy wristwatch decorated her hands and arms. She also wore some beautiful, gold earrings and a nose ring.

I first met Surya at her place of work and she struck me as a determined woman. Her skin was an even darker shade of brown with a hint of golden honey as she had just been for a vacation in southern India, her hair black and curly and her eyes brown. She wore a red and white salwar, a form of Indian tunica, over a pair of white trousers as well as a couple of rings and earrings. She wore nail polish, but I could never tell if she wore any other make-up or not, if she did it was very discrete. She introduced herself politely, after reaching forward to shake my hand, and asked me if I would care for chai; a spicy Indian tea sweetened by milk and sugar.

26 I observed Neela as she went through her bathroom routine once when I slept over. Also, she helped me with my make-up when we were getting ready for a party together.
The skin colour varied not only from woman to woman, but also from season to season depending on access to the sun, but was still noticeably darker than that of the majority in Norway. Here I can note that my informants used sunscreen if they were to spend considerable time in the sun, but, as far as I know, they did not use skin lightening products. In reference to the introductory remarks about skin colour under central concepts, the skin colour is connected to the body and my informants cannot escape their bodies. In other words, they always carry their skin colour with them.

Above I have used the words light brown, nearly beige, grey, golden and darker shades of brown as well as alabaster, milky, pale and pink tinted white to describe various skin colours. These are all my words. My informants would, instead, refer to themselves and others who resembled them as brown. They would also, at times, refer to me as white. For example, Sarah used brun and hvit, literally ‘brown’ and ‘white’, to describe our respective skin colours when we went shopping. Neela also used white to describe me, and brown to describe herself, her children and once even two of their playmates who, thinking back, I would say were closer to black. No other words were used in reference to skin colour in my presence or during interviews.

A wide range of words can be used to describe the sepia rainbow that literally colours humanity, but my informants only used two words; brown and white. Here, Neela’s description of her children’s darker playmates as brown is telling.

I had already visited Neela and her family several times, which often entailed me playing with her children. This particular day was one of the first warm summer days and we were all outside in the sun. Neela was resting in a deckchair in a pink singlet and shorts after a strenuous day at work and me, in a summer dress, and her children, both in t-shirts and shorts, were running around playing on the grass. After a while, two of the children’s playmates and their parents, who all lived next door, came around. The father’s skin was the colour of dark brown, nearly black, coffee, while the mother was just a little bit more beige than I. Their children were much closer to their father in skin tone than their mother. The father soon disappeared again while the mother found herself a deckchair and joined Neela in the sun. I was still playing with the children when I heard that they were talking about an incident that had happened at school.
Apparently, the youngest neighbour girl had thrown a fit at school because she did not want to sit next to a boy who had migrated with his parents to Norway from a country in East Africa. Neela and the little girl’s mother both commented on the story, and with expressions of shock rhetorically asked where she could get an idea like that. They both assured one another that it was unacceptable to not want to sit next to someone, as Neela put it, “just because he is brown.”

The children were not taking any note of their mothers and kept on running around on the grass. I sat down between them and their mothers, my ears fixed on the mothers’ conversation and my eyes on the children. I kept wondering whether any of the mothers would comment on how Neela and her children also were dark. They never did. Instead, I heard Neela say, “it is funny, she [the youngest neighbour girl] is brown herself.” Even when the children could have been described as black, Neela and the children’s mother opted for the word brown. The children’s mother also used the word mørk, literally meaning dark.

In a more light-hearted case, Neela, her children and I were out for a walk. Neela’s youngest was running around in a t-shirt and a pair of light, but long pants. It was hot, I could feel the sweat dripping down my back underneath my dress and I was wondering how he could bear to wear pants. Neela must have been thinking something similar because she called out, “Take off your t-shirt!” The boy did not listen so Neela called out again, “Let your body have some sun, come on, take off your t-shirt.” The boy was still not paying attention. Neela persevered, “Take off your t-shirt so that you blir brun” literally, ‘will be brown’, which is a Norwegian expression for tanning. The boy stopped what he was doing, turned to us and said, “Mom! I am brown!” Neela and I both burst out laughing.27

So, instead of allowing for the richness in varying skin tones and the sliding differences between them, the use of brown and white only allows two categories. Either you are brown or you are white. This is quite different from an American context where black and white are the main terms, rather than brown and white (Tatum 1997).

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27 According to Lien (2001), laughter connects people. Furthermore, a spontaneous joke can never be understood in isolation, it must instead be understood in context (Lien 2001: 71). Bursting out in laughter at the same time or being able to tell a joke that makes other people laugh is all about mastering important common cultural codes (Lien 2001:70). Therefore, this scene stands out in my recollection of the fieldwork, as Neela and I burst out laughing at her son’s clever remark, and the whole situation per se, together.
Rysst (2012) writes about a primary school in the east of Oslo where a large percentage of the children have immigrant backgrounds, being either immigrants themselves or the children of immigrants. Many have a Middle Eastern or African background, with thereto associated brown or black skin (Rysst 2012). According to Rysst, the word svart (literally in Norwegian ‘black’ but can also mean ‘dirty’) is used in general parlance among the staff and children alike in reference to skin colour (ibid). Therefore, it is not inconceivable that svart could be used by my informants although I never heard it myself. Still, svart differs from brun and hvit, not only because it has a double meaning, referring both to the colour black and to the condition where something or someone is dirty, but also because svarting has been used as a derogatory term to describe people with black skin (ibid). There is no equivalent for people with white or brown skin (ibid). Svart can be seen as more sensitive when describing skin colours in a Norwegian context.

Other than words pertaining to colour, I often heard the words Indian and Norwegian, used in reference to brown and white people respectively. My informants would also use Norwegian to describe themselves, but not etnisk norsk, literally ‘ethnic Norwegian’. They would rather describe themselves as etnisk indisk, literally ‘ethnic Indian’. Simrit would also use the term ethnic Indian Norwegian. As such, not only the words brown and white as colours pertaining to skin, but the term ethnic continuously emerged in the field.

What, then, is etnisk indisk when contrasted to etnisk norsk? Going further one might ask, what is etnisk norsk that norsk is not? What does etnisk norsk denote; does it perhaps have to do with the categories brown and white?

As noted in the introduction, my informants’ use of the term ethnic should not be confused with an anthropological concept of ethnicity that theorises groups and boundaries (Barth 1998 [1969]). The term ethnic Indian is consistently used in the field to describe Norwegians who themselves have migrated from India or Norwegians born to parents who migrated from India. In contrast, the word Indian is often used to describe family and friends in India. They are simply referred to as Indian rather than ethnic Indian.

