

The absence of race in Norway?

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During the last four to five decades, Norway has received immigrants from all over the world. About 16% of the Norwegian population are now immigrants or Norwegian-born children of immigrant. About half of these have African, Asian or Latin American backgrounds (SSB, 2017). Norway is becoming an increasingly multiethnic society. This causes social tensions and political controversy. Immigration policy is presently among the most heated and polarized topics in Norwegian public and political debates. The Norwegian public sphere is permeated by discussions about racism, discrimination, ethnicity, national identity, social integration, cultural pluralism, and how to deal with cultural and religious differences. However, these issues are rarely construed as “racial” issues. It is not common to use the term “race” in political or public discussions or in social scientific research about Norwegian society, and racial categories are never used in statistics.

It has not always been like this. In the early decades of the 20th century, notions about a hierarchy of races was unproblematic and commonplace within public, political and academic discourses in Norway, as in the rest of the western world. In the decades after the Second World War, however, such ideas became increasingly marginalized and delegitimized in science, legislation, politics and public discourse. Scientific racism and the notion of race as a meaningful biological concept suffered a loss of legitimacy, but in contrast to for example the USA, this was not paralleled by the rise of an academic and political discourse about race as a social construction. Instead, politicians, bureaucrats and

academics who have been studying, discussing, and managing the Norwegian society during the last decades seem, in general, to have ignored or dismissed any conceptualization of “race”.

By looking at some historical examples, this article shows how “race” was once intertwined with notions of Norwegian nationhood and attitudes towards minorities, it discusses how the retreat of “race” has affected these notions and attitudes, and, finally presents some views on the absence or presence of “race” in contemporary Norwegian discourses on immigration and the multicultural society. Do racial perceptions and racial discrimination play an insignificant role in Norwegian society, as compared to for example the USA, or do the relative absence of research and discussions on “race” mean that Norwegian academics, and the Norwegian public, are avoiding to talk about an important societal issue, namely that “race” actually matters, even in Norway?

Norwegianness, research and minority politics. An historical sketch.

Norway does not have a history of race-based slavery or legal racial segregation, and the Norwegian state has not been a colonial power. Contemporary Norway has therefore inherited a societal structure and a historical heritage, which is quite different from both USA and former colonial powers when it comes to racial and ethnic categories and divisions. This does not mean that Norway does not have a history of “race”. In the first part of the 20th Century notions about a hierarchy of races was commonplace among

Norwegian academics, politicians and the public at large. This affected their outlook on humankind, on Norwegian nationhood and on the Norwegian population's position within humankind.

Race was an ambiguous concept, which was interwoven with no less ambiguous concepts of nationhood. At the start of last century, it was common to divide humankind into three or four main races, such as the "White", the "Asiatic" or the "Negro race", and membership in the so-called "White" or "Caucasian race" was probably an obvious and undisputed prerequisite for being considered 'Norwegian'. "Race" was, furthermore, a term that could be used loosely to refer to the biological quality of a national population. It was, finally, common to think that the Norwegians had their ancestral roots in the so-called "Nordic" or "Germanic race", a subgroup within the white race, by many considered a racial elite, which constituted the core racial element of northern European nations and the USA (Kyllingstad, 2014).

Such racial notions were, however, only part of a package of features that defined your Norwegianness. It was their (assumed or real) historical, cultural and linguistic features, not their racial identity that defined the Norwegians as a separate people, distinct from other Germanic-Nordic peoples. The modern Norwegian state has a short history. In 1814, after 400 years of Danish rule, Norway achieved its own constitution and parliament, but was forced into a union with Sweden. Only in 1905 Norway became a fully sovereign state with a foreign policy of its own. This "junior-position" in Scandinavia meant that Norwegian nationalism became characterized by a need to underscore linguistic, cultural and historical distance from neighboring Nordic nations.

Even if not being an exhaustive or decisive criterion for Norwegianness, however, the racial aspect of nationhood had significant implications, especially for academic studies and political discussions about the country's minority groups, the Roma, Romani, Jews, Forrest Finns, Kvens and the Sami, since these (in contrast to the Swedes and the Danes) were often seen as

racially different. The largest minority was the Sami, who are today recognized as the indigenous people of Northern Scandinavia, and who before World War II was usually referred to as "Lapps" and commonly regarded as a subgroup within the "Asiatic" or "Mongoloid" race. The Sami were thus construed as members of a non-Nordic and non-European race, and as such, regarded as racially inferior to the 'Norwegians'.

