EXPERIENCES OF BLACK WOMANHOOD IN SWEDISH ACADEMIA: CONTESTED NARRATIVES

GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

Abstract

This thesis explores how black women as students and faculty members experience racism in Swedish universities, and what strategies they use to cope and resist. Through their lived experiences and autoethnographic elements I found similar experiences, reflections and a multitude of reactions. One commonality is a type of questioning that relates deeply to my interlocutors intersecting identities as black women. The faculty interlocutors have their knowledge questioned by students, especially if that knowledge pertains to blackness or colonial history. The students experience racist and other oppressive narratives from both lecturers and other students. Their narratives and experiences are contested inside and outside of academia, as one of my interlocutors puts it, the university is a microcosm of society at large. I argue that the racist structures in Swedish society which shape these accounts, should be explored through a historical and critical lens. Through my findings I conclude that black women in Swedish academia are well aware of how they are perceived, and relate this to larger societal structures.

Keywords: Racism, blackness, intersectionality, academia, students, faculty, autoethnography

Acknowledgements

Table of content

Introduction

> Remember, this space was not made for you. - Navarro, Williams, and Ahmed, 2013:454

The quote above was uttered by a black woman to other women of colour during a conference on mental health in the academy, Bianca Williams, who wrote this portion of this collaborative text, immediately recognised what the speaker meant by this. The space she works in does not accommodate for a black woman to inhabit the role as professor. The role of professor and researcher has been continuously gendered and racialized for white men. The presumed authority of white men as professors has set expectations for students, expectations ingrained so deeply that they when faced with a woman of colour as their professor express a sense of loss of the "real" experience of a white and male professor (Navarro, Williams and Ahmed, 2013:444).

In a time when separatist groups for black people are compared to the KKK on the Swedish national broadcasting network, the imagery of lynching is invoked when discussing our organization (Arpi, 2016)[1] and the use the n-word is debated by a panel without black people at the Göteborg Book Fair (Bokmässan, 2016), blackness and black people are certainly being discussed in the Swedish media landscape but are our perspectives included? This thesis will explore the experiences and narratives of black women in Swedish academia regarding their experiences of racism in academic spaces. To understand the current debates and how they might seep into academia, I provide a background and a historical perspective on racism in Sweden.

In a 2014 report on anti-black discrimination in Sweden (Mångkulturellt centrum, 2014), the current situation of Afro-Swedes[2] is investigated regarding employment, housing, discrimination and hate crimes. Regarding employment and education, they state that people born on the African continent are overrepresented in low income jobs and Afro-Swedes with

---

[1] Referring to this article which was first published under the title "Strange fruit hanging from the kafferep" with the image of a Cross burning. Kafferep translating to having coffee together, which is how one of the separatist groups Black Coffee has its meetings.

[2] Swedes of Afrodiasporic descent, the report does not seem to distinguish between Afro-Swedes born in Sweden and those born elsewhere.

university degrees are often overqualified for their employment or unemployed (Mångkulturellt centrum, 2014:5). From 2008-2012 hate crimes against Afro-Swedes make up a disproportionate part of the statistics on racially or xenophobically motivated hate crimes (Mångkulturellt centrum, 2014: 29-30). This is especially striking since many of the crimes involve physical violence in public places, the violence against us seems to have continued since the 1990ies and that Afro-Europeans on a whole face gruesome violence and discrimination in Europe (Mångkulturellt centrum, 2014:32-34).

The situation is dire and provides a terrifying backdrop to the subject at hand, surely these broader discriminatory tendencies effect black women teaching and researching at Swedish universities to some degree. I am interested in how these patterns and larger societal expressions of anti-black racism is perceived and experienced by black women as students and faculty.

Background and previous research

My thesis explores experiences of black women in Swedish academia, and how these aforementioned structures and are behaviours prevalent in their lives. My focus lies on the lived experiences of these women and their everyday interactions in academic spaces. In this context black women means women who identify as part of the African diaspora and through it share some experiences related to historical and current anti-blackness that in different ways shape how they are perceived and identify themselves (Eison Simmons, 2000:90-91).

Afrodiasporic people span the globe, the issues of interpersonal racism and discrimination as well as structural inequalities hinder and effect our experiences of higher education are global. Just a glance at the aforementioned hate crimes and disregard for Afro-Swedes qualifications (Mångkulturellt centrum, 2014:5) gives an indication of how deep the anti-black racism runs in Swedish society. Given the research and accounts coming from women of colour in academia from the United States and the United Kingdom, these power structures seem to inhabit our post-colonial world.

Previous research and reports regarding structural inequality in Swedish academia (Sveriges universitetslärarförbund, 2011; Högskoleverket, 2005) has focused on gender discrepancies, this thesis focus on how racialization intersecting with gendering could provide new answers and a more complex image of Swedish academia today.

In the government report "Det blågula glashuset" Paul Lappalainen pushes for a historical perspective to understand current Swedish structural racism. Sweden has an historical self-image of being separate from European colonial history. An image being perpetuated and enforced by strong Swedish involvement in the anti-apartheid movement and simultaneously ignoring racism and discrimination at home of our own recognized minorities (Roma and travelling people, Jewish people, Swedish Finns, Tornedalers and Saami people) and racialized migrants. (Lappalainen, 2005:91). Examples of this is Sweden's continued colonialism of Sápmi and forced sterilizations of minority groups based in ideas of racial hygiene. The law of forced sterilization was abolished for these groups 1976 (Lappalainen, 2005:100-103), but trans people were legally forced to sterilize to be granted to undergo transition by surgery until 2013 (Riksdagen, 2013). Applying the historical perspective highlights the disparities between Swedish anti-racist involvement *in other countries* and the way racism and oppression in Sweden is discussed.

The minimization of Swedish involvement in the transatlantic slave trade (Lappalainen, 2005:93-95) and its effects make current discussion of anti-black racism and Afrophobia seem like a recent or "imported" problem with an increased black presence in Sweden. Lappalainen brings up examples of how stereotypes and racism towards black people in Sweden was very much alive in the 1900s, in 1933 when Louis Armstrong visited Sweden he was described in a Swedish newspaper as a "drunken gorilla" and that his music proved that "apes do not have a language" (Lappalainen, 2005:96).

The discourse of racism in Sweden is characterized by the self-image of being the world's conscience and repressing of Swedish racist history (Lappalainen, 2005:109). Paulina de los Reyes and Masoud Kamali write in a report for the Swedish Government support the idea of Swedish exceptionalism when it comes to racism and discrimination and the distancing from European colonial and racist history and prevailing narratives of European superiority. Reports or discourse of everyday racism, structural or institutionalised racism sullies that pristine image of a utopia without racism and discrimination apart from a few "bad apples". Something de los Reyes and Kamali describes as a key component in the formation and reproduction of "Swedishness" lies in its assumed supremacy (de los Reyes and Kamali, 2005:9-10) relating back to Swedish exceptionalism.

Masoud Kamali's states that European racism has been wrongfully overshadowed by US segregation and apartheid making it pale in comparison, further othering is also a key component in European and "Western" racism maintaining both biological and cultural

racism. Referring to previous research Kamali shows that Sweden is not exempt from the widespread structural and institutional racism and discrimination that plagues the rest of Europe (Kamali, 2005:29-30).

Previous research on the topic of black women and women of colour in academia has mainly come from the United States and the United Kingdom (Pittman, 2010; Navarro, Williams, and Ahmed, 2013:45; Ahmed, 2009; Gregory, 2001). Therefor my work mainly draws on that research since there is very little collected research on this topic in Swedish and even less regarding academic spaces. There are some Swedish examples generally focused on black people and people of colour in general in Swedish society (de los Reyes and Kamali, 2005; Kalonaityte et al 2007; Sawyer, 2008), except for Ylva Habel's work regarding whiteness, racism and academia in Sweden. Habel's article "Challenging Swedish exceptionalism? Teaching while black" examines the Swedish self-image critically regarding the different forms of racism, Swedish exceptionalism and the legitimization of her knowledge and presence that white students demand from her (Habel, 2012: 104-107).

Aim and research questions

My aim is to investigate how black women in academia encounter racism and racialized sexism, through their own words, works and stories. The research is guided by a transformative approach, meaning that highlighting the oppressive structures prevalent in Swedish academia through research might prompt changes in universities policy, interpersonal interactions and in practice (Cresswell, 2013:79-80).

The aim is similar to the one of Navarro, Williams, and Ahmed in their article "Sitting at the Kitchen Table: Fieldnotes from Women of Color in Anthropology" (2013), that through these experiences gather a plethora of knowledges and experiences on how to survive and thrive in academia as a black woman. To even begin finding helpful strategies and transform we must map what kind of experiences and knowledges exist in my interlocutors and literature on the subject. Although I will discuss structural oppressions that black women face, the focus is on how these structures can be traced into interpersonal interactions, as Chavella Pittman (2010:184) states that structures exhibit themselves in our everyday interactions.

The research questions that guided my work are:

- How have black women in academia experienced racism and racialized sexism in academic spaces?
- What strategies are they using to cope with these experiences?

The research questions are broad and allowed me to explore different kind of experiences, and the second question focuses on both coping and strategies encompassing a wide range of reactions and strategies.

Delimitations

Due to the nature of my interlocutors environment (either workplace or classroom) and my research questions, participant observation would have been very difficult. My interlocutors are not a group located in one or several places together, to achieve any kind of prolonged participant observation would prove difficult. Another important aspect in this is their anonymity, a student following them in their place of work or in class would surely raise questions.

When I began considering the topic of racism in academic spaces my scope was much wider, I wanted to interview women of colour about their experiences, but this was narrowed down to black women. The experiences of women of colour in academia are wide ranging and the forms of racism vary, and deserve their own thorough investigation which a master thesis might not accommodate. The difficulty was instead finding an appropriate number of faculty interlocutors. The small group of interlocutors limits the scope of the study, the goal is not to provide a generalization of black women's experiences in academia, but rather contextualizing their experiences within structures already explored in similar studies outside of Sweden, as well as studies in Sweden but in other areas than academia.

Theories and key concepts

The work that inspired my thesis (Ahmed, 2009; Navarro, Williams, and Ahmed, 2013; Pittman, 2010) all acknowledge structural and institutional racism and sexism as a reason for their experiences of racialized sexism in academia, and that is my starting point.

Sara Ahmed's conceptualization that women of colour embody diversity in white spaces has inspired this thesis. Ahmed states that women of colour are tasked with being the representation of their presumed categories therefor they are proof that this room is "diverse" and "multicultural", if one then points out structural and institutional racism in this space your own "diverse" body is used against you (Ahmed, 2009:41-46). Ahmed proposes that the focus on "diversity" is a branding and marketing scheme that makes one think of the university as a less white space without changing or challenging the prevailing whiteness of academic spaces (Ahmed, 2009:45). Karen Brodkin, Sandra Morgen, and Janis Hutchinson examine the field of anthropology in the United States as a "White public space". They point to the same issues

as Ahmed where a single person of colour in a department is expected to work for workplace diversity, to the detriment of their academic career (Brodkin et al, 2011:550). They also address "colour blind racism" and race avoidant discourses, where racism is discussed as an antiquated phenomenon without any bearing today. When the topic of racial disparities is avoided in this way the effects of racism and racist acts become impossible or at least improbable (Brodkin et al, 2011:547).

To expand on how racism and sexism interact I use intersectionality as a key concept throughout this work. Intersectionality coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (Williams Crenshaw, 1991) describes how various categories (class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and so forth) as the word suggests intersect and create different experiences for different individuals. This means that I will try to incorporate how apart from being black women my interlocutors face different oppressions and inhabit different privileges in varying contexts.

