AM I STILL 'WHITE'?
Dealing with the Colour Trouble

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As a researcher studying racism in the everyday life of 'non-white' children in Finland, I need to understand the meanings of whiteness in Finnish society. As a 'white' researcher studying experiences of 'non-white' people, I also need to be aware of the possible limitations to my understanding of 'non-white' people's reality. In order to better understand the different workings of whiteness in Finnish society and in my ongoing research, I contrast common ideas and assumptions of whiteness with my own experiences as a 'white' mother of 'non-white' children, and with the ways I have been perceived by other people, as demonstrated in the data of my research. I suggest that a critical stance towards 'colour-talk' is the only way to avoid fatal leaning on the racist ideas embedded in all those concepts, including 'white'(ness), that arise from the discourse of 'race'. This paper focuses on what might be called the 'colour trouble'. It hopes to expose how a sense of belonging or not belonging is manifest in a colouring discourse that is aimed at distinguishing those who belong from those who don't.

Studying encounters that take place in individuals' everyday lives enable us to explore how racism operates in a given society through racialising practises and discourses. 'Strange encounters'; meetings where some people have already been recognised as strangers and where the figure of the stranger is processed[1] offer a special point of departure for an inquiry into racism. This approach makes it possible to focus on the agency of those who recognise strangers as well as those who are recognised.

The purpose of my ongoing PhD research is to identify and locate racist discourses and racialising practices in the everyday lives of Finnish children and adolescents. I have chosen children's and young people's experiences as the starting point for my study because of their vulnerable position within social power relations. An analysis of their everyday experiences allows me to trace how racialising practices are played out in the social institutions that feature largely in their lives. The study focuses on:

1) The kinds of responses children and young people of (easily) identifiable foreign background (usually phenotype and/or name) arouse in the surrounding society; and

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[1] Ahmed, S., *Strange Encounters. Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Routledge, London, 2000.

2) How those children and young people deal with their experiences of othering, racialisation, and racism present in various discursive practices.

The people whose everyday experiences I intend to study have been chosen using statistical and other criteria. All young participants have one parent with an immigrant or foreign background or have been adopted from other countries.[2] Methodological choices are based on ethnography, discourse analysis and insights from taking a narrative research approach. Fieldwork included interviews, face-to-face and e-mail discussions with young people and parents, and participatory observation. People interviewed (over 20 young persons, 30 parents) have ties to 30 different countries outside Finland. Data consists of the above-mentioned interviews, a 'mother's diary' which I kept for almost two years, and other documents such as newspaper articles, photos, music, children's books, etc. In the diary I have written about events in my children's everyday life as young Finns adopted from Ethiopia, and about my thoughts as their mother.

The theoretical framework for my epistemological and methodological choices is grounded both in feminist epistemologies[3] and in the 'Writing Culture' debate[4] and their impact on the ethnographic tradition. These two discourses share many premises that are significant in my work: issues of how (and whose) voices and lives are captured and represented; and, especially in feminist studies, the emphasis on the political and ethical aspects of conducting research; the demand for critical reflexivity; and issues of how the researcher herself is positioned, situated and implicated. Integrating political aims of anti-racism in the study is an ethical choice that has implications for the theoretical framework, the choice of methods and the final research questions. Although I have no certainty as yet about how an anti-racist research agenda could be conceptualised, I think it is important to sensitise oneself to the possibility of research with anti-racist implications. Also, I would insist on a continuous

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[2] In the light of demographic statistics, Finnish citizens who identify themselves as Finns but can be categorized as belonging to racial and/or ethnic minorities are predominantly children and young people. Estimating the numbers of Finnish children belonging to racial minorities is difficult as there are no statistics available. The number of residents with immigrant backgrounds is small. The number of children adopted from other countries to Finland since 1985 is a little over 2000.

[3] For example, see Harding, S., *Feminism & Methodology*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987; Hill Collins, P., *Black Feminist Thought. Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge, New York, 1991; Coffey, A., *The Ethnographic Self. Fieldwork and the Representation of Identity*, Sage, London, 1999.

