

White Apologies – Apologies for Racism as Expressions and Enactments of Whiteness in Finland

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Abstract

In this thesis three apologies for racism, which have taken place in the Finnish cultural field between 2019 and 2021, are analysed from a critical whiteness perspective. Apologies for racism and the following media discourse are seen as meaningful sources to analyse how whiteness is expressed and enacted in Finland. The data is collected from public Finnish media sources, and is analysed through critical discourse analysis. Whiteness is seen as a global power structure that normalises and privileges white people, while marginalizing and excluding non-white people. This thesis argues that whiteness in Finnish apologies for racism, is expressed and enacted through for an example, white melancholia, white innocence, white entitlement and white supremacy. When discussing racism in the Finnish cultural field, white supremacy is enacted by displacing the conversation, through discourse on intentionality, freedom of artistic expression and racism as a lower-class phenomenon.

Keywords

apologies, critical discourse analysis, racism, whiteness

1. Introduction

In November 2019, a Finnish actor turned politician, Pirkka-Pekka Petelius, apologized to the Finnish Sámi for comedy sketches made in the 1980's and 1990's. The comedy sketches, which Petelius wrote and performed together with Aake Kalliala, depicted the indigenous Sámi in a stereotypical and racist manner. Petelius' apology was met positively on one hand, and with disbelief on the other. Most commentators who were against apologising for the sketches argued that the comedy sketches should be considered as a product of their time, and

apologising for past wrong-doings would only lead to an unproductive circle of apologising. Since Petelius' apology, public apologies for racism in the cultural field have, however, broke the Finnish mainstream media news threshold more often. In this thesis, three apologies for racism and the surrounding media discourse is analysed from a critical whiteness perspective.

Racism and antiracism have previously been described as rarely discussed topics in Finnish media and research. The topics have, however, gained increasing attention in the Finnish media and academia in the 2010's (Seikkula, 2020; Rastas, 2019). On one hand the pan-European rising of the political far-right and the mainstreaming of (anti-immigration) racism has made racism more visible in the Finnish media and society (Garner, 2014). On the other hand the increased amount of BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of colour) led organizations have advanced antiracist activism in Finland immensely by producing knowledge and creating language around BIPOC experiences in Finland. While Finnish NGO's and antifascist groups have mostly focused on addressing racism as isolated events and as a far-right extremist phenomenon, BIPOC organizations have drawn the focus to structural racism and white normativity in Finland (Seikkula, 2020; Rastas, 2019). Time and again, BIPOC organizations and individuals have brought societal problems around structural racism and normative whiteness into light and public conversation – with varying success. The three apologies for racism, which are analysed in this thesis, can be seen as successful outcomes of years of antiracist activism and challenging of white normativity in the Finnish cultural field.

When speaking about racism in Finland, the attention is often turned to racist *acts*, rather than the underlying power structure that can be seen to cause them – namely, normative whiteness or white supremacy (Seikkula, 2020). While the initial ignition for the apology cases analysed in this thesis is racism, the focus will not be on the act of racism, but on the act of apology. The data analysed in this thesis consists of the apologies themselves, as well as media conversation around the apologies. Instead of treating the apologies as isolated events, the surrounding media discourse is seen as an insightful source to analyse the normative, and thus powerful, position of whiteness in Finland. All of the three apology cases have taken place in the Finnish cultural field in between 2019 and 2021. The racism controversies, and the following apologies, concern mainly taking accountability for the use of racist stereotypes, racist language, and cultural appropriation. In all of the cases a white Finnish public person(s) apologises to a non-white Finnish minority. The aim of this analysis is not to make particular claims about Finnish whiteness or white Finnish identity, but to situate Finnish racism controversies, and the

consequent apologies, in a global power structure of whiteness from which particular enactments and expressions of whiteness emerge. Although made with good or genuine intentions, the apologies and the surrounding media conversation analysed in this thesis spring from a hegemonic position and a history of whiteness in Finland. Thus, my research questions reads: *How do public apologies for racism in Finland express and enact whiteness?*

Whiteness is a rarely studied topic in Finland (Seikkula, 2020). Previous studies into whiteness in Finland have focused for an example on visual representation of whiteness in Finnish media and culture (see Kallio-Tavin & Tavin, 2018), or the white normativity of Finnish institutions, such as education (see Jäske, 2020). The focus of this thesis departs from previous research into whiteness in terms of research subject and aim. Firstly, Finnish public apologies for racism and the surrounding conversation have not been analysed from a critical whiteness perspective before. Secondly, instead of only making white normativity visible in the Finnish public conversation, this thesis also aims to map *how* whiteness is articulated in Finnish public conversation – in other words, what different types of articulations of whiteness can be detected from the discourse surrounding Finnish public apologies for racism, and how those expressions contribute to maintaining white normativity and supremacy in Finland.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework within which the analysis of public conversations about racism apologies in the Finnish cultural field is located, departs from theories on: whiteness, the conceptualization of whiteness in the Finnish context, and the politics of apologies. Critical whiteness studies consider how whiteness as a global power structure functions within Western societies. Conceptualizing whiteness in the Finnish context provides background to the analysis of whiteness in Finnish public conversations around apologies for racism. Politics of apologies discusses what is at stake when an apology takes place between a member of white majority and a non-white minority member or group.

2.1 Critical Whiteness Studies

The underlying theoretical and analytical framework for this thesis lies in critical whiteness studies. Critical whiteness studies have their origin in the U.S.A, from where it has spread to different parts of the world, such as the Nordic countries, – where localized and nuanced understandings of how whiteness operates are created (Garner, 2017). Critical whiteness studies have been employed in multiple different ways – for example, examining how the white race has been pseudo-scientifically constructed (see Painter, 2010), or how the white working class, in America has constructed its white identity by differentiation from black workers (see Roediger, 2007). What is common to all critical whiteness studies, is the consideration of whiteness as a power structure (white supremacy) and the aim to study and make visible the ramifications of white supremacy in the societies of their interest (Garner, 2017). Race is a social construct, and white or black races do not scientifically exist. However, being racialized (categorized into a certain fictitious race) as white, comes with privileges and power – meaning that race has very real social consequences (Rastas, 2004). Inclusion and exclusion from whiteness is based on political need, rather than biology (Painter, 2010). Therefore, while acknowledging that race is a social construct, I will use race instead of “race” to illustrate that race matters in the social world this research is embedded in, and to not fall into “academic color-blindness” (see Garner, 2017).

Whiteness does not have a clear-cut definition. In this thesis whiteness is seen as a global power structure that advantages people racialized as white (Garner, 2017). Whiteness is also seen as the invisible norm against which non-whiteness is constructed (Painter, 2010). The term “non-white” is not unproblematic, as it defines groups of people through a negation from whiteness, and therefore stabilizes whiteness as a norm to be measured against. However, as this thesis analyses whiteness, I will use the term “non-white” to illustrate the exclusionary nature of normative whiteness as a power structure that creates hierarchies of belonging. In discussing individual or organizational agency against racism and white normativity, I will use the term BIPOC (black, indigenous, people of colour) to highlight the multiple identities excluded from, and standing up against normative whiteness.

It is the normativity and invisibility of whiteness in the Western world which makes it important to analyse (Dyer, 1997). Whiteness, in the West, is seen as the universal human condition – white people are just people who can make claims for the common human. Non-

white people are instead, racially marked, and can only speak on behalf of their own race (Dyer, 1997). The invisible normality of whiteness is powerful, because being the norm allows for a continuous reproduction of the status quo – e.g. whiteness (Dyer, 1997). Being racialized as white, or identifying with whiteness is context dependent, and does not necessarily mean “white” skin. As elaborated later on, phenotypically white indigenous Sámi in the Nordics, for an example can be considered as non-white due to their history and position in the Nordic societies. Whiteness, albeit, context dependent, is fixed in its powerful position as the norm, and has the power to fix non-white otherness.

