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**A qualitative study on Invisible Racism, Racial Bias and Inequality
among Afro-Swedish Healthcare Workers in Sweden**



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Abstract

For many years, migration and racialization has formed a central theme widely discussed in our world today. The central notion of difference; vis-à-vis what is not seen, that is, absence of a certain element portray a huge standing in issues of race in recent times. Thus, while migration has existed for many years, communities of color continue to be perceived as “foreign matter” in white societies (El-tayeb 2008). Such is the case in Sweden, where racism is typically seen to be invisible to the naked eye. While it is widely portrayed and hugely imbibed with a considerable amount of this happenings visible in society on a daily basis, there seem to be a case of ‘selective blindness’ where ‘white bodies’ have somehow come together unequivocally to see what they want to see. This has been made possible due to the fact that there exist a form of understanding which prohibits ‘racism’ from being discussed in the Swedish society.

The aim of this research is to analyze labor market discrimination, racial bias and invisible racism on African-Swedish health care workers in Sweden. My focus is on displaying the invisibility of racism among Afro-swedes in Sweden and how they cope with it. Thus, drawing on the experiences of 8 African-Swedish healthcare workers with the aid of a qualitative research analysis, the findings suggest that a huge gap of invisible racism/bias exist in the Swedish labor market. The study also reveal that the labor market is tough on minority groups in Sweden and tougher for people of color as they have to work twice as hard, go through much more to be employed and identified as Swedish in the society.

Keywords: Labor market, Afro-Swedes, Invisible Racism, Bias, Heath Care, Sweden, Identity.

1.1 Introduction

Historically, reports indicate that people with black skin have lived in Sweden for several years. While some came as a result of kidnapping and the eventuality of slave trade to neighboring countries, others came of their own volition; most of which based on asylum or basically to migrate. Despite this, studies indicates that there is little to no research on Swedish society attitude to people with black skin-those of African heritage. Just as Eriksson (2016) points out, even though this research has never been conducted, the picture of black people in Sweden ‘were based on extremely derogatory and coarse stereotypes influenced by biological ideas of race’, this images were used to legitimize colonial oppression. Racism as a discourse denotes and connotes ideas about skin colour, cultural affiliation and development which is somehow linked to phenotypical features. Just as Smith (2006) indicates, the very illustration of difference in a sentence divides readers into two; those who understand the meaning and those who do not. While migration and globalisation plays a huge role in unifying and connecting people to different identities, it also displays effectively the differences which exist. Studies indicate that a large number of people living in Sweden are fractured by experiences of racism, bullying and violence. This is why HübINETTE & Lundström (2014), posits that Sweden tops as one of the most segregated and highly racialized among western countries in the world. Even though Sweden tops the chat as one of the most vocal countries in the world who supports fundamental human rights and freedom, however this reputation has led the country into sidelining and neglecting the issues of discrimination and racial differences in play within the system. This has somehow led into structural discrimination against foreigners particularly people of color within the country.

As Goldberg (2006) writes, “...borders are often constituted through race...” Hence, when borders are shaken up; when boundaries are threatened, or when a certain group seek to re-define their voice, become proactive and more known, the threat must be suppressed in other to confirm hegemonic dominance (Shamir 2005). This is therefore manifested in different forms which is typically expressed through racism. Gates (2016) defines racial bias as a harmful aversion to, stereotyping of, or discrimination against a race. In this regard, while people posit that bias can be both positive and negative, I argue that bias is solely negative as the opposite of bias is “preference/unbias”. Bias is described as giving a settled and often prejudiced outlook to an issue. In the case of racial bias, much attention has not been given to this area as this practice is clearly

perpetrated in our society through different categories as it impacts race and diversity. This bias is expressed in different forms in Sweden.

First, in the political sphere in Sweden, it is reported that People of color are the least represented group amongst all officially recognized minority groups in political office and at all political levels (Afrophobia Shadow Report). In 2010, the Swedish election caused quite a bit of trouble as the Sverigedemokraterna titled their campaign, “Vi gillar Olika!” (We like different!) And the slogan was titled ‘Give us Sweden back!’ (*‘Ge oss Sverige tillbaka!’* (Hübinette & Lundström 2014). Karlsson (2012) argues that this mindset of ‘Sverigedemokraterna’ can be traced back to this party having a history of connections to the right-wing extra-parliamentary political sphere which was a well-known organization titled ‘Bevara Sverige Svenskt’ (Preserve/Keep Sweden Swedish) that was active in the 1980’s; actively working against immigration, for repatriation and “solidarity among Swedes”. Even though the party was dissolved in 1986, it was reformed together with what was then ‘Framstegspartiet’ and eventually became Sverigedemokraterna (Karlsson 2012).

In the educational system, the Swedish National Agency for Education, Skolverket (2001) reports that children of minority groups, notably of African descent expressed the notion of offensive language from teachers, not getting assessed fairly compared to other children, given fewer opportunities to talk to adults in school and having fewer chances to defend themselves against racist attacks because of fear of repercussions. Hence, the report by the Swedish National Agency for Education and Save the Children (2002) further highlighted that racism, discrimination, bullying, injustice and violence is highly perpetrated in the Swedish educational system’ and in Sweden generally (Hällgren 2006). Reports from Parszyk (1999) on a study of Swedish schools, indicated that teachers seemed unaware of the presence of racism and suggested that racism was not a feature even though students on the contrary spoke of their experiences of school racism (Hällgren 2006). Also, Norberg reported that antiracist study materials issued by the National Coordination Committee against Racism (Inrikesdepartementet 1998) to some schools were not used at all by some, even though quite a small number were used by some others. The arguments put forward by those who did not were that the school had no problem with racism and that the materials were irrelevant to the students because they were so ‘very Swedish’ (mycket svenska) (Hällgren 2006).

In the labor market in Sweden, Olt (2013) advocates that the Discrimination Act has been set as a guide for the workplace and society to protect people who need extra care and are vulnerable to discrimination. The aim of the Act is, “to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age” (SFS 2008:567). Despite this, Hübinette & Lundström (2014) reports that Sweden ‘has recently, and rapidly, also become one of the most statistically segregated and segmented societies along racial lines, at least in the Western world, and particularly in respect of the residential and labour markets’. They further posit that the disparity between native- and foreign-born adults as regards to unemployment in Sweden is the highest among all OECD countries (Regeringskansliet, 2011). Also, when it comes to residential segregation, Sweden stands out in comparison with most other Western countries as having perhaps the most extreme racial segregation pattern in the OECD (Socialstyrelsen, 2010). In a news article by thelocal.se (2013), Aleksander Gabelic, a Social Democrat MP stated in his statement that “Unemployment among the foreign born is still three times higher than among people born in Sweden,” and that “A Swedish name is often a prerequisite for being called to an employment interview.” In this statement, Gabelic argued that if Sweden could imbibe and kick against the discrimination of women in male-dominated fields and vice-versa, such energy used to fight should be applied to push for companies to employ people of different ethnic backgrounds thereby increasing diversity in workplaces.

In a report released by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (2003), different factors were listed as reasons for discrimination against minority groups in the labor market in Sweden. First was statistical discrimination. This factor suggests that employers are more willing to employ people from countries that they are familiar with or that surrounds Sweden than further nations away from Sweden. In this regard, it is difficult to obtain employment according to competence but based on ethnicity or nationality. Secondly, this report also presents knowledge in Swedish and social competence as important factors that affect the chances of obtaining a job. This report indicates that these demands are sometimes exaggerated and used as an excuse for not employing a migrant since English (which most migrants speak) is an accepted and used language in Sweden. While having the knowledge of Swedish as a language seems fair, it is important to note that this migrants may experience difficulty in learning Swedish as most of them live in segregated areas where migrants of foreign-born origin reside (European Monitoring

Centre on Racism and Xenophobia 2003). Thirdly, indirect discrimination mainly expressed from social networks can be another reason behind migrants deteriorated labor market situation in Sweden according to this study. This has been linked to network recruitment; one which researchers argue has increased as a means of job recruitment in Sweden. Reports indicate that it has become a more common strategy by which people get employed. Since Hübinette & Lundström (2014) states that 80 percent of all Swedes rarely or never socialize with people of a non-European origin outside of working life, migrants and people of ethnic minorities are excluded indirectly from the labor market. Lastly, reports by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (2003) posits that self-employment has become the order of the day in Sweden which most migrants use as the only alternative to being unemployed or working in low-status professions below their skills. Thus, this research is predominantly based on the fact that an invisible gap of racism coated in racial bias exist between white people and people of color here in Sweden with a focus on the labor market by virtue of their skin color and phenotypical markers. While this seems as a wide area of research, this thesis has been narrowed down to look into the healthcare sector and the discrimination people of Afro-Swedish identity face within their work environment. Analyzing and discussing this issues therefore provides an understanding for adaptation as migration and globalization are proponents of the 21st century. This study will focus on invisible racism in Sweden, followed by arguments on racial bias among health care workers in Sweden where relating issues will be identified.

1.2 Aim and purpose of the Research

In the words of Activist Aysha Jones; one of the organizers of the black lives matter protest held in June 2020 in Sweden (with over 70,000 people in attendance virtually) was interviewed in an article with the Swedish newspaper local.se, she states that:

“The biggest problem in Sweden is that the country does not acknowledge that it has a huge problem with racism.... Sweden is just a hypocritical country. It wants to be a friend that everyone likes” (The local.se 2020)

Thus, I argue therefore that it is in this ‘unacceptance and denial of racism’ as a societal problem in Sweden that its “invisibility” is largely built upon. This supports the claim by Hübinette and

Hörnfeldt (2012) who argues that color-blind ideology (selective/well-intentioned blindness) has been the standard to address racism as if it does not matter or totally non-existent in the first instance. A practice which Goldberg (2006) describes as being present in most European countries. Therefore, just as Smith (2006) highlights, my interest lies in the way in which racial, cultural, and ethnic difference as well as categorization are present in the lives of black people here in Sweden; one which makes them to experience racial biases, judgement, condemnation, harassment, and discrimination by virtue of their skin color. Thus, the aim of this paper is to explore invisible racism (selective blindness) as a form of practice in Sweden and how this leads to racial bias(es) in work space among people of color in Sweden, particularly among health care workers. The focus here is to look at how denial of racism is a common strategy to avoid confronting and recognizing racism vis-à-vis racial bias in work spaces and how this affects black people in their work space. More so, using different articles and texts by scholars and researchers of racism and whiteness studies both in Sweden and in general, this paper seeks to analyze and address the following research questions;

- What are the challenges people of color undergo in their work spaces?
- How does invisible racism contribute to racial practices in Sweden?
- What effect does invisible racism have on the way people of color perceive themselves in their work space?

1.3 Limitations

In terms of limitations, this research focuses on Afro-Swedes experience in the labor market in Sweden; with a focus on healthcare workers. Since this Afro-Swedes do not have to be born in Sweden to qualify to be a part of this research, they should have been resident in Sweden for over a decade, have the Swedish citizenship, have studied to be a healthcare worker and consequently working in the healthcare sector; hence their experiences might differ. Also, another limitation to the study is the small sample size. Owing to this, since this findings cannot be generalized (Bryman 2012), it is imperative that the data collected is of high quality, well-interpreted and carefully analyzed.

Also, due to the job of my interlocutors (hospitals, clinics and laboratories) and the covid-19 virus, it has been difficult to get access to this group of people as I, the interviewer cannot go in and out

of hospitals freely as I could have before the pandemic. More so, since my interlocutors are not located in one or several places together as a group, coupled with the spread of the virus, most of the healthcare workers I contacted explained how they were so busy at work, some I scheduled zoom meetings were unable to show up or forgot since they had little time to rest and more work to do. While some showed up, they did not have much time for follow-up questions and some went as far as asking that the interview do not exceed 30-40 minutes. With all this in mind, participant observation was difficult as all interviews were done over zoom, Facebook audio/video messenger, WhatsApp etc.

Additionally, when I began considering the topic of invisible racism, racial bias and inequality of Afro-swedes in the Swedish labor market my scope was much wider, I wanted to interview Afro-swedes about their experiences working in different sectors/industries within the Swedish society, but this was narrowed down to the healthcare sector. The experiences of Afro-swedes in the labor market are wide and the means by which racism is carried out on this group varies, and deserve its own thorough investigation which is quite small for a master's thesis to accommodate. Thus, even though the small group of interlocutors limits the scope of the study, the goal is not to provide a generalization of Afro-swedes experiences in healthcare, but rather to unfold their experiences within structures, framework and studies in Sweden as a means of educating the public on the need to see each other as equal.

1.4 Relevance to Global Studies

Racism, whiteness and deskilling are global phenomena. They are expressed differently around the world, however they are continuously linked to one another. With globalization, a variety of issues begin to arise and interact, which goes in line with economic and cultural power of a group or people. One of such issues is migration, from as far back as the existence of man, people have always moved from place to place, however with globalization, migration have become more refined, announced and visible.

Globalization has also informed and raised questions on identity and belonging. The human and global interconnectedness to create a form of contact and linkage with people anywhere in the world has led to migrants seeking to unite and find each other within a defined territory. Not only

this, the challenges posed by migration causes problem of assimilation and the need to identify with a host country; thus becoming a discourse within the field of global studies.

Most importantly, in a globalized world, it is important to consider how the world is shaped by looking into how we make the world for ourselves and people around us. Also, understanding and researching on how we speak about the world helps us to challenge some social processes and concepts such as race, inequality, and whiteness etc. while re-writing this concepts and making the world habitable for each other. While this concepts are widely pronounced all over the world, the Swedish context is used as a setting for a global discussion on structures of oppression, deskilling and racial trajectories in this research.

1.5 Literature Review

My thesis explores invisible racism and racial bias among people of color in Sweden and how these aforementioned topic leads to discrimination among workers in their work environment; particularly the healthcare industry. My focus is on displaying the invisibility of racism among Afro-swedes in Sweden and how they cope with it. In this regard, Afro-swedes are referred to as people who are identified as having an African-Swedish background and are also referred to as being a part of the African diaspora through their identity and sense of belonging. Thus, they share some challenges on the Swedish labor market and their experiences at their work environment.

1.5.1 Afro-Swedes

Statistically, Sweden is said to have a population of over 10 million as of January 2021. According to Afrosvenskarnas Riksförbund (2015), it estimates that there are over 150,000 Afro-Swedes living in Sweden (Ehrensträhle 2020). Also, Mångkulturellt centrum, also states that over 180,000 people, which includes 60% foreign-born and 40% Swedish-born should be included in the group of Afro-Swedes (Ehrensträhle 2020). According to Statistics Sweden, reports from 2016 shows that some 18 percent of the 10 million residents of Sweden were born abroad. Also, reports from Statistics Sweden also indicate that 5 percent of those born in Sweden are born to two parents of foreign nationals, while another 7 percent are born to a Sweden-born parent and the other a foreign-born parent (Osanami et al 2018). Studies also highlights that Afro-Swedes are highly discriminated and segregated against on the housing and labor market which presents them as

having the highest unemployment rate than other minorities and original Swedes (Ehrenstråhle 2020, Hübinette and Lundström 2014). This is why Hübinette and Lundström (2014) reports that in the spring of 2012, despite the global economic crisis, the unemployment rate for native-born majority Swedes aged 25 was said to be 3.4 percent, while that of young adult immigrants was said to be 4–6 times higher than other minority group. Thus reports also show that more than two out of three of unemployed people in Sweden are majority Afro-swedes (Hübinette and Lundström 2014). Ehrenstråhle (2020) also reports that they are also seen as the poorest group in Sweden according to Diskrimineringsombudsmannen (Swedish Equality Ombudsman).

Not only this, Afro-Swedes are concerned mostly when it comes to ‘Afrophobian’ hate-crimes. Sveriges Riksdagen (2020) defines Afrophobia as a collective term for racism, discrimination and hate crimes against people of African descent. This concept became accepted in Swedish politics and in the general debate, largely due to the Afrophobia report published by the Multicultural Center in 2014, at the request of the then government (Sveriges Riksdagen 2020). The group exposed to Afrophobia in Sweden are Afro-Swedes (persons born in sub-Saharan Africa or born in Sweden with at least one parent born in sub-Saharan Africa). A report from ‘Afrofobi’ also highlights that Afro-swedes are most vulnerable to violence, hate crimes and everyday racism than other minorities and Sweden, also this was reported to have increased by 24 percent from 2008 (Ehrenstråhle 2020). In 2014, following a 5-day visit of a United Nations human right experts, the United Nations released a news report slamming Sweden for its growing hostility towards people of color and a populated increase of ‘Afrophobia’, hate crimes, violence and racial discrimination on people of African descent. According to this report, “Afro-Swedes and Africans with whom they met expressed their experiences of multiple forms of discrimination based on their skin color, race, religion and sex”. Thus, the lack of equal access to justice, increased racial profiling and the failure to effectively investigate, prosecute and deter ‘Afrophobic’ hate crimes has allowed for afrophobia to metamorphose over the years and cause for Afro-swedes to be a target of racial and ethnic discrimination in the Swedish society.

1.5.2 Labor Market in Sweden

In 2018, CEMFOR (Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies and Racism) under Länstyrelsen Stockholm produced a report commissioned by the County Administrative Board of Stockholm County which discussed in details and provided empirical knowledge about anti-Black racism and discrimination in the Swedish labor market. In this report, the data included every registered immigrant in Sweden from age 20-64. For easy analysis also, categorization on Afro-swedes were divided into two; first are the category of people within the age 20-64 born in Africa and the second was the category of people born in Sweden who have at least one parent identified as having an African origin. This report aimed to answer a variety of questions some of which includes: Do Afro-swedes and the rest of the population enjoy the same access to the labor market? Do Afro-swedes enjoy the same opportunities as regards career advancements and attainment of high-career positions and managements? The report highlights the following:

- That Swedish labor market is categorized by a high degree of horizontal segregation as Afro-swedes are seen to have low status and low paying jobs. Thus, it is highly difficult for Afro-swedes to attain higher status, salary and move to higher positions despite their educational achievements.
- As regards pay gap, that Afro-swedes are paid between 10-36 percent less than the rest of the other population. More so, Afro-swedes are underrepresented in high paying jobs and managerial positions while they are overly represented in low paying jobs. Hence, it is ten times more likely for a person from the 'other' population to hold a managerial position than an Afro-swede.
- In terms of unemployment, reports also highlights that Afro-swedes are unemployed the longest compared to other population. Furthermore, for the 'other' population, the number of unemployed days are significantly reduced with an increase in his/her educational level attainment. That is, the higher the level of qualification and education, the higher the chances of employment. However, the reverse is the case for Afro-swedes. The higher the level of education, the lower the chances of employment.

In general, this report show that anti-black discrimination and racism negatively influence the situation that Afro-swedes find themselves in the Swedish labor market. This report also highlights that the situation confronted by Afro-swedes in the Swedish labor market is worse in reality than

what the data presents. Also, the European Network Against Racism (2015) in a report titled 'Afrophobia in Europe' stated that African migrants have the highest rates of unemployment regardless of how long they have resided and no matter how qualified they are in Sweden. Thus, racism and its invisibility prevalent in the Swedish society has made it so that Afro-swedes are under-represented, unemployed and lack opportunities than the other' population in Sweden.

1.5.3 Segregation and Diversity in Swedish Work Places

Integration is the opposite of segregation. Segregation is seclusion and separation. Segregation breeds inequality. Segregation is isolation and distance to or from a group. Segregation is underrepresentation in jobs, housing and the society. Segregation is not static or accidental. It is preconceived and evolves. Segregation is deliberate. Segregation is undesirability of a person or group. Segregation is a lot of things. But for the purpose of this thesis, segregation is likened to the condition of Afro-swedes in Sweden. In all the definitions of segregation listed above, segregation encompasses the overall condition of Afro-swedes in Sweden. In all, segregation is defined as a socially constituted process of difference, displayed within the racial hierarchy in society (Wingårdh 2018). To understand fully the attributes of segregation, it is categorized into economic, residential or social segregation. Using this attributes to highlight segregation in the Swedish society, Socialstyrelsen (2010) reports that this is dominated by immigrants and visible minorities (Wingårdh 2018).

On the other hand, Sweden is regarded as one of the forefront countries in relation to diversity in the world with over 15% of the 10 million people born in countries other than Sweden. Hence, diversity in Swedish work place should be an acceptable font just as cultural diversity in Sweden is paraded to the world. However, core diversity in the work place in most Swedish institutions has been largely impossible and less discussed. According to Brandström (2018), in a report by Mulinari (2012) it was discovered that it was easier to discuss a 'we' against gender-based discrimination than discrimination based on ethnicity (or race) at Swedish workplaces. One outcome of this poor integration of cultural diversity in workplaces in Sweden is to resign or work twice as hard as 'others' to be recognized. Also, reports in another study also highlights that to be accrued some level of integration and prevent racial connotations, some participants reported to

change their names in their job application. Hence, one begin to wonder if cultural diversity are practiced in Swedish work spaces or quite the opposite. On the other hand, previous research from mainstream Swedish migration has blamed segregation and unemployment among non-white minorities on the social and cultural ‘deviancy’ and ‘abnormality’ of non-Western people (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009) in a bid to take away the blame from them and place it on the migrants themselves. Sweden therefore lacks the ability of acceptance of integration and diversity of other minority group into their work environment; particularly those regarded as being of African descent.

1.5.4 Invisible Racism

Sweden is considered to be a paradise for human rights, where social justice, gender equality, integration and acceptance of immigrants (refugees, asylum seekers and migrants) have been accomplished to the fullest extent (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009). In recent times, studies emerging from new critical migration research posit this image of Sweden as false by discussing that Sweden is not a haven for migrants from the developing world and people of color (Hübinette and Tigervall 2009). Despite this, effort to tackle this and talk about this issue so as to find ways around it is largely frowned on in the Swedish society leading on to a large resistance and widespread backlash to this research area. Unlike the situation in the USA; typical of Sweden like in all other Scandinavian countries, topics concerning race is so much a taboo (Hübinette Tigervall 2009) such that reports displays that in articles and books where ‘race’ is supposed to be mentioned it is being replaced with the word ‘ethnicity’. Hübinette and Lundström (2014) also highlights a government report about the future of Sweden which states that outside of working life, 80 percent of all Swedes rarely or never socialize with people of a non-European origin.

On the other hand, invisible racism is typically a way of defending “whiteness” (swedishness) while reprovng “others” who have clearly gone beyond their boundaries. The resistance to explore the role of this ‘selective blindness’ and the construction of difference within the Swedish society is highly present within the Swedish academia (Mulinari and Neergard 2017), one which this study aims to establish. More so, this certainly draws in the notion of “Us/Them”, “Others/Otherness” clearly illustrated in the book “black skin, white masks” by Frantz Fanon (2008). Thus, this paper will argue that social construction of difference has produced a form of racial bias to people of color in their work spaces which has consequential reproduced a semblance

of ‘selective blindness’ to white people in the manner which black people are racialized effortlessly with no one speaking up, making this practice seem acceptable and inculcated in the society.

1.5.5 Swedish Whiteness

Frankenberg (1997) argues that “whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege”. Secondly, she posits that it is a “standpoint,” a place from which white people look at themselves and ‘others’, and at society. Third and most importantly, “whiteness’ refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed”. In reading through this, I recall the arguments by Hübinette (2012) which points out that in trying to understand the standpoint of Swedish whiteness and marginalization, the historical background can be traced back to the privileged position of ‘Swedes’ being referred to as the “whitest” of all white people (Hagerman 2006; Schough 2008). Hence, even Afro-swedes born in Sweden, or mixed Swedes or adopted mixed breeds despite residing and lived in Sweden all their life are highly discriminated against as a result of their ‘non-white body.

Furthermore, Hübinette and Lundström (2014) define whiteness as a site of power which intersects with other categories such as citizenship, culture, race, religion and ethnicity. Thus, Ahmed (2007) describes whiteness’ as the institutionalization of a certain ‘likeness’, which makes non-white bodies feel uncomfortable, exposed, visible, different, when they take up space. Furthermore, it is seen as a location of structural advantage, as a pivotal analytical category for understanding a white nation in crisis and its intersection with class structures and gender relations (Hübinette and Lundström 2014). Such is the case of Sweden, where a white person is a Swede and a non-white person is non-swede (Hübinette, and Lundström 2015). For example, Hübinette and Lundström (2015) reports that the media and police when reporting news on shooting in Malmö city, the victims are regarded as “immigrants” and “foreigners” despite them living all their lives in Sweden and being of Swedish nationality. In this regard, ‘Swedishness’ is equated to Whiteness and Whiteness is Swedishness, anything other than this is “un-swede” or “non-swede”. This comes as a surprising development owing to the fact that 25 percent or 2.3 million swedes of the over 10million residents in Sweden are of foreign background, of which 8 percent are referred to as Afro-swedes (Hübinette, and Lundström 2015). In this regard, it serves the argument by Hartmann

(2009) which posits that whiteness is mostly enabled by the dominant group in a society while also playing a key role in inter-group relations and maintaining its position atop the ethnic hierarchy. This pre-conception of Swedish Whiteness are imbibed in work environment in Sweden whereby Afro-swedes are not said to measure up to white swedes despite attaining same level of qualification as them or even better in some cases. Thus, Sweden has a nature of being conservative of jobs to native Swedes compared to Afro-swedes.

1.6 Theoretical Framework

1.6.1 Structural racism and Institutional Racism

Griffith et al (2007) defines institutional racism as a collective failure of any organization to administer appropriate and professional service to people because of their color, culture, or ethnic origin. Such racism is said to be perpetrated within an organization. More elaborately, Griffith et al (2007) argues that institutional racism can be operational at three level within an organization, namely: the intraorganizational, the extraorganizational and the individual. While institutional racism within the extraorganizational involves reciprocal relationship across varied organizations, the intraorganizational focuses on relations within the organization and the individual level discusses operates through behavior, attitude and beliefs between and among staff members. In this regard, our focus will be on the intraorganizational and individual level.

Structural racism on the other hand are exemplified in macro level systems, social forces, institutions, ideologies, and processes that interact with each another to generate and reinforce inequities among racial and ethnic groups (Gee 2011). Research poses that structural racism is the most profound and pervasive form of racism which encompasses all other forms of racism (internalized, institutional, interpersonal). In all of this, Hübinette and Lundström (2014) posits that Sweden has recently, and rapidly, become one of the most statistically segregated and segmented societies along racial lines in the western world and particular of interest, in the labor market.

1.6.2 Racism and Racial Bias

Racism; a word which according to Fredrickson (1934) was first used in the 1930's by the Nazi's to base their persecution on the Jews, has become loosely used and unstable for our beliefs on our understanding of what behaviors and beliefs are considered as 'racist'. He argues that a racist attitude or ideology is preconceived through ethno-cultural differences that are regarded as innate, indelible, and unchangeable. He also posits that racism is seen in its clearest form when ethnic differences that are firmly rooted in language, customs, and kinship are overridden in the name of an imagined collectivity based on pigmentation, as in white supremacy. Similarly constructed as a theory closely linked to whiteness, it is a concept that shapes white people's lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life (Frankenberg 1992). Racism on the other hand has been defined by different scholars to mean different things, however it can be defined as a "white issue," that is, an issue that shapes white experience as well as that of communities of color. Wingårdh (2019) argues that "race is performative, and repeatedly defined and redefined by those who live it, those who see it, those who do not see it and those who claim not to see it". More so, Hartman et al (2009) defines color-blind racism as a process which can exist when whites disavow prejudice, but at the same time decline to support structural remedies such as affirmative action, which they may see as favoritism. This puts forward the argument by Moule (2009) who posits that racial bias are rooted in stereotypes and prejudice, one which is learned and imbibed as a normal form of socialization and practiced unconsciously overtime. Moule (2009) in his article described racial bias as 'a blink of the eye' racism coated with unconscious racism and reproduced in the form of invisible/selective blindness. He argued that this comes about because people respond to their gut feelings about situations with a non-white person due to their black skin color. On the other hand, a government report points out that denial of racism is a common strategy employed in Sweden to avoid confronting and recognizing racism in the society (Integrationsverket, 2002a, 2003). Nevertheless, reports also indicate that Sweden is not necessarily a good host for black minority group. Studies also show that lives of a large number of young people living in Sweden are fractured by experiences of racism and xenophobia. Despite overwhelming research done on everyday racism in Sweden, very little have been done on invisible racism or selective blindness. This research focuses on discussing this invisibility and exposing selective blindness existing in the Swedish society.

1.6.3 Whiteness Studies

This has become one of the emerging field in ethnic and racial studies in the past two decades. This has swept across humanities and social sciences disciplines and into wider mainstream publications in recent times. Previous research on this field has centred around the work of W.E.B DuBois and other major scholars which comes from (Hartman et.al (2009) diverse academic fields e.g. in history (Ignatiev 1995; Lipsitz 1998; Roediger 1991), sociology (Frankenberg 1993; Wellman 1993), legal studies (Delgado and Stefanic 1997; Fields 1982; Harris 1993), literature (Morrison 1992), women's studies (McIntosh 1989; Wiegman 1999), and education (Giroux 1997; Maher and Tetreault 1998). Empirical work on whiteness in the United States has centered on qualitative, historical and case-based thoughts which has overtime tried to look into whiteness as being hidden. Thus, the main point for sociologist is the question of how generalized and applicable are the claims on the invisibility of whiteness. On the other hand, whiteness in Sweden has been vividly displayed from the Journal of Gender Studies '*Tidskrift för genusvetenskap*' coupled with other scholarly works (Hällgren 2005; Hübinette & Tigervall 2008, 2009; Kalonaityté, Kawesa and Tedros 2007; Lundström 2007; Motsieloa 2003; Schmauch 2006) centered on broad discuss on everyday racism in the Swedish society. Osanami et al (2018) argues that the historical underpinnings to the construction of Swedish whiteness can be traced back to the stand point of Swedes viewing themselves as constituting the 'whitest' of all white people (Hagerman 2006; Schough 2008). Despite all of this, the study on Swedish whiteness has transformed and evolved to center around Sweden as an immigrant community following the huge influx of migrants in the last four decades. However discussion on whiteness has been reduced to the existence of racism in the Swedish society. The color-blind ideology has also been a topic of discourse used to address racism in the Swedish society. This among other reasons has made Hübinette and Lundström (2014) to refer to Sweden as a "white nation in crisis which sees itself as always having been white, and continuously, and perhaps even desperately, struggles to find ways to accommodate non-whites within its state territory as well as within its national imaginary". To unpack this imagery, Hübinette and Lundström (2014) uses the three phases of hegemonic whiteness in Sweden which involves the white purity period, the white solidarity period and the melancholy period to illustrate how Swedish whiteness is interrelated and intersects with different minorities and racial formations and also with different gender relations and class structures

(Hübinette and Lundström 2014). While I argue that whiteness provides a semblance of excuse to how invisible racism is perpetrated in a society, Wingårdh (2019) posits that whiteness is part of a process of racialization in a society, one which allows for racism to be internalized and perpetuated in various ways. Thus, this paper builds up on how this practice is visibly displayed in the face of ‘selective blindness’ in Sweden and how racial bias(es) are prevalent among people of color in their work spaces.

1.6.4 Exploitative Racism

We need a growing service sector. Not least, I'm thinking of those who come here as refugees and who can make bread, sew, care for children and clean. They should be able to find an outlet for their skills and in addition get paid for it (Jens Orback, authors' translation) (Mulinari, & Neergaard, 2017)

According to Mulinari, D., & Neergaard, A. (2017) this quote was made by a newly appointed Social Democratic minister of gender equality and integration in a debate between the Minister representing the Social Democratic Government and the right-wing parties and the employers' associations on how to stimulate a low-wage sector, with the Social Democrats arguing against tax subsidies. Just as Mulinari, D., & Neergaard, A. (2017), this quote clearly displays a systemic example of exploitative racism, whereby racialized work force are reproduced and exploited through discursive and institutional practices. Exploitative racism as a theory is carried out through a process of racialisation that legitimises the capitalist production of profit and as an ideology framed in the policies as (Mulinari & Neergaard 2017) of managed migration which host countries seem to benefit from (Fekete 2001; Lentin & Titley 2011) thereby serving as a means to provide citizenship to distressed migrants.

Reading this quote again presents a picture of the situation in Sweden. Though migrants may show up as refugees, they should be allowed an equal opportunity in to the labour market as any other citizen. Emphasis was laid on those who can ‘cook, clean, sew or care for children’ which are clearly odd jobs and not those who are ‘doctors, engineers, lawyers or I.T analyst’ which are professional jobs. Thus, exploitation in this regard is linked directly or indirectly to racism framed through the historical tradition of colonialism and slave-trade that creates classification systems in

which specific bodies are reserved with specific duties and allowed access to specific areas within a colonial system (Mulinari & Neergaard 2017).

More so, exploitative racism as presented above is highly linked and perpetuated by those with the power to exploit; on one side are the 'elite' political parties and government charged with formulating policies which make migrants and refugees at their mercy/vulnerable to exploitation, and on the other are employers who take advantage of the dilemma of migrants and the pronouncement by the Government. It is safe to say that the system is run as a chain which is basically shaped as a means to gain access to cheap labour through processes of racialisation and citizenship rights which affect both skilled and less skilled labour (Mulinari & Neergaard 2017).

1.6.5 Deskilling

The International Organization for Migration (2012) describes deskilling as a situation whereby migrants work at jobs not in line with their skills, qualifications and experience. Flatau et al. (1995) illustrate this within a larger framework of "invisible underemployment", which refers to employment inadequacy (International Organization for Migration 2012). They further illustrate that "Deskilling" involves a situation whereby a worker's skill, knowledge and capacities could be better utilized in an occupation other than the one in which they are employed (International Organization for Migration 2012).

Thus, deskilling is illustrated as a host country's way of filling up labor scarcities by exploiting cheap enclave labor. In this regard, migrants adjust to the 'standards' of the host country, or as a form of institutionalized discrimination. The deskilling experience of migrant groups clearly demonstrates the interplay of race, ethnicity, religion and gender in the labor market participation of skilled migrants. Siar (2013) argues that deskilling results not only in economic losses for migrants, but also psychological and health problems. She further illustrates that the inability of a host country to recognize the skills, expertise and education of professional migrants is a direct deception to these migrants. Studies have shown that deskilling has been a major encounter faced by migrants from less-developed countries, Bauder (2003) argues that this act of deskilling is a form of brain abuse from a human right perspective (Siar 2013). Despite the fact that such is not the case for migrants who migrate from developed nations to less-developed countries, it shows a

clear imbalance in how the global north versus the global south views migrants. Articles by researchers and scholars of social sciences have linked this act to exploitative racism. Such is the case in Sweden where the European Network Against Racism (2015) states that 19% of people of African descent with a university degree are in low-skilled jobs, as they are unable to get a job which matches their qualifications. Since there is a lack of research in this area, this study aim to provide supporting arguments through the interviews conducted and discuss in detail the arguments put forward by the respondents of this research.

1.6.6 Colour-blind Ideology

“Colorblindness” may be little more than a form of antiracism “lite,” but the fact that millions of whites (and not only whites) identify with this idea, and the fact that many whites have adopted a more serious antiracism—many students for example, cultural workers, “movement people,” etc., who cannot be dismissed as mere tokens or exceptions—clearly calls into question (Culled from Burke Meghan 2017).

Despite the less available research on colorblindness, it has become a discourse for social sciences scholars who illustrate this ideology something as a core part of one’s identity and politics. Burke (2017) argues that colorblindness is always grounded in material realities which its contextual nature, is presented through the difference between identities and ideologies, and the ways that individual subjectivities navigate racial awareness within systems of power. Hartmann et al. suggest that colorblind ideology have evolved to accommodate progressive and/or antiracist racial ideologies. Hence, to assume that colorblindness is the sole, fixed contemporary racial ideology misses fundamental insights about both racism (as lived experience with material social outcomes) and ideology (as fluid, multiple, contested, and never evenly applied) (Burke 2017). In all this, Omi and Winant (1994) argues that “the very necessity of unfolding ‘color-blind’ racial ideology illustrates that deep incisions have appeared in the ‘system’ of racism. To explain this further, Burke (2017) argues that the “All Lives Matter” statement in response to the Black Lives Matter movement is symbolic and representative of colorblindness for its inability to see the gap and disparities in the criminal justice system that deeply control and endanger black lives. Despite this

research being carried out in 2017, this argument by Burke became valid and overtly emphasized during the black lives matter protest which re-occurred in 2020. Just as Burke (2017) advocates, it is time to carefully analyze the dynamics of colorblind racism so as to understand how deeply rooted “color-blind ideology” is in perpetuating racial violence and inequality.

1.7 Qualitative Research Method

To effectively carry out this thesis, qualitative methods of analysis was used to carry out my research and allow my interlocutors to express themselves in all honesty. In the process of doing this, theories and concepts such as whiteness, racism, colour-blindness and stigmatization etc. was used to draw a connection between the research and relevant social research theories. Patel and Davidson (2011) illustrates that the appropriate method to use depends on how the researcher choose to generate, process, and analyze the collected data. This supports the claim by Bryman (2012) who argues that qualitative research is employed to show the connection between theory and the selected research in a bid to establish a connection to the social realities predominantly visible in our society. Most importantly, this study uses interviews to connote the argument of Kvale (2006) who argues that qualitative interviews are used to investigate varieties of human experiences by trying to understand the world and man’s environment through the lens of the respondent, by unfolding this world and giving them a voice through empowering them with freedom of speech and expression.

Bryman (2012) posits that qualitative researchers present descriptive details of the research outcomes compared to quantitative researchers. While Hällgren (2006) argues that the aim of interviews in this research is to understand individuals and the meaning they give to their experiences, rather than to gain answers to specific questions (Seidman, 1998), Bryman (2012) on the other hand posits that answers do not have to be in a format; with the aid of semi-structured interviews, the focus is on those who are perceived as “non-white”, with an emphasis on racial bias and discrimination in work spaces among people of color. According to Humphries (2008), the invisibility and enforced silence of such groups are what make it imperative for social work researchers to attempt to pursue an ethical practice in examining the conditions and policies that lead to this marginalization.

Since Bryman (2012) argues that the interest is more on the respondent's standpoint and views in a qualitative interview, the interviews were recorded to provide an accurate analysis of the respondent views. Also, since this recording allows the researcher to ask follow-up questions according to Bryman (2012) and an important strategy in the qualitative research emphasizes the words of collected data and analysis rather than quantification of numbers, the respondents were allowed to discuss and share as much as they wanted of which follow up questions were asked and responses to them were gotten in detail. Thus, this research is carried out with an objective to analyze the findings with various articles and books by scholars of racism and whiteness studies; with the hope that this findings will give a clear understanding of how black migrants struggle with racial bias(es) in the face of invisible racism while trying to fit into a predominantly white society in their work environment.

1.8 Respondents

In this research, the focus is on people of color and their experiences in the labor market. More specifically, the focus is on health care workers and their experiences. A total of eight people; six women and two men between 30-60 years old identified in the Swedish healthcare system, was the focus for this study and were interviewed in-depth for this paper. The purpose of the study is to have a broad gender perspectives since both genders can and work within the healthcare system. However, some criteria relevant to the research was set to fulfil the purpose of the research. First, they have to possess an African-Swedish background. Secondly, they have to be working or have worked in the health care sector within Sweden. Thus, the study is based on interviews with people who are perceived as having dark skin/dark phenotypical markers. Most importantly, all the participants are currently living in Sweden and met the requirements for the research.

Purposive sampling method was used also to select respondents for this research. Since Neuman (2011) discusses that the purposive sampling method is used more often in exploratory research or field studies in which a specific topic or research relates to certain individuals, by applying this sampling method to this research, it clearly illustrate that this research does not represent the entire population. In gathering participants, I reached out to them through social media (Facebook

precisely), also through my friends/acquaintances who had friends or know someone working in the healthcare industry and found volunteers for interviews.

1.9 Ethical Consideration

In carrying out this research, I have guided my thought and knowledge from the point of view of Bryman (2012) who argues that ethical principles are relevant in a qualitative study due to the one-on-one contact established with the respondents. Also, in carrying out this interviews I have been guided by the four basic ethical points stated by Vetenskapsrådet (1990) which secures the rights of my respondents. First, before starting the interview, I informed them about the purpose of the study and why I chose to undertake this research. Secondly, I informed my respondents on the need to record the interview which was to be carefully analyzed for the thesis. Thirdly, I also informed them that this material will only be used for the expressed purpose of the research, after which all documents and transcription from the respondents will be destroyed. Lastly, I informed them of their anonymity and how pseudo names will be used in the course of writing this research. Since I have no relationship with any of them and got connected to some through social media, I informed them of their need not to worry as no information they share can and will be traced to them. In addition to this, I informed my respondents of their rights and how they can freely withdraw at any time. Since I could not hand out consent forms as all interviews were done online, I informed the respondents of this and told them to state their consent on the recording which I kept also as a part of the recording.

Throughout my cause of carrying out this research, ethical consideration weighed deeply on my thought. As a researcher of color who can in some cases relate to the thoughts and experiences of my respondents, I tried to keep my personal opinion and thoughts to myself so as not to take sides with any group and remain neutral during my research. Why most of my respondents agreed that they felt, saw and experienced racism in their workplaces, one or two of them reported not having felt this in their work environment. Hence, my focus throughout the study was to ensure that my thoughts do not affect the research.

2.0 Data Analysis

To analyze this data, thematic analysis was used which according to Braun and Clarke (2006) serves as a technique used by the researcher to "identify, analyse and report patterns/themes within the data. Since this thematic analysis is widely used in qualitative analysis according to Bryman (2012) and also plays a fundamental role in ensuring that "findings are interpreted, reflected upon, and theorized so as to acquire significance of the research and to avoid distorting the respondent's words. Hence, following the recommendation for a thematic analysis approach listed by Braun and Clarke (2006) this steps were considered;

- Step 1: Familiarizing yourself with your empirics
- Step 2: Coding
- Step 3: Look for themes
- Step 4: reviewing the themes
- Step 5: Defining and naming themes
- Step 6: producing the report.

While Braun & Clarke (2016) argues that one needs at least 6 interviews or more to be able to identify meaningful patterns in the data, coupled with Bryman (2012) position on a thematic analysis comprising of repetition patterns which create "themes" and sub-themes within a thematic analysis. This method of analysis combined with the experience of my interlocutors provided a good basis for a narrative analysis. Even though Bryman (2012) argues that narrative analysis feeds into the life story interview approach, it focuses on the interviewees' way of expressing how they are connected to events (Bryman, 2012). Consequently, the themes and codes used to analyse the material were derived both from the interviews and from the literature review. In this case the interlocutor's experiences of racial bias and how they coped with these experiences are the narratives in this study.

2.1 Results and Analyses

2.1.1 Labor Market Experience

2.1.1.1 Structural/Institutional Racism

This has been a major aspect of migration policies affecting African migrants in Sweden. Majority of the respondents spoke on their experiences within their jobs and how they are perceived. While most of them were thankful as healthcare workers are in demand and are most times privileged with getting a job, they expressed concern on how they probably will have been jobless if not for the healthcare field they decided to specialize in. This goes to support the claim by the EU Afrophobia Report where African migrants are said to have the highest rates of unemployment regardless of how long they have lived in the country and no matter how qualified they are (Afrophobia 2015). They also spoke on the inadequacies in the system and how structural racism is a situation in the job market in Sweden. One of my respondents had this to say;

Structural racism is a very common practice in Sweden. As a black person, it's harder for you to get a job. It is even harder when you are young and go to the kindergarten, it starts off from there (Mira).

When I first came to Sweden, the Swedish language course taken by immigrants which I attended was within the budget for "People with impairments". Immigrants were described as 'disabled' and was passed under the disabled budget by the Government (Ben).

As pointed out by my respondents above, not only is this a common practice prevalent in the labor market, it is also common in most institutional bodies in Sweden such as the educational system, the political system and even in the housing system. This practice follows a structure and is somewhat institutionalized with the Swedish society. This is why Hübinette & Tigervall (2009) argues that there has been an emergence of new critical migration research in recent times which challenges the image of Sweden as a haven for migrants from the developing world and people of colour. While clearly, there is widespread discrimination against migrants and minorities in practically every different area of the Swedish society.

2.1.1.2 Job devaluation

The European Network against Racism (ENAR) published a report in 2015 titled “Afrophobia in Europe”. This report touched on different sectors in the European system; one of which was the labor market. In this research, it was discovered that ‘several studies in the UK, Sweden and Finland show that a significant number of Black people are unable to find employment that matches their level of qualifications, skills and experience. This studies highlight that this might be attributed to a lack of recognition of qualifications for migrants in Europe and also as a result of racial discrimination (ENAR 2015). All of the participants within this study expressed their experiences and the different struggles they have all had to go through in the process of making a career as a black, African, ‘non-Swedish’ individual within the Swedish society. They all indicated and expressed how they had to put in twice as much compared to their other colleagues. This was also reported in the study as it was discovered that the Swedish labor market is to a degree characterized by ‘horizontal segregation’ as most Afro-Swedes are left with having jobs in low-status/low-income jobs despite their educational qualification (ENAR 2015). According to the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC), it reports that many Africans are working in jobs far below their competence as the Swedish Labor Market Board estimates that 15000-30000 foreign-born university graduates are not employed according to their qualifications.

In Sweden, people of color have less salaries, low positions than their white colleagues even though you have more experience, they rather give the position to a white unqualified colleagues. And it's so hurtful, you have no idea. I cry many nights and I have been so sad because I want those positions and I work so hard for it but still yet, nothing. They know that I'm well-educated, they know my work is ethical. I work very hard. I am never sick. Even when my colleagues are sick, I cover for them. I help them. So it's not about me. It's about the color of my skin (Mira).

I tried to find a job as an assistant nurse when I came in because I had previously studied nursing back in my country, I sent thousands of application but no response. Until I attended their school before I could get a job. I worked three months with the university hospital in the radiology department, I was never appreciated even though I work as an

elephant, a donkey, and they don't care. I later got a job and that was even worse, I was expected to work as someone who has loads and loads of experience (Sam).

I have been lucky in the sense that I've had employers, bosses who have believed in me and have given me the space to be me. And again, I've had people that have refused to understand who I am. Because they think that the position that I am in, I shouldn't be there... and I will not be where I am today if they were in the position of my previous bosses (Ben).

While Ben, one of the interlocutors expressed joy and was thankful that his career had emerged a success, it is worthy to note here that this was not based on his skills or laws and regulations or the due-process that organizations are supposed to have and follow, but basically because of his “bosses” who he reported to have had a good rapport with and who gave him a chance. This is why CEMFOR (2014) reports that it is ten times possible for an individual outside the population to be appointed in a managerial position than an Afro-Swede. In a report by the “Discriminering ombudsman (2014), it was narrated on how a woman who moved to Sweden had a foreign medical degree and after converting this to a Swedish license, was still not offered a position. According to the report, it reads thus:

When I came to Sweden, I was required by The National Board of Health and Welfare to get a Swede medical ID. Thereafter, I was required to perform an AT service, and then the problems began. I was orally promised by one hospital (at another place than the one she lived in) that I would be allowed to start an AT service after having completed a temporary position at the same hospital. The woman moved with her family to this place due to the promised AT service, but then in mid-March, I went through a formal AT interview and the result was that I had not received the AT service from September as I was promised. I was hugely disappointed, sad, confused. I asked the boss why I and she answered me like this ‘Swedes must get AT first and they have more competence’. I believed that the employer “experienced that I am weak because I am an immigrant”. However, in September [it] turned out that they “Swedes” who have received AT service had almost no experience compared to me and I felt extremely sad to know this”. (Culled from “discriminering ombudsman, paraphrased and translated with google).

2.1.1.3 Overt and Subconscious attitude towards racism within the Swedish society

Research indicates that the law on measures against ethnic discrimination in the labor market in Sweden came into force on May 1, 1999 (the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia 2003). Despite the various laws and amendments which has been introduced by the “Discriminering Ombudsman” to tackle the issues of racism and discrimination over the decades, there is still no joint legislation to protect against discrimination on racial, ethnic, cultural and religious grounds but rather a series of laws independently covering various issues as reports indicate that only 14 percent of local authorities within Sweden with the majority of the local authorities not coming up with a central diversity plan. This is why studies reveal that approximately only 4 percent of people subjected to ethnic discrimination report to the Ombudsman (the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia 2003) as most cases are hardly treated or acted upon. Thus, contrary to what is obtainable in the US, the topic of race or its connotations is characterized as a taboo within Sweden such that ‘race’ is replaced with ‘ethnicity’ in books and if written as race, there is a foreword which explains why this is so (Hübinette & Lundström, 2014, Hübinette & Tigervall 2009). According to the respondents in this research, the denial and inability deeply rooted within the Swedish society does not give room for racism to be exposed, recognized, acknowledged, treated and prevented; thereby making the society inhabitable for Afro-swedes and migrants in general.

The ‘sub-consciousness’ coupled with the liberal laws of Sweden makes it difficult for both authorities and individuals to accept that there is systemic racism which makes it difficult to fight a case of racism. If a company has racism regulations put in place, and the systems are regulated as it is should be, things will be better off. The government themselves even refuse to acknowledge or see it, it makes it more hard (Ben).

The issues with racism here is that through their eyes, it doesn’t exit. This people practice a silent culture, they kill you with the silence and it affects you without you even knowing it. If someone doesn’t accept their mistake then it’s hard to correct it. This is the foundation of Sweden’s problem (Sam).

I think we still have a long way to go until we are all equal. Yeah, I feel like there's a lot of denial. And there's a lot of the status quo that doesn't want things to change, like the people

on top, 'white people' really don't want to see it for what it is and don't want to accept it and don't want to believe our experiences. We have this document which says we need to treat patients according to their needs. And that we can't treat people differently just because of their ethnicity or sexual orientation or whatever. I have found this document myself, but my bosses have never talked about it or mentioned it, I am not sure they are aware of its existence (Sara).

2.1.2 'Swedishness'- The 'Us' versus 'Them' Phenomenon

2.1.2.1 Questioning of background

Research into the history of Sweden portrays Sweden as a haven for migrants from the developing world and people of color (Hübinette & Tigervall 2009). That which is worthy to note is that adoptees of color constitute approximately five to six per cent of the total 'non-white' population of Sweden (Hübinette and Andersson 2012). Despite this, study also reveals that Sweden also harbors the most solid anti-racist population without any competition as reports and ranking also show that the proportion of Swedes categorized as being intolerant and as having a strongly negative attitude towards diversity and migration is said to be a world record of 4.9 percent (Hübinette and Lundstrom 2014). Hence, a person is Swedish if perceived by self and others as Swedish (Elgenius and Rydgren, 2019).

In kindergarten, we see, young girls, young boys, being harassed by Swedish kids of same age. My six years old girl was attacked and verbally harassed by another six year old girl saying the 'N-word', you hear another calling a black girl a monkey or calling her filthy. It starts at a young age. The staff and the teachers don't take it seriously and this continues when they get older (Mira).

I have had people ask me, "Where do you come from? I know what they asking. But I respond, Uppsala, and they will say, no, no, no... I mean where are your parents from? And sometimes I feel like what gives you the right to ask where my parents are from? Would they ask if I was white? And I sometimes ask them, "Have you ever been asked where your parents from? They sometimes get a question of "Where are you from? But not where are your parents from. And this makes me wonder why my case is different (Sara).

When they see me going to school, they ask different questions like ‘why are you going to school? Why did you choose to study or why do you choose this program? Who is your family? Why do you want to go to the university? My classmates were all white. I was the second black person in my class. The other person was a black lady and we were facing a lot of difficulties in School (Sam).

Most of my respondents reported having their background questioned or getting questions about their origin, how and why they decided to study medicine, where they came from and why they choose to be in Sweden. While this might seem as one being curious or wanting to make conversations, just like one of the respondents said; ‘initially it means nothing and you see no harm in it but when you have to answer this question for over 30 years of your life at every little gathering or any new environment, it becomes disturbing and weighs heavily on your mind’. Coupled with the use of the ‘N-word’ (which stands for ‘Negro’ is a word which is used in a derogatory manner to refer to black skinned migrants) places a significant boundary on the “we” and “them” social construction (Olt 2013) which also provides a framework for people to decide who is acceptable and who should be questioned and seen as a significant ‘other’ as a ‘non-white’ person is ‘non-swede’.

2.1.2.2 Stereotypic attitude from patients and colleagues

According to Olt (2013), the Discrimination Act in Sweden is intended to be a guide for the workplace and society on how to protect people who need extra attention and are vulnerable to discrimination. The main aim of this Act is, “to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age” (SFS 2008:567). However, most of the interlocutors reported not being safe and experiencing all forms of micro-aggressions and discrimination at work form both patients and colleagues.

From Patients

I had a White-Swedish patient who was very awful to me. I didn't even say a word. I just came in and said, I'm a nurse. And he said, no, leave the room. He said he didn't want to be treated by me. He said he doesn't want anything to do with me. I told my supervisor and he was so angry. He went to the patient's room and told him to take all his stuff and leave

the hospital, and that his nurses and staffs cannot be treated in such manner. For the first time in my 30 years as a nurse, I felt happy and glad someone stood up for me as a black woman (Mira).

Most times, I work into the room and I see the patients don't trust me or want to connect with me. I have to earn their trust or sometimes, I just let it be. I see the way they are relaxed with my co-worker who is the assistant nurse and prefer to talk to her, but me as the midwife, it becomes a totally different thing (Sara).

I have had a patient tell me he did not want to be treated by me and he wants someone 'white' (Pamela)

The patients make it worse, they don't regard you as a doctor or someone to look after them but this was not even as disturbing as the treatments from your colleagues (Sam).

From Colleagues

The workplace is supposed to be a safe place since you are there almost 90% of the time. When you cannot be safe there and you have colleagues who doesn't see when you've been attacked or don't acknowledge it, Instead they tell you to go to another patient that identifies with you (i.e. same black-skin color) while they keep quiet and silent about what was said towards you (Mira).

I remember one of my workmate said to another black work mate when he came into the room that, "Oh, I can't see anything, it is really dark here, Oh, it's you, it was like a joke. And I remember like he would come and try to compare his skin with mine like that, but we really never had that discussion (Dora).

One time, it was too much to handle that I had to quit. I had to take it up with my bosses and wrote to their bosses also that it was their responsibility to keep me safe at my workplace and I shouldn't be subjected to racism (Sara).

One of my friends who worked as a doctor did not have his badge on him while working around the hospital; he came across a doctor who asked 'if he was a cleaner within the hospital' (Sam)

I had a colleague walk up to me and say: 'you cannot handle this patient because he is racist' (Pamela).

Similar to the points raised above by my respondents, Olt (2013) reports that Nurses have been questioned regarding their expertise despite their educational background, and most of them are treated unequal in terms of receiving less help at work (Alexis, 2009; Larsen, 2007). Research also indicate that discrimination and inequality from co-workers and patients has been faced by immigrant nurses with minority backgrounds in developed countries (Olt 2013) such that Khatutsky et al (2010) reports that self- reported workplace discrimination related to race or ethnicity is three times greater among immigrants compared to non-immigrant care assistants (Olt 2013).

2.1.2.3 White Privilege

Hartmann et al argues that whiteness cum white privilege is expressed through the awareness and structural advantage that define racial status in a society such that it plays a “key role in inter-group relations, especially in enabling the dominant group to maintain its position atop the ethnic hierarchy” (Doane 1997). This concept of white privilege is also posits that those who fall within this group are unaware of the structural benefits, such that they are unable to acknowledge their own privileged position and are attuned to the realities of racial inequality and even acknowledge the disadvantages faced by communities of color as a result of discrimination and prejudice; hence they have a hard time placing themselves on the standpoint of race relations and seeing the means in which the ‘disadvantages of others are closely and directly tied to their own structural advantages’ (Hartman et al 2009). Such is the cases among these respondents who expressed that the system in which they find themselves tend to recognize and uphold this privileges above their head such that they are not expected to grow or supersede their “Swedish counterparts” or even feel above them as their level of qualification, experience or whatever degree they attain is and should not hold precedence over Swedish people.

I have a good position right now, but they do not you to grow, not so much that it threatens their white privilege. They don't want you to stretch and surpass them. It's sad because you

see it everywhere. You see this kind of structural racism, though invisible but visible every day (Mira)

I studied in Uppsala University. It is a renowned institution which is quite hard to get in, so when they ask and I tell them that I finished from Uppsala and they finished from a lower school, they feel intimidated (Sam).

I never was able to get a friend; my final year at the university, I got a project and nobody wanted to be a part of it, I ended up doing the project alone. They probably refused to join, not because I wasn't black enough but maybe I wasn't too 'Swedish' enough and I might not be able to pull it off as they wanted (Ben).

I remember talking to a coworker about my fiancé who at that time had an injury or swell on his feet. I cannot remember exactly but he had problems with his feet. And then she said, "Oh, maybe he's not so used to wearing shoes". I was shocked and asked if that was the kind of image she had of Africa (Sara).

This point made by Sara displays clearly the image most Swedes have of the African minority group. An image of Afro-swedes still being seen as slaves, unequal and 'undeserving to afford and wear a shoe. McIntoshi expresses this in his article which discuss unpacking the invisible knapsack of whiteness. According to him, whiteness protected me from many kinds of hostility, distress, and violence, which I was being subtly trained to visit, in turn, upon people of color (McIntosh 1998). Thus, when white privilege Vis-a vis 'whiteness' is not acknowledged, the structural context of the action is ignored. This breeds an oppressive nature of 'harmless' jokes, actions and words which in turn is disregarded or thrown outside the window to mean nothing.

2.1.2.4 Bias coated in Differences

Despite evidence of discrimination and inequality in labor market outcomes in Sweden among those described as Swedish and those of minority or African descent, racism is extraordinarily difficult to discuss in Swedish society let alone among healthcare workers. Therefore, the focus of our research is the fact that racism is apparent, invisible and yet expressed in a bias form in healthcare. Interlocutors interviewed during this study expressed the various bias and differences they or their family members have had to experience at their work environment, social space or even from strangers and they had this to say:

Some healthcare staff thinks that black people don't feel pain. Women gives birth and they are sewing them without anesthesia despite the pain and surgery they went through. It happened to my sisters; two of them here. They wanted to sew them without anesthesia (Mira).

I remember when I was working during the summer at Volvo as a warehouse attendant before studying medicine, I applied for a higher position and I was invited for an interview. I went to Volvo I.T with my warehouse attendant uniform to meet the Manager who had invited me. I got to the reception and asked for the CEO, the receptionist looked at me and asked, 'Who did you say you're looking for? I mentioned his name again. And she asked if I am sure of the person I was looking for, I replied and she asked again, I was just confused. She couldn't relate how someone wearing my uniform with my color should be looking for the CEO of VOLVO I.T because I have nothing to do there and my kind is not expected to be there (Ben).

At work, I notice a lot of the time that when black women are in pain, they're treated differently. And I think this is especially to black women and sometimes also Muslim women. They are like, "why is she complaining so much? Why is she asking for help so much? To me I think that is like macroaggression (Sara).

I had an encounter at forex bank with an accountant, I even cried when I got home. The lady was shouting at me, she wasn't using her normal voice. I simply asked what had happened to my account and she was so rude to me. Another was when I recently gave birth to my baby, I went to the hospital, the nurse was checking the baby thoroughly, looking for marks or signs to report, thinking maybe I wasn't taking care of my baby properly,, I felt embarrassed and angry (Dora).

2.1.2.5 The importance of language and having the 'right' name

Hällgren (2005) argues that people who belong to a Swedish-born minority group or look non-European or have a 'non-Swedish' name, or talk with a 'non-Swedish' accent— are likely to experience being treated as the 'other' (Motsieloa, 2003; Van Dijk, 2004). The argument put forward by researchers states communication difficulties which arise from deficiency in language

leads to difficulty in comprehending conversations or discussions better expressed in a cultural or native tongue. Olt (2013) reports that a study conducted in the US found that communication and interaction with co-workers from other ethnic and cultural backgrounds are likely to involve misunderstandings based on culturally different views and perceptions (Bond et al., 2013).

Most times when you are African and you have a non-Swedish name, they don't even call you to the interview. And if you have the immigrant name, and maybe you show up to the interview and they see you in a certain way (either with the hijab or just your looks) they already have this image of you. So they don't give you the chance to get the job (Mira).

There are two aspects to racism in Sweden. Skin color is one, the second aspect is the language. When you speak with fluency the way they do, they know you are born here, the reception is a bit different. But when you speak with broken accent, then they know that it'd be difficult for them to understand what you're saying. And they don't give you that chance to express yourself in your own way and they are not willing to put in more effort to try to understand, they would rather ignore you. What I'm saying is that one can be white; from India, the US or from the Middle East and will initially not be discriminated, but when the person speaks a broken Swedish, it becomes a problem (Ben).

I applied for same job with a co-worker years ago and she got called for the interview and I did not, I figured maybe because I don't have a non-Swedish name because it was clear that I had more qualification and experiences than her... Even at work, while giving report about the patients, some colleagues will say, 'This woman has been here five years, but she doesn't speak any Swedish, I don't understand why she's been here so long and doesn't speak any Swedish'. For me, that is not important to know, what is important is what language she speaks and how I can communicate with her so as to administer the best and right care (Sara).

First is the language barrier. The process here..... You come here and have to learn the language as most times, your education outside Sweden is not accepted. And it really takes a lot of time to settle...because you have to learn the language first (Dora)

When we submit our papers to the teachers and even in the class, everything was complicated. They send the papers back if there is a little mistake with your writing in Swedish and some will tell you to stop going to the university if you cannot not fully understand the language (Sam).

Most of the interlocutors expressed getting comments on their Swedish skills when they applied for jobs, as a non-white body is not Swedish and thus not familiar with the language. Brandström (2018) states that Rätzel discovered in a study that employers often meet young people of migrant background with suspicion and they are understood as ‘deeply problematic to employ’ mostly because of assumed language deficiencies (Rätzel, 2006, p. 225). As described by Hooks (1989), language is a struggle. She argues that we are wedded to language; as it binds one, fences one, holds one, reconciles, renew, and reunite one with a community to whom one is inclined to share the same beliefs. In this way, one is made to embody a particular race or community. This is the case for Sweden, being able to speak the native language draws you in and puts you in a position where you embody ‘swedishness and whiteness’, like a bodily schema, it pushes you into belonging. Thus, ‘ethnic’ variables like language, culture and religion is decoded and reproduce as acceptance and belonging to a certain race (Hübinette & Tigervall 2009), which in turn gives room for integration and “Swedishness” in this case.

2.1.3 Adaptation and Strategies

2.1.3.1 Struggle for survival

In this context, survival here discusses sanity, the mental acceptance and capability of the interviewees to rise above the societal structure within Sweden which pulls them down and questions their ability to survive in the system within the scope of the subject matter of this research.

