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Racializing categorization among young people in Finland

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Abstract

This article explores the terms by which racial difference is articulated and constructed in the everyday life of young people in Finland, by analysing interviews with children and adolescents who have one parent with an immigrant or foreign background, or who have been adopted from other countries. In addition to the categories that clearly arise from the discourses of race, expressions that in other contexts may have nothing to do with racism are also sometimes put to use for racializing categorization, especially ethnic labels and colour terms. Even though many categorizations which are used among young Finns can be found in other societies too, the analysis shows differences not only between different societies, but also between children and young people, which highlights the problems in using racial categories as analytical tools. The article also explores the conditions for the construction of racialized identities, by examining how individuals negotiate categories available to them, and how they themselves express their positionings in racialized social relations. The analysis of how these are intertwined is suggested here as a method that can reveal special characteristics of racism in a given society. It also highlights the tensions and contradictions that set bounds for the agency of those who are subordinated in racialized social relations.

Keywords

ethnic and racial minority youth, ethnicity, racial categories, racialized identities, racism

In the past decade Finland has experienced an increasing number of marriages between Finns and people from other countries, and transnational adoptions as well as a growth in the number of descendants of immigrant parents. As a result, there are more and more children and young people who identify themselves as Finns but whose identity as 'true' Finns is questioned because of their phenotype.¹ Even though these young people have grown up in Finland as Finnish citizens, and they know the culture as well as their peers, in everyday encounters with other people they are often categorized as racial and/or ethnic minorities and they, like many immigrants, are potential victims of racism.

The purpose of my ongoing research is to locate and reveal racism and racializing discourses and practices affecting the everyday life of Finnish children and adolescents who have one parent with an immigrant or foreign background, or who have been adopted from other countries. There are no readily accepted terms for the descriptions of how my research subjects are positioned in racialized relations in Finland. Even estimating the number of Finns belonging to racial minorities is difficult, as there are no statistics available. Neither the government nor local authorities collect racial data, nor do official statistics specify 'race'. In international comparison, there has been little research on racism in Finland (Suomen Akatemia/Academy of Finland, 1999). Concepts like 'racialization', 'racial categories' and 'racial identities' are not common in Finnish research on racism, where the focus has been on the attitudes of the majority, on the integration of immigrants or on ethnic minorities.

Some of my interviewees were born in, and all of them had lived most of their lives in Finland. I do not want to question their Finnishness and their belonging by categorizing them as immigrants. Also, since they identify themselves (also) as Finns, to call their ethnicities something other than Finnish would be difficult, even a racializing act. Within the framework of my research both 'immigrant' and 'member of ethnic minority' appear problematic, even ethically debatable definitions.

Evasion of the concept of 'race' in Finnish discussions can partly be explained by the historical burden that the word carries with it. Censoring 'race' in research is a widespread phenomenon (see Cowlshaw, 2000) with consequences for everyday discussions in Finland. By enclosing the word within quotation marks, I not only want to mark 'races' as social constructions, but I also seek to express discomfort in using the concept.² On the one hand, speaking about 'race' may reproduce ideas that I want to resist as a researcher. On the other hand, not using the concept, or using other concepts, make focusing on racially fashioned categorizations and racially coded experiences difficult. Identifying the terms and categories by which racial difference is constructed in Finland, and especially in the everyday life of young people, becomes an unavoidable research question.

This paper examines racializing categorizations, and looks at them as the conditions for the production of racialized identities in the everyday life of children and young people. The notion of identity deployed here is neither essential nor enduring, but strategic and positional (see Hall, 1998). While confronting racializing categorizations, individuals are forced to negotiate their positionings in racialized social relations. Even though racialization is about (and racial categories are products of) unequal power relations, racialized identities are something more than just internalized ideas of how we are perceived and categorized by other people. They are about an individual's understanding of racism and '... the meaning each of us has constructed or is constructing about what it means to be a White person or a person

of colour in a race-conscious society' (Tatum, 1999: xviii). By looking at racializing categorizations, and how young people negotiate categories available to them, I also examine individuals' agency in racialized social relations.

METHODOLOGY

There are no clear criteria in terms of which people could be categorized into different racial groups. In the context of social research, 'race':

... refers to the way in which members of a society perceive differences between groups in that society and define boundaries of such groups, taking into account physical characteristics such as skin colour. Such groups are not identified merely in terms of physical attributes but in terms of their situation in a particular society, which makes them socially distinct groups in their own eyes and in the eyes of others. (Bulmer, 1986: 55)

As an analytical tool, 'race' is problematic (Miles, 1989: 72–5). In order to examine 'the way in which members of society perceive differences between groups' and to study 'their situation in a particular society', 'race' needs to be understood as an organizing discursive category (Hall, 2000: 222). Following the idea of Robert Miles (1989: 75), I use the concept of racialization to refer to the processes whereby 'the discourse of "race" is employed in an attempt to label, constitute and exclude social collectivities' (Miles, 1989: 73; see also Solomos and Back, 1996: 8–11).³

In order to identify the different manifestations of racism, both questions of who can belong and questions of marking the differences among individuals are essential (Hall, 1998). All definitions of racism highlight the processes of differentiation. In most definitions power relations are also emphasized: 'races' are creations of and reproduced by unequal power relations. Today many scholars remind us that questions of how 'races' are constituted and labelled, how racial difference is produced and reproduced, as well as the implications of racism for social life, have to be understood in their changing historical contexts (e.g. Goldberg and Solomos, 2002; Rattansi and Westwood, 1994; Solomos and Back, 1996; Wade, 2002). The way 'race' has been used as a variable in official demographic statistics and in empirical social research has varied both between different countries and within particular societies at different times (Bulmer, 1986; Kertzer and Arel, 2002). 'Changes in terminology reflect both historical development and the changing politics of "race"' (Bulmer, 1986: 66). In the 'white landscape of Finland' (Huttunen, 2002: 130), where the number of people with foreign background is relatively small and the most typical phenotype is described as 'blond hair and blue eyes', the criteria for whiteness and non-whiteness are not necessarily the same as they might be in other countries.

