Neither victim nor fetish
– ‘Asian’ women and the effects of racialization in the Swedish context

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

I wish to express my gratitude to the people who have made this work possible. To the women who opened their hearts and shared their experiences with me: thank you, it has been a privilege to listen to and be entrusted to present your stories. To professor Stefan Jonsson and all the teachers at REMESO whose support and encouragement these past two years should not be underestimated; whose commitment and efforts towards shaping a better world for all inspires hope for the future: thank you. To my friends and family who have imparted heartfelt well-wishes and kind words of confidence along the way—Alex, Dylan, Raha, Rudeina, Carola, Charlotte, and many more: thank you. And to Fredrik, whose love and tireless support has enabled me to pursue this path; whose energy, enthusiasm and endless optimism throughout has been heartening—you’re my rock: thank you.

This work is dedicated to my fellow people of colour, especially my ‘Asian’ sisters, who are on the same path of learning how to free our minds.

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Linköping, 21 December 2018

ABSTRACT

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Year: 2018

People who are racialized in Sweden as ‘Asian’—a panethnic category—come from different countries or ethnic backgrounds and yet, often face similar, gender-specific forms of discrimination which have a significant impact on their whole lives. This thesis centres women who are racialized as 'Asian', focusing on how their racialization affects, and is shaped by, their social, professional and intimate relationships, and their interactions with others—in particular, with white majority Swedes, but also other ethnic minorities. Against a broader context encompassing discourses concerning 'Asians' within Swedish media, art and culture, Swedish ‘non-racist’ exceptionalism and gender equality politics, the narratives of nine women are analysed through the lenses of the racializing processes of visuality and coercive mimeticism, and epistemic injustice.

Key terms: racialization, racism, Asian women, Sweden, Western context, panethnicity, stereotypes, visuality, coercive mimeticism, epistemic injustice, narratives, storytelling, counter-storytelling, intersectionality, everyday racism, structural racism
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1. INTRODUCTION

When something is ‘invisible’, silent or considered unproblematic, it needs to be scrutinised, as it often has influence on, and connections with, what is visible, heard and seen as problematic. Sara Ahmed (2007: 157) uses the metaphor of ‘a sea of whiteness’ to describe a space or room filled with white bodies, which makes a non-white body entering the space both ‘invisible’ because it is only one in a ‘sea’ of white bodies, but simultaneously rendered hypervisible in the way it is made to ‘stand out’, ‘stand apart’ and not fit in—this applies of course to ‘Western’ contexts where whiteness is normative.

Contemporary racialized conceptualisations of immigrant women in Sweden seem to focus considerably on women who are racialized as ‘Middle Eastern’ or black, and in particular, Muslim women who are veiled (Bergman 2018; Marmorstein 2017; Svennebäck 2018). Therefore, I wish to draw attention to what I perceive as, in some specific ways, a relatively ‘invisible’ group in public discourses on immigrants and racialized people: women who are racialized as ‘Asian’.

In a news article¹ published on SVT in 2016, economics professor Mats Hammarstedt posed the question as to why such a large proportion—twenty-five percent—of highly educated women (i.e. those with tertiary education) from Asia and Africa are excluded from the workforce, stating that the reasons must be identified, and the pattern must be broken. I argue that the exclusion of highly educated Asian (and African) women from the labour market is a consequence of their objectification and racialization, which also lead to other adverse effects, as I will attempt to demonstrate in this study.

Relationships and interactions with the rest of society are some key factors that affect a person’s quality of life as well as psychological and emotional health (Lindblad & Signell 2008; Ahlstedt 2016: 215). My research will be centred on women who are racialized as ‘Asian’ in Sweden, focusing on how their racialization affects, and is shaped by, their relationships and

¹ As an aside, I wish to raise the question as to why the image used in Hammarstedt’s article is of Muslim Asian women wearing hijab (most likely from Indonesia or Malaysia), when the largest group of women racialized as Asian in Sweden comes from Thailand, where the majority of the population is Buddhist. Even this article about migrant Asian and African women—which is a very heterogeneous ‘group’—demonstrates what I view as the Swedish and general Western Orientalist preoccupation with the veiled Muslim woman.
interactions with others—in particular, with white majority Swedish\(^2\) men and women, but also other ethnic minorities. Note that embedded in the panethnic term ‘Asian’ in the Swedish context are the popular notions and stereotypes of Asians from East- and Southeast Asia.

Besides the challenges ‘Asian’ women may face on the labour market, in contact with social and governmental organizations (migration, tax, welfare, education, health, etc.), and so on, they may also face specific challenges in their social and intimate relationships because of the way they are racialized—which often includes being stereotyped as ‘third world women’ who are victimized, exploited and/or racially fetishized. Due to the necessity for delimiting the study, its focus is on cisgendered individuals, as queer individuals have experiences and challenges specific to them (Ahlstedt 2016: 21)—although I have not expressly excluded them.

This study will be situated within, and informed by, a broader context encompassing discourses within Swedish media, art and culture concerning ‘Asians’, as well as the following, although they might not be named explicitly or explained in detail: Swedish ‘antiracist’ exceptionalism (Hübinette 2013; Regeringskansliet 2005: 130), white or hegemonic feminism (de los Reyes 2016: 25; Ortega 2006), narratives of anti-feminism in Sweden (Eriksson 2013) and Swedish gender equality politics (Lundström & Twine 2011).

### 1.1 Research question and purpose

With this thesis, I aim to bring to light the narratives of women racialized as ‘Asian’ in Sweden, containing their experiential knowledge of often intersecting oppressions, namely racism, misogyny/sexism as well as class contempt. The focus of this study will therefore be to explore, outline, define and describe different ways by which women of East Asian and South East Asian descent are racialized as ‘Asian’ in the Swedish context. By highlighting and analysing their concrete, uniquely individual and subjective experiences, which are also linked and collective (Dillard 2000; Mohanty 2003: 191), I hope to contribute to the identification and naming of different manifestations of prejudice, marginalization, exclusion and racism. These oppressive phenomena, which are inflicted upon ‘Asian’ women, other people of colour and other marginalized groups, function to hinder their full integration into Swedish society, and in this way

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\(^2\) I choose to use the term “majority Swedes” (majoritetssvenskar) to refer to white Swedes who are generally considered “ethnic” or, more contentiously, “native” Swedes. Yet to be widely used, but gaining popularity among researchers, “majority Swedes” seems the most accurate term in the context of this thesis because not all ethnic Swedes are white, and native Swedes may arguably refer mainly to the Sami people. I am using the term as it is used in Tobias Hübinette and Carina Tigervall’s (2009: 337) paper, *To be Non-white in a Colour-Blind Society: Conversations with Adoptees and Adoptive Parents in Sweden on Everyday Racism*. 
undermines the ideals of gender and ethnic equality, which are part of the basic principle of Swedish democracy that all human beings are equal in worth (Regeringskansliet 2005: 75). Structural discrimination is a serious problem for democracy and for society as a whole, not just for the groups that are subject to it (Regeringskansliet 2005: 22). Once named, these oppressive phenomena and structures can then be confronted, deconstructed, opposed, and ultimately dismantled (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 43).

2. BACKGROUND: ‘Asian’ women in the Swedish context

Before going further, I wish to clarify once again that in Sweden, the popular notions and stereotypes of people—generally from East- and Southeast Asia—are embedded in the blanket term ‘Asian’. Being an ‘Asian’ woman myself, whose racialization has taken various expressions since I moved to Sweden from Malaysia a decade ago, I sought—in a kind of autoethnographic move (Chang 2008: 44)—to get an overview of the ways in which ‘Asian’ women are generally depicted in Swedish public discourse, in an attempt to understand some of my own experiences. To obtain this overview, I examined materials published in Swedish newspapers (online) and academia over the past decade on ‘Asian’ and/or Thai women in the Swedish context. I discerned three distinct images and stereotypes of women racialized as ‘Asian’ from the material surveyed: the young(er), ‘imported’ wife; a member of the precariat; and the sex worker—stereotypes and images that allude to them being in some way victimized/exploited and/or sexually (racially) fetishized. While this is by no means a list of every possible way ‘Asian’ women are portrayed, their depictions—especially those of the imported wife and sex worker—demonstrate clearly that ‘Asian’ and ‘Thai’ are used interchangeably in public discourse, and that non-Thai women are lost in the (relatively small) figurative ‘sea’ of Thai women, and are therefore in this way made ‘invisible’. The aforementioned

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3 The term autoethnography is used here in the way that is defined by anthropologist Heewon Chang (2008: 46)—that is, referring to the researcher’s personal narratives and stories that are “reflected upon, analyzed and interpreted within their broader sociocultural context”. I also take inspiration from Deborah E. Reed-Danahay’s (1997: 2) conception of autoethnography, which is situated at the intersection of ‘native anthropology’ (“in which people who were formerly the subjects of ethnography become the authors of studies of their own group”); ‘ethnic autobiography’ (“personal narratives written by members of ethnic minority groups”); and ‘autobiographical ethnography’ (“in which anthropologists interject personal experience into ethnographic writing”).

4 According to social work scholars Helena Hedman, Lennart Nygren and Siv Fahlgren (2009), a relatively large number of marriages between Thai women and Swedish men have taken place in Sweden since the 1990s, and these marriages have generally been described in Swedish newspapers as a “social problem”. Consulting publicly available statistics between 2000 and 2017 (Statistiska Centralbyrån), the immigration of Thai women to Sweden has increased steadily since 2000, peaking between 2008 and 2010.
depictions will be elaborated upon in subsection 2.2: The portrayal of ‘Asians’ in media and cultural productions.

In Sweden, many women of East/Southeast Asian appearance are often attributed as Thai by others (non-East/Southeast Asians)—to this I can attest, from my personal experiences, having been misattributed as Thai countless times since I moved to Sweden; this has also been the experience of many other women of my acquaintance, who are of East/Southeast Asian descent. The implication of this misattribution is that racialized constructions of the Thai woman are ascribed to a significant number of women of East/Southeast Asian appearance.

Whether racialized as Thai or simply ‘Asian’, women who are placed in these categories in the imaginations of the general public experience degrading attitudes and treatment related to their physical appearance and perceived origins, as confirmed by a 2008 Swedish study in which seventeen adopted young women from South Korea and Thailand described their experiences of “prejudices related to sexuality” (Lindblad & Signell 2008). The women reported that these “degrading attitudes” adversely influence their well-being and quality of life. Another study on adoptees found that young ‘Asian’ girls and women are more likely to experience unpleasant sexual encounters than other women in Swedish society (Berg-Kelly & Eriksson 1997); Lindblad and Signell (2008) argue that sexualized stereotypes may contribute to this, resulting in these women having difficulties in trusting men and entering into relationships. The 2010 docudrama “Your kind makes very good kissers” by Caroline Seung-Hwa Ljuus—a Swedish artist who was adopted from Korea—captures instances of “prejudices related to sexuality” and “degrading attitudes” inflicted upon ‘Asian’ women by Swedish men who objectify and racially fetishize them.

To return to the topic of categorizations: it is important to note that of course, the conflation of the categorization ‘Asian’ and certain ethnic identities imagined to originate in the Asian continent is not confined to Sweden, simultaneously while other ethnic identities from that region are excluded: as Avtar Brah (1996: 7) points out in Cartographies of Diaspora, in the USA, the categorization or descriptor of ‘Asian’ had been mainly reserved for Americans of Chinese or Japanese ancestry—and as she ‘looked Indian’, she was not categorized as ‘Asian’. In the British context however, the term ‘Asian’ is used more often to refer to South Asians—usually people of Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, or Sri Lankan descent—due to British colonial history and continuities (Brah 1996: 68, 191).

Note also that in Hammarstedt’s (2016) SVT news article, and likewise the academic report he refers to (Aldén & Hammarstedt 2014), it is not clarified exactly what the categorisation of ‘Asian’ entails. The regional categorization of ‘Asia’ employed by Statistics Sweden encompasses
not only countries that are considered part of East Asia and Southeast Asia, but also Central Asia and West Asia. Many of the countries considered part of West Asia are most commonly categorized as part of the ‘Middle East’—a transcontinental region and geopolitical concept—in popular discourse. Some sections of the report by Aldén & Hammarstedt refer to immigration of refugees and migrants from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Europe, while in the data drawn from Statistics Sweden, all the aforementioned categorizations are mentioned, except the Middle East; this implies that the category of Middle East is subsumed under ‘Asia’ in some contexts, but not in others. It is important to take note of these distinctions, especially if one intends to pinpoint how people from a particular background are marginalized as a group.

2.1 Statistics - gender: woman; birth region: Asia

In order to paint a rough picture of the possible reason why the Thai woman is foremost in the imaginations of non-Asians when they encounter somebody they perceive as an ‘Asian’ woman in Sweden, we will take a look at statistics focusing on immigrants from Southeast Asia and East Asia.\(^5\)

According to 2017 statistics, there are 81,555 Southeast Asians living in Sweden, of which 57,452 are women (Statistiska Centralbyråns 2018). The largest group of women from this figure migrated from Thailand (32,284), followed by the Philippines (10,651) and Vietnam (10,111). From East Asia there are approximately 51,449 immigrants, of which 31,168 are women. The largest group of women from this figure migrated from China (18,739), followed by South Korea (6,710) and Japan (2,383). On 20th January 2017, the population of Sweden passed the 10 million mark (Statistiska Centralbyråns 2018). This means that East- and Southeast Asian(-born) women constitute less than 1 percent of Sweden’s population. But although there isn’t a very large number of them, they occupy a certain position in sociopolitical discourse and in the collective imaginations of Swedes. I argue, using Sara Ahmed’s (2007: 159) metaphor of “a sea of whiteness”, that Asian women are invisible because they are relatively few in this ‘sea’, but at the same time, they are made hypervisible because they in some way “stand out” and do not “fit in”.\(^6\)

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5 Discourses on people from West, Central and South Asia are not included in this study because the ways they are racialized differ from Southeast and East Asians. There are of course nuances in the way the latter two categories are racialized as well, but they are the two most often subsumed under the category of ‘Asian’.

6 Note that included in Statistics Sweden’s population figures are registered residents in the country, who have the intention and right to stay in Sweden for at least one year.

7 Countries included in this figure are Thailand, Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Brunei & East Timor.

8 Countries included in this figure are China, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Mongolia & North Korea.
Various reports from Statistics Sweden reveal that the most common reasons stated in residence permit applications are asylum, family ties (including partners), as well as employment or studies (Johansson 2009; Statistiska Centralbyråns 2015: 18). Citizens of countries outside the European Union and the Nordic countries are required to have residence permits issued by the Swedish Migration Agency in order to live in Sweden. For permits based on family ties, the applicant must have ties to a person already residing in Sweden, namely their spouse, registered partner or cohabiting partner (sambo), and/or children under the age of eighteen (Migrationsverket 2018a). Extended family such as adult siblings or parents of adult children are not normally eligible for residence permits due to family ties.

Women migrate more often due to family ties than men, and statistics for the period of 1998-2013 show that this is the main reason why women move to Sweden, whether to a Swedish-born or foreign-born partner or relative (Statistiska Centralbyråns 2015: 18). Since 2006, there had been an increase in immigration for purposes of asylum and family reunification due to the conflict in Iraq, and in 2013 due to the Syrian civil war. The report states that Thailand and Turkey are also common countries of origin for women immigrating due to family ties (Statistiska Centralbyråns 2015: 18); nearly three out of ten women migrating for this reason are in a relationship with a person born in Sweden, and these women are most often from Thailand, the Philippines and Russia. It is also interesting to note that China is the most common country of origin for people (born outside the EU or Nordic countries) immigrating due to work and studies, followed by Russia and the USA (Statistiska Centralbyråns 2015: 24).

Note that even though the statistics mentioned here include neither adoptees from Asia, of whom there are a significant number, nor people who are born in Sweden to one or both parents from Asia—the way they are racialized is often similar to that faced by immigrants from Asia.

2.2 The portrayal of ‘Asian’ women in media, cultural productions and academia

This section aims to provide a very general overview of some ways in which ‘Asian’ women are depicted in Sweden; the materials I examined had helped me to make sense of some of my own experiences, and I offer this as a generalized background to the reader who may be unfamiliar with

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9 It is worth noting that the information on reasons for immigrating for citizens of EU countries is often not available, as they are only required to apply for the right of residence at the Swedish Tax Agency; and neither is this information on citizens of Nordic countries available, as they have been enjoying free movement between these countries since the mid-1950s (Statistiska Centralbyråns 2015: 18).
the Swedish context. I also include some examples from other Scandinavian countries to illustrate how some of these depictions are not confined to Sweden.

As mentioned earlier, through perusal of materials on ‘Asian’ and Thai women in Swedish media published in the past decade, I identified three distinct, but often overlapping images/portrayals of women racialized as ‘Asian’: ‘the submissive/imported wife’, ‘the precariat worker’, and ‘the sex worker’. These will be elaborated upon in the following three subsections. Another stereotype or image of ‘Asians’ encountered by some interview participants—that of the model minority—is covered in subsection 5.8 of the analysis chapter.

2.2.1 The submissive/‘imported’ wife

A 2009 report for the Institute for Futures Studies states that 29 percent of marriages between Swedish men and foreign-born women were with women from Southeast Asia or other parts of Asia (Östh, Ham & Niedomysl 2009). There is a fairly common assumption that many ‘Asian’ women, particularly those from Thailand, have moved to Sweden due to marriage or relationships with white majority Swedish men, as is evidenced by newspaper headlines such as “Young wives from Thailand evoke emotions” (Sörbring 2010), “I understand why men want Thai women” (Utter 2009), and “Swedish men choose younger wives from Asia” (Utter 2010)10. From these headlines alone, one can gauge how the figure of the Thai/Asian woman is constructed in sociopolitical discourse on the intersection of gender, ethnicity, sexuality, age, geographic origin and citizenship status.

What are the characteristics—according to media reports—that make ‘Asian’, and in particular, Thai women so desirable to some Swedish men? The article titled “Young wives from Thailand evoke emotions” (Sörbring 2010) lists various quotes and observations from interviews with, presumably, Swedish men:

"Thai girls are by nature conservative and traditional; they take care of their families."

"They have beautiful yellow skin and lean bodies and they can make yummy food."

"Thai women work hard, rarely are unfaithful and are brought up not to divorce their husband if he cheats on them."

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10 All three headlines are my translations from Swedish.
“One way that Kenneth’s relationship with his Thai wife differs from his previous relations with Swedish women is that he gets a much greater appreciation now for the things he does at home.”

“Why choose a wrinkled and grouchy 40-year-old Swedish woman when you can have a lively 25-year-old from Thailand?”

“Some with whom Expressen spoke yearn for the past, to a time when ‘men got to be men and women got to be women’.”

“Above all, it is emphasized that Thai women respect their men.”

These media excerpts reveal a very strong perception among some Swedes of the Thai woman as a “third world woman”: traditional, family-oriented and domestic (Mohanty 1984: 338). There are also glimpses of the unequal power relations between the parties involved, as well as a perceived or implied lack of something on the part of the Swedish men and/or their environment that compels them to seek relationships with Thai women, who are attributed with these specific qualities they are seeking. According to an article on media portrayals of Thai-Swedish couples, these majority Swedish men are “assigned a marginalized masculinity in relation to the meanings of the hegemonic, Western, middle-class norm of free, romantic love between equals” (Hedman, Nygren & Fahlgren 2009).

Recent years have seen several documentaries focusing on ‘Asian’ women and their relationships with white majority Scandinavian men aired on television and streamed online via the websites of various media organizations: “Thailandsdrömmar” (“Dreams of Thailand”), released in 2017 on SVT—the Swedish national public TV broadcaster; the series “Lykken er en asiatisk kone” (“Happiness is an Asian wife”)—a 2016 production on TV2 Danmark; and “Looking for love in the Faroes” from 2017 on Al Jazeera 101 East. Generally speaking, these documentaries reproduce the stereotype described in this section, reveal the asymmetrical power relations between the parties involved, and also reproduce the popular perception and discourse of ‘traditional’ Asian cultures where women are depicted as being devoted to family, versus ‘cold’ and ‘distant’ European (or at least Nordic) cultures where women are constructed as “too busy and independent”.

11 The quotes are my translations from Swedish.
2.2.2 The precariat worker

Another image associated with migrants from Asia as well as Central/Eastern Europe, is that of being cheap labour in precarious, exploitative jobs such as seasonal berry picking, cleaning, housekeeping, restaurant service work and similar (Woolfson, Fudge & Thörnqvist 2014). Thais who come to Sweden as seasonal workers for the wild berry industry, in particular, have received much notice from the media as well as in academia, which focus largely on their severe vulnerability as migrant workers (Krifors 2017: 67; Radio Sweden 2009; Woolfson, Fudge & Thörnqvist 2014). While the exploitation of workers is a very real and serious issue that needs to be addressed, it is included here as a reminder that this image also becomes included in the way that people from these regions are portrayed in public discourse. So here again, one gets a sense of another way the idea of Thais and therefore the Thai woman are generally constructed: they are associated with low-wage, low-skill, often temporary jobs with little or no work security—proletarian workers who transfer all the value they have created to the business owner or employer in exchange for wages (Wallerstein 1991c: 120).

Some of this research—such as articles by Erika Sörensson (2015) and Charlotta Hedberg (2016)—focuses on gendered relations within this context: some of the Thai women who initially work as berry pickers meet majority white Swedish men, with whom they then have intimate partnerships and perhaps later, business partnerships. Through these intimate relationships, the women are able to apply for a residence permit, stay in Sweden and start building a new life (Migrationsverket 2018c). One of the conditions for obtaining a residence permit for intimate partners is that the partner who is a Swedish citizen must be able to financially support their partner, and this makes the migrating partner, who more often than not will have difficulty finding work in their first few years in Sweden, extremely reliant on the Swede in all practical and financial matters; this is detailed in the chapter titled “Loss” in Sara Ahlstedt’s (2016: 274) dissertation on queer intimate partner migration. I would like to add here that another condition that must be fulfilled in order for a migrating partner (whatever their gender) to be granted a Swedish residence permit is that the relationship has to be deemed sufficiently ‘serious’ by the Migration Agency (Ahlstedt 2016: 189). If, however, the relationship ends, the woman (or migrating partner) has to prove that she has ‘ties to Sweden’ and that those ties are strong enough—according to the authorities—to justify extending her residence permit (Migrationsverket 2018b).

The very fact that a Thai woman’s ability to stay, survive and make a living in Sweden depends on the whims and goodwill of her (usually) white Swedish partner places her in a precarious position; as Ruth Lister (2003: 128) argues in Private-Public: the Barriers to
Citizenship, migrant women's autonomy is particularly vulnerable at this intersection of the public and private, especially due to the fact that under immigration laws, they tend to be positioned as economic and legal dependents, which has implications for their social, legal and economic rights. This is a position in which the majority of partner/marriage migrants seem to find themselves—leaving all that is familiar and dear in their home country, leaving their support networks and essentially their independence, for ‘love’; as the respondents in Ahlstedt’s (2016: 254) dissertation can attest. This precarity may drive the migrating partner to accept any job they can find, leaving them more vulnerable to labour exploitation. Of course, the challenges and difficulties faced by each individual migrant vary depending on their position on the intersections of ethnicity/race, gender, nationality, language ability, education, social connections, sexuality and so on.

The news article titled “Young wives from Thailand evoke emotions” (Sörbring 2010) outlines some of the vulnerabilities faced by Asian and Thai women who move to Sweden for the sake of their relationship with Swedish partners. Due to the fact that the migrating partner is at a severe disadvantage, especially when they have just moved to Sweden and know neither the Swedish language nor the way society functions, there are cases of men abusing this power they have over their partners. According to Cecilia Fernbrant (2013), foreign-born women, especially those with low disposable income, are—compared to Swedish-born women—at increased risk of interpersonal violence, social isolation, and also at increased risk of mortality due to interpersonal violence. Citing in her dissertation a sample of Thai women predominantly married to Swedish men, Fernbrant (2013) relates exposure to intimate partner violence and social isolation to poor mental health.

The article by Sörbring (2010) also states that many women who have been isolated, physically abused or thrown out of their homes do not file police reports against their partners for fear of being deported. According to Ruth Lister (2003: 128), the immigration laws that cast intimate partnership migrants as economic and legal dependents, where their right to stay in the country derives from their relationship to their partner, can therefore have the effect of locking these women into violent marriages, leaving them vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation.

In Lister's text (2003: 129), she writes that in the British context, the construction of women as economic and legal dependents by immigration law has served to reinforce that dependency by undermining their labour market position; the discourse of economic dependency also shapes key aspects of their relationship to citizenship, their access to the labour market and to social rights. In the Swedish context, immigration law generally protects the white majority Swede or Swedish citizen regardless of their gender, and leaves the migrating partner economically, legally and
socially vulnerable, regardless of their gender. But here I would argue that Asian and Thai women are simultaneously affected by structural inequalities inherent in their being Asian, being women, as well as being constructed as the proletariat/precariat, as can be surmised by this critique of the Swedish government by Roks (the National Organization for Women’s and Girls’ Shelters in Sweden) with regards to Thai migrant women who have been subject to abuse: “The Swedish government should try to prevent men from setting up systems to bring women here and treat them badly, instead of protecting the men” (Sörbring 2010).

2.2.3 Land of sun, sea, sand and sex (workers)

Thailand is and has been one of the most popular travel destinations among Swedes, who enjoy the sun, sea and sand, as well as the low prices for food, entertainment, shopping and more. When the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami hit, approximately 20,000 Swedes were in affected areas in Thailand (Svärdkrona 2005). After that natural disaster which claimed the lives of 543 Swedes and a total of about 225,000 victims, mainly from Indonesia, Sri Lanka and India (Svärdkrona 2005), and even despite political conflicts in the southern regions of the country, Thailand continues to be a favoured holiday destination, attracting 321,000 Swedes in 2015 (Floman 2016).

Tourism is global industry based on past colonial structural relationships, which continue to be reinforced and perpetuated today. It can be argued that tourism is a form of neocolonialism—a phenomenon that perpetuates the colonial legacy of domination and subjugation via the expansion of capitalism and economic and cultural globalization, where the metropolitan/core powers continue to exercise influence over the postcolonial periphery (Hall & Tucker 2004: 2). This is evident in the reliance of many so-called ‘developing’ countries on tourism revenue, and in the flow of tourism, which largely tends to be from ‘developed’/metropolitan to ‘developing’/peripheral countries—demonstrating the asymmetry in mobility and purchasing power of nationals from ‘developed’ countries such as Sweden contra ‘developing’ countries such as Thailand.

As mentioned before, Swedes go to Thailand not only for its beautiful beaches, tropical weather and good food—but also because of the country’s sex industry. “It is like a candy store, all young, beautiful girls”, says Roger, aged 55, in a news article about Swedish men who buy sex in Thailand (Dragic & Töpffer 2010). A search of the terms “prostitution Thailand Sweden” on the university’s academic search engine Unisearch would reveal a plethora of essays, theses and articles revolving around sex tourism, sexual exploitation of children, poverty, HIV infection rates, victim-agent networks and so on—demonstrating a fixation or fascination with issues around this topic.
Natasha Webster (2016: 13), in her dissertation on Thai women in rural Sweden, asserts that the Vietnam War era (circa 1955-1975) was a significant moment in Western discourses regarding Southeast Asian women, and in particular Thai women, when the presence of the American military in Thailand led to the development of the sex industry, as well as significant numbers of intermarriages between Western men and local women (Truong 1990: 81; Cohen 2003: 60).

The point I attempt to convey in this section is that besides the figures of the Thai woman as the imported wife and the exploited worker, the idea of Thailand and by extension Thai women is connected to sex work and the sex industry in the imaginations of Swedes. On three occasions in 2012, a number of women were denied entrance into Harrys nightclub in Växjö by bouncers or guards, who said they had been instructed to stop women “of Asian appearance” from entering the premises in order to “prevent prostitution” (Cantwell 2013). The affected women—who incidentally, were from the Philippines—were humiliated, tremendously aggrieved, and felt like they had been treated like “whores”, not only by the guards, but also by the other guests waiting in queue, who “looked them up and down” presumably in a derogatory manner (Widholm & Fehrm 2012). In another similar incident at Harrys in Växjö when three women of Southeast Asian appearance were denied entrance at the door, the door guards told them that Thai women are “not welcome” as their boss had received a police report that Thai women “usually steal money and hand out phone numbers to guests”, implying that they are prejudged not only as sex workers but as potential thieves as well (Widholm & Fehrm 2012).