While the term ethnic Indian is used quite consistently only in reference to those who have migrated from India and their descendants and not those who live in India, the same cannot be said for the term Indian. Indian is, as noted above, used to describe people who live within the boundaries of the Indian state. However, several of my informants also use the term Indian to
refer to themselves and others with a similar migrational family history. When my informants simply use Indian in such contexts, I see this as a shorthand term for the term they otherwise use, which is ethnic Indian.

“I’m the Indian girl”, Amneet told me over the phone so that I could recognise her when we met. Similarly, Gurnoor said “I look Indian”, with a hint of laughter in her voice. “She is Indian”, Neela said while describing her sister-in-law although she, her sister-in-law, is born and raised in Norway. Even Simrit used Indian to describe herself and others although she insisted “I’m not Indian” in our very first conversation about my project.

This shorthand term was also used in reference to friends. Eveleen, for example, told me that she had one Norwegian best friend and one Indian best friend, Elina said she had one group of Norwegian friends and one group of Indian friends while Simrit explained that she had one Pakistani best friend. After further questioning it became clear that none of the so-called Indian or Pakistani friends were actually Indian or Pakistani. Rather they were, like my informants, born to parents who migrated to Norway from India or Pakistan. Sarah also used the term Indian to describe some of her friends who had a similar background to herself.

Preet, on the other hand, did not categorise her friends with reference to places, but, as far as I know, her friends are mostly ethnic white Norwegians.

On a side note, two of our common friends both stressed that, “Preet is Norwegian, I don’t think of her as anything but Norwegian.” When I asked, “You don’t think of her as anything other than Norwegian although she isn’t white?” They responded, “No, I forget she is brown,” and, “I don’t think about her being brown.” Later on, however, they joked about Preet being their “immigrant alibi”, meaning she proved how multicultural and inclusive they were. Stressing Preet’s inclusion in the Norwegian category and “forget[ting] she is brown” while simultaneously joking about her as an immigrant alibi can all serve as a reminder of her difference. If her inclusion has to be stressed it means that there is a possibility that some may disagree (Prieur 2002:71). Furthermore, our friends in common never joke about our white Swedish friends, who are, in fact, immigrants as they have moved to Norway from Sweden after they turned 18, as immigrant alibis. Perhaps Preet, with her brown skin, can be an immigrant alibi because her brown skin is visible while our Swedish friends are not visible and cannot be so-called immigrant alibis.
Returning to the term Indian, however, I believe the usage of Indian in the instances detailed above is due to efficiency and practicality. Rather than going through the entire chain of, “yes-she-looks-Indian-because-her-parents-migrated-here-from-India-in-the-seventies-but-she-is-actually-Norwegian”, it is much easier to say, “she is Indian.” The rest is simply understood due to context. When talking to me one-on-one, however, the women would be more conscious of the categories and thus insist on terms they preferred. This explains why Simrit insisted that she was not Indian although she later on used the term after all. Amneet explicitly conceded to me that the categories were difficult, particularly in everyday settings. “What am I supposed to say, other than that I’m Indian?”

Non-white bodies

When Amneet says she is Indian, it can be argued that, in a sense, she is Indian. Her transnational social fields does connect her to India and if she experiences belonging in that field and chooses to evoke it in her understanding of herself, she should be free to do so. Her skin colour may rightly connect her to her grandparents’ town in northern India.

That being said, skin colour can be misleading as it may not have anything to do with a person’s ties to people and places elsewhere, such as with adoptees. Still, even when skin colour should not be a basis for identification, research on Swedish non-white adoptees finds that their colour is made significant in their everyday interactions with others (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009). Hübinette in particular has argued that non-white bodies are not granted access to the category of Swedes in a Swedish context (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009; Hübinette and Lundström 2011; Hübinette in press).

According to Hübinette, Sweden today is no longer white and homogenous, but instead multicultural (Hübinette in press). Still, this is not recognised, but rather refuted as white Swedes continue to harbour their image of Sweden as a racially homogenous country (ibid). One may wonder whether the same is true for Norway today.

Either way, this is the backdrop for Hübinette and Tigervall’s (2009) analysis of non-white adoptees in Sweden today. Sweden is the world’s leading country for transnational adoption

28 Referring to themselves and others like them as Indian can also be understood as a metonym, where a part represents the whole (Lakoff and Johnson 2003 [1980]:35–40). The Indian part of the woman is made relevant and can be highlighted to represent each woman as a whole. This is problematic because it risks that the rest of the individual becomes invisible, hidden by the term Indian and all that the term carries with it.
with more than 50,000 children adopted from primarily Korea, India and China during the last fifty years (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009:335-338). The adoptees are foreign-born first-generation migrants who “are not just completely Swedish and Western according to all existing definitions of nationality and ethnicity; they also normally belong to the upper socio-economic strata of Swedish society, a fact which makes race the only category at work when they are discriminated against” (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009:337).

Recalling the introductory discussion concerning ethnicity and “race”, the lines between these concepts are, at best, blurry, particularly because “ethnic groups have a common myth of origin, which relates ethnicity to descent, which again makes it a kindred concept to race” (Eriksen 2002 [1993]:6).

According to Barth (1998 [1969]), there must be a minimum of contact between groups who perceive each other as significantly different for ethnic groups to be relevant. As such, boundaries are a prerequisite for ethnicity to even exist (Eriksen 2002 [1993]:12). Understood in these terms, ethnicity is an aspect of a relationship, not a quality one group holds (ibid). The very same can be said for “race” as well as for class or even gender. For one “race” to be relevant, another must exist, for middle class to exist, so must, say, working class and for women to figure as a category, there must also be men.

Class may be said to differ from the other concepts in that it is not seen as biologically grounded, but purely as a social construct. Your class is not connected to your biological body, although, perhaps, your body may convey your class through mannerism and such. What remains is “race”, ethnicity and gender as aspects of a relationship that are biologically grounded, in the body, but understood as a social construct embedded with meaning depending on context (Moore 1999; Wade 2002). Gender differs from the two remaining concepts in that it does not build on ideas of nature and heredity (ibid). In other words, you do not inherit your gender from your parents. Finally, ethnicity, in part, differs from “race” as the latter to a larger extent is connected to phenotype (Wade 2002:11). That being said, “some ethnic groups are racialised, as when immutable traits are accorded to ethnic minorities” (Eriksen 2002 [1993]:6).

If we follow Hübinette and Tigervall’s (2009) reasoning and see “race” as the only category at work when non-white adoptees are discriminated against, then non-white adoptees, like my informants, make an interesting case in point for examining the workings of “race” in Sweden.
and Norway today, respectively, but also for analysing the links between different skin colours and places.