The link with racism and whiteness is obvious. Racism and white supremacy are considered as synonyms by some scholars (Seikkula, 2020). Garner (2017) suggests that whiteness studies should be considered a sub-field of racism studies, where the object of study is “ideologies and practices that comprise the identification of white racialized interests in a specific set of areas” (p. 1584). Studying whiteness allows for creating conceptualizations of whiteness, in cases where direct link to racism cannot be made, or in so called colour-blind, or post-racial societies, where “racial matters...results in “raceless” explanations for all sort of race-related affairs.” (Bonilla-Silva, 2015, p.1364). Terms such as *white privilege*, coined by McIntosh (1988) illustrate how people racialized as white are systematically privileged based on their skin colour, rather than their individual talents (in Kuokkanen, 2019). White privilege and structural racism are therefore two sides of the same coin. A concept such as, *white innocence*, developed by Wekker (2016) to describe the white Dutch self, in turn describes the disconnectedness between a society that imagines itself as equal and just, and its colonial history and racist present. White innocence sees racism happening elsewhere, such as in the U.S.A; or if domestic, in working-class circles (Wekker, 2016). Despite the Netherlands and Finland having different colonial pasts, white innocence is an apt concept to depict the white Finnish society (Seikkula, 2020; Keskinen, 2019). The following section will focus on contextualizing whiteness and racism in Finland. Rather than treating Finnish whiteness as somehow different to whiteness elsewhere, the meaning of the contextualization is to elaborate how understandings of Finnish history translate to the normative position of whiteness and to limited understandings of racism in the Finnish present. Furthermore, the next section will provide context to the exclusionary specificities of whiteness in Finland – in other words, which groups of people are excluded from whiteness in Finland.

2.2 Whiteness in Finland: Exceptionalism vs. Racism

Histories of nations are retrospectively constructed narratives that give nations their origins and personalities (Balibar, 1990). Furthermore, nation-states are represented to possess an ethnic base of naturally formed communities, that possess the origin, culture and interest of the nation. These fictive ethnicities are most effectively constructed based on language and race (Balibar, 1990). In analysing whiteness in the conversation around apologies for racism in the Finnish cultural field, the narrative of Finnish history and its relation to racism in contemporary Finnish society are looked at.

Finnish whiteness is often discussed in the Nordic context, due to the shared histories of the Nordic region. The Nordic states imagine and depict themselves as the global frontrunners of equality and minority rights, as conflict-resolution oriented, and peace-loving nations (Kelekay, 2019; Höglund & Burnett, 2019). The colonial history of the area does not fit with the contemporary self-image of the nations, and has been only rather recently picked up in the academia (Keskinen, 2019; Höglund & Burnett, 2019). As Finland was ruled by Sweden until 1809, and by Russia until 1917, Finland's role within Nordic colonialism is even further downplayed. Rastas (2012) has coined the term *Finnish exceptionalism*, "by which claims to historical innocence are used to disengage with race and racism in contemporary Finnish society" (in Kelekay, 2019, p. 387). Finland is often seen as a victim, rather than as a practitioner of colonialism (Keskinen, 2019). Despite being under the rule of Sweden and Russia, Finland's *colonial complicity*, however, translates to multiple ways in which Finland has participated in and benefitted from colonialism (Keskinen, 2019). The clearest example of Finnish colonialism is the ongoing colonisation of Sápmi, the land of the indigenous Sámi which stretches over the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia (Lehtola, 2015). Furthermore Finnish industry has benefitted from Swedish colonialism, and Finns have taken part in North American settler-colonialism and African missionary work – the latter especially contributing to the formation of a colonial image of the African "other" (Keskinen, 2019; Kelekay, 2019). What further plays into the narrative of Finnish exceptionalism, is the categorization of the Finns into a lower "yellow", "Mongol" race vis-à-vis their Nordic "white" neighbours during 18th century race theories. Categorising Finns as yellow Mongols, compared to white Nordic Swedes was used to explain the higher societal position of the Swedish speaking Finns, who were also considered to belong to the white Nordic race. The Finns

gradually becoming white and European has been a conscious effort of Finnish academics (Keskinen, 2019; Rastas, 2004). After the Finnish independence in 1917, Finnish scientists have also engaged in pseudo-scientific race theories themselves, by engaging in skull measurements of the indigenous Sámi who were perceived an even lower, primitive race than the Finns (Ranta & Kanninen, 2019; Keskinen, 2019). The Finnish identity, forming of which was a project of the Swedish-Finnish elite in the mid 19th century, was based on a romanticised image of a hard-working Finnish peasant, and distanced Finns from non-white minorities, such as the Sámi and Roma (Ollila, 1998; Seikkula, 2020; Rastas, 2004). Identification with West European whiteness at the cost of the non-white “other”, continues to inform the dominant narrative of the Finnish nation state as authentically white (Seikkula, 2020; Keskinen, 2014).

The image of contemporary Finland as authentically white, is strengthened through images disseminated via politics, media and the cultural field. While the increasing popularity of the Finnish far-right party True Finns (Perussuomalaiset) since their big win in 2011, has brought racist discourse into mainstream media, their success is not created in a vacuum. Wider social processes and discourse play a role in facilitating the popularity of far-right politics (Garner, 2014). The role of culture was well illustrated in an outcry of some Finnish cultural workers, who after another successful election outcome for True Finns in 2015 claimed that they didn't know anyone who would've voted for the party. Journalist Maryan Abdulkarim pointed out, that the Finnish cultural field is guilty of contributing to the same racist structures that they blame the True Finns for, by disseminating racist stereotypes masked as entertainment and humour (Siltamäki, 2015). Laughing at ethnic minorities can function as a form of social bonding among in-group members and as a practise of boundary-making between racially superior “us” and racially/culturally inferior “them” (Pérez, 2017). Stereotypical imagery of ethnic minorities becomes especially harmful when there isn't a lot of knowledge, or alternative images of ethnic minority members available (Näkkäläjärvi, 2019). Colonial imagery of African and Asian people, through ridicule and exotization, has been recreated for an example in Finnish TV-commercials (Rossi, 2009). In the context of Finnish TV entertainment, especially the Sámi and the Roma have often been depicted in a racist manner through a humorous lens. In terms of the Sámi, cases of cultural appropriation, in which a member of a Finnish white majority exploits Sámi culture for their own gain, have also been discussed in the recent years (Kallioniemi & Siivikko, 2020). Most popular example being Miss Finland 2015 participating in the Miss World competition in a fake Sámi outfit bought from a party store. Stereotyping and cultural appropriation in media and art function as powerful tools to

stabilise imbalanced power dynamics and to oppress non-white minorities (Näkkäljärvi, 2019).

Art and culture can also function as a way to ‘talk back’ and challenge the white normativity of the Finnish society, as discussed by Kelekay (2019) in reference to Afro-Finnish hip hop artists. The Finnish art and culture field, however, remains largely white, and the accessibility and room to operate for non-white individuals is limited. Non-white artists and cultural workers are often limited to creating art about their “otherness” and used as experience experts in discussions about racism (Lindfors, 2016). The apologies for racism in the Finnish cultural field analysed in this thesis can be seen to be located in a broader conversation about white normativity and racism within the Finnish cultural field – largely started by BIPOC individuals who operate within the field themselves.