[4] For example, see Clifford, J. and Marcus, G., *Writing Culture: The Poetics & Politics of Ethnography*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986; James, A, Hockey, J. and Dawson, A., *After Writing Culture. Epistemology and Praxis in Contemporary Anthropology* Routledge, London, 1997; Van Maanen, J., *Representation in Ethnography*, Sage, London, 1995.

recognition and awareness of the power of racialised discourses and racialising practices. They are at work everywhere - including in research on racism and in the way we as researchers see and interpret things. Put into practice, this means a constant scrutiny of assumptions that are included in the research frame. I am constantly asking how my assumptions and the concepts that I use are situated within the discourses of race, and how they might potentially either reproduce or challenge those discourses. In this context, whiteness is among the most important concepts.

To make whiteness an issue is a necessary step in my efforts to understand the different ways in which racism manifests both in Finnish society (the meanings of whiteness/non-whiteness in Finland) and within studies of racism. I need to analyse the meanings of whiteness not just in the everyday life of those whose experiences I want to study, but also in my own personal life and reality, in order to be able to examine the premises of my own situated knowledge and my understanding about racialising practises and racialised subject positions. Questioning and analysing my own whiteness is not just a personal project to convince myself and others that I can create a good researcher-participant relationship and fully understand my participants' experiences in spite of our different positions in the racialised social relations (or that I can be a capable mother regardless of my or my children's skin colour). If we want to disturb the relations of domination in research also, we need to consider how such relations structure our subject positions. Only after examining our complicity 'can we ask questions about how we are understanding differences and for what purposes'.[5]

Analysing my whiteness is not the objective in itself, rather an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of the 'confessional approach'. One form of what could be called 'white studies' is the literature of 'white confession'.[6] The confessional approach has been criticised because it only serves, ironically, to 'site whiteness as the 'altruistic' moral centre of anti-racist discourse'[7] and because of its essentialising tendency.

I want to underline that my whiteness is only one element within the meaning(s) of whiteness in my research. Whiteness has been considered as a 'taken for granted' property of Finns. It therefore features significantly among my research questions, as something the people whose experiences I intend to study are forced to negotiate. Thus, within the limits of this article I have to pass over many questions related to whiteness that are central in my ongoing research. However, I suggest that processing my whiteness points me towards important questions concerning the different aspects and workings of whiteness, racialised identities and power relations in Finland.

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[5] Razack, S. H., *Looking White People in the Eye. Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1998, p. 170.

[6] Bonnet, A., 'Constructions of Whiteness in European and American Anti-racism', in (ed.) Werbner, P. and Modood, T., *Debating Cultural Hybridity. Multi-Cultural Identities and the Politics of Anti-Racism*, Zed Books, London, New Jersey, 1997, pp. 181-183.

[7] Werbner, P., 'Introduction: The dialectics of Cultural Hybridity', in (ed.) Werbner, P. and Modood, T., *op cit.,* p. 11. See also Bonnet, 'Constructions of whiteness', *op cit.,* pp. 174-183; Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye, op cit.,* p. 170.

Predetermined ideas of whiteness

Before I present my efforts to contest whiteness as an 'ontological condition', I will summarise some common ideas of whiteness. I then use these ideas as a kind of a mirror in my efforts to reflect my own whiteness, and the workings of whiteness within the framework of my study.

The way whiteness has been understood in research on racism, ethnic relations, and in the history of History - as an unhistorical, fixed category, rather than a mutable social construction; as a defining rather than defined category – has been criticised within so called 'Whiteness Studies'.[8] These studies where whiteness has been approached as a historically, socially, politically and culturally produced social construction, suggest that despite the privileged position of white(ness) in racialised power structures, 'the contemporary meaning of Whiteness is not necessarily stable or permanent but, rather, a site of change and struggle'.[9] There is also a growing sensitivity to the hybrid nature of racial identities. Still, as a social construction, 'whiteness' is as real as any 'race' is 'real' in the sense that it has real, though changing, effects on the world and real, tangible and complex impacts on individuals' self, experiences and life chances'.[10]

Many scholars have talked about the difficulties of examining whiteness. As Richard Dyer says: 'In the realm of categories, black is always marked as a colour (as the term 'coloured' egregiously acknowledges), and is always particularising, whereas white is not anything really, not an identity, not a particularising quality, because it is everything'.[11] 'Everything' refers here to the dominant and normative nature of 'whiteness' in its relation to other racialised categories, as if whites are not of a certain race; they are just the human race.[12] Put like this, how am I able to see and understand whiteness and its workings in my understanding of reality, and in relations between myself and other people?

