

*Jaana Pesonen*

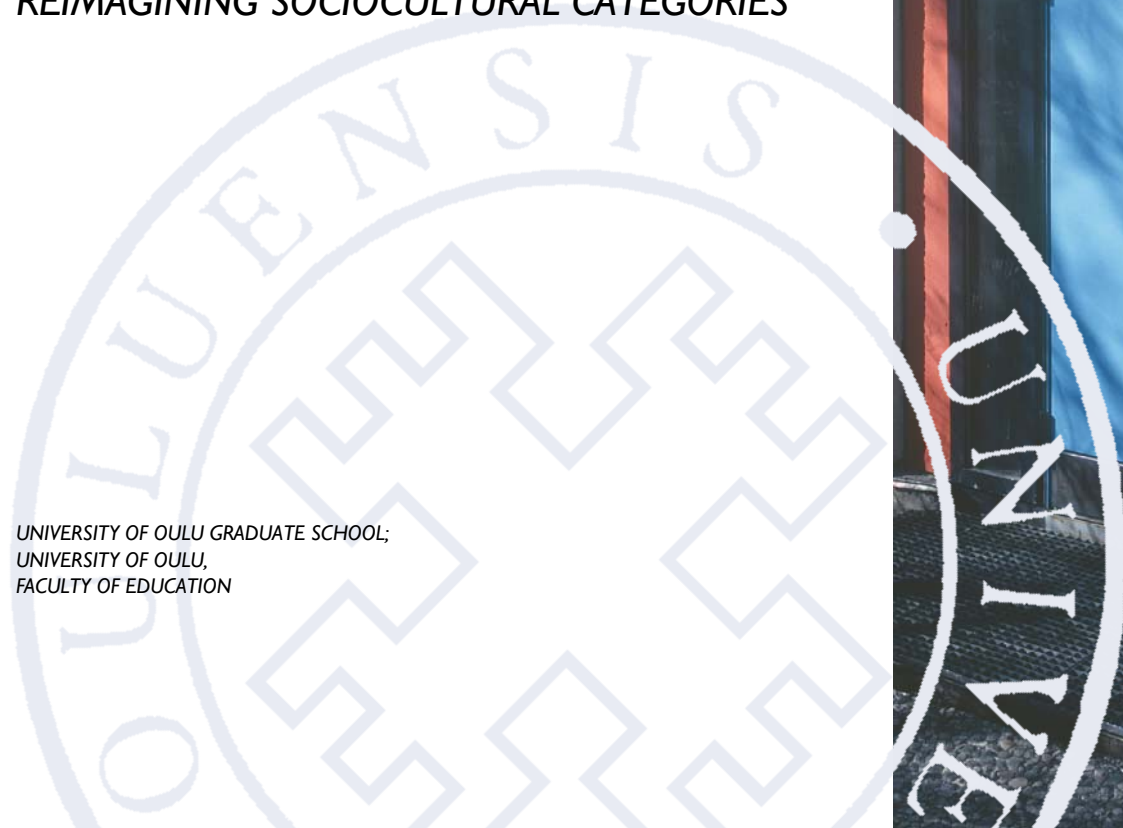
MULTICULTURALISM AS A  
CHALLENGE IN  
CONTEMPORARY FINNISH  
PICTUREBOOKS

*REIMAGINING SOCIOCULTURAL CATEGORIES*

UNIVERSITY OF OULU GRADUATE SCHOOL;  
UNIVERSITY OF OULU,  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION

E

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*JAANA PESONEN*

**MULTICULTURALISM AS A  
CHALLENGE IN CONTEMPORARY  
FINNISH PICTUREBOOKS**

Reimagining sociocultural categories

Academic dissertation to be presented with the assent of  
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**Pesonen, Jaana, Multiculturalism as a challenge in contemporary Finnish picturebooks. Reimagining sociocultural categories**

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*Abstract*

This study focuses on representations of multiculturalism in children's literature. Children's books are seen as cultural products which do not only reflect but also construct our social reality. The research consists of four peer-reviewed articles and a summary part. This interdisciplinary research is theoretically positioned in both cultural studies and social sciences, with the key concepts of multiculturalism, identity, ethnicity, racism and anti-racism. More specifically, the study contributes to the discussions of multicultural children's literature as both pedagogy and art.

The methodological-theoretical framework is based on the social constructionist approach. Language is understood as socially, historically, sociopolitically and ideologically constructed; hence performativity, discourse and representation are considered as key concepts of the analysis. Intersectionality functions as both a theoretical framework which guides the understanding of multiculturalism, as well as an analytical tool for examining the data. The data consists of children's picturebooks which are analysed by applying the method of close reading. Intersectional analysis also makes the numerous sociocultural categories, *i.e.* ethnicity, nationality, gender, language, dis/ability and age visible in the studied books.

The results show that representations of multiculturalism are connected to the ideas of nationality, which again relates to the ideas of belonging and exclusion – often meaning Finnish/non-Finnish division. The representations of multiculturalism can reproduce and circulate discourses of differentiation, and thus legitimise exclusion and marginalisation of people. However, picturebooks can also display representations of multiculturalism that challenge the normative assumptions of 'difference' and 'normal'. In the studied books, challenging the dominant sociopolitical discourses seems to further the understanding of 'us' in a more inclusive way which then might prevent exclusion of people who differ from the 'norm'. The didactic quality of children's books is manifest in anti-racist strategies with the aim of reducing racism by making it visible. The study shows that children's literature offers possibilities for readers to question implicit assumptions about the self and other, and thus can support readers in becoming more culturally aware and sensitive.

*Keywords:* children's literature, intersectionality, literary criticism, multiculturalism, representation



# **Pesonen, Jaana, Monikulttuurisuuden haaste suomalaisissa nykypäivän kuvakirjoissa. Tutkimus sosiokulttuuristen kategorioiden uudelleen kuvantamisesta**

Oulun yliopiston tutkijakoulu; Oulun yliopisto, Kasvatustieteiden tiedekunta

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## ***Tiivistelmä***

Tämän tutkimuksen keskiössä ovat lastenkirjallisuudessa esiintyvät monikulttuurisuuden representaatiot. Tarkastelen lastenkirjallisuutta kulttuurisena tuotteena, joka ei ainoastaan heijasta vaan myös rakentaa sosiaalista todellisuutta. Tutkimus rakentuu neljästä vertaisarvioudusta artikkelista sekä yhteenveto-osasta. Tutkimus on monitieteinen, ja sijoittuu sekä kulttuurintutkimuksen että yhteiskuntatieteiden kenttään. Keskeisiä käsitteitä ovat monikulttuurisuus, identiteetti, etnisuus, rasismi ja anti-rasismi. Tutkimuksessa tarkastellaan lastenkirjallisuutta sekä pedagogiikan välineenä että taiteellisenä tuotteena.

Tutkimuksen metodologis-teoreettisen perustan muodostaa sosiaalinen konstruktivismi. Kieli ymmärretään sosiaalisesti, historiallisesti, poliittisesti ja ideologisesti rakentuneena, ja analyysin avainkäsitteitä ovat performatiivisuus, diskurssi ja representaatio. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu lasten kuvakirjoista, joiden analysoinnissa on hyödynnetty lähiluvun tekniikkaa. Intersektionaalisuus toimii teoreettisena viitekehysenä, mutta se tarjoaa myös sopivan analyysivälineen mahdollistaen erilaisten sosiaalisten kategorioiden (etnisuus, kansalaisuus, sukupuoli, kieli, kyvykkyys, ikä) tekemisen näkyviksi aineistossa.

Tulosten mukaan monikulttuurisuus kuvataan usein kansalaisuuden kautta. Kansalaisuuden representaatioihin kiinnittyy kuulumisen ja poissulkemisen tematiikkaa, joka ilmenee usein suomalainen/ei-suomalainen-jaotteluna. Koska monikulttuurisuuden representaatiot tuottavat eroja korostavia diskursseja, ne myös aiheuttavat yksilöiden syrjäyttämistä. Lastenkirjallisuus sisältää toisaalta myös kuvauksia, jotka haastavat normatiivisen jaottelun 'erilaisuuteen' ja 'normaaliin'. Dominoivien sosiaalisten ja poliittisten diskursseiden haastaminen mahdollistaa meihin ja muihin liittyvien erontekojen monimuotoisemman ymmärtämisen. