

“I don’t write about me, I write about you”

Four major motifs in the Nordic postmigration literary trend

Maimouna Jagne-Soreau

Introduction

In 2003 an intense debate engaging both the media and academia began in the Nordic countries, following the publication of the debut novel by Swedish writer Jonas Hassen Khemiri, *Ett öga rött* (One Eye Red, 2003). The book was then marketed as “the first novel written in authentic broken Swedish [...] the language sounded as if you had put a microphone in the immigrant area of your choice” (Tunedal 2006),¹ while critics commented that “it is lucky that the Swedish editor helped Jonas with the language, otherwise it would be difficult for Swedish readers to understand it” (Björn af Kleen 2006).² Subsequently, Khemiri was made a figurehead for the so-called “immigrant writers” writing “immigrant literature”. Khemiri, however, was born and raised in Stockholm with his Swedish mother and studied economics and literature in a privileged area of the capital. The language and story in the novel are entirely invented by him.

A couple of years later, the Swedish author Astrid Trotzig wrote the essay “Makten över prefixen” (The Power of the Prefix, 2005) and denounced the growing trend of inviting non-white writers to cultural events and expecting them to present an authentic inside voice about “the migrant perspective”. She blames this *ethnic filter* for being a consequence of racialising structures and a problematic amalgam between non-whiteness and immigration. Building upon this idea of an ethnic filter, Magnus Nilsson in *Den föreställda mångkulturen* (The Imagined Multiculture, 2010) later showed how current readings in Sweden are limited by a reduced culture-sociological understanding of the writers’ background. Further,

1 “den första romanen skriven på tvättakta Rinkebysvenska [...] språket lät som när man ‘sänker ner en mikrofon’ i valfritt invandrarområde”. Unless otherwise indicated, the translations are my own.

2 “det är tur att den svenska lektören hjälpt Jonas med språket, annars skulle det vara svårt för svenska läsare att ta till sig det”.

Nilsson develops the idea of “exotic ethnicity” as a capital (in a Bourdieusian understanding) and he posits that a writer’s non-whiteness actually became a capital in the Nordic literary market in the past fifteen years and is used by publishers as a selling hook. Since Trotzig’s essay, the epithet “(im)migrant writer” has been widely criticised and mostly ousted in a Nordic context – at least for when the writer is not an actual migrant writing about the act of migrating itself. Nonetheless, as shown by Nilsson, the reception, the publishers and part of the research have not perceived the problem to the same degree, and the category “migrant literature” is still used to this day (i.e., Löytty 2015; Gröndahl/Rantonen 2018). Almost every month, new writers are highlighted for describing “multicultural life”, “the new Nordic” or “the migrant’s reality”.

However, it should be noted that in this Pan-Nordic phenomenon, most of the writers labelled “migrant writers” lack an actual experience of migration. Furthermore, the homogenous category makes very little sense, as the writers do not have any actual common background, ethnic similarities nor a common language. Nevertheless, they obviously share their non-whiteness.³ With that in mind, I will discuss aspects brought up by the field of Critical Race and Whiteness Studies (cf. Morrison 1992; Delgado/Stefancic 1997, 2001; Habel 2008; Hübinette 2012 etc.), and challenge the alleged colour-blind analyses, focused on, for example, cultural differences. While Trotzig claims that she cannot see any “thematic or literary similarities in the content of [the Swedish racialised authors] Leiva Wenger, Anyuru and Khemiri” (2005: 116),⁴ I will argue that, with the right contextualisation, aspects of the literature portraying racialised characters⁵ actually show marked similarities worthy of analyses. In this article, I focus on four major themes and strategies found in the targeted literature. The motifs are: (1) the play with authenticity and ethnic capital; (2) generational conflicts; (3) problems of racialisation

3 The term non-whiteness is in this context always relative and must be understood in the lines of otherness rather than an actual skin tone. This is typically the case of some Sweden-Finns writers that are interestingly experiencing a shift of category, being white in Finland but not necessarily in Sweden, especially when they write in the genre of proletarian literature. But these cases fundamentally anchor in the broader problematic of social classes, I chose here to focus my analysis around the perception of black, brown and Asiatic people among white majorities, hence focusing on the consequences of racialisation due to visible body markers. Consequently, I will in this article refer to white and white-passing people as non-racialised – a simplification that is not always accurate, but that can arguably be done in the current Nordic context. Nonetheless, it would also be interesting to think in terms of postmigration about the debut novels of for instance Susanna Alakoski (*Svinalängorna* [The Swine Rows], 2006) and Eija Hetekivi-Olsson (*Ingenbarnsland* [No Land for Children], 2012).

4 “Men finns det sådana tematiska eller innehållsmässiga litterära likheter hos Leiva Wenger, Anyuru och Khemiri? Jag menar att det inte gör det”.