The main difference is the parents of my informants and those of the non-white adoptees in Hübinette and Tigervall’s (2009) analysis. There are two aspects which are worth highlighting when it comes to my informants’ parents as opposed to the adoptive parents of the non-white adoptees. The first aspect is that of my informants’ parents’ transnational social fields and, subsequently, my informants’ being and belonging in these fields, as detailed above. Secondly, the parents of my informants and of the non-white adoptees respectively share and do not share their children’s skin colour and their thereto connected experiences of difference.

As Hübinette and Tigervall (2009) show, it can be problematic for non-white adoptees that their bodies set them apart from not only the majority, but their very own parents and families. One story is particularly striking, where Linnea, a woman who was adopted from Korea at an early age, is continuously reminded of her bodily difference as her mother retells the story of her arrival in Sweden: “And my mother has her favourite stories, such as when I arrived in Sweden and sat on the floor and looked down. Her favourite story, I think she has told it hundreds of times, is that my cousin says, “Oh it looks as if she is sleeping”, because I have narrow eyes. This story has amused her so many times!” (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009:348.)

In other words, Linnea’s non-white body is not only made significant in public places, but also in the intimate sphere of her own home. This has “been damaging for her psyche in the long run” (ibid). I find neither evidence nor any reason that my informants should experience such differentiation in their relations to their own parents who, after all, share their phenotype. When it comes to other relationships in the intimate sphere with, say, boyfriends, husbands and even close friends, I am not so sure. Sarah’s ex-boyfriend who called her his “Indian princess” makes a case in point. The same can be said for Preet’s friends who calls her their “immigrant alibi”.

On the other hand, my informants’ parents are immigrants. While adoptees can distance themselves from the group of immigrants and all that this categorisation entails without distancing themselves from their own parents and, with that, their families at large, my informants cannot do the same without attempting a difficult balancing act where they do not remove themselves too far from their own family and heritage.
Returning to the adoptees, Hübinette and Tigervall argue that “in spite of a compact belongingness to Swedishness and Swedish culture, having a Swedish citizenship, a Swedish language, [...] their non-white bodies are localised to a certain geographical origin, connected to a certain ethnicity, nationality, language, religion and race” (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009:349). I have excluded a few markers in the quote to highlight the interlinks between the adoptees and my Norwegian born informants. By replacing the word Swedish with Norwegian, the same can be said of my informants. They are continuously “localised to a certain geographical origin” (ibid) with all that this origin entails.

Hübinette and Tigervall call this racialisation and go on to state that “it is not even possible to differentiate between race and ethnicity, as a certain body and appearance almost always seems to go back to a certain group and collectivity and vice versa. The socially constructed entities of race and ethnicity are, in other words, as inseparable as the categories of sex and gender to give a parallel” (ibid). This equals my findings in a Norwegian context.

Again, recalling the introductory discussion of “race” and ethnicity, I argue that it is fruitful to understand “race” in much the same vein as gender in Moore’s terms (1999); as dialectically both biologically given and socially and symbolically constructed, bearing in mind that these two are not dichotomous, but rather stand in an unfixed relation to one another. The biologically given is symbolically constructed and the symbolically constructed is at the same time biologically given (Moore 1999). When it comes to “race” and ethnicity, the biologically given is the phenotype in general or the skin colour in particular, which again is understood socially and symbolically. In other words, skin colour may be biologically given, but that does not mean that it is not also constructed socially and symbolically. Rather, as my material shows, my informants’ skin colour is given, but the categorisation of their bodies and their subsequent identification, based on their non-white skin, is due to social and symbolic readings of skin colour.

That being said, it may be argued that “race” and ethnicity vary markedly from gender as one is born into a “race” or ethnicity, but not gender, as the gender can first be established at birth (Jenkins 2008 [1996]:60). My informants are born into their families that carry with them implications for my informants’ “race” and ethnicity. Similarly, the adoptees in Hübinette and

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29 That is, the gender is established at birth based on the newborn’s reproductive organs, whether or not if the gender established rings true for how the newborn identifies later in life.
Tigervall’s (2009) material are born to (biological) parents whose “race” and ethnicity carry ramifications for their children when their children are adopted transnationally.

Nonetheless, building on the parallel, understanding “race” and ethnicity along the same lines as Moore (1999) sees sex and gender may not make the categories more clear-cut. Rather Moore (ibid) holds that these terms continuously collapse into one another, but her argument that the distinction nonetheless is useful rings true in grappling to analyse the categorisation and thereto connected identification of non-white bodies in a Norwegian context. In other words, I argue that it is time to end the silence surrounding “race” in Norway and bring it into discussions concerning ethnicity, as the two terms, while blurry, may help highlight differing aspects pertinent to the discussion, such as the importance of skin colour (see also Rysst 2012).

Furthermore, remembering that social and cultural understandings of skin colour and “race” are based on biological traits that are, as such, given, my informants cannot escape either. In other words, my informants’ skin colour and “race” implicate an ascribed status which they cannot escape any more than they can escape, say, their gender.

**Concluding remarks**

My informants live their lives locally, at home, study and work with family and friends in Oslo, but are also part of transnational social fields due to their parents’ migration. In particular, their very skin is a constant reminder of the transnational social fields that inform their lives.

According to Prieur (2007), identification and belonging is less given than before. Nor is it connected to place in the same way as before (Prieur 2007: 31-32). This might be, but I find that, although my informants and others who look like them can live their entire lives within Norway’s borders, their skin colour does not automatically grant them belonging in the eyes of others in (mostly new) face-to-face encounters. In other words, skin colour is key to understanding the categorisation and thereto connected identification of non-white bodies in a Norwegian context, which resonates with Hübinette and Tigervall’s (2009) findings for non-white adoptees in a Swedish context.
My informants partake in the categorisation themselves. Specifically, they contrast white Norwegian bodies with brown foreign bodies. It seems that non-white bodies are categorised as non-Norwegian, which again echoes the situation for non-white bodies in a Swedish context (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009:349). During my fieldwork I found that this process of categorisation is referred to by a lay use of the word ethnic, which is closely related to notions of “race”, where ethnic Norwegian means white and ethnic other means non-white. In other words, ethnic is only used to describe people within Norway’s borders who are not white. People who have no ties to Norway, who are born and raised in other countries, in this case India, are not characterised by the word ethnic.
Chapter V: “I am from...”

Og her hjemme, kaller de han utlending
og der borte, kaller de han utlending
Men vi er enig om at vi blir fresh selv om
identitet lett dreper med en strek mellom.

And here at home, they call him an alien
and over there, they call him an alien
But we agree that we are fresh, even if
identity can kill with a hyphen in between.