I began my ethnographic fieldwork by approaching young Finns who were either adopted from other countries or who had one parent with a 'foreign background', and parents who had children who fit in these groups. The criteria for Finnishness here were that my research subjects should be Finnish citizens, speak Finnish as their mother tongue, know the culture as completely as their peers, and identify themselves as Finns. In order to avoid racialization from my side, I decided to use the individual's experiences of othering and racism as the only criteria for belonging to my focus group. By using many different channels I approached anyone who (or whose

children) belong to the above-mentioned groups, regardless of my own ideas of who can pass and who cannot pass as a 'white Finn'. I asked whether their (or their children's) Finnishness had ever been questioned, and if they wanted to be interviewed.⁴

The impossibility of placing people into racial groups merely according to their (parents') country of origin was no surprise. A young woman who has ties to South America said: 'Most people think I am from the Philippines or Thailand'. Also, my 'ethnographic eye' appeared to be a questionable instrument for measuring how individuals are perceived and categorized by other people, and who can and who cannot pass as a Finn (see Rastas, 2002). There were people who to me looked like anyone in the 'white' majority, but who wanted to share their experiences of being different – and of racism.

The fieldwork undertaken between 1999 and 2001 comprised participatory observation, discussions, email correspondence and interviews with young people (22 interviewees) and parents (over 30 interviewees), as well as participation in anti-racist activities. For almost two years I also wrote – as part of my field notes – a 'mother's diary' where I carefully documented events in my children's everyday life. They are adopted from Ethiopia, and they were between 3–7 years old at that time. My focus here is on young people's interviews, even though during the analysis I occasionally point to the other elements of my data. The 22 young people I interviewed have ties to 13 different countries in Africa, Asia, the Middle East, South America and other European countries.⁵ The interviews were conducted in Finnish, most of them were taped and transcribed, and six of them were carried out via e-mail correspondence. During the interviews the following themes were discussed: interviewees' ideas of belonging to Finland on the one hand and to the other country/nation/culture on the other hand, encounters where their Finnishness had been questioned, their experiences of othering and racism and their thoughts about racism and multiculturalism in general.

Individuals' means of negotiating 'racial' meanings attributed to them are dependent on many different things: their age, their gender, their previous experiences of racism, support available from other people, the way questions of racism are understood in that particular society and how the person herself is positioned in racialized relations (Rastas, 2004a). The heterogeneity of the group of interviewees makes it possible to address these differences, and to examine situational elements related to racializing categorization and the production of racialized identities. Since the interviewees represent different age groups (12 girls and 10 boys; of whom 3 were children under 12 years old, 10 were adolescents between 12 and 18, and 9 were young adults between 20 and 31), their stories also allow us to focus on how categorization is implemented and negotiated in different age groups. Some of the stories told in the interviews are memories of childhood, so part of the data is retrospective. The ethnographic approach employed during the process makes available a lot of background information needed in the analysis of the particular interviews and the stories included in them.

The methods used in the analysis are based on discourse analysis and a narrative approach. The point of departure in the analysis is stories of 'strange encounters' (Ahmed, 2000); meetings where the interviewee has already been recognized as a stranger and where the figure of the stranger is processed. Their difference is thus both embodied and socially constructed. The first phase in the analysis was to identify

those stories where other people have perceived my interviewees as 'different'. Here I have focused on stories in which the 'difference' is also named (cf. Rastas, 2002).

What kinds of namings and labellings can be identified as racializing categories? I understand racializing categories as articulations of the subject positions available for individuals and groups in the discursive practices produced and reproduced by racism. In order to identify them, both meanings given to different things and power relations embedded in encounters have to be examined (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001). I have analysed the interviewees' stories of encounters, asking how the words which are used for naming the difference, and especially meanings attached to them in Finnish culture, are situated within the discourse of 'race', and how power relations shape the encounter.⁶ When examining power relations in the interviewees' narratives I have focused on individuals' potential for defining others, on their ability to resist other people's categorizations and on their ability to form self-definitions. Answers to the questions listed above are used as criteria for the existence (or non-existence) of racism, or anti-racism as an indicator of racism. Any namings and labellings which, in my interpretation, are used in encounters where racism is evident, are understood here as racializing categories. In addition, racist slurs, and categories which clearly arise from the discourses of race (e.g. 'coloured'), as well as expressions which in other contexts may have nothing to do with racism, are sometimes put to use for racializing categorization, as I show in the analysis.

The notion of racialized identity refers here to those aspects of an individual's agency in which his or her 'racial being' is negotiated and performed. These are examined here both by focusing on the interviewees' reactions towards other people's categorizations (as manifested in their stories) and by analysing how they express their embodied difference and their positionings in racialized social relations. In order to do that, and in order to emphasize the multiple, coexisting aspects of the processes where racialized identities are constructed, I have tried to take note of the diversity of experiences and 'subjugated knowledges' (Harding, 1987: 188) included in my data. I have constructed a story of each interviewee by coding and rearranging the following information: general background information concerning the interviewee (age, sex, family members, living conditions, education and working experiences), the interviewee's relation to other people who belong to ethnic/racial minorities, experiences of racism (gazes, comments, bullying, racist violence, etc.), definitions and expressions regarding her/his difference (expressions of embodied difference and cultural difference, as well as comparisons like 'I am the only one of this colour in my class' or 'sometimes I've thought it would be nice to have blond hair'), and the interviewee's relation to Finnishness on the one hand and to 'the other country/culture' on the other hand as manifested in her stories of belonging, etc.⁷ These narratives constructed by myself create the context(s) in which I have analysed, for example, why individuals react so differently to certain categorizations.