5 Wenger, Anyuru and Khemiri are racialised themselves but Trotzig refer here to the *content* of their respective debuts, in which the characters also are all racialised.

and betweenship and (4) the multiple imagined readership. My findings are that while these themes and strategies can have varied significance depending on the publications there are found in, their recurrence reflects the emergence of a new trend in Nordic literature, which I call postmigration literature.

Migrant, postmigrant and postmigration

Having noted the racialising amalgam made between non-white and immigrant, I will now insist on the need to distinguish between the literary works depicting an actual experience of migration and the works that do not – as this particular experience and the eventual accompanying trauma most often shape the narratives in a specific way that defines the literary strategies.⁶ To offer a viable alternative to the racialising (when used inappropriately) epithet “migrant writer” and “migrant literature”, I propose a shift of focus from the migrants as individuals with a specific experience, to migration as a phenomenon with transgenerational impacts. Consequently, I suggest using the term *postmigration generation* to refer to individuals in the Nordics who have a connection to migration and are racialised but have no experience (or memories) of migration themselves: typically, second-generation migrants, mixed-race people and transnational adoptees. My attempt while discussing postmigration literature is, in other words, to specifically look at the stories about a generation that has been raised in the shadow of migration as a phenomenon, but not primarily expressing the experiences of a migrant. In a Franco-German context, Myriam Geiser takes a similar approach in her work *Deutsch-türkische und frankomaghrebinische Literatur der Postmigration* (German-Turkish and Franco-Maghrebian Literature of Postmigration, 2015). Furthermore, she insists that:

6 Walking away from the concept of migrant literature when not suitable, one may eventually stumble upon the concept of “postmigrant” – which at first sight can seem more appropriate. Actively first used in Germany by the artistic director of Ballhaus Naunynstraße theatre in Berlin, Shermin Langhoff, she explained that “postmigrant means that we critically question the production and reception of stories about migration and about migrants which have been available up to now and that we view and produce these stories anew, inviting a new reception” (Stewart 2017). Progressively this concept emerged in academia too, for now mostly in Germany and Denmark and in the fields of social sciences and cultural studies (cf. Petersen/Schramm 2017). But however critical and relevant, the idea of postmigrant still focuses on “stories about migration and about migrants” (ibid.) and does not help in our reading of cases like Khemiri’s debut. In my understanding the idea of postmigrant literature is more including and less specific regarding the actual experience of migration or the absence of it, as long as the literature depicts the life *after* someone has migrated – regardless of the generation perspective, and without explicitly questioning the amalgam between non-white and immigrant.

The biography remains crucial for the context of creation of the works, but 'ethnic' traces are far less important than the specific social and cultural experience of the 'descendings' who are confronted with a reality in which the migration of their parents plays a role both in their self-perception and in the perception of others. (Geiser 2015: 308)⁷

In contrast to Geiser however, I propose that taking this definition into a Nordic context, we carefully shift our reading from a socio-political perspective that essentialises the writers, to a literary one, which focuses on the books themselves. I therefore use the term *postmigration literature* (to echo the discussion on migrant and postmigrant literature) and assert that contemporary Nordic literary works which depict the postmigration generation's experience through its main character(s), regardless of the writer's background, actually have a number of common themes and use similar literary strategies.

In this overview article I will systematically apply my findings from my close-reading and analysis of four works that feature characters from the postmigration generation: Norwegian Maria Navarro Skaranger's novel *Alle utlendinger har lukka gardiner* (All Foreigners Have Closed Curtains, 2015); Danish Yahya Hassan's poetry collection *YAHYA HASSAN* (2013); Finland Swedish Adrian Perera's poetry suite *White Monkey* (2017) and Swedish Erik Lundin's rap lyrics in "Suedi" (The Swede, 2015).⁸ By relating the elements of these single readings to a dozen other literary works, which feature characters of the postmigration generation, I will argue that there are enough occasions to speak of a new distinguishable tendency in Nordic literature. I do not mean that all the themes and strategies are necessarily present in every work and I will not have the opportunity to illustrate all these themes and strategies, even when they are present in the books. Moreover, it can be specified that the same themes and strategies also arise in most of the other works that touch on the postmigration generation's experience. The material I use to support my findings has been selected only because it presented clear examples and explicit quotations. Thus, the materiel is far from exhaustive, not necessarily proportionally representative, neither statistically nor from a gender perspective, but it will include works from most of the Nordic countries. It would be interesting to do a quantitative study, but that is beyond the scope of this

7 "Die Biografie bleibt entscheidend für den Entstehungskontext der Werke, allerdings fallen dabei 'ethnische' Spuren weit weniger ins Gewicht als die spezifische soziale und kulturelle Erfahrung der 'Nachgeborenen', die mit einer Realität konfrontiert werden, in der die Migration ihrer Eltern sowohl in ihrer Selbstwahrnehmung als auch in der Wahrnehmung anderer eine Rolle spielt." (Geiser 2015: 308)

8 See the respective articles: Jagne-Soreau 2018a, 2018b, 2018c and 2019.

article.⁹ Nonetheless, from a global, Nordic perspective, my impression is that the tendency of writing postmigration narratives is today mostly present in Sweden. Norway comes second with surprisingly many female writers. Third would be Denmark, and last Finland, although I considered contributions both in Finnish and in Finland Swedish. Regarding Iceland, Greenland and The Faroe Islands it does not seem to be an actual phenomenon in the literature there yet.