According to Dyer, whiteness can be seen where its difference from blackness is inescapable and at issue, 'as if only non-whiteness can give

[8] For example, see Bonnet, A., 'Who was white? The disappearance of non-European white identities and the formation of European racial whiteness', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21.6, 1998, pp. 1029-1055; Bonnet, A., *Anti-racism*, Sage, London, 2000; Bonnet, A., 'Constructins of whiteness', *op cit*; Frankenberg, R., *White Women, Race Matters. The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Routledge, London, 1993; Vron Ware *Beyond the Pale. White Women, Racism and History,* Verso, London, New York, 1992. See also Young, R., *White Mythologies. Writing History and the West*, Routledge, London, 1990.

[9] Bonnet, A., 'Constructions of whiteness', *op cit.*, p. 177.

[10] Frankenberg, R. *op cit.*, p. 11.

[11] Dyer, R., 'White', in (eds.) Evans, J. and Hall, S., *Visual culture: the reader*, Sage, London, 1999, p. 458. Chapter taken from Screen 29.4, 1988, pp. 44-65.

[12] *ibid*.

whiteness its substance'.[13] This notion of whiteness can be compared with that of ethnicity in the Barthian sense: it must be seen 'as an aspect of a relationship, not as a property of a person or a group'.[14] It becomes an important category only when people meet others, and the need to distinguish oneself arises. This is a good methodological guideline. However, I suggest that it is not just blackness or non-whiteness that can make my whiteness an issue, but my overall relationship to issues related to racism. Frankenberg has listed different but linked dimensions of whiteness. According to her, whiteness is not only a location of structural advantage, but also a standpoint. It also 'refers to a set of cultural practises that are usually unmarked and unnamed'.[15]

To speak about my whiteness is, above all, to speak about the place assigned to me in the relations of racism. If we think about my 'race' as a position constructed by how I am perceived by others, this place is very much pre-given, anchored in my corporeality, my phenotype which makes it possible to assume my whiteness. In order to understand racism and racial identities we should not deny 'biological dimensions that have nothing to do with genetic determinations and fixed essence but rather with the body as an ongoing process (…) the power of racism to shape people's bodies and lives'.[16] My body is coloured by the discourses of race as much as any other body, even though it is constructed differently to some other bodies. I am able to (or at least supposed to be able to) benefit from the privileges available for those perceived as 'white' in 'white' Finnish society. And thanks to 'whatever my phenotype is' I am probably perceived as 'white', and everything that is included in whiteness, wherever I go. However, as Peter Wade writes, 'in particular contexts, racial identifications work to create unyielding and enduring classifications, but this would be a social process and a result of a specific history, not the automatic result of a reference to phenotype or nature'.[17] Richard Dyer writes: 'White people are socially categorised as white because of what white means rather than because that is the most accurate term to describe our skin colour'.[18]

In addition to my phenotype, what authenticates my whiteness is that I was born and have lived my whole life in Finland (in Scandinavia, in Northern Europe). The confirmation of whiteness for people categorised as Finns took place long before I was born, before the foundation of the state. Within the processes in which different nations were located on the racial map of Europe, other Europeans assigned Finns a lower status in the racialised hierarchy - as (descendants of) Mongols.[19] In turn, this lead to forceful counter arguments of

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[13] *ibid.,*pp. 459-460.
[14] Eriksen, H., *Small Places, Large Issues. An Introduction to Social and Cultural Anthropology* Pluto Press, London, 2001, p. 263.
[15] Frankenberg, R. *op cit.*, p. 1.
[16] Wade, P., *Race, Nature and Culture. An Anthropological Perspective*, Pluto Press, London, 2002, p. 122.
[17] *ibid*., p. 5.
[18] Dyer, *op cit*., p. 50.
[19] Halmesvirta, A., *The British conception of the Finnish ´race´, nation and culture, 1760-1918*, Studia Historica 34, Suomen Historiallinen Seura, Helsinki, 1990.