The nature of my data does not allow generalizations about how 'particular looking' people or people with ties to particular countries are categorized, or what their racialized identities might be like. Instead I intend to provide a description of how racializing categorization occurs in young people's everyday life, and illustrate the complex conditions where racialized identities are negotiated. I see that as a more expedient project in a 'postmodern' condition (see Rattansi and Westwood, 1994: 4), in which 'populations appear to draw and redraw, maintain and breach, narrow and

widen the boundaries around themselves and others' (Rattansi, 1994: 53). Identifying and encoding the expressions affiliated to racialization, and especially focusing on variation and contradictions within the data, make possible those generalizations I have made here (like the occurrence of certain expressions), especially since my ethnographic data as a whole give support for the generality of my findings and interpretations.

DIMENSIONS OF DIFFERENCE

Most of the interviewees are often categorized as non-Finns, or differently from other Finns because they belong to the 'visibly minority youth' (Andersson, 2003: 75). The distinctions are drawn in the cases of those who are not able to, or who do not want to, hide their not belonging to the 'white' Finns. In the case of many of my interviewees, like those who have been adopted from Africa or Asia, seeing and telling the difference is easy. However, among the interviewees there are also people whose difference is perceived by other people only occasionally.

The interviewees' stories reveal a long list of techniques and practices of differentiation. Difference can be constructed with questions or comments referring to someone's 'not belonging', their 'belonging to somewhere else' or their 'natural characteristics', like the alleged sense of rhythm. It can also be made with unsympathetic gazes, or even with friendly gazes with charitable ethos (Rastas, 2002). Noticing or making the difference is not always intended to harm someone, but most of the interviewees have faced overt racism: various forms of harassment, discrimination, exclusion and even racist violence (Rastas, 2004 a). What is important here is not other people's intentions but the meanings constructed in these encounters. In order to contextualize racial categorization, and to understand how it differs from other forms of differentiation, we need to examine what is to be negotiated in encounters where difference is constructed.

What are the questions most of my interviewees have to negotiate because of their real or supposed ties to other countries and cultures? The first and the most common issue is their relation to Finland and Finnishness. It is asked (sometimes covertly) by other people with questions like: 'Are you really from Finland?', 'Are you like half-Finnish?' or 'How is it possible that your Finnish is so good?' The following extract is from an interview with a 23-year-old woman adopted from Asia:

Every time I start to answer their questions, always the same questions, it takes me an hour, because they get more and more interested in certain aspects of my life. Still these conversations don't take us anywhere. Somehow I always wish that the other person is interested in me, that they want to get to know me as a person, as a nice person . . . to have a cup of coffee or lunch with me or something, or to know what I think about the world and But their only questions are where are you from and who are you.

AR: You mean that you have to tell them your personal history?

Yeah. Before they accept me. If they accept me. And after I've told them what they want to know they just leave.

The question 'Where are you from?' contains the message: 'I think you don't belong here'. In the encounters like this the other person is constructed as a stranger who needs to be located and categorized. She is not given any opportunities to be a fellow

(wo)man, or just a nice person. Along with the question 'Where are you from?' is also the question of 'Why are you here?', which assumes many different forms in people's stories: 'Were you adopted?'; 'Are you a refugee?' or 'So your parents are NOT refugees?' Sometimes attesting to certain aspects of Finnishness is enough to satisfy other people's curiosity. A young man (28 years old) adopted from Africa explains: 'It is because I AM so Finnish, that my skin colour fades away quite rapidly. I can see they are a little bit nervous at first when they talk with me, but then, I can see it when they relax.' Usually, however, people are asked to tell others more about their (supposed) ties to the other country/nation/culture.

Some people are more welcome than others. In Finland refugees, among them especially Somalis, occupy the lowest position in this hierarchy (e.g. Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2002; Pohjanpää et al., 2003), and being categorized as such is usually expressed in the narratives as a very negative experience. In the interviewees' memories of childhood, proving their Finnishness and their many ties to Finland, and proving that they are not refugees, has not prevented other people from calling them 'refugees'. In encounters like this 'refugee' can be read only as a pejorative, excluding category based on the idea that somebody is out of place. 'Refugee' is a term in which the 'social regulations of "belonging"' (Brah, 1996: 192) are articulated, and here the standard for belonging is based on ideas of 'blood ties', not, for example, on international and national laws where definitions of refugeeism are generally articulated.

Someone's Finnishness can also be probed by guessing her relation to her family. 'Are they your real parents?' and 'Is s/he your real child?' are questions that are repeated not only in adoptees' stories but also in stories of those perceived as 'non-white' with a Finnish parent. Biological ties to a Finnish parent are considered as some kind of evidence of belonging to the Finnish nation. However, racism has produced ambiguous ideas of when 'blood matters'. Racial categories are reproduced both by emphasizing and by denying the blood bonds. This is evident if we look at how 'mixed race' children and their families are treated in different societies (e.g. Mahtani, 2002; Olumide, 2002; Parker and Song, 2001; Twine, 1999). When these children are categorized, one parent's blood matters and the other parent's blood becomes irrelevant. These processes are also gendered. In my data, 'white' fathers of 'non-white' children are not harassed in the streets, and their relation to their children (whether adoptive or biological) is not openly questioned by other people. Instead, 'white' mothers and their 'non-white' children have often heard people wondering 'Is she really your mother/child?' A Finnish mother of an eight-year-old daughter (whose father is from Africa) tells in the interview: 'It has also happened, downtown, more than once, that strange men have shouted to me "You've slept with a black man!" or "You've slept with a nigger".'