Apart from the primary analyses, my examples from Sweden are taken from novelists Jonas Hassen Khemiri's *Ett öga rött* (One Eye Red, 2003), Marjaneh Bakhtiari's *Kalla det vad fan du vill* (Call It Whatever You Want, 2005) and poet Athena Farrokhzad's collection *Vitsvit* (*White Blight*, 2013). For Norway I will take examples from Namra Saleem's novel *I morgen vi ler* (Tomorrow We Laugh, 2016), Sarah Zahid's poetry collection *La oss aldri glemme hvor godt det kan være å leve* (Let Us Never Forget How Good It Can Be to Live, 2018) and Sumaya Jirde Ali's poetry collection *Kvinner som hater menn* (Women Who Hate Men, 2017). For Denmark I will refer to Hassan Preisler's novel *Brun mands byrde* (Brown Man's Burden, 2013), and Maja Lee Langvad's poetry collection *Hun er vred* (She Is Angry, 2015). For Finland, I will refer to Johanna Holmström's novel *Asfaltsänglar* (Asphalt Angels, 2011), and Koko Hubara's narrative essay collection *Ruskeat Tytöt* (Brown Girls, 2017).¹⁰

Authenticity and ethnic capital

Before shifting our focus from the authors to their writings, we will need to note that most of the writers from the collected material are themselves from the postmigration generation (although not only). On the other hand, writers from the postmigration generation do not necessarily all write postmigration literature. Some racialised authors fall out of the scope of postmigration literature, because they actually write about migration – in this case, they are often giving a voice to their parents' generation and this can then be read as migration literature.¹¹ This can be found particularly with Finnish writers – like Nura Farah, Ra-

9 It is yet worth mentioning that Tobias Hübinette in his last book *Att skriva om svenskheten* (To Write About Swedishness, 2019) proposes a very complete quantitative study for the case of "the non-whites' literature in Sweden", including more than 500 book titles.

10 To my knowledge none of the books have yet been officially translated to English except for Farrokhzad's collection (translated by Jennifer Hayashida). Part of Jirde Ali's poems are in English in the text and Perera translated his suite to English himself, although this version is not officially available. Other than in these cases, the English translations in this article are all mine. I will quote these works indicating in parentheses the writer's last name and page number of the publication in the original language.

11 Some books sometimes include more than one perspective and depicts the experience of several generations (typically the grandparents, the parents and the children, cf. Farrokhzad or

nya ElRamy Paasonen and Pajtim Statovci or the Danish authors Halfdan Pisket and Sara Omar, among others. Others fall out of the postmigration scope simply because they write about themes other than racialisation and postmigration. Other non-racialised authors are included because of the topic of their novels. For example, Holmström's *Asfaltänglar* tells the story of two young mixed-race sisters in Finland. Another example could be Danish Julie Sten-Knudsen's poetry collection *Atlantehavet vokser* (The Atlantic Grows, 2013) which includes the perspective of the protagonist's mixed-race (half-) sister. Instances where white writers write about the postmigration generation are however mostly exceptions. This leads us to the first recurrent literary strategy, which is the blurring of the issues of authenticity and performative biographism. Indeed, there seems to be an intention on the authors' side to confuse the reader. These writers are most often writing from a first-person perspective, using a profusion of biographical elements, like their own name, background, age, family constellation or even their own birth and adoption certificate in their works (cf. Langvad's first collection *Find Holger Danske*, 2006). Paradoxically, these same writers simultaneously criticised the biographical reading of their works, maintaining that their books must be seen as performative literature and not as authentic personal testimonies. While Langvad, in fact, published manipulated birth certificates (Ivenäs 2017: 247), Perera for his part warns the readers provocatively, in the forward of his debut collection, *White Monkey*, by saying that "Everything in this poetry suite is fiction/ except the problems".¹² However, later in the poems, he establishes a metafictional game with the reader, writing about a poet discussing the marketing possibilities of his collection with a publisher. He is evoking the idea of a commercial niche for "wog poetry", supported by intertextual references to other successful non-white Nordic poets Farrokhzad, Anyuru and Hassan. A reference to the literary process is also made in most of the other works dealing with the experience of postmigration: describing the writing school (Hassan: 161; Saleem: 177), referring to the publisher or editing process (Hassan: 135; Jirde Ali: 125) or, climax of the *mise-en-abîme*, by explicitly mentioning the Norwegian author mostly known for his polemic autobiographical novel in six volumes, Karl Ove Knausgård (Hassan: 66; Zahid: 47).