Although the affected women lodged a police report against the establishment and the guards on grounds of (racial) discrimination, and the matter was brought to the Växjö District Court, the nightclub owner and guards were ultimately acquitted (Ernstsson 2013). The Court concluded that the intention to “prevent prostitution” gave the owners and guards of Harrys the right to discriminate against people solely based on their appearance, which the former connects to latter’s presumed country of origin (Ernstsson 2013). This reveals an extremely disturbing discriminatory discourse and practice among the authorities (the police and justice system in this case) regarding Asian/Thai women, which urgently needs to be explored further.

What these women have been subjected to, and the outcome of the court case, also indicate one of the ways in which the so-called ‘Nordic Model’ is not working as it ostensibly was intended to work. The ‘Nordic Model’ or ‘Swedish Model’ in this context is the term often used in English-language discourse to refer to Sweden’s sexköpslagen or—more accurately termed—the law against the purchase of sexual services (Lag 1998:408). An important ambition in the formulation of the law was to induce a change of attitudes towards prostitution; by focusing on demand, the
intention was to send the message “that prostitution is demand driven and a form of violence against women” (Holmström & Skilbrei 2017: 92). This was meant to shift the stigma around violence against women from sellers to buyers. However, several studies have shown that the support for criminalizing not just the purchase, but also the sale, of sexual services has risen since the law was enforced (Kuosmanen 2008: 367; Jakobsson & Kotsadam 2009: 7)—it can thus be argued that the law has not reduced the stigma suffered by sex workers. As Jakobsson and Kotsadam (2011) argue, “a law that criminalizes buyers is likely to affect attitudes toward selling as well.” As is evidenced by these cases in Växjö, sex workers are still being heavily stigmatized and even criminalized; this in turn affects anyone who may be at risk of being (racially) profiled as a sex worker—and it is clear that women of colour are the most vulnerable to this risk.

To sum up what has been written in subsections 2.2.1 to 2.2.3, these images or stereotypes—especially those of the ‘imported’ wife and ‘sex worker’—demonstrate that ‘Asian’ and ‘Thai’ are often used interchangeably in public discourse concerning women with these backgrounds, and that non-Thai Asian women are lost in the (relatively small) ‘sea’ of Thai women, and are therefore in this way made invisible.

2.2.4 More consequences of objectification and racialization

The Asian/Thai woman is codified as one or a combination of these ideas—the imported wife, the precariat worker, the sex worker—based on her appearance alone, which she cannot escape. Here, I wish to invoke Fanon: like the black man in Black Skin, White Masks, the Asian woman is not allowed to escape her objectification or otherwise exercise her subjectivity, because of the movements, attitudes and gazes that fix her in the position of being an Asian woman, with all the attributes that are associated to that position—attributes which are assigned by the gazer, the one who belongs to the majority/dominant group (Fanon 1952: 82).

At the moment she is objectified, the Asian woman is stripped of whatever attributes, status or values that her profession, education, background and accomplishments afford her. This does not happen just because she is an immigrant (as Sara Ahlstedt wrote in the chapter about Loss), because not all women who are racialized as Asian in Sweden are immigrants, but because she is defined—both implicitly and explicitly—as a ‘third world woman’. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984: 338) argues in Under Western Eyes, the ‘third world woman’ is thought to lead an essentially truncated life due to being ‘third world’, that is, ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, and so on. She is most often constructed as ‘powerless’, a victim with no agency and no voice.
This is an identified problem within both (hegemonic, Western, mainstream) women’s/feminist and migration studies, that migrant and minority women have not been considered subjects in these fields, but exist “purely as a ‘sub-theme’ or a marginal category, separated or added on as exotic strangers, eclipsed behind the eminent subject of ‘the male’ (migration studies) and ‘the female’ (women’s studies)” (Lutz 2010: 1650). This is still happening even in Sweden, which is touted as being one of the most advanced countries in terms of gender equality; although it must be mentioned that Swedish academics such as Diana Mulinari, Paulina de los Reyes and others have been contributing works that apply the intersectional, postcolonial approaches in gender studies, since the academic institutionalisation of queer and postcolonial feminism in the late 1980s (Mulinari 2007: 167). As Mohanty (1984: 338) asserts, the mode of defining ‘third world women’ primarily in terms of their object status needs to be constantly named and challenged.

There is evidence that the objectification of and condescension towards Asian/Thai (as well as other minority migrant women) also causes them to be not taken seriously, misunderstood, misjudged and even demonised by agents and employees of state institutions such as healthcare, social services, the migration board and the police—and this of course can have grave consequences in every aspect of their lives. Examples of this can be seen in one of the cases in Ahlstedt's dissertation (2016: 180): white, Swedish, cisgendered Nelly and her partner, who is transgendered, a migrant and a person of colour, their nerve-wracking meetings with Swedish government officials; in Barzoo Eliassi’s paper (2015) on “Constructing cultural Otherness within the Swedish welfare state”: Johan the Swedish social worker constructing his client, a Thai woman, as ignorant and culturally deviant; and in one of the instances in Diana Muliniari’s paper (2007: 176) mentioning Swedish authorities taking children away from their migrant parents.

To return to the sexuality of the ‘third world’ or minority, migrant woman: in contrast to the image of the sexually constrained third world (usually Arab, Muslim) woman described in Mohanty’s paper (1984: 337), Asian women are sexualized, seen as sexually available—as is evidenced by the ideas of them as imported wives and sex workers—albeit sexualized in different ways, either ‘favourably’ or unfavourably depending on the context and the whims of the dominant ‘gazer’. While sexualization is in itself not problematic within the ‘right’ context, the issue with the hypersexualization of Asian women is that, in order for ‘white sexuality’ to be defined as ‘normal’, the racialized sexuality of women of colour in general, and of Asian women in particular, must be constructed in (Western) popular culture as perverse and pathological—excessive, aberrant, and deviant—according to film scholar Celine Parreñas Shimizu (2007: 25; see also Woan 2008;
Gilman 1985). The sexualized woman, as literary historian Sander Gilman (1985) argues, is both glorified and condemned; she is linked to the figure of the prostitute, who came to represent the sexualized woman in late nineteenth-century European art, medicine and literature. Gilman also describes how ideas of uncleanliness, corruption and disease have been used to link the images of the prostitute and the black woman (which in the case of this thesis can also apply to the racialized Asian woman), and what power these stereotypes and myths carry, and continue to carry.

The term \textit{racialized sexuality} is employed by postcolonial theorist Abdul Janmohamed (1992: 106), who argues that like colonialist literature, “racialized sexuality is structured by and functions according to the economy of a manichean allegory [...] a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilization and savagery, intelligence and emotion, rationality and sensuality, self and other, subject and object”—which is comparable to Edward Said’s analysis of Western Orientalist binary thinking. Within this framework, the colonized or racialized subject is reduced to “a generic being that can be exchanged for any other ‘native’ or racialized subject” (Janmohamed 1992: 106). Shimizu (2007: 65) asserts that the Asian woman’s racialized sexuality—characterised by devoted submission/femme fatale-ism is one “linked in its perversity to other women of color in representation such as the African American mammy/Jezebel, the Native American squaw/princess, and the Chicana/Latina virgin/whore”, to name a few, each presenting “contradictory sexualities that persist across time, hailing women of color variously and widely”—comparable stereotypes of racialized minority women exist as well, of course, in the Swedish context (Bredström 2005; Eliassi 2013; Hedman, Nygren & Fahlgren 2009; Lundström 2006; Sawyer 2008).

Providing the example of the United States context of slave and Jim Crow societies, Janmohamed (1992: 97) argues that \textit{racialized sexuality} exists at the point where the subjugated positioning of certain subjects “intersects with the massive prohibitive power of various state and civil apparatuses”; power that is “underwritten by the actual or potential use of massive coercive violence”. This prohibitive power is institutional/structural as well as social, and is wielded in different ways and to different degrees; in Sweden, it is manifested in, to provide just one example, the kind of racial profiling inflicted upon women racialized as ‘Asian’ in Vaxjö, whose bodily integrity was threatened by what can be considered violence and harassment in the public sphere (Lister 2003: 127). Legal scholar Sunny Woan (2008) offers yet more nuance to the picture, attributing the creation of the hypersexualized stereotype of the Asian woman to \textit{white sexual imperialism}, which is a legacy of Western imperialism in Asia; a stereotype which fostered “the
mail-order bride phenomenon, the Asian fetish syndrome, and worst of all, sexual violence against Asian women” (Woan 2008).

Although the stereotypes of contradictory sexualities differ somewhat among different groups of people of colour, most have a certain pattern in common: an intrinsic libidinousness and/or deviancy ascribed to the racialized sexuality of women of colour is blamed for corrupting white men, and this in turn is used to assign the fault for prostitution on, and justify sexual violence and harassment against, women of colour (Cho 1997; Gilman 1985; Janmohamed 1992: 104; Kwan 1998; Shimizu 2007; Woan 2008).

Besides all the issues that have been highlighted thus far, there is the problem of yet another specific kind of racism faced by people of Asian descent in Sweden. While people racialized as black or ‘Middle Eastern’ and those bearing markers of Islam are obviously still facing, and suffering the consequences of, racism, it can be argued that it is—finally—no longer really considered socially acceptable to be directly racist and openly mocking towards them, especially in the media and other ‘official’ contexts (Lundberg 2013a). However, it has been shown that Asians are still mocked and denigrated with impunity in the media, as well as in social and cultural contexts, and that this is for some reason still socially acceptable (Arnstad 2012; Hübinnette 2012; Hübinnette & Sjöblom 2015; Lidman 2015; Lundberg 2013a; Marjavaara 2014).

All the factors mentioned in this section contribute to and constitute some of the very real difficulties that Asian/Thai women face in their everyday lives. As Patrik Lundberg (2013b)—a Swedish journalist and writer who was adopted from South Korea—writes, Asian women are always objectified: seen as sex objects, ‘imported brides’, someone's lover or affectionate housewives—never as whole persons.

Mats Hammarstedt (2016) states that more highly educated Asian women need to be part of the labour force for the sake of the economy, integration and gender equality; to this I argue that full integration and gender equality cannot be achieved when Asian women are racialized the way they are in the Swedish context. Due to prejudice and discrimination, many Asian women, especially the highly educated ones, are excluded from jobs for which they are qualified. The prejudice is so strong that despite being presented with proof of their qualifications, abilities and motivation, the weight of being Asian and all the burdening stereotypes still rests upon them.

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12 Negative attitudes and explicit racism towards different groups in public discourse change according to the sociopolitical climate nationally, regionally and internationally. I wish to emphasize that Sweden and the Western world has problems with anti-black racism (Wolgast, Molina & Gardell 2018; Bashi 2004) and Islamophobia (Ekman 2015), and it is vital to keep in mind that racism and discrimination against different groups are manifested in different ways.
Stereotyping images have functioned as to exclude Asian women and other people of immigrant background from the labour market and marginalize them economically. I would also argue, based on personal experience from my early years in Sweden, as well as the experiences of my peers, that migrants—even highly educated and qualified ones—generally have difficulty accessing the Swedish labour market, and many are being actively channeled into or left with little choice but to do low-paid work such as cleaning, care work, and other service jobs; this is corroborated by research (Khayati 2008: 220; Knocke 2006: 54; Neergaard 2009: 210).

My observation is that Swedish society in general seems to have an ambivalent attitude towards ‘Asian’ women. On one hand, ‘Asian’ women are seen as sex objects or even sex workers; this sexualization is also translated into them being desirable as housewives because they are imagined to “like sex” and stereotyped to be devoted to pleasing and satisfying their husbands (Utter 2009; Lindblad & Signell 2008). Somehow this combines with the stereotypical ‘Asian woman’ characteristics of docility, obedience, being undemanding and a good homemaker into the ultimate ‘traditional’ wife. On the other hand, society also wants them to join the workforce and become ‘productive’ members of society.

To this should be added that as far as I have observed, people who are racialized as Asians in general lack a voice and representation in the contexts of media as well as politics in Sweden. As a result, discourses about Asians are largely constructed by non-Asians, specifically by white majority Swedes. While having more Asian-looking faces in the public sphere does not guarantee ‘good’ representation, the current near-absence is still extremely problematic, as the media arguably wields the greatest influence on public opinion, setting the agenda for debates, and is in this way a powerful tool in the maintenance of structural discrimination (Regeringskansliet 2005: 133).

2.3 Swedish ‘non-racist’ exceptionalism and structural obstacles to countering racism

It is apparent, albeit not always explicitly named, that the framing assumptions of the Swedish state—like the British state, according to Ali Rattansi (2005: 282)—concern whiteness and its associated ‘chains of equivalence’: ‘European’, ‘Western’, ‘civilized’, ‘Christian’, and so on (Demerath 2000; Holmberg 1994: 239; Hübinnette & Tigervall 2009; Khayati 2017). And as in Britain, these assumptions have through history been deeply woven into the fabric of Swedish political culture, state formation and popular imagination (Demerath 2000; Rattansi 2005: 282).

At the same time, Sweden has also had the self-image as well as an international reputation of being a humanitarian or moral superpower of sorts which, for example, regularly sends assistance...
to ‘third world’ countries and was a very vocal critic of apartheid (Regeringskansliet 2005, p. 44); is extolled as a defender of human rights and multiculturalism (Dahlstedt & Neergard 2015: 1); has (had) an “exceptionally activist foreign policy” (Dahl 2006); has a strong and well-documented self-image as the most modern and gender-equal country in the world (Martinsson, Griffin & Nygren 2016: 1); is of the conviction that it was not involved in the colonial project of Europe’s metropolitan centres and that it is generally a global ‘good citizen’ (Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012: 2)—features that are all part of what researchers call Swedish exceptionalism (Dahlstedt & Neergard 2015; Schierup & Ålund 2011). This view of Sweden being a moral superpower has, however, faded partially through the Europeanisation of Swedish foreign policy, but it nevertheless lingers on despite continuing efforts by the Swedish government and the parties within it—both right-wing as well as social democratic—to dispel it (Hansen 2009).

Swedish, and indeed, Nordic exceptionalism implies a kind of moral superiority and, as mentioned, a disconnect from Europe’s colonial past. However, while Nordic countries were indeed ‘peripheral’ to the major metropolitan cultures such as Great Britain and France, they were most certainly involved in colonial projects (Eidsvik 2012: 14) and actively participated in the production of Europe as the global centre, thus profiting from this experience (Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2012: 1). Postcolonial feminism scholars Diana Mulinari, Suvi Keskinen, Sari Irni and Salla Tuori (2009: 1) argue that present-day Nordic countries—especially Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Finland—are marked, both culturally and economically, by colonial relations: “a fact which has material, political and ethical consequences”. They refer to the concept colonial complicity, which is used to highlight the multiple ways in which North-European countries participated in the wider European colonial project, and continue to take part in (post)colonial processes (Mulinari et al. 2009: 1; Vuorela 2009: 19).

It follows that, as Swedish historian Åke Holmberg (1994: 239) states, Sweden’s views of the world beyond Europe “were no less prejudiced than those of the colonizing nations”. This assertion is echoed in the Swedish government report Det blågula glashuset – strukturell diskriminering i Sverige (The blue-yellow glass house – structural discrimination in Sweden), where it is stated that Sweden’s history is a part of European history, and that “the same racism that arose and spread in Europe, has thus occurred and occurs in Sweden. The racist view of, for example, people from Africa and Asia has been widely disseminated in Sweden, being almost a part of popular culture” (Regeringskansliet 2005: 44).

A serious negative effect of Nordic exceptionalism is how it affects anti-racism, feminist and gender equality efforts. Although Nordic societies have actively engaged in anti-racist and anti-
imperial activities and scholarship since the 1970s, there has been relatively little reflection and consideration of their own involvement in colonial and racist activities (Mulinari et al. 2009: 2).

Paulina de los Reyes (2016: 23) states that Sweden has been for a long time considered a country where racism was a marginal problem or an issue that could be relegated to the past; and when racism is discussed in public and political discourse, it has usually been associated with far-right nationalist organizations. Sweden may even be considered by some as a “post-racial utopia, where colour-blindness is the norm”, posit critical race scholar Tobias Hübinette and sociologist Carina Tigervall (2009). In line with these thoughts, Michael McEachrane argues that Swedish anti-racism is the kind “where one sees and projects oneself not only as against racism, but as already non-racist” (Ahlberg et al. 2014: 138). It is not too much of a surprise, then, that racism’s manifestation in everyday practices embedded in institutions and organizations was/is rarely acknowledged.

This avoidance of confronting and acknowledging everyday racism, combined with the removal of the concept of race from Sweden’s anti-discrimination laws in 2009, makes it all the more difficult to address racism (Hübinette & Tigervall 2009; McEachrane 2014: 94; Gårdenmyr & Karlsson Andrews 2015; Engholm & ten Hoopen 2017). The main argument made for excluding race in the government bill behind the Swedish Discrimination Act is that, as it has been scientifically proven that no human races exist in a biological sense, these is no reason to use the term, and that its use would legitimize racist beliefs and reify race as a real category (McEachrane 2014: 94; Gårdenmyr & Karlsson Andrews 2015). However, while the removal of the term ‘race’ was ostensibly done with good intentions, the fact remains that race is a powerful, ubiquitous social construct that continues to shape societies and people’s lives (see section 4.1, on racialization, race and racism).

This willful blindness to racism is also a known issue within feminist and gender equality movements, as misogyny/sexism is an issue within anti-racism movements (Regeringskansliet 2005: 189; Trinh 1989: 83; Lorde 2007: 113; Spivak 1988: 295; de los Reyes 2016: 33). The patronizing, “loving, knowing ignorance” inflicted by hegemonic, white feminists upon women of colour is an “arrogant perception” or attitude “that produces ignorance about women of colour and their work at the same time that it proclaims to have both knowledge about and loving perception towards them” (Ortega 2006) and, as Audre Lorde (2007: 113) might argue, is “a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought” (see section 4.4 on epistemic injustice).

While movements working towards social justice must be supported in order to achieve their presumed goals of defending human rights, particularly for the most marginalized in our societies, it cannot be emphasized enough that feminist/gender equality and anti-racism movements
in Sweden—and the rest of the world—must apply an intersectional perspective to and in their work in order to address the specific oppressions faced by different groups at the intersections of gender, race, class, ability, age and so on, and to ensure that they do not reproduce and reinforce oppressive structures (de los Reyes 2016: 38).

3. METHODOLOGY

As an aim of this thesis is to identify, make visible and analyse the concrete experiences and experiential knowledge of my interview participants, which are “uniquely individual while at the same time both collective and connected” (Dillard 2000), I decided that this study requires methods that enable me to find commonalities in their experiences, as well as allowing for individual narratives to emerge and take space. To this end, inspiration is drawn from narrative research methods and storytelling/counterstorytelling from critical race theory (CRT). Analysis of the primary source material will be informed by a theoretical framework that encompasses racialization, intersectionality (and thereby elements of critical race theory and feminist theory), and epistemic injustice, as elaborated in the next chapter.

Due to various contingencies that arose, three different methods were utilized for conducting interviews: conventional in-person meetings, video conferencing over Skype, and instant messaging on Facebook—these will be detailed in subsections 3.1.1 to 3.1.3.

3.1 Narrative research methods and storytelling

Narrative analysis refers to a family of analytic methods for interpreting texts—whether oral, written or visual—that have in common “a storied form” (Riessman 2008: 539). The definition of the term narrative itself is subject to dispute, carrying many meanings and utilized in a variety of ways by different scholars: though it is often used synonymously and interchangeably with the term ‘story’ (Tamboukou 2015a: 38; Riessman 2008: 539).

Scholars of social work, Mona Livholts, as well as feminist studies, Maria Tamboukou (2015: 7) state that “unlike other qualitative research perspectives, narrative research offers no strict frameworks or definitive methodological moves”, and therefore, it should be seen as a craft and “an open process where concepts, questions and even methods and theories take up form and generate new thoughts, themes, ideas and questions in the making.”
While it is commonly understood that “narrative research takes as a premise that people live and/or understand their lives in storied forms, connecting events in the manner of a plot that has beginning, middle, and end points” (Josselson 2011: 224), Maria Tamboukou (2015b: 93) suggests that narrative analysis “would benefit from moving beyond the conventions and tensions of classical narratology” and its three crucial traits of sequence, coherence and closure—this aligns with the approach that places the analytical focus on narrative as process.

Tamboukou (2015c: 126) posits that narrative is “a process of responding to the world and connecting to it”. A person’s stories are “played out in the context of other stories that may include societies, cultures, families, or other intersecting plotlines” in their lives; and the stories that they choose to tell about their lives “represent their meaning making”, argues Ruthellen Josselson (2011: 224). The way people “connect and integrate the chaos of internal and momentary experience” (Josselson 2011: 224), how they select what they deem important/meaningful to tell a particular listener, and how they link pieces of their experiences, are all features of how they make sense of their lives (Josselson 2011: 224; Riessman 2008: 539). Sociologist Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008: 539) asserts that oral stories are contextual, as they are ‘performed’ “with the active participation of an audience and are designed to accomplish particular aims”; in this way, oral stories are also “strategic, functional, and purposeful”.

Stories, life histories and biographies are important mediums not only for the emergence of meaning, but also “the sharing of ideas and the reactivation of action” (Tamboukou 2015c: 121). Drawing much inspiration from the works of political theorist Hannah Arendt, Tamboukou (2015c: 121) observes that “for Arendt, stories ground abstractions, flesh out ideas and thus create a milieu where thought can emerge from the actuality of the recounted incident”, from the subject’s “living experience”. Similarly informed by Arendt’s work, feminist thinker Adriana Cavarero (2000: 59) proposes that the narration of the life-story “puts into words an identity”; as Arendt (1998: 186) herself asserted in The Human Condition, self-narration entails the willingness to act and speak, “to insert one’s self into the world and begin a story of one’s own”, to leave “one’s private hiding space and showing who one is, in disclosing and exposing one’s self”, and requires a measure of courage and boldness—this is especially the case, I argue, for people with marginalized identities and societal positions. All this indicates that the act of narration itself is intrinsically “political, relational and embodied” (Tamboukou 2015c: 125; Cavarero 2000). According to literary critic and scholar of ethnicity Stefan Jonsson (2004), “the political signifies the fundament and underlying principles of politics, namely, people’s ability to represent themselves and their interests in the
public sphere”, from the local to global level—making the act of narration essential for representation.

In the collection of narrative material and the subsequent analysis for this thesis, I draw inspiration from the uses of legal storytelling and narrative analysis, as developed by critical race theorists. The critical race theory (CRT) movement—according to Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (2001: 2), who are themselves critical race theorists—is “a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power”. CRT is built on “everyday experiences with perspective, viewpoint, and the power of stories and persuasion to come to a better understanding of how Americans see race” (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 38); and legal storytelling and narrative analysis have been developed to present perspectives of colour in the legal system to achieve various ends—some of them, I argue, also very relevant for projects aiming for social transformation and justice, in the United States as well as Sweden, where whiteness is normative. These ends are described as follows:

Based on the premise that the members of a “country’s dominant racial group cannot easily grasp what it is like to be nonwhite”, well-told stories from and about members of marginalized groups—about the lives of black, brown and other people of colour—function to open a window into ignored or alternative realities. The hope is that these stories can help readers improve their understanding of what life is like for people who are marginalized (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 39), and show that racism causes real harm to real people (Matsuda 1993: 43). Of course, no matter how well-told and engaging the story, uptake is not guaranteed due to interest convergence—people believe what benefits them—and the fact that empathy is in short supply (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 41).

Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 44) refer to a concept by philosopher Jean-François Lyotard to further illustrate the value of narratives for marginalized people: the differend, which occurs “when a concept such as justice acquires conflicting meanings for two groups”. For example, when the prevailing conception of justice deprives a person from the chance to express a grievance in terms that the system would understand, the person is then a victim of the differend (this scenario is similar to what is described in the case of Carmita Wood in section 4.4 on epistemic injustice). Narratives and stories can be ‘spaces’ where ideas can be fleshed out, abstractions can be grounded (Tamboukou 2015c: 121), and a language provided to “bridge the gaps in imagination and conception that give rise to the differend”—thus helping to reduce alienation for marginalized people, and simultaneously “offering opportunities for members of the majority group to meet them halfway” (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 44).
Stories can also have a destructive function, in that storytelling can be used to attack “embedded preconceptions that marginalize others or conceal their humanity” (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 42). The social world is constructed “through a series of tacit agreements mediated by images, pictures, tales, and scripts”, and many of our prevailing beliefs are arbitrary or absurd, contingent, self-serving and cruel—though they may not be perceived to be so at the time, as they have been normalized; critical writers create and use counterstories “to challenge, displace, or mock pernicious narratives and beliefs”, thereby contributing to the dismantling of damaging stereotypes (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 42).

Finally, narratives and stories also serve as a cure for silencing, and thus have “a powerful psychic function for minority communities” (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 43). Many victims of racial discrimination suffer in silence, and it is not unusual for them to self-blame for their predicament—these are manifestations, I suggest, of coercive mimeticism and epistemic injustice, concepts which are outlined in the theory chapter; but stories can give them voice, and reveal that they are not alone, that others have similar experiences (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 43).

This sharing of stories and the ideas that emerge can drive political action (Tamboukou 2015c: 121): speaking about violence against women, leading scholar of CRT, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), asserts that through the strength of shared experience, “women have recognized that the political demands of millions speak more powerfully than the pleas of a few isolated voices”—Crenshaw argues that this politicization has transformed the way we understand violence against women, and has been instrumental in its recognition as “part of a broad-scale system of domination that affects women as a class”.

Similarly, when it comes to racism, Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 43) suggest that stories can be a medium through which a type of discrimination can be named, and once identified, can be combated. This is based on the premise that race is neither ‘real’ nor objective in the biological sense, but rather, is constructed, and thus, racism and prejudice can therefore be deconstructed, as “the pernicious beliefs and categories are, after all, our own” (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 43). Stories and narratives that are masterfully written could kick off “a process of adjustment in our system of beliefs and categories by calling attention to neglected evidence and reminding readers of our common humanity”; such paradigm shifts are required to bring about major reforms in law (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 43), which could in turn lead to larger societal and political changes.
3.1.1 The Narrative Interview and Analysis

The primary materials used to answer the research questions of this study are the stories of the interview participants, which are collected through semi-structured narrative interviews. The aim of these interviews is to create the opportunity for participants to ‘name their own reality’ (Delgado & Stefancic 1993) by sharing their first-hand accounts of racialization and racism—against the backdrop of their whole lives, revealing, as well, their self-perception and self-identification (Etherington 2009). Narrative research methods are case-centred, and the cases on which the analyses are based can be individuals, identity groups and so on (Riessman 2008: 539); in the case of this thesis, the identity group is women of East/Southeast Asian descent racialized as ‘Asian’ in Sweden. The total number of participants interviewed (nine) is intended to reflect a suitably significant group of voices that share similar/connected experiences, but at the same time one that is not too large, so as to provide the space needed for unique individual narratives to be highlighted (Crenshaw 1991; Dillard 2000).

In narrative interviews, questions should be open-ended enough to encourage participants to explain themselves fully, with follow up questions (where pertinent) that build on previous ones, and “no information is a priori ruled out, for any event or interpretation can contribute to the meaning of a story”; however, the informant, in collaboration with the researcher, make decisions about relevant and irrelevant content during the course of the interview (Ayres 2008: 545). Questions that prompt the interview participant to explain how something happened or how they reacted and acted to a phenomenon “elicit the thinking that underlies the connection of the events or experiences selected for the informant’s story”, helping to reveal said connections, which is the main goal of the narrative interview (Ayres 2008: 545).