Racializing categorization is most apparent when it is expressed in pejorative expressions. In young people's stories the most common expression is 'neekeri' ('negro' or 'nigger' depending on the context). Every interviewee who is assumed to have ties to Africa has been called by that name many times. But not only those with (alleged) ties to Africa are signified with the 'n-word': many of those who have blue eyes and blond hair, and those whose (parent's) country of origin is in Asia, in the Middle East or in another European country have been labelled in this way. In Finland people often say that in the Finnish language 'neekeri' does not necessarily have negative connotations, 'that it only means an African', and that only the other version of the word, 'nekru' ('nigger'), is pejorative. However, none of the interviewees talk

about the word 'neckeri' as neutral or harmless. On the contrary, the use of the word is seen either as overtly racist or, in some cases, as an indicator of other people's stupidity, ignorance and unawareness of the changes that have taken place in Finnish society. In addition to the n-word there are also other racist slurs (like '*äblämi*', '*rättipää*' referring to Arabs) which young people sometimes use, but in light of my data the most prevalent one is the n-word. The word is especially harmful for those who are supposed to have ties to Africa because of their phenotype, not only because they are called by that name more often than by others, but also because 'No I am not' is an answer that in their case is not accepted by other people. To say 'Nobody should be called that name' is difficult in a society where the use of the word is still common among the majority.

The 'n-word' is well known also in young children's reality. However, there is another word which is used the same way, and which seems to be a kind of a children's substitute for the 'n-word'. Among children under school age this common word for racial categorization is 'mustalainen'. Even though the first part of the word, *musta-*, means *black*, the only meaning for the word 'mustalainen', among adults, is 'a gipsy', a person who belongs to the Roma community. In young children's reality, as shown both in the interviews and in my fieldnotes, other children can call any child who cannot pass as a 'white Finn' 'mustalainen'. The use of the word 'mustalainen' among children illustrates that between children and young people there are differences in which words are used for racializing categorization. The word 'mustalainen' is also a good example of how both ethnic labels and colouring talk can be used, and sometimes become intertwined, in racializing categorization.

ETHNIC LABELS IN RACIALIZING CATEGORIZATION

Ethnicity, according to most definitions, refers to numerous aspects of social life: language, religion, myth of common origin, etc. (Eriksen, 1993). In the light of most definitions of ethnicity, two of my interviewees, a 25-year-old man and a 27-year-old woman, could be defined as 'ethnically alike'. They have spent part of their childhood in the same country in South America (where their fathers come from), but they have grown up in Finland. They speak Finnish as their mother tongue, but they speak Spanish too. They both identify themselves as Finns, but they say that to some extent they 'somehow' identify themselves also with their fathers' cultures. The young man stated that other people in Finland have not questioned his Finnishness, and that he has not experienced much racism. He, unlike the young woman, can pass as 'white'. Her experiences of racism are continual. She explains that as long as people stare at her in the street, which according to her happens every day, she cannot really feel like a Finn. She describes her relation to Finnishness as 'defensive'. The discourse of race, which signifies their bodies differently, makes 'being a Finn' complicated for her.

Most definitions of ethnicity emphasize processes of group identification, while 'race . . . - as distinct from ethnicity - is not simply a matter of what one calls oneself' (Bashi, 1998: 964). If questions of genetics and phenotype are not considered as the most decisive dimensions of ethnicity, to explain the differences between these two young interviewees' experiences by means of ethnicity is difficult. The processes where racial categories are formed and racialized identities are constructed, are

socially and politically different from the processes of ethnic categorization and identification (Kertzer and Arel, 2002). This, in my opinion, reduces the usability of ethnicity as an analytical concept in studies on racism. 'Individuals have *both* ethnic and racial identities, at one and the same time', but the power relations embedded in racializing categorization make it very difficult for some people to choose their ethnicity (Bashi, 1998: 962). Still, ethnicity and 'race'/racism are intertwined in many ways.⁸ Questions of racism cannot totally be disconnected from questions of ethnicity, especially because of the processes that are described as 'the racialization of ethnicity' (Harrison, 1995: 225; Mahtani, 2002: 71).

Referring to someone's ties to other places or cultures, or her phenotype, is not necessarily meant to offend or exclude. To assume those ties because of somebody's phenotype can be defined as a racializing act, because here perception is structured by the signification of human biological characteristics. 'Ethnic difference' is often made through naturalizing and essentializing, and thus racializing, discourses. However, if, despite other people's (mis)interpretations, an individual has the power and possibilities for self-definitions and alliances based on her sense of belonging, not on other people's categorizations, it is difficult, even impossible to identify the unequal power relations included (according to most definitions) in racism. The racialization of ethnicity is most apparent in situations in which individuals' possibilities to choose their ethnic alliances are constrained, and where some ethnicities are signified as negative/positive, as less/more valuable than others. 'Biological racism and cultural differentialism, therefore, constitute not two different systems, but racism's two registers' (Hall, 2000: 223), where what anthropologist Verena Stolcke has described as 'cultural fundamentalism' (see Hannerz, 1999: 395) serves an alternative doctrine of exclusion. The most important question, then, is not whether differences are labelled as racial or as ethnic in everyday language, but when - and whose - differences are manifested, what kinds of meanings are attributed to them, what their social and cultural consequences are and, above all, who has the control over the definitions and namings.

Ethnic labels emerge both in the interviewees' self-definitions and in their stories of encounters where other people have categorized them. In my interpretation, ethnic labels are not always used for racial categorization, but rather to refer to, for example, the place of birth, or a kind of a 'sense of belonging' and affection towards 'that country/culture/nation'. But especially in children's reality particular ethnic labels are often used for open, intentional racism.

