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Chapter 11

Rethinking Design: A Dialogue on Anti-Racism and Art Activism from a Decolonial Perspective

Faith Mkwesha and Sasha Huber

Introduction

This chapter focuses on anti/racist activism from a decolonial perspective. We analyze racialized and racist representations and propose interventions from a decolonial perspective. We use Finnish problematic representation case studies showing racism and racist practices that inspired us to act in different ways as activists to advocate for change. Our activism is influenced by our work. Mkwesha is a literary and cultural researcher and social justice activist, while Huber is a visual artist and art-based researcher whose work has been internationally exhibited in several countries. Our partnership emanates from our positionalities as black and brown women who immigrated to Finland, thus, we are both outsider and insider, in-between (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). This in-between position enables us to see what may be invisible to white people who are not familiar with postcolonial and decolonial discourse and critical race studies. Therefore, they might not easily see or recognize as racist some of the case studies we analyze. However, we hope by the end of reading this chapter even such audiences will be more knowledgeable of the racist practices we discuss. We foreground representation of racial and ethnic differences, drawing attention to different power dynamics materialised by whiteness in popular culture like magazines, advertisements and humanitarian appeals through commercial campaigns etc. We argue that Finland's visual communication community needs to rethink design forms and practices taking into consideration global transformation and adopting a decolonial perspective. We posit that representation matters and creates knowledge of people and places. In conclusion, we propose and consider different strategies as interventions in the field of representation to create non-stereotypical and demeaning racist images, in order to transform positively racialized representational practices.

We understand representation as a signifying practice that produces discourse in for example literature, exhibitions, scholarship, advertisements, campaigns and all the different forms of pop culture. Representation means substituting or standing in for something, which can be people, culture, object, etc. In the book *Representation*, Stuart Hall (1997) examines how images, works of art, language and discourse function as systems of representation and produce certain way of knowing self and others, and how one relates with them. Here we include representation of difference, that is, the social construction of whiteness as superior and more civilized build on denigrating those seen as different, non-European. Thus, we are talking about knowledge and power to create meaning. Power is important here because one has authority to create knowledge, but also to coerce, seduce, and force others to accept it. Thus, designers have a lot of power to create knowledge and meaning that can influence the worldview. In this article we probe designers to be consciously aware of racial stereotypical representation and institutional white structures in place that discriminate against the minorities.

In the following, we first describe how we met. We then engage in dialogue about our views on racism and representations, as well as how we have critically engaged with them through our activism, art and research.

Rosa Emilia Clay

The little story of how our sahwira sisterhood formed is interesting. Sahwira in Zimbabwe Shona language refers to strangers who meet, develop mutual liking and shared interests and get to know each other. They develop a trusted reciprocal friendship relationship transcending race, class, gender, sexuality or ethnicity (Marsden 2009; Barz and Cohen 2011; Mtukudzi 2016). The sahwiras support each other and have permission to criticize each other honestly in a constructive manner. Sasha and Faith have developed sahwira sisterhood relations through a shared interest in social justice issues and culture. The story of Rosa Emilia Clay connected us. Rosa is the first black African person to get Finnish citizenship in 1899 and has a special place in our hearts (Namhila and Hillebrecht 2019; Jonkka 2010; Rastas 2014). We got to know each other through our common interest in the history of Rosa Emilia Clay while we were presenting papers about her at the *Afroeuropeans: Black Cultures and Identities in Europe* conference at the University of Tampere, Finland in 2017. We wrote an article for Finland's graphic design association's magazine

Grafia on rethinking design (Mkwesha and Huber 2018). Sasha's portrait of Rosa Clay in "The Firsts" portraiture series was the cover image for *Grafia*. This made her became the first black woman on *Grafia*'s magazine cover. Later we have been meeting at different forums like at museum exhibition openings, at activist work and academic spaces and co/operating in different projects because we are both active in anti-racist activism and politics of representation from a decolonial, postcolonial and gender perspective. Also, Rosa Emilia Clay is an important historical figure for African diaspora, people of African descent, for biracial brown people and immigrants in general.