Finnishess as 'white' European, i.e. non-Mongolian, by Finnish scholars in the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century. During this time, over 100,000 Finnish men were measured by Finnish scholars in order to show that Finns did not belong to the Mongolian race.[20] As a consequence of this dispute, the idea of races and racial order was also established in Finland, firmly linking 'race' with nationhood. Thus, even though certain events related to the history of racialisation and racism in Europe may have influenced Finns less than many other European nations, the 'subject-constituting projects of colonialism and imperialism'[21] had a strong impact on, and are implicated in the way 'Us' and 'Others' are seen in Finland today.

To speak about my whiteness as a standpoint is to speak about how I look at myself and at society.[22] It is about how I have internalised the moral and cultural baggage of whiteness,[23] how I see – or am not able to see – my privileged position and the racism around me. This whiteness is constructed by various discussions and discourses, for example within anti-racism[24] and post-colonial studies. Within these discussions, attributes that are associated with whiteness are not very heart warming or encouraging for a 'white' person studying racism, or for a 'white' person parenting two children perceived as 'non-white'. Here my whiteness, or *being thought of* as 'white',[25] means that basically I am thought of as colour-blind, as unable to acquire anti-racist consciousness and that because I do not experience racism I am unable to feel racism, unable to have real empathy and sympathy. Worst of all, being white means I am probably, even if not openly or consciously, a racist. I have a colour that cannot be totally faded out, even by being engaged in anti-racism.

Contesting ideas of predetermined whiteness

The answer to the question in my title 'Am I still white?' seems to depend on the way whiteness is defined. When examining whiteness as an attribute associated with individuals or groups, both the subjective dimensions (individuals' experiences and agency, questions of identity) and how individuals are perceived and categorised by others has to be examined. I try to combine these aspects by exploring my whiteness in and through the data of my ongoing research (diary, field notes and interviews) where my relations with participants, many of whom are perceived as 'non-white', can also be examined. I use these ideas and assumptions of whiteness as questions that can be posed to the data. When reading the stories (written by myself in the diary,

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[20] Ruuska, P., *Kuviteltu Suomi. Globalisaation, nationalismin ja suomalaisuuden punos julkisissa sanoissa 1980-90-luvuilla*, (Imagined Finland: Interweawing Globalization, Nationalism and Finnishness in Public Discourse in the 1980´s and 1990´s), Acta Electronica Universitatis Tamperensis; 156, Tampereen yliopisto, 2002, http://acta.uta.fi), pp. 61-71.
[21] Young, *op cit.*, p. 159
[22] Frankenberg, R. *op cit.,* p. 1.
[23] Bonnet, A., 'Who was white?', *op cit.*, p. 1038
[24] Bonnet, A., *Anti-racism, op cit.*; Gilroy, P., *Against Race. Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2000.
[25] Ware, V., *op cit.*, p. xii.

or documented as interviews/conversations between participants and myself) I try to examine things that either distance me or that I can share with other people - with those regarded as 'non-white' as well as with those regarded as 'white'. I try to examine the different subject positions I construct and that are assigned to me within these texts. I have found that paying attention to expressions of feelings and emotions is a very fruitful way of finding moments and positions where racialisations and racisms are negotiated. I use this observation here as a kind of a methodological guideline.

The most painful stories related to my whiteness - confessions and memories from my personal history that I have been forced to process, including the way I have seen other people, thought and talked about them, racist jokes that I have found amusing etc; all those 'dirty parts' of my story that I cannot leave behind but do not want to share with other people either - are absent from the diary. I think that mentioning these experiences and placing the word 'still' in the title of this paper is enough to give some evidence of certain aspects of my whiteness, without falling into the trap of the confessional method.