2.3 Politics and Power of Apologies

When the Norwegian and Swedish governments issued official apologies for the mistreatment of the Sámi in the late 1990’s, the Finnish Minister of Justice at the time stated: “There are currently no issues that would require an apology” (quoted in Lehtola, 2015, p.23). According to him and the Finnish public opinion, there was no Finnish colonialism in Sápmi, and, therefore, the Finnish government had nothing to apologize for (Lehtola, 2015). But, even when there is an acknowledgement of a wrongdoing, what is at stake when a nation or an individual apologises for the mistreatment of a minority group?

According to literature on public apologies, a successful apology consists of (1) an acknowledgement of a wrongdoing, and harm caused, (2) acceptance of responsibility for the wrongdoing, (3) expression of regret for the wrongdoing and the caused harm, and (4) a commitment to reparation (Clarke & Fine, 2010). One of the functions of a public apology is to bring, otherwise taboo, issues out to the public sphere. However, a public apology can also function as a means of political survival, and merely give the appearance that issues are being discussed in the open (Nytagodien & Neil, 2004). Furthermore, apologies are performative acts that convey in them multiple layers of meanings in addition to the surface level of what is apologised for.

According to O’Neill, “To apologize is to grant the other person face, to imply that he or she matters and will get better treatment in the future.” (quoted in Clarke & Fine, 2010, p 105). The apologizer having the power “to grant the other person face” speaks of an imbalanced power position, where the power is in the hands of the apologizer. In providing reasons and excuses for their racism, the apologizer has the power to direct the conversation further. In cases, such as the ones analysed for this thesis, the apology has usually followed from a racism controversy where a non-white person(s) ask for accountability for racist acts. Within a power structure of whiteness, they risk being ignored, gaslighted and in the worst case attacked (Kyrölä, 2021)¹. Ahmed (2012) discusses how in institutions that claim to be committed to diversity, a person bringing up racism becomes the problem. Ahmed’s (2012) observation could be expanded to a wider white, colour-blind society – bringing up racism might be seen as worse a problem than racism itself. The person responding and apologizing to the acclaims of racism then has immense power in, either validating or undermining the concerns of non-white minorities. Furthermore, apologies done by public individuals are in some cases not only subjective, but touch upon the wider society. In cases where the issue that is apologized for is part of a collective memory, such as a cultural product or a historical happening, the apology is likely to stimulate public conversation (Poutanen, 2020). This is well illustrated in the cases that are analysed in this thesis. Although, on the surface the apologies are directed to the non-white minorities in question, in essence the wider, and perhaps even the main audience of the apologies, is the white Finnish public. Therefore, the apologies for racism provide an interesting source to explore the expressions, enactments and reproductions of whiteness.

3. Research Methods

Due to the normative position of whiteness, whiteness is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere (Dyer, 1997). Whiteness then becomes best visible in controversies, where its normative position is challenged, and its difference from non-whiteness is highlighted. Therefore, apologies for racism provide an interesting source for analysing whiteness from a

¹ In <https://open.spotify.com/episode/10pkUqjegxpdAegts6kFM0>

critical perspective. Controversies taking place in the digital media leave traces (Marres, 2015) – it is these traces that are analysed in this thesis.

Knowledge is always produced from a situated position (Collins, 1990). As a white Finnish person I benefit from the infrastructure of whiteness in Finland, as well as elsewhere. Looking at the infrastructure of whiteness “from the inside”, then, inevitably leads to an incomplete understanding of its extent. However, as discussed in Seikkula (2020), one’s position located in whiteness should not determine one’s incapability of producing critical analysis of whiteness that do not confirm its hegemonic position. Being a white researcher, here, is seen as a limitation, but not as a complete barrier to critically assessing whiteness.

In order to analyse the enactment and expression of whiteness in public apologies for racism in Finland, a qualitative content analysis is conducted by looking into three different apology cases that have taken place in 2019 and 2021. The first case, from 2019, is Finnish politician Pirkka-Pekka Petelius apologising to the Finnish Sámi for using racist stereotypes in his comedy sketches in the 1980’s and 1990’s. The second case, also from 2019, is Finnish pop-duo *Maustetytöt* apologising for using a racist word in an early version of their debut single. The third case, from 2021, is Finnish musician Mikko Kuoppala apologizing for the use of racist lyrics in his music. The three cases were chosen because, despite having a lot of similarities, they also differ from each other in terms of the minority in question, whether what is apologised for is recent or in the past, and in how well the artist in question is known by different Finnish audiences. Therefore, the cases provide multiple perspectives to how whiteness is expressed and enacted. Furthermore, all of the cases have received substantial media attention, and therefore provide an abundance of material to analyse. The apology statement and the media discourse surrounding the apology, are seen as performative practices that simultaneously reflect and shape society. Furthermore, mainstream media is seen as a powerful tool for disseminating discourse.

The data collected and analysed for these three cases has been collected from different Finnish media sources. The focus of the analysis is on the apology itself, as well as the media conversation around the apology. The apologies in the three cases are articulated through a press release of the political party *Vihreät* (Green party)(case 1), an interview in a magazine (case 2), and a blog post (case 3). Further conversation around the apologies is collected from media sources such as news articles, interviews and opinion pieces released in newspapers (28), blog posts (2), podcasts and radio programs (5), song lyrics (1) and TV programs (2). As

mentioned before, the focus of the analysis is on *public* apologies for racism, and the surrounding conversation – therefore, all sources used in the analysis are publicly available. In the third case, which was unfolding during the writing of this thesis in the spring of 2021, data from social media conversations was also collected. Most of the data was collected from individuals and activists commenting on the case as it unfolded – many of whom later appeared in other media covering the case. Due to the (semi-)private nature of social media posts, the discussion of the data is limited, and has been used mostly in the background to guide my analysis.

Since the data analysed in this thesis is publicly available, no issues with participant consent arise. However, in two of the cases analysed I've decided to not disclose the names of the people who have been the conversation starters in the racism controversies. With this, I refer to the BIPOC people, who have started the conversation about racism and white normativity in two of the cases, and from which the apologies analysed in this thesis have yielded. Although their names are easily available and often referred to when searching information about the cases, not disclosing the names in this thesis aims to protect the privacy of the individuals, and to draw attention away from centering conflict towards normative whiteness that permeates the conversation. In the three cases analysed, the names of the Finnish public people responding to and apologizing for the accusation of racism are however disclosed. This is due to the recognizability of the cases. Despite using these cases, and the names of the people involved, the aim of the analysis is not to draw attention to individuals, or judge or make claims about the successfulness of their apologies. The cases are rather used as examples to say something about how whiteness is expressed and enacted in Finland more broadly.

In analysing the data, critical discourse analysis will be used. Critical discourse analysis is concerned with relations of power and inequalities in language (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Critical discourse analysis focuses on “structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” (Wodak, 1995 in Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). As whiteness is considered a power structure which is maintained i.a. through discourse, the focus on power and control in language and the social conditions in which language is produced is highly relevant in analysing whiteness in public apologies of racism. Critical discourse analysis, here, is not used as a rigorous ‘method’, but as an approach that connects critical theory with a critical analysis of the data (see Layne & Alemanji, 2015).