“I am from...”, by the Norwegian rap group Karpe Diem (own translation).

I had already discussed the question “where are you from”, and the corresponding plausible answers, with several of my informants before I experienced something that made me realise exactly how unpleasant and differentiating the connotations of this question could be. The following case, detailing interactional data from a public event, while pertaining to the more unpleasant aspects of “where are you from”, also highlights how difficult it is for my informants to be identified as Norwegians vis-à-vis ethnic white Norwegians.

“You, as an innvandrer...”

Sarah was invited to hold a lecture about Oslo seen through the lenses of her own life story and welcomed me to attend. It was an open event hosted by a local cultural organisation, and the audience that turned out were entirely white with an age range limited to the late fifties and upwards.30

Sarah was, as always, dressed in a combination of smart and sexy with a little eye make-up, nail polish and some jewellery, with her sleek black hair loose around her shoulders. She was wearing a short, dark dress and black tights under a beige coat in addition to a pair of flashy high heels. Other than the heels, she was also flashing a vivacious smile at her audience every so often, before turning her expression sterner again. During the lecture she kept repeating to the audience, “Don’t be shy, if there is anything you want to ask, go ahead and ask me, I’m all

30 The name of the organisation and of the venue is excluded for the sake of anonymity. Suffice it to say that the organisation directs itself to the population of the capital at large, and not specifically immigrants and their children or youth for that matter, which may explain the audience’s skin colour and age group.
ears!” In other words, she was maintaining a friendly atmosphere and, slowly but surely, the audience warmed to her and soon enough a few of them were actually asking questions.

I was sitting at the back next to an older man who was dressed all in black. He was bald and was wearing a pair of glasses that gave him a somewhat distinguished look. He had been making a few comments, in my direction, and I was growing uneasy. His comments were vague, but clearly about immigrants, and I was not sure what to make of them. Was he critical of Sarah? Did he simply disagree with some aspect of her lecture, perhaps? Was he critical of immigration in general? I politely caught his eye every now and again, but never said anything in response. Towards the end of the lecture, he raised his arm, went out to the front and took the microphone.

“Why aren’t there any innvandrere (immigrants, literally in Norwegian ‘people who have wandered in’) here today? Du (you singular), as an innvandrer, tell me, why aren’t dere (you plural) engasjert (involved or dedicated, normally in Norwegian associated with volunteer work in politics or civil society), why don’t dere take part in things, why don’t dere attend these venues (gesturing to the stage, as if referring to the lecture itself)?”

I heard a murmur in the audience. A couple of grey-haired women, who were sitting in front of me, nodded their heads. I looked at Sarah. Her smile was gone and her face was much sterner than I had seen it before. A heartbeat passed before she smiled again and answered back.

“I’m here aren’t I? I can’t answer for anyone other than myself and I definitely can’t answer for all innvandrere. I’m not an innvandrer. I didn’t wander in from anywhere. I was born and raised a steinkast (literally, ‘a stone’s throw’ - a common Norwegian expression) away from here.”

The older man was clearly not appeased by her smile nor her answers and tried pushing her further, but the woman who had invited Sarah to hold the lecture had been skittish in the background and she now interrupted the man, took the microphone and said something along the lines of, “Thank you, that is an interesting question, but it belongs in another debate.” She then backtracked to the subject that Sarah had been elaborating on prior to the question. Sarah willingly picked up where she had left off.

Later on Sarah told me that she had been really annoyed by the man. She said that she did not see how he could ask her as if she were an innvandrer and not engasjert given she had been
properly introduced at the beginning of the lecture so both her background and level of *engasjement* should have been clear. She was there giving a lecture after all, how much more *engasjert* could she be.

As for me, while the older man was up at the front asking his question, the pace of my heart had increased, my palms had become sweaty and my face warm, perhaps even red. I was furious. I felt the man’s question was an insult and wanted to raise my hand, take the microphone and ask him why there were not any younger people in the audience, why there were not any people from the eastside of Oslo, as most of the audience gave the impression of belonging to the richer west, and so on. I also wanted to stress to everyone present just how *engasjert* Sarah was – all the things she took part in and all the venues she attended. However, by the time I had gathered my thoughts, Sarah had continued onto something else.

This case highlights my informants’ continuing struggle for being identified as Norwegians outside their immediate surroundings, their immediate surroundings understood as their closest relationships to their family, spouses, boyfriends and friends. Sarah is not recognised as Norwegian by the man who took the microphone. Rather, he associates her with the immigrant other who belongs elsewhere, and not in Norway. This is also implied by the shift from you singular to you plural. I also got the sense that the women who nodded their heads, agreed with him. To them, Sarah was an immigrant and, as such, not Norwegian.

This identification, on part of the members of the audience, can only be connected to Sarah’s phenotype. Firstly, she had made clear that she was born and raised in Norway. In other words, she had presented herself as a Norwegian daughter born to immigrants, but not as an immigrant herself. Secondly, she was not only speaking fluent Norwegian, she also displayed a rich vocabulary. Finally, she was not wearing a *salwar*, a *saree* or anything else that could visibly tie her to someplace else other than Norway. The only thing she was wearing that could, perhaps, be identified as non-Norwegian, was her skin.

Even though the older man did not ask where Sarah was from, his question made me feel and, as a result, see the real connotations of the original question more clearly (cf. Talle 2003). “Where are you from” encompasses a range of assumptions, among them “You look different, you are not from around here, you are not Norwegian.”
Raj (2000) explores the promotion of religious identity among young Hindus in Britain. According to her, promoting a Hindu identity may be seen as a response to being marked culturally different (Raj 2000:538). Hindu identity is seen as a workable identity that distinguishes Raj’s young informants from, in particular, Muslim peers (Raj 2000:548). This same tendency cannot be found among my informants (cf. remark about religion in the methodology). Still, Raj’s analysis of the question of origin resonates with my findings. While detailing the question of origin, she states that the “unintended effect of cultural curiosity is the implication ‘You are not from here’; ‘You do not belong’.” (Raj 2000:550.)

Regardless of the intentions of the inquirer, the question is a form of seemingly innocent “cultural curiosity” (ibid) but with severe ramifications. It continuously redraws the map where being Norwegian equals being white and therefore, not being white must mean something else. In other words, non-white bodies are seen to belong elsewhere, and not within the borders of Norway as a nation-state. Again, this parallels Raj’s findings in Britain, where “British and English continue to be popular glosses for Anglo-Saxon and general parlance does not acknowledge non-whiteness as part of those categories” (Raj 2000:551). The same can be said for the categorisation and subsequent identification of non-white bodies in a Norwegian context, where “general parlance does not acknowledge non-whiteness” (ibid) as Norwegian bodies.