Riessman (2008: 539) proposes a simple typology of various forms of narrative analysis: thematic, structural, dialogic-performative, and visual narrative analysis—the thematic and structural forms being “broad approaches [that] are the building blocks of all narrative analysis”. These are also the two analytic approaches I deem most fitting for this study. According to Riessman (2008: 539), the thematic form of analysis “interrogates what a story or group of stories is about”, while the structural approach is to examine “how a story is composed to communicate particular communicative aims”. Riessman (2008: 539) adds that “narrative analysts interrogate intention and language—how and why events are storied, not simply the content to which language refers”; the way the interview participant assembles and sequences events and uses language to communicate meaning and make particular points to an audience is examined in all the analytical approaches mentioned.
As mentioned, three different methods were utilized for conducting interviews: in-person meetings, video conferencing over Skype, and instant messaging on Facebook. Face-to-face, in-person interviews are most commonly used for qualitative/narrative interviews as it can create a personal connection, and allow the researcher to read the participant’s body language and other nonverbal cues (Seitz 2016). However, as narrative research methods can be used to interpret different kinds of texts—oral, written, and visual (Riessman 2008: 539), the differing data collection methods do not present any significant obstacles. Nevertheless, the advantages and disadvantages of interviews over Skype and Facebook are outlined in the next two subsections.

All the in-person interviews were held in a quiet spot in a fairly quiet café at an off-peak time of day. I audio-recorded these interviews using an application on my mobile phone—with the consent of each interview participant, naturally—and also took notes during to avoid the pitfalls of relying only on the recordings and transcriptions. This also allowed me to note gestures, tone of voice and other nonverbal cues, as well as the social atmosphere of the interview situation; to capture the gist of the participant’s answers for later reference; and to formulate follow up questions (Brinkmann & Kvale 2014: 205). (See interview guide in subsection 3.1.5).

### 3.1.2 Using Skype for Interviews

Three interviews were conducted over Skype, a free software application that enables communication online via microphone and webcam/camera on a computer, tablet, laptop, or smartphone. As Skype does not have a built-in call recording function, I used a separate software application to record the interviews. The participants were briefed beforehand that for the interview, they should be in a quiet environment, and set aside an hour or two with no interruptions or distractions.

Videotelephony technology allows interviews—especially unstructured or semi-structured—conducted over Skype to be almost like being face-to-face, and has some other substantial benefits. As with other synchronous online interviewing methods, Skype is a cost- and time-effective communication method that allows both researchers and participants to attend the interview at a place of their own choosing; it is convenient and there is more flexibility in organizing interview times to suit the participant; it is less disruptive in terms of scheduling and actually carrying out the interviews; and geographic location is not a limitation as long as all parties have the required devices and a stable internet connection (Deakin & Wakefield 2014; Hanna 2012; Seitz 2016; Sullivan 2012). This was a real boon to me for my study, as I was able to conduct interviews with geographically dispersed individuals, thus increasing the sampling pool (Sullivan 2012).
A major benefit I have experienced from Skype interviews is how the recordings allow one to replay the video and scrutinize nuances in expression and voice inflection. In this aspect, I prefer Skype interviews over face-to-face interviews.

Despite all the abovementioned advantages, Seitz (2016) brings up some disadvantages for Skype qualitative interviews that need to be mitigated. Skype calls can disconnect unexpectedly or have sudden interruptions due to poor internet connection or other technical issues, and this can negatively impact the flow of the interview and the establishment of rapport. Preparing and testing equipment, software and connection beforehand can help ensure a successful Skype interviewing experience (Seitz 2016). The medium can arguably also result in a loss of intimacy and rapport between researcher and participant, but this may be contingent on the topic being discussed, the participant’s personality (introverts tend to feel more comfortable communicating and socializing online) as well as security concerns (Seitz 2016). Fortunately, most of the interviews I conducted over Skype went fairly smoothly, both in terms of the participants’ responsiveness, as well as technically (apart from one—please see the next subsection).

Finally, depending on the research topic, privacy might be an issue when it comes to conducting interviews online. Whether on Skype, Facebook or any other online service, third parties such as companies, governments and individuals have the possibility to track where we go, what we say, our online moves, and more—although there are ways to make this more difficult (Sullivan 2012). But if the topic is not too sensitive, the possibility of being tracked might not be of too much concern. Another possible issue is some interview participants not feeling comfortable seeing themselves on video, but there is always the option of turning that function off.

While some researchers argue that although videoconferencing as a research tool has some drawbacks, the benefits strongly outweigh them (Sullivan 2012), others suggest that further research should be conducted on topics such as rapport, and quality and type of information obtained during Skype versus in-person interviews and other mediums (Seitz 2016; Hanna 2012); and how technologies change our assumptions about interviewing (Deakin & Wakefield 2014).

3.1.3 Using Instant Messenger

One interview was conducted over Facebook’s instant messaging (IM) or text chat application—this was part of a contingency measure. The original plan was to conduct the interview with this particular participant via video conferencing on Skype, but she encountered some technical issues and could not access her account. As this was my second attempt to interview this person (we first arranged to travel and meet face-to-face, as we live in different parts of Sweden, but she was forced
to cancel due to personal reasons), I felt I had to seize the opportunity to interview her while she had this time set aside for it. I knew IM was a viable option for conducting interviews, as we both use the same IM platform, and I had investigated the pros and cons of it in anticipation of the possibility that I may have to use it.

As with Skype and any other communication software or platform one selects, a stable internet connection and familiarity with the software or similar technology—for both interviewer and interviewee—are prerequisites for a successful interview via IM, as is briefing the participant beforehand about the importance of being in a calm environment with minimal distractions at the time of the interview.

And as with video conferencing over Skype and other methods to facilitate synchronous online interviewing, the advantages of using IM for this purpose are related to its convenience, ease of use, and time-/cost-effectiveness. One of the biggest advantages of IM interviews is that the data wouldn’t need to be transcribed, being already in textual form, saving a considerable amount of time and avoiding potential transcription errors (Fontes & O'Mahony 2008; Hinchcliffe & Gavin 2008; Dimond et al 2012). The researcher should of course make sure to copy and paste the entire conversation into a word processor document and save it as soon as the interview is done.

The ease of use of IM is also a significant factor, as the use of IMs and similar internet mediated communication platforms is an everyday practice for many people. This makes them feel comfortable, relaxed, and even a bit anonymous—for some, the perceived anonymity can encourage them to be more open with their responses. IM also makes an attractive option for participants who dislike or find it difficult to express themselves during face-to-face interviews and discussions. Some participants may feel more comfortable typing things they would not necessarily say in person, and may give more honest answers. Some perceive that communicating via IM gives them the opportunity to think more about what they want to say, hence enhancing the quality of their own responses. Researchers also found that IM interviews yield more succinct and pertinent answers compared to face-to-face interviews (Hinchcliffe & Gavin 2008). The use of IM also allows the researcher to concentrate on the interviewing process, while simultaneously reviewing the transcript, writing notes and formulating follow-up questions (Fontes & O'Mahony 2008; Hinchcliffe & Gavin 2008). In terms of quality of data, Dimond et al (2012) found—in a study comparing interviews conducted via IM, email and phone—that it does not differ substantially between these three methods.

Some possible negative points may include security concerns, which can be remedied by setting up an IM account just for a particular study, and then deleted when the research is concluded.
Distractions, nervousness and the obscuring/misinterpretation of body language which can occur may also happen during the use of other methods (Hinchcliffe & Gavin 2008); Dimond et al (2012) assert that that qualitative interviews can be successful in any medium, especially when researchers are well-prepared with respect to practical issues involved.

Generally, it can be argued that the advantages of using IM for interviews outweigh the negatives. Some researchers encourage its wider use as a valuable research instrument (Fontes & O’Mahony 2008), though some caution against using IM as a straight replacement for face-to-face interviews, as this communication platform for Internet Mediated Research (IMR) is still fairly new (Hinchcliffe & Gavin 2008).

3.1.4 Transcription notes & how the narratives are presented

There are different ways to present a narrative, and the approach I have chosen is to alternate between three forms: writing parts of a participant’s story in flowing prose; including a participant’s quote in a paragraph if it is fairly short (one to three lines); and presenting long quotes. The form chosen for each part of the participant’s story depends on which would get the point and sentiment across most effectively. I try to provide an impression of how the participants behave during the interview by including laughter, hesitations, silences, gestures, facial expressions, other body language, and emphases on particular words, and other ways that would show how the story is told. The general style I’ve used to present the narratives has been inspired by Sara Ahlstedt’s (2016) dissertation, with some of my own touches.

An ellipsis (...) indicates slight hesitation or a very short but definite pause. Italicized text indicates emphasis by the speaker (e.g. spoken in a raised voice), or a word in a language other than English that will be translated in a footnote. Italicized text in square brackets indicates something a participant does during the interview, for example, [laughs] or [shocked tone].

It should be noted that participant quotes are not always completely direct quotes, as researchers often construct narratives “from component parts offered by the informant across the interview” (Ayres 2008: 545). Sentences and words which do not contribute to the narrative may be removed to make the quote more succinct and focused on the matter that is being highlighted. Filler sounds and words such as “errrr”, “umm”, “like”, “you know” and so on are removed, if and where they are excessive and do not add to the flow of the story. Sometimes words are added to make the message of a quote clearer, for example, to add context; these words are enclosed by square brackets.
Seven interviews were conducted in English, and the remaining two in Swedish. The language chosen depended on which the interview participant felt more comfortable with. Excerpts from the Swedish-language interviews which appear in the analysis have been then translated to English to make this thesis accessible to a wider audience. Care has been taken to ensure the translations are as accurate as possible.

As some researchers have describe transcriptions as pale reflections and “decontextualised renderings of live interview conversations” (Yow 1994: 227; Brinkmann & Kvale 2014: 204), it is important to keep in mind that a transcription is an interpretation built on the selection of the one who has transcribed it (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002: 80), and that meaning is constructed and interpreted in the interaction between the researcher and research participants (Brodsky 2008: 766).

### 3.1.5 Interview guide

The interviews were guided by the following questions, although I sometimes phrased them in different ways. I did not always ask them in this exact order, nor were all questions asked in every interview. Quite often, once they start talking, the interview participants would continue relating their story without too much prompting from my side, and end up covering the different aspects brought up by these questions.

- Does the fact that you are Asian have any effect on your relationship with your partner? If yes, in which ways?
- Does the fact that you are Asian have any effect on your social and professional relationships? If yes, in which ways?
- Do you feel that there is any difference between how men and women treat you (as an Asian woman)?
- How do you feel about the stereotypes you face, and do you try to change these perceptions?
- Do you feel Swedish? Do you feel a sense of belonging in Sweden?

### 3.2 Locating participants

The interview participants for this study are cisgender women who self-identify as ‘Asian’, and are of East- and Southeast-Asian descent as, in the Swedish context, they are the ones who are most often racialized as ‘Asian’. Most of the interview participants are immigrants, but Swedish-born women who have one or two immigrant parents from relevant regions have also been included.
interview participants are presumably heterosexual (and thus their experiences will be assumed to have a heteronormative perspective), but I have not actively excluded women who are queer, and did not inquire about their sexual identities.

It was relatively easy to find participants; beginning with my own networks, I managed to arrange and conduct four interviews in short order. Several women contacted me after I posted in Swedish online forums for racialized people, and I also approached some women there directly. This meant that I mainly got in contact with two types of Asian women: those who actively seek out ‘real-life’ communities with similar backgrounds, and those who identify as racialized persons and seek support and discussions on the internet with other racialized people in Sweden. There are, of course, other avenues to find suitable participants for my study, but I found that my method worked well, in view of the time and other limitations faced. This thesis naturally does not claim or aim to represent all the lived experiences of women racialized as Asian in Sweden, and it is important to acknowledge that every selection has its limitations.

There was some initial difficulty in finding suitable occasions for the rest of the interviews mainly due to the physical distance between myself and potential participants (a number of them live in other cities, a few hours away); this led me to explore alternatives to conventional in-person interviews, as described in 3.1.2 and 3.1.3.

All in all I have been in contact with twelve women, of whom I interviewed nine. Because I wish to investigate if—despite ‘coming from’ what are essentially rather different ‘ethnic’ backgrounds and cultures—women of East- and Southeast Asian descent are racialized in some particular, similar ways based primarily on their physical appearance, I deliberately sought interview participants ‘from’ a multitude of different countries/ethnic backgrounds. This also in a way provides space in each participant’s story for revelations of her ‘actual’ ethnic background to lead to either a more nuanced racialization, or a continued flattening, stereotyping or obliteration of the “many truths of [her] existence” (Williams 1980).

Four participants are of various East Asian backgrounds (Japan, Taiwan, China, South Korea), and five are of Southeast Asian descent (Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam), including one who is mixed, Thai and Swedish. Two of the participants were born and raised in Sweden, one is an adoptee, while the others are immigrants.

3.2.1 Introducing the women who shared their stories

Apsara, who is in her 40s, moved from Thailand to Sweden in 2009. She is university educated and currently works in education.
Elin was adopted from South Korea, and brought to Sweden when she was about six months old. She is in her 40s, has a Master’s degree, and works as a teacher.

Eva, who is in her 20s, was born in Sweden to a Swedish father and a Thai mother. She has completed primary school (grundskola), and is currently furthering her studies.

Hana is from Japan, is in her 30s and moved to Sweden in 2009. She is college educated, and is currently a student.

Jennifer is from Singapore, is in her 40s and moved to Sweden thirteen years ago. She is university educated, and is a white/pink collar worker.

Linh, who is in her 20s, was born in Sweden to parents who immigrated from Vietnam. She is university educated, and works in healthcare.

Nora is from Malaysia, is in her 30s and moved to Sweden seven years ago. She is university educated, and works in education.

Ruiling is from China, is in her 30s and has lived in Sweden for a total of about five years. She is a postgraduate student and a white/pink collar worker.

Suyin is from Taiwan, is in her 40s and has lived in Sweden for almost ten years. She is currently furthering her studies within healthcare.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Some ethical considerations that need to be examined and made clear in qualitative research are that of informed consent, usage limitations of the data collected, data archival, the option of pseudonymity versus the use of real names, and the careful removal of irrelevant identifying markers.

At the beginning of each interview, whether in person or online, every participant is asked to read the prepared consent form stating what the study and interview entails, and how the data will be used—and to then sign the form, or acknowledge verbally or in writing that they understand and explicitly agree to participate in this study. This form is prepared in line with the Swedish Research Council’s ethical principles for research in the humanities and social sciences, specifically

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13 The term pink collar is sometimes used to denote feminized and proletarianized occupations—such as care work, hospitality, retail, administration, even some segments of education—which are often relatively lowly paid, with limited chances for advancement (Freeman 1993; Lips-Wiersma, Wright & Dik 2016). Administrative and clerical work, which used to firmly be considered white collar “head” work, has been devalued partially due to advancements in technology that allow information-based work to be outsourced off-shore, hence its figurative position on the edge of white, moving into pink collar (Freeman 1993).
the criterion of protection of the individual, i.e. that participants, subjects and informants must not be harmed in any way as a result of the research (Gustafsson, Hermerén & Petersson 2006: 84).

It is stated on the form that the interview will be recorded in order to ensure accuracy of analysis, and that the participant may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason. The form also states that unless the participant specifically requests to be identified by their true name, a pseudonym will be used to protect their identity and any (irrelevant) identifying information will be removed from the data. Although most participants did not express much concern regarding anonymity, a few were worried about possible repercussions if their identities were inadvertently revealed. Thus, as none of my interviewees explicitly asked for their real name to be used, they have all been given pseudonyms and generally anonymized to prevent identification and thereby prevent the possibility of embarrassment or distress (Yow 1994: 92; Brinkmann & Kvale 2014: 95). Changes—namely anonymization—are made directly as the data is transcribed as an additional security measure.

I contemplated using only regional descriptors i.e. ‘East Asian’ or ‘Southeast Asian’ for my interview participants, to remove as many identifying markers as possible. However, upon further consideration I decided that it was important to include their descent or country of origin in order to compare the points at which their experiences of racialization converge and diverge—to reveal both the complexities of this racialization and the flattening effects/erasure of stereotyping.

The collected data is being stored securely and privately, thus there is little risk that it will be accessible to others. This will ensure that the identity and anonymity of the interview participants are secured (Slavnic 2013). I do not at this point plan to re-use the data for future research, but in the event I wish to do so, the relevant participants will be contacted again for permission; this is because according to the Swedish Personal Data Act (Personupgiftslag), it is illegal to use research data for other purposes than the specific project for which the data was collected (Slavnic 2013).

3.4 Being an ‘insider’: reflexivity in research

As someone who can be considered to ‘belong’ to the target group featured in my study, being a woman who is racialized as ‘Asian’—and keeping in mind that this is, in reality, a very heterogenous group, even though the people placed under this category may have some experiences in common—I am aware of the importance of reflecting on my own position in relation to the issue at hand, to my participants and to society in general, while performing academic research. However, this self-reflection is something that all researchers today—at least in the social sciences—are expected to do, whether they are “an insider, sharing the characteristic, role, or experience under
study with the participants, or an outsider to the commonality shared by participants” (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle 2009); to constantly place themselves within the research, to examine their own social identity in relation to that of the population under study, to consider the effects that their own socialization and life experiences might have on the study (Serrant-Green 2002).

Various scholars from ‘minority’ backgrounds in Western contexts—particularly in the social sciences—have observed and argued that while qualitative researchers and academics share many tensions with regards to their positioning in relation to their object of study or specialization, certain issues are amplified for, or experienced differently by, scholars who are of ethnic or racial minority backgrounds (Serrant-Green 2002; Ng 1993; Kanuha 2000). Laura Serrant-Green (2002) states that historically, it has not been uncommon for (ethnic/racial minority) professionals working within their own communities to be accused or suspected of being biased in their approach at work, and therefore advised to be ‘objective’ and ‘professional’. Serrant-Green (2002) observes that the same charges are generally not levelled at ‘white’ professionals and academics working with the ‘white’ population, nor at ‘white’ academics performing research on ‘non-white’ groups, and an explanation for this is that historically, “studies with a race and ethnicity component in the developed world have been based on the views of the dominant culture and conducted from a white (male) perspective”.

This asymmetry in scrutiny aside, a key concern which may be raised when the researcher is an ‘insider’ is the influence of their own perspective and experiences on shaping the study at hand; however, it can also be argued that being an outsider does not guarantee or create immunity against the influence of personal views (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle 2009). In addition, as Sonya Corbin Dwyer and Jennifer Buckle (2009) state, “The intimacy of qualitative research no longer allows us to remain true outsiders to the experience under study and, because of our role as researchers, it does not qualify us as complete insiders. We occupy the space between…”.

Having said that, some considerable benefit to being seen as an ‘insider’ by the community under study are acceptance, a level of trust and openness: participants may be more willing to share their experiences because there is an assumption of understanding and shared distinctiveness, and a feeling that “you are one of us and it is us versus them (those on the outside who don’t understand)” (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle 2009). Although this can usually result in strong rapport between researcher and participants, it can also result in transcripts that are difficult for ‘outsiders’ to interpret, as they rely on shared understandings that are not always spelled out (Acker 2001). This means that the researcher must be careful not to make assumptions based on personal knowledge and experience, and to ensure that participants explain their individual experience fully.
and explicitly during the interviews, as I did, even though I felt at times that they knew I understood specific parts of their experiences without them being verbalized. Detailed reflection on the subjective research process, with a close awareness of one’s own personal biases and perspectives, help to reduce potential concerns associated with insider membership.

Whether one is seen as an ‘insider’ or ‘outsider’, Corbin Dwyer and Buckle (2009) suggest that the “ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience” is key to good qualitative research.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to get beyond racism, we must first take account of race. There is no other way.

- Justice Harry Blackmun (1978)

This chapter constructs a theoretical framework on racialization—in general, as well as racialization that is specific to the construction of the ‘ethnic’ subject, touching on the dimensions of gender and class—that will inform my analysis. Drawing from the work of prominent cultural critic Rey Chow, two key concepts which can be considered part of the racialization process are presented: visualism and coercive mimeticism. I will also make a foray into epistemic injustice—as an auxiliary concept—which spans the fields of philosophy, ethics, epistemology and feminist theory. As the reader will see in the analysis chapter, these theories are interconnected and complementary.

4.1 Racialization

The term racialization is a ubiquitous term in discourses on racial and ethnic relations, and as Karim Murji and John Solomos (2005: 1) argue, it has become a key concept in analysing racial phenomena, ”particularly to signal the processes by which ideas of race are constructed, come to be regarded as meaningful, and are acted upon” [my emphasis].

Ali Rattansi (2005: 271) suggests that the concept of racialization by necessity draws on prior definitions of race and racism, and may be conceptually visualized in two ways: racialization can be imagined as occupying a variable position on a spectrum, somewhere between race and racism; or it may be visualized as one of three constituent elements (with race and racism), one
element in each corner of the same triangle, with mutual interconnections between them. This section will function as a sort of overview of these interconnections, and of how race, racism and racialization are embedded within the system of capitalism.

Since the 1970s, the concept of racialization has been applied—at least in the context of the United Kingdom—to the analysis of a wide range of issues, from immigration, the media and political discourses to poverty, crime/policing and housing/residential patterns, as well as other areas: culture(s) and the arts, bodies, institutions, images, representations, technologies, landscape and the environment (Murji & Solomos 2005: 1).

Rohit Barot and John Bird (2010), who explored the genealogy of the concept, contend that the term was first used in 1899—according to the 1971 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary—enjoying wide usage in anthropology, as well as in discussions of religion, nationalism and political analysis. Its use was in decline after the first half of the twentieth century, but then re-emerged within the sociology of race and ethnic relations (Barot & Bird 2010). The contemporary emergence of the term racialization in the social sciences appears to have arisen out of a desire to move away from the concept of race, which is dismissed by academics such as Michael Banton (1998: 3) as a scientific error, as well as Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown (2003: 90) as “an idea that should be consigned to the dustbin of analytically useless terms”. The categories used to differentiate human beings along racial lines are artificial (Balibar 1991a: 9) and, as Michael Omi and Howard Winant (2015: 110) argue, “at best imprecise, and at worse completely arbitrary”. It is crucial, however, to note that arbitrariness does not equal lack of meaning, far from it: race is strategic, and it does ideological and political work (Omi & Winant 2015: 111). Although profoundly problematic as a concept, race clearly remains part of the lived experience of many people, with concrete and often dire consequences.

The concept of race—which invokes the focus on so-called phenotypes, i.e. physical features or the outward appearance of humans, for purposes of racial signification—is “always and necessarily a social and historical process”, argue Omi and Winant (2015: 110). The identification of distinct human groups based on differences in physical appearance (as well as habitation, food, customs and so on) can be traced to the prehistorical period and found in early documents such as the Christian bible or in the writings of Herodotus (Omi & Winant 2015: 112; Mudimbe 1994: 72). However, the modern conception of race—with “the distinctions and categorizations fundamental to a racialized social structure, and to a discourse of race” (Omi & Winant 2015: 113)—only began to emerge when Europeans arrived in the Americas at the end of the fifteenth century.
What the European explorers found in the “New World” was a seemingly bottomless treasure trove of land, labour and other resources—and they saw their ‘discovery’ as an unprecedented opportunity for the appropriation of wealth, exploitation and predation or ‘primitive accumulation’. As Omi and Winant (2015: 113) argue, “modern capitalism could not have come into being without this grand infusion of stolen wealth”. Under the encomienda system, indigenous peoples of so-called ‘New Spain’ were viewed as part of the property (land) that a Spanish colonizer held and could exploit. Suffice to say, this exploitation was widespread, brutal and inhumane, leading to Bartolomé de Las Casas’ work, In Defense of the Indians, which was used in the Valladolid debate, in which the ethics of Spanish colonization was deliberated upon (Danver 2013). While the debate of Valladolid—which is “one of the earliest and most famous discussions about racism as an ideology” (Wallerstein 1991a: 33)—saw the beginnings of ideas on human rights, it also revealed a codification of people based on race, which emerged as a way to justify and procure cheap or free labour. This codification has been utilized throughout the colonial era and beyond, and has become deeply rooted, globally. Its legacy has continued throughout history till the present day, with the differentiation between human groups varying based on shifting criteria, evolving from the biological to the cultural (Balibar 1991b: 21), manifested through a spectrum of racism, from the insidious to the overt.

So, what is racism? While an actual consensus on how to define this social phenomenon does not exist, I will explain the conception of racism that informs this thesis. Audre Lorde (2007: 115) asserts that racism is the belief in the inherent superiority of one race (or 'ethnic' group) over all others and thereby the right to dominance. This follows, as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1992: 8) argue, that racism is the discourse and practice of inferiorizing groups; according to them, racism does not necessarily rely on a process of racialization, but can also use the notion of the undesirability of groups; for example, based on religion or ethnicity/culture. This broader approach, however, should be utilized with care, so as not to disregard the nuances brought about by nationalism, xenophobia, religious tensions, and other conflicts (Murji & Solomos 2005: 12). The discourse and practice of inferiorizing and notion of undesirability “may lead to attempts to assimilate, exterminate or exclude” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1992: 8). Manning Marable’s (1996: 87) notion that “racism is the system of ignorance, exploitation, and power used to oppress African-Americans, Latinos, Asians, Pacific-Americans, Native Americans and other people on the basis of ethnicity, culture, mannerisms, and color,”—which can also apply to the Swedish context, with
its corresponding minorities\textsuperscript{14}—is significant as it makes explicit that discussions of race and racism have to include multiple faces, voices, and experiences (Solórzano & Yosso 2002). It should be evident then that embedded in the combination of these three complementary definitions is the position that racism is about \textit{institutional power}—as Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso (2002) contend—in which “one group deems itself superior to all others”, “has the power to carry out the racist behavior”, and “racism benefits the [dominant] group while negatively affecting other racial and/or ethnic groups”. Like people of colour in Sweden, people of colour in the United States have never possessed institutional power (Solórzano & Yosso 2002), and therefore it can be surmised that where whiteness is normative, the group that has the institutional power to oppress other groups is ‘white’.

It seems appropriate to note here that, as Etienne Balibar (1991a: 10) argues, both minorities and majorities are subject to processes of ethnicization and/or racialization. However, in Western contexts, it is generally only non-white minorities who are \textit{othered} in a way where they are referred to as ‘ethnic’. Balibar’s co-author Immanuel Wallerstein (1991b: 83) states that minorityhood is a concept not necessarily based on actual numbers, but rather one that refers to a group’s degree of social—and I argue, institutional—power. This social power is measured within the boundary of a state, and means that numerical majorities can sometimes be social minorities, and that the group(s) which command the lion’s share of social and institutional power, regardless of their actual number—are referred to as the ‘majority’.

Balibar (1991a: 9) asserts that racism is reproduced within the world-wide framework or system of hierarchies and exclusions created by capitalism, and whether in traditional or new forms, “racism is not receding, but progressing in the contemporary world”. Stefan Jonsson and Alireza Behtoui (2015: 139) hold a similar view, stating that the modern world is characterised by racism; that the current world order with its cultural hierarchies and systems of race/ethnic-based exploitation and exclusion has been inseparable from racism for at least the past 500 years. Wallerstein (1991a: 34) proposes that racism and sexism—as well as ageism—are intimately linked in a capitalist system. Racism in the labour force is evident in the division between the so-called ‘core’ and ‘periphery’, where those assigned to the figurative ‘periphery’ are consigned to and kept at the bottom level of the occupational and reward hierarchy, where their work is devalued; sexism is manifested in the division between male (waged) ‘work’ and female (non-waged) ‘non-work’; and ageism, which is linked to sexism, is seen in the way the “multiple work inputs of the non-

\textsuperscript{14} These include Sweden’s national minorities, namely the Sami, Swedish Finns, Tornedalians, Roma and Jews; as well as people with backgrounds in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, South America, Eastern Europe and so on.
waged young and aged”, like the woman’s domestic work, is dismissed as non-work (Wallerstein 1991a: 33). The Marxist critique of capitalism focuses on class struggle, which refers to the antagonism between people of different classes in society—the have and the have nots in terms of ownership of property and other capital, education and skills, social (upward) mobility and social capital—attributable to competing or conflicting socioeconomic interests (Boatcă 2015: 154).

With these connections in mind, it is imperative that any movement which aims to address societal, political, economic and other structural inequalities has an intersectional perspective embedded within it. Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), the concept of intersectionality provides the means for examining the specific marginalizations that result from the multiple inequalities produced at the site where two or more elements of identity and social categories intersect—in particular, categories such as gender, race/ethnicity, class, sexuality and dis/ability, among others.