Words like 'Chinese' or 'African' are not intrinsically negative expressions, but when a child asks 'Mother, is Asian a dirty word like African?' (fieldnotes) we know that she has learned that negative meanings can be attributed to that word. Those interviewees who have one parent from Japan, tell that as children the most insulting words of abuse were 'jap', 'nip' and 'Chinese'. In the interviewees' stories not only those who (or whose other parent) were born in China are called 'Chinese', but also those who were adopted from Thailand, or whose other parent is from Vietnam. Even children adopted from Africa can be called 'Chinese' by other children (diary, 2 June 2001). Children who know each other seldom need to refer to their or their parent's country of origin. Somebody's ties to other countries seem to become negotiable predominantly when someone's 'foreignness' is used against her, as an instrument for abuse. In those situations people with (alleged) ties to any African country are usually called either 'neekeri' or 'Somali', those who have ties to any Asian countries become 'Chinese' or 'nip' and ties to Russia make people 'Russki'.

Some of these expressions are acknowledged as pejorative and racist, easily identifiable as racializing categories. If other children in a day care centre or at school know that someone was born, for example, in Nigeria but they call her 'Somali', or they keep on calling 'Chinese' those who have no ties to China, their using these names cannot be understood as harmless, referring to other people's ethnic background. In cases like these the issue is to show someone her position within racialized power relations. Representations of the Other, as well as discursive strategies by which they are constructed (see e.g. Hall, 1997), can also be found in young children's reality (cf. Tatum, 1999). This kind of naming takes place even before school, at the day care centres and in the playgrounds, and children are conscious of the negative connotations of these labellings, even when they do not understand the 'real meaning' of the words. At school age, the hierarchy of nations and places (countries and continents) is already entrenched (Gordon and Lahelma, 2003).

Ethnic labels, which in some contexts can be understood as 'neutral' with regard to racism but are also used as means for racism, are especially difficult for the objects of racism. When words are announced as harmless and politically correct, individuals are denied arguments by which they could resist other people's categorizations. When somebody's (parents') 'place of origin' becomes a pejorative word, how can she call herself by a name that indicates her ties to that place? Still, that is what people have to do if other people do not accept their 'being from here'.

As mentioned above, the word 'mustalainen' is a Finnish word meaning a person who belongs to the Roma community. Even though people who belong to the Roma sometimes talk about themselves as a particular 'race', the Roma in Finland, even among the Roma themselves, are considered to be an ethnic minority. The generality of the word 'mustalainen' as a pejorative expression among children could be considered as an example of how ethnic labels are used for racializing categorizations. The problem with this interpretation is that young children who use that expression sometimes have no idea of that particular ethnic group. I still remember how I tried to educate my older child and her friends when she was only four years old:

First: you are not a 'mustalainen', since 'mustalainen' means somebody who belongs to the group that some people call 'mustalaiset' (Gypsies), but which in my opinion should rather be called 'romanit' (the Roma), since the word 'mustalainen' (Gypsy) has pejorative connotations and it refers rather to their skin colour than to their culture . . . other children should not call you 'mustalainen' because you don't belong to that group and because . . . even though there's nothing wrong in being 'mustalainen' (Gypsy), I mean 'romani' (Roma) . . .

I had to stop explaining when I saw their befuddled eyes with no sign of understanding. It took some more years, and encounters with people who belong to the Roma, before they even understood who 'the Roma' are. For children who do not know who the Roma are, the term 'mustalainen' indicates somebody's (skin, hair, eyes) colour, and at the same time the hierarchy of colours.

COLOURING TALK

I see the use of colouring talk as the most likely sign of discourses where racialization can be found. As the cultural politics of racism relies on visual processes of

'othering' (Yue, 2000), 'color-coded humanity' (Gilroy, 2001: 47) provides the basis for racism, which in turn reproduces its 'truth'. If we consider 'race' 'as a precarious discursive construction' (Gilroy, 2002: 251), colour-talk, the use of words like 'black' and 'white', is the core of this discourse. In my data, colouring talk is apparent in stories of how individuals are perceived by other people, in the interviewees' own definitions of their difference, and in their ways of talking about racialized relations.

In the interviewees' stories there are only a few examples where they have been called 'black' ('*musta*') by other young children. A young woman adopted from Asia remembers how another child in a kindergarten had asked her 'Why you are so black?' She had answered, that where she comes from people have dark skin, and then she had added: 'And by the way, I'm not black, I'm brown! Don't you know the colours?' In my diary there are plenty of stories where my children talk about differences in skin colours, but the word 'black' is never mentioned, neither in their stories of how other children have talked about them nor in their self-definitions. Young children have not learned that the term 'black' can be used as a signifier of racial difference, since among adults those with dark skin are usually referred to by using different terms, like '*immigrants*', '*Somalis*' or '*negroes*'.

Stories of encounters where expressions like '*mustalainen*', '*poo-colour*', '*mud-colour*'⁹ or '*neekeri*' had been used are all stories of negative experiences, usually told as examples of racism they have experienced. Those who had been called by these names never talk about themselves in terms of these expressions. Sometimes small children talk about differences in skin colours with expressions like 'brown', 'different colour', 'this/that colour' or (some one is) 'not of the Finnish colour'. In the interviews expressions like 'brown' and 'different colour' are never talked about as negative. Not all the colour terms have negative connotations, and differences may be talked about as long as negative meanings are not attributed to them.

Sometimes the fact that even small children perceive colours and categorize people in terms of colours, has been used as evidence of an 'underlying cognitive predisposition' of racial categorization, and thus as evidence of 'natural' behaviour among human beings (Wade, 2002: 32–3). However, the use of the word '*mustalainen*' among Finnish children, the way that particular word is sometimes chosen from all the 'colour words' available, is a good example of how perceiving and talking in terms of colours should 'equally well be evidence that even very young children pick up these social classifications' (Wade, 2002: 33). In spite of the ostensible neutrality of the word '*mustalainen*', as an ethnic label, that word carries a lot of negative connotations. That is also a clear expression of the position of the Roma minority in Finnish society. Even though small children are sometimes said to be colour-blind, they do notice physical differences such as skin color. They also learn very early that colour can be turned against you.

The use of colouring talk changes when children grow up. Expressions which can be characterized as childish (e.g. '*poo-colour*') disappear, as well as '*mustalainen*', as soon as the 'real meaning' of the word is learnt. Also the term black becomes more familiar. Children at school and especially young people are already aware that they can be called 'black', and that other people see them as 'black'. They have learnt that negative meanings are attributed to the word black, but they also learn new, positive meanings, especially through the media. In films, for example, 'blacks' are not always bad guys: they can even be heroes. They are 'brothers' and 'sisters', they can resist 'white' racists and make fun of 'white' people. The meaning of 'black' as a collective

racialized identity (see Britton, 1999) has become familiar especially through hip-hop culture and rap. Snowboarders in Finland can be described as one of those youth cultures that have been influenced by hip hop. In their own journal the word 'nigga' is used both to refer to 'black' people, in a very positive and even admirable tone, and sometimes also to themselves, as 'brothers' who want to differentiate themselves from the (racist) mainstream (Markkanen, 2003: 39). In the city of Joensuu young immigrants from Russia have, among other immigrants, faced a lot of racism. They are people who, to some extent, could pass as 'white', but they have started to reject racism by adopting the hip hop culture and, ironically, by calling each other 'niggas' (Keskisalo, 2003: 136, 152). If being 'black' in Finland can also be 'cool', why do those who are seen as 'black' avoid these expressions as self-definitions?

NEGOTIATING RACIALIZING CATEGORIZATIONS

The coping strategies available to children seem to be few. The way racism is understood and discussed in Finland makes it difficult to express personal experiences of racism. Many of my interviewees have confronted these situations alone, without any help from other people, and without supportive collectivities where negative experiences could have been shared and processed (Rastas, 2004a). In a social environment like this, the danger of internalizing the negative, racist meanings is apparent. In the interviews there are stories of how some young people talk very negatively about their country of origin, how they have avoided other 'visibly different' people's company, and how they have created different kinds of strategies to 'not look different' (Rastas, 2002). However, most of the interviews can also be read as narratives of survival, and as narratives of how individuals have managed to turn their negative experiences into useful social and cultural capital. But in most stories about namings and labellings, the interviewees' agency seems to disappear. To oppose racializing categorization is usually explained as either impossible or as frustrating and useless, especially in the case of racist slurs (see Rastas, 2004a). Also ethnic labels seem to be tricky categories. Those whose parents are not Chinese or Somali (or who were not born in China or Somalia) have some possibilities to say 'No, I'm not Chinese/Somali', unlike those who (or whose parents) are 'from there'. Sometimes young people deny their (parent's) roots in order to resist these categorizations, or in order to get a girlfriend, as a 16-year-old boy confesses during the interview. Children and young people are not equipped to explain to others that their ideas of those countries/cultures are stereotypical and pejorative. However, some people say 'It did not bother me' when they talk about other people's categorizations. There are also some stories in which expressions that are known as pejorative are used for self-definitions. It is important to look at their stances more carefully, since this kind of behaviour is often used as an example of a high level of self-confidence, which is offered easily as a solution when speaking about the problem of racism toward children.

A girl (16 years old, father from Asia) tells that she did not really get upset when her classmates called her 'a negro', since '... you cannot really take it as an ... I mean, can they really mean it? They can't.' An explanation for her reactions can be found in the interview, when she describes her embodied difference: 'my skin colour is maybe a little bit different, not that brown, rather yellowish ... I have dark hair, but usually people have not noticed the difference.'

A young man (23 years old, father from South America) explains:

Racism is not racism if you can take it as absurd and ridiculous. I think the most important thing is irony. I've even made fun of my name. . . . (in the army during the military service) I called myself a negro and mulatto, like I said 'I'm your home-negro' or Since when you do it yourself you take the weapons from them, you take off their power to name. So, I didn't have any problems . . .

This young man, who has no problems calling himself a 'negro' or a 'mulatto', is in his own words: '. . . not noticed as different in public places'.

If somebody's blackness or African-ness is dubious even in other people's eyes, she does not really have to deny it. She has the possibility to ironize and to turn insults into humor. For those to whom, as Frantz Fanon (1986: 110) writes 'consciousness of the body is solely a negative activity . . . (and) . . . the body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty', and who are more experienced in the negative meanings attributed to particular words, irony is a much more difficult and less alluring strategy. Only one of those interviewees who really are perceived as 'black', as 'negro', refers to these kinds of strategies. He is a 29 year-old man who was adopted from Africa as a baby. He says that sometimes 'I make jokes of my phenotype and my difference just to show other people that they are allowed to do it too. They really get surprised when I do it first.' His ability to 'make jokes' arises, in my interpretation, from his status as a much-travelled, successful male university student, whose 'cultural capital', also due to his 'white' family, is something many 'white' young Finns can only envy. His joking is a message for the others that 'I'm okay with my phenotype'. When '. . . people try to test me, when they try to find my limits . . .', he has the power to draw the lines, to say '. . . Hey, try to raise the level of the conversation'.