Experiencing racism and confronting normative whiteness

Even a quick reading of the diary that I kept during the years 2000 and 2001 illustrates that racism is an everyday issue in my personal life. It is something I am forced to process and negotiate non-stop not just because of my current work but also and especially because of my children. Documenting events related to racism in my personal life as a parent took so much time, and gradually became so depressing, that in order to be able to do anything else I had to stop writing about it. Many events, like fears that became true when my daughter started school, or the threat of racist violence to my family and my home, were never written down. Most stories are about encounters where people have noticed my children's difference and commented on it to them or to me. Gazes, questions and comments addressed to my children and to me make their 'difference' an issue that just cannot be forgotten, not even at home. Stories of everyday situations like travelling by bus, going to the beach or visiting friends are accentuated with expressions like 'I was' or 'I felt … 'alert', 'sad', 'depressed', 'angry' and sometimes 'released' or 'surprised and glad' to describe my reactions to other people's behaviour, or to my children's questions, stories and worries.

There are also a large number of stories in the diary where my children, and myself as their parent, have been forced to face and process not just other people's attitudes and their lack of understanding, but also how we are surrounded by the normative whiteness and representations of those people and cultures regarded as non-white, non-European, non-western. These are events that have been observed in institutional settings like the day care centre, at school, at health care services, as well as in free time in everyday encounters with other people: with strangers, with neighbours, even with close friends. The normative whiteness barges into our home when we turn the TV on or when we

read children's books. The power of the norm can best be seen in children's surprised happiness when it is challenged. *('He looks like me!'*) Being forced to process these issues makes it very difficult to be colour blind and not to mind.[26] Moreover, it does not remove my own whiteness.

Sometimes seeing and feeling the effects of the normative whiteness on 'non-white' children's self-esteem *('Mother, is 'Asian' a dirty word like 'African'?' 'I want to become blond! I hate my hair! Nobody likes my skin.' 'Yes, but other children never say I'm pretty!'*) may also make parents change the 'white environment', to break the norm. This is a subject I often discussed with other parents during the interviews.[27] Parents' efforts to break and change the all-embracing whiteness - for example by demanding different kinds of toys and books, plays and songs, employees with different backgrounds, or by criticising established ways of teaching at schools - open up encounters where the difficulties of contesting the normative whiteness can be examined in other people's reactions of surprise, uneasiness, disagreement, hostility, arrogance and all their 'this has nothing to do with racism' defences.

Being privileged and the limits of privilege

If whiteness is a privileged position, I am led to ask how my position as a 'white' person may have influenced my fieldwork and data. Analysing my interviews and reading my field notes are helpful here. They contain stories of how teachers at school or other people working with my children have treated me when I talk to them about racism, and show that they may be different from stories by mothers with a foreign background. What we share as parents is the fact that our attempts to talk about racism are often not understood, and that our worries are underestimated and sometimes dismissed by people, even by professionals working with our children. Where my position differs from some of the immigrant mothers is how our talk is received: sometimes even their right to talk is questioned. They are patronised instead of heard, and their parental competence is often questioned in rude, unprofessional and unethical ways by Finnish professionals working with children. Ironically, one participant - a mother with a foreign background - once said to me after seeing me on TV talking about racism*: 'It is good that you talk about these things, because people will listen to you, they don't listen to us if we talk about these things.'* The fact that I do not belong to 'us' here is an example of my whiteness. It is also a good example of reality where the cultural/racial

[26] On colour blindness as the dominant white discourse see O´Brien, E., 'Are we supposed to be colorblind or not? Competing frames used by whites against racism', *Race & Society* 3.1, 2000, pp. 41-59.
[27] Regarding problems and survival strategies in 'transracial mothering', see also Winddance Twine, F., 'Transracial Mothering and Antiracism: The Case of White Birth Mothers of'Black' Children in Britain', *Feminist Studies* 25.3, 1999, pp. 729-746; Winddance Twine, F., 'Bearing Blackness in Britain: The Meaning of Racial Difference for White Birth Mothers of African-Descent Children', *Social Identities* 5.2, 1999, pp.185-210.