Bakthiari). In these cases, it is conceivable that the categories of migration and postmigration will start to go in each other, but for the clarity of my argument I will maintain a clear distinction in this article by separating the two depending on the experience of the main character/ protagonist.

12 "Allt i denna diktsvit är fiktion/ förutom problemen".

My reading of the play around authenticity as engaged in postmigration literature is that some authors, more than just responding to the public demand for “real histories”, are showing that they are aware of the existence of the *ethnic capital*. In this way, they denounce it, while they simultaneously ironically capitalise on it (see even a similar conclusion in Geiser 2015: 514). On the other hand, authors who are lacking this ethnic capital run the risk of being accused of cultural appropriation (see for example Melkas/Löytty 2016).

Generational conflict

Another theme central to the idea of postmigration literature is the expression of a generational conflict between children and their parents; the migration and postmigration generations. The manifestation of the conflict takes various proportions, involving a broad series of affects. One could, for instance, distinguish the rage expressed in Hassan’s collection where the parents are wished to be “still-born” (Hassan: 104), from the resentment and deception in Langvad’s collection, where the protagonist is angry with both her adoptive and biological parents for different reasons. A mode developed by Holmström, Perera and Farrokhzad has been to use pathos in depicting a perpetual and tragic misunderstanding between the parents and the children. Authors like Bakhtiari, Khemiri or Skaranger, on the other hand, play down the conflict with humour and irony, mainly by portraying the parents’ alienation through comical anecdotes of culture shock or amusing language mistakes that annoy the children. In fact, even Lundin plays with this register, when he describes the day he “found himself” and decided to assume his Swedish identity, and suggests an absurd and uncomfortable coming-out scene. Some other works partly describe the conflict from the parents’ side. For instance, Jirde Ali writes: “I think she has infected me/ with her disobedience/ My daughter is dangerous” (65).¹³ In these cases, it is interesting to note that a double conflict may be played out. Also, Lars Wendelius in his study of migrant literature in Sweden (1970–2000) analysed the recurring mention of a generational conflict between the migrant generation and their own parents, who stayed in their home country and did not necessarily understand or approve of their children’s decision (2002: 187). We can grasp a spark of this first conflict between parents and grandparents in Farrokhzad’s verses: “My mother said: A woman dug out her mother’s eyes with her fingers/ so that the mother would be spared the sight of the daughter’s decline” (Farrokhzad: 11),¹⁴ although these verses could as well have

13 In English in the text.

14 “Min mor sa: En kvinna grävde ut sin mors ögon med fingrarna så att modern skulle slippa se dotterns förfall”.

been meant by the mother to make her daughter feel guilty, here again confirming a second level of conflict between parents and children.

It is interesting to note that the reason for the conflict appears from time to time as being diametrically opposed. In Skaranger's, Zahid's, Saleem's, Hassan's, Bakhtiari's and Perera's stories, the parents are mocked and teased for not managing to fit in their new country, not mastering the language and societal codes or conflicting with their religion.¹⁵ However, in some other works, such as Khemiri's, Farrokhzad's, Bakhtiari's and Perera's very same books, the parents are criticised for their mimicry and acculturation. This is often illustrated by a change in their culinary practice and the traditional Swedish casserole *Janssons frestelse* is mentioned in the three first works, while the mother in Perera's text is described flushing away all exotic spices and "says she's trying to cook like the other moms:/ mixing blueberries/ with cookie crumbs,/ sausage with water and potatoes" (49).¹⁶ In Jirde Ali's poem, it is through the cleaning of the house that the motif appears, when the mother "scrubs the white walls even whiter" (113).¹⁷ Underlying the symbolism of the food or the whiteness of the metaphorical walls lies the problematic of *hegemonic whiteness* as problematised by Sara Ahmed (2007). The *reorientation* of the parents after this whiteness and its impact on the family dynamic is something Kristina Leganger Iversen says can also be understood on the lines of Homi Bhabha's concept of the *unhomely*, thus creating a link between the privacy of the home and the political of the nation (Iversen 2018: 205).

