THE EXPERIENCES I CHOSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE.

THE STORIES I CHOSE TO TELL:

WHITENESS RESEARCHED THROUGH PARA-FICTION.

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MASTER OF ARTS THESIS ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

What impact can para-fictional writing have as a research method? Can one, through para-fictive writing, create a deeper sense or knowledge of one's own biases? Will this knowledge lead to behavioral changes? This thesis explores these questions.

Whiteness and biases are examined/analyzed through para-fiction. The thesis consists of a theoretical part, an artistic part and a reflective part. The theory is based on research on whiteness from a Nordic perspective. Arts-based research, auto-ethnography and para-fictional writing serves as methods.

Main topics within the theory are racism, white privilege, colorblindness and biases. These topics are processed through self-written texts that are partly auto-ethnographic and partly fictive. Whiteness and biases are the themes that are examined while para-fictive writing functions as research method.

KEYWORDS: whiteness, para-fiction, biases, arts-based research, auto-ethnography, biases, colorblindness, racism, nordic

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SAMMANDRAG AV LÄRDOMSPROVET FÖR KONSTMAGISTEREXAMEN

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SAMMANDRAG

Kan man med hjälp av para-fiktion skapa djupare kunskap om vithet och ens egna fördomar? Leder denna kunskap till någon form av ändring i ens beteende? Avhandlingen utforskar dessa frågor.

Vithet och fördomar undersöks här med hjälp av para-fiktion. Avhandlingen består av en teoretisk del, en konstnärlig del samt en reflektiv del. Teorin bygger på forskning om vithet från ett nordiskt perspektiv. Som metod används konstbaserad undersökning, auto-etnografi och para-fiktivt skrivande.

Huvudämnen inom teorin är rasism, vitt privilegium, färgblindhet och fördomar. Dessa ämnen behandlas med hjälp självskrivna texter som delvis är auto-etnografiska och delvis fiktiva. Para-fiktivt skrivande fungerar som forskningsmetod.

NYCKELORD: vithet, para-fiktion, konstbaserad forskning, auto-etnografi, fördomar, färgblindhet, rasism, Norden

CONTENTS

1

INTRODUCTION

I have been raised in an almost completely all white community of Swedish speaking Finns in the suburbs of Helsinki. I have grown up thinking that the world is out there to be conquered. I realized early on that I had been handed luckier cards than many others had been given and I have been reflecting my identity on my surroundings since then. Even so, race was never really present in this self-reflection. In my home country it was never really present because it wasn't clearly visible in the bubble I lived in.

When moving abroad it was present in the sense that I thought it was nice that a society as the U.K. was so free from otherness and bias. I was blinded. For me it looked like the ideal society, flawed but at least equal. When my friend of color once pointed out that he was feeling oppressed in a certain situation I thought he was exaggerating and tried to get him to let that thought go. I didn't want to see what he was pointing out. I wanted everyone to feel as liberated as I did, living in a country where everyone looked different and it was "no big deal". I now realize I was never looking at myself, I was only focusing on the others.

During a course at university I came across the topic on whiteness. I had not given my own whiteness much attention before, which I have learned is common among whites. Through this course I noticed that I became more in touch with racial oppression because I had given my own white privilege some attention. Instead of approaching race through listening to the voice of the oppressed, I now gazed at myself and realized that much of what I took for granted was not evident to everyone. After this realization I was able to see signs of these privileges around me, sometimes more sometimes less, but

I have carried this quest with me since then and this awareness of my own whiteness (and privilege) has become a part of who I am.

I am in this thesis, writing para-fictional stories based on these realizations. I am gathering information through previous research as well as my own experiences. This information has then been communicated in slightly different ways, telling tales or questioning myself and/or the reader. I am hoping that by sharing these with others, I might awaken thoughts and self-reflection around a topic that is very much unspoken of in Finland (and in Sweden where I now live), as well as aspire whites to work towards an equal society by using the privileged position we are given.

I was not sure how to mold my ways of being and thinking in to the traditional frame of research, where the outcome is articulated and stated. I wanted to gather the thoughts I had, the things I had heard, and the experiences I had had, in one place. This way there are elements of auto-biographical writing in the body of work I have produced, in some more than others. This is not necessarily something that I consider important to the reader, but to myself these stories became a safe place for me to twist and turn the thoughts I had carried with me for some time.

I am mostly speaking to my white peers with this work. I want to raise awareness on white privileges and biases and maybe articulate the things that often is compressed and ignored. When realizing that I am biased on a level that I cannot control I also began to notice my biases more clearly. This is my aim for the thesis. To make the (white) reader aware of their own whiteness and what privileges we maintain just by not acknowledging these.

What impact can para-fictional writing have as a research method? Can one, through para-fictive writing, create a deeper sense or knowledge of one's own biases? By exploring the effect of the writing process, I am trying to figure out if it can work as a method to become more aware and ultimately lead to changed behavior.

2

METHODOLOGY

I am researching whiteness through writing. As a method I am using arts-based research and combining it with auto-ethnography and para-fictional writing. By sharing some of my own experiences through artistic practice, I am hoping to broaden my own comprehension on racial bias and what it means to me to be white. I am also hoping that the body of work I have created will speak to others and function as a kind of mirror to one self or as a thought-provoker or conversation-starter. I strongly believe that only by recognizing one's own biases one can start to make small amendments towards more equal social structures. The writings I provide in this thesis are not poems, but there are similar elements in them as in poetry. The texts communicate multiple ideas and questions to both reader and writer.

2.1 PARA-FICTIONAL WRITING

"Using poetry writing as a research methodology, researchers are compelled to move from conceptualizing those they study as research 'subjects' to viewing them as co-participants (with themselves) in the research effort" (Furman et al., as cited in Long, 2014, p. 91).

Furman et al. extend their argument by stating:
"As a document of social phenomena, poetry can be viewed as a vehicle through which to communicate powerful and multiple 'truths' about the human experience. While poetry may not commonly be thought of as a source of knowledge, poems are powerful documents that possess the capacity to capture the contextual and psychological worlds of both poet and subject."
(Furman et al., as cited in Long, 2014, p. 91).

These texts do not look like a source of knowledge at first glance but have a similar power as poems do, to capture the conceptual, the clearly formed ideas, as well as the psychological, the ideas and values that might be difficult to describe. Long (2014) states above that using poetry as a sort of methodology, the research subjects becomes participants in the research effort (p. 91). The use of poetry, in this case, is a way to engage the participant, the audience, with the research in a way that engages each one differently. Each participant views the subject themselves and mirror it upon their own experiences and ideas. Instead of explaining how things are, one forms their own thoughts about it and his/her perspectives grow a little.

I know my stories. I know where they come from. I know their truths and non-truths, the bibliographical parts and the fictional ones. I am not interested in sharing what is true and what is not with the reader because I think it isn't of importance to the research. I do not want to impose my views on others, only motivate the reader to question themselves (and me if they wish). The way the texts have been written allows for me to do this. I have tried to create something that can be looked at in different ways.

"Through a recursive dialectic of collectively gazing inward and then outward, the aim is that we as co-researchers will not only reach deeper understanding of ourselves, but also will attain a vantage point for interpreting and influencing culture" (Neumann, as cited in Lapadat, 2009, p. 959-960). This kind of dialogue, or conversation, between the printed words and the self-reflective text comprehension, is critical to this thesis. The thesis will only be a short introduction on white privilege without the engagement of the reader.