specificity of white people can be 'more obvious to people who are not white than to white individuals'.[28]

Despite my position as one of the dominant white population, I have also had painful experiences of racism. Because my children have an African background, our family is also sometimes identified with their 'African-ness'. In Finland, people perceived as African occupy the lowest position in the hierarchies of the 'non-white' category. In this hierarchy children with an African background seem to face racism in its crudest variety, and more starkly than other 'non-white' people located differently in the racialising hierarchy. This is perceived in comments such as this, by one of my interviewees: '*that was hard for me, but it will be even harder for your kids because they look African'*. This racialisation also extends to us as parents. Combating everyday racism[29] means that I have to be aware of these grades of racism within racialised relations and hierarchies. I have learned that strategies which are available for some 'white' parents of 'non-white' children are not necessarily available for me. My children's 'colour' is less negotiable than some other 'colours'.

Being excluded, because of my whiteness, from arenas where some collective racialised identities are negotiated and practised as a source of resistance to racism,[30] means some strategies available for 'non-white' parents are not available for me. Racism also complicates the meaning of parental competence for 'white' parents of 'non-white' children.

Another factor that makes my whiteness an ambiguous privilege is my gender. Colour is a gendered category, but again in a contradictory way. Within the racial ideal, 'white' women have been assigned specific attributes - chastity and purity - as biological reproducers, as 'guardians of the race'.[31] A 'white' mother with a 'coloured' child is an easy target for remarks such as *'Is s/he really your child?'* or *' You've been with a black man!'*. There are many stories, for example among those that I have shared with the parents I have interviewed, where I have been treated differently because of my close relations to 'non-white' people. 'We' have learned to know all the 'she must have had sex with a black man' gazes, as well as, in the case of adoptive mothers, the obvious relief when we turn out to be 'especially good and respectable people', instead of 'loose and immoral women'.

These, among many other experiences, illuminate how colour and gender are often conflated with racial distinction. I can laugh at the 'she must have slept with a black man' gazes and I have become skilled at interrupting and contradicting blatant, impudent and aggressive gazes and comments. I am trying to learn how to be a 'nice' mother even though I know I have to be

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[28] Frankenberg, R., *op cit.*, p. 5.

[29] Regarding 'everyday racism', see Essed, P., *Everyday Racism: Reports from Women of Two Cultures*, Hunter House, Alameda, 1990.

[30] See for example, Britton, N. J., 'Racialized Identity and the Term 'Black'', in (eds.) Roseneil, S. and Seymour. J., *Practising identities. Power and resistance,* Macmillan, Londond, 1999, pp. 134-154

[31] Bonnet, A. 'Who was white', *op cit.*, p. 1046, see also Ware, V., *op cit.*

stricter, constrain my children's space and freedom more than most parents do, just because of the fear of racism, including racist violence, that they as very 'non-white' people will face. What will probably never stop hurting me is how, because of my skin colour, my parenthood, my relationship with and my love of my children is questioned and not always accepted, as if I have been denied basic rights such as to fall in love, to have children and a family, with people positioned differently in racialised hierarchies. It is a painful way to experience and to be touched by racism.

Sharing the same reality

I see dialogue and sharing as necessary or at least possible and desirable characteristics of ethnographic interviews. The ability to offer my stories, and occasionally my friends' and other participants' stories, in order to gain new stories of othering and racialisation in individuals' everyday lives, showed that I do share many experiences with many of the participants, regardless of my/their 'colour'. This can also be read in their comments, like: *'Well, you know this probably as well as I do'; ' you have not probably experienced this because your elder one is a girl, but when your son gets older…'; ' you don't have to worry about her dating for a long time, when they start it nobody wants to date her, so you don't have to think about it yet, but when she is …'*. They know that some issues are or will be part of my life too.