This map, where white bodies belong within Norway’s borders and non-white bodies are from elsewhere, is far from relevant all the time, but I discuss it here because it is made relevant again and again in new face-to-face encounters between my informants and others. In Eriksen’s terms, this is a form of exclusion at the level of greater society (Eriksen 2007:1060). When the elderly white man tells Sarah, “You, as an innvandrer,” or when a stranger asks Neela, “Where are you from?” the words draw the line between a category of white Norwegians and non-white others. In other words, greater society, in the form of the elderly white man and other, mostly white, strangers, enforce a category of non-white and thereby, not Norwegian bodies (Gullestad 2010 [2002]:79; Prieur 2002:62). Non-white bodies are not identified as Norwegian. Instead, they are ascribed a status of foreign-ness.

Furthermore, the case illustrates my informants’ need to distance themselves from immigrants in order to be included within the category of Norwegians themselves. This is specifically evident when Sarah says, “I can’t answer for anyone other than myself and I definitely can’t answer for all innvandrere. I’m not an innvandrer.” Underlining that she is not an immigrant
is understandable as she is, in fact, not an immigrant, just like the rest of my informants. Still, this is problematic for primarily two reasons. First of all, Sarah and my other informants are distancing themselves in order to obtain inclusion from society at a greater level, but this process may incur costs upon a category who also strive for inclusion; immigrants. Secondly, it is problematic because the category my informants are removing themselves from include their very own parents. Remembering that most of my informants have rather close knit families with next to everyday contact, the cost of distancing themselves from their own family may not be worth the prize of inclusion. In other words, distancing themselves from the category of immigrants may be experienced as a betrayal, either on their own part or on the part of their parents.

The day after the lecture, Sarah and I visited her parents and had some tea. During the course of the conversation, Sarah mentioned the scene with the old man. She told it as if it was a joke, ridiculing the man for seeing her as an immigrant and not engasjert, and Sarah, her parents and I all smirked. Although Sarah had distanced herself from her own parents when she insisted to the old man “I’m not an innvandrer,” she included them in making fun of him. In other words, she might have demanded her place within the borders of Norway as a nation-state by distancing herself from the category of immigrants, which includes her own parents, but she and her parents could nonetheless strengthen their bonds based on the shared experience of being singled out as, precisely, immigrants. As written under transnational social fields, “generational experiences are shaped by common experiences during youth that create a shared worldview or frame of reference” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1017). As the above implies, such shared experiences may not be limited to youth.

Multiple identities

When asked “where are you from” in a Norwegian context, my informants are, in part, asked to explain their identity as they are perceived as non-Norwegian due to their skin colour. My informants strive to find, not only an appropriate answer with regards to the asker’s intentions, but an answer that can account for their experiences as the daughters of migrants, born and raised in Norway. As such, they are searching for an identity, or a self-presentation, that is not only accountable to their experiences, or, perhaps, their self-representation or sense of self, but also, more importantly when answering the question of origin, easy to comprehend (Raj 2000:551).
Here it can be useful to take a step back and clarify what I mean by self. According to Spiro (1993), the self-examining and reflexive ‘I’ develops in the meeting between the ‘self’ and ‘other’. The ‘I’, then, facilitates “self-other differentiation” (Spiro 1993:111). A self may be personal and linked to what we may call a personal identity, but it is simultaneously always relational as it only exists in relation to other selves. In Spiro’s words, the self is “relational through and through” (Spiro 1993:139). As such, even a personal identity is always social as it exists in relation to others.

With thought to the importance of skin colour in processes of identification in a Norwegian context, it is worth noting that the self is connected to a body and may thus be seen as bounded by the body’s skin (Spiro 1993:133). Taking this one step further, the other’s self may be seen as bounded by his or her skin.

The self is not only connected to a body, but is also relational in the same manner as ethnicity, “race” and gender. All of these, which again are connected to processes of identification, may be understood as only existing in relation through their difference, for example, when talking about women, to men, which also implies their similarity to, taking the same example, women. In other words, there are no selves without other selves just as there are no women without men and vice versa. This relational difference is found in the theories of Barth (1998 [1969]), Spiro (1993), Moore (1994) as well as Jenkins (2008 [1996]).

Taken together, identification may be seen as a multiplicity of difference and similarity, which is perceived categorically, as we as selves are grouped in categories based on our differences and similarities to the categories in question, but lived relationally and, may I add, socially in concrete meetings (Moore 1994:20). In other words, we have multiple identities that must be understood in context and particularly vis-à-vis significant others.

Jenkins (2008 [1996]), however, argues for a unitary selfhood. That being said, I do not see recognising multiple identities as divergent from Jenkins unitary selfhood because, in Jenkins words, “a unitary model allows us to recognise selfhood as simultaneously cognitive and emotional, a rich amalgam of knowledge and feelings, both individual and collective, and thoroughly interconnected and interdependent (it probably wouldn’t ‘work’ otherwise) (Jenkins 2008 [1996]:67 his emphasis). In other words, a unitary self contains many facets and may, perhaps, be another way of conceiving multiple identities. According to Jenkins some parts of this multitude or, in his words, “mixture” (ibid) may be “in contradiction, some
in agreement” (ibid). The case in point, whichever way you see it, is, again, that we as selves contain multitudes, different aspects of which may be made relevant as different or similar vis-à-vis others. Our identities cannot be reduced by fixating them along one central axis.

The question of origin, on the other hand, assumes to connect identity, colour and culture, but also “race”, nation and belonging along one axis (Raj 2000:551). “Where are you from” refers to a myriad of identities, but still begs one unitary answer. In other words, the question fixates the identity of the person, who is forced to answer, along one axis. More crudely, my informants’ multidimensional identities, when faced with “where are you from”, are fixated along an assumed axis of nation, territory and blood, which again implicates notions of “race” that is perpetuated through the generations (ibid).

This resonates with the solitarist view of identity, mentioned in the introduction, which sees human beings as members of exactly one group (Sen 2006). As such, it involves seeing each and every human identity in terms of one single, unchanging essence (ibid).

In other words, examining the solitarist view highlights critical aspects of the question “where are you from.” In short, those who ask do not allow for multiple human identities. Rather, when directing the question towards my informants, they are only content with one answer: “India.” In other words, when strangers ask “where are you from” they imply that my informants can only be from one place and that the place in question is their parents’ country of origin and, moreover, that this place is relevant for the stranger and my informants’ social interaction (Raj 2000:551). If my informants can only be from one place, their multiple identities are reduced to one single, unchanging essence (cf. Eriksen 1993:171-172).