Roberts (2002) brings up the key debate of biographical research, `realism' versus `constructionism'. Simply put, realism holds that there is some objective knowledge of reality, that the stories told would reflect a lived reality, that what is explained is an objective knowledge of the real. Theoretical texts are often understood to be told in a "real" way, that the objective truths and non-

truths are building blocks for these texts.

Constructionism, on the other hand is something different, where stories told relies on past experiences and interpretations, texts are intertwined in a net of other texts, the interpretation is individual because the stories told are reflected upon each individual's past experienced texts. Therefor the idea of realism is not sustainable because there is no story that can be told in a completely objective way, the idea of empirical truth is simplistic and almost naive. The idea of biography reflecting something true or something real is simply an illusion. To tell a story is having control of what is being told, but one can only know how it is perceived by oneself, not everyone else. This is a critical point to this thesis. What you will read is not a product of truths gathered, but more of a collection of suggestions, gathered from one person's point of view (mine). The truths are also there but they might be read differently depending on the reader.

Suominen et al. (2017) argues that something deeply singular often make the most sense to people. "Rather than being inaccessible, it was conceptualized that something so deeply singular usually makes most sense to other people. The artistic and/or research knowledge was often discussed in the context of a singular event or experience and described through personal narration. Personal narration and reflection combined with conceptual and theoretical analysis was presumed to afford others access to the otherwise singular and particular knowledge." (p 103). The structure described above is relevant to this thesis. In some way the texts can be read as personal narratives/stories based on one person's insights. The thesis is not a text that seeks absolute truths, it is clearly indicated that the stories are told by the same voice throughout.

2.2 AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY

Auto-ethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to analyze and describe personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.

Instead of looking at the "other", they look at themselves and their experiences. Not only can this process be therapeutic and self-improving for the writer, but it can also be a means that allows for the outcome to reach a broader audience. I have used auto-ethnography as a method in this thesis. Only parts of my writings are pure autoethnographic in the sense that they would describe a personal experience just as it is. Even so, my writings are connected in, sometimes more, sometimes less, indirect ways to personal experiences.

The reason for using auto-ethnography as a building block for my thesis is explained quite well by Ellis et al. (2010) "..scholars began recognizing that different kinds of people possess different assumptions about the world – a multitude of ways of speaking, writing, valuing and believing – and that conventional ways of doing and thinking about research were narrow, limiting, and parochial." (p. 275). I have found that by sharing thoughts and views that are contradictory and maybe even ugly, people easily let their guard down a little and allow themselves to relate and re-think their own behavior and thoughts.

Compared to a more traditional approach to research, auto-ethnography can easily be critiqued to lack scientific grounds and be too artful and therapeutic. Auto-ethnographers are also accused to do too little fieldwork and use biased data as well as being navel gazers. (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 283). On the other hand, there are lots of possibilities using this method. It allows for research to be something more than an attempt to present something true.
"Gradually, scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines began to consider what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they proffered stories rather than theories, and if they were self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free." (Bochner, as cited in Ellis et al., 2010, p. 274).

People have different assumptions of the world, different ways of perceiving their environment, different things they value and believe in. By only allowing a certain way of doing research, one accepts that the research will be some-

thing that is only available to grasp by a minority of academics, an elite so to speak. By bending the rules of traditional research methods one can reach an audience that would not otherwise be included. "Thus, the auto-ethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people" (Ellis et al., 2010; Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Goodall, 2006; hooks, 1994).

Stories/texts are complex. They do not only tell a tale but they are also "complex, constitutive meaningful phenomena that teaches morals and ethics, introducing unique ways of thinking and feeling" (Ellis et al., 2010, p. 280). A successful story does not impose the writers view on the audience, but instead it provokes the audience into intertextual comprehending. Reading texts and reflecting them upon their own selves, and in best case raising consciousness. The writer is, in this case, the one giving direction, pointing towards the text, but how it is read, perceived and acted upon is all up to the individual reader. This applies to this thesis. How it is perceived or critiqued is in direct connection to the reader and his/her experience on the subject.

2.3 ARTS-BASED RESEARCH

Knowledge is not limited to the articulated, but it is challenging to describe and write about it if it originates from the artistic or the multisensorial. Suominen, Kallio-Tavin and Hernández-Hernández (2017) believe that Arts-based research (ABR) makes it possible to approach this type of knowledge, the vague or unreachable. Through artistic practice one is able to reach their topic on a different level than researching it the traditional way. Even though artistic practice might be difficult to articulate it is also an access point to a process which is "rich, complex, often unpredictable, and mostly unspeakable, leading

the researchers to areas of knowledge that have not yet been classified and restricted by words and logic" (Suominen et al., 2017, p. 103).

Language does not reach all aspects of knowledge and this is typical within ABR. Intuitive or sensorial knowledge is ungraspable and difficult to explain with words. This knowledge translates in to research when ".arts-based or artistic researchers commit to reflexivity, continuous analyses, and pledge to find ways to give accessible form to the research experience and all the ethical and ontological choices that direct the process." (Suominen et al. (2017) p. 105). By studying the "unspeakable" and reflecting upon it and analyzing it from a personal standpoint as well as from a distanced, outer perspective, an ABR is at its best.

Art-based research allows for turns to happen, where a more traditional method of research would not. Even though art-based research can be critiqued to be non-academic and simplistic, it also makes room for surprising turns and new insights in a way where more traditional methods fail. ABR enables for the spectator to be open for own interpretation whilst being presented to the subject.

Suominen et al. (2017) have clarified some basic principles of Arts-based research (ABR). These principles applies to my work, but some of them in slightly different ways than described. (p. 108-110).

Art or artistic knowledge is present throughout the whole research process, interacting and influencing the research at every stage of the process. The body of art in this thesis has been present throughout the process and has surely influenced the stages of the process, sometimes more, sometimes less. The researcher interacts with the subject of study by shifting between the perspectives of being close to the subject (personal viewpoint) and looking at it from far (from an external viewpoint). It is necessary, in my opinion, to move between the perspectives of one self and others, to be able to create a study

that can have meaning to someone else than oneself. This principle is present throughout the thesis.

Knowledge gained through ABR is founded on the researcher´s ability to move between immediacy and afterthought. I agree in this sense, information and insight can be gathered on the spot or it can be something that is developed through afterthought. Both ways have been present throughout my study.
The researcher's personal and professional inclinations are strongly present throughout the research process and defines how the knowledge gained is being presented and communicated. To some extent there is of course signs of personal opinion and views throughout the study. The body of work in this thesis is partly written with clear indications of my own viewpoint on the subject, but there are also parts that are not my opinions or thoughts even though they might be looked at in that way.
Rather than a quest to answer a direct question, ABR arises through a deep interest for a phenomenon or issue and acknowledges and salutes the personal. A direct research question feels difficult to set for this thesis because of the way I have chosen to approach the subject. I have not had a deep interest for the subject, but I do feel like it serves a purpose that supports one of my personal fundamental values.