The first inference of this recurring generational conflict is a confirmed need for distinguishing between the manifestations of the immigrated parents' generation and those of their non-migrated children. The immigrated parents typically manifest tropes of submission, resilience, mimicry and can appear "white washed". The postmigration generation on the other hand uses very different strategies, along the lines of provocation, indignation and open rebellion, thus challenging the classic postcolonial reading strategies and refocusing instead on the question of racialisation. A similar reasoning is made in Langvad's collection, when the protagonist resents her adoptive parents' whiteness and becomes angry at herself for making a correlation between transnational adoption and colonialism: "It may well be that in the majority of cases, children of coloured parents have been adopted by white westerners, but from there to say that transnational

15 Holmström's *Asfaltänglar* would also fit in this category, although it is the white Finnish-Swedish mother that has radicalised herself and clashes with the established Finnish values.

16 "Min mor säger att hon försöker göra mat som de/ andra mammorna:/blandar blåbär och kexsmulor,/ korv med vatten och potatis."

17 "Hun vasker huset fra topp til tå/ Skrubber de hvite veggene enda hvitere".

adoption is a modern form of colonialism, there is still some way to go” (65).¹⁸ Koko Hubara’s thematizing of a third possible generational conflict also confirms this assumption, as the conflict with a third generation clearly appears to go beyond the experience of migration and/or colonialism. By referring to her white mother and addressing her daughter (mixed-race of second-generation and so called “white passing”), Hubara expresses a split in the vision and experience of the (white) world between racialised and non-racialised members of the same family, her own:

For you I am mum, exactly like grandma is my mum regardless of anyone else. But it affects, that our language, our culture, our religion, our history and our bodies only partially cross, even though you are my only biological offspring. It affects you in ways that I cannot imagine and that will be hard to talk about, if I have learned something from being a daughter. (160-161)¹⁹

Also divided by whiteness from the second to the third generation, Preisler observes along the same lines that “it is actually weird that [his] sister Rebecca’s boy is white as chalk when [his] daughter is black as coal” (23).²⁰ The same intrusion of dividing whiteness in the family nucleus was also to be observed from the first to the second generation, in for instance Perera, where the mother is estranged from her son the instant he is born, as the doctor says that the son is “too white for a Sri Lankan woman” (10).²¹ Later she learns to see salvation in her son’s lighter skin tone: “You are not black./ You are white”, she insists, although the son says that he is brown (22).²²

18 “Det kan godt være, at det i langt de fleste tilfælde er børn af farvede forældre, som er blevet adopteret af hvide vesterlændinge, men derfra og så til at sige, at transnational adoption er en moderne form for kolonialisme, er der alligevel et stykke vej.”

19 “Sinulle minä olen äiti, aivan kuin mummu on minulle äiti riippumatta kenestäkään toisesta. Mutta se vaikuttaa, että meidän kieleemme, kulttuurimme, uskontomme, historiamme jakehomme risteävät vain osittain, vaikka sinä olet minun ainoa biologinen jälkeläiseni. Se vaikuttaa sinuun tavoilla, joita en saata kuvitella ja joista tulee olemaan vaikea keskustella, jos mitään olen omasta tyttäryydestäni oppinut.”

20 “det egentlig er underligt, at søster Rebeccas dreng er hvid som kridt, når nu min datter er sort som kul.”

21 “Han säger att jag är för vit för en lankesisk kvinna”.

22 “Jag är inte svart./ Jag är brun./ Du är inte svart./ Du är vit”.

Racialisation and betweenship

While whiteness happened to create a distance between the parents and their children, it is actually the children's non-whiteness that happens to create distance between them and the rest of their surroundings. The depicting of this theme in postmigration literature clearly illustrates the link that still exists between whiteness and the nation in a Nordic context (even mirroring the link between non-whiteness and immigration). Skaranger turned it into an absurd reasoning with the formulation "half-Norwegian, real foreigner" (22),²³ while Lundin addresses the issue by offering the Arabic substantive of 'suedi' as an alternative way of being Swedish. Jirde Ali for her part goes straight to the point: "think of how many people allow the external to decide/ who is Norwegian./ I will forever be an immigrant in your eyes" (37).²⁴ While the ethnic filter questions the reading of the literature written by non-white authors on a meta-level, the topic of otherness which leads to racialisation is omnipresent in the books themselves. In the case of the postmigration literature, a surprisingly recurrent motif is present in stories involving hair:

In high school, he bleached his hair. Or yes, it became more orange, but still. It was like proving. Prove that, like, that, what you see doesn't have to be what you think you see. (Bakhtiari: 127)²⁵

Your brother saw the terrorist's face in the mirror
and wanted a flat iron for Christmas. (Farrokhzad: 19)²⁶

The [skin heads] have no idea that I'm a girl with quite a lot of dark hair on my head,
and I don't want to know what they would do if they knew it. (Holmström: 17)²⁷

Everyone says I have such beautiful hair.
"It's so thick.

23 "halvt norsk [...] ekte utlendinger".