The main, and most difficult task of the analysis, is to make the unsaid and unstated – whiteness – visible, and to analyse its operations. Therefore, the *enactments* and *expressions* of whiteness lie in the subtext, rather than being readily available to the researcher. Furthermore, critical whiteness theory does not provide a clear description of whiteness (Garner, 2017), let alone a clear-cut framework to operationalize or analyse it. The analysis in this thesis pays attention to, amongst others, arguments/excuses for racism, denials of racism, language of inclusion and exclusion, problematizations, and imaginaries. An example of a problematization would be equating criticism for racism with limiting freedom of speech. An example of an imaginary would be the imaginary of the Finnish countryside as a homogenously white space. As the research question consists of two parts – *expressions* and *enactments* of whiteness, the two are treated analytically separable. In the analysis, the differentiation between the two is, however, sometimes difficult. In principle expressions of whiteness have to do with personal identifications with a certain type of whiteness – i.e. white innocence. The expressions of whiteness are most readily available in the justifications and excuses made for the racist behaviour. Enactments of whiteness in the analysis of this thesis, has to do with embodying power positions and drawing up borders between “us” and “others”. Enactment of whiteness further stabilizes whiteness through approximating whiteness to Finnishness. As becomes clearer in the results section and the following discussion, expressions of whiteness often contribute to enactments of whiteness. An expression of white innocence or white entitlement, for example, is often closely connected to enactments of white supremacy.

4. Results

In this section the results from the analysis of the three apology cases chosen for this thesis are discussed individually. The results will start with some background to the cases, and will continue by analysing the apologies and the conversation around them from a critical whiteness perspective. The focus of the analysis is on answering the question: How do Finnish public apologies for racism express and enact whiteness? The result section will end with a discussion on how white supremacy is enacted in the apology cases through issue displacement, and via discourse on intentionality, freedom of artistic expression, and racism as a lower-class phenomena.

4.1. Pirkka-Pekka Petelius – Apologising for racist stereotyping of the Finnish Sámi and Roma in comedy sketches

In November 2019 Pirkka-Pekka Petelius, a Finnish politician for the Green party (Vihreät), called together a group of influential Sámi people to discuss comedy sketches he wrote and performed together with Aake Kalliala in 1980's and 1990's. After the meeting Petelius issued an official apology for the negative impact the comedy sketches have had on the lives of the Finnish Sámi². The comedy sketches depict two men dressed in a “traditional Sámi outfit”. The men are depicted as simple-minded and always drunk, and their faces are tarnished with dirt. The catchphrase of the sketches was “Nunnuka-nunnuka-lai-lai-laa”, which is a mockery of the Sámi joik, a traditional form of singing and storytelling. It is specifically the catchphrase that caught on among the public, and has been used to mock Sámi people in schools, work, etc.³ Mocking the Sámi joik, is especially problematic, because the joik was seen as a sin by the Finnish Evangelic Lutheran church, and was thus prohibited, and is considered endangered nowadays (Ranta & Kanninen, 2019; Näkkäljärvi, 2019). Petelius and Kalliala's Sámi sketches have received a status of Finnish comedy classics and they can still be viewed in the Finnish public broadcaster YLE's Living Archives. In 2017, YLE added a note in connection to the shows, stating that the shows contain caricatures that can be interpreted as racist⁴. In the aftermath of the official apology to the Sámi, Pirkka-Pekka Petelius further issued an apology to the Finnish Roma, who were also depicted in a racist manner in Petelius and Kalliala's comedy sketches⁵.

4.1.1. Expressing white melancholia, enacting white supremacy

A central theme in the media conversation around Pirkka-Pekka Petelius' apology to the Sámi and later on the Roma, was whether or not he should've apologized at all. Petelius' partner in the comedy sketches, Aake Kalliala called Petelius' apology “ridiculous” and, although he admitted that he would not make the same sketches anymore, didn't feel the need to apologize himself. Kalliala further continued that: “you have to be really careful what you say these

² <https://www.vihreat.fi/ajankohtaista/pirkka-pekka-petelius-pyytaa-anteeksi-saamelaisilta/>

³ See for an example <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10508300>; <https://www.hs.fi/sunnuntai/art-2000002631864.html>;
<https://www.hs.fi/nyt/art-2000002782408.html>

⁴ <https://www.hs.fi/nyt/art-2000005169416.html>

⁵ <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000006349529.html>

days”, and that things have become “impossibly absurd”⁶. Helsingin Sanomat, the largest newspaper in Finland, issued a survey asking whether Petelius did the right thing by apologizing to the Sámi for the comedy sketches. The majority of Finns, who responded to the survey, agreed with Kalliala; 57% thought that he should have not apologized, whereas 29% thought Petelius did the right thing by apologizing to the Sámi⁷. Petelius also told in *Helsingin Sanomat* that he received a large amount of blaming, threats and hate speech due to the apology⁸. Some politicians joined the conversation about the apology and argued, for an example, that apologizing for humor made in the past will only lead to endless circles of apologizing⁹, and that apologizing for art made within the frames of freedom of speech will lead to “snowflake totalitarianism”¹⁰. The consensus among the people who thought Petelius should not have apologized, was that the current societal atmosphere has been taken over by oversensitivity, which threatens freedom of speech. As one journalist points out¹¹, it seems that the critics were longing for a past where “political correctness” did not limit humor, and where the white majority could make fun of non-white ethnic minorities without having to face criticism. This longing for simpler days can be seen as what Hübinette and Lundström (2011) in the Swedish context call *white melancholia* – “yearning to return to the safe days of white homogeneity when it was easier to be either racist or anti-racist” (p.50). Although, the geographical area known as Finland has never been homogenously white, the imagination of the Finnish nation’s history is often presented as such (Seikkula, 2020). Petelius and Kalliala’s comedy sketches have become a part of a collective memory, and therefore Petelius’ apology was seen as a betrayal of that shared memory by some. What is challenged by apologizing for comedy pieces laughed at by generations of Finns, is the exclusive right of whiteness to decide who can, and who cannot be laughed at. Therefore, dictating whether hurting non-white minorities is something to be apologized for, enacts white supremacy. Putting a further white supremacist spin on the case in the aftermath of Petelius’ apology, internet trolls with far-right connections filed multiple reports of offence from old TV shows to the Finnish police. The reports were intended as a nuisance and did not advance further into an investigation¹². However, the main point of the trolls was made clear – apologizing for past racism is ridiculous.

⁶ My translations, <https://www.is.fi/politiikka/art-2000006315894.html>

⁷ <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000006349588.html>

⁸ <https://www.hs.fi/politiikka/art-2000006349529.html>

⁹ <https://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/a/006fb75b-b1fd-4ca0-a4b8-a50c35600b0a>

¹⁰ <https://www.verkkouutiset.fi/heikki-vestman-kenelta-seuraavaksi-pyydetaan-anteeksi/#aa88e31a>

¹¹ <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000006318559.html?share=b01ee28479df25f1aa660c81a535bb7f>

¹² <https://www.hs.fi/nyt/art-2000006325927.html>

White supremacy is here, then, enacted through an expression of white melancholia – a narrative in which sensitivity towards non-white minorities is seen as a limitation to the freedom of white people to laugh at non-white minorities, and a simpler past is longed for.