I also use a black feminist approach in this thesis, more specifically a black feminist anthropological theory focused on an alternative activist practice in the discipline that encompass both theory and methods. Irma McClaurin describes it as:

> An embodied, positioned, ideological standpoint perspective that holds Black women's experiences of simultaneous and multiple oppressions as the epistemological and theoretical basis of a 'pragmatic activism' directed at combating those personal, individual and structural and local and global forces that pose harm to black (in the widest geopolitical sense) women's wellbeing. (McClaurin, 2001:63)

McClaurin comes from the field of anthropology and Williams Crenshaw from law, their theoretical entry points might differ somewhat but they are compatible. In this research I am using intersectionality as an overarching theory and operationalizing it in practice by using black feminist anthropology, as the method and goal of the research. The life stories, perspectives, autoethnography and narratives collected in this thesis are themselves transformative and this practice might be a useful way of capturing that. It can be a transformative approach to collaborative ethnographic knowledge production (McClaurin, 2001:64).

When discussing racism and discrimination it can at times be precarious to determine what acts are individual acts of racism and institutional and structural racism. To explain this in a Swedish context, I draw on Masoud Kamali's definitions. Individual acts of racism occur when an individual intentionally acts in a way that harms and separates a person based on their ethnicity, race, gender and gender identity. This definition does not exempt marginalized groups from perpetuating racism and oppression towards others.

Institutional racism is rooted in institutional policy, practice and work procedures, the individuals within the institution can, when following policies based in racism and bias, carry out racist actions in their work. The institutional practices outcome is that marginalized groups are further discriminated and disadvantaged.

Structural racism is found in societal ways of organization, norms and through societal institutions. These practices stem from ideologies that legitimizes discrimination, although the racist and discriminatory effects of these seemingly innocuous practices can be accidental and indirect they still harm marginalized groups and individuals. Institutional and structural racism systematizes oppression though its ignorance of how their "neutral" and apolitical practices hurt and discriminates (Kamali, 2005:31-34).

Irene Molina describes racialization as a theoretical perspective to signify processes and actions, that based on historical contexts take various forms of oppression in different societies and cultures. These processes both racialize societies (with hierarchical structures) and groups. Molina's example of groups in Swedish society is the term "invandrare" (immigrants), and only some people are actually identified as belonging to the group invandrare but it also includes people born and raised here, that are merely racialized as non-white (Molina, 2005:96-97). Sweden has historically up until the end of the second world war dealt with race through a naturalistic perspective: the supremacy of Sweden is based in the strength of the race/people (positioning others below), this was used as one of the excuses for the forced sterilization of minority groups. The dominant perspective after the second world war is a historical perspective, focusing on industrial and technological prowess as the reason for supremacy, race is not explicit but "difference" is explained through cultural difference (Molina, 2005:99-100). Using the social constructions of race and racialization brings attention to the power those constructions has had and still has on people's lives, as Molina states, these terms are crucial to understand power relations and to fight racist structures (Molina, 2005:103-104).

Black, Afro-Swede or what?

There are different ways of identifying with one's blackness or belonging to Afrodiasporic communities. In certain contexts you identify with your nationality, in others with your blackness or in some cases both, like with the label "Afro-Swede". These terms shift over time and space, both with how you yourself identify and how your community identify or how those outside your community classify you.

Afrosvensk (Afro-Swede) comes from the organization Afrosvenskarnas Riksförbund (ASR) formed in 1990 when different groups based on African nationalities came together to form one group with a Pan-African vision to work for all people of African descent in Sweden. ASR defines the term afrosvensk as a political identity useful to work against anti-black racism (Afrosvenskarnas riksförbund, 2016). Eison Simmons describes a similar usage in the Dominican Republic when an organization she worked with started using the term Afro-Dominican to describe themselves. She notes that by doing so they reclaim their African heritage and include themselves in "the diasporic sisterhood with other women of African descent in the Americas and around the world" (Eison Simmons, 2000:89-91). The prefix Afro or African in both Sweden and the Dominican Republic relates to the belonging of a diaspora and a political struggle against anti-black racism, and relates to the Pan-African movement founded in the 1800s.

Relating this to my interlocutors and myself, we identify and have identified differently, to not inscribe the specificity of an Afro-Swede identity upon my interlocutors, I use the broader term black unless the interlocutors specify otherwise.

Research methods

The traditional role of the anthropologist as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson puts it is similar to the image of the American professor role I described in my introduction: white, western and male, his informants were not only separated from him by these categories but also the academic privilege of shaping the narrative and not questioning the structural inequalities that shaped his field (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992:13-15).

In this thesis I will use methods and theories to try to counter these tendencies, my hope is that in the end it will not only be my narrative but mine *and* my interlocutors common narrative. To achieve this I have to be acutely aware of my own role as a black woman and "native" anthropologist (in the sense that I belong to the group that I am studying) would according to some give a biased account. I do not agree since my knowledge is situated (Haraway, 1988) (as every researchers) and gives me an "in" and a unique perspective to critique dominant discourses (McClaurin, 2001:51-52; Khosravi 2010:6). This is related to what Du Bois referred to as double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903), the oppressed can gaze upon themselves through the eyes of the oppressor and see their perceived faults. It's not simply consciousness of yourself but how others perceive you through the lens of your gender, race and other factors. Through these perspectives you are forced to consider or

negotiate the oppressors gaze in everyday life. This could grant interesting perspectives when both researcher and interlocutors in some ways share this awareness. Relating to these perspectives Irma McClaurin highlights the research of Lila Abu-Lughod and her own work as a black feminist anthropologist by saying:

> We construct a complex ethnographic world from our data, our field experiences, our knowledges as 'natives', halfies, woman, other, that is contradictory, multi-layered, engaged, and as close to representing the social reality of the people we study as we can get. - McClaurin, 2001:61

But there are of course critical perspectives to consider with being presumed 'native'. In her book regarding reflexive ethnography Charlotte Aull Davies discusses how a female researcher approaches her field with the expectation that she will bond with her informants because they are women, but this bonding does not occur because class and ethnicity separates them as well as their way of narrating their lives. Aull Davies emphasizes the importance of an open approach from the researcher when meeting their informant and remaining open through the process as your perceived similarities are just that, perceived and changeable (Aull Davies, 2008:111). This is where an intersectional perspective and power analysis comes in. The way that oppressions and discrimination shifts and changes over time and in spaces becomes important nuances to portray and perceive. As my thesis focuses on racism, sexism and class, these perspectives are integral to my method and analysis.

Methods

In order to explore my research questions I have used recorded life story interviews, where I have interviewed my faculty interlocutors, and then I followed up the interviews by email communication where my interlocutors reviewed, read and commented on my transcripts and time code notes. This allowed a collaborative approach and gave my interlocutors more control over what material made it to my final analysis, it also provides me with perspectives on what subjects or stories might reveal their identity. The time that passed after I had sent out my transcripts, made it clear to me how sensitive this material is. For some it took months to get back to me with comments, so it was not only a labour-intensive method but also emotional labour.

The secondary method I used to gather material for my study was emailing black female students' questions regarding their experiences of racism in the classroom. This method was developed during my analysis of the interview material with faculty. I found that the material needed perspectives from current students and their experiences to both compliment my own

autoethnography and provide a comparison between the faculty's experiences as students with students today.

Semi-structured interviews

My previous experiences of semi-structured interviews for my bachelor thesis and other courses taught me that the preparation of questions, themes and talking points is crucial. Another important factor is location of the interview, so I asked my interlocutors where they would be most comfortable doing the interview and went with that. One of the interviews was in a public space which is can be challenging both when performing the interview and after in the transcription process.

Before the Master thesis course we performed a trial interview and it was indeed a learning experience. The interviewee gave mostly short answers, so we either left the topic or I interjected with follow up questions. I had prepared 28 questions; the topic was childhood and the teenage years. Some questions would have needed more time to ponder and prepare for. For my thesis interviews I sent some topics and questions in advance to my interlocutors so they could refresh their memory. The sensitivity of some subjects in the trial interview (family relations for example) made the interview awkward at times, unfortunately I think there will always be awkward conversations, as long as the aim is related to painful and difficult topics and the interviewer has to learn to deal with it to some extent. When an interviewee did not want to answer certain questions I simply accepted it and moved on. In my first interview I felt I had overwhelmed the interviewee with too many questions and interjections, after that I tried to adapt to the interviewees pace of narration and coming with interjections and comments in the end of the interview or after the tape recorder was off. Small talk and talking about other things before and after the interview made for a more informal setting which probably helped both of us when discussing difficult subjects. There was a balance to strike between stepping back and allowing the interviewee to talk about their experiences and thoughts (Atkinson, 1998:40-42) and interjecting with follow up questions. Mostly this was not an issue since my interlocutors were prepared and there was a clear narrative of their experiences and could connect to larger structures of oppressions.

Life story style interviews

My focus is on both the individual and the broader contexts as these may reflect and complement each other. To provide a context and understanding for my interlocutors experiences a deeper understanding of their identity and history was needed. I therefor

combine semi structured interviewing with some aspects of life story interviews. Robert Atkinson describes life stories not only as a way of informing us about the individuals' experiences but the broader context in which these events took place (Atkinson, 1998: 4-5).

The largest critique towards life story interviews is its lack of generalizability (Bryman, 2012:489-90), however my focus is on the individual experiences related to my topic. It is not my goal to generalize the experiences of being a black woman in academic spaces, I do however want to link these individual experiences to larger structures. The method is suited to answer my research questions, while I do not use the method in its whole (meaning recording someone's life from birth until the interview itself) it is the style and depth of the method that inspires my work. The anonymity my interlocutors crave that I eliminate details, longer quotes and some contextualization in my finished product.

Themes

The main theme that guided my interviews are the academic workplace related to racism and racialized sexism. Subthemes to this is reactions to racism and strategies to deal with racism. The main focus is if and how racism has shaped my interlocutors academic life. The questions I asked centre education and academic spaces but also the racism experienced while growing up and particularly in school environments. The aim of the themes is to offer a frame the interviews, operationalize the analysis and of course provide answers to the research questions. Two of my themes that I started with initially proved difficult to suss out: separating racism from sexism and racialized sexism and the childhood relationship to school. The racialized sexism was difficult because it is very difficult to differentiate between what racist/sexist behaviours relate to your blackness, what to relates to you as a black woman or what only relates to your womanhood. My interlocutors early school experiences are also difficult to anonymize in the finished data to mine and their satisfaction so that data is not used.

The themes are accompanied with a list of questions (a short version mailed to the interlocutors at least a week before the interview), the questions give support and guidance for me as researcher to encourage more focused and elaborate answers and to do this follow up questions is key to eliminate any questions I might have after the interview and for the interviewee to elaborate on their answers

Questions

The questions I used focused on education and academic spaces but also on the racism experienced while growing up and particularly in school environments. The answers regarding childhood encounters with racism and identity making will not be used in this thesis, some minor references might be made but for the most part they are left out of my results to protect my interlocutors anonymity. It was however important for me to understand the context in which my interlocutors were raised and how they identified as children, teenagers and into adulthood to help me understand their methods, thoughts and experiences with racism.

The questions chosen for the trial interview was largely inspired by Robert Atkinson's question guide (Atkinson, 1998:41-53) focusing on education and family life. Some of those questions were used in my interviews, they are open ended and can easily provide long answers, that easily can accommodate experiences regarding racism and racialized sexism without specifying the topic since the interlocutors know my chosen topic and might elaborate in that direction. The research questions lead to a particular focus in conjunction with the open-ended questions, I assumed that those asked to be interlocutors when reading my research questions will either see that the question applies to their experiences or not and participate accordingly.

Sample of questions to faculty

- Discuss your experiences of racism and sexism from other students and teachers.
- How have you handled racism in your work place? (Follow up: Reactions and strategies, how it has changed over time)
- Discuss teaching, have you had your authority and/or skill questioned by students and colleagues?

The questions regarding academic spaces start very simple; I want them to discuss their general experience and particular moments or instances they find representative for their experiences. This leads into how they react, if they have any strategies both for dealing with the situation at hand and after, this can lead to questions regarding how those strategies and methods have changed over time or how they vary in different spaces. As previously discussed regarding using elements from life story interviewing, I adapted my way of

interviewing to allow for more space and elaboration from the interlocutor, to then after ask follow up questions and have a discussion in the end asking if they felt something was missing or had been left out. The last question was influenced by Pittman's work which also guides how I present my results. Pittman studied women of colour in faculty in the United States, Pittman presents the common themes among her informants as: challenging authority, questioning teaching competency, disrespecting scholarly expertise, threatening and intimidation (Pittman, 2010: 187-191)

Sample of questions to students

- Have you faced racism and sexism in Swedish universities? If yes, please give examples and details (From who? How was it dealt with?)
- How have you reacted to racism (not only directed towards you/black people)? Did you for example stay quiet, discuss or notify the university?
- Have you heard hate speech or offensive language in university? (Use of the N-word for example) Who used that language?

The student questions were formulated after I had done my interviews with my faculty interlocutors, but since these were conducted via email the follow up questions were included and more specified, offering examples. I found this important as the answers might be to brief or the questions misunderstood without the accompaniment of a face-to face discussion.

Autoethnography as a methodology

> In my years as an anthropologist, I have been astonished at how my informants' experiences overlapped, confirmed, completed, and recalled my own experiences of borders. One interesting aspect of the auto-ethnographic text is that the distinction between ethnographer and 'others' is unclear. Similarities between informants' subjective experiences and my own blur the distinction between anthropologist and informants. This challenges imposed identities and boundaries and offers forms of meaning alternative to the dominant discourse (Pratt 1992). Auto-ethnography links the world of the author with the world of others. It bridges the gap between the anthropologist's reality and the reality of others.- Khosravi 2010:5

Shahram Khosravi's *'Illegal traveller'- an autoethnography of borders* introduced me to autoethnography. His own history of flight amplified and expanded through the informants' journeys and fates. My entry point to my field of research was through my own body and experiences combined with glimpses of other racialized and black people's experiences in Swedish universities online in Facebook groups, and interactions with acquaintances. A

particular story of a black woman was brought to my attention: she wanted to write about black separatist organising for a university assignment but was continually discouraged and in the end persuaded into changing her research questions into something more "suitable". This stayed with me and I began thinking about how these kinds of experiences continue into PhD student and post-PhD life for academics, which in the end informed the topic for my thesis. Studying something so close to my own experiences made me to consider if I should include my own experiences in this thesis. Finally, I decided that the way forward was to include elements of autoethnography, seeing that my experiences would (and did) shape the research questions, interactions in interviews and my way into the field. The approach of autoethnography I chose is partial, only using experience that reflect those of my interlocutors.

Heewon Chang describes the difference between autoethnography and autobiography as autoethnography having a "ethnographic explanation", interlinking the personal and cultural. When autoethnography was first introduced by anthropologist Karl G. Heider in 1975 he considered the informants accounts as autoethnography, not the anthropologists account. In later interpretations autoethnography came to include the anthropologist or ethnographers own people, identifying oneself with your informants (Chang, 2008:46-47). Chang argues that autoethnography is a method throughout the research process and present in the end result. The method is not solely focused on the researcher; it's a tool that the anthropologist can use to understand others, cultural phenomena's and societies through the eyes and experiences of the researcher (Chang, 2008: 48-49).

In my early contact via email, social media or phone calls with potential interlocutor's, I found myself forced to legitimize my interest and being questioned for my interest. The answer I gave and later often led with was that I am myself a black woman in academic spaces. In some cases, those I contacted recognized me from Facebook groups for black people, then my interest and intent was clear and went unquestioned. I understand and understood the questioning of my interest, since there is a tiredness in both black and non-black people of colour communities of white researchers, students and journalists telling our stories from their own perspectives, lacking nuance or making a career off our life stories.

 My assumed positionality as a black woman was made clear for potential interlocutors, a positionality rooted in my body and its assumed experiences. It gave me access but also expectations, there are certain expectations of a "native anthropologists" from informants, oneself and others in the academic field.

Kirin Narayan proposes that the category of "native anthropologist" is mostly applied to people of colour and "non-westerners". This very essentialist gaze often ignores the nuances, power dynamics and fluidities of both informant and anthropologist identities and status (Narayan, 1993:673-674). But applying this to specific experiences rather than cultures and a whole identity could give certain advantages in finding informants and finding relevant questions.

Aull Davies also discusses the intricacies of being a presumed native, she describes a situation where the researcher is assumed to have knowledge and a connection to female Indian factory workers because of her identity as an Indian woman. The researcher in this case found it very alienating, finding the education and class difference seemed too vast to bridge with the identity of "Indian woman" (Aull Davies, 2011:220). These notions of what a "native" anthropologist is can create an essentialist gaze upon the informant and the researcher's identities, leading to difficult situations for both, and might give false expectations from the researcher only to be disappointed in one's ability to use the "native" status (Aull Davies, 2011:221).

Ann-Charlotte Palmgren interprets autoethnography as a contextualizing tool, positioning the researcher in the field and thereby increasing reflexivity. She describes the autoethnographic text as something that materializes from the researchers own bodily experiences, the researcher recognizes and interprets cultural traces through their own interaction with the material (Palmgren, 2011:180). The researcher's previous experiences in life and in the field, are integrated into other material and data to deepen and re-contextualize the work into larger cultural and societal structures (Palmgren, 2011:178-179).

Aull Davies also makes this connection, giving the example of a researcher's own experience with disability as an entry point into discussions of larger processes and structures in society accessed by individual experiences to create heterogeneity, a breath of knowledges and pushing theory building forward. Aull Davies also connects this method to some aspects of feminist theory where the personal and the political are intertwined. This method is a tool to illuminate these connections but it also points to the fluidity and liminality in categorisations (Aull Davies, 223-224).

Lena Marander-Eklund and Ann-Catrin Östman highlight the strength of life stories as a tool to portray and bring to life the experiences of oppressed and marginalized groups (Marander-Eklund & Östman, 2011:8-9). My goal through this method is just that, to follow the traces of

larger societal structures of racism and oppression in the privileged room of academia and how it affects those faced with intersecting oppressions.

There are of course weaknesses and critiques of the method. Autoethnography is sometimes portrayed as navel gazing, narcissistic and lacking validity due to its personal nature (Palmgren, 2011:179). I believe that the reflexivity it can bring to academic text the space it offers the author to explicitly discuss their own experiences and emotions of the research process that relates to the research area instead can contribute to the study in an explicit way- rather as an undertext that risks informing the research implicitly.

The research is contextualized not only in a larger societal view but also how it relates to the researcher and their experiences.

Chang discusses some of the possible pitfalls in using autoethnography:

- Exaggerated focus on the researcher
- A focus on narration rather than analysis and interpretation
- Relying too much on personal memory without other sources of data
- Not respecting ethical standards relation both to oneself and others in self-narratives

These pitfalls are of course important to consider, and I have tried to counteract these through Chang's suggestion of using several other sources and methods for data collection: interviews, literature and artefacts (my own writings to back up my memory of events) (Chang 2008: 54-57).

Positionality

In the combination of the Black feminist anthropological and autoethnographical approach I am using the role of the researcher is paramount, as I provide my own experiences in this thesis my positionality is relevant. I will therefore describe myself so that the reader understands how I am positioned, using some intersecting categories that shape my gaze: Class, education and colourism.

I was born into a working class/working poor single parent household, money and time was my mother's struggle raising me. She worked fulltime in a factory setting, but we were in debt for most of my childhood. Food security was not a problem but it is fair to say that we were struggling until my teenage years. My mother did not finish high school and started working in the local factory at age 16. Through my education I have made a class journey, the social

and cultural aspects of my education have granted me privileges beyond my previous working class conditions.

My mother's family is white and Swedish and my father is of Afro-French descent. My mixed race granted me privileges growing up compared to other children of colour being racialized. My "Swedishness" was rarely questioned as I spoke Swedish with no accent and many assumed I was adopted because of my "Swedish sounding" name. My light skin also gave and still gives me some racial ambiguity shielding me from some anti-black racism.

These aspects of my history contextualize the autoethnographic snippets I this thesis, there are other intersections to my person but these are the most pertinent to the subject at hand.

Analytical framework and dealing with the data

My analytical framework based upon my theoretical framework, meaning intersectional, black feminist and post-colonialist analysis. How are my interlocutors experiences connected to these theories? If so how? If not, what other forms of analysis could describe their experiences?

The approach of combining ethnographic method and post-colonial feminist theory provides an insider perspective to black women in academia's life stories, their different voices and contexts brought together yet separate. To analyse my data I will use some of Julia Powles framework for analysis. The steps she proposes considers the informants experience of trauma, how the interview was performed (setting and emotions expressed around the interview), the current stage of life the informant is in and what themes and images seem to reappear (Powles, 2004:7-9). The last point I find very important for comparing and analysing my interviews.

Powles also describes the benefits of the life story interview in her studies with refugees, although refugees and black university employees and students in Sweden might differ quite a bit (though some of my interlocutors might have a history or family history of flight and conflict). Some of the advantages are still applicable, she states that the method:

- Allows the interlocutors voices to come through the text directly.
- Promotes complexity, the partial and particular of a person's experiences
- It in some ways promote agency of the interlocutor, by telling their story in their way and to some extent "control" their story.

- Can fill knowledge gaps and give new perspectives on the interviewees' experiences
- Can aid in understanding the impact of trauma. (Powles, 2004:1)

A part from Powles' (2004) the analytical framework I use is black feminist anthropological theory focused on an alternative activist practice in the discipline that encompass both theory and methods. Meaning that my research has the goal of transforming the current state of affairs for black women in academic spaces by bringing their experiences to the forefront (McClaurin, 2001:63). I do this through life stories, perspectives, autoethnography, it is a collaborative ethnographic knowledge production (McClaurin, 2001:64). The stories themselves are a critique, I collect and interpret them wanting to change current structures in universities and to illuminate strategies for dealing with such experiences. It's rooted in both mine and their situated knowledges (Haraway, 1988; Aull Davies, 2008:111).

The interview data was time coded, where I wrote what topics and themes were discussed at what points and then the parts that I wanted to use as either quotes or for further analysis and comparison was transcribed word by word. This method aided in comparison between the interlocutors and provided a good basis for a narrative analysis. Narrative analysis feeds into the life story interview approach, it focuses on the interviewees way of retelling and how they connect events (Bryman, 2012: 584). In this case the interlocutors experiences of racism and how they have made sense of these experiences are the narratives in focus. The criticisms of narrative analysis are rooted in not connecting the narratives to larger societal trends, and how certain narratives are shaped by common tropes. The example Bryman uses is narratives of chronic illness where the interviewee emphasize their competence, it highlights resistance and glosses over "failure" at the hands of illness (Bryman, 2012:585). This is certainly a perspective that pertains to my topic, resistance and taking action against racism are desirable traits. As I cannot control the way my interlocutors discussed their experiences, the one step I took to open up for other "less desirable" reactions were to leave the question open and not ask for their resistance strategies to begin with. For the students, I gave suggestions including silence as a reaction.

Selection of interlocutors
Faculty interlocutors

The scope being academic spaces, my main group of interlocutors are in senior positions in the academic hierarchy meaning post-doctoral studies and further. They have experienced the

role of the student, teacher and employee at the university, this provides insight to these different roles and the aspect of time. My goal was to have different backgrounds represented, those who were born and raised in Sweden and those who came here later in life.

Finding interlocutors proved itself to be difficult, since there is no way to search for black women in Swedish universities. I used Facebook groups for black people to describe my thesis and my need for interlocutors and word of mouth to receive tips. This of course limited the group to those in my network know and those in Facebook groups and their networks. These groups are based on anti-racist and feminist values, so one can expect that the people in them share some of these values and have some form of analysis regarding racism in Sweden. My own network is also skewed towards social sciences and the humanities, hence none of my faculty informants are in the "hard sciences"[3].

My goal was four or five interlocutors. I contacted about 10 women by email or via Facebook and three responded that they were interested which finally led to my interviews. The other people I contacted either did not answer or declined due to lack of time.

Student interlocutors

To find student informants I used the same method, posting in and messaging people from Facebook groups for black swedes and black students in Sweden. The five interlocutors are all under 30, ranging from bachelor students to a PhD student. Their field of studies include the humanities, political science, arts and engineering.

The power dynamic for both interlocutor groups are somewhat unusual for anthropology, I am "studying up" with the faculty interlocutors and "sideways"[4] the students sharing a similar position as myself.

Ethical considerations
My aim is to have some sense of transparency both in method and thesis, the method provides this through the collaborative nature in line with how Atkinson describes it: "The transcript of the interview could be used as a first draft by someone who wanted to go back over it and subtract, add, or revise anything." (Atkinson, 1998:24). The data was sent back to the faculty interlocutor, thereby allowing changes and follow ups. While time consuming and labour intensive for both researcher and interlocutor, Atkinson highlights its benefits for more in

---

[3] Meaning natural or physical sciences such as physics, chemistry and biology.
[4] Referencing Laura Nader's call to "study the colonizer rather than the colonized", see Nader 1972.

depth data (Atkinson, 1998:24-25). Most of my interlocutors have experienced harassment and discrimination there is a possibility of perpetrators using my material to further them, therefor I had to be even more careful in masking their identities and keeping some contexts vague.

The method is also helpful to minimize ethical transgressions. Bryman defines the four main factors that indicate unethical practice and method as:

- Lack of informed consent
- Possible harm to participants
- Invasion of privacy
- Deception (Bryman 2012:135-143)

With this method the interaction with faculty interlocutors can reduce the possible harm that they might face (through details that might expose their identity), and decide which material can be used (providing informed consent and avoiding invasions of privacy). One of the risks is that they are unaware of how the material will be framed in the final text which can be viewed as deception at worst and it also brings questions to the informed consent. Another possible problem with this method is lack of time or knowledge for the interlocutors to edit the transcripts leaving some details in that might expose them. Choosing this method, I assumed my main group of faculty interlocutors had the skills and time to edit and review the material. This turned out to accurate but there is a risk in this method, especially with time and the emotional toll it takes to go back into traumatic experiences.

Powles provides some good insights on how to analyse and deal with material that focuses on traumatic and difficult subjects. She suggests asking yourself: what is not being said? What is not elaborated on? Or when something is told minutely and vividly. (Powles, 2004:9). The key here is respecting the interlocutor's boundaries, if someone not ready or willing to discuss certain subject then just leaving it there.

There is the challenge of what a researcher can share in the interview, is sharing good to create a good discussion and rapport or can it turn manipulative (Aull Davies, 2008:111-112). I found it to be a good tool in some of the interviews to either directly follow up what someone was saying with sharing my own experiences or to after the interview discuss shared experiences and reflections. This was done from my own interest and wanting to have not only a good interview, but to also have a conversation with my interlocutors and genuinely share.

Results

The first part of my results section present my faculty interlocutors experiences. The discussions with my faculty interlocutors are presented without distinction, as though it is one person, their experiences and some direct quotes spread out through the results. This method was chosen to hinder identification. These results are based on direct quotes from our recorded discussion, some of my experiences and my transcription notes describing our discussion and the interlocutor's reflections.

In the second part of my results are the student answers, which are direct quotes from our email interviews followed with brief analyses for the different topics. None of the student answers included names or places, their answers have only been translated to English and edited to include answers relevant for the themes. Their fields of study are not included for risk of identification.

In third part I analyse faculty, students and my own experiences of the n-word in academic spaces using direct quotes, my own narrative and relating it to larger societal discussions through articles and theories. This leads into my discussion of the material as a whole, analysing and comparing it with previously presented literature and theories. The result sections and the discussion are guided by my research questions: describing experiences of racism in academic spaces, reactions to racism and strategies when faced with racism.

My faculty interlocutors

The three women I have interviewed have lived very different lives both inside and outside of academia.

One wasn't that bothered or interested in school growing up until she was shown there was a place for her in further education by being invited by an organization to be in those closed off spaces. Seeing others like her in those spaces made it possible.

One fought sexist men assuming that she had no place in academia and in her field, and she grew a thick skin and learned how to talk back, which made her a feminist.

One learned the hard way that hard work doesn't always pay off when your race and gender is stacked against you.

Reactions to racism

> …I don't know whether it is the media or the politicians or if there is some kind of unconscious collusion in re-defining racism to where they are making colour irrelevant. When in fact the subtlest and the most painful form of racism is precisely carried out based on colour and nothing else… I am happy with my colour I'm not saying I want to change it but it's not something I take a personal decision over, there is nothing wrong with me but I can't deny how others react to who I am.

She has previously denied that she faced racism, she told herself that it was other things and aspects, that it was just that *individual* and the system steadily denies racism so it must just be that *individual.* Now looking back, she sees that they have used her and her scholarly material, she thought her hard work and ambition would pay off and make them recognize her as an academic.

Her early university experiences with sexism prepared her and formed her response to racism, she faced sexism from colleagues because of her choice of study: women. She was the first woman in her institution and her topic of study was more provoking than her presence. She says she had to become thick skinned and "shameless", turning sexist opinions on the people spouting them and getting personal with them. She grew into what she today would call a feminist during those years. She refused to be belittled because of her topic of study and by extension they belittled her. They asked: What are you going to study about women? She asked them about the women in their life, are they not important?

Discussing her encounters with racism in academic spaces she recalls meeting a black man in one of her previous institutions.

> I must say he had a much more negative perspective, and it alerted me to the different ways of Africans, black people from Africa and black people from the New World react to white peoples' behaviour...When I look back has a lot of influence on how you take the dominant white environment's behaviour and I couldn't care less and I still don't. The only thing I fear is physical attack of my body. Attitude I can deal with; it just runs down my back it's the same way I dealt with sexism which I did as well.

The black man expressed having many racist experiences there, which is something she didn't recognize to the same extent there, perhaps partly because she did not teach there.

She feels she hasn't always dealt with racism in the way she wants to looking back, sometimes she has reacted and "ruined" the good atmosphere by being upset and leaving. Other times she has said nothing and felt bad about it and maybe talked to someone about it after. She feels racism can be very subtle, it's difficult to exactly pin point what is racist in the moment, the racism is flighty and evaporates. But that subtlety is also translated into who is

recruited and hired, if that subtlety is noticed depends on what experiences and views you have. She points out how people of colour can reproduce these racist structures, they experience racism but can access a certain kind of power by reproducing the structures. But those who discuss the prevalence of racism in the system or try to make changes, person of colour or not, are subtly or not so subtly attacked for it.

When she started teaching she noticed the students and colleagues having racist attitudes. She felt the students trying to be "helpful", unintentionally. The way she is perceived when she makes mistakes or even when she follows the rules differs from how her white and male colleagues are perceived and treated. She notices their subtle reactions and their body language, they don't think she notices but she says doesn't care. She does set very clear boundaries to her students continuing harmful and ignorant narratives concerning Africa and by extension its people, she does not let them speak for the continent or its people and asserts her knowledge.

She recalls being questioned by a black student from the African continent who perceived her as not caring about racism:

> It's not lack of knowing and not knowing or feeling but simply saying as long as I can do what I want to do, like that. So I remember her saying 'But these Africans they bow down to white people', that's her explanation … I asked her to come to my office so we can talk, she didn't come. I was trying to explain to her that other Africans are thinking about it … It's not because I can't fight but because I think it's worthless putting my energy in the wrong effort.

She feels that if she can continue her work to her satisfaction, it's not worth putting her energy towards arguing or discussing everyday racism. She also refers to how this attitude and strategy is something common among black people from the continent. But there is also a frustration, she discusses the differences when facing discrimination and oppression for her religion and other more "hidden" aspects of her. She says that here is a choice of how you disclose of your religion for example by clothing and symbols but it can to some extent remain hidden. Her blackness cannot be hidden; it is not a choice of whether you want to disclose of it or not. She says that people should of course fight for their rights to dress however they want, but there is a difference in how these different oppressions operate.

She misses the support and knowledges she has previously experienced and shared with other black people, people of colour and allies in another countries. There, socioeconomic background and cultural capital was a divider but there was still a community and a support structure among students and faculty.

Racism outside of the university

> I really didn't know racism until I landed in Sweden.

Inside of the university it's more nuanced, people try to negate her experiences but they have some sort of basic respect. Her judgements and decisions are still questioned in a way that white colleagues are not. Outside of the university its more obvious from both white people and non-black people of colour, for example going into shops is a situation where this is evident, the shopkeepers treat you as you won't be able to pay. Blackness becomes a class signifier.

I have myself felt the subtle and not so subtle racism when I go shopping, both in supermarkets and department stores. The shop security guards follows me, the cashier following my every move as I am are holding my wares, trying to catch me sneaking it into my bag or pocket. This treatment is amplified when I'm out with other people of colour and pacified when I'm out with white people.

Being questioned by students

> But their reactions to those things I do has a lot to do with me being black as well as being a woman.

She has had her authority questioned very directly by students, she always acts in the same way: ignore it and see if they continue. It's a waste of her energy and she sometimes tells other black teachers to not put their energy towards it. She describes a student barging into her office to question her grading. She has received a nasty letter from one of her students questioning her grading and a passive aggressive follow up saying that they now have a position in the university world. She has reacted by questioning their questioning. They question her mistakes and question her when she's following the rules. It's clear to her that they react very differently to her compared to her colleagues. She gives the example of being two teachers responsible for a course, her and a white man or woman. The students' response to her compared to her colleagues is noticeable in atmosphere and their body language. She perceives them as not noticing that she sees this difference in their behaviour.

She gives an example of a topic that is often questioned by students: The Trans-Atlantic slave trade. They undermine the subject with comments like "Slavery has always existed and people have always been enslaved". It is typically a white man commenting this. When discussing how "critiques" often come up when there is a lecture about post-colonialism, black diaspora and critical whiteness studies she says:

And it's not criticisms really, even if they are presented in that way, it's microaggressions[5]. They are not accepting the premises quite frankly and they can't see a black woman as someone who has anything to offer them intellectually.

She says that you separate yourself from the experiences to be able to say it isn't racism, being able to tell yourself "No it must be something else". There was one student in particular, he would offer his critique at every lecture, questioning every assignment and her. She says she can't be sure what he wanted but looking back she thinks he must have wanted to be stopped. She didn't stop him and it continued. It was him harassing her in front of the whole classroom, 60-75 students sitting there quietly, they were also tired of him but no one dared to question him, argue or resist his behaviour. They were all held hostage under his "critique". She now sees it as bullying or harassment, and it was quite scary looking back.

She generally doesn't perceive the students being upset or argumentative regarding racism in lectures but rather in seminars with fewer students, she feels that it challenges her as a pedagogue. On one hand she wants to have seminars with open discussions, but on the other hand she does not want the discussions upholding racist, sexist and other oppressive structures which can discriminate and offend someone in the seminar. The crux is when she is the one discriminated against in the room. The students are oblivious to the teacher's identity sometimes, making blanket statements about the people in the room. They assume everyone shares the same background and experiences, thereby erasing other identities. She has on occasion reminded them of her presence but it is a difficult situation being the facilitator and speaking up for yourself and others who might not be present. It hurts having your identity erased and overlooked. In some rooms and lectures her identity is the focus, it is different teaching or working with other people of colour that might share some of her experiences. Those spaces make it easier to share, since your identity is not erased but it does not overshadow other parts of you.

Structural racism in academia

I asked the interlocutors about structural racism in Swedish universities and how they perceived it being counteracted.

She says that when she was faced with racism outside of theory and books, she realized how structured it is and that it's built into people's mindsets. Where she lived before she never

---

[5] Microagression - a term coined by psychiatrist Chester M. Pierce describes how certain phrases and ways of questioning and/or insulting is used against people of colour, women, the LGBTQIA+ community and people with disabilities. Further reading by DeAngelis (2009).

faced racism, she knows exactly what it's like living without racism, so it is ridiculous when people question the reality of racism and the structure of it.

She discusses the way Swedish universities work against structural discrimination, she has heard talk of it but not seen much. She says there is an element of not consulting the people effected, talking over or for people without consulting them. But if you are included there is a risk there is a hidden agenda and being used as an alibi. We have rules, regulations and laws to counteract discrimination and oppression but:

> …There's a lot of fantastic documentation, rules and laws but it's also wrong to think because you have rules and laws in an institution or regulations or whatever that actually that what happens in wider society has nothing to do with it. Because the people who these regulations should apply to are seeing and hearing what goes on in wider society. As long as there is such depth of racism in Swedish society and there is in the university as well, we are just a microcosm of the wider institutions and no different.

She describes the difficult situation many are faced with after earning their PhD, working part time and unsecure employments perhaps at multiple universities. She recognizes how the racial hierarchy operates within this system, white men are fast tracked to secure positions, after them are white women, then non-black people of colour, and lastly black men and women. When she finally earned a secure position she thought things would change, and she would be seen as an equal by her colleagues. She still to this day feels like she is treated like someone working hours; that she can do a bit of everything and not receiving the responsibilities her co-workers are granted.

When asked about the ideal of meritocracy and who gains what merits she brings it back to norms and theoretical perspectives. The theoretical perspectives can grant you access to the powerful group who acquire funding, and thereby inscribing the assumed superiority of those perspectives. Norms are also very important. She discusses how norms play into recruitment and staying in their institutions, in Sweden informal networks are key even for jobs outside of academia, and seeing that Sweden is very segregated this of course effect who is even considered for different positions. She says that people often only associate with people of similar class backgrounds which is also connected to racialization processes. Considering this when people in academia recruit, you recruit someone you know or someone who is a friend of friend. You need someone who will "vouch" for you. When she had that she finally got considered, before that she was just sending CVs and wondering why no one answered. Seeing these informal structures in Swedish society, she has used her power within this system to vouch for and approve of other people. Even when it comes to hiring, the question

of "What is this person like?" comes up and the person needs approval from an insider. Her colour does not matter as much in this context but that approval is important, but this process of approval is to her clearly based on class and race, she says that if you are white and middleclass these questions are not that important. That person is acceptable and has capital, they conform but if you are a person of colour the approval and vouching matters.

She believed in the notion that Sweden was equal, that there would be rewards for the hard working and ambitious. She finds it difficult to come to terms with an unfair system, the pervasive image of the equal and fair Sweden shattering around her.

Driving forces and harmful narratives

I asked my interlocutors what drive them in their work and what values they would not compromise in their research or in their classrooms.

She asks her students why they want to study Africa in different ways, there are often well intended answers of "I want to help". She sees this as an indication of a paternalistic attitude. Sometimes she answers that with: "You think people there don't know how to solve their own problems?" They mean "well" but that attitude would not be applied to Sweden or other so called industrialised countries, that tells her that they have a value issue with African people, and by extension her. It is important to her to change the image of Africa, to make sure that certain interpretations do not prevail and become the norm.

She would never compromise her postcolonial perspective. She will not overlook critical whiteness and works to keep an intersectional perspective.

To her meeting the students and giving them tools to critically interpret the society we live in is important. In her role as an educator it is important to keep the class room discussions open and safe, keeping discussions from turning racist and xenophobic. She wants the students to understand the political nature of their education and see themselves as political agents.

Strategies and coping
She has pulled back from trying to convince those who claim to be anti-racist "allies", not expending her energy on the same issues and debates.

She does not engage in debates anymore; she doesn't have the energy. The level of public debate and discussion has effected this, the racism is psychological violence. She feels a vulnerability in the current climate of more visible racism on social media and in political

debates. The community she has been a part of does not exist here in Sweden in the same way, there is no "backup" to support you publicly. Privately it is important to have someone to vent with, someone who understands.

A new hope

She has hope for younger generations, she sees that it's not just one small black community in Sweden right now. Many are meeting on social media and are trying to create a larger community. She says that there is a discussion and discourse growing, like the book Svart Kvinna[6] (Ndow Norrby, 2015). It's becoming public discourse with lots of different writers. But within academia she is worried, when is the next generation emerging here? She feels that people are encouraged by social media, they are finding others with similar analyses, that makes it easier to set boundaries and speak up against oppression. The university is needed, it gives you a credible platform but there are structural conditions within that you have to work with. It is an environment that effects people, she feels it when she's teaching as sees one or two students nodding. It is activism to inspire, giving new tools and perspectives through teaching and mentorship.

Students answers

Experiences of racism

I asked the students if they had experienced racism and sexism in Swedish universities and if so to describe in detail.

> Yes and no. There have been several attempts by white students to "hijack" discussions a la #AllLivesMatter and centring themselves. My classmates have never for example used the n-word in front of me, that I know of. But I still think offensive acts include to taking up too much space in conversations and discussions of specific non-white experiences. There was one particular white male classmate who was constantly telling me about my experiences of racism and that I really hadn't faced any.

> When I was applying for a job as an aid to students with learning disabilities at the university, the recruiter laughed at my surname and said that "African surnames are always so funny sounding". He later claimed that he didn't mean anything by it and that he thinks the surnames are nice.

> Yes, I experienced a Doctor whose research group that shared a space with mine would say racist and other hateful things about Africans. Another time a professor in a course insisted on only speaking English with me and the only other black student in the class but Swedish to the rest. It didn't matter how many times we answered back in Swedish, every day for three weeks he "forgot" and spoke English to us.

---

[6] Translation: Black woman. It is an anthology by Fanna Ndow Norrby collecting black women's experiences of racism, microaggressions and racialized sexism in Swedish society.

> There have been occasions when the entire class has been watching video clips (related to the area of study) with black people in them but the teacher and white/non-black students have made fun of the people of the video, based in racist ideologies. Homophobic and racist narratives have also occurred in our course literature.

The answers above are examples of overt racism in a university setting. The first student being told they haven't faced racism and silenced in discussions of racialized experiences, the second one being ridiculed by a during a job interview for their name, and the third bringing up hate speech and a professor refusing to speak Swedish with black students. The last example combining teacher and students engaging in racist ridicule. The following examples hint at larger structures and less overt accounts.

> My university is very white and you can tell by the teachers' rhetoric especially when they are teaching about producing countries. Also with 99 percent of the students being women we have been warned several times to be careful while travelling in producing countries because we are women. Recently a teacher shared their own and a colleague's personal "experience" where they warned us for the future about us being targets as women, western women also. The countries they brought up was Egypt and Indonesia. They indirectly said that they are dangerous rapists so that we should be cautious. It's not dealt with at all it's just part of the jargon, no one critiques or questions it with the majority being white.

> …I haven't experienced any discriminatory comments but I have become more aware of white people's denial of societal structures. For example, I wrote an essay using a postcolonial perspective, when I was supposed to be a respondent I was critiqued by our teacher for "overstating" in my text regarding racism against black people. A part from that, I studied at university for two years and never read a single text by a black/non-European author, the syllabus was consistently very American and Eurocentric- despite the topic being conflicts in Africa and the Middle East.

> Within academia I think most people feel well-read and knowledgeable when it comes to how our society is shaped. But as I have explained… That is rarely the case. Despite that my programme is supposed to be broad and international we have never discussed for example post colonialism, intersectional feminism, racism in Sweden/other counties, discrimination, societal structures and so forth. The focus has been Western authors theories and very rarely anything to question that. Therefore, I feel that many in academic circles hide behind their education to call themselves politically correct, when they are unwittingly reproducing discriminatory structures. It's is basically veiled. The racism and discrimination I have faced elsewhere is more clear and direct.

While the first example describes some more overt racist tendencies, it's coming from well-meaning teachers and is rooted in "concern". The teacher's anecdotes inscribe brown and black men as predators towards women (particularly western women i.e. white women). It also disregards the power structures at play, they are describing white women travelling to "producing" countries for work or education without an intersectional analysis, assuming the category of "woman" outweighs class and whiteness. Both the student discussing the subtlety of racism in academia and the student having their essay questioned point out racism shrouded in an academic critique, but also the erasure of people of colour in course literature.

Excluding research from oppressed groups or "the Other" being studied effects the students and further marginalize critical perspectives (as they are not presented). On a similar note, I asked the students about their experiences of how Swedish universities include perspectives from students of colour and the support available.

> Where I have studied racialized people there haven't been any offered to talk to a counsellor about mental health related to racism or the pressure to prove that you are just as intelligent, if not more intelligent, than you white classmates. Sure, there is a general support, but the schools aren't considering other needs. If the schools actively worked with a deeper decentralisation of whiteness, whiteness norms and racism, where the course literature would leave the cemented Eurocentric self-centredness…

> No not at all. The education is always rooted in a Western perspective while" different" voices are denied.

> There has been a continuous erasure of non-white perspectives and thoughts around what literature that is valid - where European and North American literature, with specifically white authors has been perceived as more relevant and trustworthy over non-white writers' texts/perspectives.

> No I don't feel that. There is a distinct separation between them and racialized people. The rhetoric and the way you relate to people with a different skin colour is so unmodern. Sometimes subtle, but often salient for the racialized person.

> I can't comment on the entirety of the Swedish university system but at my university there has been a change. I don't know why or how but 10 years ago we were 5 black people on campus. Today the representation of black people is noticeable, clear and hard to ignore.

A common theme brought up by the students is a lack of people of colour and non-western perspective as a missing piece in their educations. The second and third student both see people of colour being erased and being portrayed as irrelevant or invalid. The first student describes feeling a need to prove their intelligence towards white students and the mental toll that takes. That need seems rooted in assumptions that they are not as intelligent as their white peers. The lack of representation of people of colour, women and other marginalized groups reflects the students need to prove themselves. If similar voices not valid or important in the course literature and syllabus how can the students be? The last student sees changes happening in the representation of black people as students suggesting this might change things.

One students experience of thesis writing

A student I encountered online discussed having met difficulty with their chosen topic. I asked her to describe her process of writing a thesis and what resistance her ideas and perspectives faced.

I wrote a thesis about separatist forums online and what significance these platforms hold to the feminist and anti-racist movement in general, and also if and how the creation of your own platforms (news media, blogs, Facebook groups) affect the narrative in mainstream media. My teachers on one hand found it refreshing and imaginative but on the other provoking and unachievable. I was discouraged and was told that it would be easier if I reformulated my research question so that it wouldn't focus too much on "race". I kept writing with the same idea and research questions, but my supervisor cancelled several meeting for tutoring so I didn't get any support in my writing, despite the support and guidance from a supervisor being mandatory! I didn't receive any particular help with the literature either, everything was up to me. When I was on one occasion given advice on a book it wasn't in any way suitable for my subject. Another issue was that my supervisor did not have any personal experience or frame of reference to what I was writing. Him being a white man, which does not necessarily mean that he lacks analyses, but seeing that he belongs to and is served by the structures I wanted to highlight I the thesis, I found that he was incapable of challenging my text so that it would excel to the next level.

This example shows that although the student's idea was questioned, the lack of support or knowledge of the chosen topic is what made her essay writing so much more difficult. The supervisor did not understand the student's analysis and how her experiences shaped what she was writing and was seemingly unwilling or unable to provide guidance. The other students' experiences of lacking perspectives and theories from people of colour might play apart in this case, the supervisor and other teachers being unfamiliar with theories of power structures and race.

Methods of dealing with racism and harassment

The students' answers are varied on how they have dealt with and reacted to racism, but the theme is that most of them comment and/or objects to racism in academic spaces.

Sometimes I go quiet from chock but I try to question.

I have like in the previous example questioned and looked for statistics or sources to the "advice" or information. Trying to make it more obvious and clarify that what they are saying are preconceived notions and not facts. This is never appreciated and is met with a classical awkward silence or an uncomfortable atmosphere

I have reacted verbally, written email and I am now contemplating reporting a teacher. I have had some encouraging emails and comments from other students when I have protested against teachers expressing themselves problematically, but nothing more than that.

I have always been the angry black person speaking up, for all oppressions! It can lead to repercussions, but in my case I have substantial knowledge on what might happen if that would happen. We were only three black people in my class at university and two non-black people of colour, it was basically only me and another person that would object. No white person did anything to take a stand against racism.

Within academia I always made sure to protest against racism when I had several witnesses around me, to ensure that people could corroborate what had happened if the teacher or another oppressor, would claim something else or try to worm their way out of it. Outside of academia the racism is harsher and is often backed up with acts of violence, this has not happened at the university, however it can feel more difficult to point out racism and racist

structures at university if your teacher is the offender, seeing that hierarchical power positions comes into play for how and if a student has the courage to protest.

The students are vulnerable as they depend on their lecturers and teachers to continue their education through their grading (which is not wholly anonymous in take home exams and seminars). But they are also in some ways freer than an employee of the university to be critical and the repercussions of speaking up might not be as long lasting. The people who have protested are prepared: they have witnesses, they look up statistics and knowing what repercussions are possible. There an awareness of the power structures at play between student and teacher.

What can be gleamed from the students' answers is also that the support for those speaking up and discussing racism and other oppressions is quite small, emails and other students not interjecting to support or even reacting. These are the students answers to the question if they have been supported by other students or teacher/lecturers in racist discussions and situations.

> No not once. Most of them are afraid of conflict and always manage to interpret the teacher or lecturers' racism as unproblematic.
>
> In the first case I didn't do anything but to comment to the people in the break room that it isn't okay to talk like that. If I would have reported the teacher without evidence, I wouldn't have gotten very far. In the other case several students reported the professor together. In that case I was supported by the PhD council at the university.

In the first quote, there is again a reluctance from other students to get involved, in the second quote there is a reluctance to report because of a lack of evidence. It is unfortunate that a lack of evidence would stop someone from reporting offensive language or racist discourse, but as the student state there needs to be several students reporting and working together. Which could be difficult if the other students take part in racist discourse or see nothing wrong with it in their lectures or interactions.

To further examine what experiences are specific to academic spaces, I asked the students if there is a difference between racism faced inside and outside of academic spaces and how it manifested.

> Not really. The rhetoric is similar and my experiences have been the same. The exceptions are when drunk white men approach you. Then the racism is clear and direct.
>
> Yes, in academia the racism comes from people trying to prove their racist opinions with various "facts". They usually keep a civil tone but it's still disparaging, outside of academia it's usually just ignorant drunks shouting things like "go home!".
>
> There is such a clear power difference when you face racism as a student compared to when you face it out and about. And you are also surprised as you expect to be treated with respect

at a university! But many of the teachers are white men 50+ years, who celebrate a Western perspective on most topics, it's hard to study post colonialism or racism with old white men.

Contrasting these answers with the students' answers regarding experiences in academic spaces, the idea of racism being subtler in academia is yet again present. The two first students describe experiences with strange drunk men as the most overt racism outside of classrooms. This also mirrors the faculty interlocutors experience of racism being more overt outside of academia. The last quote brings up the power imbalance between student and teacher, a relationship quite different from strangers on the street.

The N-word

In one of the interviews we discussed the use of the n-word in academic spaces. My interlocutor shared her experiences with the discussion surrounding the word and a moment a colleague discussed and used it.

> X: I have noticed, I don't know if there is some kind of psychological need to express it but there has been a debate and people are starting to recognize that it is a word that many find offensive and discriminatory but it still pops out in the retelling of other people using the word and then you say it several times. There's an example 'I know someone from such and such country and she calls this friend n-word, and she uses the n-word and he says he's an n-word'… I was sitting there and started to think how many times do you need to say it? It is being legitimized through this black man's usage of the word, do you understand? It's legitimized in a strange way, and I felt that she really enjoyed rolling the word over her tongue in some way… I have noticed that it's centred around people not expressing it themselves but discussing someone else using it and then saying the word several times.

> Me: Instead of saying that this person says this and then discussing but using the abbreviated version of the n-word?

> X: Yes exactly, instead of having to express it three-four times and then legitimise it through someone with interpretive prerogative. It's a bizarre legitimization of the prerogative taken back by a white body. To able to use it while referencing someone else, but what do we know that person might not exist or they do but either way this is a way of legitimizing its usage and *getting the enjoyment of rolling that word over their tongues* in places and a society where you can't, then you get this opportunity of saying it three-four times. This is what I don't understand…It's like some form of Tourette's, you need to get it out is the way I interpret it.

Her discussion of this obsession and the pleasure derived from saying the word brought me back to one of my own experiences in an academic setting where a student used a similar way of legitimizing its usage and how the administration and other students handled the aftermath. Below is an excerpt from my research journal.

> While transcribing X's interview last week I was listening to the part where she talked about her colleagues' pleasure in saying the n-word, I recalled my own experience with the n-word in academic rooms. During a weekly seminar which I and a few other students chaired, a student was for some reason bringing up ways you can use words to hurt people and then gave examples like "stupid gay" and then used the n-word. I had a gut reaction and swiftly said that

we shouldn't be using that word, the person who said it seemed flabbergasted and quickly two other students jumped in and one said "Why can't they say that?!" and the other who is black said that they are fine with the word being used. This reaction was quite shocking as I had previously during the seminar informed another student that the term they were using about Roma people was considered a slur which they accepted and no one had intervened or even seemed bothered.

This incident was brought up the week after when the whole class had a lecture (funnily enough about post-colonialism), it started badly with the teacher saving the discussion for last after the lecture, some had started gathering their belongings and others had left. The teacher discussed the offensive nature of the n-word and how its usage in whatever form is not compatible with the schools ethical and anti-discrimination guidelines. A black student quickly started asking the teacher what word they meant and practically bullied them in to saying the word in its entirety in front of the class. The black student thought it was ridiculous and wondered what other words one can't use and the teacher suggested using ones' sensibilities which the student found very entertaining. Then a white student raised their hand and asked "Is there a difference between using n****r and n***o?", another classmate sitting close to me exploded in frustration: "You're doing the thing! We just said that we shouldn't be using those words!". It pretty much ended on that note. The interesting thing was that both in the seminar and in the class room the people defending or questioning the n-words offensiveness were Swedes or people who have lived in Sweden for a long time, none of the international students or other racialized students defended or even discussed it. And twice it was used in the same way that X described as an example of what another fictive or real person might say.

One part of this event that has confounded me until this day, is when I told the student to not use an anti-Roma slur and there were no objections or even a discussion. The perception of my power versus Roma peoples (who to my knowledge were not present in the seminar room) might be one explanation to this. The discrimination of particularly EU-migrants of Roma descent was at the time one of the hottest topics in both media and among us students, the discourse I could pick up from other students was mostly "sympathising" and upset over their tough living conditions and discrimination.

In recent years the discussion of Sweden's discrimination of its minorities which include Roma and travelling peoples has been brought to the forefront (Lappalainen, 2005; de los Reyes and Kamali, 2005), especially relating to Roma EU-migrants who survive on street performance and/or begging on Swedish streets. It has become a representation of their marginalized position in Sweden and Europe at large. The discourse of Afrophobia and anti-black racism in Sweden has mostly been tied into racial stereotypes in art, books and other media (most notably Lilla Hjärtat och alla små brokiga/Little Pink and the motley crew) where those (particularly black and racialized people) opposing the pickaninny imagery where described as intolerant, loud, wrongfully affronted and wanting censorship (Thorsborg, no year; Linde 2012; Thente 2012; Ravini 2012; Nilsson 2012).

The difference of framing between these discourses are obvious: the discourse of Roma peoples focuses on providing housing, food and employment for a group historically persecuted in Europe for centuries (or the sentiments encouraging continued persecution) and anti-black racism is framed as a cultural debate coming from a small "oversensitive" group that are "well off" compared to Roma people. While this is partly true, the confrontation with racist structures as part of Swedish society might be more difficult to stomach when the solution is not limited to the individuals monetary and charitable contributions. The marginalization of Roma people is rendered (neoliberally) technical (Li, 2011), making it seem as it can be solved with money as if the marginalization and discrimination is not cultural, structural, based in racism and prejudice. The cultural debates of anti-black racism are in this way not perceived as a vehicle of oppression and dehumanization furthering interpersonal and structural racism (Kamali, 2005:29-30).

Bringing this back to the seminar, me asserting my right to not be faced with abusive language, places me, similarly to the critics of "Little Pink" as a loud, oversensitive person wanting to censor the discussion. The questioning of me is also instantly legitimized as one of the other black people present gives their blessings for non-black people to use the n-word which instantly neutralized my comments. To provide context, this person is -unlike me- from the African continent and less racially ambiguous making their opinion more valid. Here the privilege I embody through my nationality (Swedish), mixed heritage and light skin colour undermined my authenticity.

To understand this dynamic, we need to understand some of the ways colourism operates. Colourism is a complex subject that effects people of colour all over the world, it's expressions vary but what is universal is that lighter skin is favoured over darker. Colourism in some Asian countries predates contact with white colonialists although Keith and Monroe state that the pre-existing colourism has intensified its potency (Keith and Monroe, 2016:4-7).

Margret Hunter proposes that lighter skin can be viewed as social capital, she asserts that lighter skin is conflated with beauty. The social capital of beauty can be as Hunter puts it "converted" into educational and economic capital (Hunter, 2002:177-178). Hunter describes how lighter skin places you closer to whiteness altering the particular brand of racism you experience and imbues you with qualities associated with whiteness (intelligence for example), possessing a white parent adds to this and might provide you with structural privileges such as networks and economic capital (Hunter, 2002: 188). As lighter skin places you closer to whiteness your authenticity, culture and identity can be questioned. Hunter uses

Barack Obama as an example, his blackness was questioned in 2007 with headlines such as "Is Obama Black enough?". The tactic separating him from other black people by implying his lack of loyalty towards the black community (Hunter, 2007:244-245). The questioning of lighter skinned individuals is of course unfortunate and hurtful, but is not comparable to the discrimination darker skinned people face effecting their economy, education, job opportunities and finding romantic partners (Hunter, 2007:246).

When pondering colourism, education and privileges in Swedish society the situations I can see as the most applicable is that of having and growing up with a white parent. The white Swedish parent might be perceived as more relatable to teachers and negate some of the racism (from both teachers and other students) by giving the young student a connection to whiteness (Hunter, 2016:57). And maybe a claim to "Swedishness", especially if you have a "white Swedish" passing name.

Students experiences the N-word and other offensive language

The student interlocutors also have experiences of the n-word and other offensive language being used in the classroom.

> A teacher used the n-word without problematizing it or opening it up for discussion, a WHITE teacher openly said that the n-word is not racist and that it's ridiculous that people (black) are offended.

> In some cases words that some people (mostly white) don't find offensive are used for example 'mulatt'[7].

> A teacher was discussing power in a text and described racial hierarchies, she started off using PC words like POC to then saying that the only black men not perceived as a threat were the "House n****rs", then she wrote it on the blackboard. I reacted strongly and she apologised and erased the word. Two days later I was thrown out of her seminar because I couldn't add to the discussion (I chose to not be active because yet again the discussion of racial hierarchies would come up and I did not feel safe with the teacher).

In these examples the teachers are using the n-word to "illustrate" or describe and some are minimizing its offensiveness outright from their position as teacher and lecturer. The student who was thrown out of the seminar felt they could not participate because of the teacher's previous actions, the room was therefore perceived as unsafe for this black student to discuss and learn. I have also had a lecturer use the n-word to exemplify but was to stunned to act in that moment. Afterwards I felt bad for not speaking up or at least talking to them after. Sometimes just the thought of speaking up or even writing to someone is exhausting. Regardless of the teachers' intentions, the casual usage of the n-word and minimizing its

---

[7] Swedish word for mulatto. The word has casually been used to describe mixed race children, ignoring the words origin and offensive nature.

effects are creating unsafe and even hostile spaces in academia for black students, other students of colour and lgbtqia+ students.

The discourse surrounding the n-word in these academic spaces do not account for black people being present or hurt by its usage. Karen Barad discusses the power of discursive practices (performativity) and the materiality of discourse, building off Michel Foucault and Judith Butler. When she describes discourse, it is not the speech act or the text but the context that inhabits them. The context shapes, limits and enables knowledge production and which "canon" is drawn upon (Barad, 2008:136-138). If certain bodies have been excluded from these contexts and the knowledge production, then the canon does not include them or at worst attacks them. Using the n-word to exemplify violence by using that very violence, inscribes racist discourse and ignores those bodies still oppressed by those discourses. The key here is to see that certain bodies are naturalized in these spaces and contexts; they are the default while others are anomalies. When a black student or someone else protest or acknowledge the racist discourses performed, they are perceived as the ones introducing the violence. As Sara Ahmed puts it "To speak of racism is to introduce bad feeling." (Ahmed, 2009:47). The student who was quiet during the seminar was perceived as a nuisance enough to be dismissed, her silence echoing previous discussions.

Discussion and analysis

In this chapter I will explore how my results relate to the theories I have presented and similarities (or dissimilarities) with other research in the field.

When I began doing this research and preparing questions, I did not expect such similarities with research and case studies from the United states and the United Kingdom. After performing the interviews with faculty members, the data from black students provided new insights and reaffirmed my own experiences. Based on the results my study, the number of interlocutors are somewhat limiting. A larger number of participants would produce a wealth of knowledge, providing even more heterogeneous accounts and experiences. The nature of e-mail interviews has also provided some limitations (despite my efforts to prompt detailed accounts) for in-depth accounts and the difficulty to ask follow up questions.

The experiences of racism in academia presented by my interlocutors are varied and complex. Various systems of oppression impact them differently through time and space, despite this I have found general themes found in their experiences as black women in academia. The first

is questioning of narratives, perspectives and your person in academic spaces. The second is the expectation and bind of "embodying diversity". The third theme relates to my second research question; the methods, strategies and reactions when faced with racism.

The questioning of narratives

Chavella Pittman inspired some of the questions that guided my research. Her findings outline how faculty women of colour are being questioned in their roles as teacher and researcher, as well as outright harassment (Pittman, 2010: 187). One of Pittman's informants discusses how she is approached and addressed by her students, they write e-mails with a disrespectful tone that she doubts her white male colleague receive (Pittman, 2010:188). This is reminiscent of my interlocutor who describes students barging into her office and writing her nasty letters to question her grading. She feels scrutinized by the students, but they seem unaware that she notices the difference in their attitude towards her.

My faculty interlocutor who was harassed by a white male student in front of the entire class repeatedly, mirror Pittman's findings that the main offender in her cases is a white man. As does the student who has her experiences of racism dismissed by a white male classmate. Pittman ties this behaviour to hegemonic (white) masculinity in academia. The woman of colour skews this norm, causing white male students to question their competence to "reassert their dominance and restore the normative status quo" (Pittman, 2010:189). Navarro et al. also describe this power struggle through the constant questioning from a white female student, the student having a counterpoint to every statement and trying to "one up" the lecturer throughout the semester (Navarro et al, 2013:452-453). One of my faculty interlocutor's states that the questioning is rooted in the disbelief in the competence and worth of a black woman as an academic. This doubt or outright questioning seems less tied to gender in my interlocutors accounts, especially the students' experiences with female teachers and lecturers upholding racist discourse.

The questioning of narratives relates to my earlier discussion of the n-word. There is a disregard for the people effected by its usage and their protests. But the protest hinges on there being people effected to speak up and "defending" their humanity.

Embodying diversity

The embodiment of diversity ties into the questioning of narratives, it can be seen as a pre-emptive measure to the questioning or a response to questioning. When the faculty interlocutor try to hinder seminar discussions from turning oppressive or racist, she is

expecting that questioning or other oppressive behaviours are going to occur. In my own seminar experience and the interlocutor nipping paternalistic narratives of Africa in the bud are responses. We share a feeling of responsibility not only to ourselves but others, we are responsible for both addressing and teaching (including students and faculty) others about these issues. Sara Ahmed describes that the embodiment feels personal, the oppression being conflated with your person. Ahmed was the only person of colour at her institution and teaching the course about race being the example of how "diverse" the institution is. Addressing racism from that position places the responsibility of action upon you (Ahmed, 2009:41-42).

In the students' accounts of being the only ones to protest, receiving very little support from others provides an example of this. They are the only ones noticing or being effected by what is taking place. In this embodiment there is a risk of having anger ascribed to you. Ahmed examines how anger is attributed to black women and people of colour when we address racism: "The exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence." (Ahmed, 2009:49). This relates back to the student who was dismissed from her seminar for being silent. Her silence introducing "bad feeling" and being "angry". Being perceived as angry invalidates your argument, making you seem irrational. The students describing their preparedness for "arguing", debating or reporting seem to be a tool to minimize this perception of being angry, lying or irrational. They are viewing their actions through the eyes of the oppressor, using their double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903) to assess their actions.

Methods of coping with racism and harassment

A key aspect of the methods is that they shift over time and space, in which methods are available physically and mentally. The racism and harassment that my interlocutors have met in these spaces are as some of them describe it as "flighty", subtle and something one realizes after the moment has passed. The students describe the actions they take, but very little of what emotions are present and the aftermath. The faculty rarely speak of their colleagues or superiors' racist behaviours; the discussion is on a structural and institutional level regarding recruitment and which research topics are valued.

The faculty interlocutors methods are varied but they have to some extent distanced themselves from the more public and argumentative approach. There is an element of exhaustion. An interlocutor describes her realization that she has ignored it and not called it racism or discrimination, thinking that it's the problem of that individual person

discriminating or acting racist, not wanting to face the truth that she has been used and cheated as part of a larger structure of racism. She then after realizing the structure and recognizing it as racism taking on every exhausting struggle until she couldn't. Another interlocutor describes confronting the students questioning her by questioning them back. Both approaches relate to setting boundaries, not being roused into "discussion" or questioning back set the clear boundary that you will not engage.

The student interlocutors have methods in place to deal with racism, being aware of what repercussions or arguments might come from their protest. The students describe looking up sources and facts to question, writing emails, speaking up in the situation and being aware of witnesses to help corroborate their accounts. The preparedness suggests that they have experienced similar situations before, but also the specific analysis of power structures. Some provide reflections of how the teachers have power over them and how that effects the possibility of protest. The students accounts regarding how people of colour are excluded in their curriculum and literature provides insights to how they see racist structures mirrored on an institutional level. One student suggests that there should be counselling or support adapted to students of colour and their needs (needs created by racist structures). A possible reason for the students awareness and strategies might be the online forums and the black community that is forming in Sweden. The faculty interlocutor who shares her analysis of what role social media plays in building communities might be right. These forums provide support, and are used to share experiences and strategies.

 The reactions of chock, silence or denial might relate to the elusiveness of racism. The Swedish self-image of being anti-racist and refusal to acknowledge experiences that question that self-image feed into this. This image is based upon a rejection of historical connections to colonialism and racial oppression (Lappalainen, 2005:93), placing racism outside of Swedish society. As Irene Molina describes, the explanation method for racism in Sweden today is rooted in "cultural differences" (Molina, 2005:99-100), but as one of the interlocutor's state:" …the subtlest and the most painful form of racism is precisely carried out based on colour and nothing else.". Ylva Habel describes Swedish racism being hidden behind terms such as ethnicity, culture and multiculture, all describing people of colour (Habel, 2012:101-102). The colour blind racism avoids and ignore how societal constructions of race effect those who are racialized (Brodkin et al, 2011:547). As the faculty interlocutor describes, she did not realize that certain actions were only carried out based upon her skin colour. Not speaking of it protects you in some ways, not forcing you to embody the race ascribed to you.

Sara Ahmed suggests failing to embody diversity, not ignoring and using your anger to fight racism (Ahmed, 2009:51). These are important points, but I would push for the importance of allies who fight with us inside of academia and outside. Not only in cases of clear harassment, but carefully examining how structures of oppression are present in their day to day life.

Conclusions

This thesis collects some of the experiences and accounts of black womanhood in Swedish academia. It provides the perspectives of black young women as students, their struggles and strategies. It also provides the reflections, hopes and stories of black women employed by Swedish universities. The findings in this thesis suggest that power structures regarding race and gender are considerably unexplored in university classrooms and at an institutional level. It also suggests that the young black community in Sweden are knowledgeable about these issues, and can share their struggles online, which was unavailable for my faculty interlocutors in their student years.