To return to the topic of domestic work: according to Barbara Laslett and Johanna Brenner (1989), social reproduction or reproductive work is a term used by feminist scholars to denote the (often unpaid or low-waged) work that is needed to reproduce and maintain human life. It includes the mental, manual and emotional labour which aims, not only to literally reproduce i.e. give birth to the next generation, but also provide the socially-, historically- and biologically-defined care needed to maintain existing life—this encompasses the care and socialization of children, care of the ill and elderly, and domestic work; i.e. how “food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption” (Laslett & Brenner 1989). This definition of reproductive work echoes the connection Karl Marx made between this—often unpaid, taken-for-granted yet essential—work done at home, and capitalist production: he argues that the cost of production of labour power is that which is required for the maintenance of the worker as a worker—namely, the means of subsistence or the cost of commodities necessary to keep a person in working condition; for the person’s education, training and development into a worker; and for the “cost of propagation”, i.e. the means by which “the race of workers is enabled to multiply itself, and to replace worn-out workers with new ones” (Marx 1902: 33).

Reproductive work—also labelled ‘care labour’ (Anderson & Shutes 2014) and ‘service work’ (Glenn 1992)—falls under what some call ‘feminized precarious work’ (Precarias a la deriva 2004), and is a site where the intersection of gender, race/ethnicity and class reveal grossly asymmetrical power relations and inequalities on a (local) societal and global level. Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1992) argues that reproductive labour has been divided along racial and gender lines, the
specificities of which have varied from place to place and evolved over time “as capitalism has reorganized reproductive labor, shifting parts of it from the household to the market”.

Bridget Anderson and Isabel Schutes (2014: 1) contend that migrants, the majority originating in the global South, have increasingly taken over the unpaid or low-paid, reproductive and/or care labour formerly provided by non-migrant women in the global North, working as domestic workers, nannies, nurses and care assistants in the private homes and in care services, both state and privately funded. International migration—whether from global South to North, or intra-regionally between Central/Eastern European and Western European countries, and between countries in Southeast Asia and East/West Asia—has been “an integral part of the restructuring of care in different national contexts” (Anderson & Shutes 2014: 2).

This restructuring is related to what Wallerstein (1991a: 33) terms the *ethnicization of the workforce*, in which racism operates through the existence and reproduction of “an occupational-reward hierarchy that has tended to be correlated with some so-called social criteria”, the kind of racism that provides a non-meritocratic basis to justify inequality, enabling the maximizing of profits/accumulation of capital as per the ideal operating conditions of modern capitalism by minimizing of the costs of production/labour-power as well as minimizing the risk and therefore cost of political disruption and protest by the labour force. The constant ethnicization of occupational categories exists to permit very low wages for whole segments of the labour force (Wallerstein 1991a: 34), conferring legitimacy to the overexploitation of the majority of workers; at the same time, ethnicization *produces* a racist discourse, as the devalued segments of the workforce are made to *appear* on the whole racially inferior to the dominant segment, regardless of the particular ethnic hierarchy in that location at that specific moment (Boatcă 2015: 70).

Wallerstein (1991b: 84) declares that ethnicization of the population “resolves one of the basic contradictions of historical capitalism - its simultaneous thrust for theoretical equality and practical inequality.” My understanding of what Wallerstein attempts to convey regarding ethnicization is that it is a process caused by forces both coming from the outside of, and working within, ‘ethnic’ groups themselves. Not only are people constantly being categorized in certain ways by society in general as well as by the various apparatuses of the state; they voluntarily (to which degree, is debatable) and in specific ways socialize or ‘ethnicize’ themselves and their

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15 People are constantly being categorized, and it can be useful to think of the different ways how, with a little inspiration from Louis Althusser’s (2014: 75) theory of two kinds of state apparatuses: the Repressive State Apparatus, referring to “the government, administration, army, police, courts and prisons”; as well as Ideological State Apparatuses, which include the education system, the idea of the family, religion, politics, mass media and social institutions (associative and cultural apparatuses).
children, and also try to influence people whom they deem to belong to their ethnic group, to ‘perform’ ethnicity and behave in certain ways to defend and reproduce their group identity, thus simultaneously upholding and legitimizing the “hierarchical reality of capitalism” seemingly completely of their own volition. When ethnicization is voluntary/self-induced, it does not formally violate the word of the law, i.e. that everyone is, theoretically, equal before the law (Wallerstein 1991b: 83)—in democratic states, in any case. It is therefore important to be reflective of processes of ethnicization and their repercussions; as Jonsson and Behtoui (2015: 139) argue, racism is a living force, contributing to our very identities, whether or not we are aware of it, whether or not we wish it. Here we can also see the connection to how the meaning of race (or, I argue, ethnicity) should be interpreted in terms of racial formation processes, chief among which is racialization—which Winant (1994: 59) defines as the construction of racial identity and meaning. Winant states that race itself both “shapes the individual psyche and ‘colors’ relationships among individuals on the one hand, and furnishes an irreducible component of collective identities and social structures on the other”.

Wallerstein (1991a: 35) argues that in order for us to achieve universalism and thus a truly egalitarian society, we must not only eliminate legal and institutional barriers, but also internalized patterns of ethnicization—and that this takes not just time (“at the very least a generation”), but also, I would argue, the collective will to do so, which seems a near-impossibility. I wish to problematize the implication that difference—ethnic or otherwise—must always have a hierarchical value attached to it; it is not always difference in itself that is the problem, it is the attribution of negative/positive meaning and value to these differences (i.e. notions of inferiority or superiority) that is the problem.

Rey Chow (2002: 34) observes that the phenomenon of migration “highlights and amplifies the connection between commodified labor and ethnicization […] that takes place in a society even when there are no migrants, even when migrants have become citizens” and often even, I argue, when the children and descendants of migrants are born citizens. In the Swedish context, as Anders Neergaard (2018: 18) explains, ‘ethnic immigrants’ as a group are created through everyday speech, as well as media, political and bureaucratic discourse, and recreated via the use of the term “second generation immigrants”—which refers to people who have not immigrated themselves, but whose parents are immigrants. This terminology, in effect, locks them into perpetual ethnicization, never to be regarded as ‘real’ Swedes.

Chow (2002: 34) proposes that the ethnicization of a worker occurs because they are commodified in specific ways, because they have to perform certain kinds of work in order to pay
for their living—while these occupational categories, “despite being generated from within that society, continue to reduce the one who performs them to the position of the outsider, the ethnic”—thus also functioning as an exclusionary mechanism.

It is vital to note that the details of this constant pattern of ethnicization vary “from place to place and time to time, according to what part of the human genetic and social pools [are] located in a particular time and place and what the hierarchical needs of the economy [are] at that time and place” (Wallerstein 1991: 33). The shifting boundaries and details of ethnicization and racialization will be examined in the paragraphs that follow.

Based on my observations and experiences, as well as the experiences of others witnessed during my fieldwork, I’m interested in theoretical conceptualizations that can in some way articulate the slippery, mercurial manifestations of the three concepts of race, racism and racialization. There is a loose consensus among many contemporary researchers that these three concepts are not fixed or essentialized.

According to Magnus Dahlstedt (2010), racialization (rasifiering) is utilized in Sweden today as a tool for both exclusion as well as inclusion—the latter however only on certain, specific terms; the boundaries around the ‘community’ (gemenskapen) are open and negotiable, but simultaneously closed. Who is included or excluded—and under what conditions—changes with time, and varies based on the context.

Rattansi (2005: 272) argues that race can be viewed as—employing Ernesto Laclau’s (1990: 28) notion—a category which functions as a ‘floating signifier’, which can (or can be made to) acquire different possible meanings when articulated with different elements in different contexts, situations and discourses. Rattansi (2005) offers an example illustrating how race is a floating signifier: because the modern conception of race includes biological and cultural elements—with increasing emphasis on the ‘cultural’ due to developments in modern genetics—distinctions between ‘race’, ‘ethnicity’, and ‘nation’, which have always been blurred, have become even more indistinct.

Instead of the terms racialized and racialization, Rey Chow utilises the term ‘ethnic’ in an attempt to avoid “replicating the residual biologism that is inerasibly embedded in the term ‘race’”. Chow argues that using the term ethnic “situates the problems at hand within culture and representation, marks the discrimination entrenched in dominant ways of thinking and talking about so-called minorities, and allows, finally, for an analysis of the discrimination against ‘ethnics’ that is found within ethnic communities themselves” (Chow 2002: 25). The modern usage of the term ‘ethnic’—in designating a kind of cultural condition descriptive of all human beings—attempts to
dismantle “the clear, aggressive binarism that legitimates the separation between “us” and “them,” between the inside and outside of a community”. The understanding that “everyone is ethnic” was supposed to mean that there should be no more violence or discrimination, only humanistic tolerance. However, as Chow asserts, ethnicity seems to have just brought about new ways to justify violence and the annihilation of others (2002: 27).

The notion of race functioning as a floating signifier is in alignment with Howard Winant’s (1994: 59) assertion that race is predominantly a social construct whose “meaning is intrinsically unstable”, and “inherently subject to contestation”. Omi and Winant (2015: 110) state that race should be understood—from a racial formation perspective—as a fluid, “unstable, and ‘decentred’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle”. For Omi and Winant (2015: 110), “race is a concept that signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies”. It is also useful to think of racialization as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group” [my emphasis], and that it is a process which “occurs in large-scale and small-scale ways, macro- and micro-socially” (Omi & Winant 2015: 111).

Whether people are categorized by race or ethnicity, racism is ever-present, and has— according to Wallerstein (1991a: 34)—“always combined claims based on continuity with the past (genetic and/or social) with a present-orientated flexibility in defining the exact boundaries of these reified entities we call races or ethno-national-religious groupings”. Wallerstein states that racial and/or ethno-national-religious groups or communities are created and constantly re-created based on claims to a connection to past boundaries, combined with the constant redrawing of these boundaries in the present. These groups and communities always exist and are always ranked hierarchically, but their rank and formation do not always stay the same: some groups could disappear or combine with others, some split into subdivisions, new groups might come into being, and some groups may move up or down in the hierarchy. But there is always a group that is at the very bottom of the hierarchy; Wallerstein (1991a: 34) uses the n-word to refer to this group, describing those who are the economically, politically, or socially disenfranchised, and who are victims of prejudice similar to that suffered by black people. He argues that “if there are no Blacks or too few to play the role [in a given society], one can invent ‘White n**gers’”.

Omi and Winant (2015: 13) cite a few examples illustrating the changing boundaries and rankings of racial and/or ethno-national-religious groups: The Irish and the Jews were earlier in US history not considered racially ‘white’, but eventually have been included in that group; and Asian Americans have been viewed as either a ‘yellow peril’ or ‘model minority’ depending on the
historical period, racial hierarchy and/or political relations between the US and Asia. Taking an example from the Swedish context, the Finns were—about a hundred years ago—categorized as belonging to the ‘inferior’ races by Herman Lundborg, who later became the head of the Swedish State Institute for Racial Biology (Regeringskansliet 2005: 98); today however, Swedish Finns join with majority Swedes in an “alliance of whiteness” (Hübinette & Lundström 2014).

4.1.1 Panethnicity: Allied by and against common pressures

One hears of groups such as Asian Americans, Asian Swedes, Native Americans, African Americans, Afro-Swedes, and so on—groups that, in reality, each contain communities that vary by language, religion, cultural practice and place of origin. What is it that causes disparate ethnic identities to be ‘lumped’ together by society, and/or choose to bridge their differences, joining under one umbrella identity? Omi and Winant (2015: 131) describe how these groups are being lumped together in panethnicizing processes, arguing that panethnicity is a kind of racialization, and that every racially defined group is a panethnic group. The racialization process is set in motion by a combination of centripetal and centrifugal forces: ethnic groups may—despite having “different cultural orientations and sometimes long-standing antagonisms” (centrifugal forces)—be compelled to form alliances because of the common pressures and injustices they face, namely exclusion, discrimination and violence against them (centripetal forces) (Omi and Winant 2015: 131).

An incident that epitomizes the racism of Asian ‘lumping’ is the 1982 murder case in Detroit, US of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American who was beaten to death by two white men who mistook him for being Japanese at the time when the Japanese automobile industry was booming, and the US car industry was in decline. When it emerged that the killers were ultimately not to serve any prison time for their crime, Americans from various ‘Asian’ backgrounds—including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, Vietnamese, ‘Asian Indian’, as well as some non-Asians, such as the black and Jewish American communities—rallied together in support of the pan-Asian American organization, American Citizens for Justice (ACJ) to protest the sheer injustice of the lenient sentences (Espiritu 1992: 148).

This case and its aftermath—in terms of activism—demonstrate how panethnicizing processes comprise not only the shared experience of suffering that draws people together (Omi & Winant 2015: 131); but also engagement in “reactive solidarity” that can, for example, lead to the formation of organizations to monitor, report and protest violence and injustice, with the aim of improving the community’s conditions (Okamoto 2006). As Yến Lê Espiritu (1992: 163) argues,
political benefits do contribute to pan-Asian organization, but “it is anti-Asian violence that has drawn the largest pan-Asian support because it cross-cuts class, cultural, and generational divisions and necessarily leads to protective panethnicity” [my emphasis]. It is vital to recognise that all Asians (who are racialized in the same way) are at risk of racist hostility and acts targeting a specific Asian subgroup, because outsiders do not or cannot distinguish between the different subgroups, but instead perceive all Asians as a single group (Espiritu 1992: 140). Because the dominant group or larger society regards and treats panethnic communities such as Asian Americans, African Americans, Native Americans and Latinos as if they each were a single race, “these groups [may] respond by asserting a panethnic identity and constructing a common culture that is facilitated by common experiences vis-à-vis the dominant group”, states Dina Okamoto (2006).

Even though, as Omi and Winant (2015: 131) argue, panethnicity is often imbued with internal tension, conflict and asymmetric power relations, involving the subsumption or muting of ethnic differences; and even though it is often originally imposed by outsiders/the dominant group, it can become, for the targeted group(s), “a symbol of pride and a rallying point for mass mobilization by later generations” (Espiritu 1992: 20).

In the Swedish context, it is obvious—as covered in the background section of this thesis—how disparate East- and Southeast Asian identities are often lumped into one and the same group. However, as I have observed in separatist groups for racialized Swedes on social media, people with backgrounds in not only East/Southeast/South Asia, but also those from Central Asia and perhaps slightly surprisingly, some from West Asia, are self-identifying as ‘Asian’, even if the larger Swedish society presently does not generally lump them all together as Asians—illustrating once more the panethnicizing process as well as the changing boundaries of racial and/or ethno-national-religious groups.

4.2 Visuality, corporeality and stereotypes

The concept of visuality or visualism embeds corporeality—the physical body, and more specifically, its outer appearance—within racialization processes. Of course, people can be, and are, racialized based not only on outward appearance, but also due to their name, accent, mannerisms and other factors. But as Omi and Winant (2015: 111) argue, the understanding and definition of racial categories has a “crucial and non-reductible visual dimension”. Racial profiling, for instance—which is the act of targeting or suspecting a person perceived to be of a certain race on the basis of observed physical characteristics, leading to discrimination—may be understood as a form of racialization (Omi & Winant 2015: 111).
Rey Chow (2002: 96) defines visuality as “the coded manners in which one is being imaged”. According to Chow (2002: 66), “the act of stereotyping is always implicated in visuality by virtue of the fact that the other is imagined as and transformed into a (sur)face, a sheer exterior deprived/independent of historical depth”—even though stereotypes are not necessarily physically viewable or visual. Stereotyping can be regarded as a system of sorts, a process that links words and ideas to images. It is comparable to the process of racial categorization, in which “bodies are visually read and narrated in ways that draw upon an ensemble of symbolic meanings and associations”, and perceived corporeal distinctions are so common they become essentialized (Omi & Winant 2015: 111).

In his book Public Opinion, originally published in 1922, Walter Lippmann (1998: 8)—who is well known for coining the term “stereotype” in the modern psychological meaning—compares stereotypes with “pictures in our heads”, arguing that printed or spoken words can also evoke part of this system of stereotypes, so that the actual, ongoing sensation of viewing something, and the preoccupation with the pictures (as well as associations and meanings) in one’s head occupy one’s consciousness simultaneously. “The two are blended, much as if we looked at red through blue glasses and saw green,” he offers, by way of illustrating this phenomenon (Lippman 1998: 8).

Lippmann (1998: 98) describes stereotyping as a kind of perception that “precedes the use of reason” and “imposes a certain character on the data of our senses before the data reach the intelligence”. The reason for this, as he argues, is that how we interpret or process what we see depends on who we are, our position and the “habits of our eyes” (Lippmann 1998: 80). A person’s account of an event, or an observation, is the joint product of the person—the ‘knower’—and what they know at that point in time. As Lippmann (1998: 81) argues, “in the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world”, we tend to perceive what we are observing “in the form stereotyped for us by our culture”. My interpretation of what he writes is that we tend to view the world through lenses that have been shaped by our upbringing and the society around us.

Stereotyping is deemed by Lippmann a necessary phenomenon to process the information and stimuli we often encounter every waking second; it fulfils the existing need for economy of thought and effort, and allows us to cope somewhat with complexity—albeit inadequately—and “to define ourselves in relation to other peoples and groups in a simple and usually unreflective way”, as Michael Curtis (1998: xxxiv) writes in the new introduction to Public Opinion. But while the act of stereotyping may have its benign uses, stereotypes can just as often become “images that injure” and word games that “dehumanize the vulnerable”—as demonstrated the background chapter of this thesis—and most calamitously, “take lives” (Chow 2002: 53).
Jason Stanley (2015: 195), author of How Propaganda Works, likens Lippmann's notion of stereotypes to a “surrogate for an ideology”, in the sense that Stanley himself defines ideology. Stanley (2015: 195) summarizes an extract from chapter seven of Public Opinion, which depicts stereotypes as “social scripts that guide us through the world, make sense of it, and legitimate our actions within it”. This follows that the act and process of stereotyping is strongly connected to our sense of self, our identity, and not what might independently be considered ‘facts’ (Lippmann 1998: 80).

Curtis (1998: xix) refers to Lippmann’s observation that—through the use of propaganda in World War I—‘facts’ could be distorted. And although this problem could “technically be overcome by an effective press and use of expert advice” (Curtis 1998: xix), this was not easy to do at the time and arguably, markedly more difficult today, with technology that allows virtually anyone to disseminate (mis)information in the public (online) sphere; the advent of the increasingly pervasive ‘spreadable media’ (Jenkins, Ford & Green 2013: 3); the term ‘fake news’ being appropriated to discredit what should be considered accurate, reliable and nonpartisan sources (Lischka 2017); and the term ‘alternative facts’ being used to legitimize false claims (Tsipursky 2017).

Lippmann describes distortion as also being present in the minds of people, in that each person creates a reality that aligns with their world view; the use of stereotypes is therefore related to the ego, and it is the projection of our sense of our own value on the world—the problem is that “we act as if our projections correspond to actual fact” (Curtis 1998: xix). This once more explains one of the reasons why stereotypes are so difficult to revise or abandon: they are connected to our identity, and how we make sense of the world. As Lippmann (1998: 98) argues, there is nothing as stubbornly resistant to education or criticism as the stereotype, and that it “stamps itself upon the evidence in the very act of securing the evidence”.

So how do we maintain our stereotypes—these “pictures in our heads”—and if they are in some way harmful, is there any hope at all that they can be changed or altered? Lippmann (1998: 99) proposes that if the person or phenomenon we are observing corresponds with what we had anticipated, the stereotype is reinforced; whereas if the stereotype is contradicted, one of two things happens: we either decide—due to self-interest and/or sheer bigotry—to consider the contradiction an exception, discredit the observation and dismiss it as inconsequential; or we make the decision to keep an open mind and allow the contradiction to modify and broaden our way of seeing things.

To return to visuality, corporeality and racialization: Omi and Winant (2015: 44) ask, “in what sense can groups of color [sic] be considered in ethnic group terms?” They argue that each
panethnic group of colour—such as blacks, Asian Americans, Latin@s (sic) and Native Americans—are in ethnic terms are as diverse as ‘whites’, and therefore, when whites are seen as variegated in terms of group identities, but other panethnic groups “all look alike” despite their differences in terms of language, religion, place of origin and cultural practices, it clearly indicates elements of racism at play. Omi and Winant (2015: 44) propose that this “is the effect of the application of a paradigm based in white ethnic history to a variety of racially defined groups”.

Another vital point that must be emphasized once more is that race is not self-evidently an ocular phenomenon, because “once specific concepts of race are widely circulated and accepted as a social reality, racial difference is not dependent on visual observation alone” (Omi & Winant 2015: 111). This is demonstrated in a study where respondents who have been blind since birth could ‘see’ race—in a conceptual sense—because they had been socialized through interpersonal and institutional communications and practices that shape their perceptions and understanding of what race is (Omi & Winant 2015: 111; Obasogie 2010).

4.3 Coercive mimeticism: from attempting assimilation to internalizing ethnicization

Coercive mimeticism is a concept coined by cultural critic Rey Chow, who uses this term to refer to a process of self-racialization—a performance of ethnicity induced by external pressures. Mimeticism is “a theory or practice of representation based on imitation” (English Oxford Living Dictionaries 2018), and in cross-cultural contexts in which colonialism has played a part, mimeticism is often existential as well (Chow 2002: 103). A process that is identitarian, cultural, textual, and as mentioned, existential—or a combination thereof, coercive mimeticism describes the mechanisms and ways by which those who are marginal to mainstream Western culture—that is, non-white ‘ethnics’—are expected to imitate, reproduce and resemble “the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them”, thereby objectifying themselves in accordance to existing stereotypes, and in this way sanctioning “the familiar imagings of them as ethnics” (Chow 2002: 107). (See the previous subsection on visuality and stereotypes). In other words, coercive mimeticism ‘keeps in place’, and effectively traps, a person who is racialized or categorized as ‘ethnic’ in “a space in modern Western society that is categorically equivalent to that of […] caged animals [in zoos]”, and is therefore, Chow (2002: 107) argues, “the very mechanism that holds together the fabric of this particular captivity narrative.”

This metaphor of the caged animal in the zoo comes from art historian John Berger's essay Why Look at Animals?, which explores the historical transformation of (white) Western man's relation with animals. The zoo is a place where people go to see, observe and meet animals, but as
Berger (2015) argues, it is in fact “a monument to the impossibility of such encounters”. The zoo is a wholly artificial space, and the internment of animals in zoos renders them “absolutely marginal”, and at the whims and mercy of the people who placed them there. The confinement of the animals—which is the condition that enables their spectators to observe them at relatively, to very close, quarters—changes their responses and behaviours, which become unnatural, that is to say, dramatically different from those of animals in their natural habitat. Berger (2015) suggests that “all sites of enforced marginalization – ghettos, shanty towns, prisons, madhouses, concentration camps – have something in common with zoos.”

While the drawing of parallels between racialization/ethnicization and the metaphor of the caged animal in the zoo is uncomfortable, even repugnant, it brings to mind the colonial ‘human zoos’ which were popular from the eighteenth to the early twentieth century (Blanchard et al. 2008; Blanchard, Boëtsch & Jacomijn Snoep 2011)—a reminder that this comparison is not so far-fetched after all.

The phenomenon of the ‘human zoo’ was rooted in the European Renaissance and Enlightenment practice of “bringing indigenous people to colonial capitals where they were paraded as exotic curiosities” (Forsdick 2003: 47). Non-European, or rather, specifically non-white bodies were also displayed for financial and—ostensibly, dubiously—scientific gain (Andreassen 2015: 11). A well-known and particularly horrific case was that of Sara Baartman, the indigenous South African woman who was cruelly exploited in life as well as in death, when her exoticized, hypersexualized—even, I argue, racially fetishized—body was dissected and put on display for almost two centuries in museums in England and France (Forsdick 2003: 47; Qureshi 2004). In the nineteenth century, the phenomenon of human zoos or exhibitions was connected to colonial expansion and instrumentalized as part of domestic propaganda, developing into “a systematic exhibiting of ‘savage’ otherness”, and was thus used to justify the perceived right to colonize, and support “the claim to an associated right to displace and exhibit colonized cultures and peoples” (Forsdick 2003: 47). This demonstrates clearly patterns of racialization and the central function of visuality in the construction of stereotypes, and corroborates the role of human exhibitions in the genealogy of modern racism.

Chow (2002: 96) argues that the metaphor of caged zoo animals (and, I contend, the historical existence of human zoos) offers a disturbingly apt parallel to “the politics of ethnicity in the context of capitalist liberalism”. Human zoos in particular, with their intent of showcasing and ultimately essentializing various cultures as ‘traditional’, ‘authentic’ and ‘exotic’, functioned in similar ways to some of the elements of coercive mimeticism, which will be outlined in the next
subsection. This kind of cultural marginalization continues to affect people who are racialized, not only in society at large, but even in the context of academia, as is illustrated in this passage by literary theorist Trinh Minh-ha (1989: 82) in her book *Woman, Native, Other*:

> “Have you read the grievances some of our sisters express on being among the few women chosen for a ‘Special Third World Women’s Issue’ or on being the only Third World woman at readings, workshops, and meetings? It is as if everywhere we go, we become Someone’s private zoo. [...]it is difficult for us to sit at table with them (the master and/or his substitutes) without feeling that our presence, like that of the ‘native’ (who happens to be invited) among the anthropologists, serves to mask the refined sexist and/or racist tone of their discourse, reinforcing thereby its pretensions to universality.”

4.3.1 Three levels of mimeticism

Chow (2002: 104) proposes that there are “at least three levels of mimeticism working in an overlapping, overdetermined manner at all times”, and that they can never be clearly or completely distinguished from each other. These levels which Chow has identified, which will be described briefly in this section, are: first, the centring of the white man as the original, the norm and the standard—ergo, the model against which the colonized or the ‘ethnic’ is judged; second, the focus on the subjectivity of the racialized subject, encompassing the ambivalent wishes, resentments and acts of resistance embedded in their struggles of identity; and third, the level at which the ethnic person is expected to ‘perform’ and “resemble what is recognizably ethnic” (Chow 2002: 104).

The first level of mimeticism is the placing of the white man at the centre and the top of the hierarchy of race and culture: a condition and imperative created by centuries of Western imperialism and colonialism. The white colonizer—together with his language and culture—has been made the norm and the standard against which the ‘ethnic’ is measured and judged. Racialized people are expected to imitate and try their very best to meet this standard, to assimilate into the white man's culture, even though their efforts will never be completely satisfactory. This relegates the ‘ethnic’, their language and their culture to the position of an inferior and improper copy (Chow 2002: 104), forcing racialized persons into the category of second-class citizen, excluding them from ‘the norm’, designating them as *the Other*—to use the term in the eminent Edward Said’s (1978) spirit. In the Swedish context, anyone who is an immigrant or is of ‘foreign background’ can be forced into this inferior position, depending on the circumstances; this discrimination also affects/has affected the Swedish national minorities to different degrees at different periods—Jews, the Roma, the Sami, the Swedish Finns and the Tornedalers (Regeringskansliet 2005: 97). In order
to survive in such a society, ‘ethnics’ have no choice but to keep trying to mimic, even as they continue to be degraded—they are damned if they try, and damned if they don’t (Chow 2002: 104).

The second level of mimeticism concerns and provides room for more complexity and psychological nuance with regards to the subjectivity and agency of the racialized subject. Here, Chow (2002: 104) draws substantially from postcolonial scholar Homi Bhabha’s concepts, namely hybridity, ambivalence, cultural difference, mimicry and the Third Space (Huddart 2006: 1; Bhabha 1994: 37), which attempt to follow up on Frantz Fanon’s (1952) understanding of the colonized subject’s psychology. This level of mimeticism focuses on the colonized person or ‘ethnic’ as “an indeterminate, internally divided subject” who “[vacillates] between black and white”—or, as I interpret, between majority and minority cultures; cultures which are no longer rigidly polarized against each other, but “can now be considered as mutually constituted” (Chow 2002: 105) thus, situating the ethnic—to use Bhabha’s terminology—in a hybridized or liminal location (Huddart 2006: 5). At this level of mimeticism, the ethnic subject is gripped by existential angst, conflict and ambivalence: desiring acceptance into the majority, into whiteness and simultaneously ashamed at the inferior social position imposed upon them; experiencing the angst of neither being able to fully change/control the colour of their skin and other physical features, nor the negative values ascribed to these; the resentment and anger at being faced with unattainable standards, and being demeaned for failing to achieve them (Chow 2002: 105)—in short, the frustration, even agony, of being caught in an impossible situation.

Chow (2002: 106) critiques the general preoccupation by cultural theorists with this second level of mimeticism, which “assumes the antistance of resistance but is still, by and large, governed by the white man as the original”, and offers an expansion of the concept of mimeticism into an area which she feels has been neglected or bypassed: a third level, at which the ethnic person is expected to perform ethnicity—Chow proposes this be called coercive mimeticism. As mentioned in the beginning of section 4.3 on coercive mimeticism, the original or standard that should be replicated is not the white man or his culture, but rather the stereotyped image of the ethnic: “Asianness”, “Africanness”, “Arabness”, and other similar kinds of ‘nativenesses’ to which racialized people in North American, Swedish or other societies are often expected to conform (Chow 2002: 107). Together with the other two levels of mimeticism, it is apparent how different historical and societal forces—as well as the impulses and compulsions within the racialized subject—operate together to shape and pressure the ethnic in the direction of attempting assimilation or internalizing ethnicization.
How is coercive mimeticism actively put into practice? Chow refers to several scholars to explain the mechanisms of how and why the ethnic comes to internalize ethnicization or a cultural stereotype of themself—and I will attempt to make a condensed summary of it. Chow draws first from Louis Althusser’s concept of *interpellation*, or *hailing*: In a scenario where an individual is walking along, and somewhere, someone hails them, “Hey, you there!”, the person will most likely respond by answering to the hailing in some way, and in doing so is ‘transformed’ into a subject (Althusser 2014: 191). Only, according to Althusser, “individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects”, meaning even before they are born, they already have been assigned an identity through familial ideology: surname, family role, and so on (Althusser 2014: 192). It could also be said, then, I argue, that before birth, an individual would also (usually) already be assigned an identity through the ideology of ethnicity/race, of which the phenotype is a central feature—illustrating “the intimate mutual implications between mimeticism and visuality” (Chow 2002: 107).

The *interpellation* may come from the *Repressive State Apparatus*, which includes the police and the government, or *Ideological State Apparatuses* such as the church, the institution of family, or social institutions such as an ethnic community (Althusser 2014: 75; Chow 2002: 108). In terms of ethnic politics, the hailing comes not just from within the confines of the individual’s ethnic community—which simultaneously designates them as a member—but also “predominantly from the outside, by the cultural critics”, which Chow likens to “the zoo gazers” mentioned in 4.3, who are intent on bestowing upon the individual and their perceived culture a meaning different from society’s norms (Chow 2002: 108).

One of the main critiques of Althusser’s model of internalization is that it does not allow for the interpellated person’s agency or will “to respond with variation or to reject the call altogether”. Chow (2002: 109) also puts forth Slavoj Žižek’s argument that Althusser had not explained how the subject becomes the thing that they are hailed as, how they internalize their interpellation by ideology (Žižek 1989: 42). She then employs her interpretation of Žižek’s assertion that the subject always tries to avoid, postpone and resist the “terror of complete freedom” and “the terror of a radically open field of significatory possibilities” by allowing themselves to be articulated in advance and by responding predictably to the “ideological, institutional process of being interpellated” (Chow 2002: 110). It follows that identity is a result not only of rules being imposed from the outside or the resistance against this imposition, but also the outcome of an *unconscious automization* of mimicking and internalizing existing practices, rituals and beliefs—which in turn give an identity a sense of legitimacy, security and empowerment (Chow 2002: 110).
Identifying with a group can obviously be a source of support, strength and pride—as can be seen, for example, with panethnicity—but also a source of inner conflict and pressure to conform. This leads us to the last question: if the interpellation of the ethnic subject essentially concerns “the successful internalization and incorporation of a hailing from the outside” asks Chow (2002: 111), how is this interpellation manifested and made perceivable in cultural representation? How does the ethnic be recognizably ethnic?

For this, Chow examines the self—particularly the ethnic self—as a form of production. She refers to James Clifford's (1985: 237) assertion that the Western sense of self is that of being an owner, and this is contingent on two things: owning property and displaying what is owned. The self is thus defined by objecthood, rather than subjechood. In order to exist, to be allowed to function in society, the racialized person must both appear to 'own' their ethnicity as well as to exhibit it repeatedly and constantly (Chow 2002: 111)—that is, to ‘perform’, or perhaps one could even say (re)produce ethnicity. Chow suggests that this repeated display tends to take the form of confession or self-display, in autobiographies, memoirs, journals, forums, conferences and lectures (Chow 2002: 112). In line with Clifford's (1985: 239) idea about the self being defined by objecthood, the coercive mimetic display of ethnicity by an ethnic person—like an object in an ethnographic museum, or to return to the metaphor of the caged animal in the zoo, or gut-churningly, a person displayed in a human zoo—“creates the illusion of adequate representation of a world” or a culture. In this way, the ethnic person becomes a metonym for that ethnic culture they are assumed to belong to, and is pinned down to their ethnic identity, marked as ethnic (Ang 1994).

### 4.4 Epistemic injustice and its harms

The topic and phenomenon of epistemic injustice concerns and encompasses issues of authority, power, justice, trust, credibility and testimony (Kidd, Medina & Pohlhaus 2017: 1). According to Ian James Kidd, José Medina and Gaile Pohlhaus Jr (2017: 1), it refers to the kinds of unfair treatment related to “issues of knowledge, understanding, and participation in communicative practices”. Epistemic injustices can be understood as epistemic in at least three ways: first, when someone is wronged specifically in their capacity as a knower, through the suppression of their testimony (Fricker 2007: 9; Dotson 2011), or from inhibiting or withholding knowledge that is in their interest to know (Fricker 2007: 151); secondly, when someone's understanding is being distorted, or their ability to question is impeded; and third, these previous two injustices are committed within, and sometimes through the use of prevailing epistemic practices and institutions,
such as school curricula and academic disciplines which are “structured in ways that systematically ignore, distort, and/or discredit particular intellectual traditions” (Pohlhaus Jr 2017: 13; see also Mohanty 2003: 78).

In order to discern if epistemic injustice is being done to a particular person or group, or in a given context, one should ask a number of questions: “Who has voice and who doesn’t? Are voices interacting with equal agency and power? In whose terms are they communicating? Who is being understood and who isn’t (and at what cost)? Who is being believed? And who is even being acknowledged and engaged with?” (Kidd, Medina & Pohlhaus Jr 2017: 1).

The practice of examining the ethics and politics of knowledge practices in this and similar ways isn’t new: it has been done, and continues to be done, by feminist, critical race, postcolonial and decolonial philosophers as well as other scholars. Where there is epistemic injustice, there is also resistance to it; one form of resistance is for those subjected to epistemic injustice to explicitly identify and analyse what they are experiencing, thus drawing attention to the ways in which they have been wronged in their capacities or positions as knowers (Pohlhaus Jr 2017: 13). Postcolonial scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988: 283) uses the term ‘epistemic violence’ in her text, Can the Subaltern Speak? to describe how marginalized groups are silenced in an attempt to erase the knowledge they possess; how their ability to be heard and taken seriously is damaged; and how claims to know the interests of marginalized people prevents them from formulating knowledge claims concerning them and their interests, hindering them from speaking for themselves. Feminist and civil rights activist Audre Lorde (2007: 124) speaks of those who are marginalized using their anger in the face of racism, exclusion, silencing, stereotyping, and so on, to examine how they are being epistemically oppressed, and the expression of this anger as a way to reassert their epistemic agency.

As it has been made quite clear now, epistemic injustice can take many forms. In Miranda Fricker’s 2007 book—Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing—she aims to shed light on some ethical aspects of two most basic, everyday epistemic practices: making sense of our own social experiences, and conveying knowledge to others by telling them. Fricker outlines how two forms of epistemic injustice can arise during these practices: hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice.

Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a gap in collective interpretive resources and relations of power can constrain someone's (or a group's) ability to understand their own experience, thus putting them at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of said experience (Fricker 2007: 149). Fricker cites the case of Carmita Wood—described in Susan Brownmiller’s book In
Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution—as a clear example of this form of injustice. Carmita Wood, an administrative staff member at Cornell University, suffered and repeatedly tried to fend off unwanted sexual advances from a distinguished professor. After developing physical symptoms from the stress of trying to avoid being molested, she requested a transfer to another department; when that was rejected, she resigned. As she did not have a name for what she had been subject to, her claim for unemployment benefits was denied. She then sought to appeal the decision with the help of a group of activists at the university, who after brainstorming came up with the term “sexual harassment” to describe this distinctive social experience that many women have suffered, and are suffering. This occurred in the year 1975 (Brownmiller 1999: 281).

This lack of the concept of sexual harassment—and if the term did already exist, but the victim was unaware of it—was a hermeneutical disadvantage that prevented her from understanding a significant part of her own experience which was strongly in her interests to understand. In Wood's case, this left her troubled, confused, isolated and vulnerable to continued harassment. Her being unable to name the way by which she was mistreated prevented her from protesting it, much less taking steps to stop the mistreatment (Fricker 2007: 151).

The other form of epistemic injustice described by Fricker (2007: 17) is testimonial injustice, which is a form of credibility deficit, meaning a speaker receives less credibility than they otherwise would or should have from a hearer. This credibility deficit could be the result of the hearer’s prejudice or stereotyping based on the speaker’s appearance, accent, and so on; or the result of an “innocent error: error that is both ethically and epistemically non-culpable” (Fricker 2007: 17). She also states that “testimonial injustice is a normal feature of our testimonial practices”, which may sometimes have very little impact and do minimal harm, but in other case may be seriously harmful, especially when it is systematic and persistent (Fricker 2007: 43). In cases where testimonial injustice—and other kinds of injustice, whether intentional or not—causes harm, I argue that impact and outcome outweigh intent.

A case of what likely was testimonial injustice recently came to light in Swedish media: a person who fell during a football match, hitting their head and subsequently suffering from pain in the head and neck, was brought by ambulance to the emergency department of Sahlgrenska University Hospital. In the documentation by ambulance personnel, it is stated, among other things, that the patient “pretended to be unconscious” and that it was a “cultural fainting”16. This report resulted in a one-and-a-half-hour delay in diagnosis and treatment for what later was revealed to be a massive brain haemorrhage and a ruptured aneurysm (Helander 2018). From the limited

16 My translation from the original Swedish “spelade medvetslös” and ”kulturell svimning”
information revealed in the news report, it can be gleaned that some sort of grave prejudice—most likely racism—was involved in the making of these “unprofessional” statements regarding a patient; and the fact that the patient’s complaints of pain and even fainting were not believed or taken seriously because of this prejudgement—which could have dire, even deadly consequences for the patient—makes this, I argue, a clear case of testimonial injustice.

This subsection is merely meant to be a brief introduction to the concept of epistemic injustice—which is broad and very complex—and I have chosen to only focus on Miranda Fricker’s two forms for the purposes of this thesis. A more comprehensive view of the field of epistemic injustice would, for example, delve more profoundly into injustices embedded in social/racial contract and coordinated ignorance (which elaborates further how epistemic injustice is intertwined with, and reinforces, relations of dominance and oppression); interdependence and epistemic relations; degrees of change in epistemic systems; and epistemic labour and knowledge production (Pohlhaus Jr 2017: 16)—all of which deserve a dedicated study focusing on some or all of these phenomena.

5. THEIR NARRATIVES, ANALYSED

In this chapter, the women I interviewed are introduced in more detail, as their narratives are presented and analysed through the lenses of racialization, panethnicity, visuality, coercive mimeticism and epistemic injustice. They relate to us a range of situations in which they have experienced being racialized or Othered in some way, how they navigate this and other phenomena they are subject to, and their strategies for coping and resistance.

The structure is quite organic: some women’s narratives contain several topics I’ve selected, which are examined in separate subsections; some women’s accounts will only be presented in one subsection; and some subsections will contain parts of stories from different women who have all experienced a similar phenomenon. I have tried to loosely group the phenomena to make for smoother and more coherent reading, but readers of these thesis will find that the topics and phenomena have elements that overlap, and that certain patterns can be discerned across the women’s experiences. These patterns will be addressed in the discussion chapter.
5.1 The kind of racism that you shall not complain about

Linh is in her 20s and was born in Sweden to parents who immigrated from Vietnam. She was raised and educated in Sweden, seems to be an outgoing and fairly confident person, and is quite relaxed and expressive during our interview. Quite early on, I ask her whether she thinks that her background and physical appearance has affected her life here in Sweden. She gives a short laugh and says that it has affected everything, for good and bad; and starts describing how when she was little, she and her younger sister were the only Southeast Asians in the whole school. “We were few... and so... we were bullied for it. There were of course other second-generation kids, but we were bullied extra because we were the only ones who looked like this. I was very introverted as a child”. She then struggles a little with herself, saying haltingly that it was not “dangerous” bullying, but it was still so bad and made her so extremely sad that she sought support at kamratstödjarna\(^{17}\). This discriminatory treatment however continued throughout her school days, and there was an undertone in it that wasn’t directly personal, but that she couldn’t pinpoint at the time.

One day, when she was around 18 or 19 years old, she happened to be listening to the radio when a programme came on addressing racism towards people of East Asian descent. Prior to this, her conception of racism was that it was “between white and black people”. According to Linh, the woman on the radio asserted that what happens to East Asians—presumably in Sweden and other Western contexts—“is racism, except that it is hidden, not as clear, because we don't have the terrible history [of oppression] that black people have”. And then she recalls that she cried for about an hour, because for the first time in her life she understood why she felt ashamed every time she was to tell someone that she was ‘from’ Vietnam. “[I understood that] when I was little, it was not bullying I was subject to, because bullying is personal... this was based on how I look, or what should I say, race...this is based on one’s roots”. Even though she was suffering, she was made to feel that she could not complain about what she was experiencing:

[People said that] it is not ‘gross racism’ that ‘you Asians’ face, so why are you complaining? But it is horrible anyway! It was tough when I realised that, shit, this is a legitimate reason to be upset, and it does not only concern me... it also concerns other Asian people I’ve seen being ‘bullied’, or the racism aimed towards my mother because she has an accent... I understood that I could be sad, but that I couldn’t... express it openly.

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\(^{17}\) A group of fellow students tasked with maintaining a good school environment and providing anti-bullying support.
Linh refers to herself and her sister as “second-generation”, using a term indicating that she has internalized the constant, unceasing racialization imposed upon them via the *interpellation* of them by Swedish society as ‘ethnics’ (Neergaard 2018: 18; Chow 2002: 108). Having had her physical appearance remarked upon all her life, Linh’s experiences of racialization have been very much tied to *visuality*. Being the only Southeast Asians in school, the sisters were racially isolated; the lack of visibility and critical mass—that may have lent support—made them simultaneously ‘invisible’ and ‘hypervisible’ (Chou 2012: 51; Ahmed 2007: 157). The shame she felt at being forced to reveal that she is of Vietnamese descent over and over again reflects an internalization of the racial oppression inflicted upon people of East- and Southeast Asians descent (Trieu & Lee 2018; Pyke 2010; Chow 2002: 105; cf. Fanon 1952: 88). It is clear as well that Linh has suffered and continues to suffer *epistemic injustice*, both *hermeneutical* and *testimonial* (Fricker 2017): firstly, for almost two decades of her life, not having enough/accurate knowledge of the concept of racism to realise that it also applied to her situation (*hermeneutical injustice*); and secondly, having her feelings and experiences minimized and her voice suppressed, because she has been told repeatedly and constantly that the kind of racism that ‘Asian’ people face isn’t considered ‘gross’ or ‘dangerous’ or serious—and therefore should not be complained about, even though it obviously caused her psychological distress (*testimonial injustice*).

Kristie Dotson (2011) has identified two practices of silencing: *testimonial quieting* and *testimonial smothering*—both of which Linh has experienced. *Testimonial quieting*—which is comparable to Fricker’s (2007: 17) *testimonial injustice*—occurs when an audience fails to identify, or undervalues/discredits a speaker as a knower, thus failing to acknowledge the testimony and lived experience of the speaker as valid, rendering it ineffectual. Linh’s protests against the racism she faced were not taken seriously because racism towards Asians is not considered ‘dangerous’, even though she is hurt by it. *Testimonial smothering* happens when the speaker truncates or “smothers” their own testimony because they perceive their audience as “unwilling or unable to gain the appropriate uptake of proffered testimony”; the speaker thus capitulates to the audience’s prejudice, testimonial incompetence (lack of understanding) or pernicious ignorance—this should be considered a type of *coerced silencing*: Linh being made to feel that she could not even speak out about racism against Asians. Both forms of silencing and testimonial oppressions are particularly harmful in the context of structural inequality and systems of domination, where the *testimonial quieting* and *testimonial smothering* of marginalized groups is a form of *epistemic violence* (Dotson 2011; Spivak 1988: 283).
Linh’s strong emotional reaction to what she learned from the radio show and the revelation that what she had suffered at school was, indeed, racism—and should be called that—shows how “astonishing and life-changing a cognitive achievement” it can be to overcome prevailing social interpretive habits and arrive at eye-opening interpretations of “formerly occluded experiences”, as Fricker (2007: 148) puts it.

5.2 ‘Colour-blindness’, and being adopted, does not magically erase racism

Adopted from Korea when she was a few months old, Elin arrived in Sweden over forty years ago. She grew up in a “very small, very white village” not too far from one of the country’s largest cities. To provide some context, Elin tells me that when she grew up in the 1970s, it appeared that adopted persons were virtually the only ones who were racialized as non-white, and they numbered only a few thousand. Most adoptees ended up in very white, often very small, rural areas; and in families of working or lower middle class. In her village there were only a handful of children of colour, including her brother, who is also adopted from Korea. She describes having felt quite alone while growing up, an impression she also gets after speaking with other adoptees. Like Linh, Elin was racially isolated, and had her experiences of racism mislabelled and dismissed as ‘mere’ bullying—by her own adoptive parents:

We were in many ways... exotified, considered a bit strange... I know many of my fellow adoptees were subjected to bullying, racism... it was very difficult for many of us to actually verbalize this and make our parents and relatives and friends understand this. When I had my first encounters of racism... my mum and dad wanted to see it as just another type of bullying, saying things like, “kids are always nasty to each other and they will always find things to tease others for, and in your case it is just easier for them to tease you for being Asian. They could just as well have bullied you for your glasses, or if you’re overweight, or the teacher’s pet...” Basically they wanted to make racism just... just as any other case of child’s play. So... [exasperated sigh] it was only until quite recently actually, I’ve been actually been able to call it racism myself. I never did that when I was growing up. I did the same thing my parents did, I just dismissed it as, well, kids are stupid, kids are mean, and... you know. And this is something I have in common with many, many adoptees. Especially from my generation where we grew up in a very colour-blind Sweden.

Being the only one among the interview participants to have been socialized almost exclusively among white majority Swedes, and in every way raised as a white majority Swede—her language, culture and ‘values’ are all ‘Swedish’—Elin experiences in a very concrete way the discrepancies between the notion of Swedish colour-blindness (Hübinette & Tigervall 2009) and the lived
experience of a person of colour in Swedish society. The experiences Elin shares—as well as those of Linh and Eva, the two interview participants born in Sweden—also often reflect the sensation of double-consciousness, which is a “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity”, declares sociologist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois (1903: 8), to illustrate how the self-perception of racialized/marginalized people is “heavily influenced by the dominant group’s negative gaze”, argue Monica Trieu and Hana Lee (2018).

Although Elin’s parents did not want to acknowledge that what she was facing at school and from other kids was racism, minimizing it to ‘child’s play’ and ‘regular bullying’, things changed when she became a teenager:

When I was in my teens I remember my mother talking about how men might look at me… me being Asian and such… and she talked about women from Thailand… this is the end of the 80s, when people started going to Thailand. In the 90s it really took off. But I remember that when I was in junior high, there were documentaries about sex tourism and trafficking and such… and I remember feeling very... I didn’t know how to relate to that because in a way I thought that all these people look like me, but at the same time it is obvious that they are not me and they are not like me... at all. So for me finding out about this particular... ah... phenomenon... it was really, really hard to deal with, I think.

The fact that Elin’s mother had this talk with her adopted daughter shows that she was trying to protect her daughter and prepare her for the eventualty that men will treat her in a certain way, different from how they may treat white majority Swedish girls, because of the way she looks, and the implication is negative. But it also reveals an awareness on the parents’ part that society at large would first and foremost treat their daughter as non-white, non-Swede and Asian, despite Elin being raised as an ethnic/cultural Swede. In Elin’s narrative, the omission of the concepts of race and racism from their vocabulary when they were growing up, was a disservice to her and her brother; her parents failing to acknowledge to Elin that the kind of ‘bullying’ Elin was subject to at school was, in fact, racism, can be classified as a case of both testimonial quieting (Dotson 2011) and hermeneutical injustice, because by undervaluing her testimony and lived experience of racism, they consciously or subconsciously attempted to deny/erase the existence of racial prejudice in society (reflecting the ideology of colour-blindness), thus constraining Elin’s ability to understand her own experiences, putting her at an unfair disadvantage when trying to make sense of these experiences (Fricker 2007: 149). As is evidenced in both Linh’s and Elin’s cases, being unable to accurately name what they were experiencing prevented them from effectively protesting it, leaving
them vulnerable to continued mistreatment. This also prevented them from finding support and solidarity in others who may have been facing the same problem, much less taking steps to stop it (Fricker 2007: 151).

Elin: I have never learned how to… feel proud of myself… of my Asian self. As with many of my fellow adoptees, we are not taught to feel proud, we are told to be proud, but at the same time we get these mixed signals. If you look at Swedish media and you look at how people of colour are portrayed, there is nothing in there that makes me feel that I should be proud.

Growing up, the only thing I saw about East Asians on TV and in films were geishas [i.e. hypersexualized women]. “Shogun”, this miniseries with Richard Chamberlain, really popular… and the series “Marco Polo” in the 1980s… David Bowie’s “China Girl” was aired when I was 12 years old, and when I saw that video, I remember thinking, “uh oh, it’s not going to be fun tomorrow at school”. It was super difficult to develop any sense of pride in being Asian, because it was so obvious how people viewed us.

[referring to how Thai women were portrayed in documentaries on sex tourism and trafficking] I didn’t know if I should be… how could I be proud… of an appearance that is obviously so… disrespected? Do you know what I mean? That was how it felt. This was of course in combination with how East [and Southeast Asians] usually were and still are portrayed in mainstream media… in comedy. The West finds it very amusing to make fun of the way we are assumed to speak… our accents… all these stereotypes. As opposed to blackface and stuff which finally… finally! is acknowledged as unacceptable. Whereas racism against, stereotyping East and Southeast Asians… that’s still just fine. Anyone can do that. Even some of our most popular so-called “anti-racist” [makes the air quotes gesture] celebrities who are marketing themselves as anti-racist, they still do this. And they defend doing it… they defend that type of stereotyping. And just some months ago, one of the most popular stand-up comedians, he made a very very stupid remark, supposedly a joke, about Thai women on this show “Parlamentet”. I can’t remember the so-called joke right now, but um… yeah no one pays attention to this.. well, unless we do [small laugh, indicating herself and me] and pointing it out always generates a lot of hate. It takes so much energy… raising these questions.

Although Elin was told to be proud of her “Asian self”, she had no foundation or access to materials and role models on which to base this pride, because all she knew about Asians was derived from Swedish media productions, and Western films and series broadcast in Swedish cinemas and television, which depicted hypersexualized portrayals of Asian women and Asian characters that were generally one-dimensional, ridiculed, mocked and disrespected. This demonstrates the undeniable importance of good and balanced representation of racialized people in the media (see sections 2.2.4 and 5.5 on the damaging effects of racial humour). The fact that some celebrities, especially those who promote themselves as anti-racist, are blithely perpetuating racist stereotypes
and fiercely defending their actions when criticized without self-reflection or considering the feelings of those affected by this stereotyping, reveals a sore need for self-confessed anti-racists and feminists to apply an intersectional perspective to their own ways of thinking and acting, especially in the public sphere, where they may influence dominant social and even political discourses and attitudes.

Elin found it difficult to handle when people around her—her friends—reproduced racist discourses about East Asian and Southeast Asian women (read her narrative on this in section 5.6):

They of course… in this case yes, they... were colour-blind, because of course they forgot about the way I look. And sometimes if I was in the right mood, I actually tried to point out, “yeah, but how... how about me?” [mimes raising her hand] And they go, “yeah but you’re adopted.” And I’m like, “yeah, but I still look like… that...”, and they say, “yeah but you’re our friend, you’re Swedish”.

As long as I’m in this box, among people who know me, who have known me for years, then I’m safe. But as soon as I leave this little sphere, this little bubble, um... then I try to explain this to people but it’s so hard when you don’t even use the word race, it doesn't occur to you to use it because it’s been denied… you. You’ve been denied using it for so long, that trying to navigate linguistically... was so hard. So then, trying to explain the fact that they [my friends] are my white alibis, as soon as I step out of this, I’m just another ch*nk, I’m just another Thai, I’m just another… whatever. And... they didn’t get that. And of course I wasn’t very persistent either because it was so shameful... to talk about this. Because it made me feel um... it made me feel ashamed.

And at the same time I felt like I was very... disloyal... towards other Asian girls. And that’s what I was told as well when I tried to talk about this, [they were like] “oh so you mean you look down on East Asian girls, you look down on Thai girls”. I was like, “no, I’m not the one doing that”, and they said, “yeah so why do you not want to be connected to them?” I’m not saying that. And today I have no problem being... associated with Southeast Asian and other Asian women, but what I don’t want to be, and no one should have to be, associated with that prejudice, that stereotype... that is the problem. But I didn’t know how to disconnect the racialization and the sexualization... and the prejudice, the racism. That was really difficult to navigate.

The above narrative demonstrates the conditional acceptance that racialized people and immigrants face in Sweden. Racialized Swedes are accepted as Swedes when it is known that they are adopted; they are (provisionally) accepted as Swedish by their friends who are white majority Swedes. It is evidently also considered OK by some majority Swedes to disparage other racialized people in front of their racialized friends who are adopted. Such people are wilfully blind to the fact that their visibly racialized friends will be subject to the same stereotypes and racism from other people who do not know (or care) whether they are adopted, or how ‘Swedish’ they are. Adoptees and other
racialized people who are constantly exposed to these racist narratives and discourses from the people close to them, their friends and family, as well as in dominant socio-political/media discourse, often internalize the racism towards people in the same panethnic group (e.g. Korean adoptees distancing themselves from other East/Southeast Asians). This contributes to self-hate, existential angst and ambivalence; the racialized person with internalized racism is caught in the level of mimeticism where they desire acceptance into the white majority, are ashamed of the inferior social position imposed upon them, and are frustrated at neither being able to change their physical appearance, nor the negative values ascribed to it (Chow 2002: 105; see also Fanon 1952: 82).

This part of Elin’s narrative also shows once more the effects of hermeneutical injustice; she has been denied the use of the terms and concepts of ‘race’ and ‘racism’ for so long that she has a difficult time explaining to her friends that their racist talk about other East/Southeast Asian women will affect and hurt her as well, someone they consider their friend. And while Elin is trying to verbalise this, they instead turn the accusation of racism (“looking down on” East Asian/Thai girls) against her can be considered testimonial smothering, where she is silenced because her audience is “unwilling or unable to gain the appropriate uptake of proffered testimony” due to their prejudice, lack of understanding and pernicious ignorance (Dotson 2011).

Saying to Elin “but you’re adopted” and “but you’re Swedish” while denigrating Asians is a way to separate her from others who are racialized as Asian, especially immigrants. At the same time, it reinforces the idea that equates Sweden and Swedes with whiteness (see section 2.3). Being adopted, and therefore raised and socialised the same way as (white) majority Swedes puts Elin on the border, the liminal location (Huddart 2006: 5) between whiteness and non-white racialization; she is as close to whiteness as any ‘Asian’ person can be. But to this Elin poses the question: “Why can’t I be Asian and Swedish at the same time?”

5.3 “Where are you from?” – a Question that Keeps Us in ‘Our Place’

It may seem like a common and innocuous question to ask someone you have just met where they come from, even when this is not relevant to the matter at hand (except that it is not innocuous). What makes it an even bigger problem, however, is when the answer given is not accepted, and the questioner presses the other person for another answer\(^{18}\). Linh has been asked this dreaded question

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\(^{18}\) Sociologist Catrin Lundström’s 2007 PhD dissertation on Swedish Latinas reveals that this is a question commonly posed to Swedes of Latin American descent as well; a question that reproduces and draws the boundaries of national affiliation and belonging.
all her life, up till today. In the past, she would answer by naming the part of the city in Sweden in which she was born and raised, which was not accepted as a satisfactory answer, instead leading to more questions.

I have never understood what I should answer to the question of where I come from, and I answer wrong, every time, it seems, when I do not say Vietnam from the beginning, because that is mainly what people are after... what are your... roots. Due to all the bullying [I’d faced], I was ashamed to explain that I’m from Vietnam... but it emerges anyway, sooner or later.

She is asked this question with increased frequency now that she works in healthcare, a field where she meets new people constantly.

I think I hear at least once every single day or every other day... where do you come from? Or they ask directly if I am from Thailand. I mean, these are the kinds of questions they begin with. Some people will ask where I am from, and I answer that my parents are from Vietnam. And they will be like, both?! [in a shocked tone of voice and expression] Everyone is so shocked... Some ask, which one of your parents is from Thailand and which is from Sweden... and I'm like, neither are from Sweden or Thailand! They think that I am from a mixed background...

What is being done to Linh in these conversations is that she is constantly being forced to ‘admit’ to an ethnicity, to foreignness: based on her physical appearance, the questioner interpellates her as ‘not Swedish’, as someone who must be ‘from’ another country than Sweden, even though she speaks Swedish with native fluency and with a Swedish accent, even though she was born and raised there, even though she is a Swedish citizen and is familiar with/has been socialized in the Swedish context. To answer the questions Rey Chow (2002: 110) asks about the racialized person who is interpellated—“Does the ethnic have a choice of not responding? What happens when she responds? How might she respond? What happens if she does not respond?”—it is clear that Linh has to respond in some way if she is to abide by the unspoken rules and norms of the conversational language game19, and it is also clear that the only correct response in the eyes of many of these questioners is one that aligns with the presupposition that she has foreign roots. If she ignores the question, the best thing that might happen is that the questioner does not pursue the matter further, and the worst that can happen is the questioner insisting on an answer, which could turn the situation

19 Mary Kate McGowan (2009) asserts that most collective human activities are norm- or rule-governed, and some behaviours therefore count as unacceptable or otherwise inappropriate as contributions to said activity. Dancing, walking, football, chess, conversations, and so on, can all be regarded as rule-governed activities.
confrontational and unpleasant if she continues to refuse and resist the interpellation. Keeping in mind the asymmetry in power between Linh and the questioner, which could be someone in a stronger position in the social or organizational hierarchy than herself, or who may be a client at work, she may have to pay a considerable price—socially, career-wise and/or psychologically—if she does not respond to the interpellation in the expected or satisfactory way.

This scenario suggests that there are other reasons for a subject to answer their interpellation as an ‘ethnic’, than the avoidance of “the terror of a radically open field of significatory possibilities” or the “terror of complete freedom” that Chow mentioned (2002: 110).

Another participant, Nora, in her 30s, moved to Sweden from Malaysia seven years ago to be with her Swedish husband. She deals with these sorts of questions in a different way:

When I moved here I lived in a small town, where everyone stares at you if you’re different. They did not say anything, they just stared. At parties, people did not ask me where I'm from, but just asked directly, ‘Are you from Thailand? Are you from Thailand?’. That freaking irritates me. For me, I think it is not proper to judge a person like that... [In one incident] I asked [the questioner] back, ‘Are you from Finland?’ and he got really pissed off... [laughs]

Using the same illocutionary mechanism utilised on her, Nora responds to the question by also interpellating the questioner as ‘not Swedish’ and having roots elsewhere. I interpret this as an attempt to resist the hailing and also as a way to show her displeasure at being prejudged, and to turn the tables on the questioner and show him how unpleasant it is to be prejudged and *Othered* in this way—and the negative reaction of the questioner shows that she succeeded, at least on the latter point. Having migrated to Sweden as an adult, Nora’s sense of identity is probably fairly secure, and perhaps she has more of the self-confidence needed to respond more assertively. It is also worth noting that in Nora’s example, the person she was interacting with may only have been an acquaintance she will probably never meet again, and thus she was risking less than Linh would, if Linh responds in the same way.

### 5.4 Integrated on paper, but not in her heart

Jennifer is from Singapore, university educated, and is now in her 40s. In Singapore, she worked as a junior manager in a big company. She gave up her career to move to Sweden thirteen years ago with her Swedish husband and her child from a previous marriage. Her husband had assured her that she would have no problem finding a job, as there are many multinational companies in Sweden. She started job hunting after successfully completing a one-year intensive Swedish course
at university, but over ten years her search for work had been fruitless, despite having a CV that is described as ‘good’ by a case officer at Arbetsförmedlingen\textsuperscript{20}, where she has had only frustrating and unhelpful interactions. Being out of the workforce, having no income and caring for three children (two with her Swedish husband), Jennifer did not go out much to socialize and had very few friends. When she first moved to Sweden, there did not seem to be many Asians in her city, and the ones that were there were mainly Thais and Vietnamese—so she also felt culturally isolated (cf. Chou 2012: 51). The people she met at university—majority Swedes as well as international students—had rather stereotypical views of Asians: some thought Singapore was part of China, and some asked if she could speak Japanese. It was clear that Jennifer found these instances of \textit{racial lumping} or \textit{panethnicization} quite irritating. Besides the social and cultural isolation, Jennifer also suffered what she describes as a shrinking or even a loss of identity. Having worked for many years prior to her move to Sweden, her identity was strongly tied to having a job (in the area she is qualified for), and without the social interaction that being employed usually entails, she felt that she was only regarded by the people she encountered in her daily life as her children’s mother, and her husband’s wife.

Like, but I am my own person, you know. But it feels like nobody really sees that part of you anymore. So for a long, long time, I almost forgot who I was before I moved. It was only when I met [my Taiwanese friend, who is more culturally similar to me] and we started hanging out a lot [and celebrating different festivals together] and then... I started to rediscover that this is me, not just someone’s mom...

Another significant reason for Jennifer’s perceived loss of identity were the constant reminders over the years that she is a foreigner—a term she uses instead of ‘immigrant’—which implicitly seems to be very much tied to her skills in the Swedish language. Even though now, she speaks Swedish well enough that some people think she grew up in Sweden, and she has employment at her husband’s own company—Swedish proficiency and employment being two commonly used yardsticks for measuring integration—and she feels that mentally, she is “in a good place”, she has internalized the view of herself as a foreigner and does not feel she can integrate into society even though she wants to: “Or maybe it's just me, after so many years of feeling like a foreigner it’s kind of set that, OK, I have given up, I am a foreigner… that's just the way it is. It [has become] part of me.”

\textsuperscript{20} The Swedish Public Employment Service.
Speaking with Jennifer, I get a sense of a life put on hold; the social isolation she had felt for almost ten years was not ‘normal’. She has not really gotten along with most of the other ‘Asians’ she has met (mainly from China) due differences in personality and ‘culture’. Even in her own family, she feels a kind of isolation: “[In many ways,] I feel that I am the only foreigner in my family. Because [the kids all] grow up here, so they are... they are Swedes. So it is really up to me to teach them about... the Asian culture... the different festivals. But since I'm the only one, it's kind of hard. And... after a while you just give up.”

Although she had said in the beginning of the interview that she didn't “really feel like [she is] being treated in a negative way”, she later related an incident that occurred when she was fairly new in Sweden. She had been walking on a pedestrian path and was going to pass an elderly woman—white, majority Swedish—using a walking aid, coming from the other direction. Even though Jennifer had moved aside to ensure there was room for both her and the woman to pass by each other without stopping, the woman said, in Swedish, something along the lines of, “If you cannot walk on the right lane, then just get out of this country! Jävla invandrare.”

Looking at what Jennifer has shared with me as a whole, I get a sense that she has been repeatedly stopped while trying to make a new life in Sweden, stopped by invisible, intangible yet perceivable blockages, restrictions, and obstructions, as described by Sara Ahmed (2007: 161). As demonstrated, these blockages can, for example, come in the form of direct racist insults (a kind of interpellation), or situations that make her feel insecure about her fluency in Swedish, or not being invited for a single interview despite sending out hundreds of job applications over several years. Jennifer’s non-white, visibly racialized body has been stopped in that it is deemed ‘unrecruitable’; it is stopped when she tries to feel like she belongs, but instead is made to feel strange and out of place; it is stopped so often that she “inherit[s] the failure of things to be habitual” (Ahmed 2007: 163)—that is, she internalizes the feeling of being a permanent foreigner.

These blockages and obstructions function like a cage: if she is not included, not allowed to be part of the norm—that is, the wider majority Swedish society—then she may be more driven to uphold the social practices of her ethnic group such as celebrating certain festivals, and to try and pass these practices on to her children. She may also be more motivated to seek out and connect with others of Asian descent. But having the same ethnic (or panethnic) background obviously does not guarantee compatibility, and Jennifer was trying to socialize with people she would clearly not usually socialize with in her home environment, Singapore. She is ambiguously positioned or trapped in a liminal space where she feels foreign among majority Swedes, and is also unable to fit

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in with many other Asians. The processes of coercive mimeticism are at work on Jennifer, but she shows some measure of resistance and complicates both the panethnicizing and coercive mimetic processes by differentiating herself—and by extension, Singaporeans—from certain Asians (from China) and aligning herself with others (from Taiwan and Malaysia).

5.5 Hypersexualized girls and women, tired of sexual/Asian ‘jokes’

Eva is in her 20s and was born in Sweden to a Swedish father and a Thai mother. She has completed primary school (grundskola), and is currently furthering her studies. She grew up in the suburbs of a mid-sized city, where she says that it felt like she and her mother were the only Thais there. There were no other mixed kids that she knew of either, and she found out very early that “being Thai and having a Swedish father was quite a big deal”:

People had no filter, they made direct comments. There were friends’ parents who commented on my appearance, saying that I should be glad that I am not a bit dark, like my mom. There were very many questions about the relationship between my mom and dad. I remember that I was as young as six years old or so, sitting at the dinner table at a friend’s place, and their parents asking questions such as “do your mom and dad love each other?” or “sooo what did your mom work with before?”, followed directly with questions about sex trafficking. These questions were most often from majority Swedish families. Minorities usually just commented that I don't look like a svenne \textsuperscript{22} although I am one. Even today, people are curious and ask if my mother has been a sex worker, voluntarily or not, or if my mom has only dated Swedish men, and how many. It is absurd. It felt almost like my existence was taboo. Our existence as a family.

The kinds of questions addressed towards Eva about her mother allude to the stereotyping as sex workers\textsuperscript{23} and imported wives that Asian—particularly Southeast Asian—women are often subject to in Western contexts (see subsections 2.2.3 and 2.2.1). The fact that the people who make and ask these comments and questions have “no filter” and either do not comprehend, are not aware, or do not acknowledge that what they say is damaging and hurtful suggests a sort of feeling of entitlement to act in a racist manner towards Thai/Asian women—behaviour which they themselves likely do not consider racist, or possibly consider ‘not dangerous racism’, and therefore tolerable or allowed (see Linh’s story in section 5.1; cf. Hübinette & Tigervall 2009; Arnstad 2012; Lundberg 2013a).

The comments in favour of Eva’s fair skin while disparaging her mother’s darker complexion centres whiteness as the standard (of beauty) to be aspired to, also conveying to Eva

\textsuperscript{22} Svenne is slang for a majority Swede.

\textsuperscript{23} This connection is made because sex work is often conflated with human trafficking.
that she should be grateful that her fairness affords her greater proximity to whiteness—phenotypically and implicitly, racially—while simultaneously positioning her higher on the racial hierarchy than her mother (Smith 2012: 69, 74).

Eva’s mother is constructed via these questions as implicitly poor, possibly prostituted and therefore “sexually deviant from the Swedish norm”, but yet “sufficiently empowered to make a conscious choice to acquire the symbols of wealth and whiteness” that majority Swedish men represent—this is the way that Thai women are often represented in the media, as Helena Hedman, Lennart Nygren and Siv Fahlgren (2009) argue in their article about how Thai-Swedish couples are discursively constructed in the Swedish daily press. As Eva herself senses, the constant questions she gets are predicated on the prejudgement that her parents’ relationship is one that deviates from the hegemonic, Western (and Swedish), “middle-class norm of free, romantic love between equals” (Hedman, Nygren & Fahlgren 2009).

Also striking is that the people asking these probing, intimate and frankly intrusive questions about Eva’s parents did not consider, or did not care, that they were addressing a small child who was between six and eight years of age at that time. Would they have felt as free to interrogate a fully white child in the same manner? Although Eva is half white majority Swedish, her whiteness is subsumed by her racialization as part Thai, forcing her into the position similar to that of a child migrant, which is a rather ambivalent one in a political climate that has become increasingly parochial. While children are generally defined by their innocence, vulnerability, and need to be protected; migrants are attributed with agency, cunning, and are often treated with caution and suspicion (O’Connell Davidson 2011). For a child who is also a migrant—or in Eva’s case, of migrant background—I argue, their right to protection is eroded or hollowed out due to racism and xenophobia. Perhaps this disdainful attitude of society towards the child migrant is one reason why the questioners took the liberty to impinge on the dignity of a child and make her feel that there was something wrong with her family—which clearly caused her psychological distress.

When she was between twelve and fourteen years of age (grades six to eight), Eva studied in a “very white school”. As she came from a suburb which is part of the Million Programme24—where half the population were immigrants—the misogyny and racism she faced intersected with class contempt. The boys in her class often made demeaning comments about Thailand and her mother. Even though as a child she had been somewhat aware of these attitudes, “all the shit started

24 Miljonprogrammet or the Million Programme is the public housing project—which aimed to construct a million new homes—implemented in the mid-1960s to mid-1970s in Sweden by the Social Democratic party to supply housing to the populace at a reasonable price.
for real” around the time she was twelve and hit puberty—this was the beginning of constant and unrelenting *hypersexualization*:

When I was a teenager, my friends called me ‘Thai whore’—people thought that was fun. That term was terribly destructive for me. It really broke me down, as an insecure teenage girl with identity issues… also around the same time, my dad got [a terminal illness] and passed away suddenly. Facing the kind of racism that no one else around me understood and at the same time losing my father was unbearable... I ended up in the hands of *Socialstyrelsen*[^s]25, staying for short periods in different foster homes and finally at a *HVB*[^h]26, where the staff sexualized me and made the same kinds of offensive, stereotypical comments about my mom, as mentioned earlier. It felt like this happened twenty-four hours a day.

In my relationships, my background has been used to insult and hurt me during a fight or a breakup. I’ve gotten to hear that so many things are wrong with me because my mom is Thai, and that it is my Thai side that makes me bad in different ways. It was the same thing with friendships; my first impression on everyone was ‘Thai whore’; people didn’t even know my name. When they got to know me better later, they told me about the image they had of me earlier. It was very difficult to try and build meaningful bonds with people who made comments about my Thai background; I was always made into a joke at the end. All the crude sexual jokes made me uncomfortable, they overstepped my personal boundaries. This is why almost all the friends I have now, I’d met later in life.

Today, I am still affected by the destructiveness of that terrible term. In the end I tried to own it instead, when I could not stand letting others influence my self-image. But it affected my entire reputation, my future relationships and friendships. Even strangers saw me as a wandering sex object, and I experienced a great deal of sexual harassment.

The focus of the racist and misogynistic comments extended from Eva’s mother to encompass Eva herself when she became a teenager. Even though she should have still been considered a child in her early teens, and accordingly afforded the protection a child should have, Eva from the age of twelve started facing the full brunt of sexualization that a grown adult woman faces. This demonstrates clearly the force of intense, pronounced and constant sexualization suffered by girls and women racialized as Thai, especially those who are categorized as lower or working class, in Swedish society.

The impact of *racialized sexualization* (Janmohamed 1992: 104) on an affected individual is profound and all-encompassing. Eva’s ‘Thai side’—which is intertwined with the hypersexualization she faces—has been denigrated by her partners and the people she had

[^s]: *Socialstyrelsen*, or the National Board of Health and Welfare, is a government agency under the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs in Sweden.

[^h]: *HVB*, which stands for “hem för vård eller boende”, are residential care homes for children and young persons who are unable, for various reasons, to live with their parents.
considered friends, and this denigration is used as a psychological weapon to oppress, humiliate and diminish her. This disparaging treatment understandably lead to her having difficulties in trusting people enough to attempt to form meaningful relationships—whether they be friendships or intimate relationships; a problem also faced by young Swedish women adopted from South Korea and Thailand (Lindblad & Signell 2008).

The slur ‘Thai whore’, which Eva’s friends thought was “fun”; the crude sexual jokes aimed at her; and her being “always made into a joke” due to her racial/ethnic background forcefully illustrates more of the dehumanizing effects of racialized sexualization. Because these comments are widely considered ‘jokes’, the feelings, discomfort and personal boundaries of Eva, the person subjected to them, are therefore disregarded and not taken seriously. This reflects what linguistics professor Jane H. Hill (2008: 96) describes as “a nearly total inattention on the part of Whites to the sensitivities of people of color” and an “outright and explicit rejection of the authenticity of the feelings of people of color who object to racist language”—this is of course situated in a context where whiteness is normative, as is the case in Sweden. Viewed through the lens of epistemic injustice, this can be considered an instance of testimonial injustice (Fricker 2017: 17), and specifically what Kristie Dotson (2011) calls testimonial quieting, which Linh and Elin experienced as well, as shown in earlier sections.

Christina Sue and Tanya Golash-Boza (2013) argue that racial humour not only reflects but plays a pernicious role in reproducing and reinforcing racialized systems of domination and inequality. While Sue and Golash-Boza (2013) also suggest that “people’s interpretation of and reaction to racial humour could potentially disrupt colour-blind ideologies and challenge racialized hierarchies” and social inequalities, this is not the case in Eva’s situation. By not objecting to the racialized sexual ‘jokes’ that Eva was subject to, the people around her allowed such ‘humour’ to stand, and according to Sue and Golash-Boza (2013), “through their silence, discursive framings and behaviours, they ultimately reinforce the perception that racial humour is unproblematic”.

In Sweden, stereotypical and denigrating depictions of Asians in mass media as well as in social and cultural contexts are presented as humour or satire, reinforcing the idea that it is acceptable to mock and poke fun at Asians, demonstrating the widespread popular acceptance and normalization of these depictions in all segments of society (see 2.2.4). While some degree of humour should probably be allowed/accepted for any situation, Swedish racial humour aimed at Asians often goes far beyond the boundary of ‘well-intentioned’, coming across as callous at best, and at times, malicious—as Tobias Hübinette and Carina Tigervall (2011: 139) have found.
A fairly recent example—in September 2018—was on Svenska Nyheter, a satirical television show aired on national Swedish broadcaster SVT, which presented an ‘informational video’ for tourists from China, containing do’s and don’ts while visiting Sweden, which included not defecating “outside historical heritage sites” or while eating; and not mistaking people walking their pet dog on the streets as having “just bought their lunch” (Tan 2018). This video provoked an uproar among an “overwhelming” number of people in China, and was condemned by the Chinese government (Tan 2018), as well as other people racialized as Asian in Sweden and other parts of the world, as I have observed in online forums. Time will tell if this episode—which has undercurrents in relations between Sweden and China, and socio-political implications—will contribute to shifting perceptions and make stereotypical depictions of Asians less acceptable in Swedish society.

To return to Eva: she may not always have had the energy or will to protest and object the racist and sexist ‘jokes’ due to teenage insecurity, identity issues, the lack of support and understanding of the racism she faced, as well as the loss of her beloved father. Furthermore, as Sue and Golash-Boza (2013) argue, “the targets of jokes generally conform to social pressure and feign acceptance” despite their discomfort with/being offended by racial humour. However, even if Eva protested, she would have been charged with being over-sensitive, thin-skinned and unable to take a joke—thus ruining the ‘fun’ and creating a bad social atmosphere. This situation demonstrates the kind of silencing practice described by Dotson (2011) as testimonial smothering, which Linh had also faced.

Even if one is willing to be an ‘antiracist killjoy’ (to appropriate Sara Ahmed’s term, feminist killjoy27, but emphasizing antiracism) in social settings, racist jokes and mocking also surface in work situations. When the perpetrator/creator of the ‘joke’ or mockery is one’s boss, or a colleague, the stakes are even higher. One of the episodes Linh related during our interview involved an episode at her workplace:

I had a boss... a man in... around his 40s perhaps... came up to me at work and did this [mimes pulling the outer corners of her eyes upwards], and I’m like... [disbelieving look] I was so disturbed. I mean, if it was anyone else I would have lambasted them, but he was my boss... And I was like... you know, I said his name [exhibiting patience, composing herself] ... and then, told him that [with a curious expression] “to be honest,

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27 According to Sara Ahmed (2010: 65), being a feminist killjoy is to disrupt the status quo by pointing out sexism, racism, and other oppressive acts (such as, I argue, class contempt, ableism, ageism, etc.) in other people’s talk and actions, thus exposing “the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy”. This very often leads to feminists being “attributed as the origin of bad feeling, as the ones who ruin the atmosphere, which is how the atmosphere might be imagined (retrospectively) as shared. In order to get along, you have to participate in certain forms of solidarity: you have to laugh at the right points.”
...you have smaller eyes than I do”. And he responded by going, “haha, I know”. I think he was a little ashamed after that. I'm not sure what response he was looking for.

Linh had the presence of mind to come up with a response that in a way both disarmed and turned the focus on the perpetrator, so that he would get the message that he was being insulting and offensive—a reaction doubtless shaped by the racism she has faced all her life: from gestures like the one her boss inflicted upon her, as well as other acts and words mentioned in earlier sections. It is also noteworthy that this racist ‘slant eyes’ gesture, which is usually meant to mock people racialized as East Asian, was in this case aimed towards someone of Southeast Asian descent, demonstrating the racial lumping of people of different backgrounds. It is not always possible or easy to counter such behaviour in the way Linh did, especially when it appears to be sanctioned by a group of which one is a part.

Elin, who is a teacher, was at a staff meeting at work—where the larger part of the attendees were majority Swedish—and was in the midst of describing a trip she had made to Korea. To Elin’s shock, one of her colleagues—a person of West Asian background—suddenly started speaking gibberish in a fashion that mocks the way East Asians are presumed to speak, ostensibly in an attempt to imitate native Koreans. The rest of her colleagues either laughed or shifted uncomfortably in their seats. No one spoke up to say that such behaviour was not OK. Elin—who was the only attendee visibly racialized as (East) Asian—was too stunned to say anything to go against the will of the group, which seemed to—through ‘going along’ by laughing, or silence—condone this form of mockery towards East Asians, even though such conduct in principle goes against the rules of the school. What Elin experienced was a clear case of testimonial smothering (Dotson 2011). This incident also illustrates one of the ways racial stereotypes are maintained, and how minorities with other backgrounds contribute to it by internalizing the dominant discourse/attitude that making racist jokes and mockery towards Asians is socially acceptable, and based on this, reproducing and upholding these attitudes.

Jane H. Hill (2008: 95) asserts that “the excuse that a racist remark was a joke is always available for Whites”—or the most dominant groups in society—“and those who reject this excuse are likely to be accused of lacking a sense of humor”. In sum, racial humour works in several ways to maintain colour-blind ideology and racialized systems of domination and inequality: the pressure to ‘go along’ with jokes (both the target as well as the other people witnessing); the framing of racial humour as benign (by the joke creator); and the simultaneous use of humour/laughter to ‘soften’ racism (Sue and Golash-Boza 2013).
5.6 Framed as rivals and ‘man stealers’, yet simultaneously ‘second choice’

One of the questions I wanted to explore is whether there is a difference in the way women and men behave towards my interview participants. Many of them have had experiences demonstrating a definite difference in attitudes from these two genders towards them.

We’ll start with Ruiling, who is in her 30s, comes from China, and has lived in Sweden for a total of about five years. In China, she had what she describes as a good career in a well-known international company in Beijing. She came to Sweden to study for a Master’s degree, hoping for a change and advancement in her career. She met her (majority Swedish) husband towards the end of her studies and got married in Sweden. After attempting and not finding work—being called for interviews but never getting past the final stage—she decided to move back to China with her husband. There, Ruiling managed to get employed almost immediately, but her husband could not get work because there were very few employment opportunities in his area of expertise, which is rather specialized. After a while, they moved back to Sweden.

Ruiling has an air of quiet dignity, speaking with gravitas about her experiences. As a reply to my enquiry about whether the attitudes of majority Swedish men and women towards her differ, she had this to say:

“Yes, I feel sometimes maybe the women are more sensitive... for example, we went to the bank, and this [majority Swedish] woman was the manager for handling our case. She was very nice when my husband and I were both there to ask about some loans. One day, only about a week later, I went there alone to fix a bank account. Then she was totally different... she totally didn't recognise me or... had no patience... it was totally different from last time. I feel like I am an appendix to my husband. When I go there with him, she is very nice, and when I go alone, she is not nice even though I am also a customer of this bank. She doesn’t treat me like a customer. This is the difference I feel between women and men. The men in the dancing [study circle I am in] for example, I don’t feel like they treat me different. But maybe the women are quite sensitive... because we can see... they are not many, but some... Swedish men marry... Asian women... I feel... maybe we are seen as competitors by [majority Swedish women]... [exasperated smile]. I get this feeling... So that’s why they’re not very... kind to us.”

This kind of attitude from majority Swedish women—which seems to be a mixture of disdain, resentment and hostility—towards ‘Asian’ women emerges not only in public and official contexts, but also at work.

Suyin, who is in her 40s and from Taiwan, has lived in Sweden for almost ten years. Bubbly and sociable, she used to be a white-collar worker in her home country. After migrating to Sweden with her (majority Swedish) husband, who she had met in Taiwan, she started working in elder
care, but is currently studying to be an assistant nurse. As she relates her experiences as an Asian woman in Sweden, I ask her about her stint working in an elder care home. She says that in the beginning, some residents in the home were ‘cranky’ that she couldn’t speak Swedish very well, but after a while things got better as her Swedish improved. Some residents were nice to her, but some continued to show their dislike of her because she is an immigrant.

It is very difficult because they are old and sick. You can’t predict their feelings. Sometimes they can be very very very strange. They just don't like foreigners at all. They can say some things like... *jävla invandrare*... But even if they are not nice, I still have to help them because it is my job. There was one lady who has dementia. And she has some history with Asian women because her husband ran away with a Thai girl or something like that. So whenever she sees an Asian woman with long black hair, she starts to... but of course she is sick right, she has dementia... so even if something is ‘forbidden’ in her mind, she says it aloud because she is sick... So she would say some bad things about Asian women, really really bad. But it’s OK... it happens.

Q: So how do you feel about it?

Suyin: I feel... in the beginning, a little bit sad. Because she... shouldn't judge my look... and... I want to help her! You know? But to be professional, I shouldn’t think about these things. I actually... cried. [blinks back tears at the memory, laughs] Sorry, I got a bit emotional... But later, after talking to my colleague, I understood... I still helped her of course, because she is very sick. At the end, she kind of liked me... [laughs]

Working as a care assistant in an elder care home, ‘feminized precarious work’ (Precarias a la deriva 2004) which she says would be considered a ‘bad’, low status job in Taiwan, Suyin copes by assuring herself that in Sweden—as she has been told—this is considered an ‘OK’ and ‘not bad’ job. While elder care and many low-status jobs such as cleaning and other sanitary, care and service work are essential for reproducing and maintaining human life (Laslett & Brenner 1989), this reproductive work is divided along racial and gender lines (Glenn 1992), with more immigrant women as well as men working in the elder care sector as Sweden’s ageing population grows (Torres 2017). To be working in elder care, according to scholar of sociology, aging and migration Sandra Torres, “is not namely the kind of job that people ‘dream’ of having; in fact, the prospect of it is a ‘dream crusher’ for some”; and on top of this, to be subject to outright racism and hostility—as well as this particular stereotyping specific to one’s gender and assumed race—from the very people one needs to provide care services to, is a daunting task, and one that is hard to stomach.

The situation is not much better in social contexts. Korean adoptee Elin describes the specific degrading and condescending attitudes aimed towards her from majority Swedish women.
While she normally “plays down” her femininity (see section 5.7 for an elaboration on this), the few times she had tried to “doll up” a bit, she faced an increase in hostility:

The way I was… the way people addressed me, I didn’t like that. And… the women, actually... I didn’t like the way that white women treated me. It was like, when I wore some makeup and a skirt and put my hair up, it was almost like they were like grabbing on to their men [mimes grabbing someone with both arms and rolls eyes, smiling incredulously].

Elin relates an incident when she was in a pub and waiting for her friend to come out of the bathroom. She was standing next to a table full of white people, and she heard the women in the group talking. One of them said something very disrespectful about Thai women, reproducing a tired yet persistent stereotype:

She said it so loudly that... I got the feeling that she really wanted me to hear it. But since she didn’t address me directly, I couldn’t really confront her on it. She said something like, “…and then they run away with some Thai woman, some import wife” or something like that.

She describes another incident, when she was a university student and had made plans to meet up with an old family friend, an older majority Swedish man who used to take her brother and her fishing when they were children.

He was doing construction work here in town, so he offered to take me out for dinner… I mean me being a student, no money and such, and just to have time to talk about old times and stuff. So we went out. I was in my mid-twenties and he was in his fifties. Big mistake. I mean the glances that we got from people around, both from women and men... we had a hamburger dinner at a pub and then went to the bar for a few beers. And the questions and remarks that he got in the bar… of course no one talked to me because even though that was my regular pub, in people’s eyes, I suddenly wasn’t able to speak Swedish... So they asked him, “How did you find her? What is it like to be with such a…” [gestures towards herself] It was so rude. And the women his age were really rude to me. They were looking at me like [gasp] she’s here stealing our men! [incredulous laugh] Not pleasant at all. That was the day I realised that I would never be able to go out for dinner with my dad unless my mom is with us.

Elin also relates something that happened to another woman she knows, adopted from Thailand, who told her about a family trip to Thailand when she was around twelve years old. They were at a hotel and her father was about to go to the lobby to get some water. She wanted to go with to get some ice cream, but her father said no, so the girl naturally got upset because she didn’t understand
why. “Her mom had to explain to her why her dad didn’t want to be seen alone with his adopted daughter in Thailand. It’s so sick,” says Elin.

It is clear that, on sight, women and girls who are racialized as ‘Asian’ are—to paraphrase Rey Chow (2002: 66) imagined as and transformed into a surface/exterior deprived of depth and individuality. Simultaneously as they are seen physically, in real time by the viewer, stereotypes are called to mind, occupying the head/consciousness of the viewer and projected upon the racialized woman/person (see Lippmann 1998: 8). It is racist stereotyping, combined with internalized misogyny, that led the majority Swedish woman whose husband left for a Thai girl to ‘punish’ Suyin just because Suyin is an ‘Asian’ woman with long black hair; it is partially why the majority Swedish woman working in the bank treated Ruiling with resentment when alone, and with two-faced pleasantness when Ruiling’s husband is with her; it is why the majority Swedish women Elin encountered behaved as if Elin’s very appearance and presence, in her ‘Asianness’, could seduce their partners/husbands, as if those men have no agency or will to make their own decisions and plan their own actions. All three women—Suyin, Ruiling and Elin who are all of East Asian descent, not Thai—and several of the other interview participants understand instinctively that the treatment they receive/have received from majority Swedish women is linked to racist stereotypes, and due to how people with backgrounds in diverse parts of Asia are lumped together into one panethnic group.

As mentioned earlier, media depictions of women from Thailand, other parts of Southeast Asia and East Asia certainly play a crucial role in reproducing and maintaining these negative attitudes and racist stereotypes. To provide just a few examples: the narratives presented in the media articles described in section 2.2.1 are most definitely provocative (Sörbring 2010; Utter 2009; Utter 2010), and documentaries such as “Thailandsdrömmar” (Swedish) and “Lykken er en asiatisk kone” (Danish) are dominated by discourses that position East/Southeast Asian women as rivals of majority Scandinavian women for the attentions and affections of majority Scandinavian men. Unsurprisingly, these negative attitudes and stereotypes have an impact on the dating and intimate relationship prospects for women racialized as ‘Asian’ as well, as Elin’s narrative reveals:

[When I was a teenager living in a ‘very white’ village] I was so self-conscious about… would anyone want to go out with me, with ‘that ch*nk’... and also since I was starting to be aware of how people viewed men who date Southeast Asians... oh, those are the losers, they cannot get a Swedish girl... you know, these types of [discourses]... the men who go to Thailand for... errr... to find... partners... those are the ones that can’t make it on the Swedish meat market, so they go there. And it was so difficult to handle that, because this is something I heard... eh.. among friends.
Elin’s use of the slur ‘ch*nk’ as a teenager on herself, reflects the depth of her self-loathing at that time, caused by internalized racism. The way majority Swedish men who date Southeast Asian women are constructed through the discourses she mentioned—which are discourses I’ve personally heard in my circles as well—indicates that these men have been “assigned a marginalized masculinity” in relation to the majority Swedish middle-class norm (Hedman, Nygren & Fahlgren 2009). The discourse that the men who go to Thailand to find partners are ‘losers’ because they ‘cannot get Swedish women’ implies that Southeast Asian and East Asian women are always second choice, while the (white majority) Swedish woman is the norm, and the ultimate, ideal, sought-after partner. This discourse also carries the implication that no eligible, desirable majority Swedish man would choose an ‘Asian’ woman over a majority Swedish woman, because ‘Asian’ women are framed as inferior to white women—this is a purely racist view, and such discourses in effect serve as a sort of deterrent to miscegenation.

By comparing and analysing the interview participants’ narratives with media discourses focusing on relationships between white/majority Swedish men and women racialized as Asian, as well as the way white/majority Swedish women are compared to ‘Asian’ women, I argue that ‘Asian’ women are often positioned as a sort of object of contention/proxy in a ‘gender war’ between majority Swedish men and women. There is a sense of a gender/race triangulation (Kim 1999) in the dynamics between these groups, based on the premise that some majority Swedish men seek a return to ‘traditional’, strictly divided gender roles (Mulinari & Neergaard 2014), and majority Swedish women are on the other hand generally ascribed to be striving for gender equality (Lundström & Twine 2011). The ‘Asian’ woman is caught between these two opposing movements; regardless of her actual, individual stance towards feminism and gender equality, she is ‘doubly feminized’ and framed as ‘doubly submissive’ (Chen 2007, citing Arisaka 2000) due to the way Asians in general, and Asian women in particular, are stereotyped in Western discourses (Shimizu 2007: 80; Chou 2012: 91; Trinh 1989: 87; Cho 1997); she is fetishized by some majority Swedish men (Hübinette 2007; Your kind makes very good kissers 2010) and generally denigrated by ‘liberated’ majority Swedish women (Yu 2007; Hübinette & Lundström 2014). (See also section 5.9 on how participants deal with prejudiced views of ‘Asian’ women). These patterns I’ve just described seem to exist in all Western contexts. There is a sense that women of East/Southeast

28 The existence of a fear of miscegenation in Swedish history is mentioned in Sayaka Osanami Törngren's (2011: 29) PhD dissertation about attitudes towards interracial marriage in Sweden. Although this fear and form of discrimination has mainly affected a socially constructed group of people called “tattare”—indigenous Swedish nomadic people who are of Romani or even majority Swedish descent, or a mix of these—as well as Jews for about a decade around WWII, Osanami Törngren (2011: 32) argues that this historical aspect “should not be forgotten when examining contemporary attitudes towards interracial relationships".
Asian descent are regarded as and treated like “object(s) for western consumption and the satisfaction of western desires” (Kwan 1998). To put it in another way, as Sumi K. Cho (1997)—US scholar of ethnicity and professor of law—argues, stereotypical “Asian Pacific women are particularly valued in a sexist society because they provide the antidote to visions of liberated career women who challenge the objectification of women”. This stereotype of ‘Asian’ women assumes a ‘model minority’ function, deployed to ‘discipline’ or keep white women ‘in line’ (Cho 1997).

5.7 Everyday microaggressions; centring whiteness

According to social scientists, microaggressions are “one of those many sudden, stunning, or dispiriting transactions that mar the days of women and folks of color” (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 2). They can be thought of small acts of racism which are consciously or unconsciously perpetrated, stemming from the dominant socio-political assumptions and discourses about different races/ethnic groups—assumptions and discourses which most people internalize, and which inform civic/public institutions such as the government, the police, education and care systems, as well as our whole lives: private, personal and corporate (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 2; Mulinari et al. 2009: 1; Neergaard 2018: 18). Although small and often subtle, microaggressions wear away at the targeted person like dripping water gradually wears on sandstone; they can also be thought of as mosquito bites—imagine how maddening being bitten constantly would be.

Many different kinds of microaggressions faced by people racialized as Asian are recounted throughout this analysis chapter, but in this subsection, I focus on a specific one: greetings. Seemingly innocuous, directing a greeting in Mandarin Chinese (“ni hao”), Thai (“sawatdee krap/ka”) or Japanese (“konnichiwa”), for example—all of which basically mean “hello”—to someone racialized as Asian is not as straightforward as it may seem. Linh relates to me some of the things people said to her that had a disparaging or irritating effect:

When I was little it was a lot… of “ching chong”… and strange things like that. Something that is constant is people trying to greet you in all possible East- and Southeast Asian languages… eh.. it was a lot of “ni hao”… a lot of “konnichiwa”… and they are actually just greeting phrases. But depending on [holds up fingers to count] 1) which person it comes from, 2) what tone they use, and 3) which context… it often has an undertone… which is meant to push me down. So it is not a greeting to be pleasant or nice, [increasingly irritated and animated tone] Also, we are in Sweden, greet me first in Swedish! If you want to show your language skills, we can talk about it later, then I can also start speaking German, French or whatever… I mean, it is a weird thing to just go around and greet people in different languages you don’t know… why do you choose to greet me in Chinese? I cannot even speak Chinese, and I actually have nothing to do with
Chinese. I mean, I have nothing against China or Chinese people, but all this makes me annoyed and I don’t want to be associated with them. And then there are also these stereotypes that Asians are smart, Asians are good at cooking rice, Asians are this or that… it’s all these tiny things, you know [holds thumb and forefinger very close together]…

The greetings function as interpellations which racialize Linh as East/Southeast Asian, thus pinning her down to her ethnic identity and marking her as ethnic (Ang 1994). The fact that Linh (who is of Vietnamese descent) is greeted in different Asian languages (Vietnamese not being one of them) is a demonstration of the flattening effect of prejudice, as if all East/Southeast Asians are alike and interchangeable; this in effect reduces the racialized subject, as Abdul R. Janmohamed (1992: 106) states, to “a generic being that can be exchanged for any other […] racialized subject”. As Linh argues, she should first be greeted in Swedish while in Sweden. There are countless media articles and politicians’ soundbites presenting the demand that immigrants and Swedes of immigrant descent speak and master Swedish, and complaints about immigrants speaking Swedish with an accent or ‘refusing’ to learn the language. If the ‘Asian’ greeting is issued because it is assumed that Linh cannot speak Swedish based on her appearance, it reinforces the notion that immigrants or people of non-white descent don’t speak Swedish. If the greeter is aware that Linh knows Swedish, it can be perceived as a way to mark her as non-Swedish, as not belonging. The undertone that Linh mentions implies that the greetings are sometimes delivered in a mocking tone, perhaps as a subtler and more socially acceptable replacement for the puerile “ching chong”.

Greetings in various Asian languages are also often used by men to break the ice when approaching a woman of East/Southeast Asian appearance at a pub or nightclub. This is often combined with comments about a country in that region, and the women from there, as Linh and Elin relate:

**Linh:** The world is still very heteronormative... so cisgendered men come up to me and racialize me, either in a purely racist, condescending and offensive way, or as their way to hit on me. When I was nineteen, I went out to the pub with my friends a lot. Every time I came home feeling sad because I had gotten a comment about how I look, my racialization. There were guys who came up to me and said how beautiful Thailand is... many guys greeted me in Thai or Chinese or whatever... and were like, “I love Asian women” [sleazy tone and expression]... in that kind of tone... there were so many, it was irritating. They’d say things like, “I love Malaysia”... and I’m like [rolls eyes], “I love France”… it’s like, what are they trying to say? I guess they use the way I look as a conversation opener... sometimes they speak English.... this is how men approach anyway.
Elin: …and of course, making fun of chi*nks, that’s part of mainstream comedy in Sweden. So that’s just “harmless fun”. So walking up to someone like me, saying “ni hao” is apparently hilarious, I don’t know why, but… [shrugs]. Or walking up to me and saying how beautiful Thailand is... [bewildered laugh] yeah, OK... I trust you, I wouldn’t know, never been there, and certainly not going there either... that is something I have decided, I will never go to Thailand because I think I will end up in a huge fight or something. And I’ve heard that from other adopted Koreans as well, they think it would be very uncomfortable going there, very difficult to deal with how men would behave.

It is apparent from their responses to such comments that Linh and Elin find it irritating and even offensive when men approach them in this manner, and that it has happened repeatedly. If taken at face value, these comments seem innocuous, but combined with tone of voice, body language and the prevailing stereotypes of ‘Asian’ women in Sweden makes it clear that the men who approach East/Southeast Asian women in this way tend to exotify and hypersexualize them, often in a patronizing way. This behaviour has a dampening effect on the mood for these women when they try to enjoy an evening out; they feel the need to constantly be on their guard and find that their physical features are always under scrutiny as well:

Linh: People tell me, “wow, you are so beautiful, you don’t look like the average Vietnamese, you don’t look like a typical Asian” [surprised tone]. It’s meant to be a compliment... some people ask me directly which of my parents is Swedish and which is Thai. And I’m like, neither are from Sweden or Thailand. They think that I am from a mixed background... they say. Maybe because of how I look, because I am quite tall for the “average Vietnamese” [makes the air quotes gesture]... but I feel bad for my parents who are typical Vietnamese that my background is always questioned. If you think I am beautiful, why must one of my parents be Swedish?

And guys who are hitting on me at the pub say things like, “you are quite pretty for being from another country”, and I’m like, “what do you mean?” Do you mean that only Swedish girls are beautiful, and then there are some Asians who stick out as exceptions, who could be attractive? What do they mean?? Do they mean that it is the norm that Southeast Asians are ugly and should speak with a strange dialect? I mean... I get so angry that... this is how we are portrayed in the media... that Asians are like... semi-ugly, semi-attractive... there are no super-attractive Asians in Hollywood films for example... do you understand? That’s why they come with these comments and you just get so angry and annoyed.

Ruiling: When I first met [my Swedish friend], he didn’t think I’m from China. Because in his mind, all Chinese must be short, with small eyes... I am different [quite tall, has

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29 This interview was conducted before the release of the film “Crazy Rich Asians” in August 2018; the film has been described as “groundbreaking” in terms of Western media representation for people of East/Southeast Asian descent (Haynes 2018; Kang 2018).
Neither victim nor fetish

fairly large eyes and slightly tan complexion] so he said I didn't look Chinese. But you know, China is quite big...

In Linh’s case, even when the beauty of a Swedish woman of Southeast Asian descent is her own, and her fully ‘Asian’ features are inherited from her fully ‘Asian’ parents, people try to attribute her good looks to her having white genes, as if Asia, the largest, most populous and arguably most diverse continent in the world would not produce people who run the gamut from beautiful to unattractive and everything in between—just like every other place on the planet. Here once more we see Linh’s internalization of her Othering and exclusion from Swedishness—although she’s not “from another country”, she refers to “Swedish girls” when she means white majority Swedes. Any backhanded compliment directing praise to Linh as an individual, and belittling other Asians, ends up becoming more of an insult.

Regardless of whether the people making these comments had malicious intentions or otherwise, it doesn’t make such behaviour less of a microaggression. It can be argued that these people have absorbed media discourses in which East/Southeast Asians are ridiculed and portrayed as strange and unattractive, and thus when confronted with someone who does not fit into the stereotype, they are surprised. As Ruiling says, China is “quite big”, being the most populous country on the planet—again, it is ignorant to assume that all Chinese would look the same; this is a fitting example of how Lippmann (1998: 98) describes stereotyping: a kind of perception that “precedes the use of reason” and “imposes a certain character on the data of our senses before the data reach the intelligence”.

These sorts of comments affect Elin in a more drastic way. As someone who grew up with no role models who ‘looked like’ her, she internalized majority Swedish standards of beauty and attractiveness, as well as its prejudices, and developed her own coping strategies against racism towards East/Southeast Asian women:

When I was in my twenties I started going out to pubs and clubs. And that’s when I realised that... the thing that I’ve been told... that me being adopted would work as some sort of shield... um... of course it doesn’t! People don’t know if I’m adopted or anything else, and... so... when I walk into a bar, people think, that’s an Asian, that’s a Filipino girl, or that’s a Thai girl. So... what I did, and I’d already started doing it in my teens... I just tried to look as... as non-feminine as possible… by not wearing makeup, not fixing my hair... um... being as butch as I could. And now that [slightly abashed] I’ve actually started hanging out with adoptees and other people of colour... I didn’t do that growing up because I was... I was busy being white… now I know that this is a strategy used by quite many... especially East Asian adoptee women. That is how we “make Swedishness”, that is how we “do whiteness”… by refraining from... being feminine.
All throughout my life, my mom has said to me, “why are you trying to make yourself so ugly? You could be so beautiful, you could be so cute, yada yada yada. I don’t understand why you make yourself so ugly, are you a lesbian? [laughs] I didn’t have words for that either. Today I can tell her what I was actually doing back then. But it has taken me over 40 years to come to terms with what the hell I’ve been doing. By toning down the femininity, that is how I distinguished myself from other… non-adopted East Asian and Southeast Asian women, and that is how I protected myself from being stereotyped.

Q: Was it an observation that a lot of the women were feminine? How did you develop this strategy?

Elin: Back then it was really just some disrespect on my part as well, me not wanting to be like them. I didn’t want people to look at me the way that they look at these women. Since I heard what people said about them looking cheap, um… with all these… those types of outfits that they wore and stuff… not necessarily so different from the way white girls make themselves up when going out. But still though, being white you can do that, you can get away with looking like that. We don’t.

It was basically the way people treated me that taught me how to be left alone. In a way I thought it was easier to be viewed as… like a butch lesbian than a... Philippine woman or a Thai woman... which. is. horrible!

Elin found that being stereotyped as an East/Southeast Asian woman was so difficult to bear that she did her best to disassociate herself from these stereotypes. Her strategy of “toning down” her femininity seems directly related to how East/Southeast Asian women are “doubly feminized and doubly submissive in western contexts: first as women, and second as Asian” (Chen 2007, citing Arisaka 2000). Digging deeper, femininity is viewed as negative in Orientalist binary thinking, and therefore associated with deviance, excess and inferiority; the excessive femininity attributed to ‘Asian’ women is part of a racialized sexuality characterised by femme fatale-ism and/or devoted submission (Janmohamed 1992: 106; Shimizu 2007: 65). These stereotypes of racialized sexuality are why the same sort of outfit/look, when worn by white women, is acceptable, but considered “cheap-looking” on East/Southeast Asian women. It makes sense that Elin’s strategy for “doing whiteness” and “making Swedishness” is by attempting to shrug off the “excess” femininity that is already pre-ascribed to her racialized body. As mentioned in section 5.5, the racialized sexuality of Asian women must be constructed as perverse, pathological, wanton and immoderate, in order for white women’s sexuality to be defined as ‘normal’ (Shimizu 2007: 25; Woan 2008). This is embedded in the concept of the first level of mimeticism, as outlined by Rey Chow (2002: 104), which centres whiteness, making the white person the standard against which the ‘ethnic’ is measured and judged. From the hegemonic cisgender- and heteronormative perspective, by minimizing her femininity and making herself more “butch”, Elin also makes herself less of a threat.
to white women in terms of competition for white men’s attentions, and reduces the ‘wrong’ kind of attention from men (see section 5.6). However, no matter how successful their attempts are in meeting the standards of whiteness, the efforts of Elin and people racialized like her will never completely be satisfactory; they will always be vulnerable to being treated with prejudice, and are always at risk of being designated the Other (Chow 2002: 104; Said 1978).

5.8 The insidiously damaging model minority myth

No analysis on people racialized as ‘Asian’ (East, Southeast, and in this case, South Asian) would be complete without including the model minority stereotype, which is both embraced by some but generally imposed upon people of East/Southeast/South Asian descent in North American contexts (Trieu & Lee 2018; Hattori 1999; Cho 1997). As we will see, this stereotype reaches far, emerging in other Western contexts such as Sweden as well, perhaps less evidently. Excerpts from interviews with two women will be presented in this section: Linh and Apsara.

Somewhat departing from the image of the precariat, in Linh’s case, when it comes to work and school, her racialization as ‘Asian’ comes with expectations of high productivity and industriousness, and a tendency to be intelligent and good at studying. Her academic performance in school and university—which is, incidentally, strong—is attributed to her being ‘Asian’ and, in that way, her own efforts and abilities are minimized as things that are intrinsic to her ‘Asianness’.

I always managed to get summer jobs when I was younger. Because… there is some fundamental idea that Asians work hard. I mean, there were many Asians… working in Chinese or Thai restaurants… those sorts of places, you know… so I got jobs at restaurants… and I applied for jobs at restaurants because I knew… In that way it was good that I got work, but still, it was based on prejudices, so I don’t know…

Linh senses that being stereotyped as intelligent and hardworking because of her Asian background is not necessarily a good thing, and her hunch is right: the model minority myth generalizes the socioeconomic and educational success of Asians Americans (and ‘Asians’ in other Western contexts), ascribing and fixing a certain value to this success, valorising it (Kim 1999). This is damaging because it obscures the socioeconomic diversity among people racialized as ‘Asian’ and disregards the various forms of racial discrimination that the majority of them face in their daily lives (Chou & Feagin 2015: 13). Asian American Studies scholar Tomo Hattori (1999) argues that “the capital of American multiculturalism would be that which creates racialized (American) human subjects—such as ‘Asian Americans’—while at the same time continuing to have them
function in the conventional manner as objects and commodities, that is, as nonhuman capital”. According to Rey Chow (2002: 213), Hattori “emphasizes that the cultural and social contradictions inherent to the model minority discourse must be understood by way of the work of global capital, which effectively turns racialized bodies into commodities”. Hattori (1999) also brings up the fact that the stereotype of the model minority as the ideal immigrant “predicates social acceptance upon exceptional capitalist achievement”, resulting in “the anguish and desperate calculations of Asian Americans as they sustain their public image as models of American multiculturalism”. This brings to mind “Tolerated Citizens” a term coined by migration and citizenship scholar Bridget Anderson (2013: 6); Tolerated Citizens must endlessly prove themselves, doing all they can to show that they have the right kinds of values, impressive ‘work ethics’, are taxpayers, arrived legally/is born in the country, and fervently disassociating themselves from those who are not deemed fit to belong (criminals, benefit scroungers, illegal immigrants, and so on). Despite all this, Tolerated Citizens are only contingently accepted in society, constantly reminded of their fragile “tolerated” status, with the risk and fear of failing and not belonging ever-present.

Next, we meet Apsara, who moved to Sweden from Thailand nine years ago “for love”, to be with her majority Swedish husband, and prior to that had lived in another Western European country for several years. She is in her 40s, university educated, and currently working as a teacher. I ask her how it was when she and her husband met the first time:

There was no problem for communication with my husband at all, because we communicated in English. And because I have been living in Europe, and I have always been working with foreigners—only with Europeans, Americans—even in Thailand... so I am used to their cultures, so to say... there’s never been any problem between us. I remember my manager, I think he was from [a European country], he told me – “it’s very good to be you, because you’re proper Thai, but you have European mentality”, he said. [laughs] So I said, “what do you mean?”, and he said, “you’re not really like… um… a proper Thai”. And I didn’t know what he meant by “proper Thai”.

Q: He didn’t... elaborate?

A: No... I understood what he was trying to say, or I didn’t take it in the wrong way... [laughs] So I took it as a compliment. But it was not a problem because after a long time working with foreigners, you get used to their ways of thinking and speaking, and you see different things.

Q: You didn’t see any issue with him saying that you are not like a “proper Thai”? 

A: No but... he meant it in a good way. Like when... I have to do a job, and then I do it properly, I don’t... just like, oh, I can do it tomorrow.

Q: But is that how people in Thailand do it?
A: Um... yeah, they like to take things slow, take it easy...

Q: So that is what you think he meant?

A: Yes. Um... because when I work, I work very hard, I don’t just stop and then... I mean, most Thai... that is our culture. No rush... we just take things slow, relax and easy. Most of them, they are like that. But European people, they are different, when they work, they work very hard. [she sees my questioning look] The people I know anyway... [laughs].

[later in the interview, Apsara talks about all her Thai friends being happy with their Swedish partners] I think... one thing about Thai people is that we adjust ourselves to the environment we’re in. [laughs] Yeah... we try to do our best to... eh... fit in. And... I mean… if you go to somebody’s house, you live by the house rules. You don’t create your own rules and you don’t demand this and that. Because if you demand too much, and if you don’t get it, then you become disappointed. But we… I think we generally are quite thankful for what we’ve got. That’s why we don’t expect too much.

Compare Swedish-born Linh, with Apsara who immigrated from Thailand, but has experience of living and working in two European countries. They have both been affected by the model minority myth in different ways. Linh has been subject to racism manifested in several different ways since childhood, and senses that both negative and seemingly positive prejudices about ‘Asians’ are two sides of the same racist coin.

In this part of her narrative, Apsara displays the first level of mimeticism, in which the white Western European man, his language and culture have been made the norm and the standard against which she, like other ‘ethnics’, are measured and judged (Chow 2002: 104). Apsara seems to have internalized this quite profoundly; by taking her white manager’s words “you’re proper Thai, but you have European mentality” and then “you’re not like a proper Thai” as compliments, she then denigrates, in a very generalizing way, Thai people by comparing their “slow, relaxed, easy” culture in an unfavourable way to Europeans, who “work very hard”. This in effect relegates the ‘ethnic’—Thai people—and their culture to a position inferior to that of the white Europeans (Chow 2002: 104), both in Thailand itself and in Europe.

In her narrative from the later part of the interview however, the purported mellow characteristics of Thai people and culture are presented as something good: their adaptability, striving to fit in, “living by house rules”, not “creating their own rules” or being demanding, being thankful, not expecting too much. While Apsara constructs Thais in this way, she does not mention those who are regularly constructed in the opposite way: the demanding, not-adaptable, ungrateful ones who don’t try to fit in but expect others to conform to them—who are implicitly, I argue, people who are racialized and ethnicized in other ways.
Sumi K. Cho (1997) states that model minority stereotypes “operate as systemic forms of political and cultural coercion that promote the maintenance of power relationships between the dominant and subordinate groups”. The same model minority stereotype that functions to “discipline” and put other groups of colour (and poor whites) “in their place”, by promoting “unfavorable comparisons with the ‘model minority’”, Cho (1997) argues, also functions to circumscribe Asian Americans and other subordinated groups in various ways. Research shows that the model minority stereotype is oppressive and damaging, and the damage inflicted is multi-layered: it prevents different marginalized groups from recognizing their common struggles (as is evident in Apsara’s narrative); it is used as a measuring stick to point out the supposed inferiority of other groups of colour if they do not attain high educational or career achievements; it is a method by which racial othering is reinforced, used by whites to differentiate themselves from people of colour; and it limits the options of those ascribed as the model minority, imposing unrealistic and highly stressful expectations upon them, both within and outside the community, which negatively impacts everyone who is thought to belong to the model minority (Chou & Feagin 2015: 142; Cho 1997). Most often, those in the model minority internalize these expectations, which then are not only externally- but also self-imposed, that all in the community should succeed in fitting the stereotype or be considered failures (Chou & Feagin 2015: 142).