4.2. *Maustetytöt – Apologising for the use of a racist word in song lyrics*

In February 2019, *Maustetytöt*, an up-and-coming band comprising of two sisters, Anna and Kaisa Karjalainen, caused a small media stir¹³. A video of the band performing live in 2018, in which they used the racist n-word in their song, *Tein kai lottorivini väärin*, started circulating among fans. The conversation heated up on the bands Facebook page, encouraging some fans to use racist slurs in the comments section. The band’s manager brushed the controversy aside, by saying that the racist word had been changed after a few live shows, and by appealing to the girls ignorance, and small-town upbringing¹⁴. The Karjalainen sisters did not comment on the issue, and the racist comments were deleted from their Facebook page. In November, 2019, the issue gained renewed attention, around Finland’s biggest music award show, Emma-gala. Two weeks prior to the official announcement of the Emma-gala nominees, music magazine *Rumba* reported that an anonymous jury member had leaked information that *Maustetytöt*, would not be nominated for any category in the gala¹⁵. Leaving *Maustetytöt* unnominated came as a surprise to music industry professionals as *Maustetytöt* was earlier in 2019 chosen as the upcoming act of the year by another music magazine *Soundi*¹⁶, and their debut album was referred to as “the most awaited album of the year”¹⁷. The anonymous member of the jury described how one member of the jury had opposed the nomination of the band, and justified her argument by saying that nominating the band would normalize racism. After the discussion the jury had voted by hand, and the band was left unnominated by one vote difference. The conversation around the Emma-gala nominations prompted *Maustetytöt* to officially apologize in an interview given to *Rumba*¹⁸. On the day of the announcement of the Emma-gala nominees, the jury member who opposed the nomination of *Maustetytöt* came out in an article where she explained why she argued that nominating *Maustetytöt* would be normalizing racism. Her main

¹³ <https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/taman-hetken-hehkutetuun-suomalaisbandi-keskella-rasismikohua/>

¹⁴ <https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/taman-hetken-hehkutetuun-suomalaisbandi-keskella-rasismikohua/>

¹⁵ <https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/emma-galan-puheenaiheeksi-nousee-yhtye-joka-ei-ole-ehdolla/>

¹⁶ <https://www.soundi.fi/uutiset/maustetytot-master-of-pulpets/>

¹⁷ <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000006284857.html>

¹⁸ <https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/maustetytot-anteeksi/>

argument was that when the *YouTube* video of the song performed with the racist n-word first surfaced and caused a stir, the band failed to take responsibility and apologize. She explains: “It might be difficult for a white music journalist to understand how it feels when the n-word is not worth apologizing for... the message this conveys is that... it is ok to go on without anyone demanding accountability for what is said, it is normal to act in a racist way and to not apologize for it”¹⁹.

The *Maustetytöt* apology and the public conversation around the apology is concentrated in two points: ignorance and interpretation of art. Ignorance is the main reason *Maustetytöt* has given for the usage of the racist word in their song lyrics, and the initial failure to properly address the issue when it first emerged. Interpretation of art, instead, has to do with the conversation around the apology, mainly instigated by music journalists and critics.

4.2.1. Ignorance and the Finnish countryside: expressing white innocence, enacting “authentic Finnishness”

When the video of *Maustetytöt* singing the n-word in their song first emerged, the band’s manager Aki Roukala commented in an interview in *Rumba*: “The song in question is an early version... They were told that this is not ok, and the lyrics were changed... I would say the issue is about ignorance and sloppiness of young people from a small town... Personally I wouldn’t have necessarily changed the lyrics in question. It has to do with freedom of storytelling and context.”²⁰. On the band’s *Facebook* page the article with Roukala’s comments was shared with a text: “If it’s still unclear to someone, we’re not racists, just yokels”. Ignorance in regards to whether a racist word can be used in song lyrics is here explained with young age, and being from the countryside. When the band issued an official apology as a result of the renewed media attention due to the Emma-gala debate, and reflected on the earlier failed apology, they repeat: “...Like we’ve said before, the reason is more ignorance and us being yokels. I would dare to argue that our geographical history has an influence on not realising that the word should simply not be used”²¹. In the apology article the band says, however, that they do not want to justify the use of racist lyrics with ignorance, and that they

¹⁹ My translation, <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2019/12/12/kommentti-mina-aloitin-keskustelun-maustetytoista-emma-tuomaristossa-nyt>

²⁰ My translation, <https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/taman-hetken-hehketuun-suomalaisbandi-keskella-rasismikohua/>

²¹ My translation, <https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/maustetytot-anteeksi/>

did not mean to provoke or hurt anyone. Although the band seems sincere in their claims of ignorance, defending the use of a racist word with ignorance can be seen as expressing white innocence. In discussing white innocence, Wekker (2016) argues that innocence “enables the safe position of having licence to utter the most racist statement, while in the next sentence saying ... it was not meant as racist” (p. 17). The jury member who opposed the nomination of *Maustetytöt* similarly states that accepting ignorance as a good enough reason for not apologizing for hurting non-white people, gives out the message that hiding behind ignorance gives the mandate to say or do anything, and that it is understandable to not know in 2019 that the n-word is a racist word²².

The band basing their ignorance on being from a small town, furthermore, provides an angle to analyse certain imaginaries of Finnish countryside as an enactment of white supremacy. Finnish countryside, and its relationship to Finnish urban areas is loaded heavy with imaginaries. Finland is a scarcely populated nation state with vast empty areas and long distances between towns. The division between urban areas and the countryside is pronounced (Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2011). The national image of Finland, built in the 19th century, was largely based on the image of Finnish countryside and it's peasants (Salonen, 2014). Finnishness being equal to Finnish countryside remains strong in visual culture (Heikkinen, 2001; Salonen, 2014). Finland was urbanised rather late, in the 1960's-1970's. This means that many families in Finland have ties to the countryside – whether it is family homes or summer cottages (Salonen, 2014). The rapidly emptying countryside is often seen as backwards, and the people living there as yokels. However, that backwardness is not necessarily seen as bad, but as something nostalgic and authentically Finnish. The Finnish countryside represents roots, and authenticity (Alasuutari & Alasuutari, 2011). Basing ignorance in terms of racism on being a yokel from the countryside can be read as depicting the countryside as a place where one does not have to know about racism – in other words, as a homogenously white space. The imaginary of the homogenously white countryside as authentic Finland, then, turns to the image of authentic Finland being white. The ignorance of a countryside yokel functions as an enactment of white supremacy, where boundaries between authentic Finnish countryside and non-authentic multicultural urban areas are made. The imaginary of the authentic Finnish countryside being white, is clearly illustrated in an example from summer 2019, when a

²² <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2019/12/12/kommentti-mina-aloitin-keskustelun-maustetytoista-emma-tuomaristossa-nyt>

Finnish, black, female, hip hop artist *Yeboyah* released her “*Elovena EP*”. *Elovena* is a blond, female character known mostly as a Finnish oatmeal brand. In the original package the character is depicted in a national dress in the middle of an oat field. *Elovena* is also used more broadly as an adjective to depict a Finnish person (mostly woman) who is close to the Finnish nature and the countryside. *Yeboyah*’s use of the *Elovena* character to depict herself and her closeness to Finnish nature was seen as “political”, and some internet trolls even blamed her for appropriating Finnish culture²³. *Yeboyah*’s blackness combined with imagery of the Finnish countryside as white, is thus seen as provocation, whereas the countryside-ness of *Maustetytöt* is seen as a natural and justified part of their brand image²⁴. Claiming the Finnish countryside as authentically Finnish and authentically white, is an enactment of white supremacy. Therefore, basing ignorance in terms of racism on being from the countryside contributes to the white supremacist imaginary of the Finnish countryside as a homogeneously white space.