Rosa was born out of a multiracial relationship between a black Namibian woman and a British man who was working in Namibia, Southern Africa. Therefore, she was a biracial African girl from Africa. She was fourteen years old when a couple who were Finnish missionaries in what is now Namibia, a country in Africa brought her to Finland. They wanted her to train as a missionary and go back to teach in a school they had established in Namibia. While in Finland, she did well in school and became a teacher. She was also very active as a singer in Finnish culture. But, disillusioned by Christianity and losing faith in it she did not want to go and teach at the missionary school. So, she decided to stay in Finland and work as a teacher. Therefore, she is an important ancestor who opened the path for people of African descent and people of colour to be in Finland (Rastas 2019). Unfortunately, despite her achievements and integration into Finnish society, she encountered a lot of racism in Finland. Unhappy, she later immigrated to the United States of America. Seeing herself as Finnish, she went to live among the Finnish community in U.S.A. She taught Finnish and was an active member in Finnish cultural activities (Rastas 2019). Again, she also faced a lot of racism from the Finnish community (Erickson 1993). While, Rosa considered her identity to be Finnish, the Finns racialised her and could not accept her as one of them. Thus, in the eyes of the Finns she remained an outsider even though she had integrated herself and was a Finnish citizen. Therefore, reclaiming her as an African Finnish and positioning her as a person of color in our discussion, we argue that racism has a long history in Finland, and designers have played an important role in sustaining racial stereotypes and prejudices that fuel racism. Furthermore, we propose that designers rethink representation from a decolonial perspective and create non-racist creatives.

Representation and Problematic Visuals

On our first meeting we found ourselves engaging in conversations about our first encounters with problematic visuals in Finland.

Faith: I started to be more aware of representation that is stereotypical in Finland when we had memory group meetings for parents of racialised children to discuss our children's experiences of racism in public spaces in 2015. We were also discussing how to support them. What came out of the discussions was that there are racist narratives that parents needed ways to navigate, for example children's books like Astrid Lindgren's Pippi *Longstocking* that reproduce racist stereotypes. Even though the old edition with the offensive racist word 'negro' is not in print anymore, the new edition still represents the white man as the colonial-emperor. Also, there is an archive of children's literature that represent black people using racist stereotypes. We talked about how to read the books that make you suddenly encounter racism in the text. Also, how to support the child who has taken the book from the library and encounters racist images. Books like *Pippi* are training white children to be racist. I am now working in a Children's library -project and we aim to create new narratives with positive representations that are inclusive and non-racist. Also, at Sahwira Africa International ry I am co/ordinating an anti-racism project by youth titled "Changing culture: Youth Surviving, Thriving & Transforming the Nordic." The multiracial and multicultural youth talk about racism they encounter and support each other and use their embodied experiences to create new narratives in poetry, short stories, songs and photography. We use festival as a scientific way to disseminate their creatives and we organised our first *Bira: Literature Rhythms* in 2019 at Sibelius museum in Turku.

Case of Plan International Finland Campaign

I also encountered colonial representation from an advertisement by Plan International Finland NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) that advocate for children's rights and equality. The advertisement was featuring a 12-year black teenage girl-child model from Zambia, Africa called Fridah put on billboards at bus stations in a fundraising campaign themed "Maternity Wear for a 12-Yea-/Old" designed by celebrity fashion designer Paola Suhonen whose name was on the posters. The images were taken by equally renowned photographer and journalist Meeri Koutaniemi. There was also an exhibition about her at downtown in a trendy area in Helsinki center. I went with my husband, and a colleague who was a black African woman to see the

exhibition and found the images of young Fridah displayed in shop windows. Connected to the exhibition was also social media campaign and a Youtube video where designer Sahonen and photographer Koutaniemi speak. As a response to the 12-year-old girl posing erotically and sexually, I tweeted on @SahwiraAfrica. Disturbed and shocked that a child was being used this way the three of us from Sahwira Africa International went to Plan International Finland offices. The office administrator denied us access to see those who were in charge of the campaign and said they were in a meeting. We were willing to wait but she denied us access to even enter the offices and asked us to send an email. My colleague sent an email, but we never got the answer.