The solitarist view of identity, then, is not only plainly false as it belies my informants’ multiplicity. It can even be dangerous as it perpetuates the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’, even when we, as Norwegian-born Norwegian citizens, are all born and raised within the borders of the same nation-state. The question of origin deepens the divide between those who can trace their lineage within one nation-state’s borders through the generations and those who cannot. In other words, it enforces a distinction that we, on part of greater society, ourselves have created to understand people’s lives, where various nation-states can be seen as accounting for differing peoples’ identities, which, moreover, they cannot escape (Eriksen 1993:171; Raj 2000:551-552).
On the other hand, if we all contain multitudes, we can select among our identities, albeit unconsciously (Moore 1994:60, 64-66). This entails that we can invest in those aspects we share with others rather than those we do not or vice versa, given external factors that may limit such investment. In other words, we on part of greater society will, perhaps, invest in the similarities if they are conceived as more rewarding, emotionally or otherwise, than the differences (ibid). If we can emphasise those aspects that unite us, we can move away from unnecessary distinctions such as those where people who are born and raised in Norway nonetheless are seen as belonging elsewhere. In addition, by recognising multiple human identities, we can nuance otherwise simplistic understandings of one another.

In order to recognise multidimensional identities, it is important to stress the difference between multiple and shifting identities, which implies room for selecting between and investing in different identities depending on context, with volunteerism. In other words, you cannot choose between unlimited identities indefinitely (Moore 1994:60; Moore 1999:158). Nor can you can always select (ibid). To be plain, this is not a voluntaristic approach. At times, circumstance can and will call specific aspects of your identity to the forefront, be it national, ethnic, gender or class.

Recalling Sarah, she may in part in various contexts, or, in other words, relations, be described as: Daughter, sister, girlfriend, wife, mother, urban, middle class, interested in theatre, music, literature and art, Hindu, seemingly secular, loyal, rebellious, strong-minded, curious, confident, ambitious, a pioneer, both career-oriented and family-oriented, the daughter of immigrants and a self-made woman, but also as fair-skinned, darker-skinned, brown, Norwegian and Indian.

With her parents, she may be primarily their daughter, with her husband she is primarily his wife but also, perhaps, friend or lover. Over a cup of coffee with her best friend she is loyal. Applying for a job she is ambitious, but also accomplished and even smart. Her university degree may also be her main marker in such a context. When she travels, on the other hand, the identity that comes to the forefront will be that of her citizenship, as noted in her passport: Norwegian.

My material, however, shows an undue attention to skin colour and “race”, where my informants’ bodies are continuously placed elsewhere outside of Norway’s borders. This even happens in contexts where their “race” and skin colour should not be the prime concern, such
as at Sarah’s lecture or in the numerous first meetings with strangers who ask my informants where they are from (cf. Eriksen 2007 [2001]:40-41).

Simrit and her husband had been for a vacation in Egypt, just the two of them, shortly before I joined them for dinner. During the course of the evening they told me how, after they had gotten off the plane and collected their luggage at the Cairo airport, they had found the passport queue for foreigners, which was relatively long. Finally, at the counter, the officer behind the glass-screen looked up, eyed them both and said something in Arabic. When they did not respond, the officer started waiving his hand towards another cubicle a few metres away. Simrit and her husband obligingly picked up their luggage and walked over to the other counter. There, in front of another cubicle with another officer, they handed over their passports. The new officer took one look at the passports and started shaking his head, waving his hand back in the direction they came from. Apparently, the first officer had sent them to the queue for nationals, meaning Egyptian citizens. Again, Simrit and her husband obligingly picked up their belongings and moved back to the first cubicle, which was for foreigners. The first officer, then, looked up at them and started speaking Arabic yet again. Now, Simrit’s husband interjected, in English, something along the lines of, “He told us to come back here,” upon which the officer eyed them again and shrugging accepted their passports. After a split-second he asked, in broken English, “Are these your passports?” According to Simrit, the officer could not comprehend that she and her husband are, as a matter of fact, Norwegian. In the end, they had to tell him, “We’re Indian, but we live in Norway,” which he gladly accepted.

This implies that it is not only in Norwegian contexts that Norwegian bodies are assumed to be white. Rather, the myth of Norway as a white homogenous country (cf. Vike 2007 [2001]:137) and, subsequently, that all Norwegians are white, seems to exist outside of Norway’s borders as well, at least in the mind of the first officer who controlled Simrit and her husband’s passports at the Cairo airport.

In other words, my informants’ “race” may seem to be an overriding identity that is constantly made relevant in contexts where it is, perhaps, not evident that it should be relevant. The ascribed status of “race”, which is linked to biologically grounded phenotype, may be understood in much the same way as the ascribed status of mother, which is also grounded biologically in reference to women’s capacity to bear children (Moore 1994). Moore details how motherhood becomes overriding when, for example, a woman who is a mother is also
career-oriented, which leads to the woman in question being categorised as a ‘bad mother’, although her status as mother is not necessarily relevant for her status in the workplace (Moore 1994:99). In Moore’s words, “[w]omen continually find themselves defined by the label ‘mother’, and it is this label which then defines their relation to work, to social relations, to sexuality and even to life” (ibid). A similar process seems to be happening with thought to my informants’ “race” in a Norwegian context as the label Indian or, at best, ethnic Indian is constantly made relevant in social interactions where it should, perhaps, not be of immediate concern.

Here, again, the semantics of the field become important. Moore goes on to write that, “[t]here is nothing natural about motherhood or womanhood”, which, I may interject, can also be said for the social category of “race”, and, returning to Moore, “social categories are […] socially constructed, and they are at their most powerful when they appear most natural, most transparent, most taken for granted” (ibid). Here, I may add, that as “race” appears to be taboo in Norway today, it may even be entirely translucent. We, referring to greater Norwegian society, appear not to want to talk about it.

Labelling – or, in other words, the naming game – is central to the politics of identity. Choosing which labels to use, at all, and subsequently which segments of the population they refer to, implies which identities these segments have at their disposal. Furthermore, every label both includes and excludes as they imply both similarity and difference vis-à-vis significant others, but by excluding labels can also split the identities of people who are not either or but, rather, both, for example both Norwegian and Indian, although on separate grounds.

When my informants voice which labels they prefer and present themselves to me and others as Norwegian, or, in response to the question of origin, as from Oslo, I believe it is because they are conscious of identity politics and the importance of both naming and recognition. In other words, when Neela insists that she is from Oslo or when Simrit proposes the term ethnic Indian Norwegian, they are both being active, each in their way, in the politics of identity naming. They are attempting to broaden the category of people who may be identified as from Oslo and by introducing a new label altogether.