ABR is analytical throughout the whole process, meaning that there is not an isolated analytical part, but the analysis happens side by side with the rest of the process. The process of this thesis is definitely analytical throughout but the analysis is only partly documented. I am also leaving some of the analysis to the reader but introducing the topic through the semi-fictional stories.

Different expressions and methods of communication applies to ABR. Each ABR project is unique with its structure, framework, language and topic, which demands an investment from the reader or spectator. This applies well to this thesis since it consists of an artistic part. It requires an effort from the reader to form thoughts and questions further through what is presented. I believe

this to be a powerful way of emerging in a subject and grasp it differently than through a direct monologue.

These principles form a good overall picture of what ABR is and how it is used in this thesis. I have functioned as a researcher and been strongly present throughout the process. My personal values and interests are at its base. Knowledge has been gained throughout the process and has been looked at closely from a personal point of view as well as from a distanced, external, point of view. The research is not limited to the articulated, and analysis happens throughout the process. It is a unique project, as ABR usually is.

CONCLUSION

I am writing this thesis using para-fictional writing, auto-ethnography and arts-based research as methods. Writing functions as means of communication as well as a tool for creation, leaving the body of work open for different interpretation. Knowledge can be found in the written word as well as in the invisible that appears through one's thought.

In the next chapter I will go through some of the key elements and theories that stand as a foundation for the rest of the thesis.

3

LITERATURE REVIEW

I have looked at whiteness studies, with an emphasize on the Nordics in the literature review for this thesis, and picked out a few key angles/issues related to it. These key issues are also processed further in the body of work that follows after.

3.1 BEING WHITE, DOING RACE.

Being aware of one's own whiteness is not necessarily obvious when it is considered being 'the definition of normal' within the Nordic society, especially in Finland. By this I mean that the representations around us very much support the idea of being white as the ideal, the norm. Otherness is very much present with its un-presence. We can talk about an equal society where everyone is accepted and has the same opportunities, where we are all the same, and that this ideal society is within reach. In reality, this is not the case.

"Whiteness has been described as a set of three linked dimensions by Ruth Frankenberg. First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege." (Croll, 2008; Frankenberg, 1993). This means that by being white, one is by default placed in a position that comes with benefits, benefits that are just there and have been, for many generations, and therefore are seen as natural and taken for granted. Privileges that are difficult to imagine not having.

"Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at themselves and others, and at society." (Croll, 2008; Frankenberg, 1993). Whiteness is part of a social construction in the sense that whites do not consider them

as part of racial discussions. Issues on racial matters does not involve them. Being white means being part of an un-racified group and we are taught that racial issues only applies to the oppressed.

"Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed." (Croll, 2008; Frankenberg, 1993). These hide within society as behavior, speech, values, visual culture, education.
Keskinen and Andreassen (2017) clarifies the meanings of the concept racialization. They suggest three approaches depending on where the analytical focus is placed; "on the 1) racialisation of bodies and subjectivities, 2) cultural and discursive construction, or 3) intertwining of cultural signification and social structures."

3.2 WHITE BODIES

The Swedish speaking Finns are for most part a very white community, with very few exceptions. Finnish is the main language and is also the most common language to learn when immigrating to Finland. During my time in school the few exceptions were a few kids of color that had been adopted when they were young. I now understand that this is where my own biases partly rooted from. The Finnish (Swedish) have never really dealt with certain type of oppression or gotten used to the thought of living in a non-white society, partly because it is easy to not face racial issues in a mostly white society. One does not identify with racists, as they are presented to them in the media. The general perception that being Finnish equals being white is consistently maintained. In Finland, the differences between so called rooted Finns and a non-rooted Finns are often pointed out (Kallio-Tavin and Tavin, 2018). A rooted Finn is in almost all cases represented as white with ancestors rooted in the country for many generations, whereas a non-rooted Finn is someone of immigrant background, though he/she might have been born in Finland, know the language or have a Finnish citizen, and be recognized as a Finn. This sense of otherness is present, only the designation is changed.

Studies show that children or grandchildren of migrants face discrimination because of their physical looks. "While they may attempt to claim belonging based on their citizenship, language skills and other attributes, their "racial belonging" is still questioned in everyday interactions." (Leinonen and Toivanen, 2014, p.163). This has been demonstrated also by many Nordic scholars (Leinonen and Toivanen (2014); Haikkola 2010; Hübinette & Tigervall 2009; Rastas 2005; Sawyer 2002; Toivanen 2014).

"Following Miles, we understand racialization as a social process through which (real or imagined) embodied and biological features become associated with certain meanings and values. This process results in individuals and groups being assigned to certain identity categories, which mark them as different from the "majority" and influence their everyday life in society." (Miles, as cited in Leinonen and Toivanen, 2014, p.161).
Leinonen and Toivanen (2014) talk about the idea that "seeing is never an objective process" (p. 162). When we look at something we evaluate and look for meaning in what we see. What we observe and how we evaluate what we see is a socially constructed process. People are categorized and grouped and these groups evoke either feelings of sameness or difference. This speaks directly against colorblindness and what it obtains.

3.3 WHITE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND ITS PREJUDICE

Croll (2008) explains the fundament to whiteness theory clearly. It's an "idea that racialized systems of power and domination have been normalized and hidden." (p. 66). Being white means being invisible and belonging to a group that benefits from a lot of invisible advantages. It is important to know from the start that these advantages are usually not acknowledged by whites. They are deeply rooted in to our social system in such a way that they are rarely evident to anyone other than the oppressed ones. Andreassen and Myong (2017) say that these advantages are easily boosted by the Nordic welfare state

model. The idea of everyone having the same possibilities in life, that if you work hard you will succeed, is at its center. Everyone is able to make their own fortune. This is a common belief within the Nordic countries, and an attempt to simplify the issues on race.
"Whiteness is also a cultural phenomenon whereby whites do not see their own race, or the racialized nature of their position in society." (Croll, 2008, p.66). Racism is not only active means of racist gestures, but also something that is incorporated into our social structures and culture as white privileges and white norms. Whiteness is to a large part not acknowledged, and this applies to Finland well. It is considered the normal. By not acknowledging one's own whiteness and what privileges it contains, how can one work towards less biases?

The goal is to reduce racial prejudice noticeably. A good start to tackle this issue would be to start a discussion. In Finland there is an underlying understanding that our country is divided. There are the racists, that openly show their biased opinions and skepticism. Then there are the rest, the ones that are neutral or pro-immigration and all for a multicultural society. The ones that would, in no way, identify themselves as racists, but might still carry around racist thoughts. Finland is to a large part, a white society, meaning that the country never underwent a critique of colonalization as many other countries did. (Kallio-Tavin and Tavin, 2018, p. 2). Due to this fact the country has skipped a step in the process and is now tackling issues on race purely based on opinion and an illusion of what racism is and how it is being performed.
"Whites are not only evil oppressors, they are also "normal" people enjoying lives of racial advantage, privilege, and few barriers which is often perceived as luck, hard work, or just being in the right place at the right time" (DiTomaso, as cited in Croll, 2008, p. 64).

"This privilege is understood as a fortunate set of circumstances and events, not as a societal system of privilege designed to benefit whites." (Croll, 2008, p. 64). Important to know is that one who maintains the social structures that

considers white the normal/the pure, maintains prejudice and racial oppression.