During the interview the above-quoted young man underlines his role as 'a kind of pioneer' in breaking the negative stereotypes related to male Africans, and he is definitely aware of the many positive meanings of the word 'black'. He uses the expression 'black' repeatedly when he explains other people's reactions to his difference, but never as a self-definition. Instead, he uses the expression 'black-skinned' ('mustaihoinen'). Those interviewees who have (more) experiences of racism are very careful in how they express their embodied difference and their positionings in racialized relations. For all of them, 'black' as a self-definition, seems to be too risky. In light of my interviews, as well as my field notes, in Finland only those young people who are not 'black' in the eyes of other people, can safely talk about themselves as 'black'. My argument is that, unlike in some other societies, in Finland among people who belong to my focus group neither 'black' nor any other word used by other people as a racial category has become a political term to express collective racialized identities.¹⁰

In order to find words for 'Us, subordinated in racialized relations', I focused on the interviewees' expressions of their embodied difference and their expressions referring to 'other people like me'. In those expressions both 'I' and 'Us' are articulated either in colouring talk or as non-Finnishness. As mentioned above, all young interviewees identify themselves generally as Finns and they even underline their Finnishness. But when they talk about racism they position themselves above and beyond Finnishness, and Finnishness becomes a byword for whiteness. Most of the interviewees find it impossible to position themselves as Finns without also proclaiming their 'non-whiteness'. 'My embodied difference' as well as 'Us' are both expressed

by using terms referring to non-whiteness: 'brown', 'non-white', 'not of the Finnish colour' or just 'different colour', and 'black-skinned' in the case of the young man quoted above.

Individuals' slight possibilities to resist racial categorization and definitions related to them does not mean, however, that they do not have any agency in racialized social relations. Their agency is not limited to their refusing to adopt certain words as self-definitions. While the interviewees talk about themselves as 'non-white' Finns, they, at the same time, define 'white' Finns. This means that 'whites' too become visible in racialized power relations, and whiteness, which in Finland among the majority has been seen as free from any meanings because of its normative nature (see Dyer, 1997), becomes defined, also with negative attributes. In these definitions 'whites' (Finns) are not only privileged, but also ignorant, unfeeling and insensitive, people who are unwilling and unable to understand 'our' experiences of racism (Rastas, 2004a). Even though the experiences and ideas of 'whites' are usually shared only among those categorised as 'non-white' (Rastas, 2004a), it is obvious that also in Finland those categorized as 'white' will increasingly find themselves in situations in which they must negotiate racializing categorization, i.e. the negative meanings of whiteness attributed to them.

Among the Finnish Roma, a group having a long history of being victims of racist oppression, people belonging to the majority have already long been called by words referring to white colour. Throughout Finnish history, the Roma have been marginalized both owing to subordination by the majority and because of their efforts to maintain their own culture (Kopsa-Schön, 1996). Unlike them, young 'non-white' people who belong to my focus group live among and share their everyday life with 'white' people: their parent(s), their relatives, their 'white' friends. By making their standpoint visible through giving meanings to whiteness, they disturb the ideas and discourses that maintain racialized relations. They may also change the 'white' perspective of those people who are close to them, in case they are able to share their experiences, which reminds us that essentialist ideas also regarding 'whiteness' need to be questioned (Rastas, 2004b). I am not suggesting any rapid social changes here; I only want to underline this dimension of the agency of those who are subordinated in racialized relations. Since these relations are hierarchical and unequal, their consequences for individuals and groups are dependent on how we are positioned on the 'racial maps'. A person categorized as 'white' does not need to negotiate the same things as someone who is categorized as non-white, but when the different meanings of whiteness become implicated in discussions concerning racialized relations, these relations become disturbed.

Articulations of difference by subordinate groups have also been criticized as essentialist, and thus racializing and even racist. There is always the danger of essentialism and racism being embedded in the processes where racialized identities are constructed, and in the way they are sometimes performed (Bonnet, 2000; Gilroy, 2001; Werbner, 1997). However, manifestations of lived experiences of racism should not be criticized, as Serene Razack (1998: 169) writes, 'without paying attention to the specific relations of domination and subordination in any one context, and without contextualizing the responses subordinate groups make to domination, thus distinguishing the acts of resistance from acts of domination'.

CONCLUSIONS

The absence of established terms by which the issues of racism could be discussed demonstrates that as a point of discussion racism can be considered a new phenomenon in Finnish society. However, an analysis of the expressions through which racial difference is articulated and constructed shows that racism should not be understood only as a consequence of the growth of immigration since the 1990s. The use of the *n*-word and meanings attributed to it remind us that the 'subject-constituting projects of colonialism and imperialism' (Young, 1990: 159) are very much implicated in the way 'Us' and 'Others' are seen also in Finland. Finnish words referring to the Roma, a group which has a long history of subordination in Finland, as well as the expressions by which people belonging to the Roma refer to the majority, make clear that in Finland the 'colour-lines' were drawn a long time ago.

There are differences in how racial difference is named between children's, young people's and adults' realities. In order to protect children from racism and in order to be able to make necessary interventions, we need to be aware of these differences. Focusing on the particularity of children's and young people's realities may also help us see some things that are more difficult to see from an adult perspective. In my study, children's vocabulary has directed me to notice that 'Finnish racism' cannot be understood and explained without including the Finnish Roma in the picture.

The analysis of how racial difference is constructed by namings and labellings produces a list that could describe many other societies too: pejorative racist idioms (like 'negro/nigger', 'nip'), particular words that are used to express that somebody does not have 'the right to be here' ('refugee', 'foreigner', 'immigrant'), particular ethnic labels and particular colour-terms. However, in light of research on racism in other societies, there are also many differences in racializing categorization. Certain expressions, like 'mixed-race' and 'hyphen-terms' (cf. Mahtani, 2002) have not become common in the Finnish language and there are no neologisms (like 'Br-Asian', see Huq, 2003: 36) either.¹¹ The most significant difference is that unlike in some other societies, there seem to be no politicized terms expressing the existence of collective racialized identities. In local discursive practices words referring to subordinated positions in racialized relations are loaded predominantly with negative meanings, and thus rejected as self-definitions by those who occupy these positions. Children's terms such as 'brown' and 'different colour' sound childish to young people, who are aware that outside Finland 'black' is used instead. Still, young Finns do not want to identify themselves as 'black' either. To find words for 'Us' is difficult in an environment like this. Racial identities are articulations of individuals' and communities' efforts to cope with their experiences of racism. Difficulties in finding the words, especially words by which 'Us' could be constructed, demonstrate the conditions for anti-racism in Finnish society: questions of racism are not openly discussed and especially the perspective of those who are subordinated has remained hidden.