In 2018, Plan International Finland and Hassan and Partners were awarded with the most important prize in Finland – *Vuoden Huiput* award for best creative design in Finland in 2017. The design agency Hasan & Partners was recognized with *Creative Distinction Award* by the Art Directors Club of Europe. I responded on Twitter: "#ShameOnYouFinland Exhibiting a black African girl-child in the streets of Finland cannot be the best advertisement of 2017 in Finland. It's a shameful advertisement exotising a traumatized pregnant child." We later started an online campaign #ProtectBlackGirlsToo that became international. I requested a PhD student who was volunteering at Sahwira Africa International to tweet about the complicity of Finland to racism evident in awarding a prize. Black and people of color (BPOC) community, in particular us black women, saw this representation of Fridah as the continuation of colonial exhibitions. Europe has the history of eroticizing and displaying black female bodies at street carnivals, museums and churches in 19th century Europe for the white gaze. For example, Sarah Baartman (branded as the Hottentot Venus), although illiterate, was claimed to have signed a contract and was brought from her home in South Africa in October 1810 to be exhibited at freak shows and museums in Britain and France. Even in death her body was dissected by scientists in France subjected to scientific racism, her remains were returned in 2002 to South Africa when President Nelson Mandela requested them. Finland is complicit too: in 1888 Rosa Emilia Clay was 14 years old, when Finnish missionaries brought her to Finland from Namibia to parade her at church gatherings and made her sing to raise money. Therefore, the young Fridah's case follows in the path of her African ancestors, when she was exhibited in the streets and bus stops of Finland in 2017–18. Mkwesha (2018) wrote an article asking why people were not outraged by this campaign and the prizes being given. The case of Fridah depicts the racist objectification and commodification of black women's bodies to raise money.

Yle News and other media sites invited Sahwira Africa International and Plan International Finland for a discussion and wrote the article "Eroticising and sexualising: Researcher slams Plan Finland over ad campaign featuring pregnant 12 year-old girl", which brought visibility to the campaign (Wall and Taylerson 2018). I participated as the Executive Director of Sahwira and asked the question: Why did Fridah loose the right to protection as a child? My view was that Plan International Finland had failed in its own mandate which is to "prevent harm and keep children and young people safe and protected,"[1] because they were harming Fridah and her unborn child. The journalists also asked if Plan International Finland could use a Finnish child this way. In my view, it is racist to do to a black child what one cannot do to a white Finnish child.

Demonstration and Petition

We later demonstrated at Plan International offices and gave a petition to Plan International Finland Executive Director asking them to apologize for the dehumanizing and sexist campaign, to return the prizes, and pay Fridah for her labor. I argued that the campaign was racializing, sexualizing and eroticizing the girl and fueled negative stereotypes on black girls and women and was racist. In addition, the campaign stigmatized the unborn child. We argued that the white women who created the campaign material practiced white saviorism that perpetuates the image of poverty-stricken Africa. In "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak refers to white savior complex in relation to the manner in which western cultures investigate other cultures and argues that knowledge is never innocent, because it expresses the interests of its producers (1988). Building on Spivak this chapter refers to acts of white people's practices of helping non-white persons so that the white people feel good about themselves; thus, it is about self-serving help. The white savior complex is being challenged by a Ugandan collective who have been campaigning using #nowhitesaviours to advocate for an antiracist humanitarian aid organization. The Antiracist researchers' network RASTER supported our campaign calling out for white savior mentality to end and challenged other organizations to speak out and other organisations wrote statements supporting our campaign, for example Decolonial International Network, Finnish Gender Studies Association, Fem-R, Anti-Racist Forum Finland, Finnish feminist organization and others

[1] https://plan.fi/en

responded to the call and this helped in the negotiations with Plan International Finland and the other organizations that were involved.

In response, Plan International Finland said they wanted to create a shocking campaign and never intended to sexualize any child. They argued that the aim of the campaign was to raise awareness of child motherhood, to advocate for girls and to fundraise, "We wanted to talk about it in a new way. We chose to mimic another genre of advertising [fashion] to create an element of surprise so we used a made-up maternity line to ensure it would stop people," (Wall and Taylerson 2018). My interpretation is that they wanted to shock and awe the viewers so that they give money. They argued that the campaign was successful because there were 21,000 visits to the campaign page and a 40-percent year-on-year increase in regular donors who support the NGO's work. Plan celebrated the prizes and money raised, but for us it was child pornography and pedophilic. What was also disgusting for us was the thin line between seeing the white gaze bordering into public rape of a girl-child whose image was displayed in public spaces including the arena where awards were given. Plan said they did not pay her because they support her community and she did the work to support her community. We found this condescending and a form of unpaid child labor. A child cannot work for the community. They also said they supported her for maternity care and were going to pay for her fees when she went back to school. While in Zambia all expecting mothers have access to government maternity care, we found their suggestion and decisions of paying fees paternalistic and condescending because Plan had no right to decide what would happen after birth.

White Savior Complex

The gendered representations and the role of the two white Finnish celebrity women who were the front figures of the campaign raised a lot of issues for me as a black African woman. The black African girl was represented through what Mohanty (1984) calls the 'western gaze'. The western gaze is a white gaze seeing through the eyes of Western lenses and the viewers are also seeing and interpreting the exhibited or advertised images of the girl through the eyes of their own European culture. Thus, the Zambian girl's images are sensationalized by the campaigns that have been feeding the Finnish white gaze, bringing images of children, the different African rituals and customs to public exhibition spaces in Finland that fuel racial and gendered prejudices towards

black people. The problem with this representation was the white saviourism complex that in my view is a product of the white liberal feminism that framed the Plan Finland campaign. I concurred with Mustonen (2017) who also challenged the celebrity humanitarianism and saviorism in the campaign. The two Finnish celebrities who produced the material for the campaign and became the spokes persons on behalf of the black women and girls were positioned as white saviors. While the good work done by Plan Finland needs to be acknowledged, the white savior complex where the white celebrities position themselves in the hero role as philanthropists for social causes around the so-called 'developing' world, particularly Africa in the case under study, needs to be criticized. We campaigned against the Plan campaign because it employed the rhetoric of Eurocentric individualism that re-inscribes colonial narratives of Africa's diverse peoples as passive and helpless and creates the white women celebrity brand that silences the voices of those they speak on behalf of.

There are harmful effects of white savior complex to both the white people practicing it and the black people being helped. In an open letter "Call to protect black child used as begging container in White Finland!" #ProtectBlackChildrenToo #NotoPovertyPornography the demand was to protect black children from predatory humanitarian organizations exploiting the children in the communities they support (Mkwesha 2018). Mkwesha argued that white saviorism perpetuates poverty pornography to elicit white people's compassion at the expense of the black and brown people. It causes paternalism as the white saviors fail to have dialogue with the local people to really understand what they need and how they want to be supported, thus imposing solutions that are detrimental to the community. It makes white people heroes while making those helped victims who have no agency. It causes white people to do what they would never do to children in Europe like taking and using dehumanizing images of children, while, denying the black children the right to protection, sexualizing and eroticizing children. It makes white people see themselves as experts and the only knowledgeable people of communities they do not belong to or fully understand. It also perpetuates racist colonial representations and stereotypes, as well as dehumanizing those being helped.

The Finnish Children's Ombudsman who weighed in on the issue of children's rights in Plan International maternity wear campaign said, "We are [in] a global world and we have to think about those children that might be used as campaign figures on a global scale… We cannot use

these children even if they are not living in Finland -- even if they are not Finns, we are responsible for their privacy." (Wall and Taylerson 2018). Both the Ombudsman and UNICEF state that similar treatment would not target Finnish white children. So, the question is, Why do these black girls loose the right to protection like white Finnish children? Representations like this reproduce racism and inflict racial violence and trauma to black and brown people.

In *Imperial Encounters: The Politics of Representation in North-South Relations*, Doty (1996) states that politics of representation refers to how identities of people, states, regions are constructed through representational practices. The ways in which the South is discursively represented in the North creates the binary of civilized and uncivilized, first world and third world. Also, politics of representation is acting in the expressed wish of the citizens and, in this case, it should act in the expressed wish of the black, brown and indigenous people being represented. It should be considered what is in the best interests of both the representatives and the represented. Listen to their wish and respect it even if they are poor people from a community the organizations support.

In the campaigns, SahWira Africa International has done, we critically engage with images using the concept of intersectionality in the manner that the black scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) examined poverty as interconnected to race, class, gender and sexuality. We look at how difference is represented negatively in terms of both racialization and racism, sexism, religion, class, place etc. In the cases we have campaigned for addressing the intersection of poverty, class, race, sex, geography and power dynamics enabled by the white saviorism, paternalism, dehumanization and exploitation of the marginalized. We argue for changing negative representation of 'others' that use negative stereotypical images fueling anti/black racism, and ethnocentrism in public spaces. That is why I founded the organization SahWira Africa International ry: to create a platform from which to actively participate in advocacy for equality, diversity and inclusion and to do anti-racist activism work at grassroots level, as well as influence policies through online petitions. There is need to change because stereotypical images cause real harm in the everyday life of those negatively represented, as well as on the policy level.

Racial Illiteracy, White Fragility and Willful Ignorance

What I found interesting in running anti-racist campaigns on negative stereotypical representations in visual communication in organizations, media, social media and in the everyday interactions is racial illiteracy. Racial literacy is a concept developed by sociologist Twine (2004) that refers to a set of practices designed by parents and others to teach their children how to recognize, respond to and counter forms of everyday racism. Our campaigns have shown us racial illiteracy, which refers to when white people are socialized to be functionally illiterate on the topic of race and socialized not to think of themselves in racial terms, thus have not learned the ability to grapple with the nuances of multiracial or mixed-race spaces. The idea that one is a good person and cannot be racist – racists are those who are bad people. This takes away the understanding of the institutional racism and how it operates. Thus, it is about what DiAngelo has called 'white fragility', which is caused by racial stress when white people have not developed racial stamina to deal with issues of racism and resort to being defensive when called out for having practiced racism or being racist. Defensiveness causes crying and in other ways becoming the victim even though they have power and privilege to silence the one raising a complaint (DiAngelo 2011; 2018). The focus is on 'them' and 'us' taught formerly in schools and informally in pop culture. This is also caused by willful voluntary ignorance which happens when a person decides not to learn. Tactical ignorance is a state and practice of ignoring anything that affects the emotions in a way that one does not want by intentionally not engaging with it. Mills (2007, 2017; cf. Lynch 2017) points to white ignorance being linked to white supremacy when privileged people discredit knowledge they do not agree with and have the power to dominate; hence, they do not see the need to know about the other. Even though information on racism and anti-racism is now readily available one chooses not to read it. Instead, one has a sense of racial exceptionalism of being a good person. The position is that in Finland we are for equality and we are not racist. Yet, when the Plan International campaign treats a black child differently from the way they would treat a white Finnish child, that is racism. When people fail to see that a child is not protected as white children they are also participating in willful ignorance and racism. What surprises me is why there is not enough knowledge about representation, especially an awareness about representing black and brown people, here. Is it not taught in schools and at the university Sasha?

Representations and Design

Sasha: Before I became a visual artist and art-based researcher I was working as a graphic designer. I completed my Bachelor studies in Zurich and the Masters studies at the University of art and design in Helsinki and I am presently undertaking practice based PhD studies in artistic research at the Zurich University of the Arts. During both earlier degrees we never had any courses concerning representation and what should be considered when depicting people from diverse backgrounds within visual communication in the realm of advertising for instance. This lack of knowledge is why designers and their clients tend to make wrong decisions. What caused this is also because the universities and advertising agencies, design studios and major media companies are predominantly occupied and led by white people, and, hence the designs tend to be made for the white gaze. Finland is generally still considered a monoculture, even though it is meanwhile a diverse society which should be taken into consideration when making the design decisions. When we wrote the article for the *Grafia* magazine, I took it as an opportunity to speak with my former and now retired professor Tapio Vapaasalo on this issue. He too agrees that: "There is a strong need for more comprehensive education on racial and cultural values and social issues, but there is no course in just this." and he says that a reason is that: "One part of this is that there is great avoidance not to indoctrinate political or narrow attitudes on students. There is a strong belief on individual freedom that prevent manipulation. But it should not prevent to update our view on the reality." He further points out that: "Design is a profession that serves the needs of people but the truth is that great part of it is done to those who have power or money.[2]" Interestingly after the *Grafia* article has been published, current staff from the Visual Communication department where I studied argued that the situation has been improved and that they would welcome me to guest teach. One of the teachers in touch with me wrote that: "The course they developed will contain readings, discussions, lectures, practical design and bodily exercises in order for them to try and understand how designers, or people who use design tools, can be a critical, constructive force in societies. The idea is to form and express stances within collective/individual design practices, the wider design field as well as the sociocultural, technological, ecological and political circumstances and structures. Intersectional feminism, postcolonialism, ecology and critical pedagogy are key topics within the course[3]." This is a good development and it is to be hoped that this will have a positive impact in the visual landscape of Finland in a longer run.

[2] Personal communication with prof. emeritus Vapaasalo.
[3] Personal communication to Sasha Huber.

The acknowledgement of a diverse society in Finland has indeed already contributed to the fact that people of color have become more visible in the visual landscape. Often the positioning of the person in advertisements, for instance, is next to at least one or two white person. Only seldom is the black or brown person the main protagonist, with the exception of advertisements for help organizations using often stereotypical depictions of Africans, notably adults and children in need. If those persons in positions of power could better identify racist representations, they could help to avoid the reinforcement of wrong stereotyping which is harmful. Racism has to be understood as deeply embedded system and that is why whiteness needs to be named in order to tackle and dismantle racial inequality.

After moving to Finland in the early 2000s and until today, I have been observing occasional examples of visual communication where representation was done wrongly and where negative stereotypes have been maintained for a very long time and reinforced. As an example, I noticed the Brunberg Suukko candy which has been on sale since the 1950s. Until very recently in 2020, the twenty-five-piece packaging design was almost unchanged depicting a stereotypical representation of an African couple. Only the name was changed in the early 2000s removing the n-word beside the Suukko which means kiss in Finnish. That same chocolate candy is also sold in Switzerland and although the packaging design was never as racist and stereotypical as in Finland, the naming was similarly racist. Or the other classic product sold in the millions is the popular board game the Afrikan Tähti which basically teaches children about how to exploit and colonize Africa without explaining what colonialism was. It would be possible to use this game for educational purposes, if its problematic history continuing until the present was explained to children.

The recent case where representation has gone wrong was, as mentioned earlier, the Plan campaign from this year which Mkwesha has publicly challenged and constructively criticized. As much as I can recall, she is the first person in Finland to react and respond to the effect of advertising made in Finland. She is able to offer the vocabulary on why this kind of representations are offensive. I find this kind of critique positive for the society because it helps to understand the effects of what the advertisers put out into the public and invites us to rethink on how to ‘sell’ the message without harming anyone. The untrue assumption based on colonial representation of Africa as a poor continent in need of help keeps on re-strengthening the colonialist framework.

Figure 1 caption: Faith Mkwesha during a demonstration in front of the Plan office in Helsinki. 7.5.2018. Photo: Sasha Huber. © Sasha Huber, re-used here with kind permission.

As of myself, even though I studied graphic design, I found that art is to be the best medium for me to discuss topics like postcolonialism and inequality and work in decolonial ways. Since the early 2000s, I have sought to widen the perspective of history to make sense of the world we live in through arts. The beauty and power of art is that you can imagine a reality and future how you want it to be and it gives a sense of freedom.

Institutionally though there is still a lot of work to be done to adjust and correct the narratives. One important initiative comes from Amsterdam and was co-founded by Simone Zeefuik who is working with the hashtag #DecolonizetheMuseum (2014) and #Rewritetheinstitute (2016). Their work challenges institutions which produce knowledge, define art, "uphold traditions" and dictate norms and make concrete propositions how to do better. One example is that signatures beside artefacts and artworks are used to provide additional information which articulates and explains the meaning of the work within the history and in the discourse of decolonial understanding. To help clarify how the object should be understood, especially when the object might be offensive for some of the racialized audience. Faith, you made this observation recently and I find it exemplary how you identified the lack of clarity in a museum and how you reacted, instead of keeping the unease feeling we got without taking action. Can you tell about this?

Faith: During discussions I have realized that in Finland the politics of representation, colonial representations, and decolonizing design and art have not yet been the focus. Also, there has been narrow discussion about race, racism, whiteness and colonial power inequality. Maybe the report titled "Being Black in the European Union" (FRA 2018) that indicates 63% of black people in Finland experienced racial harassment is an indicator that it is time we talk about these issues. There is need to revisit representation practices and creative designers have to think more about why they are choosing a certain image, color, texture etc. because one can easily tap into stereotypes and prejudices of colonial creations. Sasha's work is one of the exceptions in Finland creating art which deals with these issues and is for this reason of importance for the society. It has been good to see how you have been getting a platform to present your work here and abroad. I was happy to hear that the Turku Art museum acquired your video work (*Karakia - The Resetting*

Ceremony, 2015) in their collections. Art pieces like this created from a postcolonial perspective will help people rethink the racist cultural conditioning and create new perspectives.

Sasha: Finland is a place where I started my artistic career and when I first moved here, I noticed several traces of colonial history. Together with my partner Petri Saarikko we redesigned the packaging of the Brunberg Suukko. We also contacted the company and they said that this product does not need any advertising because it is such a well selling product. In 2015 we exhibited the series for the first time within the research exhibition African presence[4] in Finland in Tampere. We asked our Finnish-African-American friend, Edna Nelson at the time why she thinks the packaging needs to change and she said:

"Yes, I think the image should be removed, because it is offensive. I think it supports white supremacy by depicting Africans in a stereotypical and negative, primitive fashion. Africa has some of the most advanced cities today, and African people are making huge contributions to the global community in every end. This image encourages people to see Africans and black people in general as uncivilized, silly, and up for consumption. Ideas like that hold any society back. Images like this are divisive, because against the primitive definition of the African is the supposed civility of the White Finn purchasing the product, reinforcing a sense of superiority that feeds into white supremacist sentiments sadly already at work in Finland. These kinds of images contribute to shame, in Black Finnish people, and encourage bullying. How can one be black and Finnish and feel that we are viewed as equally civilized, or worthy, with images like this saturating our visual landscape, and lives? There are many reasons to change the name and packaging of these candies."

Figure 2 caption: Huber, Sasha & Suukko, Petri Saarikko, 2015. © Sasha Huber and Petri Saarikko, re-used here with kind permission.

Faith: I have been told that Finland was not involved in slavery and colonialism; yet work by scholars prove otherwise (Keskinen 2019). This is colonial exceptionalism, based on untruthful justification. Holger Weiss argues that the sugar company in Turku founded 1756 came from Caribbean Islands produced by slaves (2017). Moreover, what is not talked about is that Finland participated in the civilizing mission in complicit with Britain in Africa, specifically Namibia

[4] http://www.werstas.fi/nae-ja-koe/nayttelyt/menneet-nayttelyt/

where the Finnish missionaries build school, hospital and churches. These are the missionaries who brought Rosa Emilia Clay in late 1880s and evidence of colonial complicity. Also, colonization of Sámi people still going on is not talked about. In addition, what surprised me is the lack of awareness of the Anglo-Eurocentric culture and knowledge from educational resources like books, articles and films dominating the culture and higher learning institutions here (Vuorela 2009). This white ignorance is a result of the education system not teaching about these issues, and thus people develop white apathy. This means lack of interest to learn or listen. The conversation about race, racism and racial violence is derailed and even stopped, thereby, perpetuating racism and creating racial tensions (DiAngelo 2018).

Sasha: The same applies also to Switzerland, and as Finland it is one of the countries that participated in colonialism even without having had colonies. Although we should remember that Finland colonized the Sámì people.

In 2011, I made an art installation called *Strange Fruit* which was inspired by the song Billie Holiday performed. The work was installed in the courtyard of the former Finlayson textile factory in Tampere which has been built in the 1820s. They acquired the cotton from the Southern States in the USA. The song is about racism in the USA, and specifically about the lynching of African Americans, which happened mostly in the Southern states between 1882 and 1968.

The more recent portrait of Rosa Emilia Clay that I made in 2017 was the first one of a new series called “The Firsts”. The series is dedicated to first Africans in the diaspora starting from the 19th century and it researches historical and systematic racism and its debilitating effects on members of the contemporary African Diaspora. The portrait is made with staples which I shot into black painted acoustic board. The materiality of the board refers to the muting of history in a symbolic manner. The use of the compressed-air staple gun, relates to its symbolic significance as a weapon, which is offering the potential to renegotiate unequal power dynamics. This is a technique which I developed in 2004 and which I have been applying in several projects over the years.