My observation is that in Sweden, it is not one particular group that is explicitly designated the model minority, or that strives to uphold the “ideal immigrant” image. Some immigrants/people of immigrant descent who have lived in Sweden for a considerable amount of time and are established in society do their utmost to distance and differentiate themselves from new(er) arrivals who they perceive as not making enough effort to fit in and establish themselves in society (TT Nyhetsbyrån 2018). In this way, they designate themselves the model minority, and “guardians of good citizenship” (Anderson 2013: 6), often contributing to the reproduction of damaging discourses and stereotypes about immigrants in general, perhaps not considering that they themselves will also be negatively affected and trapped into holding themselves and everyone racialized like them to unrealistic standards.

5.9 More coping strategies: Dealing with prejudiced views

This final section will focus on more ways in which women of East/Southeast Asian descent cope with prejudice and racism. While many of the themes covered previously emerge here once more, they appear in the narratives of different women, demonstrating the panethnic and flattening quality of the racialization and stereotyping aimed towards them.
Hana is in her 30s, university educated and had worked in publishing in Japan, her home country. She has lived in various Western countries, and after meeting her majority Swedish husband—who is the same age as her—in one of them, she moved with him to Sweden about nine years ago. She got a job in a pub through her husband’s connections after about a year of living in Sweden. Like the other interview participants, she has had numerous experiences where she’s felt unwelcome in Sweden, the first time being an incident that occurred when she and her classmates from SFI\textsuperscript{30} were in town, chatting on a sidewalk. “And then a very old Swedish-looking guy walked up to us and said, ‘Flytta på er, invandrare!’\textsuperscript{31} That’s when I thought, ‘Ah, we are not Swedish’ [laughs] Some people don’t like us foreigners being in Sweden”. Hana describes being shocked by her first encounter with racism, as she had never had such an experience before. “After that first experience, I still didn’t react much, I was always shocked when it happened again, but I understood that there were people like that around”. She has also had her share of uncomfortable encounters with men who have unsavoury impressions of East/Southeast Asian women, and this has in turn made her feel uneasy and self-conscious in public:

Once when it was my turn to close the pub for the night, and my husband was there too, one old Swedish guy came to talk to me… and he told me that he had a girlfriend in Cambodia that he wanted to send clothes to. So… [embarrassed laugh] he was asking me my clothes size and said that I’m about the same as his girlfriend… we thought it was quite creepy. My husband didn’t like the way that guy looked at me, or when he explained about his girlfriend in Cambodia that he was helping with money and such.

Q: So you got the impression that he thought that you and your husband had this kind of relationship as well?

H: Yes, yes. Sometimes I feel that being an Asian lady… for example, last week we went to a restaurant with my Thai friend and her sambo\textsuperscript{32}, an old Swedish guy. Four of us were in the restaurant and… maybe nobody thought so, but I felt like people might think… [nervous laugh, finding it hard to spell it out, but I encourage her] that maybe we are all paid by this guy or something. Like… imported wives. I didn’t know this term until I moved here. I think I heard about it the first time from my friend from Thailand. She told me that she married her husband in the regular way, so she didn’t like people thinking that about her either. Me and my husband talk and joke about it… because we know that it actually does happen here. So we think some people might think our relationship is like that…

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\textsuperscript{30} SFI is the abbreviation of “svenska för invandrare” (Swedish for immigrants). SFI is the national, free Swedish language course for immigrants. Anyone who has received a Swedish personal identity number has a lawful right to Swedish language education.

\textsuperscript{31} “Move out of the way, immigrants!”

\textsuperscript{32} Live-in, common law partner.
Also… maybe because people think I’m Thai, sometimes when I am at the gym, some guys ask if I know any good massage place. I was wondering why they ask me… maybe because many Asian ladies work in the massage industry. I have a friend who has a massage store, and some customers actually ask for… [hesitant laugh] “that kind” of massage. Of course she doesn’t do it, it is insulting.

In Hana’s narrative we find yet more examples of how all women racialized as East/Southeast Asian—regardless of their educational, professional, class and personal background—are constructed as “third world”, hypersexualized, and sexually available—at work and in other public settings. Her way of dealing with stereotyping, degrading attitudes and outright racism is to joke about them with those close to her, and acceptance:

I… don’t think so much about it because… we are in a different country and I need to understand, maybe they have bad experience with foreigners. So… I accept that this is the way it is… that some people don’t like us being here. I think it would be the same if my husband and I were in Japan, maybe some people don’t like foreigners in Japan. I think wherever you go there are people like that, and some have this kind of opinion… I don’t think I can change them, so I just accept it.

Hana’s acquiescence to the status quo and lack of motivation in wanting to try and change things may be due not only to not knowing how and where to start, but also possibly the fact that she may not consider Sweden her permanent home.

Moving to the next narrative, we meet Apsara from Thailand once more: although she already has a university degree from her country of origin, Apsara is now pursuing another degree while working at the same time. Soft-spoken and serene, she takes great pains to tell me how nice and friendly the Swedish people are, and how much she likes living in Sweden. I ask her what people think of Thais and Thailand, and if people think she is Thai upon meeting her:

I think they immediately know that I am Thai... because a few hundred thousand Swedes go to Thailand every year… that’s a lot. So they know a lot about the country and the Thai way. I think... maybe... before, people had a negative image about Thai people, especially Thai ladies. When I was doing a job internship, my manager said to me that she would never go to Thailand, because she has seen TV programmes... where old men go there and pick up young girls, and she thought it was very disgusting... that was her image of Thailand. So I guess that prostitution, it is everywhere, even in Sweden. But in Thailand it is quite well known... because... many men, they go there and they fall in love, and they bring those girls back. But not everyone who is here in Europe... worked like that. And my manager said “yeah, but... you know, it’s a bit far... and there is nothing there for me to see...,” and I'm like, OK [small laugh] yeah, if you’ve already made up your mind and if you’re not even open to listen, that’s fine, because... some people they are like that. I’m like, you have a brain, you can think... if it is true or not... I mean, Amsterdam has red...
light districts... I don’t take it the wrong way or anything when people judge... everybody judges anyway [laughs]. But... I’m not ashamed to come from Thailand.

Another incident... where another teacher actually, an old man, in one of the schools I’ve been working at... he asked me, “how old is your husband?” And I said, “he is four years older than me”. And he was like, “ha... [surprised tone] so you... you are different”. And I said, “what do you mean?” Because I know that most Thais marry old... older guys. That’s the impression... that he got, like every Thai lady here in Sweden must have an older man...! [we laugh] I mean... why must you ask about things like that? Thankfully, most other colleagues... Swedish... both men and women, they have been to Thailand, and they came back and told me all the good things they’ve seen and experienced in Thailand. That made me happy.

Once more, even when Apsara, a Thai woman who is obviously educated, middle class, well-spoken, well-travelled—and elegant, I must add—stands right before them, some of the people she has encountered at work still cannot resist stereotyping her, Thailand and all Thai women, directly to her face. Apsara’s response to this stereotyping is to “not take it the wrong way” when people judge, and to understand when people make assumptions because “it’s a fact” that a significant number of Thai girls marry older men because they seek “a better life”. She has also been asked what job she had previously, before moving to Sweden—with an undertone insinuating that she’s done sex work—to which she just provides the answer in a matter-of-fact manner, without aiming to convince the questioner: “If they don’t accept my answer, it’s up to them”. It is apparent, however, that she does feel irritation towards people who, due to self-interest and/or sheer bigotry, stubbornly cling to stereotypes—to the “pictures in [their] heads”, as Lippmann (1998: 8) would put it—despite being confronted with a person who contradicts the stereotypes, when they could instead make the decision to allow the contradiction to modify and broaden their way of seeing things (Lippmann 1998: 99).

Suyin from Taiwan has a somewhat different way of managing unpleasant attitudes she may encounter when moving through Swedish society. Some time during our interview, she mentions that she “shuts off” or “shuts out” her surroundings when she is out. This surprised me, as she is a very vivacious and seemingly sharp and observant lady. I asked if she does the same in her native country as well, to gauge whether it is a personality trait, but she revealed that unlike in Sweden, she is “very alert” in Taiwan, paying close attention to happenings around her wherever she goes. We discussed this and concluded that it is a form of self-protection and a survival strategy; she is a little reluctant to be too outspoken about racism, but it is quite clear that this coping mechanism has arisen precisely due to the racism she has faced.
In Elin’s case, we have seen in section 5.7 how she deals with hypersexualization, but she has been beset with another phenomenon her whole life, since childhood: racial humour (Sue and Golash-Boza 2013), the workings of which have been outlined in section 5.5. Elin related to me that in the past, her way of dealing with racist jokes about ‘Asian’ people was to make the worst, most vicious stereotypical jokes she could think of, so that no one else could make them; her defence strategy was to strike the first blow, so to speak. The development of this strategy was fuelled by the shame and self-hatred she felt, which is indicative of a racialized/ marginalized person internalizing their own racial oppression (Pyke 2010; Trieu & Lee 2018). Using this strategy had the effect of cutting off her nose to spite her face; today she feels remorseful, because this particular way of trying to minimize the pain she felt at hearing racist jokes, and to somehow protect herself, had the effect of throwing all people of East/Southeast Asian descent under the bus, herself included. It also provided the people around her further endorsement to continue making racist jokes, because one ‘Asian’ went along with it and was not just OK with it, but made the worst jokes herself. As Sue and Golash-Boza (2013) argue, “every time racial humour goes unchallenged it gains legitimacy, reinforcing the view that it is harmless. This circular pattern of reinforcement is strengthened when the subject of the joke does not object to the humour”. This is another illustration of the far-reaching and profound effects of hermeneutical injustice; if Elin knew about the ills of racism from an early age, and had learned about internalized racial oppression (Pyke 2010), then she would have sooner been better equipped to deal with the different manifestations of racism she would face through life.

When I ask Linh about her strategies against stereotypes and whether she tries to change perceptions of people racialized as East/Southeast Asian, she reveals that she is in the process of working on herself before attempting anything like that:

Well the first thing is that I think I am still in that phase where I’m trying to change my own perceptions... in the past, for instance, I’ve indirectly gotten the message that Asians are ugly, and that we don’t fit in. And it’s like... why have I never had a partner who is Southeast Asian? Why have all my boyfriends been white? I don’t know why, I don’t have an answer for that. But I think it has to do with representation as well. I mean... I grew up watching Asian films... but nowadays I watch series and films from the US and Sweden and so... I want to change things for myself first, I want to think that Asian people are beautiful... I am actually not that fixated on appearance, but one does have a self-consciousness about how one looks. I want to follow more cool Asians on Instagram. And I noticed that when my [news]feed is filled with content on cool Asians, I start to like myself more as well [gestures to herself and smiles]. We Asians are strong, we are cool, we have culture... which is so hidden here in the West! Everyone knows about the
Linh’s narrative reflects an awareness of the critical roles that visuality and representation play in combination with dominant discourses in shaping prevailing societal perceptions about racialized/marginalized people. The content of mainstream traditional mass media is driven predominantly by the agenda of the dominant majority, in which marginalized people are almost always portrayed negatively—causing them to internalize the images and stories they are bombarded with daily, constantly, resulting in psychological harm (Delgado & Stefancic 2000: 231). However, for the past decade or so, our impressions and perceptions have been, are and can be shaped not just through traditional mass media, but also through social media\(^{3}\) such as Instagram, Facebook and other platforms. This sort of platform is particularly important for marginalized groups whose voices and images are not adequately represented in mainstream media, as anyone who has a suitable device and internet access can start their own platform—the difficult part is to continuously create enough interesting and relevant content to garner enough followers to start wielding even a small portion of the influence that traditional mass media continues to have. More importantly, Linh displays the desire to unlearn and to stop perpetuating patterns of internalized racial oppression (Pyke 2010; Trieu & Lee 2018) that took hold during her formative years. This is an important step to developing what Paulo Freire (1970: 17) calls ‘conscientização’ or critical consciousness, which refers to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality”—which in turn will help in countering an individual’s internalized racial oppression.

While it may be argued that Linh’s burgeoning, panethnic appreciation for ‘Asian’ peoples, cultures and history is part of the coercive mimetic process of self-racialization (Chow 2002: 107), I put forth the question that Elin posed earlier in this chapter: why can’t Elin, Linh and every person of East/Southeast Asian descent living in Sweden be (seen as) Asian and Swedish at the same time? I argue that developing an appreciation for her Vietnamese heritage, as well as other Asian cultures that are often ‘lumped’ together with hers, can contribute to a sense of pride in “being Asian”—which is the way she will always be racialized in the current world system—and can assist in a process of healing from the hidden injuries of racism (Pyke 2010). If Swedes of East/Southeast

\(^{3}\) Social media are “Internet-based platforms that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content, usually using either mobile or web-based technologies,” as defined by Margetts et al. (2016: 5). They can take on many forms, including social networking sites (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, etc), blogs/micro-blogs (Twitter, Weibo), content-sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr, Vine) and so on. As the use of these has grown to become the way that many users experience the Internet, ‘social media’ is now the term being used to describe the kind of Internet-based interactions that impact upon collective action (Margetts et al. 2016: 5).
Asian descent who suffer from internalized racial oppression manage to develop critical consciousness, it could provide them more strength and the fortitude to continue carving a place for ‘Asian Swedes’ in Swedish society.

Finally, we meet Eva again, who in the following narrative relates some differences between the ways men and women behave towards her:

Women tend to be ‘protective’, as if they would save me from all sorrows. [laughs] They tend to look at one as a victim, and like to talk about their trips to Thailand. They talk… as if growing up in Thailand gives one zero possibilities, if a white man doesn’t pick you up and bring you home with him. They feel that they are so lucky to not need to live as Thai women do. It feels that they think that everyone lives in total misery.

Men are sleazy and talk about sex… they talk about “whores they met and whom they did not know were women or men, haha”. Middle aged men also say how nice Thailand is, that the food is wonderful and that they want to retire there. And then after a couple of beers, they speak about wanting to buy a young, new wife.

Q: Does it matter what background these men have, for example, class, ethnicity, etc?

Eva: No, not really. All of them can be just as fucked up in their own ways. There is a difference between racialized and white women though: racialized women seldom speak to me as condescendingly as white women do.

Q: How do you handle it now, when people are condescending or sleazy, or talk about buying a wife from Thailand?

E: I speak to them condescendingly in return, and simultaneously lift my people to the skies. I choose my battles too. Sometimes I just shut off, leave the place and do something which doesn’t weigh me down. I do what feels best for the moment. Sometimes I have the energy to confront them, sometimes not.

Q: Yes, that is understandable. It takes a lot of energy. You refer to Thais as ‘your people’; do you feel more (mostly) Thai now? Or how do you identify yourself?

E: Yes, I am Thai first! But I am proud to be mixed also, even if I feel the most belonging to my Thai side. I am proud to be Thai. Whenever there is a reference to Thailand I shout, “woohoo Thailand!” I don’t take the same shit anymore. I’ve read about my country’s history, and it feels that I am ready with comebacks whenever someone comes along with a negative stereotype about my people. I had a very uninspiring image of Thailand before, because that was the image I got from the people around me.

Eva, who is half majority Swedish and half Thai, has been pushed into the ‘ethnic’ box all her life; it appears as if most of her ‘Swedishness’ has been crushed by the weight of her racialization, and the racism she has faced and is facing. She, and all women racialized as Thai, seem to be generally considered “third world women” (Mohanty 1984: 338; Trinh 1989: 82) and viewed with a mixture
of condescension and pity by majority Swedish women; and regarded by a not-inconsiderable proportion of men as objects for consumption, for the satisfaction of men’s desires—objects that are interchangeable, which can be bought, used and discarded (Kwan 1998; Jammohamed 1992: 106; Woan 2008; Cho 1997). Many of these men and women have the privilege and the resources to travel to Thailand on holiday, but fail to even begin to see the diversity and complexities of the country and its people, not bothering to look beyond the tourist enclaves of their all-inclusive resorts (Jonsson & Syssner 2011: 233).

It could be argued that Eva identifying as, and expressing pride in being “Thai first”, and only secondarily “mixed”, is a testament to the fulfilment of the coercive mimetic process, where the stereotyped image of the ethnic is replicated (Chow 2002: 107). Swedish-born and raised, half-majority Swedish Eva has been interpellated as Thai—a part of her identity that used to be loaded with so much shame—with such frequency and force that she appears to have almost fully embraced and accepted herself as Thai, calling Thailand “her country”. I argue however that the Thai identity Eva has embraced hardly seems stereotypical, nor does it seem like one that meets the “banal preconceptions” of Thais in Swedish dominant discourse—if one is to apply Rey Chow’s (2002: 107) concept of coercive mimeticism. While the mechanism of interpellation has forced her into and trapped her in the position of an ‘ethnic’, she has equipped herself with the knowledge and has the desire to try and change the negative stereotypes and perceptions of Thai people and Thailand. For Swedes who are visibly racialized, it is impossible to fully escape being trapped in the position of the ‘ethnic’, because of the overwhelming forces that untiringly fight to keep them there. But as mentioned in Linh’s case, the development of critical consciousness, which comes from “learning to recognize one’s own oppression and taking action against it” (Trieu & Lee 2018; Freire 1970: 17), as well as cultivating pride in one’s heritage—both ‘Asian’ and Swedish—can provide Asian Swedes the firmness of purpose and the tenacity to claim their place as part of Swedish society.

6. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The genesis of this thesis was motivated by a desire to bring to light and make visible some of the specific challenges faced by women of East Asian and Southeast Asian descent who are racialized as ‘Asian’—a panethnic category—in Sweden. The kind of racism faced by ‘Asians’ of all genders is widely considered ‘not dangerous’, ‘hidden’ and insignificant, and is therefore not taken seriously. However, besides the obstacles they encounter on the job market, in contact with public
and governmental organizations, and in their social and professional interactions, those who are subject to this form of racism suffer psychological distress both from racist acts and words, as well as from being silenced and having their lived experiences trivialized and minimized through various forms of epistemic injustice (Dotson 2011; Fricker 2017: 17; Kidd, Medina & Pohlhaus 2017: 1). In this study, I argue that this silencing, combined with the prejudice and discrimination inflicted upon ‘Asian’ women, function to hinder their full integration into Swedish society, thus impeding social inclusion and undermining the ideals of gender and ethnic equality, which are part of the basic principle of Swedish democracy that all human beings are equal in worth (Regeringskansliet 2005: 75). Structural discrimination is a serious problem for democracy, not only for the groups that are exposed to it, but for the entire society (Regeringskansliet 2005: 22).

The research questions of this thesis concern identifying and describing some of the ways by which ‘Asian’ women are racialized in the Swedish context; showing how this racialization affects, and is affected by, their relationships, whether social, professional or intimate; exploring whether there are differences in the way they are racialized by non-‘Asian’ men compared to non-‘Asian’ women; examining the ways in which they navigate questions of identity and belonging, and their strategies for resistance against stereotypes and racism.

In order to identify, make visible and analyse the concrete experiences and experiential knowledge of my interview participants, which are individual and unique, while simultaneously both collective and connected (Dillard 2000; Mohanty 2003: 191), I used a combination inspired by narrative research methods and storytelling/counterstorytelling from critical race theory (CRT) to determine the commonalities in their experiences, but also allow for their individual narratives or personal stories to emerge and take space. I interviewed nine women in their twenties to forties, from different ethnic backgrounds—five of Southeast Asian descent, four of East Asian descent; two were born and raised in Sweden, one is an adoptee who was raised in Sweden, and six are immigrants. The majority (seven) are university educated, including two who have postgraduate degrees. The women’s narratives are examined through the theoretical lenses of visuality, coercive mimeticism and epistemic injustice; the mechanisms described through these theories and concepts are intertwined and are embedded in the racialization process.

Narratives and personal stories are important mediums for the emergence of meaning, for how people make sense of their lives, for the sharing of ideas, and for the activation of action (Josselson 2011: 224; Tamboukou 2015c: 121; Crenshaw 1991). The act of narration is in itself intrinsically political (Tamboukou 2015c: 125; Cavarero 2000), and is thus an essential part of “people’s ability to represent themselves and their interests in the public sphere” (Jonsson 2004).
Narrative analysis and storytelling within the CRT framework can function in several ways, which I find useful for this work, namely: opening a window into ignored or alternative realities; serving as a cure for silencing, and thus also as a powerful psychic balm for the marginalized; and finally, being used to “challenge, displace, or mock pernicious narratives and beliefs”, thereby contributing to dismantling damaging stereotypes and weakening/destroying prejudices, which are required to drive the paradigm shifts needed for major societal and political changes towards a more egalitarian society (Delgado & Stefancic 2001: 42). Although Delgado and Stefancic (2001: 37) described how storytelling and narrative analysis can be used to advance justice in the legal system, I propose that they can also function in the same way in social and pedagogical settings.

So, what are some of the ways in which women of East/Southeast Asian descent are racialized? The analyses demonstrate clearly that visuality and corporeality (physical appearance) play a central (but not the only) role in this racialization, and generally, in peoples’ experiences of ‘race’. An ‘Asian’ woman moving through Swedish society is imagined as, and transformed into, a surface/exterior deprived of depth and individuality (Chow 2002: 66), subject to stereotyping and even profiling first and foremost based on her appearance alone—this refers mainly to her facial features, hair colour and skin tone. In the beholder’s eyes, the ‘Asian’ woman’s individual personality, motivations, class status, upbringing, education, profession, achievements and other characteristics are obscured and/or diminished by the stereotypes occupying the beholder’s mind (see Lippmann 1998: 8), which include the stereotype of the ‘third world woman’ who is considered a victim and/or very often hypersexualized; regarded at times as inconsequential, an object of condescension and ridicule, at other times opportunists and romantic/sexual rivals. The beholder, or the person that the ‘Asian’ woman interacts with, racializes her in some specific ways, such as interpellating her—either through direct comments or through questions—as (generic) ‘Asian’ or ‘from another country’ and therefore not Swedish, an immigrant and a perpetual foreigner. Besides direct interpellation, this racialization is also done via greetings in various East/Southeast Asian languages; references to a country the woman is assumed to have roots in; the ‘slant-eye’ gesture; comments and ‘racial humour’ on stereotypical characteristics attributed to ‘Asians’; degrading attitudes; and the offensive term “ching chong” and similar gibberish, which are based on how the Chinese (or other ‘Asian’) language supposedly sounds to people who do not speak it. All these acts of racial prejudice function to mark the person they are aimed at as not belonging; to various degrees, to disparage the person; and to have a flattening effect that reduces the racialized person to a generic, indistinct being who is interchangeable with any other racialized subject (Janmohamed 1992: 106). This form of racialization has the coercive mimetic, othering effect of forcing and
trapping the afflicted person into the position of the ‘ethnic’—a position which is deemed inferior in dominant discourse (Chow 2002: 107).

How do these women navigate questions of identity and belonging, and what are their strategies for resistance against or dealing with stereotypes and racism? Most of the interview participants who migrated to Sweden as adults retain a sense of identity quite strongly connected to their countries of origin; this identity is continually bolstered both by their cultural and familial ties in these countries, as well as by othering/exclusionary discourses and attitudes from Swedish society. Those who were born and raised in Sweden tend to be more conflicted, as although they have been socialized their entire lives in Swedish society and have internalized some of its ‘values’ and discourses, the othering that is inflicted upon them makes them feel like perpetual outsiders and/or in limbo, neither really fully Swedish nor completely ‘Asian’. This commonly held, unspoken notion that Swedishness is associated with whiteness (Holmberg 1994: 239; Hübinette & Tigervall 2009; Khayati 2017), does not thus far allow for Swedishness to encompass people of colour who have nonetheless been socialized as Swedes—whether partially, mainly or exclusively. While the experiences of many interview participants reflect a sense of double consciousness (Du Bois 1903: 8), in that their self-perception is influenced by the dominant group’s negative gaze (Trieu & Lee 2018), this sensation can be perceived especially prominently in the narratives of Eva, Linh and Elin—the participants who were raised in Sweden—but particularly in adoptee Elin’s narrative: Elin’s inner (white Swedish) identity is at odds with what she sees in the mirror and with the treatment she receives from majority Swedes who are unaware of her background. These three women—among others—have also suffered from internalized racial oppression (Pyke 2010; Trieu & Lee 2018) and are still working on countering it.

The interview participants employ various different strategies to deal with everyday racism, stereotypes and microaggressions, which take a significant toll on the person subject to them. Some shut themselves off in order to avoid hostile glances, acts and words; some take the route of tolerance, enduring and accepting that “this is the way it is in Sweden”; others make excuses for perpetrators—“they did not mean what they said in a bad way”—or state facts that counter the stereotypes without feeling the need to convince the perpetrator. But some choose the route of confrontation, discussion or argumentation, even though a potent combination of coercive mimeticism, internalized racial oppression and epistemic injustice (hermeneutical, testimonial and more) serve to make it, psychologically, a herculean effort to do so. Apropos of this, some of the women are already in the process of developing their critical consciousness (Freire 1970: 17), an
often difficult and painful yet emancipating process that is necessary for confronting and countering racism and other oppressive phenomena and structures.

As is demonstrated in the analysis, the interview participants cannot escape their racialization, which affects nearly all their relationships and interactions—albeit in different ways and to different degrees. While—happily—the majority of the women I interviewed seem to have no problems related to racialization with their existing intimate/romantic partners, collectively, their narratives reveal that racism and racialization has caused and contributed to feelings of shame, unease, humiliation and disrespect in different contexts: at school, at work, in public, among acquaintances, friends, lovers and potential partners. This has in general led to reduced trust in people and a difficulty in creating deep and meaningful relationships with others.

Finally, many interview participants have perceived a distinct pattern in the way some women treat them—in particular, white majority Swedish women. This behaviour seems directly related to the interviewee’s relationship with a white man, and/or prevailing discourses on the relationships that some white men have with some ‘Asian’ women. These narratives have a heteronormative and cisgendered viewpoint; some experiences, I am certain, have been silenced and are more complex than what is apparent. For example, while several of the women I interviewed spoke about being sexually objectified and exotified by majority Swedish men, none spoke explicitly about being objectified in this way by majority Swedish women—this however, does happen, in my own experience, and in the experiences of others in my circles—further corroborating the theory that women of East/Southeast Asian descent are regarded as “object(s) for western consumption and the satisfaction of western desires” (Kwan 1998). To this I wish to firmly declare that ‘Asian’ women are neither victims to condescend to, nor anyone’s sexual (racial) fetish.

As mentioned early in the thesis, I naturally do not claim that all the experiences of every woman racialized as ‘Asian’ in the Swedish context are represented in this study; there are other aspects, manifestations and consequences of racialization which have not been covered due to various constraints. But even though the way that one person experiences the phenomena described in this study is not necessarily how another person experiences them, I posit that virtually every woman who is racialized as ‘Asian’ is and has been subject to many of these phenomena, which have a subjugating effect on people racialized as ‘Asians’, as a whole. Consequently, resisting and countering racism towards ‘Asians’ requires solidarity among people racialized in this way, as well as from non-‘Asian’ allies.

It is hoped that this thesis will contribute to greater understanding and awareness of these specific manifestations of racism; to the people affected by racism becoming better equipped to
make sense of their experiences, developing *critical consciousness* and being thus enabled to resist, challenge and counter their mistreatment; and to the concerted anti-racism efforts at dismantling pernicious stereotypes and prejudices that have no place in an egalitarian society.

James Baldwin, the black American social critic once declared, “the place in which I’ll fit will not exist until I make it” (Pierpont 2009)—a declaration that echoes my conviction that Asian Swedes must create and claim their place in Swedish society. Equally importantly, everyone who believes in an egalitarian society must continuously work together to make this place, this society, an inclusive one that is “honorable and worthy of life”, to once more borrow Baldwin’s words (Pierpont 2009). In order to achieve this, there must be a willingness to listen to the lived experiences of the people afflicted by racism, sexism and other oppressive phenomena and structures—and put oneself in their shoes; a willingness to learn about the nuances and complexities of these structures, and constantly reflect on one’s own role in contributing to and upholding them; a willingness to put in the hard work of shattering one’s own prejudices and undoing the damaging ways of thinking, talking and behaving which one has learned through one’s upbringing and socialization in a society in which racism, sexism, class contempt and other oppressive phenomena have been normalized; and a willingness to consistently work on (re)building a society in which all human beings are free and equal in worth, dignity and rights.

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7. BIBLIOGRAPHY


Neither victim nor fetish

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