My concern with labels, on the other hand, is connected to my wish to account for my informants’ experiences, which, I believe, calls for new processes of identification altogether
together with ending the silence concerning “race”. In my view, the current processes of identification, as they are expressed in meetings between my informants and significant others, where my informants are seen as primarily different from the white majority, limit my informants’ identities unnecessarily.

The politics of identity naming can be understood as part of the current Norwegian politics of inclusion (Eriksen 2010:91; Rysst 2012). These politics call for recognising diversity as minorities are to be included at school, in the workplace and in politics etc (ibid). Ironically, its subsequent exploration of diversity leads to the naming game, which, again, may lock those being named into solitarist, unchanging identities. It should, perhaps, rather seek to give way and make room for the myriad of identities within Norway’s borders as a nation-state. Norway is today, after all, like Sweden, no longer white and homogenous (Hübinette in press). Who is identified as Norwegian and, with it, images of the Norwegian body must be redefined.

“Where are you from?”

When asked “where are you from” my informants can answer with “I am from Norway.” They are born and raised in Norway, so they are from Norway. Norway is the nation-state, or the imagined community (Anderson 1983), they are born into. Most of the time, however, this is not what the asker wants to know. Mostly, only “India” will appease whoever is asking my informants where they are from. In other words, they want to know the “race” or ethnicity of the families they are born into, their so-called Indian-ness, rather than the country they are born into.

It does happen that the inquirer wants to know where in Norway or where in Oslo one of my informants is from. This is usually made clear by context. For example, Neela and I were out walking with her children in their neighborhood when we met an elderly man out walking his dog. The children wanted to pet the dog and so the grown-ups started talking. Both Neela and the man were clearly local, otherwise they would not be out walking with their children and dog respectively. After chatting for a while the man asked, “So, where are you from?” Neela answered, as I had heard her answer before, “Groruddalen,” which is a specific area located in the east of Oslo. Instead of the usual, “No, where are you really from,” which I had heard before, the man continued, “And when did you move here?” In other words, the meeting and
subsequent chat was informed by a local context where the question of origin could be understood locally, with reference to differing places in Oslo. In this local context, perhaps, it was easier for Neela to be identified as Norwegian.

In a similar vein, “where are you from” may also refer to where in India my informants’ parents are from. Again, this is usually made clear by context. Specifically, I partook in a conversation where Surya, a colleague of hers and I were discussing India. All three of us had travelled in India and after a while the colleague inquired, “Where are you from?” Surya answered where her mother and father were from respectively. The colleague continued by stating, “I visited [Surya’s mother’s town], it was beautiful.” The conversation continued with an interchange of brief references to other places one or all of us had visited within the borders of India. Again, in this collegial context, Surya was, perhaps, already identified as Norwegian. Highlighting her tie to India was perhaps unproblematic.

When the question is asked with reference to my informants’ parents’ country of origin, however, it helps locate their generational heritage within an increasingly transnational world. Still, this emphasis on origin cannot be presumed to describe them or others like them.

We should, then, ask why people ask my informants where they are from. Those who ask, what do they want to know? Why does the inquirer want to know where my informants are “really” from? Is it, perhaps, significant for their subsequent social interaction?

Perhaps “where are you from” goes right to the heart of what it means to live in a country coming to terms with multiculturalism. Perhaps it marks a society where people are curious and take a generous and open-minded approach to social difference. The inquirer may be asking whether she or he may use her or his own frame of reference to understand my informants, or whether, perhaps, some other cultural understanding should be evoked. As such, it is a question of communication and perhaps even trust.

As the above stories about Neela and Surya imply, the meaning of the question of origin is a case of context. So is whether or not my informants are identified as Norwegians. Still I wonder whether, we, as greater society, might be better off asking other questions altogether. In connection to this, one might wonder how long the question “where are you from” will be asked and whether it will, eventually, be replaced by (an)other question(s). If, for example,
the inquirer is interested in a person’s generational heritage, perhaps the question will, in
time, be: “What is your heritage, can you tell me your family history?”

With the question of origin, my informants and other non-white first generation Norwegians
like them are confronted with how their bodies exclude them from the bounded group of
white Norwegians. Therefore they have to explore other ways of being Norwegian, where
other factors than skin colour are detriment to the identification of Norwegian-ness, while at
the same time not excluding their parents, but rather letting their parents play an active role in
their lives by, for example, being proud of their heritage. This is no easy feat.

**Concluding remarks**

In short, there are assumed connections between place and ethnicity. These connections,
however, are obscured by transnational movements. These movements, in obscuring the
assumed connections, prompt the question “where are you from”, which again is problematic
as it may constrict those being asked into one unchanging identity fixated along the lines of
their family’s generational heritage.

So perhaps Norwegian-ness is bounded by skin colour together with notions of “race”. Skin
colour is, then, a decisive factor. More to the point, my informants are identified as non-
Norwegians due to their skin colour. This identification happens primarily in every new face-
to-face encounter vis-à-vis significant others and, as such, on the border (cf. Barth 1998
[1969]), but also in other relations as my informants are reminded of their skin colour even in
the intimate sphere by family and friends (cf. Sarah’s ex-boyfriend and Preet’s friends). In
other words, my informants are continuously regarded as a minority due to their skin colour.
They are not recognised as ‘the same’ by the white majority.

That being said, the goal for my informants may not be to be recognised as entirely ‘the
same’. Rather, it may be to draw up a map where brown bodies can be included within the
borders of the Norwegian nation-state. “Race” and skin colour should, perhaps, not be taboo
to discuss, regardless of whether it is the main marker for identifying bodies and thereby
people in a Norwegian context or not. Either way, the current situation, were skin colour both
is detriment but also taboo, poses a near impossible situation for my informants who are
identified as ethnic others due to racialised traits such as skin colour, but are not given the
means to acknowledge or discuss this.

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Chapter VI: Conclusion

According to SSB, it is of interest to follow Norwegians born to parents who migrated (Henriksen et al 2010). This thesis can be seen as a contribution to this field. My informants’ family histories, everyday rhythms and meetings with significant others, detailed herein, make a case in point for analysing processes of identification for children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context. This is largely due to my informants being well integrated economically, socially and culturally. The only aspects that remain, then, are their migrational family histories and thereto connected skin colours, which differ from the white majority.

In the introduction I asked how can we understand processes of identification among Norwegian women born to immigrant parents, how women who are born and raised in Norway to parents who migrated from India identify themselves and are identified by significant others. My material shows that they are not entirely identified as Norwegians vis-à-vis ethnic white Norwegians simply because they, my informants, are not white. Therefore, this thesis is about how both white and non-white Norwegians define what it means to be Norwegian, particularly when facing new citizens who do not fit longstanding requirements for Norwegian-ness such as skin colour.