Survival here becomes like a trauma for you. As black people.... I'm not saying all black people, but we are taught to be tough. And we are used to people treating us in this manner since we were kids, we used to hear the 'N-word' and receive this sort of treatment and it's something that you just don't forget. So you have this wall. You build up a wall. You don't let people touch you, you're a human being and this stuff is a trauma. It is a trauma for us. It affects us 100%. Every time I leave for work, I am thinking, "What kind of treatment am

I getting today?” When another human being look at you as a less person, a less human being, it affects you. You get traumatized, and people don't understand when you say that you are being discriminated or being attacked by racism. So this affects us emotionally (Mira).

The biggest challenge, which is very personal, and challenging is the potential or the risk of losing your self-confidence. Because you don't feel accepted within the sphere or environment that you are in.... assuming you're a professional and your language is broken or probably you dress in a certain way; if you're not a strong character, very conscious of your objectives and where you want to go, you could retire. You drawback, hide in your shell and you lose yourself. When you lose your self-confidence, achieving your goals are very difficult. And I think this what makes it difficult for so many people to apply for certain jobs. I have a friend who had the same background as me, he got a job, and he just couldn't stay, he wasn't sacked or anything but he said he couldn't cope with the situation (Ben).

The situation causes a high level of stress for me that I am not usually aware of. Before I walk into a new place, I am bracing myself because I don't know how I will be perceived or met. At work there is always a level of stress because there are some co-workers who say this kind of stuffs...even though generally not aimed at me, it still affects me, I have a hard time not internalizing it, my thoughts are if you can say something like this about this person, then you can say such about my kids, family or loved ones... (Sara).

While some of the interlocutors expressed this as a high level of stress and trauma, one which they have grown into and transformed themselves into having to deal with no matter where they find themselves, two other interviewees; Dora and Pamela expressed not having concerned themselves with it. In the words of Pamela, she stated: “This is it, this is Sweden, this is how life it, it took me a while to adjust to this, but now that I have, I don't care, I don't concern myself with it, the goal is to survive and care for my family”. This responses from them brought me to my next question.

2.1.3.2 Coping mechanism

While this research aims to discuss and understand clearly the situation of racial bias and the invisibility off racism widely practiced but unacknowledged situation among Afro-swedes in the Swedish society, the interviewees ability to discuss how they have coped with the situation is

worthy of sharing as this research aim to contribute and fill in existing gaps of Swedish racism within academic discourse.

The thing is I don't even think I ever coped with it. I just accepted it and I have built a wall like I said previously. 10 years ago when I was working in the hospital, I lock up myself in the toilet and cry. Then I clean it off, go out and give professional care for the same people/position that treated me bad. But today, I am used to it, I don't let them affect me and I have to protect myself and my peace of mind. I have built up a wall so they can say whatever they want. Today I am stronger and that is not good either, because like I said, it is a trauma which affects you socially, mentally or as a professional anywhere you find yourself (Mira).

I worked formerly as a translator so I sent in my resignation and when I did, no one asked why. They just accepted it and told me, 'okay'. Another black woman working there told me I made a good decision to leave because it was better for me to save myself from here as she plans to do too. I don't intend to go back to working in the medicals here in Sweden but hopefully work in the medicals if I relocate to my country or another country because health care is my passion (Sam).

I have coped through pain and through stubbornness and being conscious of what I want in life and working hard to achieve what I want. And another thing is that you cannot be on average basis. If I have to give a presentation, I have to put in twice more effort, be more impressive so that this people can listen to me. Thus, you have to go the extra mile. So the thing is, it is an individual thing. If you don't do it, and you want to rate yourself as them saying, "I'm a human being, I went to university, we are in same class etc." Remember, your impairments, it is not just your language or your network. It can even be your attitude, your looks or the law. But when you recognize and fight through it, then you move ahead (Ben).

What keeps me going is I have to live and the situation isn't so extreme such that we are not allowed to be on the streets. I mind my business. I usually avoid people that I see they need space. Of course, if you say hi to somebody, and they don't answer that shows they are not interested in friendship or anything. And I have to accept myself in the first instance.

This is how I am able to cope with everything. Of course, I can't bleach, some people do and you will still not be white enough to them (Dora).

I have overtime surrounded myself with black people and we created spaces for black children and black adults; though inactive at the moment but I think it was a means for us to have a safe space. It has been important for me to be around black people; irrespective of culture, we don't necessarily have to speak on racism but we understand our experiences, we don't have to prove ourselves and we see each other as a human being or are not judged according to the color of your skin. Growing up here and not seeing my kind being represented made me yearn for this. I do this also for my kids so they don't experience what I went through and are not limited by race in Sweden (Sara).

2.1.3.3 Social limitation

I think subconsciously or consciously you just limit yourself. In terms of my work position and income, people in my category will not reside in the area I live, they'll choose to live in middle class white areas. And, personally, I refuse to do that. I do not yearn for that. I identify with people in Angered and it feels like home. This white dominated areas will have people asking questions, what am I doing? Keep looking twice, see me as different from others etc. but I am me and not interested to be anyone. So yes, there are limitation; consciously or unconsciously (Ben).

I have been in some praktik places and it was only dominated by whites. And you automatically felt, I won't work there. It does leave you thinking which places to go to like when you're searching for an apartment. There are places you really don't want to go to where they have this white over class people, you will really feel bad (Dora).

Just as the interviewees said, there exist a form of limitation amongst people of color and Swedish people which is described as residential segregation and discrimination in the labour market by Hübinette & Tigervall (2009). As Ben and Dora; both of the interlocutors stated above, housing segregation is a big deal around the city of Gothenburg where they reside. Areas like 'Bergsjon, Angered and Biskopsgården' are typically described as slums, more like ghetto settlements where violence and anarchy are perpetrated and thus inhabited by people of color. This is why Hübinette and Lundstrom (2014) describes this as a worrying issue whereby segregation and segmentation

pattern seems to be transferred to and is 'inherited' by the children of the next generation. While carrying out a group presentation in class some months ago on a course work, I discovered that 95% of native Swedish born citizens have never been to 'Angered'; a place less than 15 minutes from the city centre. Because it is described and known as a place where people of color reside, Swedish natives are somewhat forbidden in such location. Not as a law, but as a history or myth passed down through parents to their offspring which goes on and on. As described by McIntosh (1988) while unloading the invisible knapsack of white privilege, he argues that this white privilege and beliefs were passed onto me as a white person.

2.1.4 Identity

2.1.4.1 Sense of belonging/Acceptance

Right now I am the only black person and the first immigrant to occupy this position in my work place as only white people have been able to attain such height. I don't see other immigrants or black people. I work as a physician now, they are very good to me and they treat me very well. I have very good boss right now and I feel I belong there. I can never go back to working at the hospital, it was too much for me (Mira).

When I first came to Sweden, I had the perception that I'm the visitor. I'm a minority. It is my duty to adapt. It's my duty to belong. I was living in a village and going to school in a bigger town about 20 kilometers away. Anytime I took the bus or a train, I don't sit at an empty space as is common, I look around and sit beside a Swedish person. At work, I will go out of my way to be nice and create that contact to be accepted. I don't do that anymore. I refuse doing that. I was seeking acceptance then, I don't care if I belong or not, now I just do me and that's all that matters (Ben).

When I was employed, we were 115 employees, and I was the only person of African descent. I didn't realize how tough that was going to be despite growing up here, I've been the only black person in situations, but I didn't realize how much this would affect me. So I actually had a situation where I quit, I left the job because it got just too much for me. I did not feel accepted (Sara).

Working as a lab technician, you are not supposed to work alone because of how crucial and important it is. Two or more people should work together but when they see me in the

lab, they all leave and go over to another lab. This made me feel sad and drew me back. I took more than 5 years to graduate school. I had a bad experience with school and working I experienced worse as I did not feel accepted or that I belong there (Sam).

Most of the respondents in this study who discussed their sense of belonging in Sweden all had almost similar perceptions. While most of them felt that they legally belong by virtue of their Swedish passport and citizenship, others expressed their desire to not refer to this place as ‘home’ but a place which they reside in. The majority pointed out that they have over the years created a connection to their African heritage or ancestral home by making effort to visit Africa and identify with ‘their people’. For instance, one of the participants narrated how his kids were unhappy with him as he did not connect them so much to their ancestral home which is Ghana and as such, they do not speak the native language which they believe they are supposed to. This according to him is sad as he said “I was so concerned with them being Swedish, I registered them for all kinds of sports Swedish kids do, from horse-riding, to volleyball, ballet dancing, swimming etc hoping to make them “Swedish” but I had no idea it broke them as they told me that they faced heavy discrimination in this activities, the place I wanted to connect them to so much did not accept them but that which I was not focused on is where they are accepted and see as home”. This is why Ali (2021) argues that the concept of belonging isn’t only about membership, rights and duties that comes with citizenship or identifying with a particular group. It is also about the social places formed by such identifications and memberships and how these social places impact oneself as being a part of something greater than oneself and the emotional and social bonds that are strongly associated with such places (Anthias, 2008). Thus, the notion of acceptance/identity is both informal and formal experiences of belonging.

2.1.4.2 The Invisible self/ Otherness

Invisible racism is visible in every sphere of the Swedish public life. E.g. you go to a shop to buy something, you pick what you want, you see three people standing before you, you quietly wait your turn and then a fourth will stand behind you. The person at the counter will serve the two or three before you and look at the fourth person standing behind you, trying to capture their attention while refusing to acknowledge or attend to you who is

ahead of them. Until you voice out, then you are suddenly recognized. Or you enter a room full with people and suddenly, the room gets quiet because you're not expected to be there. It is that bad, it is everywhere; in the shops, in meetings at workplaces, buses, Trams, trains, everywhere (Ben).

I have had patients who question my nursing degree because of my skin color, some say they don't want to be treated by me. While some directly say it to you, others don't, they don't acknowledge or want to see you when you come into the room and that is even worse. They don't even want to look at you or answer you. They're like, can you get me another nurse? (Mira).

You're on a queue to pay at the shop and everyone is waiting, but when it gets to your turn, no one greets you. They take it automatically that you don't know Swedish, or they don't need to acknowledge you for whatever reasons, I still don't understand why (Dora).

With the bosses and colleagues, you are supposed to be like a football team but it's different. They don't accept people and push you way from opportunities. Being black and defeating all odds at the university, you are still expected to be the lowest person at the workplace, they still see you as a slave; that invisible non-existent body that should not measure up to them despite attaining the same level of education or knowledge as them (Sam).