24 "Jeg tenker på hvordan mange lar det ytre bestemme/ hvem som er norsk./Jeg vil for alltid være innvandrere i dine øyne".

25 "I högstadiet blonderade han håret. Eller ja, det blev mer orange, men ändå. Det var liksom för att bevisa. Bevisa att det liksom, alltså, det man typ ser inte behöver vara det man liksom tror man ser".

26 "Din bror såg terroristens ansikte i spegeln/ och önskade sig en plattång i julklapp"

27 "De [skinnskallarna] har ingen aning om att jag är en flicka med ganska mycket mörkt hår på huvudet, och jag vill inte heller veta vad de skulle göra om de visste det".

Not at all

Finnish". (Perera: 42)²⁸

My hair is straight, thick and rough. People have always touched it without permission, and it has often been compared to a horse mane or the fur of a shepherd dog. (Hubara: 68)²⁹

She is angry about being told she has horsehair. (Langvad: 36)³⁰

during the break, the janitor came into the auditorium
complains that there is long black hair everywhere

I say *don't look at me*

there are several pakis

in the parallel class. (Zahid: 49)³¹

I was bullied for [...] my black frizzy hair – all the other Pakistani girls in the class had long and smooth hair, I don't quite understand what happened with my smooth hair genes. (Saleem: 37)³²

The similarity of the features in the anecdotes above is striking and even goes beyond these short excerpts. In Preisler, the protagonist has a kind of fetish for blonde hair and explains that he “prove[s his] Danishness by loving women with white skin and blonde hair and blue eyes” (16).³³ The blond hair as a synonym to success is also the main topic of Alejandro Leiva Wenger's short story “Elixir” (in *Till vår ära* [To Our Honour], 2002) while it is a strong leitmotiv in Khemiri's play *Jag ringer mina bröder* (I Call My Brothers, 2012) just to name a few more. All use black, thick or frizzy hair as a metonymy for physical otherness, which eventually results in a societal otherness involving bullying, shame and fear. These racialising encounters have the clear function of denouncing the Nordic whiteness standard, and it is this aspect of the narratives that once again motivates the need

28 Alla säger att jag har så vackert hår./ “Det är så tjockt./ Inte alls/ finskt”.

29 “Minun hiukseni ovat suorat, paksut ja karheat. Niitä on aina kosketeltu ilman lupaa ja usein verrattu hevosen jouhiin ja paimenkoirien turkkiin”.

30 “Hun er vred over at have fået at vide, hun har hestehår”.

31 “i pausen kommer vaktmesteren inn i auditoriet/ klager på at det ligger langt svart hår overalt/ jeg sier don't look at me/ det er flere pakkiser ++/ i parallellklassen”.

32 “Jeg ble mobbet for [...] det svarte krusehåret mitt – alle de andre pakistanske jentene i klassen hadde jo langt og glatt hår, jeg forstår ikke helt hva som skjedde med glatt hår-genene mine.”

33 “[jeg] beviser min danskhed ved at elske kvinder med hvid hud og blondt hår og blå øjne”.

for a concept as specific as postmigration generation, as opposed to, for instance, Cross-Cultural Kids.³⁴ While this last category addresses the question of belonging created by the parents' travel experience, the study of CCK is developed in a colour-blind tradition, which also biases the reading possibilities. In contrast, acknowledging the recurring patterns of racialisation in the stories, highlights the similarities of the experience of three otherwise quite different groups of people: the children of non-white immigrants, the transnational adoptees and the mixed-race people.

These same three groups were in fact already brought together, relating to the experience of *betweenship*:³⁵ the understanding of identity in a neither-nor dialectic, caused by constant racialisation and the absence of an alternative. The researcher Daphné Arbouz and the Swedish collective *Mellanförskap* describe the betweenship as the challenge of growing up as non-white in a mostly white Europe. It encompasses feelings of illegitimacy, rejection and exclusion paralleled with enclosure (Arbouz 2012). This double rejection is also a recurrent motif in postmigration literature, most often built from two different anecdotes: typically, first through an experience of racism in the Nordic home country and then later by an experience of othering in the (biological) parent(s)' home country. Thus, in Perera's poems the protagonist is called a "mulatto", when he plays in a sandbox in Finland and later his grandfather affirms that he would never fit in Sri Lanka anyway, since he is a "white monkey" (22, 35). Lundin raps about being called a "negro" in Sweden and presented as a Swede by his cousin when traveling to his relatives' home country. In Hassan's poetry we read about several racist encounters in Denmark, but once in Lebanon the protagonist is called a "Danish dog" and is yelled at to "Go the hell back to Denmark" (44).³⁶ Likewise, when Hubara is yelled at to "go back to where [she] came from", she ironically wonders if this means the Finnish suburb of Vantaa or Yemen? (19).³⁷ In Jirde Ali's writing, the dilemma is shown in the paradoxical nature of a pair of questions repeated sixteen times in a row, suggesting the frequency of the confrontations involving various perpetrators asking "When are you going home again?/ Why don't you feel that you belong?" (47).³⁸

34 The Cross-Cultural Kids (or CCK) is a term used to refer to "Traditional TCKs [Third Culture Kids], Bi/multi-cultural/ and/or bi/multi-racial children, Children of immigrants, Children of refugees, Children of minorities, International adoptees, and 'Domestic' TCKs" (Pollock/Van Reken 2009).