4.2.2. Interpretation of art: condemning “wrong” interpretations, expressing white entitlement

When asked about the interpretation of their debut song *Tein kai lottorivini väärin*, *Maustetytöt* say that in their opinion the song can be interpreted in multiple ways. Even though they did not mean the song as racist, if it is interpreted so, it is as good an interpretation as any other²⁵. The correct interpretation of the song lyrics, and the ability of audiences to interpret music lyrics however, become a central theme in the critics commentaries on the *Maustetytöt*/Emma-gala controversy. One critic writes: “*Maustetytöt* was left out of the Emma-gala due to a racist word. This does not surprise me – Finns have always had weak music literacy skills”²⁶. Another critic argues, while heavily gaslighting the person who started the conversation about the normalization of racism in the Emma-gala jury: “...Every literate person understands that, despite one racist word, (the song) as a whole can in no way be interpreted as racist. At most it can be interpreted as a lazy, blunt depiction of globalisation”²⁷. One commentator further writes that the song should actually be read as a post-colonial critique

²³ <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000007754457.html>; <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2019/10/24/yeboyah-ei-tuhlaa-energiaansa-suomalaisuudesta-huutelijoihin-koska>

²⁴ See for an example, <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50309996>

²⁵ <https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/maustetytot-anteeksi/>

²⁶ My translation, <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000006323923.html>

²⁷ My translation, <https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/kolumni-vuoden-ankein-mediakohu/>

on global inequalities²⁸. What is stated in these comments is, (1) the song is not / should not be interpreted as racist, (2) the song should be interpreted as a criticism to global inequalities. The band has told that the song is about a small person comparing their struggles to a big world. In the chorus they sing:

When the (lottery)balls spin into the chute

I think of the little boys in Sudan²⁹

Who would like to get drunk

At least their problems are real:

The bananas from their trees

Have been brought to the shelves of my local market

The coffee from their bushes has been drunk

They've been spanked on their bare asses³⁰

In the following choruses *Maustetytöt* sing about malaria, HIV and how the person handing out free condoms is nowhere to be seen. The song lyrics seem to be a collage and a reproduction of stereotypical images of Africa; bananas, coffee, malnourished and maltreated naked black children, malaria and HIV. Sudan, here, is depicted through a Western imaginary of the African content as a monolith, whose specificities do not deserve a more nuanced depiction (see Wainaina, 2005). Therefore the argument that the lyrics should be interpreted as a criticism for globalization or a post-colonial critique becomes extremely weak – with or without the n-word. Seeing the lyrics as a post-colonial critique would further be paradoxical to the bands initial claims of total ignorance in using a racist word. Furthermore, the lyricist Kaisa Karjalainen tells that the line about the Sudanese boys was conceived at the closing hour of a bar, mourning over an unfinished beer – referencing to a line “children in Africa have nothing to eat” familiar to many who have ever been guilt tripped to finishing their plate of food³¹. Claiming that the song is not racism, and has been interpreted wrong, then expresses the entitlement of the white critics to decide how art, and racism within art should be interpreted. Furthermore, claiming stereotypical imagery of Africa as “postcolonial critique” is an enactment of white supremacy

²⁸ <https://verkkosaro.sarolehti.net/maustetyttojen-jalkikoloniaalinen-kertosae/>

²⁹ In an earlier version of the song “little boys in Sudan” was “ni**er boys in Sudan”

³⁰ My translation

³¹ <https://www.soundi.fi/jutut/me-ei-edes-alun-perin-tykatty-siita-biisista-nain-maustetyttojen-lottorivi-single-syntyi/?fbclid=IwAR012IlossM-UCsPS4o3bc33beOI2jeoSnaALygSWYKS3Waj8kUVGzxHule>

veiled in a weak attempt of intellectuality. White entitlement and supremacy is further enacted in comments such as: “the most depressing media controversy of the year”, “leaves a bad taste in everyone’s mouth”³². Considering that not nominating *Maustetytöt* was described as “making history” by some BIPOC people in the music and media industry³³, “everyone” here seems to refer to white people. The “wrong” interpretation of the song has left a bad taste in white people’s mouth, and challenged the entitlement of whiteness to define racism, and the rightful interpretation of art.

4.3. Mikko Kuoppala – Apologising for the use of racist words in song lyrics

In March 2021, a black, Finnish, hip hop artist published a story on her Instagram account, which called for the Finnish hip hop scene to critically assess its whiteness and issues of cultural appropriation. She mentioned as an example Finnish hip hop artist Mikko Kuoppala, best known as his artist persona *Pyhimys*, who has used racist words in his song lyrics, and took issue with Kuoppala not having taken responsibility for the lyrics or taken the songs down. She further mentioned that the wider Finnish music industry shows its lack of understanding of hip hop’s origins by nominating and awarding artists like Kuoppala, in the previously mentioned Emma-gala. She furthermore commented that Kuoppala does not appreciate black culture, and appropriates it for his own gain. However, she ended the Instagram story by saying that her criticism goes further than just Kuoppala, and is a call for action for the whole Finnish music industry³⁴. Instagram stories are temporary and disappear after 24h. The conversation, however, got picked up by multiple Instagram users, including well-known Finnish music artists, and prompted a response from Kuoppala in the form of a 1500-word blog post³⁵. The conversation about the use of racist words in music lyrics and the whiteness of the Finnish hip hop scene was picked up by the mainstream news media, and was extensively discussed, for example, in a 2h 15min long radio program *Musa vai Bisnes*³⁶ (Music or Business) where Kuoppala among others was interviewed about the topic.

³²My translation, <https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/kolumni-vuoden-ankein-mediakohu/>

³³<https://areena.yle.fi/audio/1-50363234>

³⁴<https://www.rumba.fi/uutiset/pyhimys-pyytaa-anteeksi-loukkaavia-kappaleitaan/>

³⁵<https://www.pyhimys.com/2021/03/03/ongelmallisen-artistin-ongelma/>

³⁶<https://open.spotify.com/episode/10pkUqjexdpAegts6kFM0>

The conversation around Kuoppala's apology, was deeper and wider than in the other cases and touched upon topics from artistic freedom and responsibility to censorship. Censorship was discussed largely due to two of the songs where Kuoppala uses the racist n-word being taken down from Spotify as a reaction to the criticism towards the songs. Due to the limited scope of this analysis, censorship will not be discussed here. Rather the discussion will focus on cultural appropriation and the protection of whiteness to operate in a black culture without rules – which will be described as white immunity.

Although the conversation started on Instagram aimed at discussing cultural appropriation and the lack of white hip hop artists actively working towards an anti-racist hip hop scene in Finland, the conversation that followed focused largely on what white people can or cannot do in hip hop. This was highlighted in direct questions such as “is it always a problem if a white person raps?”³⁷ or “if rapping is somehow ok for a white Finnish person, how should they do it in the right way?”³⁸. Although, the questions aim at discussing how white people should operate within a black culture, they centre whiteness and show the difficulty of grasping the concept of cultural appropriation.

4.3.1. Distancing from Culture and Calling for Equal Rules – Protecting white immunity

In his blog post Kuoppala says that he doesn't see himself as a representative of hip hop culture, and that it seems absurd to him that as a white Northern European person he would be a maker of “black music”. He further continues: “This might be difficult for many to understand, as the influences (of hip hop) can clearly be heard. Can we talk of cultural appropriation? I cannot make the decision, but drawing the border is problematic at least: what is black music? Who is allowed to make black music?”³⁹. Kuoppala further writes that he doesn't see his music as taking a stand or as political, but as fictitious images of his experiences in the world. With these statements Kuoppala distances himself from hip hop culture, and problematizes the boundaries of cultural appropriation. A black, Finnish, hip hop artist Deogracias Masomi, known as his artist name *Gracias*, points this out in his Instagram posts that respond to Kuoppala's blog by saying that to him it seems weird that white rappers in Finland distance themselves from the

³⁷ <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50820662?autoplay=true>

³⁸ <https://open.spotify.com/episode/10pkUqjegxdpAegts6kFM0>

³⁹ My translation, <https://www.pyhimys.com/2021/03/03/ongelmallisen-artistin-ongelma/>

context of black music by saying that they just make “rap as music”. He continues: “when I go to an interview to talk about my apolitical song...at some point I have to respond to questions of BLM, racism, equality or immigration”. Masomi sees it as problematic that white rappers distance themselves from “difficult topics”, while that is not a possibility for BIPOC artists.