Currently, it seems two dichotomous categories exist where Norwegians and immigrants are conceived as more or less mutually exclusive. Furthermore, these two categories may be connected to two perceived different bodies, where the first is white and the other is non-white. In other words, Norwegians are white and immigrants are non-white. My informants, however, are brown Norwegians. As such, my informants might belong to an intermediate category. In Douglas’ words my informants, as brown Norwegians, can be seen as discordant and “[if] they are accepted the structure of assumptions has to be modified” (Douglas 1989 [1966]:36). Building on Douglas, this intermediate category might gain acceptance in time. If so, my informants may deconstruct the current categorisation of bodies in a Norwegian context, so that non-white bodies can be identified as Norwegian when they are born and raised within Norway’s borders as a nation-state. Norwegians of all different shades of the sepia rainbow, then, may in time open up the category of the Norwegian body to allow for others than whites. In other words, the categories are not unchanging. Rather, they are part of larger historical and geopolitical processes that include new links between bodies and places.
Based on the above, it seems we need new conceptual categories to include all the bodies that live local lives within Norway’s borders as a nation-state that might at the same time be informed by transnational social fields. Currently it seems a lay use of the word ethnic is used to cover this gap. Bodies labelled by the word ethnic may be brown and still belong within Norway’s borders, but they are nonetheless tied to places elsewhere. That being said, perhaps the current use of the word ethnic is opening up the identification of bodies in a Norwegian context. If we open up for certain bodies to be included, others will be left at the border.

I cannot, within the framework of this thesis, offer an autonomous explanatory model for where the border will be in the future. Consequently, and importantly, this thesis does not purport to be an all-embracing account of the identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context. Rather, its aim has been to probe into some aspects of the phenomenon. Therefore, I cannot stress enough that the descriptions and analyses detailed herein are highly contingent on me as a researcher and each individual woman I met in the field.

So, as a final comment, this thesis while staking out a few questions and analysing them on the basis of new qualitative data gathered through anthropological fieldwork is, at best, a beginning in analysing the identification of children of non-white immigrants within a Norwegian context. It has only scratched the surface of what it takes to be identified as Norwegian. However, now that I have commenced the scratching, it might be easier to develop research questions, models, and categories that can dive further into the matter at hand.

In the future, it could be fruitful to examine processes of identification among Norwegian men born to migrants from India, or women and men born to non-white parents who came to Norway from other countries under other circumstances, such as Somalis. This could, perhaps, provide material to analyse the importance of gender or class for processes of identification among non-white children of immigrants. As such, it would be interesting to analyse when and if Norwegian men born to parents from India, or Norwegian women and men born to parents from Somalia, self-identify and are identified by others as Norwegians. For the latter, religion could, perhaps, figure as a more important aspect than what I found among my informants. Furthermore, it could be informative to study first generation Norwegians with a whole range of skin colours, also white, to see what nuances exist in skin colour as detriment to identifying and being identified as Norwegian. Are Norwegian-born
children of Swedish migrants, for example, identified as Norwegians? Later on it would also, in particular, be interesting to study the children of my informants. As Sarah asked, with reference to her children, “What will they be when they grow up? Will they be Norwegian with no further explanation needed or will they be asked where they are from?”
Epilogue

After a bomb had exploded in the centre of Oslo on the 22nd of July 2011, I wrote a text message to one of my informants whom I knew was at work in a nearby office. Judging from the pictures that were showing on the news, the damage was massive and I did not know whether or not my informant’s place of work had been affected by the blast. I did not want to call her in case she was trying to get a hold of others or others were trying to get a hold of her. Soon, though, I got a text back, “Dear Maria, thank you for your concern, we could feel the blast in our offices, but nobody here has been hurt. How are you and your loved ones? Take care of yourself!”

Fortunately, none of my informants were directly affected by the bomb and following attacks at Utøya. Still, the events shook them, just like they shook everyone else with an affiliation to Norway.

I do not have the empirical material to analyse what this tragedy may mean for the identification of children of non-white immigrants in a Norwegian context. Still, I mention it here because it lays bare two aspects that are consequential to my thesis. First, to paraphrase Foucault (1980a:78-133; 1980b:92-6), not only power, but also politics is everywhere, including in the matter of this thesis and the thesis itself. In other words, not only examining processes of identification in a Norwegian context, but arguing for recognising multiple identities and opening the category of Norwegian-ness to include the experiences of those who are born and raised within the borders or the Norwegian nation-state with non-white bodies, is a political act. We as anthropologists or scientists in general cannot shy away from this (cf. Green 1999). Secondly, that understanding people in terms of unchanging essences, currently primarily with reference to religion in general and particularly Islam, can have immensely tragic consequences. Highlighting multiplicity to complicate otherwise simplistic understandings may therefore be in the interest of all. Also, presenting stories of individuals who are finding their way as first generation brown Norwegians illustrates that, whatever problems they face along the way, they are doing it. Being a brown Norwegian is already a reality.

31 Monica F. Aarset is currently studying what she calls the settled generation, in reference to the now grown-up children of immigrants. Among other things, her material covers the period before and after the 22nd of July 2011 and uncovers the complexity in reactions where the Norwegian ‘we’ might have been broadened, but could also, at times, be further restricted and therefore even more problematic for non-white Norwegians in the wake of the gruesome attacks in Oslo and at Utøya (Aarset forthcoming).
References


Appendix

Interview guide for the first semi-structured interview conducted with each key informant in order to get a quick overview of her background, nearest family and current everyday life.

1. Interview location / date
2. Duration from / to
3. Respondent’s full name / dob / sex
4. Respondents’ attire at interview
5. Other persons present at interview
6. Contact details
7. Parents’ place of origin in India
8. Parents’ religion
9. When did parents move to Norway
10. Why did parents move to Norway
11. Siblings’ age / sex
12. All previous living arrangements
13. Current living arrangements
14. Education(s)
15. Occupation(s)
16. Yearly income
17. Daily schedule
   a. What did you do yesterday from early morning to late at night, who were you with and what were the contexts / occasions
   b. What did you do the day before yesterday from early morning to late at night, who were you with and what were the contexts / occasions

18. Clothes
   a. What did you wear yesterday and what were the contexts / occasion
   b. What did you wear the day before yesterday and what were the contexts / occasions

19. Food
   a. What did you eat and drink yesterday and what were the contexts / occasions
   b. What did you eat and drink the day before yesterday and what were the contexts / occasions

20. Physical activity
   a. Did you do any physical activity last week, if so, what
      M / T / W / T / F / S / S
   b. Did you do any physical activity the week before last, if so, what
      M / T / W / T / F / S / S