The notion of a racial divide between Sami and non-Sami populations, along with the idea of Scandinavia as the historical homeland of the so-called Nordic/Germanic race, helped stimulate a significant amount of physical anthropological and race-biological research on Scandinavian populations from the 1890s to the 1930s. Such research was linked to archaeology. Through the measurement of ancient skulls, surveys of living populations, statistical comparison and racial classification, it aimed to clarify the prehistoric origins, movements and settlement of Sami and Norwegian ancestors. This research had implications for a politically potent issue about the ethnic identity of the first settlers of contested Northern Scandinavian territories. Norwegian physical anthropology was also to some extent, linked to eugenics, or *rasehygiene* (racial hygiene), which was the common Scandinavian term for eugenics. Leading Swedish and Norwegian eugenicists advocated a school of racial hygiene centered on the protection of the purity of the Nordic race. They used physical-anthropological methods to identify assumed detrimental processes of racial mixing between supposedly inferior and superior racial elements in North-Scandinavian populations (Kyllingstad, 2014).

Such eugenic ideas along with generally held assumptions about racial otherness and inferiority affected public discussions about minority issues. It is however important to note that in neither academia nor the public sphere were the Sami or other minorities construed only, or mainly, as "racial" entities and as objects for physical anthropological research. Research on the racial identity and history of the Sami were dwarfed by the amount of historical, ethnographic and linguistic research on Sami culture

and society. Racial hygienists had an impact, but not a decisive impact on the state's actual minority policy. Norwegian minority policy was not primarily characterized by measures to protect the racial purity of the Norwegians, but mainly by a harsh policy of assimilation, the so-called Norwegianization policy that had its hey-day in the first half of the 20th century. In order to create a culturally homogeneous nation, minorities were to be culturally assimilated into the majority population with or against their own will (NOU, 2015, p.7; Eriksen & Niemi, 1981).

The retreat from scientific racism

After 1933 - when the idea of Germanic-Nordic racial supremacy and purity became a key element in the state ideology of Nazi-Germany - these ideas fell increasingly into disrepute in Scandinavia. The German invasion of Norway and the coup d'état by Norwegian Nazi Vidkun Quisling, helped to delegitimize these ideas even more. After the war, scientific antiracism became a dominating trend in the international academic world, fueled by the disclosure of Nazi atrocities, the human rights declaration, the rise of the United Nations, UNESCO's anti-racist campaigns and the de-colonization processes. As Norway was a strong supporter and key player in the development of the UN-system, it is likely that these ideas had a strong impact on Norwegian academic and political elites.

The retreat of scientific racism did not mean that race was abandoned as a research topic. The 1951 UNESCO statement on race which (after some controversy) won support from internationally leading human geneticists and physical anthropologist, rejected the idea of primordially pure races and dismissed that races can be ranked in a hierarchy. The concept of race was however, upheld and (re-)defined in line with a population-genetic theoretical framework (UNESCO, 1969).

In Norway, research on race was not abandoned, but strongly marginalized, along with a general decline of physical anthropological research. Norwegian physical anthropology was

not part of a broader anthropological discipline. It was, rather, a medical sub-discipline, upheld by army doctors doing anthropometric studies of conscript soldiers and by the Anatomy department of the University of Oslo, which owned a huge skulls collection. Leading figures of the interwar years, were military doctor Halfdan Bryn, an ardent proponent of Nordicism and racial hygiene, who died in 1933, and professor Kristian Emil Schreiner and his wife Alette, who from the early 1930s distanced themselves from such ideas. After the war, only one professor of anatomy, Johan Torgersen, maintained the discipline, along with other tasks and research interests. Torgersen dismissed racial hierarchies and was critical of the race concept, but he continued to undertake traditional racial classifications of bones from archaeological excavations in order to identify their (Sami or Nordic) ethnic affiliation. This practice continued into the 1970s, but did not draw much attention, since issues about ethnic groups in prehistory was not high on the Norwegian public or academic agenda (Kyllingstad, 2014).

While racial hygiene was delegitimized and physical anthropology was in decline after the war, social anthropology and sociology arose as influential purveyors of research and theoretical input to public and political discourses on minority-related issues. These disciplines, which experienced a huge growth in funding, research, teaching, institutions and prestige in the decades after the war, were strongly inspired by the American social sciences. In contrast to the USA, however, where "race" (seen as a social construction) is an important social scientific field of study, the social scientific or social anthropological study of "race" as a socio-cultural entity, never gained a foothold in Norwegian academia (Thue, 2006). This may imply that Norwegian academics tended to assume that racial issues were something that only existed elsewhere, such as in South Africa or the USA, and that research and academic discourse on minorities in Norway was no longer construed as racial issues.

In 1970, Norway ratified the United Nations Convention on the "Elimination of All Forms

of Racial Discrimination". This convention defines racial discrimination as any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin. The ratification was preceded by a white paper in which "race" was defined as a genetically distinct population, and thus as a biological concept distinct from the socio-cultural concept «ethnic group» which was defined as a group with a shared culture. In line with this conceptual framework, Norwegian minorities - Sami, Rom and Romani – were defined, not as races, but as «ethnic» groups (Haave, 2015).

At this point, the Norwegianization policy against the Sami was officially abandoned, but some legal regulations originally initiated to curb the itinerant lifestyle of the Romani-people were still in force. The white paper argued however that these regulations did not violate the UN-convention, since the measures was not meant to discriminate an ethnic group, but to, as it was put in the White paper, impede a "way of life". The only necessary legislative amendment, according to the government, was the addition of a new paragraph in the Penal Code, banning hateful speech, threats or discrimination based on religion, skin-color, national or ethnic origin, or race (Haave, 2015).

The term "race" (defined as a biological fact) was thus included in the Penal code in 1970. In 2008 it was, however, taken out again, partly based on the argument that race is *not* a biological fact. Around the same time, "race" was also removed from other laws that address discrimination and it was never taken into the new "Act to Prohibit Discrimination" which was implemented in 2005. In spite of being at odds with the wording of the UN convention on racial discrimination, and other antiracist conventions signed by Norway, the omission of "race" from Norwegian legislation won acclaim from the majority of NGOs and public bodies that were consulted on the issue. A key argument was that race is an unscientific concept, since modern science has disproved the existence of races, and that it was a negatively charged word. It was also claimed that the usage of the term race was superfluous, since

ideas about "race" was included in other concepts used in the convention, such as "color" and "ethnicity". Instead of "racial discrimination", "ethnic discrimination" was turned into a key concept, since "ethnicity" was assumed to embrace all the other criteria in the UN convention, including "race" (NOU, 2002, p.12).

Even if the omission of "race" was partly based on arguments about the biological meaninglessness of races, the White paper did not refer to directly to genetic or biological anthropological literature. Instead, social anthropology seems to have been an important source of inspiration for the deliberations on the concepts of race and ethnicity.

Sami indigenoussness and the notion of ethnicity

The white paper's embrace of the term "ethnicity" was in line with a general trend. Before the 1970s, the term "ethnic" was hardly used in official documents or in public media. Since the 1980s it has appeared with rapidly increasing frequency.¹ One the things that helped to trigger the usage of "ethnicity" in the 1980s was the discussion about Sami indigenous rights. A highly polarized conflict on a huge hydropower project inside a traditional Sami reindeer-herding district, the so-called Alta struggle around 1980, ushered in a period of Sami cultural and political mobilization. This struggle lead to Norwegian ratification of the International Labor Organization's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention in 1990 and the acknowledgement of Sami indigenous rights.

These struggles heightened public interest in Sami history and prehistory, and propelled archaeologists and historians to address questions about ethnicity. Instead of turning to physical anthropology, however, archaeologist now turned for help to social anthropology. At this point, the leading figure of Norwegian

¹ Search on the term "Ethnic" printed Norwegian media in Retriever: Atkest 28.02.2017, and in <http://www.nb.no/statsmaktene>.

anthropology, Fredrik Barth had won great international academic acclaim for his approach to the study of ethnic groups and boundaries. Barth maintained that boundaries between ethnic groups do not necessarily coincide with cultural differences or with demographic population boundaries. Instead, ethnic boundaries should be seen as a mechanism that regulate the interaction between human groups and that is upheld through specific social and cultural practices (Barth *et al.*, 1969). Taking this insight as a vantage point, archaeologists now abandoned the old questions about the (eastern) origin, migration and settlement of a Sami population, and instead tried to uncover the social processes that had led to the rise of ethnic boundaries in Northern Scandinavia. In short, these archaeologists saw the Sami (as well as their Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish neighbors) not as racially defined populations that could be identified by skull measurements, but as dynamic socio-culturally defined ethnic entities. Their 'race', biological ancestry or genetic characteristics, were not seen as keys to their ethnic identity (Hansen & Olsen, 2004).

The Barthian approach to ethnicity also had a significant impact on legal and political discussions about the Sami. During the 1960s and 1970s, sociologists and social anthropologists turned their attention to the Sami and their relationship to the majority population and the state. Such research produced empirical knowledge and theoretical insights that affected the political and societal discussions among and about the Sami. In Norwegian official reports discussing Sami indigenous rights in the 1980s, the issue of indigeness was construed as a question about whether or not the Sami are a distinct ethnic group that could claim continuity with the people that had inhabited Northern Norway at the time of Danish-Norwegian seizure in the 16th-17th century. The White paper *Concerning the Legal Status of the Sami* (NOU, 1984) underscored that "ethnic groups and ethnic boundaries are maintained" in spite of extensive social interaction across ethnic boundaries, in spite of that a group's culture changes through time, and in

spite of that individuals may change their ethnic identity. According to such a definition, there were no doubt about the ethnic distinctiveness and continuity of the Sami, even if many present day Sami had non-Sami ancestors and vice versa, and in spite of a long history of cultural interaction with neighbouring ethnic groups.

An important outcome of the process was the establishment of a Sami parliament, a public body that represents the Sami and their indigenous rights within the Norwegian political decision making system. Voting right to the Sami parliament is restricted to persons who self-identify as Sami and speak Sami as their first language, or alternatively, has at least one great grandparent who was a native Sami speaker (<https://www.sametinget.no>). Even though it can be argued that these criteria includes a tiny element of biological ancestry, it is clear that - compared to the pre-war period - the ethnic division between Sami and non-Sami citizens are here construed mainly as a socio-culturally, not racially, defined boundary.

The most important contrast, however, to the prewar period was that the new policy aimed explicitly to thwart the effect of the Norwegianization policy of the past, and help to strengthen a distinct Sami cultural identity. This policy was of course grounded on the principle of indigenous rights, but it was also legitimized by a principle of cultural pluralism. Cultural diversity was not framed as a threat, but as a resource for the nation.

Immigration and new minorities

The last four to five decades have seen an influx of immigrants into Norway that is unprecedented in its magnitude and geographic scope. This includes labor migrants from the EU-countries, refugees and asylum seekers, and family members of previous immigrants. Most of the immigrants have fared reasonably well in the Norwegian labor market and in society at large. A number of people with immigrant background have made careers in politics, art, culture and media and are thus highly visible in the Norwegian public sphere. At the

same time it is clear that compatriots with immigrant backgrounds have on average lower incomes and higher unemployment rates, and are more likely to live in low-cost urban neighbourhoods than the majority.

About half of the immigrant and Norwegian-born children of immigrant have their background from Asia, Africa or Latin America. (SSB) This means that about 8 % of the Norwegian population are not members of what traditionally has been referred to as the “white race”. As we have seen, some decades ago, the superiority of white people and the whiteness of the Norwegian people was generally taken for granted. This begs the question as to what extent traditional racial ideas have affected the way that Norwegian society has responded to the influx of new, “non-white” compatriots.

The latest survey of attitudes towards immigrants and immigration, undertaken by Statistics Norway (SSB, 2017) demonstrates some ambiguity. On the one hand, 67 % of Norwegians feel that immigrants enrich the country’s cultural life, 74 % of the respondents would not mind it if their son or daughter married an immigrant, and there are frequent outbreaks of public outrage when asylum-seekers or paperless persons with close ties to Norwegian local communities are being deported. On the other hand, about 30 % believe that immigrants, in general, misuse the social welfare system and are a source of societal insecurity and about 50% hold that immigrants should strive to become as “Norwegian” as possible. In early 2016, only 12 % were critical to the increasingly tight immigration policy that was being implemented by the conservative coalition government (SSB, 2016), which included the right-wing *Progressive party*, whose main trademark is a staunch anti-immigration rhetoric. In short, immigration is a highly controversial political issue, which is intertwined with heated struggles about cultural differences and social integration.

While the modern era of immigration started incrementally in the late 1960s, it was mainly from the 1980s, that this important field of societal tension and political debate emerged. The issue was put on the public agenda around

the 17. Mai – the National Day - in 1983. The 17 May celebration consists mainly of parades of schoolchildren. In Oslo, the children pass in front of the Royal castle and greet the Royal family. In 1983, an Oslo school with a high amount of immigrant children, received a bomb-threat against its parade. This caused a lot of public stir, an increased public awareness of the problem of racism, and helped propel the breakthrough of an organized, popular anti-racist movement.

The antiracist movement was politically and organizational heterogeneous, but during the 1980s, most antiracists gathered around a common, broad understanding of “racism”: Overt race-centered racism was in decline, but racism still existed in the shape of organized racism, everyday racism and institutionalized racism and it was increasingly legitimized, not by racial arguments, but by notions about insurmountable cultural group differences. This extensive definition of racism meant that antiracist activists directed their attention not only towards overt and organized racism, they also criticized commonly held prejudices and behaviors within the majority population and discriminatory implications of social structures and institutions (Nydal, 2007).

At the same time, the 1980s also saw the flourishing of right-wing anti-immigration organizations, that depicted “non-western immigrants” as a threat to the social coherence, cultural identity and ethnic purity of the nation and framed antiracists and the political elite as traitors against the nation. The most successful organization, *Folkebevegelsen mot innvandring* (FMI), managed to draw a lot of media attention and mobilize supporters in street rallies. FMI was, however, surrounded by public controversy, with public meetings evolving into street fights and supporters being arrested for harassment and violence against immigrants. Its heyday ended in 1991, after 10 000 opponents had turned up at a street rally and turned their back to the leader Arne Myrdal. Although FMI never managed to mobilize significant popular and political support, it can still be argued that FMI and similar initiatives capitalized on prejudices and fears that were shared by many people outside the hard core of followers.

These controversies, increased immigration rates, and tensions related to immigration helped putting immigration and the multicultural society on the public and academic agenda in the 1990s. The state, in collaboration with NGOs and local communities implemented measures to combat racism and xenophobia. Historians, social anthropologists and sociologists began increasingly to do research on issues about migration, nationhood, nationalism, ethnic groups, racism and multiculturalism in past and present Norwegian society. Academics, social anthropologists in particular, became strongly involved in public debates about such issues, advocating a variety of viewpoints. They raised critical questions about the effect of immigration on the Scandinavian social-democratic model and the welfare state, described, analyzed and criticized racist attitudes and structures in Norwegian society, warned about the rise of a new colored lower class, advocated pluralism and multiculturalism, as well as problematized suppressive practices and cultural conservatism within minority groups (Hylland-Eriksen, 2016).

Since the 1990s, debates about minorities and the multicultural society have become increasingly focused on Islam and Muslim minorities. This intensified after the US 9/11 terror attacks in 2001. In Norway, as in the rest of Europe, positive attitudes to cultural pluralism are now increasingly challenged by demands for cultural assimilation of minorities, as well as by intensified debates about national traditions, values and identity. In such debates Muslim minorities and their religious and cultural norms and practices are often juxtaposed to “western” or “Norwegian” values.

Notions about an insoluble division between Islam and western civilization are taken to the extreme by many rightwing nationalist. A new anti-jihadist ideology has arisen, which is nourished by the threat from Islamic extremism, advocate the ideal of a monocultural Christian Europe and construe Islam as an evil ideology that aim to take over Europe by the help of Muslim immigrants and naïve or treacherous western elites in favor of multiculturalism. Such conspiracy

theories are developed and spread internationally through ideologically dedicated websites. The most perverted product of this conspiracy discourse was the terrorist attacks in Norway on 22 July 2011, when Anders Behring Breivik killed 69 persons, mainly members of the youth organization of the Labour party, which Breivik held responsible for what he saw as the “treacherous” policy of immigration and multiculturalism.

Racism, race and ethnicity

Many researchers have adopted the term “neo-racism” to describe a shift towards a racism where “race” is substituted by essentialist notions about culture and religions. “Neo-racism” is characterized by the notion of cultures or religions as static, monolithic and mutually incompatible entities, which determines people’s attitudes and behavior and by the idea that the mixing of “cultures” will inevitably lead to mutual mistrust, societal disintegration and conflict. Such an extensive definition of the term “racism” is not only in line with a common definition of the term among antiracist activists, it is also in accordance with the UN-convention on racial discrimination. It has still been strongly contested in both public and academic debates in Norway, as it has been argued that such an inclusive definition of racism functions as a rhetorical tool to delegitimize sound critique of cultures, religions, immigrants and immigration policy.