In his blog post and in *Musa vai Bisnes*, Kuoppala explains his use of racist language with the fictitious characters that he uses to illustrate different societally relevant stories. He says that he understands that hiding behind a character is not a justification for using racist language, but underlines the importance of context in judging the racism of the characters. Kuoppala further says he would not use the n-word in his music anymore. However, he says that for him it is difficult to distinguish when “art is offensive” or when someone “gets offended by art”, because he has never gotten offended by art himself. Therefore, he calls for a “set of criteria” to equally treat all music that is deemed offensive. With this Kuoppala seems to refer to music containing all forms of oppression, such as sexism or homo-phobia, but also to all music containing the racist n-word.

The creation of a set of criteria is, however, also immediately problematized. Kuoppala says in *Musa vai Bisnes*: “I’m just thinking about some young punk-kid... is he first going to read a theoretical manual of what is shocking in the right way, or is he just going to shock because he feels like it..?”. A presenter in a TV program *Kulttuuricocktail* further says in connection to cultural appropriation: “to me the idea, that some young kid who is enthusiastic about any type of musical genre should first read some type of a manual, seems alienating”⁴⁰. Another journalist argues: “I claim that rap was and still is a way for young people to make music without academicism” “what is often forgotten in these conversations is class differences... not everyone has access or interest in all relevant-at-the-time feminist discourses”⁴¹. What is expressed in these comments is the perceived difficulty of white people to understand the boundaries of racism and cultural appropriation. The conversation about using racist or shocking language or understanding cultural appropriation in music is seen to be too difficult to grasp without there being a “manual” or access to a university education. This is seen as concerning for the freedom of “young people” to express themselves through music. As writer Koko Hubara reminds in *Musa vai Bisnes*, conversations about racism are not a topic

⁴⁰ My translation, <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50820662?autoplay=true>

⁴¹ <https://www.hs.fi/kulttuuri/art-2000007847515.html>

exclusively discussed by people with a university background, but that the conversations are constantly held on multiple different levels and in multiple different languages.

What the conversation about cultural appropriation, then, boils down to, is who can decide what white people can or cannot, or should do within hip hop culture. The freedom of white people to operate within the hip hop field without being accused of cultural appropriation is seen to be limited by rules that are too difficult for a common person to understand. What is challenged here is the immunity of whiteness to take a universal position within a field of art, while non-white people remain representative of their race (Dyer, 1997). Claiming an “outsider” position within black culture, and deeming the rules too difficult, expresses, then, white immunity – the immunity of whiteness to appropriate the culture without taking an active antiracist stance. Furthermore, the expression of white immunity enacts white supremacy, as it supposes a superior, “objective” position within a culture that it appropriates.

4.4. Discussion: Enacting White Supremacy Through Issue Displacement

As discussed through the cases above, various expressions and enactments of whiteness can be detected in apologies for racism in the Finnish cultural field, and the surrounding media discourse. In this section I will further discuss how white supremacy is enacted through various modes of discourse that reoccur in all of the cases, namely, issue displacement through the discourse on intentionality, freedom of artistic expression, and racism as a lower class phenomenon.

Intentionality

In *Musa vai Bisnes*, Mikko Kuoppala draws attention to the difference in the artist’s intention in using certain lyrics, versus the impact they have. In all of the three apology cases the artists emphasize that their intention was never to hurt anyone, and that they are not racist. The reasons to use racist lyrics or stereotypes in their art, however differ between the cases. Whereas *Maustetytöt* explain their use of the n-word with ignorance and say that their intention was not to provoke, Kuoppala admits that he has intentionally used racist slurs in his music as provocation. In the Pirkka-Pekka Petelius case the reason for creating a racist Sámi character

is explained with wanting to make fun of the stereotypes of Sámi people, not the people themselves⁴².

As discussed with the *Maustetytöt* case, claiming ignorance, and the goodness of their intentions can be seen as an expression of white innocence. In the other two cases, however, the racist slurs or stereotypes are used intentionally despite having received criticism since the release of the cultural products in question. Pirkka-Pekka Petelius and Aake Kalliala's Sámi and Roma sketches have been consistently criticised since their very release, without leading to much action⁴³. Kuoppala also says that there have been BIPOC hip hop artists who have disagreed with his use of the racist n-word in his songs since the release of the songs. Good intentions and non-racism are claimed, while simultaneously ignoring the criticism from the BIPOC people who the stereotypes or language actually affect. Despite all of the artists saying that they would not use racist language or create racist stereotypes anymore, and apologising for the negative impact their cultural products had, behind the language of "good intentions" is years of ignoring criticism from BIPOC people. Therefore, the rhetoric of goodness of intentions functions as a mask for white supremacy in a society, which has only recently started reacting to the criticism of BIPOC people.

Freedom of artistic expression

A central way of displacing the issues of racism and white normativity is through the discourse on freedom of artistic expression. In all three cases the criticism towards using racist language or stereotypes in art is seen as somehow problematic or as a treat to the freedom of artistic expression. However, as pointed out by Abdulkarim (2021), criticising artists is also a part of freedom of speech. In the context of Kuoppala's apology, Kyrölä (2021) further argues, that criticising the use of racist language is not putting freedom of speech at stake, but the freedom to insult certain groups. Masomi further argues in *Musa vai Bisnes* that instead of white artists immediately taking the conversation to the "we-aren't-allowed-to-say-anything-anymore extreme", giving criticism to "good guys" should be normalized. Seeing criticism for racism in the Finnish cultural field as a threat to freedom of art, then, seems only to be a threat to the white normativity and white supremacy of art. Whiteness in the Finnish art and culture field

⁴² <https://yle.fi/aihe/artikkeli/2016/09/15/menneen-ajan-suomi-viihde-nayttaa-nyt-rasistiselta-pirkka-pekka-petelius-puhuu>

⁴³ See <https://piritanakkalajarvi.com/2019/11/22/stereotyyppiolla-naytetaan-paikka-yhteiskunnassa-petelius-ja-nunnukasketsit/>; <https://www.aamuposti.fi/paikalliset/1189536>

enjoys a normative and privileged position that is rarely challenged. This normative position, further allows for reproduction of whiteness and racism. As pointed out in the case of *Maustetytöt*, the person who started the conversation about whether the band should be nominated or not was the first and only brown jury member in the Emma-gala jury's history ever. Opening up the field to non-white people, and the criticism they bring to the table, then, only challenges the immunity of whiteness to insult. Therefore, equating criticism for racism with limiting freedom of speech can be seen as an attempt to silence non-white criticism, and therefore as an enactment of white supremacy.