In the diary there are expressions of disappointment towards people, including my close friends, who do not seem to understand my and my children's reality, and expressions of release and happiness when I have been understood in spite of my presumptions. This, as well as a quick listing of those whom I have been able to, or wanted to share my experiences with, shows the importance of people regarded as non-white in my social network and/or the importance of people, regardless of their colour, who have close relations (as parents, as spouses, as close friends) with people regarded as non-white. How issues related to racism can be shared has become an important indicator of many things in my relationships with other people and influenced my social network in many ways. Regardless of the 'colour' of the people who seem to be able to listen to me, to discuss, to give me strength to overcome the difficult moments and to act when needed, they all share something: they have faced othering and racism and/or people close to them have faced racism. Likewise, both the diary and the interviews show that my experiences of racism in my personal life (introduced to the participants as one of the motives for the research and thus known by all the participants) is what, in many cases, makes people share their experiences with me - despite my colour.

Not sharing the same reality

What is explained above is how I have become conscious of many issues related to racism and whiteness. But it does not make me feel non-white. On the contrary, the fact that I seem to learn new things because of my children

and other 'non-white' people close to me all the time could be considered proof of my whiteness. There are many stories in the diary explaining how uncertain and confused I can be in my efforts to understand my children's, or my participants', reality. I am uncertain of how conscious they are or are not of their 'being different' in certain situations. My ability to understand and share has also been questioned by some of the participants: *'don't get hurt but I think a parent who is not 'different' herself will never understand these things the same way we do...'; ' I can tell you they* [my children] *will never tell you everything, so you won't know…'*. Interviewing both young people and parents has shown how unaware parents can be of their children's life and experiences.

People become conscious of different dimensions of their own racial being when racialisation extends to 'white' people because of their close relations with 'non-white' people. 'White' people are not inevitably able to share the reality of 'non-white' people close to them, which suddenly makes whiteness a burden. What may also happen is that sharing with 'us', those positioned similarly in racialised hierarchies, becomes difficult. Being thought of as a 'white', I have access to the disclosures that are shared only among other people perceived as white:[32] racist ways of talking, racist jokes and comments – and sometimes sudden embarrassment and uncomfortable silence which follows from their noticing that I do not want to share that reality, moments when I am not able to be one of 'us', moments when I would like to shout: 'Stop hurting me! Don't you see I'm not really white!'

To keep quiet, not to comment or make any other interventions in these situations is being and staying 'white'. But if I do something, does it make me less 'white'? Could it make me 'non-white'? The way whiteness as a social construction and its workings are understood, being either white or non-white is what matters. So, the 'less white' does not even really exist. Also, my changed and changing position does not really allow me an entrance into non-whiteness as long as I am perceived as 'white'. But what it does, even though the effects on the complex reality of the racialised world are minor, is unbalance, contest and contradict that 'white' reality.

Conclusion: dealing with the colour trouble?

I have tried to reflect my being a 'white' researcher/woman/parent/ friend by comparing common ideas and assumptions of whiteness both through my own experiences and through the ways I have been perceived by other people as demonstrated in the data of my research - in the diary and the interviews. I have done this in order to be aware of the conditions in which the data of my study has been generated, and the possible limitations to my understanding of other people's reality when analysing the data.

Reflecting on the workings of whiteness in my personal life has added to my understanding of racialising practises in general. To better understand the

[32] Brah, A., 'The scent of memory: strangers, our own and others', in (eds.) Brah, A. and Coombes, A., *Hybridity and its Discontents. Politics, science, culture*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 289.

reality of those whose experiences I intend to study, I need to know how and where whiteness works as a norm in Finnish society and what kinds of difficulties individuals may face when confronting it as 'non-whites'.

Even though following the 'reflexivity recommendation' seems to benefit my ongoing research in many ways, I have found this reflection on and talking about myself as 'white' very disturbing. Terms referring to 'racial groups' have been contested by individuals and groups for various reasons: in order to gain a better position in racialised social hierarchies or in order to question these hierarchies,[33] or just because they have been found inadequate, as is often the case for people considered to be 'mixed race'.[34] Talking about myself as 'white' is uncomfortable not just because of the 'guilty burden' associated with whiteness, not just because it reminds me of the racialised reality, and not just because of the difficulties in defining whiteness as a racial category and my own position within these categories. I am reluctant to use the term because I would like to find a better way to talk about racism, a way that would erode the powerful assumptions behind racism instead of reproducing them.

I have found the same reluctance towards certain terms in the interviews I have made with young people. Their uneasiness with words like 'white', 'black', and 'coloured' is remarkable. The newness of certain phenomena or discussions in Finnish society is one possible explanation for that. When children talk about being brown instead of black or coloured or non-white, they may talk about their or other people's skin colour as they see it (as brown, not as black), it also says something about the absence of a discussion about racism and racialised identities in Finland. However, among adolescents these colour-terms that refer to racialised categories should be something they know from TV and other sources. Still they seem to avoid them.[35] That, along with my own uneasiness with the word 'white', has made me think that not using these colour-terms may also be a means to reject the positions offered for us in racialised relations and hierarchies. It does not necessarily mean denying racism; on the contrary, it may also work as a strategy against racism.

At a theoretical level 'race' needs to be viewed 'as a precarious discursive construction'.[36] I see colour-talk, the usage of terms like 'white', 'coloured' and 'black', as the core of this discourse. As the cultural politics of

[33] Bashi, V., 'Racial categories matter because racial hierarchies matter: a commentary', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21.5, 1998, pp. 959-968; Bonnet, A., 'Who was white?' *op cit.,* pp.1029-1055; Thornton, M. C., Taylor, R.J. and. Brown, T.N., 'Correlates of racial label use among Americans of African descent: Colored, Negro, Black, and African American', *Race and Society* 2.2, 2000, pp. 149-164.

[34] Phoenix. A. and Owen, C., 'From Miscegenation to hybridity: mixed relationships and mixed parentage in profile', in (eds.) Brah, A. and Coombes, A. *op cit.,* pp. 72-95; Rockquemore, K.A., 'Between Black and White. Exploring the 'Biracial' Experience', *Race & Society* 1.2, 1998, pp. 197-212.

[35] Phoenix and Owen, *op cit.*, p. 74.

[36] Gilroy, P., 'The End of Antiracism', in (eds.) Essed, P. and Goldberg, T. *Race Critical Theories*, Blackwell, Oxford, 2002, p. 251. First published in (eds.) Donald and Rattansi *'Race', Culture and Difference*, Sage, London, 1992.

racism relies on visual processes of 'othering',[37] 'colour-coded humanity'[38] provides the basis for racism that in turn, reproduces its 'truth'.

If being against racism is being against racialisation, I should be against being *talked* of as 'white', instead of trying to redefine whiteness in a way that could better describe my position or identity. I should not talk about other people by using these colour-coded terms, created and reproduced within the discourses of 'race' either. This does not mean denying racism, or the existence of racialised identities, ie. people's real experiences. What I hope follows from being aware and experiencing the problems of colour-talk, is a very critical stance towards all colour-coded terms, both in everyday usage and especially in research. In so far as 'race' needs to be *seen*, I suggest that a critical stance towards colour-talk is the only way to avoid a fatal leaning on the racist ideas embedded in these terms.

Encounters where colour-talk arises produce or flesh out 'others' and differentiate those 'others' from 'other others'.[39] If we focus on these particular modes of encounter (rather than on my 'colour', on my particularity), we can ask 'not only what made this encounter possible (its historicity), but also what does it make possible, what futures might it open up?' It may open up 'the possibility of facing something other than *this* other, of something that may surprise the one who faces, and the one who is faced'.[40]

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[37] Ming-Bao Yue 'On not looking German. Ethnicity, diaspora and the Politics of vision', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 3.2, 2000, pp. 173-194.
[38] Gilroy, P., *op cit*., p. 47.
[39] Ahmed, *op cit.*, p. 144.
[40] *ibid.,* pp. 144-145