3.4 COLORBLINDNESS

A counterreaction to open racism is often colorblindness, which claims that we are all the same and equal to society. That physical appearance is not of relevance. It was imposed in Europe after the barbarity of World War 2 (Andreassen & Myong, 2017; Goldberg 2006; Su Rasmussen 2003) and from the ideologies of the Nordic welfare states, where equality was promoted through sameness. (Andreassen & Myong, 2017).

The problem in this ideology is that by saying that we have achieved an equal society one does not have to reflect upon themselves and doesn't have to give up any of their own privileges. The statement that we are all equal and that looks do not matter is an attempt to "fix" the problem of oppression without having to reflect upon one's own self.

3.5 ETHNICITY

Another attempt towards solving issues on race is the concept of ethnicity. Equality and sameness are strived for by acknowledging people of "different ethnic backgrounds". Not only is it oppressive to group and define people through their ethnicity, but the whole concept of identity is complex and fluctuates depending on where you are and who you interact with. The word ethnic is another attempt for the white to simplify all other groups than their own.

"...a focus on "ethnicity" or "culture" fails to explain the social realities and inequities that many groups of migrants and minorities face in the contemporary Nordic region. Our focus on in/visibility will illuminate how "race", understood as a socially constructed category, influences group position in Nordic societ-

ies in a forceful way – both in the case of groups that are racialized as visible and in the case of privileged individuals who due to their "whiteness" can pass as "one of us" in everyday interactions. " (Toivanen 2014 and Guðjónsdóttir 2014, as cited in Leinonen and Toivanen, 2014, p. 161).

3.6 PRACTICING WHITE

"Despite overwhelming evidence, for many white people it is easier and more comfortable to hold on to the belief that there are other reasons for the oppression experienced by people of color—class, economics, education, and lack of motivation. These distorted perceptions leave many white people living lives insulated from issues of race and feeling uncomfortable when confronted with their privilege." (Welch, 2013, p. 24).

What makes a white person change their behavior, or work towards an equal society? Awareness is not enough. Are there different kinds of ways to be aware, a passive and an active way?

"Despite the experiences of people with a non-European background, until the recent diasporic movements in Europe, (during the second decade on the 21st century) there have been very few reported and openly discussed examples of "intentional racism" in Finland. The subjugated history and expurgated experiences seem to preserve the belief by the majority of Finnish white people that racism is extremely rare, and there is no need to consider themselves or other whites' as "racist" (Kallio-Tavin and Tavin, 2018; Haikkola et al., 2014; Oikarinen-Jabai, 2011; Rastas, 2014).

Racial issues are still strongly seen in an "us and them" kind of way: Us being the original Finns, and Them being the brown others. The opposite of being brown is being white. Whiteness is not acknowledged, it is invisible and taken for granted by most Finns. As Kallio-Tavin and Tavin (2018) says "More specifically, in Finland, the general climate seems to be one that refuses to prob-

lematize the power of whiteness to produce both white and non-white subjectivities" (p.2) meaning that when race is being discussed, whiteness is rarely even mentioned.

It's not about being a good non-racist and a bad racist. "Racial inequality is maintained through everyday practices of living. It is not about finding the guilty ones but about examining how we see and represent social groups and how our view on otherness is shaped." (Croll, 2008, p. 24). This is the core to whiteness studies. We are part of a social construction that benefits whiteness and considers being white the norm. By accepting that we sit in the privileged position we accept that we take part in the social construction that benefits us over the others. We are maintaining the racial inequality as long as we are ignorant to this fact, and this way assent to racial inequality.

Welch reminds us that knowledge and awareness is not enough to change society towards equality.

"While the moral imperative for white people to learn about privilege and oppression is compelling, it is also insufficient as a motivator for most white people. White people need to understand that there are costs—economic, cultural, social, and personal—to them for participating in and contributing to the maintenance of systems of privilege. Economically, racism keeps wages low and discourages working class whites from forming alliances with people of color. Lower wages limit funds available for investment in schools, health care, housing and other essential services, which in turn limits available jobs and the cycle continues." (Welch, 2013, p. 23-24).

Awareness might not be enough to make a societal change immediately. Even so, awareness and a deeper understanding of the issue might lead to personal changes and re-evaluation that in the long run leads to a change in society.

3.7 CONCLUSION

There are different angles to approach whiteness and recognize how it is done. The key angles have been highlighted here, but only by reflecting them upon oneself, one is able to see how whiteness appears to them. Looking at whiteness is complex. It takes form in different ways depending on situation and location. How it is seen or noticed in society differs, depending on where you are and your past experiences.

What follows now are the para-fictional stories that have been written as a response to some of the thoughts I have had after starting to familiarize with the topic on white privilege and biases. I will look at the stories and analyze the writing process to figure out if it is an adequate method for raising awareness and becoming more self-aware, and ultimately doing race less.

4

BODY OF WORK

THE EXPERIENCES I CHOSE TO ACKNOWLEDGE.
THE STORIES I CHOSE TO TELL.

PART 1

"THE RACISTS"

Do Racists think this?

They are dangerous.
They steal our jobs.
They take our money.
They are lazy.
They don’t integrate.
They don’t look like us.
They do not appreciate what we do for them.
They don’t speak our language.
They are violent.
They are stupid.
They kill their own family members.
They steal.
They objective women.
They are brainwashed.
They are dirty.
They drive badly.
They are not Finnish.
They are animal-like.
They are ugly.
They are in Our way.
They are disrespectful.
They are ungrateful.

Do I think this?

COMMENTS FROM THE INTERNET

Comments taken and translated from article:
https://www.hs.fi/elama/art-2000006018144.html

"I lived in central Europe for 40 years, and I speak their language fluently. People often asked where I was from. I never got upset or experienced this question as racist."

MUUTTAJA

"The fact that the majority of the university students in Finland are genetically Finnish cannot be considered racism, and prevailing whiteness that is present in the academic community and in the world. One does not get accepted to the universities depending on their ethnic background, but by other means."

VOLKSPOLIZEI

"Would be interesting to know how Finnish students abroad experience their position in society. Will a Finnish name awaken biases in Athen, Paris, London or Barcelona?"

VOLKSPOLIZEI

"I never once experienced racism during my time in the university. Even though I am a second generation Russian immigrant, I never once experienced racism during my studies."

DENIS GALKIN

"Getting offended a little bit too easily here. A sense of humour and self-irony keeps the mind fresh and should not be taken too seriously :)We are a very long way from real racism here. Put a smile on your face and move forward with some common sense."

J1J2

"Finnishness is different things. A person can have a Finnish nationality. It does not mean that he/she is Finnish in any other way. If this person does not have Finnish roots, he/she cannot be Finnish in the same way as a rooted Finn, who might know his/her roots as far back in time as from the 1500 century.
I myself have lived 4 times in different cultures and speak several languages fluently, but I would never even imagine that I could be on the same level/page as any other country's rooted habitants. My kids would not even do this, even though they would decide to stay and live abroad. They are still foreign in the local's eyes. Becoming "at home" can take hundreds of years.
So let's be realistic and not just politically correct and stupid. Different people are treated differently in different parts of the world. It is normal. One learns that by living abroad."

J KERPPO

"Of course the universities in Finland are white. Nothing changes in a second. It takes 3-5 generations for todays' immigrants until their amount is perceived in the universities. It's natural evolvement and not racism."

EUDAIMONIA

"I'm just asking how this lady knows who does and who doesn't belong to an ethnic minority? One cannot decide that by the look of one's skin color.
The Sami people or the Swedish speakers belongs to the ethnic minorities, but this cannot necessarily be decided by the color of their skin.
Also the statement that many of the students in the university are "white" might not be true. This kind of statement represents to me some kind of racistic interpretation where people are evaluated as groups, and even by their skin color.
Isn't this, if anything, clear racism, because she cannot in any way know if every white belong to the same ethnic group, the Finnish? There can be any amount of foreign white-looking students as a lecture."

- LEJONAMIELI

"The concern of the interviewed is only reassured when looking at most of these comments – it has a name, it is called whitewashing."

JUSAKROS

PART OF BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

"You came back!" said the Beast in a thick voice.

"I am sorry that I am late!" said Beauty.

"I could not bear it that you may not come back to me. And now, I fear it is too late." His eyes closed.

"No!" cried Beauty. "Do not leave me!" Just then, she knew in her heart what was true. "I love you!" she cried out. "Please come back! Come back and I will be your wife. I will!" Tears rolled down her cheeks.

Just then, the Beast opened his eyes. "Beauty!" he said. "You did it!"

In a flash, the Beast was changed to a handsome prince! Beauty did not know what to think.

"Ah, Beauty!" he said. And the Beast told her his story. Years ago when he was a prince, an evil fairy had put a spell on him. He must stay a beast forever, until a maiden grew to love him when he still looked like a Beast. Now she had been the one to break the spell!

And so Beauty and her prince, formerly the Beast, were married. And they lived happily ever after.

https://www.storiestogrowby.org/story/early-reader-beauty-beast-english-story-kids/

DO RACISTS THINK THIS? Part 2

They are dangerous.

"Don't walk alone in the evening. Who knows who you might bump into on the way."

They steal our jobs.

"With so many of our own being unemployed, it is ridiculous that they just come here and expect us to make room for them to just steal our jobs."

They take our money.

"Our government just handles out our money and they don't even try. What an insane way to spend our taxes on."

They are lazy.

"They are from a completely different culture. They don't know what real work morals are."

They don't integrate.

"Our government floods them with privileges. They get a home and money. They will have no reason to integrate."

They don't look like us.

"He makes me uncomfortable."

They do not appreciate what we do for them.

"We just give and give, and they don't even pretend to be grateful."

They don't speak our language.

"If you live here you should know our language."

They are violent.

”Did you hear about that girl that got raped on her way home from a party. I think the offender was of foreign origin.”

They are stupid.

”..I mean, they can’t even read and write”

They kill their own family members.

”Don’t get mixed up with those, they have completely inhuman morals.”

They steal.

”They are poor and uneducated, we need to be careful that they do not take anything that is ours.”

They objectify women.

”Poor women. They are prohibited their free will and are only there to serve the mens needs.”

They are brainwashed.

”We cannot blame them, they have been fed this propaganda since they were small and living on the streets.”

They are dirty.

”That man, he smelled so much of sweat.”

They are not Finnish.

”They are not born here, they eat strange things and they do not respect our ways.”

They are animal-like.

”I don’t think they are receptive to understand. They just think in a different way, act on instinct more than intellect.”

They are ugly.

”I mean, I try to look at her and see what he sees in her.”

They are in our way.

”They are everywhere! At the shop counter serving me my lottery ticket, at the train sitting in front of me, at the reception of the job interview I’m waiting to get called into.”

They are disrespectful.

”They swear, they are loud, they interact always in groups.”

They are ungrateful.

”We are one of the safest countries, we have a great school system and our social welfare is top notch. They should be grateful!”

PART 2

"WHAT COLORS SHOULD WE SEE?"

TO MY WHITE, UNDEFINED, PRIVILEGED FRIENDS

To you who is all for a multicultural society, but who has never really had a friend of color.

To you whose mother is sick, or you whose just given birth to twins, or you who works long days, or you who suffers from anxiety. To you who struggles with your everyday life. To you with bigger problems.

To you who gets irritated and says the discussions around racial matters are getting old, who thinks we already fixed this problem, that we already decided that racism does not exist, that it is time to gaze forward.

To you who do life appropriately and avoid the matters that stand in the way of you doing that.

To you who like to think we have achieved equality and that we are all perceived the same.

To you who is afraid to question because you might not want to find yourself in an awkward situation.

To you who is afraid to question because it might be mistaken for racism.

To you who knows that we need to have the discussion, that the issue is only the tip of an iceberg, and the thought in itself is exhausting and too big.

To you who are raising the children of our future.

To you who is here, now.
Is this how we want it to be?

We are hypocrites.
We see ourselves as almighty.
We chose our opinions.
We chose our values.
We have power.
We decide how we think.
Or do we?

When I look myself in the mirror I see someone who I think has benefited quite a lot from looking the way I do. I have not reflected much on my skin color up until the past years, which means I have not had problems attached to it. It is common knowledge that problems tend to rise to the surface of our minds whereas in when all is good and well we tend to not pay that much attention.

They scream, they are angry. They have had enough! They are frustrated because their issue never leads to discussion. Their issue is once again seen by the white as something they can solve and rule over.

We should know by now that we are privileged, but what we really like to think is that we are normal. If that is our starting point, that we are just an average person, with all / just as little - possibilities and advantages as the rest of the population, we make it easier for ourselves. Who likes to be told that their problems/issues are small?

Wouldn't it be more important to start recognizing what racism and what (unintended) biases does to our society and our values than to convince ourselves and others that we are free from it/them?

We criticize our society for being too xenophobic. We want to our home to constitute of a modern society, and we hope that the boundaries of what it means to be Finnish would be broken and rebuilt. To do this would mean

putting Us under a microscope, instead of just briefly listening to words from Them.

In some way, unintentionally, I think I'm above Them. It's one of my ugliest thoughts. At the same time I'm rather the one privileged than the one oppressed, if having to choose.

Clearly this is the root to our issue on race. It is the reason why people of color doesn't find ways to resonate with the privileged white. Making way for them would probably mean giving up some the things we have assumed belongs to us, such as the position of being considered the norm, the privileged, the pure.

IN THE IDEAL WORLD

I would for sure be more aware of different cultural holidays and traditions than now.

When I travel, I wouldn't be considered innocent and pure by default. Maybe I would be worried before crossing country-borders.

When I interview for a job there would not be the assumption that I am Nordic. They would also not assume that I am highly educated by default.

There would be as many jokes about white people as there are about the oppressed now.

Would I be less attractive?

How would I see myself in relation to others?

What privileges would I lose?

Would I be less employable?

Would I be defensive about my home country?

Would I be more easily offended?

Would I be welcomed?

Illusions

~~We are the same~~

~~We are doing everything we can~~

~~We all have the same possibilities~~

~~Skincolor does not matter~~

~~Our universities are mostly white by chance~~

~~All racists are evil~~

~~Being silent is being neutral~~

~~We should all just get along~~

~~They are also racist against whites~~

PART 3

"BIASED, UNINTENTIONALLY"

”I’M SORRY, BUT IT’S WHERE THE WORLD IS GOING”

”If I choose to move to another continent, people do not interfere”

”If I choose to change profession, people do not interfere”

”If I choose to sleep around with anyone, pretty much, people do not interfere”

”If I choose to break my bonds with my family, people do not interfere”

”If I choose to stop eating, people do not interfere. Unless I look sick”

”So, how come, when I chose to be with a man with a great intellect, who comes from a good family and who is good to me, people interfere?”

”I’m sorry, but it’s where the world is going”

..is what she said. We live outside of the borders that were given to us as children. We will mix, and it will, slowly make us start understanding each other instead of fearing each other.

THE CLEANER

I sit in an empty lecture room, staring at my screen. I'm wearing headphones but have no music on. It's 8am and Monday. A man walks in. He is the cleaner. I don't really look at him. Don't want to be in the way of him doing his job, but at the same time I'm too lazy to move seats. He doesn't seem to mind. He moves around me, moving his feather duster around the tables and turning the lights on.
I take a quick glance at him. Cleaning is one of those jobs that I have grown up assuming that no-one chooses to do. It's a job that one sort of ends up doing but it's not part of one's career foresight.

Yes, I grew up assuming I could do any job I wanted,
seeing the future as only opportunities.

My mind wanders. How did he end up here, cleaning these rooms? I don't start to speculate, but somehow I assume it wasn't part of his career foresight either. Maybe he is happy just having job, don't think that moving to Finland wasn't part of how he forecasted his future.

Would I be happy with just having a job, any job?
No. I get quickly frustrated if my job feels boring and meaningless,
or if I feel like I'm not evolving.

And yes, I assume he is not Finnish-born. Mainly because of his skin
colour, but also because of the job he does.

Is he happy with the life he has here, or grateful? I don't know anything about this person and I question if he is grateful for having a job. Would someone white, who would see me sweeping the tables around a student on a Monday morning question if I'm grateful for the job as a cleaner? Somehow I'm guess-

ing it's less unlikely. I would probably be victimized in some way.

Am i grateful for the life I have? I am. I should be.
"I'm grateful" is an active thought.
I don't think it too often.

THE ONE-WAY CONVERSATION.

Just ask her about it.
You're an open person.
People happily share things with you.
I'm sure she would do the same.
What are you afraid of?
I think I want her to bring it up.
I want her to choose when she talks about it.
Or then I want it to come up in a conversation in the future.
Am i impatient?
Is that it?
We only just got to know each other.
I should be in no rush.
I never ask anyone I have known for a week or two about their religion.
Or about their values.
Or if I do, it is because it comes up naturally.
It really hasn't made a difference to me in the situations before.
But now.
I read all the things there is to know via Google's first page search results.
All the things I expected to pierce my eye were there.
But what about the things that has molded her, made her, the way she is?

She makes it a little bit less easy for me to hold on to my biases.

A Love Story

When I just got to know you, I was afraid to say something offensive.
I did not want to be misinterpreted as the close-minded person that I didn't relate to.
"I'm not like that. Like them."

When you spoke, I listened.
I listened and educated myself with the words you chose to say, the gestures and looks you let me have.
I absorbed as much as possible. I needed information to keep my facade standing.
Or to build the body behind the façade.

When you did something nice I was so grateful.
I felt privileged. I felt good.
I felt like I was doing you a favor.

When you said something hurtful, I cried.
I thought about how different we are, we must be.
That you can't possibly understand.

You want me to see you as the same.
You do not want to stand out.
You keep quiet about the things that might provoke.
You like the normal, the mundane.

I see you now, better than before.
I accept that there are things I cannot see about you.
That my relationship with you shouldn't be different from my relationship to my others.

We have our differences, and we will have them in the future.
We will try to understand the things that clash and find a way in-between.
We will do this, actively, until the contrasts grow smaller.
We might not have the energy to last forever, but until then I want to try.

"She says it's not my fault that I
think this way"

CONFESSIONS TO MY BROWN, UNDEFINED, OPPRESSED EQUALS

To you who look different than me

When I don't see you on our streets I become irritated at society. Irritated because of its conservatism and narrow-mindedness.

When I see you on our streets I react, because you look different, you stand out.

If you are dressed as my white friends and talk and behave in a way appropriate, I feel glad that you live in my country. I can ideate you as Finnish where you jog in the mornings, go to work at an office, eat lunch at the same place as me, spend summer weekends at the cottage, do a Finnish language evening course, are educated and have ambition.

If you, however, give an impression of being un-educated, hang out in groups, dress differently, talk loudly and maybe give me a gaze, I become insecure and feel threatened.

Only for a second. Then I feel ashamed.

You are welcomed if you act and behave in a certain, white, way. You are different, but within a framework where we don't have to face our own biases, we are in control. We decide that you are welcomed and perceived as an equal. We decide that you are welcomed because you make us look better in the time we live in now.

To you who, in silence, struggle to achieve a more disparate society

You sip coffee at the same cafe as me. You are my neighbor. You date my friend. You buy the same kind of cheese for your breakfast sandwiches in the same store as me. You have a reasonable job, you pay off your mortgage and you read the newspaper from your phone on the way to work.

You are born here, you belong here as much as any of us. You want to fit in, and at the same time stand out, just as the rest of us.

But you don't look like the rest of us.

I want you to feel like you belong here, like the rest of us. I want you to fit in and stand out, if that is what you want.

I sip coffee at the same cafe as you. I am your neighbor. I am the friend of whom you are dating. I buy the same cheese for my breakfast sandwiches in the same store as you. I have a similar job to you, I pay off my mortgage as you do too and I read the newspaper from my phone on the way to work the same way you do.
If the goal is to melt in and not stand out then you are doing it everything right, but has it worked yet?

To you who is angry

You are angry. I can feel it. I wish I was angry too. But I am not. To you I am ignorant, selfish, maybe stupid. To me you are difficult and exhausting. It is difficult and exhausting to resonate with someone who is bitter to the core.

5

REFLECTION

This is the afterthought of the para-fiction: can writing function as method to grasp a specific topic (here whiteness and biases) in a different, broader way? What impact did it have on me?

5.1 RACISM IS NOT JUST AN ACTIVE ACT OF MEANNESS

They are dangerous.
They steal our jobs.
They take our money.
They are lazy.
They don't integrate.
They don't look like us.
They do not appreciate what we do for them.
They don't speak our language.
They are violent.
They are stupid.
They kill their own family members.
They steal.
They are ungrateful.

Writing down these things felt quite radical to me at first. I was afraid of being judged or misunderstood. I didn't write down opinions, I just wrote down some words that were familiar to me. I also wrote down words I had reacted upon during conversations or on the streets or on tv-shows. I looked for these signs of white privilege. I have felt more alert to biases. I knew they could be a start-

ing point to one of these para-fictional texts.

I think most of us (white) are taught that racism is something that happens actively, that it is performed with individual acts of meanness or by intentional thoughts of meanness. This means that if one is not being mean, one is not a racist. I am guilty of this. Racism, to me, was for a long time something that I rarely paid attention to because I did not identify as a racist. I still don't. Even so, there was always a sense of otherness present. I notice if someone non-white is on the bus, I notice if a non-white person is depicted in an advert, I react if someone I know is dating a non-white person and so on.

The thing is that one can perform race just by being part of the society we live in now. By accepting white as the norm, one is doing race, and therefore also making room for racial oppression. As mentioned earlier, Croll (2008) talks about this by saying that by being a "normal" white person, one enjoys racial advantages, privilege and a few barriers that are often perceived as luck or hard work. This privilege is often seen as a fortunate sense of events and not as a societal system that is designed to benefit whites.

I have realized that by being an ordinary white person, I am part of this societal system, and therefore doing race. I am an oppressor without, for the most part, acknowledging it. Croll (2008) highlights that it is not about being a good non-racist or a bad racist, and I think this is good that it is brought up to attention. By being white, one should already see it as a reason to reflect upon themselves.

Knowing this one might look at the semi-fictional text above in a slightly different way. Knowing that racism is not just these angry and mean outbursts but that it is something most white people carry around with them in behavior and in their values, maybe one can look at statements such as "They are violent" and familiarize with something in that statement. This would only be possible of one has, to some extent, understood that he/she is part of a social con-

struction that benefits whites and by maintaining this one is being oppressive. Maybe one can recognize their own thoughts in the statement above, and realize that it might be present in their lives but maybe said in a more politically correct manner?

Personally, I do not learn to understand what it feels like to be non-white by reading about it. I can feel empathy to some extent, I can try to imagine myself in his/her place. I can briefly touch upon the feeling I am assuming s/he is trying to communicate. But honestly, I cannot relate to it.

We maintain a "us" and a "them" by not making room for others in our privileged circle.

In a flash, the Beast was changed to a handsome prince!
Beauty did not know what to think.
"Ah, Beauty!" he said. And the Beast told her his story.
Years ago when he was a prince, an evil fairy had put a spell on him. He must stay a beast forever, until a maiden grew to love him when he still looked like a Beast.
Now she had been the one to break the spell!"

By immersing in research about whiteness I started to see signs of white supremacy a bit everywhere. It could be during conversations I had, or signs and texts I came across. To describe these texts in words to someone else easily becomes a seed for argumentation. By explaining what is written or what is seen and perceived can easily be understood as patronizing. If I am told what I am supposed to see or what I am supposed to find from a text, I don't really put any of my own effort in to the understanding process and the understanding becomes shallow and not internalized. The texts I have written or gathered can in some way be approached as poems, even though the writings in their self does not necessarily look so. I choose to avoid explaining what the reader is supposed to read, understanding that some of it might not be understood/

perceived as texts about white awareness and racial biases. What impact the writings has on others is not, as I see it, measurable. The impact the writing had on my own awareness is also difficult to grasp. Writing about some of the biased thoughts that often appear as vague and brief is a way to clarify the thought, and in some way to eternalize it. A certain awareness has become stronger and with this awareness I feel closer to the subject and the topic has more value to me.

Can we work towards a more equal society? Yes, I believe we can. Can we be free from racial oppression? I doubt it. Welch (2013) mentions that white peoples' awareness about privilege and oppression is insufficient as a motivator for change for most people. She explains that there are costs (economic, cultural, social and personal), to the contribution to the maintenance of the systems of privileges. Everyone has problems that are experienced as real, even the privileged ones. It would take a lot from the white people to give up the privileges that are considered in-evident to them.

In some way, unintentionally, I think I'm above Them. It's one of my ugliest thoughts. At the same time I'm rather the one privileged than the one oppressed, if having to choose.

This is an issue. I was hoping when starting this thesis that becoming more aware one can make changes to their behavior that slowly shapes a process of change. I am egoistic in my choices, I make room for the people that are important to me, such as family and friends, and myself. It all became real to me when writing the words down. It all became real to me when writing the words down. They are in focus. I want what is best for them. How does an issue on race become something to prioritize when I quite easily can turn the other eye the whole issue?

5.2 BEING WHITE COMES WITH PRIVILEGES

As a white person I am privileged. What it actually means and how it takes its form is still a discovery. Croll (2008) pointed out that the advantages whites have are usually not acknowledged by themselves. I realize now that it is one thing to not be aware of whites being privileged, and another thing to actually understand its form and recognize the privileges in one's everyday life. When talking to (white) people about my thesis they often want to know "real" examples of how whiteness is done so that they also can become more aware. I can explain how it can take form but it is rarely something they can immediately attach to their own everyday life (since many of them live a very white everyday life).

The fact that the majority of the university students in Finland are genetically Finnish cannot be considered racism and prevailing whiteness that is present in the academic community and in the world. One does not get accepted to universities depending on their ethnic background but by other means.

I found that through the stories I wrote and the literature I read, I actually grasped my own whiteness on a different level. I find it difficult to explain, but the stories are born through some insight and then the shape of them just come along, like telling a tale. They are written around a theme or an insight. I believe that the impact of the writing process, and the fact that I grasped the theory on whiteness in a different way than through read research, was because I gave myself time to process what I have read, privately. I also believe that by actually processing a theme through different techniques, one ingests the message on a deeper level. By reading, then ingesting, then seeing, then writing, I acknowledge the theme on a completely different level that only by reading about it. I found a way that worked for me. I have used writing as a process method on other occasions in life before. It works for me.

We should know by now that we are privileged, but what we really like to think

is that we are normal. If that is our starting point, that we are just an average person, with all / just as little - possibilities and advantages as the rest of the population, we make it easier for ourselves. Who likes to be told that their problems/issues are small?

Wouldn't it be more important to start recognizing what racism and (unintended) biases does to our society and our values, than to convince ourselves and others that we are free from it/them?

Writing has also been a way for me to think out loud. Text consists always of a choice of words, it has its limitations. Thoughts, on the contrary, are limitless and often unstructured, and easily mixed up with feeling and emotion. Writing, here, is a way for me to pick one thought of the emotional clutter of ideas and thoughts, and focus on that, grasp it and internalize it on its own. As Long (2014) mentioned, sources of knowledge can be found in unexpected places. I found knowledge in this writingprocess. I learned about myself, about my real values. I also internalized the fact that my own whiteness is not simple to grasp. I am only able to deal with the issues I have become aware of, but there are still many issues that I am completely unaware of.

We criticize our society for being too xenophobic. We want to our home to constitute of a modern society, and we hope that the boundaries of what it means to be Finnish would be broken and rebuilt. To do this would mean putting Us under a microscope, instead of just briefly listening to words from Them.

5.3 WHEN RACE IS DISCUSSED, WHITENESS IS NOT MENTIONED

Kallio-Tavin and Tavin (2018) mentions the fact that whiteness is rarely included in discussions on race in Finland. I admit that this is something I do too. I have tried to process racial issues throughout this thesis with a focus on the fact that I am white and should be considered part of the racial problems we

face in my society.

I sip coffee at the same cafe as you. I am your neighbor. I am the friend of whom you are dating. I buy the same cheese for my breakfast sandwiches in the same store as you. I have a similar job to you, I pay off my mortgage as you do too and I read the newspaper from my phone on the way to work the same way you do.

If the goal is to melt in and not stand out then you are doing it everything right, but has it worked yet?

Unintentional bias happens. We are all victims of it. If we continue to only focus on what is in front of us, the "race in your face" issues, we are making it a bit too easy for ourselves. It is easy for a white person in our society to speak his/her mind but I don't hear many speaking out loud that they are white and that they want to be free from racial bias but that they are not, and that they don't know how to be. It is not a black and white matter. We should not believe the solution is, either.

5.4 WE ARE BIASED

"She says it's not my fault that I think this way"

A big realization for me when I learned about whiteness studies and the privileged position I am in as a white person was that it isn't my fault that I am biased. I was born in to it. I remember that this realization gave me new tools to talk about white privilege. I became braver in my statements because the guilt I had felt before was somehow explained and accepted. I could move beyond the comprehension I had had before, and I could start talking about the issue and admit my flaws openly. Some might argue that it is yet another way for the white to make themselves feel better by explaining that their biases are out of their hands. I understand this argument, but it helped me in a major way by stopping my paralysed mind and helping me move forward in my own develop-

ment towards a less biased mind.

5.5 WE ARE NOT DOING EVERYTHING "RIGHT"

To you who gets irritated and says the discussions around racial matters are getting old, who thinks we already fixed this problem, that we already decided that racism does not exist, that it is time to gaze forward.

To you who do life appropriately and avoid the matters that stand in the way of you doing that.

To you who like to think we have achieved equality and that we are all perceived the same.

To you who is afraid to question because you might not want to find yourself in an awkward situation.

To you who is afraid to question because it might be mistaken for racism.

To you who knows that we need to have the discussion, that the issue is only the tip of an iceberg, and the thought in itself is exhausting and too big.

To you who are raising the children of our future.

To you who is here, now.
Is this how we want it to be?

Welch (2013) brings up the fact that for many white people it is more comfortable and easier to hold on to a belief that there are other reasons for oppression experienced by people of color, such as class, economics, education and lack of motivation. In this way white people can live lives without thinking

much of race, and if confronted, feeling uncomfortable.
This uncomfortable feeling is familiar to me, but I have noticed that through acknowledging that I am privileged, I have also become less uncomfortable with the thought of "not doing everything right" and less afraid of conflict. I have found a vocabulary for speaking about racial oppression, and for me this has been a big step towards becoming more aware and accepting that being an oppressor (even if its not intentional) needs work, and to process it one needs the words for it.

When I just got to know you, I was afraid to say something offensive.
I did not want to be misinterpreted as the close-minded person that I didn't relate to.
"I'm not like that. Like them."

5.6 LIMITATIONS

I started writing this thesis with the will to encourage the subject on race from a white perspective. This theory that has affected my own relationship to race and I wanted this subject to get more attention to raise awareness. Even so, I am not really convinced that awareness will lead to action. Not in a fast and revolutionary sense at least. Because of the complex nature of our societal structure and the fact that a lot of the privileges we (white) have and take for granted and consider normal, it is difficult to even recognize them. And if recognized, they are not necessarily something we (white) will change, because it benefits us.

Writing in the way I have can also turn out to be perceived in a way that has no impact. I know what methods draws my attention but how can I be certain that it has any impact on anyone else? The body of work aims to raise awareness, but if it serves is goal is not really possible for me to know at this stage. The body of work consists of a one-person dialogue, external points of views are

missing.

I have tried to bring up some of the main issues on white privilege in this thesis, but since everyone has his/her unique relationship to racial oppression and self-awareness I cannot really control what the reader gains from this text. I have accepted that because of the methods I have used, I can only control the reading experience so much. As a writer, I function as a conductor, pointing out what to look at. How it is perceived is out of my hands.
It was difficult to start writing the thesis because of this. I was afraid to share my uglier thoughts, mainly because of a fear that I would be the only one having them.

The issue on whiteness is also very complex. It is experienced differently by different individuals, but also experienced differently depending on the geographical location. The fact that whiteness and its perception also change and is not fixed, makes the whole issue complex.

What I do know is that education and knowledge changes opinions and makes understanding more complex. With a raised awareness, one have more tools and a wider perspective on the topic in question, which gives more alternatives when making decisions or behavioral changes. Through insight on a subject that have been unfamiliar before, one can change their values and opinions and through this, their behavior. On a societal level it is more complex.

5.7 CONCLUSION

Looking into writings that are created with a very lose grip and mostly with no clear vision of the outcome is a little difficult. I have never actively analyzed my writing process, and doing it now, here, as part of the afterthought, was challenging and felt sometimes unnecessary. Writing the para-fiction was an internal process where I re-thought an idea or a thought. To then, in retro-

spective, explain what I was thinking and were the idea came from, was not a creative process, but more an attempt to put words to some of the thoughts behind the texts.
I am definitely more aware of my biased mind, but it feels challenging to present them in actual results. They are private and difficult to articulate. Even so, the para-fiction that was created are not that difficult to read, and they are open for interpretation and different understanding. They do not need much explanation unless the topic is completely new to the reader. It has been a good way to immerge in this issue through writing, as it feels uncomplicated to me. To someone else another form of artistic practice might feel more natural, but for me writing was the technique I used to grasp the topic on a deeper level.

In the next chapter I will recap the content of this thesis to give the reader an overview of the content of this thesis.

6

CONCLUSION

This study has been a deep-dive in to my own relationship to white privilege and biases. I have written stories based on the realizations and the findings I have had, throughout the process, and by doing this I have noticed that my understanding has grown deeper. The stories have been born through the literature I have read as well as the encounters I have had, often through a combination of both sources. I have realized lately that I notice my own biased thoughts quicker. I have also become more aware of how racial biases are embedded in to language and opinions around me and my white peers, and I have been able to raise awareness on what it can mean to be white. Even though I have done a lot to become more aware of my own privileged position as a white person in a mostly white society, I still think there are a lot of aspects of which I am completely unaware of when it comes to white privilege because it is so deeply embedded in the society and so rarely pointed out as an issue.

To grasp one's own whiteness and what privileges it includes has been central to this thesis. I have used writing as a method, creating short, para-fictional stories or texts. I have investigated the ideas and thought I have had through creative writing. Whiteness and biases are not simple to grasp fully. The more aware I have become of my own biased mind, the more I have realized that there are more thoughts and things I do not notice, or do not see.
What impact can para-fictional writing have as a research method? Can one, through para-fictive writing, create a deeper sense or knowledge of one's own biases?

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The stories were written at different times, separately. The writing was a creative process for me. The texts were not steered in a certain direction but were born through a word or a sentence. By giving the topic or theme time, in this thesis by writing para-fictional stories about them, one do not only get a deeper sense of the issue, but one makes the subject his/her own. Because I gave the thesis my time and my mind, I now feel more closer to the subject and understand the issue in a better way.
I believe that I am less oppressive now, even though I have a clearer awareness of how my mind works. I believe white people, especially in the Nordics or within the societies I have lived in, would benefit from becoming more aware about their own privileges that are connected to their skin color. I think that with a higher awareness the issue becomes more personal and feels more important to the individual.

Since the work is open for interpretation, and not stating everything there is to see, the thesis might appear differently to different readers. This limits the thesis. Its impact will differentiate depending on who the reader is. Even so, the foundation for the para-fiction has been articulated in the literature review and will function as a basis for the reader.

In the future I would be interested in continuing to investigate other subjects through this para-fictive way of writing or find some other tool to look at the topic on whiteness and privilege. The process in itself has been a very valuable experience to me. Through this process, I have not only evolved and become less blind to my privileges, but it is also a constant journey that continues every day, even after this thesis has come to an end.

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