35 *Betweenship* is the translation of the Swedish neologism *mellanförskap* that reminds of Homi K. Bhabha's concept of in-betweenness (1994) while still taking a distance to the postcolonial disruptive performativity included in his definition (see Jagne-Soreau 2019: 49).

36 "Danske hunde!/ Skrid tilbage til Danmark råbte han".

37 "mene sinä n-huora sinne mistä olet tullutkin. (Vantaalle? Jemeniin?)".

38 "Når skal du dra hjem igjen?/ Hvorfor føler du ikke tilhørighet?".

A manifestation of *betweenship* that deserves attention occurs when the double exclusion almost seems self-inflicted, as with Zahid's protagonist, who herself thinks that a "summer holiday in Pakistan is not meant for us Norwegians", while two pages later she complains about the Norwegian coldness and conclude that "we foreigners do not tolerate that cold like, *wallah!*" (16-19).³⁹ The association between nation and whiteness appears in these cases to have become an unbeatable reality for the postmigration generation itself and an internalised distancing process can be observed. Education, cultural and financial success and the understanding of what would be a "correct language" are also associated to whiteness in these texts. These negative associations are to be found in the postmigration literature, either as something the protagonists use themselves to criticise others, as in Skaranger's and Khemiri's stories, but more often it is a situation in which the protagonist is a victim, once again being excluded by the community. This can be seen in Hassan when the speaker of the poem is mockingly being called "Gyl-dendal" (like the publishing house) by his peers from the suburb, or when the main character of Saleem's novel moves from the secluded town of Stavanger to a busy multicultural part of Oslo and is there criticised for being "too Norwegian and speaking strangely" (44).⁴⁰ Lundin interestingly identifies this recurring dead-end and first raps about the voluntary role of the "bad boy" and the use of the slang as something that gives respect, since "the one who doesn't fit in does everything to stand out" (54).⁴¹ Later, he nonetheless tackles the problematic fusion of whiteness, Swedishness and success, by confessing the honest penchant for conservative values that he and his friends share, including the stereotypical package house-Volvo-kids and snuff! The same turnaround can be found in Zahid's verses, that I here read as genuine rather than ironical: "When I will be 45/ I will buy a cabin/ in western Norway/ celebrate Christmas there/ light candles and decorate the tree/ with pink glass baubles/ bake all the Christmas cookies/ on TV2" (74).⁴²

39 "sommerferie i Pakistan er ikke ment for oss nordmenn [...] vi utlendinger tåler ikke sånn kulde ass, wallah!".

40 "jeg fikk masse komplekser på grunn av kommentarene på ungdomskolen om at jeg var stygg, at jeg var "for" norsk og at jeg snakket rart [...]".

41 "Den som inte passar in gör allt för att stå ut".

42 "når jeg blir 45/ skal jeg köpe en hytte/ på Vestlandet / feire jul der / tenne stearinlys og pynte treet/ med rosa glasskuler/ bake alle julekakene/ på TV2".

Two imagined readerships

The use of clichés, stereotypes and references is the last recurrent literary strategy I will analyse in connection to the postmigration generation. In most of the works, we can see simplified and stereotypical descriptions, mostly revolving around the status of the language and the vision of multiculturalism vs. Swedishness/Danishness/Finnishness etc. According to my analysis, the use of the stereotypes is a form of distancing performative irony, that eventually leads to two possible mechanisms: laughing with and laughing at. Realising the impact of this mechanism, readers are consequently invited to note that the texts involve two kinds of imagined readers; which I mean, here again, are characterised by their whiteness or non-whiteness. This exact same duality was problematised in the case of Afro American fiction already in 1928: “It is more than a double audience; it is a divided audience, an audience made up of two elements with differing and often opposite points of view” (Weldon 1928: 477). That said, some books work with both readers in mind, although eventually creating an elusive gap between the “critical readers” and the “less perceptive readers” (Eco 1979: 9-10; Richardson 2007: 259). These books can be complicated to spot, as they often operate on several levels, depending on whether or not their satirical irony is perceived – and if it is, to which extent. This is the case in both Khemiri’s and Bakhtiari’s debut. These novels have been analysed in numerous high schools as well as in Swedish For Immigrants (SFI) classes, since they are seen well suited for discussions with people of various backgrounds. On the other hand, they are also often invoked as almost canonical in discussions about multiculturalism in a cultural and political white sphere.

