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BEING BLACK IN THE FINNISH LABOUR MARKET

A qualitative study of the labour market experiences of Black people in Finland

ABSTRACT

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Being black in the Finnish labour market - A qualitative study of the labour market experiences of Black people in Finland.
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In recent years, Finland and other European countries have been grappling with the impact of significant global trends, including globalisation and an ageing population. Consequently, Finland, like many other nations, has become increasingly reliant on migrant labour. In response to this, policies have been developed to attract foreign nationals to work in Finland.

Background research conducted across multiple sources in Finland and other European countries has shed light on the experiences of Africans and people of African descent in the labour market. This research has revealed that these individuals often face racial discrimination and encounter additional hurdles in their pursuit of employment opportunities. This thesis examines the experiences of Black people in the Finnish labour market, focusing on the relationship between race and labour market access. By conducting qualitative research and employing a critical race theory framework, this study aims to understand how race influences employability, labour market outcomes, and the challenges faced by Black people in the Finnish context. The research was conducted in collaboration with Think Africa ry (registered association).

The data collection involved twelve semi-structured interviews and ten individual interview questions with ten employed black people. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data. The interviewees shared their experiences of being black in the Finnish labour market, including their perceptions of the impact of race on their employability. The findings of this study reveal various experiences of racial hierarchy, a continuum of favouritism, racial ghettos, and the normalisation of whiteness in the Finnish labour market. An individual's racial background and social network can significantly influence their labour market outcomes.

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for greater race consciousness and awareness among employers and policymakers to address racial disparities in the labour market. The findings call for the implementation of policies aimed at promoting equity and inclusion for Black people in the Finnish labour market. Further research on the intersectional experiences of different racialized groups in Finland could provide valuable insights into the broader implications of race on employment outcomes in the country.

Keywords: Race, Racism, Critical race theory, Inequality, Racial discrimination, Institutional Discrimination.

Contents

1 INTRODUCTION

Finland is known for its reputation as the world's happiest country for seven consecutive times (Helliwell et al., 2024). It is supposed to have a fair and equal society that treats individuals without limitations based on race, religion, gender, nationality, or country of origin. However, it still faces challenges in achieving true equality in the labour market. While the concept of meritocracy suggests that hardworking individuals will experience upward mobility in the labour market, empirical studies have shown that various factors beyond personal efforts and competencies influence employment opportunities and labour market outcomes. (Ahmad, 2020; Finnish Ombudsman, 2020; Keskinen et al., 2021)

As European societies become increasingly multicultural, with a rising proportion of the population from diverse cultural backgrounds, people of African descent have become an integral part of these societies (Ebun 2020, p. 178). However, they continue to experience fundamental rights violations, as highlighted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and other studies (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019).

The "Being Black in EU" study conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in November 2019 and October 2023 revealed widespread prejudice, exclusion, and racial discrimination faced by people of African descent across the European Union (EU). The study found that racial discrimination, racist violence, and discriminatory profiling by the police are common experiences for this group. In Finland, residents of African descent experience the most racism, according to the EU report. They encounter challenges in accessing the labour market, indicating the presence of racial inequality and discrimination (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019). Another report, published by the Finnish Ombudsman on the discrimination faced by people of African descent in Finland, revealed that everyday discrimination occurs in interactions between individuals, groups and in the structures of society (Finnish Ombudsman 2020).

Before the EU and the Finnish Ombudsman report, the issue of racial discrimination in Finland had not received much attention or acknowledgement, largely due to the limited availability of data. In particular, the acknowledgement of how race impacts the employment of people of African descent. Based on official statistics recorded in Finland the unemployment rate of the foreign-born population (19.4%) was two times higher than that of natives in 2018; but mounted to 28.8 % among African migrants" (Khan et al., 2021). The disparity in the numbers is significant and this thesis aims to study the role of race on this disparity.

This thesis aims to fill the research gap by exploring the experiences of Black people in the Finnish labour market and investigating the influence of race on their employability and labour market outcomes. By conducting qualitative research and applying a critical race theory framework, this study seeks to understand how race intersects with other factors such as class and gender, and how it shapes the labour market experiences of Black people in Finland.

The research methodology employed in this study involved twelve semi-structured interview questions and ten individual interviews with employed Black people. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data collected. The findings of this study reveal the existence of racial discrimination, a favouritism continuum, racial ghettos, and the normalisation of whiteness as the norm within the Finnish labour market. These findings align with previous research, indicating the presence of racial bias in the Finnish labour market. This study emphasises the need for further comprehensive research on the impact of race on employment outcomes and the experiences of different racial groups in Finland. It also calls for the implementation of race-conscious policies and solutions to address the difficulties faced by individuals in the labour market due to their race.

My motivation and interest in conducting this study stem from my personal experience as a naturalised black Finn who had to navigate the labour market process in Finland. This personal experience drives my desire to seek answers and gain a deeper understanding of how race can influence the employability and labour market outcomes of Black people in Finland. To comprehensively explore this phenomenon, it is essential to examine the experiences of other Black people in

Finland and their perceptions and understanding of how their race impacts their employment outcomes.

Furthermore, as the current chairperson of the African Anti-Racism Society Finland ry (African Anti-Racism Society Finland ry, 2024), I have actively worked towards raising awareness around issues of racism, institutional discrimination, and Afrophobia in Finland. Through this involvement, I have encountered the multiple layers of racial inequality and witnessed the pressing need for a comprehensive understanding of and solutions for this problem. This exposure and the desire to address these issues have inspired and motivated me to engage in this study.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND KEY CONCEPTS

The theoretical framework of this thesis is grounded in the critical race theory, as proposed by Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva (2008, p. 15). The literature review within this theoretical framework explores key concepts central to the thesis, such as race, racial discrimination, racial inequality, employability, and access to the labour market by Black people in Finland. The adoption of the critical race theory framework is deemed most suitable for this study due to its ability to effectively examine the labour market outcomes of Black people within the context of race, employing empirical research methods.

Moreover, the theoretical framework of this thesis is primarily rooted in the notion of the permanence of racism, a fundamental aspect of critical race theory. This perspective recognizes that racism is deeply ingrained in societal norms and daily interactions, constituting a stable and pervasive reality for most racialized people. Intersectionality, which encompasses the intersections of race, class, and gender, is another crucial tenet of critical race theory that informs the theoretical framework. The concept of intersectionality challenges the mainstream approach of perceiving identities as monolithic and advocates for an understanding of how different forms of oppression intersect. When examining people's lives, it is necessary to consider multiple dimensions, rather than focusing solely on one aspect. (Ebun 2020, pp. 15-16)

The theoretical framework of this thesis draws from critical race theory scholars who assert that racial hierarchy categorizes migrants and minorities into distinct groups within their host countries, subsequently influencing their outcomes in those countries. Newcomers, as well as established residents, are assigned racial labels that determine how they are treated, including their access to resources and social status. (Zuberi & Bashi, 1997)

The research study focuses on the relationship between employment and race in Finland's labour market. Analysis of employment statistics reveals that Black people in Finland are more likely to face unemployment and underemployment

compared to other groups, even when they possess similar qualifications, language skills, and work experience. (Finnish Ombudsman, 2020)

2.1 Critical race theory

Critical race theory emerged in the mid-1970s as a field of study that examined the complex interplay between race, racism, and power. It originated from the efforts of lawyers, activists, and legal scholars who sought to understand racial inequalities, particularly in the United States. Critical race theory views racial inequalities as structural phenomena, rooted in systemic factors rather than individual causes. It offers a framework for critically analysing and contextualizing race and racism, both historically and in contemporary society. (Delgado, and Stefancic 2012, pp. 1-14) Central to critical race theory is the examination of racial hierarchy in modern states and the marginalization of individuals classified as black or non-white. It aims to investigate the effects of race and racism while challenging the hegemonic system of white supremacy. (Ebun, 2020, pp. 7-10)

One fundamental premise of critical race theory is that race and races are social constructs that lack objective reality or biological basis. This notion aligns with the views expressed by Martin Luther King Jr., who emphasized that race should not be used to determine one's abilities or character (King, 1960). However, race as a social construct does influence interactions between racial groups. Critical race theory explores how the social understanding of race is shaped by politics and institutions. (Ebun, 2020, pp. 7-10)

A key aspect of critical race theory is its insistence on analysing race and racism within historical and contemporary contexts. This approach allows for an examination of the relationships between different racial groups and the role played by supremacist structures and the law in maintaining racial hierarchies. (Delgado, and Stefancic 2012, pp. 10-18) Critical race theory sheds light on how societies have organized themselves along racial lines and hierarchies, ultimately calling for action toward emancipation (Ebun, 2020, pp. 7-10).

Like any other theoretical framework, critical race theory operates based on its core tenets. These tenets serve as analytical and conceptual tools to understand and expose systems of oppression and privilege. In this thesis study, four main tenets of critical race theory are applied: the voice-of-colour thesis and counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, interest convergence, and intersectionality (intersections of race, class, and gender). (Ebun, 2020, pp. 10-18)

2.1.1 Critiques of critical race theory

Critical race theory is rather a new theory which emerged in the mid-1970s, and it is still open for further development. Those who are new to the critical race theory methodology, can find it challenging. There are a few critiques that need to be addressed for the purposes of this theoretical framework. (Delgado, and Stefancic 2012, pp. 99-102)

One main critique of critical race theory is of the tenet of counter storytelling. The criticism is that critical race theory relies too heavily on subjective experiences and anecdotal evidence rather than empirical research and data. Stories are usually socially constructed and may not tell the full story. Some argue that this makes it difficult to assess the validity and rigor of its claims. While it is true that critical race theory does prioritize the lived experiences of people from marginalized communities, it does not completely discount empirical research and data. In fact, many critical race theorists use a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to support their arguments. Additionally, the emphasis on subjective experiences allows for a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities of racism that may not be captured by traditional research methods alone. (Delgado, and Stefancic 2012, pp. 99-108)

Some critics argue that critical race theory's focus on race can sometimes overshadow other forms of oppression, leading to a neglect of the unique experiences of people who face multiple intersecting forms of discrimination. It is important for critical race theorists to be mindful of addressing issues of intersectionality more comprehensively. Intersectionality is a key concept within critical race theory,

highlighting the ways in which race intersects with other forms of oppression such as class, gender, sexuality, and ability. While there may be valid criticisms that certain intersections are not always adequately addressed, critical race theory provides a framework for understanding the interconnections between different systems of power and how they impact marginalized individuals and communities. (Ebun 2020, pp. 17-19)

The tenet of permanence of racism in critical race theory is also criticised. Critics argue that it presents a pessimistic view of social change, which can discourage people and society from actively working towards dismantling systemic inequalities. Some argue that focusing solely on racism as an inherent and unchangeable aspect of society can be divisive, overlooks the progress that has been made and diminishes the agency of individuals to challenge and combat racism. However, permanence of racism in critical race theory emphasizes the importance of acknowledging the enduring legacy of racism and systemic inequalities that have persisted for generations. It can be argued that systemic inequalities are deeply embedded within institutions and societal structures, making it challenging to dismantle these systems without sustained effort, which can only be achieved by acknowledging the continued existence of racism. (Ebun 2020, pp. 11-13)

2.2 Key concepts

In order to comprehend and analyse the experiences of Black people in the Finnish labour market within the framework of critical race theory, it is essential to develop a thorough understanding of the concept of race and its historical context in Finland. The key concepts in this study revolve around the concept of race and its position and history within the context of Finland and its labour market.

Race is a central focus of critical race theory, which rejects notions of race-neutrality and colour-blindness (Ebun, 2020, p. 7). Denying or ignoring the impact of race on our daily lives and interactions is a form of self-deception and a refusal to acknowledge the elephant in the room. The social construct of race is deeply

embedded in every aspect of our surroundings, often operating subconsciously without conscious recognition or admission.

2.2.1 Concept of race

"Race today is supposed to be a thing of the past. And yet all we do, seemingly, is to talk about it. We talk (about) race when not talking (about) it; and we don't talk (about) it when (we should be) talking (about) it". (Goldberg, 2015, 1)

The quote by Goldberg highlights the paradoxical nature of discussions about race in contemporary society. While race is often considered a thing of the past, the reality is that discussions about race persist, even when they are not explicitly acknowledged. The quote suggests that there is a tendency to avoid discussing race when it should be addressed and to discuss it when it may not be the most relevant or appropriate topic.

The denial or refusal to recognize the impact of race on our daily activities and interactions is seen as a form of self-deception and a failure to acknowledge the obvious. The social construct of race is deeply ingrained in various aspects of our lives, so much so that we may not consciously recognize or admit its influence. It permeates our institutions, social structures, and individual experiences, shaping our perceptions, opportunities, and interactions with others.

The modern concept of race emerged during the European colonisation of the world and the oppression of people from the so-called "New World" who had physical features distinct from Europeans (Kivisto & Croll, 2012). Europeans, using their own image and civilization as the standard, deemed non-Europeans as less than fully human. This led to a distinction between the European "civilised" world and the "barbarians," a mindset that persists to this day.

Race has historically defined the humanity, belonging, and rights of people. It determined which bodies were valued and which were not, dictating what work people could engage in and what was deemed appropriate for them. Race played

a significant role in decisions about social accountability, livelihoods, and even existence. This racial categorization continues to exist today, particularly in Western countries, where ideals of equality do not align with the continuous rejection faced by racialized groups. (Goldberg, 2015)

The idea of race evolved from the concept of "purity of blood" and eventually settled into categories such as civilised and uncivilised. By the nineteenth century, the central classification of race revolved around European and non-European distinctions, with Europeans being seen as superior and others as inferior, lacking in knowledge, history, development, and democracy. These categories and classifications form the basis of the contemporary concept of race. (Alemanji, 2016, pp. 7-10)

"Race works with and in the service of racism" (Alemanji, 2016, p. 9). Race is not solely a biological construct and cannot be ignored or rejected. The consequences of race, whether social, political, or material, have a profound impact on the creation of otherness. Rejecting race in discourse dissociates people from the negative aspects of the term, hinders deeper understanding, and complicates efforts against racism. (Alemanji, 2016, p. 9)

Race is a socially constructed concept intertwined with cultural views, assumptions, and behaviours based on the colour of one's body. It is deeply ingrained in our subconscious thinking, resulting from a complex interplay of history, social classification, and the process of othering. The concept of race was not created overnight but gradually constructed over centuries, benefiting certain bodies through oppression and empowering others. (Alemanji, 2016, pp. 7-10)

2.2.2 Race in Finland

Regarding the discourse in Finland on the concept of race and the historical background of race, it is crucial to examine the original Finnish word for race, "rotu" (Maamies, 1996). This term also conveys the notion of "breed" in reference to other animal species, thus carrying strong biological connotations. The utilization

of the word race in the Finnish language is problematic due to its association with a biological construct, despite race being widely recognized as a social construct with no basis in biology. Consequently, the discomfort surrounding the term hinders discussions on race within the Finnish context. (Alemanji, 2016, pp.10-11)

Alemanji (2016) asserts that the focus of discussions should shift from the concept of race itself to the impacts of race. In Finnish society, race and, consequently, racism, result in the stratification of people along a hierarchical ladder. White people occupy the top of the ladder, wielding the most power, while Black people are positioned at the bottom. The power dynamics between white and non-white people cannot be adequately explained by other social categorizations such as class or gender. This understanding aligns with contemporary critical race and whiteness theories. (Keskinen et al., 2021, p.14)

Race can be perceived as a concept and a classification, whereas racialization is a process that segregates groups of people and justifies the unequal distribution of power. The consequences of racialization manifest in identities, privileges, and unequal opportunities. Within Finnish discourse, the term "racialized" is employed by non-white groups for self-definition and collective identity. It is also used to describe the status of people experiencing racism. Racialization shapes the perception of non-white people and the concept of whiteness itself. (Keskinen et al., 2021, pp. 51-55)

Whiteness lies at the core of the racialization process and is deeply intertwined with the history of white supremacy. White supremacy allocates privileges based on skin colour, particularly in whiteness. Additionally, whiteness is equated with Europeanness, and this ideology has been disseminated worldwide through colonization and globalization. Whiteness is associated with dominant and superior ideologies and cultures, often referred to as the "West." Consequently, whiteness is entrenched within our ways of knowing and being. (Alemanji, 2016, pp.24-28)

Racial hierarchy is established through the process of racialization, wherein certain groups of people are linked to hierarchies, assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices based on their skin colour or presumed racial background.

Racialization perpetuates racist and discriminatory actions, as people consciously or unconsciously treat racialized groups unequally based on stereotypical definitions. Racism is the outcome of the racialization process. (Finnish Ombudsman, 2023)

Racial categorization inherently leads to social dominance. According to Sidanius et al. (1992), social dominance theory posits that all societies are characterized by hierarchical systems that are actively maintained, reinforced, and reproduced. Such systems consist of a hegemonic group occupying the top position and negative reference groups situated at the bottom, a pattern evident in Finnish society. (Kivisto & Croll, 2012)

Racial categorization establishes a default starting position for non-white people, creating significant obstacles that impede their access to equal opportunities and social mobility. Despite their efforts, people from racialized communities face persistent barriers due to their racial classification. As a result, climbing the socioeconomic ladder in their host country may prove exceedingly difficult or even impossible for those burdened with a specific racial tag. Therefore, critical race theory and the concept of racial hierarchy help to elucidate the higher unemployment rates experienced by Black people in Finland. (Keskinen et al., 2021, p. 165)

Presently, the prevailing idea concerning race in Europe is embedded in neo-racism and post-racial discourse, both of which reject and deny the significance of race altogether. The concept of race is perceived as archaic, with discussions shifting towards ethnicity and culture instead. While culture and ethnicity provide a means to detach from historical implications, relying solely on these categories fails to address the underlying causes and impacts of racism. By grouping people under the banners of culture, ethnicity, racialized, or immigrants, we neglect a comprehensive exploration of racism. A multidisciplinary approach is imperative for effectively addressing racism and its effects in any society. (Alemanji, 2016, pp.11-15)

2.2.3 Racism in Finland

Racism in Finland is rooted in the concept of Finnish exceptionalism, which portrays Finland as inherently superior and other nations as inferior. This exceptionalism stems from a historical perspective that has shaped the national identity, emphasizing Finland's excellence in various aspects, even when it may no longer be the case. Consequently, anyone outside the narrow definition of "Finnish" is often viewed as a second-class citizen. (Keskinen et al., 2021, pp. 9-15)

In the past, Finland, like other Nordic countries, has denied its participation in the colonial history of the Western world. This denial has been fuelled by the notion of "white innocence," which overlooks Finland's complicity in colonialism. However, research on colonial complicity reveals that Nordic countries, including Finland, actively participated in, and benefited from the unequal relations established during European colonialism. (Keskinen, 2019)

Within the context of racial hierarchy in Finland, Finnishness is closely linked to whiteness, which serves as a normative standard for defining and categorizing people. Africanness, on the other hand, is associated with blackness and is positioned at the farthest point from whiteness. This places people of African descent at the bottom of the racial hierarchy in Finland, subjecting them to racism, discrimination, and institutional bias, including in the labour market. (Alemanji 2016, pp.25-31)

In discussions on racism in Finland, there is often an emphasis on immigration as the main cause, disregarding the long history of racism within the country. This narrow focus on immigration ignores the fact that racism and racialization have been part of Finnish society for centuries. Racism is not solely a consequence of immigration but has deep roots within Finnish reality. (Keskinen et al., 2021, pp. 12-13)

Research on the Finnish labour market supports the existence of significant employment disparities and uncertainty for immigrants and non-white groups. The unemployment rate for individuals whose native language is not Finnish or

Swedish is twice as high as that of the native population, regardless of their place of residence or educational level. However, the discussion often places blame on the people themselves, overlooking the racialized and class structures that contribute to these disparities. (Keskinen et al., 2021, pp. 165-168)

The labour market is not a neutral space, as systemic and institutional practices of exclusion create barriers for immigrants. Racialization, immigration status, and residence status all contribute to unequal positions and limited opportunities. Immigrants often find themselves in low-wage jobs that do not correspond to their education or professional qualifications. (Keskinen et al., 2021, pp. 167-168)

While individual factors such as motivation, education, language skills, and cultural adjustments influence immigrants' labour market outcomes, they do not fully explain the disparities among different migrant communities. African migrants, for example, experience significantly higher rates of unemployment compared to other migrant groups in Finland. (Khan et al., 2021)

Language requirements can also function as a form of racism, as proficiency in the Finnish language does not guarantee desired employment outcomes. The language becomes a tool of exclusion, tied to a specific notion of "Finnish ethnicity," perpetuating discrimination in the labour market. (Khan et al., 2021)

Overall, understanding the complexities of racism in Finland requires recognizing the historical context, the impact of Finnish exceptionalism, the denial of colonial complicity, the role of whiteness in defining Finnishness, and the systemic barriers faced by immigrants and non-white groups in the labour market.

2.3 Research on racism in Finland

Numerous studies have been conducted on the presence of institutional discrimination and racism in Finnish society and the labour market. In a study by Ahmad (2020) titled "When Name Matters," the impact of immigrants' names on their employment opportunities in 2020 was examined. The study's correspondence

findings strongly supported the notion that ethnicity remains a significant factor in employment decisions in Finland. Employers demonstrated a preference for Finnish applicants and European names when presented with otherwise similar profiles of applicants, highlighting the influence of ethnicity on hiring decisions.

Keskinen (2021), along with a group of researchers and civil activists, compiled a book comprising various articles discussing racism, its historical context, experiences of racism, and anti-racist efforts in Finland from diverse perspectives within society. The recurring conclusions drawn in the book revolved around the definitions and history of racism. It challenged racialized definitions of "Finnishness" and emphasized the importance of understanding racism within its historical context. The book highlighted the prevalence of institutional and structural racism in Finland across multiple aspects of life, including academia, employment, housing, and general welfare, impacting the lives of Black people and other racialized minority groups.

While there have been studies on ethnicity and migration in relation to employment in Finland, there is a lack of research specifically focusing on the concept of race. This study fills that gap by examining the relationship between race and employment outcomes, offering a new and necessary perspective.

In Finland, there is often a belief in the idea of an equal and meritocratic society, where qualified and hard-working people have equal access and opportunities in the labour market. However, empirical research studies in Finland have shown that there are factors beyond personal efforts and language skills that significantly influence employment outcomes (Ahmad, 2020; Keskinen et al., 2021). Therefore, this thesis adopts a critical race theory framework to investigate the disparities in labour market outcomes within the context of racial hierarchy.

Existing studies on inequality and inequity in the Finnish labour market often do not consider the race and employment perspective. Hence, this thesis adopts this approach to explore the relationship between race and employment outcomes in Finland. While nationality and citizenship are relevant factors affecting

employment outcomes, this study primarily focuses on the racial group of the research target community, rather than their ethnicity, nationality, or citizenship.

Comparing the labour market outcomes of Black people with other racialized migrant groups in Finland, who may possess phenotypic whiteness, does not fully capture the lived experience of Black people. Therefore, this study is important and relevant in providing data specifically on the employability of Black people as a distinct group within the broader context of migrant and other racialized groups.

3 AIM OF THE RESEARCH AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of this study is to examine and document the experiences of Black people in the Finnish labour market, focusing on the relationship between race and employability. By conducting qualitative research and employing a critical race theory framework, this study aims to understand how race influences employability, labour market outcomes, and the challenges faced by Black people in the Finnish context. By focusing on the experiences of employed Black people, the thesis aims to investigate the disparities and outcome gaps they face, as well as their perceptions of the racial hierarchy in the Finnish labour market.

To address this knowledge gap, the study will explore the relationship between race and employment outcomes, shedding light on racial discrimination and obstacles present in the Finnish labour market associated to skin colour and race. It will examine the impact of such discrimination on the social, economic, personal, and emotional lives of the black racial groups residing in Finland.

This thesis is research-oriented and will provide further research and policy recommendations based on the data analysis. These recommendations will serve as a guide for employers, authorities, politicians, and other stakeholders in the labour market to improve services and address racial inequality effectively.

The findings of this thesis will also be utilized by the thesis cooperation partners, Think Africa ry (registered association) (Think Africa ry, 2023), and the African Anti-racism Society Finland (African anti-racism society Finland ry, 2024), to initiate or inform their projects to better mitigate the identified problems. Personally, this study is of great importance to me as it aligns with my interest in working and studying in the field of social justice and racial inequality in Finland.

The research questions formulated for this thesis revolve around the central variable of race, which is the main focus of investigation. These questions are derived from the four main principles of critical race theory, which serves as the theoretical framework for this study.

1. How do Black people experience the Finnish labour market?

       a. What opportunities, challenges, and/or threats Black people encounter in Finnish labour market?

2. How does race impact the employment outcomes of Black people in Finland?

4 WORK LIFE PARTNER – THINK AFRICA RY

Think Africa ry (registered association) serves as the work life partner for this thesis study, as they have a keen interest in addressing inclusion and racial inequality faced by Africans and people of African descent in Finland. The organization actively works to change the narrative and find solutions to the problems caused by racism in the country (Think Africa ry, 2023).

In collaboration with this thesis, Think Africa ry assisted in identifying interview participants through their extensive network and community. They also provided logistical support, such as arranging interview spaces. The findings of this thesis will be valuable to Think Africa ry, as they will utilize them in their work and potentially develop projects to address the issues uncovered through the research.

Established in 2014, Think Africa ry is a community-driven organization that promotes participation, representation, diversity, and collaboration between the African diaspora and Finnish society. Their members possess a variety of skills, diverse expertise, and extensive networks, enabling them to facilitate collaboration between Finland and African countries. (Think Africa ry, 2023)

The main vision of Think Africa ry is to support the realization of the potential of each member of the African diaspora and contribute to the growth of African countries. Their mission is to make a social and economic impact by engaging, promoting, and empowering the African diaspora in Finland, while also fostering effective collaboration between Finland and African countries. As a diaspora-inspired organization, they aim to build bridges and create opportunities in both host and home countries. (Think Africa ry, 2023)

Since its establishment, Think Africa ry has focused on promoting awareness and understanding of Africa and the African diaspora. Their activities encompass three main areas, taking a holistic approach to engage people, private and public sector organizations, and creating activities that facilitate connections, provide information, and inspire. (Think Africa ry, 2023)

Think Africa ry actively promotes realistic representations and stories to challenge stereotypes and improve collaboration, representation, integration, and participation. They believe that when people are actively engaged, well-informed, and have access to networks, resources, and opportunities, they are empowered to take action for themselves and their communities. (Think Africa ry, 2023)

Furthermore, Think Africa ry has been involved in a project the mentorship project focused on assisting highly educated migrants, primarily from the African community in Finland, in gaining employment. This project specifically addresses the needs of the black community, and the findings of this study will be incorporated into the project implementation. (Think Africa ry, 2023)

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research Methodology

The research employed a qualitative research method to gather data for this thesis, as it aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the labour market outcomes and experiences of Black people accessing the Finnish labour market. Qualitative research methods were deemed appropriate for investigating phenomena and promoting rich descriptions. The objective was to provide comprehensive insights and understanding of the labour market experiences of the target group, which cannot be quantified. (Moser & Korstjens, 2017)

Qualitative methods, particularly interviews, were chosen to collect rich narrative materials. Interviews offer an in-depth and holistic approach to studying a phenomenon, and the use of flexible semi-structured interviews was a natural choice for data collection. (Moser & Korstjens, 2017)

The research focuses on Black people in Finland as the target group, as the study aims to investigate the employment experiences of this racial group in the country. It is important to note that in Finland, people from various nationalities and backgrounds are classified as part of the black racial group based on their skin colour. Previous studies, such as the Being Black in EU report, have revealed that those classified as black in Finland face specific institutional discrimination and racism due to their skin colour. (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2019)

From the inception of the thesis idea, it was clear that recorded interviews with semi-structured questions would be included in the data collection process. Since the interviews were conducted with individuals rather than groups, this aligns with the nature and elements of qualitative research methods (Moser & Korstjens, 2017). Ten participants, with an equal gender balance, were interviewed for the study.

The choice of qualitative research method was also driven by the intention to gain insights and understand how race influences labour market experiences in Finland. The intensive collection of narrative data was used to generate hypotheses and themes. According to Kumar (2014), qualitative methods are recommended when data collection involves unstructured questions to create qualitative data using open-ended questions that delve deeper into the issues to obtain in-depth information. (Kumar 2014, pp.176-177)

The use of the qualitative research method allowed for in-depth understanding of the labour market outcomes and experiences of the research participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small sample of ten participants, which is suitable for qualitative research. The method was chosen as the thesis aimed to provide insights and understanding of the labour market experiences of the targeted study group, which cannot be quantified. (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Given the purpose and objectives of the research, the data collection was based on spoken and written narratives, making qualitative research method more suitable. The subjective, holistic, and process-oriented approach to inquiry aligns with the nature of qualitative research, which focuses on generating themes and patterns. In contrast, quantitative research methods tend to be more objective, focused, and outcome-oriented (Silverman, 2004). Hence, qualitative research method was considered appropriate for this thesis.

5.2 Data collection process

A total of ten semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted between August and September 2023, with each interview lasting from thirty minutes to one hour. The interviews were structured around twelve interview questions that were designed based on the framework of critical race theory, with race as the central construct (Appendix 1). The interviews took place at a suitable time and in a comfortable setting preferred by the participants. The research cooperation with the participants was facilitated by Think Africa ry, the work-life partner, was responsible for coordinating the interview times and locations.

The selection criteria for the participants included legal residence, the right to work in Finland, currently employed, a university education, and self-identification as black. Additionally, participants were required to have a minimum of two years of living and working experience in Finland to ensure they had sufficient lived experience and perspectives on life in Finland. The research partner, Think Africa ry sent out an open invitation for interested and suitable participants. The invitation which included an online form was distributed to their members and network via email, social media platforms, and WhatsApp. Those who met the criteria were contacted by the work-life partner, and interview arrangements were made. A total of eleven voluntary participants signed up. One of them was not accepted because they did not fulfil the two-year working experience selection criteria. There was no prior contact between the master student (researcher) and the research participants before the interviews.

The work-life partner also assisted in arranging the interview locations and times. The work-life partner informed the master student to only show up and conduct the interviews. On the day of the interview, the participants were provided with an official letter of consent to read and sign before the interview commenced.

A total of ten participants were interviewed, with a heterogeneous demographic composition and a gender balance of five women and five men. The participants' length of residence in Finland ranged from 2 to 15 years, and one participant was born in Finland. Three participants had a bachelor's degree, while seven had a master's degree. Three participants worked in the social services field with non-profit organizations, one in the educational sector, one in healthcare, and one in the public sector. Four participants worked in the ICT field. Among them, five held senior management positions, three held middle management positions, and two held lower-level management positions in their respective workplaces.

Before each interview, the participants were given the official letter of consent, and they were given time to read and sign it before the interview started (see Appendix 2). During the interview process, confidentiality and participant safety were given due consideration. The interviewees were provided the option to

withdraw from the process at any point. All interviews were recorded and assigned unique identification numbers, and later transcribed. The interviewees were offered the opportunity to review the transcripts for correction and acceptance. To ensure anonymity, all references to the participants' names, employers, and colleagues were deleted or anonymised with the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (2019).

The sample of ten participants was determined to be sufficient for the study, as data saturation was reached during the interviews, meaning that no new data were being generated (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). The interviews were conducted using twelve semi-structured questions (see Appendix 1). These questions guided the participants to share their personal journey and experiences in the Finnish labour market, as well as their perceptions of how their race influenced this process. The step-by-step approach of the interviews ensured that each question led to the next, maintaining focus on relevant issues and objectives.

The interview questions progressed to inquire about the participants' career history, work experience, and education in Finland. The questions allowed the participants to share their own stories and experiences in the Finnish labour market. The interviews provided an opportunity for participants to reflect on the racial hierarchy as they perceived and understood it in the labour market of Finland. The interview questions prompted participants to reflect on experiences starting from their initial attempts to access the labour market, as well as their current experiences within it.

The interview questions guided the participants through a step-by-step process of recounting and reflecting on their experiences regarding the relationship between race and employment in Finland, which was the focus of the thesis. The questions aimed to elicit participants' perceptions and understanding of how their race influenced their employability and experiences in the Finnish labour market. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 1.

The interview environment was free from distractions, and sufficient time was allocated for each interview to ensure that nothing was rushed or conducted in a

manner that could affect or manipulate the outcomes. As the interviewees were all adult volunteers, there was no need to apply for a research permit.

5.3 Data analysis process

The collected data was subjected to thematic analysis from a critical race theory perspective. Thematic analysis was chosen as the appropriate method due to the small size of the research data set and the qualitative nature of the data, which cannot be quantified or expressed in numerical form. Thematic analysis is a systematic approach that involves coding the data and identifying recurring patterns to develop themes. It is primarily a method for data analysis rather than a methodology. (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

For the analysis of the data, a six-step process proposed by Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019) was employed. This process is commonly used for analysing qualitative data and was applied as follows:

1) Following the completion of the ten interviews, transcripts were generated from the audio recordings. Subsequently, I familiarized myself with the transcript data by repeatedly reading through it.

2) Relevant phrases in the data were then identified and labelled through a process known as coding (DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall & McCulloch, 2011). The coding focused on elements that were deemed significant to the research questions and those that were consistently emphasized by the research participants.

3) The coded data were then organized into categories, with the aim of identifying overarching themes.

4) After organizing the codes into categories, a review process was conducted to establish connections and similarities between the categories, leading to the identification of themes.

5) The identified themes were further reviewed, defined, and named. Subcategories were created to capture the scope and nuances of each theme.

6) In the final stage, the findings were synthesized into a comprehensive narrative describing the themes and their interconnections. The presentation of the findings adopted a neutral voice, avoiding any interpretation or subjective bias.

Following the conclusion of the interviews in September 2023, written transcripts were created by manually transcribing the audio recordings using Microsoft word between October and November 2023. Each interview resulted in 3-7 pages of text, resulting in a total of 44 pages of transcript. The transcripts underwent editing to ensure accuracy, including spell-checking and verifying that the content matched what the interviewees had expressed during the interviews, keeping the voice of the interviewees. The transcripts were then shared with the interviewees for approval to confirm their accuracy and authenticity.

Once the data accuracy was confirmed, the coding process began. The transcripts were printed out, and manual coding was conducted by hand. A total of 30 prominent codes were initially identified throughout the transcripts. These 30 codes were subsequently refined to 19 by aligning them with the research questions. This coding process took place between November and December 2023. The coded data, now consisting of the 19 refined codes, were further analysed to identify similarities, associations, and contextual relationships, resulting in the formation of four main themes. This process is illustrated in Table 1. Some of the quotes in the table are direct quotations form the interviewees and some have been summarised.

Table 1. Main themes arising from the codes.

Theme	Political and social systems that power discrimination.	Structural racism	Nature of career journey	Workplace realities/ expectations
Codes	Proximity to whiteness decreases discrimination.	Structural racism is often hidden	Discrimination forces changes in career choices	Expectations for Black people / migrants are higher than for white Finns

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Finnish language, na-tionality, cultural simi-larity can be protective measures	Language can be used for exclusion	Working outside the field of education. Compromising ca-reer	Volunteering to prove capabil-ity and to be validated as qual-ified.
Increased "Finnish-ness" adds ac-ceptance	Colour blind-ness is avoidance of the racial is-sues	Professional capac-ity and skills of Black people are questioned	Black people must work harder to earn trust.
It is difficult being dif-ferent in any way in Finland, whiteness as the norm.	Networks are im-portant for job-seeking	Race and personal racial experiences drive career paths towards societal change	Community is important for mental health
Eurocentric views in the workplace can al-ienate people of col-our	Tokenism as a mean into employment.	Black people are welcome to work on things related to other Black people	Unequal expectations. Guilty until proven innocent
Slower career pro-gression	Education and skills from Europe are deemed superior	Long distance to reach the same goal. Favouritism contin-uum	Glass ceiling can be deter-mined by race and career field.

By employing thematic analysis within the framework of critical race theory, the coded data were examined, leading to the identification of four main themes that were coherent and relevant to the research questions. These four main themes were aligned with the key tenets of critical race theory, representing tenets that were visible and supported by the data. Verbatim responses from the data were integrated into the findings section in a descriptive manner, without interpretation, using a neutral voice.

Table 2. Assigning the themes into the tenets of critical race theory.

Four main tenets of critical race theory	Four main themes from the data
Voice-of-colour thesis and counter storytelling	Workplace realities / expectation
Permanence of racism	Structural racism
Interest convergence	Political and social systems that power dis-crimination
Intersectionality: when race, class and gender intersect	Nature of career journey

The four main themes were assigned based on the characteristics of the con-tent and its alignment with critical race theory, addressing the research

questions. The data analysis process culminated in the identification of these four main themes, as presented in Table 2. The research results were reported based on the order of prominence and relevance to the research questions, considering the contributions of the participants to each theme. The most substantial and pertinent theme was presented first, and the conclusion also focused on these themes.

6 ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE AND RELIABILITY

This study adhered to ethical guidelines governing research involving human participants and human behaviour. These ethical principles, as outlined by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) were followed throughout the research process. (Finnish national board on research integrity 2019)

Respecting the dignity and autonomy of the research participants was of paramount importance in this study. Measures were taken to ensure that the research did not pose significant risks, harm, or damage to the participants, the communities involved, or any other subjects of research. Additionally, the study upheld the principles of preserving both material and immaterial cultural heritage and biodiversity. (Finnish national board on research integrity 2019)

To safeguard participant anonymity, no personal identifiers or data were collected. The use of anonymity standards provided a stronger guarantee of privacy. These considerations were upheld during data collection, analysis, and the publication of the thesis study. Once the research was completed, all collected data, including transcripts and audio interviews, were securely destroyed, ensuring that no data was stored in any form.

Ethical considerations are essential in any research endeavour. Ethics can be defined as a principled sensitivity to the rights of others, necessitating careful and ongoing attention, regardless of one's professional field (Iphofen, 2011). Throughout the thesis process, particular attention was given to key ethical protections, such as voluntary participation and the inclusion of only adult participants during data collection. (Finnish national board on research integrity 2019)

Participants cannot be coerced into involvement in research. In this study, prospective participants were fully informed about the research procedures and risks involved, and their consent was obtained (see Appendix 2). Ethical standards also require researchers to avoid putting participants at risk of harm due to their involvement in the study (Iphofen, 2011). These principles were carefully

observed during data collection and interaction with the research participants, with due consideration given to potential physical and psychological harm.

Privacy protection was upheld through two approaches. No personal information was collected, and participant confidentiality was guaranteed, assuring them that identifying information would not be included in any analysis. Additionally, all collected data were promptly destroyed once the research was completed, further safeguarding participant privacy.

The research design and data collection process considered issues of reliability and validity, including potential interviewee bias, researcher bias, and reactivity. Continuous risk evaluation was conducted to anticipate possible challenges and mitigate risks. Credible work is based on comprehensive documentation of what was done, why it was done, and how it was done (Kananen, 2013). Therefore, a full audit trail was maintained throughout the research process.

The ethical perspective would be incomplete without considering the researcher's position and interests in the study. Therefore, it is important to further discuss these issues, even though some aspects have been mentioned in the introduction chapter. From the inception of the thesis process, including the idea generation and early planning stages, the researcher was acutely aware of the sensitive nature of discussing race, particularly as a black person who is also part of the target group for the study. Unexpectedly, the researcher's identity as a black person positively influenced the research participants' experience. The participants expressed that the researcher's shared racial background created a safe environment during the interviews, fostering trust and enabling them to share more openly. It was crucial to the participants that they were conversing with someone who understood their realities, would not pass judgment, and would respect their stories.

As highlighted by Burkholder et al. (2022), conducting research involving Black people as the target group necessitates careful consideration of ethical issues and potential harm mitigation. Utilizing experiences-centred perspectives of Black people can help reduce anti-black bias in research. It is preferable and safer to

capture, narrate, and understand the experiences of Black people through black lenses, either by being black oneself and sharing lived experiences or by acquiring a comprehensive intersectional understanding of their everyday realities. (Burkholder et al., 2022)

The emotional weight of the research process was significant for the researcher, as the participants shared deeply personal experiences. During the interviews, some of the interviewees broke down in tears as they recounted their experiences. These participants said that they were aware that the interview could bring out some strong emotions because of the nature and sensitivity of the topic. They also acknowledged the impact of these emotions on the researcher during the interviews. These participants also pointed out that they were impressed how well the researcher was able to deal with the emotional reactions. These emotional breakdowns did not come as a surprise to me as a black person, and I was prepared in advance on how to deal with these situations. To ensure effective recovery and maintain focus, reasonable intervals of at least two weeks were scheduled between interviews. This approach allowed the researcher to recharge and remain efficient during the interview sessions.

It is important to acknowledge that the researcher's own background, perspectives as an anti-racism educator, and personal experiences as a black person in the Finnish labour market contributed to a strong investment in this research area and the quest for answers. To prevent any external influences, a rigorous analysis of the data was conducted in accordance with the chosen methodology, and the reporting focused solely on the data itself, without any interpretations or the researcher's own voice. Throughout the thesis process, a steadfast commitment to ethical perspectives was maintained to minimize the risks of researcher bias and protect the research participants. This commitment was upheld by following the recommended steps outlined by TENK and adhering to the ethical standards of conducting sound research.

7 RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the study, which are derived from thematic data analysis and organized into four identified themes, as depicted in Table 3 below. Throughout this chapter, the interviewees will be referred to as (R) when quoting their statements. A total of ten interviewees, labelled as R1-R10, were involved in the study.

Table 3. Four main themes, with corresponding theory and supporting number of interviewees.

Four main tenets of critical race theory	Four main themes from the data	Number of interviewees contributing to the theme
Permanence of racism	Structural racism	All ten interviewees
Intersectionality: when race, class and gender intersect	Nature of career journey	Eight interviewees
Interest convergence	Political and social systems that power discrimination	Eight interviewees
Voice-of-colour thesis and counter storytelling	Workplace realities / expectation	All ten interviewees

The findings are presented based on the three most prevalent themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, aligning with the research questions and corresponding tenets of critical race theory. These themes are: 1) the permanence of racism (structural racism), 2) intersectionality (nature of career journey), and 3) the voice-of-colour thesis and counter storytelling. The concept of interest convergence is closely linked to structural racism and are presented together.

7.1 Permanence of racism – experiences of whiteness as the norm

The interviewees consistently expressed their observations regarding the permanence of racism in the Finnish labour market, which they perceived as the norm. They suggested that racism and racial discrimination are pervasive in the labour

market, with a clear color-coded hierarchy favouring white people, whether they are native Finns or white migrants. According to the interviewees, white people are more employable than people from other racial groups solely based on their skin colour. This finding supports the critical race theory's concept of the permanence of racism, which was predominantly reflected in the theme of structural racism. The theme of structural racism encompassed various codes from the interview data, describing different aspects of institutional and structural racism and its consequences experienced by the interviewees. Consequently, the interviewees' experiences imply that racism is deeply embedded in the Finnish labour market.

For instance, Interviewee R4 stated, "There is a hierarchy in the labour market I think it's easier to be employed if you are Finn, and then it sort of escalates by colour. So, the closer you are to whiteness, the easier it is, that is my assessment."

All the interviewees perceived the existence of a white over black ascendancy in the Finnish labour market, indicating a racially hierarchical structure. Despite the Finnish constitution stipulating equality and equal treatment regardless of race, the interviewees' experiences suggest that this may not hold true for Black people in the labour market. The interviewees concurred that accessing the Finnish labour market as a black person requires resilience and persistence. They described the process of upward mobility as time-consuming, exhausting, and challenging for Black people, often lacking equality, equal opportunity, and fair treatment. As Interviewee R7 explained, "It is not by law, but it has become like that not all are equal."

> "I know that I am a master degree holder and on top of that I have other studies and the language skills they require I have it even though not native level, so I should still be able to compete to find my dream job of choice at any level but also I know that there are some limitations and barriers because of my race these barriers would prevent me from reaching my full potential in the labour market in Finland" (Interviewee R2)

Moreover, the interviewees highlighted that race is relational and that whiteness acts as the standard against which other races are measured. Whiteness serves as a filter that excludes non-white people, analogous to how maleness grants privileges to men. This perspective aligns with the notion that race determines the stratification of migrants in their host countries, thereby influencing their outcomes. According to critical race theory scholars, migrants, including both new arrivals and long-term residents, are categorized and assigned a racial tag that determines their treatment and access to resources and status. Irrespective of their efforts, Black people face significant obstacles due to their racial tag, making socioeconomic advancement in their host country exceedingly difficult or even impossible. This observation was consistently emphasized by all the interviewees.

> "The society already doesn't think that certain races should even rise in ranks. You asked about career choices and paths we blacks are not allowed to think that we want to grow. Like to start at the basic level in the labour market then grow into manager level. That is a dream, you don't know whether it's going to be attainable, but we can only dream". (Interviewee R1)

> "I think race is the most relevant issue when a black person is accessing the Finnish labour market. They can look at us Black people and assume my identity just by looking they can put me in a box but for other non-Finnish white migrants they are not just assumed to be foreigners as Black people are. I think that I get a certain treatment from people because I am black I really, but I really do not know how I would have been treated if I was not black". (Interviewee R3)

The interviewees attributed various factors to the negative racial tag assigned to Black people of African roots in the labour market. They highlighted racism, ignorance, and negative media representations of Black people and Africa as sources of the stereotypes that stigmatize Black people in the labour market. Interviewee R7 noted, "Race is very important when accessing the labour market, especially when someone is from Africa. The image of Africa and Africans in the West is very negative, full of stereotypes that Africans are poor and uneducated based on the media, what they read and see on the media."

Furthermore, the study revealed that even when some Black people manage to break through in the labour market, they often encounter a glass ceiling at some point in their careers. The presence of this glass ceiling varies across sectors, with some job sectors having a lower ceiling than others. The interviewees mentioned that this differential positioning is influenced by factors such as time and the demand and availability of labour in each sector. Interviewee R8 shared, "I think the only reason why I am able to have been able to get to this level in my career is because they do not have a choice in the IT industry, they don't have enough people in the Finnish manpower to staff their companies and if they did, I would not have a job lets be real".

> "I have been able to navigate the labour market until now I know that the glass ceiling is right here like we are getting there I know that now I am getting to be applying for those positions of decision-making level and I know the glass ceiling is coming". (Interviewee R6)

The experiences shared by all interviewees underscore the influence of proximity to whiteness on the differential treatment of Black people in the Finnish labour market. The findings of this study reveal that the proximity to whiteness grants certain privileges to black job seekers, resulting in variations in the treatment they receive. It is evident that within the subgroup of Black people seeking employment in Finland, there are significant differences in their experiences within the labour market.

The interviewees consistently described how being black in the labour market is accompanied by varying degrees of proximity to whiteness, which in turn influences the treatment they receive. Those with closer proximity to whiteness, such as individuals with one white parent, reported experiencing fewer barriers and resistance when accessing the labour market. This subgroup of Black people with mixed racial backgrounds acknowledged that their racial tag as being half white afforded them certain privileges not experienced by other Black people.

These findings highlight that the labour market dynamics for Black people are not homogeneous, but rather shaped by their proximity to whiteness. The interviewees emphasized that the closer a black job seeker is to whiteness, the more

favourable their treatment becomes. This proximity to whiteness acts as a determining factor in the level of resistance and barriers encountered when seeking employment.

Furthermore, two interviewees with mixed racial backgrounds shared their experiences of relatively smoother accessibility and integration into the labour market. They attributed this relative ease to their close proximity to whiteness, as one of their parents is white. They acknowledged that their racial tag, as half white, granted them additional privileges not afforded to other Black people.

These findings align with critical race theory, which posits that proximity to whiteness carries advantages and privileges within systems of racial hierarchy.

> "I think there are different levels of structural racism in Finnish labour market, I think it is hidden it's not easy to point out. I think for my benefit being half white is a big benefit in this society. So, for me I have been very lucky in that way I am very employable these all things I have been aware of ever since I moved back to Finland" (Interviewee R9)

> "Well, there are recent studies showing that Finland is the most racist country in European Union and other studies shows that In Finland you get a better job and better chance to be employed if you have Finnish sounding names these are not debatable these are facts. So being a White Russian is better than being a black Somali". (Interviewee R6)

In addition to the proximity to whiteness based on mixed racial backgrounds, some interviewees highlighted that being black and originating from Western nations, Latin America, or Brazil can also confer certain privileges and a degree of proximity to whiteness. This finding suggests that Black people from these regions may encounter different experiences and treatment compared to Black Africans who are first- or second-generation residents in Finland.

> "When we look at people who identify themselves black in Finland, as black American, I have a different experience than maybe a Cameroonian or Nigerian. ---I know that my white American counterparts have a different experience than I do, and I have a different experience than black people who are from the African continent. I manage a group of Black men that come from different African countries we

actively talk about these things, and we try to help each other as well" (Interviewee R4)

7.1.1 Racial discrimination sets a default unequal starting position

The interviewees consistently observed a de facto positioning of Black people at the bottom of the employment ladder, indicating a significant disadvantage for Black people within the labour market. Concurrently, they noted a de facto positioning of White people at the top of the employment ladder, suggesting a wide disparity in career advancement between Black and White people. This de facto positioning was perceived by the interviewees as a catalyst for racial discrimination, marginalization, and economic inequality experienced by Black people, while affording economic dominance to white people within the labour market.

In the responses provided by six interviewees, it was explicitly mentioned that Black people face greater difficulties and a longer journey from the starting point of their careers to achieving comparable outcomes within the labour market compared to groups positioned at the top. The interviewees uniformly perceived that Black people must exert significantly more effort than those in privileged positions to attain similar results. Furthermore, they noted that Black people contend with numerous secondary challenges stemming from their racial identity, which are not encountered by other groups. One interviewee (R3) shared their arduous journey in finding employment, describing a four-year period following graduation during which they engaged in multiple internships, volunteered extensively, pursued language courses, and undertook various odd jobs, including cleaning. Despite these efforts, they struggled to secure a full-time job related to their field of study.

> "It was a very difficult journey for me to find a job, I came here to study but after graduation it took me like about four years to get a full-time job and I did about five internships and volunteering a lot. I was doing a lot of work during these four years but not getting paid. I studied many language courses and did a lot of jobs trails. I was also working in other fields like cleaning and other odds jobs that were easily given to immigrants. ---I came to Finland studied international human rights law hoping that I will get into any big NGO, but

then after my studies I really considered changing my career because it was extremely difficult to find a job. I really considered many things even now where I am at my current job it is not so related to what I have studied" (Interviewee R3)

This account aligns with the findings of Quivine Ndomo's dissertation titled "The Working Underclass: Highly educated migrants on the fringes of the Finnish labour market" published in 2024, which also described a similar phenomenon where highly educated African migrants were inherently assigned an inferior position in the labour market based on perception rather than their individual competencies and skills.

Regarding the time aspect involved in Black people's job search in Finland, eight out of the ten interviewees experienced a significantly protracted period of vigorous attempts before securing their first paid employment, reflecting a difficult entry into the labour market. According to their perception, this prolonged process was directly linked to their race. The remaining two interviewees, both with mixed racial backgrounds, achieved relatively better outcomes in terms of employment, and they attributed this to their racial background.

One interviewee (R9) emphasized the advantages of being half white and possessing a Finnish passport in Finnish society. While acknowledging a certain degree of racial discrimination, they believed that their employability was significantly enhanced by their mixed racial background, as it made them more acceptable and less burdened by preconceived notions associated with Black people. This sentiment underscores the influence of proximity to whiteness on employment prospects and reinforces the privileges afforded to people perceived as closer to whiteness.

> "Being half white having a Finnish passport is a big benefit in Finnish society even though I would experience tiny bit of discrimination because of my race I don't believe it's the full extent of what other Black people can experience. I am very employable because I am half white it makes me more palatable people don't have some preconceived notions that they have about Black people its mush easier to hire me and all these I am very aware" (interviewee R9)

The malleability of the de facto unequal starting positioning of job seekers within the labour market was evident in the employment journeys of eight out of the ten interviewees. These individuals reported undertaking lengthy and challenging routes to secure their first paid employment. Some even had to completely reinvent themselves or pursue re-education due to their previous education and work history from their home countries not being recognized. This process of reinvention and makeover resulted in a significant loss of valuable time and potentially hindered their mobility and ability to realize their full potential within the labour market.

The observations and experiences shared by the ten interviewees unequivocally portrayed white people as having a privileged starting position in the labour market, which was attributed to their race and influenced by factors such as unrecognized skills, limited education opportunities, and language barriers. Based on the interviewees' understanding, white people faced a shorter journey toward their career goals compared to Black people.

7.1.2 Blacklisted guilty until proven innocent.

All the interviewees in this study shared their experiences of having to constantly prove themselves throughout their career journeys in Finland, either in the past or on a daily basis. These encounters were attributed to racism, microaggressions, and at times, harassment. The interviewees unanimously described how Black people in the labour market are automatically placed in a category where they are presumed guilty until they can prove their innocence against preconceived stereotypes about their abilities and capabilities based on their race, nationality, educational background, appearance, and speech.

According to the interviewees, respect, trust, recognition of skills, and the expectation of fluency in the Finnish language are not given freely to Black people in the Finnish labour market. Instead, they must be earned through continuous efforts to prove themselves. Additionally, seven interviewees shared their

experiences of not being perceived as individuals but rather being judged as part of the black racial group, which influenced their employment outcomes during the recruitment process.

One interviewee (R9) expressed the need to work harder and constantly prove oneself, highlighting the disparity between Black people and white Finns. They emphasized the extra effort required to demonstrate their worthiness for a job compared to their white counterparts.

> "I see with me and other Black people I know there is an element of working harder just trying to sort of show like I am worth it. I see in my self-trying to prove yourself in a way that other White Finns don't do. You are working as hard as you even can just to show that you deserve the job". (Interviewee R9)

Another interviewee (R1) shared their journey of starting with an internship and gradually earning a longer contract, indicating how their initial opportunity allowed them to showcase their abilities and prove their value.

> "So, this is how I got my foot in, after I did my first internship, they realised okey they can give me a job an di got my first temporary employment and then I was evaluated, and they gave me a longer contract". (Interviewee R1)

Interviewee R2 discussed their workplace experiences, noting that they were accepted and valued in jobs they were overqualified for, while facing doubts and questioning in roles where they met the qualifications. They highlighted the constant judgment and scepticism they faced from others, with people wondering if they were truly capable of performing their job. Despite having an education in Finland, they explained that it didn't prevent others from making judgments based on their race.

> "My workplace acceptance and value experience depend on the job. Those that I was overqualified to do they were happy to have me there but in those jobs that I was qualified to do they were still doubting me if I can do my job. Everybody looking at what comes out of this black African does he really know what to do or is he really qualified to be doing what is doing you can see in their eyes they are asking themselves these questions. Having the education in Finland

>can boost your own self moral and confidence this change something, but it does not stop people from judging you". (Interviewee R2)

An interviewee (R7) described the initial doubts they encountered when starting a job as the only black person in their workplace. They highlighted the constant attention and questioning from both clients and colleagues. However, after working there for a year and a half, they were able to prove themselves and gain the trust and acceptance of others, alleviating the doubts and scrutiny.

>"In the beginning when I started, they had doubts like who is this? Because I was the only black person. Like you are passing in a corridor everyone is looking at you the patients and colleagues. You sit in the cafeteria you can see everyone having questions on their mind about how did you end up here? But now after working there for one and half year I have proven myself to everyone no doubts anymore". (Interviewee R7)

Overall, these accounts from the interviewees demonstrate the ongoing need for Black people in Finland to prove themselves in the labour market. They face constant challenges, doubts, and scrutiny, which can only be overcome through consistent efforts to showcase their skills and capabilities.

7.1.3 Favouritism continuum

Another notable observation shared by all the interviewees was the concept of the "favouritism continuum." They recounted experiences of favouritism in the labour market, where white job seekers are given opportunities and the benefit of the doubt that non-white people do not receive. This type of favouritism leads to racial discrimination in the labour market.

According to Heikkila (2017), there is a tendency in the Finnish labour market for recruiters to favour those who are perceived as closer to whiteness and Finnishness. Those who are considered to possess less sameness are often at a disadvantage, creating a culture of favouritism. This group favouritism occurs when people look after their own, unjustly, and unfairly treating and favouring members of their own group with similar attributes, while neglecting and scrutinizing

members of other groups who do not possess the same attributes associated with the host country. (Ebun 2020, p. 32)

This sameness and similarity are judged and approached favourably, resulting in positive experiences and outcomes for those who possess them, while those who are different are judged and treated harshly, leading to negative experiences and outcomes in the labour market. This similarity and sameness extend beyond physical attributes and include culture, nationality, names, educational credentials, and ethnicity. (Ebun, 2020, p.32)

The favouritism continuum operates on a spectrum, as illustrated in Figure 1 by Ebun (2020, p.192). It becomes evident that in Finland, being different is often met with punishment, and there are societal expectations and boxes that individuals must fit into. This treatment is particularly noticeable for people who look different, even if they are Finnish citizens with darker hair or other distinguishing features (Interviewee R3).
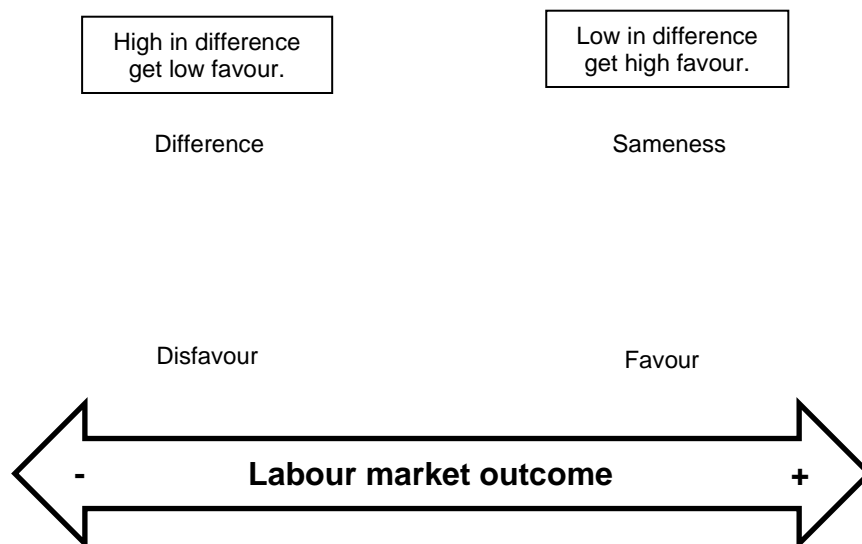

Figure 1 – Favouritism continuum as illustrated by Ebun 2020, p. 192.

> "In Finland it is very difficult to be different, I think in Finland you get punished for being different. There is this line or boxes that if you don't fit then you are off from both sides. This is something that no nobody speak about, but you can see how they treat people who are

different even some Finns with darker hair who look different". (Interviewee R3)

The interviewees unanimously expressed that it is easier for white people to find employment in Finland because they are perceived as the preferred kind. The interviewees also noted that recent government policies explicitly indicate a preference for non-black labourers, despite the country's need for workers (Interviewee R2).

> "It is easy to be employed in Finland if you are white because you are their kind, and they prefer you more than anyone it's obvious. Also, the new Government policies makes it clear to you that even though Finland need labourers but those they want are not Black people". (Interviewee R2)

In recent decades, many European nations have implemented policies to protect their citizens and labour markets from global competition and volatility. In Finland, the recent government reform policies concerning foreign workers in 2023 aim to protect the economy and citizens. However, these policies and systems unintentionally operate on a favouritism continuum, perpetuating a racial order that favours those who exhibit sameness with citizens.

This means that sameness, linked to factors such as nationality, language, education, culture, and residency status, is openly rewarded based on a person's race, nationality, residency status, and mode of entry into the country. Conversely, people with less sameness, based on their race, nationality, residency status, and other factors, face disadvantages (Interviewee R10).

The favouritism continuum also manifests by denying equal access to crucial positions and legitimacy to individuals or groups that do not conform to the host country's arbitrary criteria of normality. This creates a sense of fictive homogeneity and an "us versus them" mentality, where solidarity is rewarded based on sameness. All ten interviewees in this study have experienced and witnessed this phenomenon in the labour market.

"It is easy to be employed in Finland if the person is white because the employers offer advantages to Finnish people that they are more comfortable with and also other white people, but the Finnish employers feels most uncomfortable with Black Africans". (Interviewee R10)

"In Finland they use these two filters to remove let say 99% of the immigrants non-Finns out of the labour market and this to me is a structural thing. When people get excluded right away based on their names, the second thing is the language requirement, so I mean if you don't speak the language obviously you are an immigrant". (Interviewee R4)

Social networking with white Finns was found to be vital for entry and mobility in the labour market, as most employers and recruiters in Finland are Finnish. Building connections and relationships with white Finns in positions of power and at the top of the employment hierarchy opens doors and creates opportunities for accessing the labour market. Having a strong social network within the labour market allows Black job seekers to be perceived more positively as insiders, breaking down barriers and leading to opportunities (Interviewee R5).

"In Finland if you are white, it is easy for you to be employed because it is presumed that if you are white, you are Finnish and if you are White and non-Finn then you come from Europe you are presumed to be smart educated and qualified no questions about you." (Interviewee R5)

"If a black immigrant person goes for an interview with another White immigrant, even before they speak the employer may already trust the white immigrant more than black even though are both immigrants". (Interviewee R7)

One interviewee mentioned that it may be challenging to distinguish whether discrimination occurs due to a lack of the right relationships and network or solely based on race. They emphasized the importance of both network and race in shaping a person's opportunities and experiences in the labour market (Interviewee R4).

"So, this is also one of the reasons why network is so heavily important, sometimes it's even hard to distinguish you are discriminated against because you don't have the right relationships including network or because of your race, there is a thin line there it's hard

> for me to figure that out and sometimes the answer is you become held back because of both. I would say network is equally as important to race." (Interviewee R4)

Interestingly, one interviewee, a black Finn with mixed racial background who shares a lot of sameness and likeness with white Finns, had a more positive and smooth experience in the labour market compared to the other interviewees. They attributed this to factors such as speaking Finnish, holding Finnish nationality, having been educated in Finland, and fitting into Finnish society, which made it easier for them to secure employment (Interviewee R9).

> "I speak Finnish that is one thing obviously it's such a big benefit for me, my passport, and the fact that I have gone to school here and the fact that I sort of fit into the Finnish society I think that those are the things that makes it easier to employ me. I think there has rarely been instances when I don't get a job if I think that I could be qualified" (Interviewee R9)

7.2 Intersectionality: when race, class and gender intersect

The responses from the interviewees shed light on the interconnectedness of race and class and how they combine to influence individuals' positions and outcomes in the labour market. Intersectionality emerged as a prominent theme in the data, aligning closely with the principles of critical race theory.

All the interviewees acknowledged that in the Finnish labour market, certain races are classified and assigned specific jobs and positions, and access and upward mobility in the labour market are determined by how one's race has been classified. While one interviewee briefly mentioned the impact of gender in their experiences, they perceived that Black women are better positioned and favoured in the labour market when compared to Black men. Further analysis in the thesis focused solely on the intersection of race and class.

Upon arriving in a host country, people are often automatically assigned a class based on their race. They inherit a perceived power position and wealth associated with their racial group, regardless of their personal achievements,

educational background, or expertise. This phenomenon is referred to as the "classed race" concept. (Ebun, 2020, pp.20-21)

Heikkila (2005) describes how immigrants are integrated into the labour market based on their nationality, race, skin colour, and how certain racial groups are deemed suitable only for menial jobs, while others higher in the racial hierarchy benefit from better opportunities. This hierarchization perpetuates inequality in the labour market.

Whiteness, as a concept, extends beyond skin colour. It carries tangible possession and power ascribed to the white racial group, positioning them in higher social classes. This social class plays a vital role in determining ascribed or perceived status, wealth, and attributes such as intelligence, trustworthiness, and capability. These attributes and wealth are not directly linked to individual wealth, but rather to the perceived historical wealth and assigned attributes of each race and nationality. Thus, individuals themselves may not be classified, but the historical social class of their racial group is attributed to them. (Ebun, 2020, pp.116-119)

The interviewees expressed that people tend to feel more comfortable expressing themselves freely among their own racial group since they share commonalities. However, when people are different, even their colleagues treat and interact with them differently, creating a challenging working atmosphere (Interviewee R2).

> "People are more comfortable to be free and express their mind to their own kind since they share a lot of common things but if you are different even your colleagues treat and interact with you very differently and this creates a very difficult working atmosphere" (Interviewee R2)

It is important to note that this classed race phenomenon is not solely based on skin colour, and not all white people are placed in the same class. The interviewees pointed out that Roma and Russians, who are white, are not perceived and treated the same in the labour market as other white Europeans. This classed race phenomenon poses a significant obstacle for Black job seekers trying to

enter and progress in the Finnish labour market. Regardless of their individual efforts and achievements, their fate is tied to that of their racial group as a whole.

The interviewees also observed that certain qualities and expectations are associated with different races in the labour market. Their experiences suggest that Black people may not be expected to excel in certain fields or professions. Consequently, if a black person seeks employment in a field or sector perceived as unsuitable for Black people, they may encounter more resistance and hurdles. Conversely, if the field of work is associated with a racial group, resistance is often less pronounced (Interviewee R4, R1, R3).

> "It seems that Finnish people have categorised Africans and maybe Latinos and Asians into health care industry. So, if you want to get into the industry it seems to be easy to do" (Interviewee R4)

> "It is easier to get employed depending on the job, as a black person cleaning job is very available even Black children in school are offered nursing career paths. For Asians now we are moving tech field and Latinx people restaurants. For the Caucasians white collar jobs" (Interviewee R1)

> "There are different jobs for different people and the assumption that you would do because of your race is shocking. There is the assumption that some races are smart than others" (Interviewee R3)

Negative stereotypes of Black people in Finland further exacerbate the difficulties faced by Black people in obtaining employment and being recognized as experts or holding positions of power. The interviewees noted a colonial mindset where countries and races are classified to fulfil certain roles in the labour market. Africans, Asians, Estonians, and Russians are specifically sought after for different jobs, reinforcing these stereotypes (Interviewee R6).

> "There is this colonial mindset that they classify countries and race to be able to do certain things. For certain jobs they want Africans and for certain jobs they want Asians and for certain jobs they want Estonians and Russians. People are wanted in the labour market to specific jobs" (Interviewee R6)

One interviewee, who works in the health sector, recounted numerous instances where people, including clients and colleagues, expressed surprise that a black person holds the position of a doctor rather than a nurse. Another interviewee,

working in the tech industry, regularly faces perplexity from colleagues and others who find it unexpected to see a black female in that field. Both interviewees experience prejudice and being underestimated (Interviewee R7, R8).

> "A lot of people underestimate you to the extent that after interacting with you they say stuffs that are supposed to be complimenting by them but quite insulting. like you are so smart, they are surprised I am smart. I also get this a lot of people saying that my parents must be so rich to have sent me to the best school to study they just assumed that the only reason I am here is because I went to the best schools. Like there are no perfect average middle class or even lower-class people from where I come who are even more smart and very capable of a lot of things, I find this very insulting". (Interviewee R8)

7.3 Racial ghettos in the labour market

The interviewees consistently highlighted the prevalence of low-wage jobs for Black people in Finland, which often involve tasks that other racial groups are reluctant to undertake. This observation aligns with the concept of the classed race phenomenon.

According to Interviewee R5, the cleaning industry has become associated with Black people in Finland, leading to the perception that it is where they belong. This mindset, held by some Black people, may contribute to the perpetuation of this perception.

> "In Finland the cleaning industry have been made for Black people and this impact them when Black people come to Finland, they easily think that is where they belong. I think also that this type of mindset of some Black people have contributed to this perception". (Interviewee R5)

All the interviewees pointed out that differential treatment and preference for white European job seekers create structural barriers and marginalization, resulting in the segregation of job opportunities based on race. This phenomenon can be linked to the favouritism continuum and the classed race concept. Consequently, ghettos are formed within the labour market.

Heikkilä (2005) also describes the segmentation of the labour market in Finland, where immigrants from non-OECD countries often find themselves trapped in precarious and menial jobs, while migrants from Western countries are more likely to succeed in white-collar positions. This further supports the existence of a divided labour market.

Similarly, the interviewees perceived the Finnish labour market as having different segments for different races, with white Finns being given priority followed by white Europeans. Over time, these segments may become more inclusive based on labour demand and availability.

Interviewee R3 shared an experience where they applied for a job they were qualified for, but the company attempted to offer them a position below their qualifications. This assumption that certain races are inherently less intelligent than others was shocking to them.

> "Yes, there are different jobs for different people and the assumption that you will do because of your race is shocking. I applied for a job that I was qualified for, but the company instead try to offer me something else that is below my qualifications and skills set. There is this assumption that some races are smarter than others". (Interviewee R3)

The position of Black people in the labour market is not permanent but subject to change, driven primarily by the needs and demands of Finnish society and the labour market. These needs change over time and are influenced by global trends. Sectors such as caregiving, hospitality, services, and technology are opening up to marginalized racialized groups, including Black people, due to high labour demand.

In the past, it was challenging for Black people to enter high-paid jobs, especially white-collar positions. However, attitudes are gradually changing. Interviewees R2 and R1 noted that it is now easier for Africans to become entrepreneurs in fields like cleaning, although entering academic or high-status positions remains more difficult.

> "In Finland in those fields that there is need for workers especially in low paid jobs, cleaning, nursing, taxi, and bus drivers and even the IT fields in these fields race is no issue but in high paid jobs there is racial discrimination and barriers because of your race depending on the type of job. This attitude changes over time, especially with the white-collar jobs in the past it was not easy for a black person to get in" (Interviewee R2)

> "In Finland today it is very easy for an African to become an entrepreneur in cleaning this is something that was not possible many years ago. If I would want to do a certain job as an African black, I would have to work ten times harder if I want to work in academics for example, it much difficult for a black person" (Interviewee R1).

These findings are consistent with Quivine Ndomo's dissertation on highly educated migrants in the Finnish labour market. Ndomo's research revealed that highly educated African migrants often face underprivileged status and are more likely to be in low-status jobs. This further supports the existence of racial ghettos within Finland's labour market. (Ndomo, 2024, p.70)

7.4 The black experience, characteristics of labour market journey of Black people.

The interviews consistently shed light on the black experience in the Finnish labour market, reflecting key concepts from critical race theory such as the voice-of-colour thesis and counter storytelling. While Black people cannot change their race and their de facto position in the racial hierarchy, they can exert influence and work towards improving their position within the labour market. The study uncovers the strategies employed by Black people to navigate the Finnish labour market and highlights the different stages and challenges they face along the way.

7.4.1 Downward mobility, underemployment, and exploitation in unpaid jobs

This study unequivocally demonstrates the significant impact of race, nationality, and skin colour on the labour market outcomes of the job seekers. Those interviewees who faced immense difficulty in securing paid employment often embarked on their career journeys through volunteering or accepting lower-skilled jobs, as a means of entering the labour market. This finding challenges the notion of equality and meritocracy as pathways to mobility in Finland's labour market. Despite possessing educational credentials, skills, and prior job experience, these interviewees experienced a devaluation of their qualifications, leading them to undergo a period of downward mobility.

Among the ten interviewees in this study, eight started their careers with internships and volunteering. These interviewees shared a common understanding that most Black people begin with smaller, part-time, and sometimes menial and precarious jobs on a voluntary or internship basis. These "starting jobs" served as assessments to determine their suitability for other roles they were already qualified for and should have been employed in. Eight interviewees reported that they were unable to find paid employment until they engaged in unpaid volunteering and internships to demonstrate their skills and eligibility for paid work. According to these interviewees, without volunteering and unpaid internships, entering the labour market would have been even more highly challenging.

> "It was very difficult for me to find a job it took me like about four years to get a full-time job. I did five internships and volunteering a lot, I was doing a lot of work but not just being paid. It was very difficult journey to sacrifice four years without giving up" (Interviewee R3)

> "My journey was fairly difficult from the beginning, I am not saying this from a kind of conceited perspective my CV was fairly good 15 years of experience in the IT field so obviously, I understand what IT field is but when I came to Finland and started looking for job I noticed I was not getting any response and if I did they will say I am over qualified so I become reluctant searching and start my own company." (Interviewee R4)

> "I started with part time work as a cleaner while I was studying, then later I was delivering news peppers which I did for three summers. My first IT job was an internship when I was in that I applied for other jobs. My first software engineering job I sent about hundreds of applications before getting the job, so it was not an easy process over the space for a year of about five hundred applications." (Interviewee R10)

7.4.2 Erased past and going around in circles

The interviewees also commonly shared the experience of having their professional past erased in the labour market as Black people, leading to a sense of going around in circles in their career journeys. They all observed that this phenomenon predominantly affected Black people who arrived in Finland with a university or postgraduate degree. According to some interviewees, their previous education and career accomplishments were not recognized, partly due to the devaluation of foreign credentials from non-Western countries. This lack of recognition resulted in disempowerment, undervaluation, and diminished opportunities for obtaining paid employment upon arrival. All interviewees agreed that this experience of going around in circles, wasting time without making progress, is a common occurrence among Black job seekers in Finland.

The majority of interviewees personally experienced underemployment, and they all witnessed other Black people facing underemployment in Finland. Some interviewees explained this phenomenon as a result of many perceiving taking on menial jobs below their competence and education level as preferable to being on welfare. Additionally, all interviewees described how the numerous challenges and obstacles in obtaining paid employment commensurate with their qualifications often led Black job seekers to reevaluate their career goals and aspirations. At some point in their careers, they had accepted smaller roles below their skills and educational qualifications. Nearly half of the interviewees expressed dissatisfaction with their career paths and current employment, feeling that their roles were close to a glass ceiling in terms of opportunities for advancement.

> "In general, like people often say get an education but we know there are people with who have like multiple master's degrees but can't find a job in their field and they speak Finnish good enough to work." (Interviewee R9)

7.4.3 Black resilience and attitude of Black people in the labour market

The analysis of the interviewees' narratives and employment journeys indicates that Black job seekers require strong resilience and tenacity to exert agency over their labour market outcomes. The interviewees referred to this particular resilience as "black resilience," which enables Black people to remain determined in the face of adversity without giving up on their dreams and career goals.

> "I think Black people are the most resilient people in general. Just being black in the world anywhere you sort of must be resilient even if you come from a very wealthy family and move here to Finland your family riches will not protect you from racism." (Interviewee R9)

The individual stories and journeys of the interviewees revealed three distinct coping strategies and behavioural attitudes employed by some Black people to navigate their position in the labour market amidst the adversities and barriers caused by racism, institutional discrimination, and racial hierarchies. These attitudes were identified as the resistance attitude, adaptation attitude, and collusion attitude.

The interviewees with a resistance attitude are characterized by their relentless efforts to enter the labour market. They identify the requirements, study the language, make necessary adjustments, and even enhance their skills to attain citizenship. They do whatever it takes without giving up, seeking unpaid internships, and volunteering opportunities to gain labour market experience in Finland, ultimately working towards their goal of securing paid employment. This group demonstrates the highest success rate in labour market integration.

Next, those with an adaptation attitude adjust their labour market and career pursuits to target sectors with less resistance. They lower their expectations and

ambitions, focusing on low-paid jobs with less stringent employment requirements. Many of them down skill, particularly those with higher education, taking on precarious and menial jobs. They often find themselves in situations of underutilized skills, experiencing "brain waste," and are compelled by challenges to accept their circumstances as their reality.

The final attitude observed in the interviewees' individual journeys is the collusion attitude. This attitude reflects the weariness and exhaustion Black people experience due to the relentless efforts and ongoing resistance encountered in entering the labour market. It's important to note that these individuals were previously part of the resistance group, fighting not to give up until they reached the lowest point of their resilience. At this stage, they either reduce their efforts, doing the bare minimum, or they completely stop trying and transition between unemployment schemes, internships, job training programs, and short courses offered by various state agencies, including the unemployment office.

8 DISCUSSION

This study started as a quest to understand the labour market experiences of Black people in Finland, specifically examining the opportunities, challenges, and threats they encounter based on their race. Additionally, the study aimed to explore how race influences the employment outcomes of Black people in Finland. The findings of this thesis have answered both the research questions as it shared more light as to the impact and how race may influence the labour market outcome and experiences of Black people in Finnish labour market.

The first sections of this chapter discuss the findings of the research utilising the two main research questions; how Black people experience the Finnish labour market, and the impact of race on the employment outcomes of Black people in Finland. The final section is a general discussion about the findings in reflection to existing studies, and other relevant issues that came up during the research.

8.1 Experiences of Black people in the Finnish labour market – opportunities, challenges and/or threats Black people encounter

With regards to the first research question this study has successfully answered and uncovered how Black people may experience the labour market. The research captured attitudes of Black people and the characteristics of their labour market experiences. The interviewees' experiences of downward mobility, underemployment, exploitation in unpaid jobs, and existence of racial ghettos are further explained in Results, in sections 7.3 and 7.4. The research also uncovered distinct coping strategies employed by Black people in navigating the labour market, including resistance, adaptation, and collusion attitudes which are described in section 7.4. These attitudes reflect the resilience and tenacity of Black people in Finland. They strive to overcome obstacles and challenges in their career journeys despite facing systemic inequalities based on race. The findings also captured the experience of being black in the Finnish labour market revealing the

difference phases and routes in the labour market journey of Black people in Finland, fully covering and answering to the first research question.

Furthermore, the findings of the study have covered and answered the sub-question by depicting the challenges and threats Black people encounter in the labour market associated with their skin colour. These have been described in the results section by using the critical race theory tenets of the permanence of racism (section 7.1) and the intersectionality of race and class (section 7.2). Racial inequities in the Finnish labour market have been highlighted by various studies, indicating that certain racial groups face systematic disadvantages due to the racist notions that certain groups are superior to others, reinforcing racial inequalities in the labour market. This is a racist idea (see Ibram X Kendi 2019) recycling the idea that third world is inferior to first world, and developing is inferior to the developed (Alemanji 2016, pp.25-30).

8.2 The impact of race on the employment outcomes of Black people in Finland

Pertaining to the second research question, the findings of the research have fully addressed it. The findings suggest that race can serve as an unmarked marker that hinders upward mobility for Black people in the Finnish labour market. The interviewees recounted their trajectory and journey into the Finnish labour market with interview question number three, and later with interview question number twelve, all interviewees agree to a white-black ascendancy with white at the top of the labour market ladder and black at the bottom. While factors such as motivation, education, language skills, and cultural adaptation may influence labour market outcomes, they do not fully explain the disparities experienced by Black people.

According to Ibram X Kendi (2019), racial inequity is when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing. This racial inequality has been revealed in the labour market of Finland by many studies including Ahmed (2020) and Keskinen et al. (2021). This unequal footing produce racism in the

labour market. Racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities (Ibram X Kendi 2019).

As to the second research question, the findings in section 7.2 suggest that race, class, and nationality are closely intertwined with accessibility to resources and rights in the labour market. The categorization of people as white or non-white, as well as perceptions based on whether they are from developed or developing countries, impacts their labour market outcomes, as expressed by the interviewees. As discussed in section 7.1, the interviewees recounted experiences of whiteness as a norm, unequal starting positions, favouritism, and lack of trust and need to prove expertise. Many studies in Finland have shown that some racial groups are routinely placed at the top and others at the bottom of the labour market ladder. This is regardless of the fact, that race or biology does not influence a person's intelligence or work performance. (Keskinen et al., 2021, pp. 164-184) The experiences of the ten black interviewees of this research suggest that race plays a big part in determining if, when, and how a black person achieves desired labour market outcome.

8.3 General discussion about the findings in reflection to existing studies

Presented in the research findings, the interviewees experienced that racial tag categories have attached status, privileges, and assumptions and they present challenges for the categorized person, especially when they are making independent decisions for themselves. These experiences echo the findings of the study conducted in Ireland by Ebun in 2020. Race influences the labour market outcome in several different ways and thus, it is important to include race in the discourse and understanding of data and outcomes related to labour market. Skin colour is used to identify non-white people and bring consequences. This is why it is essential to understand what it means to not be white and how it affects the lives of the non-possessors of whiteness. (Ebun 2020, p.2)

The findings of this study support the existing research by Ndomo (2024), Keskinen et al. (2021), Heikkilä (2017), Ahmad (2020) and Alemanji (2016) that

the labour market outcome and experiences of Black people is affected by more than just their educational background, language skills and individual abilities. Especially the most recent publication by Ndomo (2024) highlights very similar trends in the labour market. Ndomo's research reveals the ascribed inferior position of highly educated African migrants in the labour market based on perception rather than professional qualifications. It can be argued that this perception is associated with skin colour and perceived racial background of African migrants.

In Finland, scholars occasionally blame this disparity in the labour market outcome on individual motivation, education, language skills, culture shock, routes of entry into the country and the migration process itself. All these factors indeed influence the labour market outcome of immigrants, and it clearly shows the migrant deficit which is understandable. However, these factors do not explain the difference in labour market outcome for immigrants with very similar backgrounds in education, work experience, and language skills. (Keskinen et al. 2021, pp. 9-15). Routinely people may be reluctant to attribute that race is a leading factor responsible for the labour market outcome and challenges faced by Black people in Finland. Perhaps because this reveals an image about us as a society, that most of us want to think that we have left behind and outgrown. This can be associated with other avoidance narratives from race sceptics such as the promotion of colour blindness. (Ebun, 2020, p. 7)

Overall, the study emphasizes the need for greater race consciousness and awareness among employers and policymakers to address racial disparities in the labour market. The findings call for the implementation of policies aimed at promoting equity and inclusion for Black people in the Finnish labour market. Further research on the intersectional experiences of different racialized groups in Finland could provide valuable insights into the broader implications of race on employment outcomes in the country.

9 CONCLUSION

The findings of this thesis have shed light on the challenges faced by Black people in the Finnish labour market and their experiences related to their race. The study indicates the presence of racism, racial discrimination, favouritism continuum, and segmentation within Finland's labour market. The themes identified in this study align with the four main principles of critical race theory. This research contributes to the existing body of knowledge on race and racism in Finland, specifically within the context of the labour market.

Despite the limited sample size of research participants, the findings of this thesis suggest that race is a relevant factor in the labour market experiences of Black people in Finland. The interviewees perceived their black race as a barrier to career advancement and upward mobility within the labour market. They associated the discrimination and biases they encountered with their skin colour and race.

It is important to note that while the themes and findings of this thesis are significant, they may not encompass the experiences and realities of all Black people in Finland. The research sample consisted of only ten Black people, which limits generalizability. Additionally, the accounts and experiences captured in this study primarily represent Black people living in the metropolitan region of Finland, potentially differing from the experiences of Black people residing in other regions of the country.

The findings of this thesis emphasize the importance of raising awareness of race consciousness among Finnish recruiters and employers to facilitate the positive integration of Black people into the labour market. The colour-blind and equality narratives and attitudes prevalent among employers contribute to discrimination and exclusion of Black people in labour market spaces. The interviewees expressed that greater race consciousness and tolerance within the labour market would be a meaningful step towards achieving equity. Such measures would also alleviate discrimination and workplace pressures experienced by Black people.

The study findings highlight the need for policies aimed at supporting the labour market integration of Black people in Finland, specifically addressing the barriers they face related to their skin colour and race.

Furthermore, the findings of this study suggest the necessity of conducting a broader-scale investigation into how race may influence employment outcomes and experiences among different racial groups in Finland. A comparative study involving various racialized groups and employers/recruiters could shed light on how each group perceives and positions the others within the labour market hierarchy. Such research could provide insights into the reasons behind differential outcomes and labour market experiences among these racialized groups in Finland.

10 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

This thesis study has been an exciting and inspiring research endeavour. The entire thesis process has been reflective and educative in many unexpected ways. This process honed my academic skills and allowed for growth and learning. Obstacles along the way presented good challenges to learn deeper and gain even more knowledge on the issues I was studying.

Undertaking research that resonated personally demanded a high level of professionalism and adherence to ethical standards as a researcher. Balancing my own emotional connection with the interviewees' stories required maintaining working capacity while navigating through potentially heavy and emotionally charged content. To ensure my well-being during the process, I strategically scheduled recovery gaps between interviews.

The research project's time management and organizational demands pushed me to operate at highly efficient levels, leading to significant skill development. Managing a full-time job alongside completing a research project posed scheduling challenges, necessitating effective prioritization. Collabourating and communicating with my work-life partner also called for punctuality and flexibility to maintain a harmonious balance.

Preparation for this thesis involved extensive reading and familiarization with a vast body of new research and information. Venturing into a new field, I engaged with other researchers and sought consultation from experts in the area, which greatly enriched my knowledge of the subject matter and research methodologies. Interactions with teachers during the thesis process provided valuable opportunities to receive critical feedback and refine my work accordingly.

Studying and learning about others' experiences proved to be enlightening, allowing me to gain new perspectives and insights into my own lived experiences. This process has provided me with profound understanding and equipped me with the necessary skills for future research endeavours.

It was very eye-opening to study and learn about other people's experiences, but I felt that this process also allowed me to understand some of my own experiences from a new perspective. I believe this process has given me great insight and equipped me for further research in the future.

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APPENDIX 1. Interview questions

1.Can you introduce yourself; Give some background information Where are you from, how long have you lived in Finland, level of education, language skills and how do you identify racially?

2.What is your employment status now? What field and what do you like about your job?

3.Can you recount your trajectory into employment in Finland from arrival to present roles?

4.Explain your career goal from arrival in Finland until present time; have they changed; the influencers and attempt they have made to change your careers and why?

5 How satisfied are you with your career development until present?

6.What is your experience about your workplace acceptance and value?

7.What categories or groups that you were placed in, or that you have placed your self-based on you race when you are accessing the labour market? Can you explain why?

8.What are the reasons that make race relevant or to have any effects on your present career choice, or do you know anyone whose careers path trajectory has been affected (Positively or negatively by their race)

9.What are the threats/Challenges and opportunities that you think because of your race you have experienced?

10. What are the coping strategies and resilience mechanism of a black person in Finnish labour market.

11.Do you think the Finnish labour market is structured racially? If so, how?

12.These three statements will be made to the participants and given them time to respond,

•It is easier to be employed in Finland if you are: Black, White, Asian and Latinx.

•There are different career paths or jobs easily attainable by: Blacks, Whites, Asian and Latinx

•Colour blindness- race is not an issue in Finnish labour market.

APPENDIX 2. Interview consent form

Research project tittle: Racial hierarchy and inequality in accessing the Finnish labour market.
Researcher and institution: Ufoka Eugene, Master student in the degree program of Global Change and Community Development, Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, Helsinki.

Research participant Name: (To be filled when given to interviewees)

The interview will take estimated about 30 minutes or maximum one hour. I don't anticipate that there is any risk associated with your participation, but you have the right to stop the interview or withdraw from the research at any time.
Thank you for agreeing to be part of the above research studies project. Ethical procedures for academic research require that interviewees explicitly agreed of being interview and on how the information contain in their interview will be used. This consent form is to ensure us that you understand the purpose of your involvement and that you agree to the conditions of your participation. Would you carefully read the information below and sign this form to certify that you approve the following?

•The interview will be recorded, and transcript produced you will be sent the transcript and given the opportunity to correct any factual error.
•The transcript of the interview will be analysed by researcher (Ufoka Eugene). Access to the interview transcript will be limited only to the researcher.
•Any summary interview content or direct quotation from the interview that will be made available through academic publication, or any other outlet will be anonymised and no information that will reveal yourself.
•After the research institution Diaconia University of Applied sciences have approved the research study completed we shall destroy all data collected.

SIGN……………………………………………………………………

DATE…………………………………PLACE……………………………..