This rhetorical battle to avoid the racist stigma, demonstrates a rather strong taboo against traditional race-centered racism. Debates about immigration and minorities are mainly referring to social, cultural and religious issues, not “race”. Increasing numbers of people with “non-white” immigrant backgrounds participate in these public debates, advocating a wide variety of views on integration, universalism, multiculturalism, Norwegianness, Islam, religious freedom and secularism. Tensions and dividing lines in such debates does not necessarily follow “racial” boundaries. It is therefore possible to argue that if we want to understand and deal with problems

of racism, discrimination and ethnic conflicts in Norway, we should worry less about traditional racial ideas, and more about essentializing, monolithic and stereotypical notions about cultures and religions.

This argument must, however, be modified. A number of social scientific and social anthropological studies have shown how preconceptions based on outward appearance, including skin-color, affects attitudes and interactions between people in Norway. Phenotypic traits are commonly interpreted as information about ancestry. This may evoke stereotypical ideas about cultures, religions, ethnic groups, regional and national origins. This means that physical traits, along with surname, dressing style or language, often affect a person's success in the labor and housing markets, access to nightclubs and restaurants, or the likelihood of becoming the victim of hate crime.

Intentional or unintentional double-communication is a typical feature of discourses on minority issues. The decline of "race" has been paralleled by the increasing usage of the term "ethnicity", which has migrated from the academic sphere and into everyday language. "Ethnicity", as it is presently used in everyday language, is a flexible and ambiguous term that often refers to notions about biological ancestry, (Vassenden, 2011; Lynnebakke & Fangen, 2011) and as such, it may have affinities to the race concept. In contrast to race, however, it is not a taboo to talk about "ethnicity", and it is becoming increasingly common to use the neologism "ethnic Norwegian" to describe people with old family roots in Norway, in distinction from Norwegians with non-Norwegian ancestry.

In 2006, the newspaper *Ny Tid* asked The Language Council of Norway, the state's consultative body on language issues, for advice on alternatives to the term "ethnic Norwegian (etnisk nordmann)". The Language Council answered that "ethnic Norwegian" (etnisk nordmann) could be replaced with "Norwegian/nordmann", since only people with Norwegian ancestry could be termed "Norwegians". This ill-considered statement caused a very heated media debate,

and the Language Council ended up changing its standpoint, proposing "ethnic Norwegian" as a term for compatriots with Norwegian ancestry and "Norwegian" for any compatriot, regardless of origin (Ny tid, 27.10. 2006).

The controversy demonstrated that the term "ethnic Norwegian" was commonly associated with whiteness. While Norwegians with European or Anglo-American ancestry can easily pass as ethnic Norwegians, this is not necessarily so for Norwegians with African, Latin-American or Asian ancestors. The leader of the antiracist organization *Organization against Public Discrimination* (OMOD), Caribbean-Norwegian Akhenaton Oddvar de Leon, argued that the conceptual distinction between "ethnic Norwegians" and "Norwegians" was irrelevant. He proposed instead the dicotomy "white Norwegian/black Norwegian", which he saw as more socially relevant. "Black Norwegians" was to include all "non-white" Norwegians. Although he admitted that this was a very heterogeneous group, he argued that they had common minority experiences which often included discrimination, and which it was important to put on the public agenda (Aftenposten, 04.11.2006). The terminology suggested by de Leon never won broad acceptance. This may have to do with the fact that the term "black" (svart) has racial connotations, which most Norwegians find objectionable, and that the term closely resembles the derogatory term "svarting" commonly used by racists to denigrate non-western immigrants.

The term 'race' is generally absent from Norwegian public debate on the Norwegian society. Norwegian nationhood is not intertwined with "race" in the same way as it was in the interwar years, and ideas about Nordic/Germanic supremacy, which once was part of mainstream culture, is now mainly maintained by extreme groups at the fringe of society. This does not imply, however, that Norwegian society is colorblind. Skin-color and external physical features invokes notions about ancestry, identity and belonging, and affect the interaction between people. In spite of the numerous "black" Norwegians, and in spite of a strong drive to develop a colorblind society,

there is still an ambiguous conceptual connection between whiteness and Norwegianness. The term “ethnic Norwegian” can be interpreted as an attempt at including new compatriots into a generous community of Norwegians, as it implies that “ethnic Norwegians” are only one among many ethnic groups that make up the Norwegian people. The term can, however, also be interpreted as a way to underscore that some Norwegians are more Norwegian than the rest. Unfortunately, the latter attitude seem to be on the rise for the time being.

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