Other books seem to have another kind of ambition and use defined strategies to address a specific readership. Hubara, for instance, explicitly writes for “other brown girls”, and the motto of her publishing platform *Ruskeät Tytöt* (Brown Girls) is “for us, by us”.⁴³ Consequently, her essays offer many invitations to identify (or not) with her, like the engaging question: “Do you also always forget that you are brown?” (19).⁴⁴ Similarly, Lundin by the various language shifts he operates and the nature of his message seems to directly address a racialised audience, one that he on other platforms calls “all the proud *suedis*” (46).⁴⁵ In Skaranger’s and Zahid’s books, mostly the subcultural references suggest an address to a young multicultural readership. These productions do not necessarily actively exclude white readers, although they may sometimes turn them into “strategically placed misreader” (Hedin 1993: 193). More generally, we could conclude that these texts

43 “Meiltä meille”.

44 “Unohdatko säkin aina, että olet ruskea?”

45 “alla stolta Suedis”.

work on the sidelines of the hegemonic whiteness and challenges its limitations, as well as eurocentrism.

On the other side of the spectrum, the implicit reader seems to clearly incarnate whiteness in Perera's, Jirde Ali's, Hassan's and Holmström's stories for instance. This can be seen in the more or less direct address, like when the reader is entangled and called out by the pronoun "you" in Jirde Ali's verses: "*You* ask me to show some skin/ so I can prove/ an unsteady relationship with God./ Then *you* like me better/ *You* like to degrade" (22, my emphases).⁴⁶ Hassan's collection (which I argue is picaresque, see Jagne-Soreau 2018b) also abounds with similar examples; the following verses reveal in passing that he specifically makes fun of the Danish cultural elite, who use old-fashioned expressions like "stepping in the spinach" (meaning "put one's foot in it by accident", i.e. to make an unintended and foolish mistake): "Me I am a wog/ Me I don't understand Danish idioms/ Me I haven't run in no one spinach/ and if *you you* start to/ speak about spinach/ well *you you* will get a problem!" (142, my emphasis).⁴⁷ Perera is less confronting in his poetic discourse, but one should see beyond the embarrassing character of a blonde journalist a systematic tackling of diverse manifestations of racialising micro-aggressions (8, 21, 43, 53, 75). Even next to the character of the friend overcome by white guilt, the protagonist of the poem subtly deplors how he has to put up with an invading whiteness, because "it is clear that [the] friend needs the comfort/ more" (55).⁴⁸ Later on, Perera ultimately stated in an interview following the publication of his poetry suite, "I don't write about me, I write about you" (Lindqvist 2017).⁴⁹ In these cases, we will conclude that the stories are directly targeting the racialising paradigm of the implicit white and privileged Nordic society.

Concluding remarks

By problematizing the discussion of "migrant writers" and "migrant literature" with a critical race and whiteness studies perspective, I proposed to shift the focus of our readings from being biographically centred to being centred around the literary content. This way we began by questioning the racialising amalgam between non-white and immigrants, as well as the attendant essentializing par-

46 "Du ber meg vise hud/ så jeg kan bevise/ et ustødig forhold til Gud./Da liker du meg bedre/ du liker å fornedre".

47 "MIG JEG ER PERKER/ MIG JEG FORSTÅR IK EN DANSKERS IDIOMER/ MIG JEG HAR IK JOGGET I NOGEN SPINAT/ OG HVIS DIG DU BLIVER VED/ MED OG SNAK OM SPINAT/ SÅ DIG DU FÅR EN PROBLEM!"

48 "Det är klart att min vän behöver trösten/ mest".

49 "Jag skriver inte om mig, jag skriver om er".

adigm of our readings. It became important to highlight the specific experience of the racialised postmigration generation in the Nordic literature, as opposed to a colour-blind approach. In this overview article, I demonstrated how the problematising of racialisation appears to be a red thread in the selected material, from the motif of generational conflict caused by the hegemonic whiteness, to the encapsulation of the postmigration generation in an alienating between-ship. In addition, this seemed to have consequences on the literary strategies used by the authors, including a play with authenticity and a specific address to the imagined readership, depending on whether this readership is expected to be white or not. Other themes and strategies I have mentioned in this article, and would be relevant to develop, would encompass an important discussion around the problematic of the nation, engaging perspectives like postnationalism and *glocalisation*. The use of the language in the books could also lead to a more in-depth discussion, as well as the intriguing use of humour, satire and irony. However, we can already assert that the contemporary Nordic literature, which engages the postmigration generation, clearly appears to display similar themes and strategies. This recurrence reflects the presence of a trend, which enables the recognition of a so-called *postmigration literature*.

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