When you enter a bus, the bus driver doesn't say hi. The next person enters, he is white and you hear the say, "Hi, how was your day? You go to the pub or a store to buy something, and no one acknowledges you, in fact they pass by you like you are not there. But then you are on a public transport and the ticket controllers come in, you who was initially invisible to the driver becomes visible to them and they leave a host of black people in front of you and come straight to you because you are black and as such have been profiled to be a thief, a criminal; one who will cheat the system and not pay for the tickets (Pamela).

Smith posits that difference can be likened to absence. Absence in the terms of being invisible, not present or unseen. It serves as a primary stimulus, in which categorization of difference begins even earlier than language, and first represented as 'otherness' (Smith 2006). While Olt (2013) argues that 'otherness' is a sense of wanting to be included and adapted to the majority group, yet

experiencing the perception of not belonging and being pushed aside. It is also seen as being invisible in a dominant group which is manifested through physical differences such as race, ethnicity, cultural, and religious categories or sexual orientation. Such is the case in Sweden as Afro-swedes are considered invisible and absent, they are only seen or acknowledged in the media or when a crime is committed by a 'black-colored Swedish citizen'. The media is always quick to indicate this and put a significant "them (Afro-swede) and not we (Native-Swede)" narrative, for example, (Hübinette and Lundstrom (2014) reports that when a series of shootings of non-white Swedes in Malmö city was carried out by a white male serial killer between 2003 and 2010, the victims were described as having an 'immigrant appearance' and a 'foreign appearance'. Just as Pamela one of the respondents describe, 'a black person is only visible in the face of a criminal act in Sweden. Also, Karlsson (2012) in her analysis of the slogan; 'Vi gillar olika' initiated by Swedish tabloid newspaper Aftonbladet in the antiracist campaign during the 2010 election was said to have won great approval and was soon supported by more than half a million 'clicktivists'. The message published by Aftonbladet reads thus; "A party that says that everybody has to be alike to merge with the Swedish nation has entered Swedish parliament. It is a dangerous dream that pleads to our fear. We do not like xenophobia. We like different." (Karlsson 2012). With all this thoughts in mind coupled with the fact that this was widely accepted, together with several reports which indicate that there is a difference among 'Swedes' and 'migrants', it is safe to argue that a Swede is a white person and a non-white person is therefore not, and cannot fully become a Swede (Hübinette and Lundstrom (2014).

2.1.5 Responses/Thoughts on the existence of "Racism" and "Invisible Racism" in Sweden

I think in Sweden, invisible racism is the biggest racism. The fact that it's invisible makes it harder to address and change. I think racial bias is so embedded in Sweden.....I think when it comes to racial bias or racism, no one wants to see it as their fault, and especially in general here in Sweden, they don't see what they are doing at all. My fiancé is born and raised in South Africa and he is born in the 80s. He grew up during apartheid where racism was very in your face. Coming here has been tough for him because the racism here is so different such that it's not in your face, it's very under the carpet. I tell him that Sweden breaks you down slowly with the little things that constantly get to you. For me it's more

like it doesn't exist, people think this is a post-racial society and we are all treated equal when that is false (Sara).

Racism is everywhere, it is like water you drink in Sweden, it feels like a necessity, it is everywhere. Sweden is a racist country. I think this people are honestly unaware and I feel sorry for them because they are brought up in a society where they are so ignorant, they are in a box and no one looks outside the box. It is really sad to talk about and my priority is to educate my kids and family to be dependent on themselves (Pamela).

Racism for me is of two types. There is the subtle one which you don't notice and then that which you notice but other people don't, and the problem with racism in Sweden is that they rather not see it as Swedish people are conflict scared, they rather cover it up, but invisible racism affects a lot. It is affecting the individual who has to go through it every day and the society who has to live in constant denial as well as the kids and youths who have to grow up with much pain and anger burning in them from being treated differently and badly. At work, they always say we don't accept racism in our workplace, but what action comes to play when it happens? And it is sad because in Sweden, there's no protection for health care professionals today (Mira).

Racism is very much existent in Sweden but it is more refined. In terms of comparison to other countries, I think there is more racism here; like more discrimination in Sweden. The type practiced here is a kind of subconscious racism where the person is very much aware, but will do it in a way that is so refined that makes it so hidden, while some do it subconsciously, because they don't really understand their actions yet they react towards you not because of your action, but because of the way you look. Which is what racism is about, because you are black (your skin color). The person acts based on the know-how of what they have read about Africans and black people. With those perceptions in mind, they behave differently towards you until they get to know you. A situation where someone tells you that 'oh you are different, you are not like the others'. That by itself is even the worst form of racism. Both the conscious and the subconscious might deny it. Nevertheless, the only way we can make them recognize is to tell our stories and there are many who change their ways when they hear stories because most Swedes are very good hearted people but

because they are so subconscious and because of perceptions some behave in this manner (Ben).

Frankenberg (1992) argues that racism is a “white issue,” that is, an issue that shapes white experience as well as that of communities of color such that can be conceived as something external rather than as a system that shapes our daily experiences and sense of self. Also, racism shapes white people’s lives and identities in a way that is inseparable from other facets of daily life (Frankenberg 1992). To buttress the position of the respondents, I put forward the argument by El-tayeb (2008) who discusses on how a migrant seek to create an European identity in her article titled “The Birth of a European Public: Migration, Postnationality and Race in the Uniting of Europe”. Her aim gives an “internalist” narrative of how Europe is constructed, how it adversely affects migrant and minority communities, and how it is being deconstructed by exactly those groups it is meant to exclude. She presents an argument which builds on the project of constructing a pan-European identity. She describes this as racist and is a replication of colonialism. Thus, while we describe colonialism as happening outside Europe, it happens more inside Europe than any other place. She argues that racism is still largely enforced and even after a migrant gets the European passport, He/she is still largely restricted/bordered in diverse ways; either by ethnicity or skin color and as displayed in this research; in the society/labor market. More so, majority of people of color living and born in Europe are still described as migrants and in a way do not feel a sense of belonging.

3.0 Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to bring to light several hidden but visible happenings in the Swedish society. First, the treatment and condition of Afro-swedes in the Swedish labor market. Secondly, the invisibility of racism characterized by bias on this group of people while focusing on their experiences as healthcare workers. Thirdly, to discuss the dynamic ways of segregation, identity and belonging of this group despite being Swedish citizens by allowing them to describe their thoughts and experiences; with the hope that things get better within the Swedish society especially sectors which limits this group of people as well as other minority groups/immigrants.

According to Essed (1991) those who challenge or identify racism are often seen as over-sensitive and prone to exaggeration; 'it's only a joke' is a common reply to these issues. In presenting initial findings of this study, it shows that the situation is no joke and by no means a form of attack or being bias against Swedes. This is why Jonas Hassen Khemiri wrote an open letter to Sweden's Minister of Justice Beatrice which stated, 'Jag vill att vi byter skinn och erfarenheter' (I want us to trade skins and experiences). This was shared 120,000 times on Facebook and viewed more than 250,000 times on *Dagens Nyheter* within 24 hours of publication. The Minister in this letter was challenged to walk through the streets of Stockholm in a non-white/non-Swedish stereotyped body as an "immigrant" (Gokieli 2017). White privilege, institutional racism, micro-aggressions, stereotypes, bias are practices which are regularly unchecked due to fear and ignorance (Johnson 2017). Hence, this research was primarily motivated on the social stratification of Afro-swedes, the characterized attitude of silence in the face of racism and their situation within the labor market in Sweden. As Hällgren (2005) reports there seems to be a 'silent agreement to make racism a non-question in the Swedish integration debate, which is in reality one of the largest obstacles to creating strategies against racism' (De los Reyes & Molina 2002). Furthermore, it is my opinion as well as other researchers that there is a need in Sweden for new research and forms of education which show how racism operates in different Swedish contexts (Bhavnani, 2001; Hällgren et al., 2004). Sweden is no different to other countries in respect of these issues and therefore needs to find ways of dealing with its own forms of prejudice and racism.

Worthy of note is that healthcare is a core sector of any society. If not handled properly, it creates a longstanding institutionalized discrimination that damages patients, staff and the community in general. This is why Olt (2013) argues that healthcare providers must manage two sets of complex relationships: colleague-to-colleague and nurse-to-patient (including significant others). This relationships are critical as it involve factors that are strongly influenced by many aspects of one's culture, ethnicity, and other social attributes (Olt 2013). Even though most of my respondents reported being in a good position at the moment at their work places while some don't seem to care and are grateful for their profession as healthcare workers though they acknowledge and experience the subject matter which has been discussed in this study, but others have also discussed how this affects them mentally, socially and career-wise (unable to work) which is what this study hopes to expose. For a country like Sweden which parades itself as a cultural and ethnically-diverse society, research indicate that there are multiple issues and high failure in these relationships due

to differences in culture and ethnicity. Coupled with harboring the most solid anti-racist population without any competition according to several ranking/reports, it shows that a large proportion of Swedes are categorized as being intolerant and having a strongly negative attitude towards diversity/migration and the combined silence (invisible act) of racism in all sectors of the economy (Hübinette and Lundstrom 2014).

It is no news that people of foreign origin constitute a large part of the Swedish population. Despite this, it has been discovered that the integration of migrants has not been successful since having a job indicates one's integration into the society. Despite the lack of research on this subject matter, the very little available indicate that Africans in Sweden are one of the groups most subjected to ethnic discrimination in the Swedish labor market. Research also demonstrate that one disillusioning reality regarding discrimination in the labor market is the inadequate information/insufficient knowledge on the legislation by the trade/labor unions (EUMC 2003). Since they have a significant job to neutralize segregation and forestall such happenings, their impact cannot be over-emphasized.

Then again research indicates that the Swedish health and social care work-force is dependent on foreign-born labour; skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled (Brady et.al 2019). Hence, the future view of the Swedish labor market in general looks a lot splendid in recent times than in the past years. In the end this may prompt expanded opportunities for the entire populace independent of identity, ethnicity, religion, and sexual direction. Future projections demonstrate that Sweden in the following decade should extend its workforce as Ethnic Swedes alone can't fill anticipated holes. This alongside acceptance of this minority groups in all sectors of the economy is the foundation of this research and what this research sets to achieve. The expectation is that conveying and examining the encounters of this group will assist with raising the consciousness of 'Native Swedes' on their 'unconscious' behavior that make the difference between social and cultural inclusion and exclusion in their day-to-day activities.

Future Research

Further research can look into the experiences of other minorities in the Swedish society within the same spheres so as to see if they face same challenges. If so, a connection can be made and

policy makers will take note and make amends where required. My hope is that this thesis will encourage future research to further examine the importance of diversity in building a nation, and additionally, if and how open dialogue in interracial societies can serve as a key strategy in the everyday fight against racism in Sweden, as well as worldwide.

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