Racism expressed through a lower class narrative voice

Derived from the discourse on freedom of artistic expression, is the conversation about using narrative voices, and fictitious characters in cultural products. One of the justifications for racist language or caricatures used in the cases, is that art allows to depict different characters. The narrative voices might represent opinions and type on language that the artist would never use in their daily life. The use of narrative voices is particularly central in the *Maustetytöt* and Mikko Kuoppala cases. What is notable, is that in both of the cases the use of racist language is written in connection with a lower class character. In the case of *Maustetytöt*, the protagonist of the song, *Tein kai lottorivini väärin*, is a person who gets high on their grandmother's flu medicine and supermarket beer, and struggles to pay their electricity bills. In the case of Kuoppala, the connection to a lower class character is two-fold. Firstly, Kuoppala explains in *Musa vai Bisnes* that in the first song that was taken down from Spotify, the n-word is used as a synonym to a slave in a post-apocalyptic fantasy world, and in the second song the n-word is used to describe a lower socio-economic status. The meaning of the n-word then is somewhat detached from the word's original use, and is used in this context as a synonym for (modern wage) slavery and lower socio-economic status. Secondly, in the second song that was taken down from Spotify, the protagonist is a societal outcast who "does not fit into an intersectional matrix". In other words, the protagonist is a lower class white person who identifies with the experience of being a "dirty person of color" in the eyes of the Finnish society. Kuoppala says that he tries to create characters that are so repulsive, that the listener wants to avoid the world becoming like that. A critic commenting the *Maustetytöt* case argues that there should be room in pop music for fictitious characters, like the idiot in *Maustetytöt's* song who things bananas

grow in Sudan⁴⁴. The racist characters and racist slurs are then outsourced to fictitious lower-class characters, which allows the artists to distance themselves from the character they've created. Kuoppala says: "I would of course never use these words in real life, but I believe that art gives the opportunity to step into the shoes of other people". Furthermore, by representing racism/racist lyrics in connection with a lower-class narrative voice, racism is made into a class problem. This underlines that racism in Finland is often conceived as a problem of uneducated lower-classes (Seikkula, 2020). Distancing themselves from the racist character, or the racist stereotype allows the artists to imitate a racist character from a moral high ground while simultaneously signaling their own virtuousness. Displacing the issue of structural racism by depicting racism as acts of ignorant lower class individuals expresses white innocence (Wekker, 2016), and enacts white supremacy.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I've analysed three public apologies for racism, and the media conversation around the apologies from a critical whiteness perspective. The focus has been on answering the question: how do Finnish public apologies for racism express and enact whiteness? While each of the cases analysed in this thesis would have enough angles and nuances to examine whiteness to deserve a thesis on their own, bringing the three cases together provides an opportunity to review whiteness in Finnish apologies for racism in different contexts and with different foci. The Pirkka-Pekka Petelius case provides insight into white melancholia and white supremacy in the context of humour and shared memory. White melancholia (Hübinette & Lundström, 2011) is expressed through a disapproval of cultural sensitivity, and a longing for a past when humor did not have to be "politically correct". The *Maustetytöt* case provides an angle to assess ignorance as an expression of white innocence, and the imaginary of the Finnish countryside as authentically white, as a site for enacting white supremacy. Claiming ignorance and innocence functions as a justification for racism (Wekker, 2016). Furthermore, the "rightful" interpretation of art is seen as an expression of white entitlement, and as a discreditation of the experiences and interpretations of non-white people. Finally the Mikko Kuoppala case provides insight into how whiteness operates within a black culture by assuming

⁴⁴ <https://www.soundi.fi/kolumnit/kolumni-koko-emma-gaalan-voisi-rajayttaa/>

a sense of universal or objective (Dyer, 1997) immunity. When that immunity is challenged, the “new rules” are deemed unfair, and too difficult to understand. Common to the conversation around all of the apologies is the displacement of the issue of racism and white normativity, to discussions of intentionality, freedom of artistic expression, and expressing racism as a lower class phenomenon. By drawing attention away from the issue of structural racism and normative whiteness, within the Finnish cultural field, the status quo of white supremacy is maintained. Seeing criticism expressed by non-white people as a challenge to the freedom of white people to express themselves freely in the Finnish cultural field, can in worst cases be used as a justification to silence non-white criticism.

As the data analysed in this thesis is collected mostly from mainstream news media sources, the voices that are represented in this thesis represent a sort of well-groomed and neat whiteness. Furthermore, the conversation and opinions of people analysed in most of the data, come from a well-spoken, predominantly educated, creative class of journalists, cultural critics, media professionals and artists. Therefore, this thesis offers a limited view, rather than an exhaustive list of expressions and enactments of whiteness in Finnish apologies for racism. Furthermore, the role of gender is not taken into consideration in my analysis. Future research could focus more closely on how class and gender play into the expressions and enactments of whiteness in Finland.

Despite this thesis focusing on how whiteness is expressed, enacted and reproduced in Finnish racism apologies and media discourse, the cases analysed in this thesis are just as much an example of the outcome of the interventions and determined criticism from Finnish BIPOC individuals and organizations, who challenge normative whiteness and white supremacy in the Finnish cultural field and society. Without these interventions and criticism there would be no apologies to analyse.

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APPENDIX 1. Checklist Ethical and Privacy of Research



CHECKLIST ETHICAL AND PRIVACY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH

INSTRUCTION

This checklist should be completed for every research study that is conducted at the Department of Public Administration and Sociology (DPAS). This checklist should be completed *before* commencing with data collection or approaching participants. Students can complete this checklist with help of their supervisor.

This checklist is a mandatory part of the empirical master's thesis and has to be uploaded along with the research proposal.

The guideline for ethical aspects of research of the Dutch Sociological Association (NSV) can be found on their website (http://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17). If you have doubts about ethical or privacy aspects of your research study, discuss and resolve the matter with your EUR supervisor. If needed and if advised to do so by your supervisor, you can also consult Dr. Jennifer A. Holland, coordinator of the Sociology Master's Thesis program.

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

Project title: White Apologies – Analysis of Racism Apologies as Expressions and enactments of Whiteness in Finland

Name, email of student: Oona Kanerva, 483859ok@student.eur.nl

Name, email of supervisor: Willem Schinkel, schinkel@essb.eur.nl

Start date and duration: 11-01-2021, 5 months

Is the research study conducted within DPAS YES - NO

If 'NO': at or for what institute or organization will the study be conducted?
(e.g. internship organization)

PART II: HUMAN SUBJECTS

1. Does your research involve human participants. YES - **NO**

If 'NO': skip to part V.

Part V: Data storage and backup

Where and when will you store your data in the short term, after acquisition?

All my data will be digital data, acquired from online newspaper articles, social media and other online sources. The data will consist of transcripts of online interviews, screenshots of social media posts, and copies of online newspaper articles. I will store the data on my laptop and on an external USB stick or a hard drive.

Note: indicate for separate data sources, for instance for paper-and pencil test data, and for digital data files.

Who is responsible for the immediate day-to-day management, storage and backup of the data arising from your research?

I will be responsible for the management of the data arising from my research.

How (frequently) will you back-up your research data for short-term data security?

I will back up the data every time I find new data sources. After I am finished with data gathering I will back up the data on the external USB/har drive weekly.

In case of collecting personal data how will you anonymize the data?

All of the data in my research will be collected from publicly available sources. Data collected from people's personal, but publicly available, social media accounts will be organised in folders that do not directly name the person or their social media account handle. Instead the folders will be named with a code.

Note: It is advisable to keep directly identifying personal details separated from the rest of the data. Personal details are then replaced by a key/ code. Only the code is part of the database with data and the list of respondents/research subjects is kept separate.

PART VI: SIGNATURE

Please note that it is your responsibility to follow the ethical guidelines in the conduct of your study. This includes providing information to participants about the study and ensuring confidentiality in storage and use of personal data. Treat participants respectfully, be on time at appointments, call participants when they have signed up for your study and fulfil promises made to participants.

Furthermore, it is your responsibility that data are authentic, of high quality and properly stored. The principle is always that the supervisor (or strictly speaking the Erasmus University Rotterdam) remains owner of the data, and that the student should therefore hand over all data to the supervisor.

Hereby I declare that the study will be conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Department of Public Administration and Sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam. I have answered the questions truthfully.

Name student: Oona Kanerva

Name (EUR) supervisor: Willem Schinkel

Date: 18-03-2021

Date: 18-03-2021