The narratives of black women in academia, be it faculty or students, are questioned. Their experiences both inside and outside of academia are met with doubt. They question themselves over their experiences and try to make sense of them. Their accounts in this thesis describe their experiences in academic spaces, which differ in some ways from their experiences in other spaces yet still reflect societal structures and discourse. I argue that the Swedish self image and denial of racist structures in Swedish society stunts the struggle against racism. There is an importance in my interlocutors experiences by themselves, but the context, power structures and society that shapes them must be scrutinized.

In a time when the budding black community in Sweden are sharing our experiences with each other online, the stories of resistance and coping seem to inspire hope and courage. This might be a future field to explore, how black organizing online can build communities and their effect on activism offline. Another area for further research would be how colourism and other intersections of oppression shape the black experience in Sweden.

References

Afrosvenskarnas Riksförbund (2016) *Om Afrosvenskarnas riksförbund [About Afrosvenskarnas riksförbund].*

URL: http://www.afrosvenskarna.se/om-afrosvenskarnasriksforbund/ Accessed 2016-10-26

Ahmed, S (2009), "Embodying diversity: problems and paradoxes for Black feminists", *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12:1, 41-52. DOI: 10.1080/13613320802650931

Arpi, Ivar (2016) Ett eget kafferum [A coffee room of their own] (previously titled Strange fruit hanging from the kafferep). *Svenska Dagbladet* 2016-09-26.

URL: http://www.svd.se/strange-fruit-hanging-from-the-kafferep Accessed 2016-10-31.

Atkinson, R. (Ed.). (1998). *The Life Story Interview.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Aull Davies, C. (2008) *Reflexive Etnography – A guide to researching selves and others.* London & New York: Routledge

Barad, K (2008). "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter". In Material Feminisms Ed. Alaimo, S and Hekman, S. Pp.120 – 154. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bokmässan (2016) Får man lov att använda n-ordet? From the Göteborg Book fair's programme 2016, no author.

URL: https://bokmassan.se/programs/far-man-lov-att-anvanda-n-ordet/ Accessed 2016-10-31.

Brodkin, K, Morgen, S and Hutchinson, J (2011) Anthropology as White Public Space? *American Anthroplogist*, Vol. 113, No. 4. pp: 545-556. DOI: 10.1111/j.1548-1433.2011.01368

Bryman, A (2012) *Social research method.* Fourth edition. New York: Oxford University press.

Chang, H (2008) *Autoethnography as method*. Walnut Creek: Left coast press, Inc.

Crenshaw, K (1991) Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review* 43: 1241-1301. DOI: 10.2307/1229039.

de los Reyes, P and Kamali, M (Ed.) (2005) *Bortom Vi och Dom Teoretiska reflektioner om makt, integration och strukturell diskriminering*. [*Beyond us and them- theoretical reflections on power, integration and structural discrimination*] SOU:2005:41. Stockholm: Fritzes Offentliga Publikationer.

URL: http://www.regeringen.se/rattsdokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2005/06/sou-200541/

DeAngelis, T (2009) Unmasking 'racial micro aggressions'. *Monitor on psychology, American Psychology Association.* Vol 40, No. 2. Print version: page 42.

URL: http://www.apa.org/monitor/2009/02/microaggression.aspx

Du Bois, W.E.B (1903) *The Souls of Black Folk*. Reprint 1969. New York: New American Library.

Eison Simmons, K (2001) A passion for sameness. In McClaurin (Ed) *Black feminist anthropology- Theory, politics, praxis and poetics*. Pp. 77-102. New Jersey: Rutgers University press.

Gregory, S (2001) Black Faculty Women in the Academy: History, Status, and Future. *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 70, No. 3, pp. 124-138. DOI: 10.2307/3211205

Gupta, A and Ferguson, J (1992) Beyond "culture": Space, identity, and the politics of difference. *Cultural Anthropology* 7(1): 6-23. DOI: 10.1525/can.1992.7.1.02a00020

Habel, Ylva (2012) "Challenging Swedish exceptionalism? Teaching while Black", in *Education in the Black Diaspora: Perspectives, Challenges and Prospects*, Freeman and Johnson, (Ed.) Routledge, pp. 99-122.

Haraway, D (1988) Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective**.** *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3. Pp. 575-599. DOI: 10.2307/3178066.

Hunter, M. (2002) "If You're Light You're Alright": Light Skin Color as Social Capital for Women of Color, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2. Pp. 175-193. DOI: 10.1177/08912430222104895.

Hunter, M. (2007) The Persistent Problem of Colorism: Skin Tone, Status, and Inequality. *Sociology Compass* 1/1 (2007): 237–254. DOI: 10.1111/j.1751-9020.2007.00006.x.

Hunter, M (2016) Colorism in the Classroom: How Skin Tone Stratifies African American and Latina/o Students, Theory Into Practice, 55:1, 54-61. DOI: 10.1080/00405841.2016.1119019.

Högskoleverket, (2005) *Dold könsdiskriminering på akademiska arenor – osynligt, synligt, subtilt. [Hidden genderbias in the academic arena- invisible, visible and subtle]* Rapport 2005:41 R. Högskoleverket: Stockholm

URL:http://www.ukambetet.se/download/18.1ff6bf9c146adf4b4967dc/1404210546967/0541 R++Dold+k%C3%B6nsdiskriminering+p%C3%A5+akademiska+arenor+- +osynligt,+synligt,+subtilt.pdf Accessed 2016-10-31

Kalonaityte, Kawesa, V and Tedros, A (2008) Svarta(s) strategier: att hantera rasism och diskriminering som svart svensk [Black(s) strategies: dealing with racism and discrimination as a black Swede]. *Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift* 15, 3–4. pp. 210–220.

Khosravi, S (2010) *'Illegal traveller'- an autoethnography of borders*. Basingstoke :Palgrave Macmillan.

Marander-Eklund L. & Östman A.C. (2011) *Biografiska betydelser- Norm och erfarenhet i levnadsbeträttelser[Biographical meanings- norms and experience in life stories]*. Vilnius: Gidlunds förlag.

McClaurin, I. (Ed) (2001) *Black feminist anthropology- Theory, politics, praxis and poetics.* New Jersey: Rutgers University press.

Molina, I (2005) Rasifiering- Ett teoretiskt perspektiv i analysen av diskriminering i Sverige. [Racialization- A theorectial perspective in the analysis of discrimination in Sweden] In *Bortom Vi och Dom Teoretiska reflektioner om makt, integration och strukturell diskriminering* [*Beyond us and them- theoretical reflections on power, integration and structural discrimination*]. SOU:2005:41. Ed. de los Reyes and Kamali. Pp. 96-112. Stockholm: Fritzes Offentliga Publikationer.

URL: http://www.regeringen.se/rattsdokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2005/06/sou-200541/ Accessed 2016-10-31

Mångkulturellt centrum, (2014) *Afrofobi. En kunskapsöversikt över afrosvenskars situation i dagens Sverige. [Afrophobia. An overview of current knowledge regarding Afro-Swedes' situation in Sweden today]* Botkyrka: Mångkulturellt Centrum.

URL: http://mkcentrum.se/2015/04/samma-land-men-olika-villkor/ Acessed 2016-11-04

Nader, L (1972) "Up the Anthropologist- Perspectives Gained from Studying Up" In Dell H. Hymes (Ed.) Reinventing Anthropology. Pp. 284-311. New York: Pantheon Books.

Narayan, K (1993) How Native Is a "Native" Anthropologist? *American Anthropologist*, New Series, Vol. 95, No. 3, pp. 671-686. DOI: 10.1525/aa.1993.95.3.02a00070.

Navarro, T., Williams, B., and A. Ahmed, (2013) Sitting at the Kitchen Table: Fieldnotes from Women of Color in Anthropology. *Cultural Anthropology,* 28:3, 443-463.

Ndow Norrby, F.(Ed.) (2015) *Svart Kvinna [Black Woman]*. Lettland: Natur och Kultur.

Nilsson, U (2012) "Intoleransen får aldrig bli kulturens metod" [Intolorance can never become the method of culture] 2012-11-29. Dagens Nyheter.
URL: http://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/kulturdebatt/intoleransen-far-aldrig-bli-kulturens-metod/.
Acessed 2016-10-31.

Lappalainen, P (2005*) Det blågula glashuset- Strukturell diskriminering i Sverige* [*The blue and yellow glasshouse- structural discriminiation in Sweden*]. SOU 2005:56. Stockholm: Fritzes Offentliga Publikationer.

URL: http://www.regeringen.se/rattsdokument/statens-offentliga-utredningar/2005/06/sou-200556/ Accessed 2016-10-31.

Li, Tania M. (2011) Rendering Society Technical: Government Through Community and the Ethnographic Turn at the World Bank in Indonesia. In *Adventures in Aidland: The Anthropology of Professionals in International Development*. David Mosse, (Ed). Pp. 57-80. Oxford: Berghahn.

Linde, M. (2012)"Tusen nyanser av svart" [Thousand shades of black] 2012-10-05. *Dagens Nyheter.*
URL: http://www.dn.se/kultur-noje/kulturdebatt/tusen-nyanser-av-svart/. Acessed 2016-10-31.
Palmgren, A. (2011) Autoetnografi- att läsa andras kroppar [Autoethnopgraphy- reading other bodies]. In *Etnografiska hållplatser- Om metodprocesser och reflexivitet* Gunnemark, K. (Ed.) (pp. 173-192. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Pittman, C (2010) "Race and Gender Oppression in the Classroom: The Experiences of Women Faculty of Color with White Male Students", *Teaching Sociology* 38:3 183–196. DOI: 10.1177/0092055X10370120.

Pripp, O. (2011) Reflektion och etik. [Reflection and ethics] In *Etnologiskt fältarbete.* Kaijser L. & Öhlander M. (Ed.) (Pp. 65-84). Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Ravini, S (2015) "Hur kunde det gå så fel?" [How could it go so wrong?] 2015-06-22. *Göteborgs posten*.

URL: http://www.gp.se/kulturnoje/1.1158380-hur-kunde-det-ga-sa-fel-   Acessed 2016-10-31

Riksdagen, (2013) *Upphävande av kravet på sterilisering för ändrad könstillhörighet* [*Revoking the compulsory sterilization when reassigning gender*.]Socialutskottets betänkande 2012/13:SoU24. Riksdagen: Stockholm.

URL: http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/arende/betankande/upphavande-av-kravet-pa-sterilisering-for-andrad_H001SoU24   Accessed 2016-10-25

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present.* Harvard university press: Camebridge, Massachusetts. London, England.

Sveriges universitetslärarförbund, (2011) *Kokbok för jämställd akademi. [Cookbook for equal academia]* Sveriges universitetslärarförbund: Stockholm

URL:http://www.sulf.se/Documents/Pdfer/Press%20opinion/Skrifter/SULF_kokbok%20for%20en%20jamstalld%20akademi.pdf Accessed 2016-10-31

Thente, J. (2012) "Jag fick nypa mig i öronen när jag hörde att barnfiguren var rasistisk" [I had to pinch my ears when I heard the children book figure was racist]2012-09-12. *Dagens Nyheter.*
URL: http://www.dn.se/dnbok/jonas-thente-jag-fick-nypa-mig-i-oronen-nar-jag-horde-att-barnfiguren-var-rasistisk/

Thorsborg, C (no year) "Hjärtat som brast" [The heart that broke]. *Vi tidningen.*
 URL: http://www.vi-tidningen.se/hjartat-som-brast/ Acessed 2016-10-31.

Verna M. Keith & Carla R. Monroe (2016) Histories of Colorism and Implications for Education, Theory Into Practice, 55:1, 4-10.