The existence of 'collective racialized identities' (see Britton, 1999) is often seen as a kind of a precondition for race-consciousness as a sense of belonging and the potential for positive cultural images about one's own community (c.f. Tatum, 1999). Collective racialized identities are seen as important sources of empowerment, which enable political organizing against racism (Bonnet, 2000; Britton, 1999). One of the paradoxes included in the politics of anti-racism is that without collective racialized

identities it is difficult to be organized ‘under the political roof’ (Hall, 1998: 295) that is needed in the struggle against racism, but articulations of racialized identities also produce and reproduce the differences that maintain racism. Therefore all racial categories, whether articulated as categorizations made by others or as self-definitions, need to be examined critically. The analyses of racializing categorizations among young Finns, and especially the way young people seem to reject categories offered to them by the surrounding society, makes obvious the need to be careful in using racial categories as analytical tools. Categories used in research on racism in other societies cannot be adopted without examining how racialized identities are articulated in the society under study. Even though we need to be sensitive to how people want to or do not want to be categorized, we should not take ‘finding new, better expressions’ as the object of research. Examining how categorizations by other people and articulations of racialized identities are intertwined may reveal some special characteristics of racism in a given society – when, how and whose power uses differences, and for what purposes. I suggest it also can be used as a method in examining the more general aspects of racism: the tensions and contradictions which set the bounds for the agency of those who are subordinated in racialized social relations. The more we problematize and question racial categorization and all racial categories, the more difficult it is to put people into them. That, as well, can be considered a strategy for anti-racism.

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Notes

- 1 10.4 percent of all the marriages contracted in 2001 were between Finnish citizens and foreigners (Statistics Finland, 2003). Statistics concerning inter-country adoptions are incompatible, but there are more than 2000 children that have been adopted from countries other than Finland (Parviainen, 2003).
- 2 For the same reasons, terms referring to racialized groups/categories are also enclosed here in quotation marks.
- 3 According to David Theo Goldberg and John Solomos, the concept of racialization is overused and its cognates ‘racialize’, ‘racialized’ ‘fail in their often facile usage to distinguish descriptive context from normative critique, analysis from dismissal, processes of race-making from critical rejection of racist implication’ (Goldberg and Solomos, 2002: 4). Being aware of these risks, I consider the concept as the best possible one for the purposes of my research, since it directs us towards the processes where racist practices and discourses are implemented and reproduced.
- 4 As an adoptive mother and owing to the many years I had worked with refugees and other immigrants in Finland I had good networks and finding interviewees was not difficult. Personal experiences of racism is such a sensitive topic to discuss, that some young people did not want to participate, or could not talk freely, because I knew their parents (see Rastas, 2004a). That is why I also used some Non-Governmental Organizations’ mailing lists and internet discussion groups in order to find interviewees.
- 5 The number of people who have moved to Finland from certain countries is so small, that to guarantee the interviewees’ anonymity, their or their parents’ countries of origin are not mentioned here, only continents.

- 6 The methods that I have used for identifying racist discourses and racism in language are mainly from Reisigl and Wodak, 2001; Van Dijk, 1998: 277–312, 2002; Wetherell and Potter, 1992 [cf. Wade's (2002: 98–9) critique concerning their idea about the shift from the biological discourse of race towards a culturalist one]; Myers and Williamson, 2001; Asante, 1998. Concerning racist discourses in Finland, see e.g. Lepola, 2000. For a discussion of how cultural, ethnic and racial differences are manifested in the language of young Finns, see e.g. Suurpää, 2001, 2002; Markkanen, 2003.
- 7 In the case of some interviewees, this restructuring of data has produced concrete written stories, in some cases they are more like rearranged notes. Most interviewees have become so familiar to me during the process, that when I read their stories I was able to rely on my own memory concerning certain details of all the things I know about their lives.
- 8 Racial categories and identities are related to ethnic categories and identities, as they can both be understood as 'part of the long history of the dialectics of "othering"' (Hall, 1998: 296). Both ethnic and racial categories are defined as socially constructed, as aspects of relationship rather than properties of individuals or groups (on ethnicity e.g. Eriksen, 1993; Jenkins, 1997; on the many uses of the concept see also Yinger, 1986: 23). In studies where the focus is on the identity construction of particular groups (e.g. ethnic group, 'mixed-race' people, second generation immigrants, etc.), it is often difficult to differentiate between racial and ethnic identities (e.g. Kibria, 2000). Since individuals' self-definitions may include various ethnic, cultural, national and racial affiliations, the concept 'ethno-racial identity' is also sometimes used (e.g. Mahtani, 2002: 71).
- 9 The imagery of dirt and filth is common in representations of all kinds of Others (Brah, 2000: 278).
- 10 Among immigrant youth the word 'foreigner' is sometimes used as a political term (Keskiälä, 2003). Also some of my interviewees sometimes talk about themselves as 'foreigners', but as explained above, they are able to prove their 'non-foreignness' with their 'blood-ties' and/or their belonging to a 'Finnish' family, which makes it for them a different kind of strategy compared to those who come from immigrant families.
- 11 In my data the only neologism is 'Nibai', a Japanese word meaning 'double', by which some of those with one Finnish and one Japanese parent call themselves.

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