Figure 3 caption: Sasha Huber, Strange Fruit, installation with 200 pineapples, 2011. © Sasha Huber, re-used here with kind permission.

Faith: What we forget is that our worldview has been shaped by Anglo-Eurocentric knowledge through formal and informal education (Vuorela 2009). The images we create or choose for specific purposes are influenced by our socialization, education and worldview. That is where decolonization comes in, we need to be critical of Anglo-Eurocentric colonial practices instilled from childhood through formal and informal education and culture. We have all been exposed to the dominant Anglo-Eurocentric knowledge and culture. Hence, prejudice influences people's thoughts and behaviors in many ways even if they have good intentions. Unconscious bias can have harmful effects at institutional and individual level – these kinds of intellectual harms are known as epistemic injustice. Thus, the discussions about decolonizing designs might be helpful in reimagining epistemologies. What I mean is that imagination as a resource for social and political reform can influence the questions one asks. My point here is that circumstances of society and one's social location affect the process of knowing, that is why it is important to rethink design from a conscious position and awareness of geographic location from which one knows. What is required from individual and institutional level is to remedy the practices of difference representation ethically. There is a need to account of 'sympathy' as an imaginative and reflective capacity that provides fertile resources for addressing systemic failures to recognize the histories, needs, and experiences of marginalized social groups. The subject of knowledge is constituted by a large number of social factors in their cultural context, like gender, wealth, class, and it affects how and what we know (Sherman and Goguen 2019).

Conclusion: Towards a Decolonizing of Design

What emerges from the discussion is that no one intentionally uses prejudicial and racist representations and art. One may sincerely want to be epistemically just, but unconscious bias may cause one to represent others in a harmful and dehumanizing racist way. Looking at the racist and problematic representations of black and brown people we discussed earlier in this text and the common answer of not having knowledge of good representations, we propose that there is need for decolonizing the mind to free the mind from racist conditioning and way of knowing. Decolonization calls for rethinking design, and this rethinking is a process of decolonial reflections so that one can "learning to unlearn in order to re/learn" (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). This means unlearning Western colonial knowledge we have been taught through education, culture and social environment that has socialized the category of white people to think through a

Eurocentric view of white superiority, while seeing others as inferior. It also means to be willing to accept another knowledge coming from outside Europe. In other words, decolonization in design entails questioning and changing the designing epistemic practices and the role of designing in the changing times of global transformation accelerated by technology.

There are two main parts in decolonizing visual communication designs. The first one is the critique of the mainstream contemporary visual communication discourses and representation materialized by the neo-liberal and colonial world system that is shaping the world. This focuses on issues of gender, race, sexuality, culture, religion and class, which both take us to the notion of power and responsibility. The second one is to practice decolonial designs – rethink beyond the designs that exist in our cultures. This re-thinking and re-designing will enable the designers and creatives to re-imagine and develop alternative inclusive and diverse solutions. Therefore, decolonial calls the creative community to rethink representation practices and forms used to represent difference in popular culture like advertisements, media, films etc. We encourage designers to re-think why there is a fascination with difference of people and places, while, probing them to be critical of negative images and racial stereotypes dating from slavery and colonialism.

Inclusiveness in our visual environment and landscape has an effect on our wellbeing as we are exposed to it on a daily basis while moving around in the city, print media and online media. There is a need to have workshops on decolonizing the mind so that designers may stimulate their creativity, and decolonize stereotypical images, thereby creating new narratives. Instead of the racialized representation and constant representation of black and brown Finns in stereotypical ways, designers can create positive images of black and brown Finns that they see here every day. Also, exposure to other knowledges may positively allow designers to rethink outside the white dominant culture, and bring a new awareness of the advantages of diversity and inclusion in the human resources and tape into some of the great talent among the immigrant community that is currently shut out of the system through the emphasis on fluency in the Finnish language. Maybe bringing in black and brown Finns will help the designer community find innovative ways of reversing the stereotypes and reimagine a diverse and inclusive culture of representation. This entails rethinking who can be an expert, without only considering experts who know the Finnish context. While, working with white Finns only and at times brown Finns only creates comfortability, there is the chance of missing on different perspectives from those who are not

Finnish, who can therefore, pick up some of the problems of the stereotypical and negative representations.

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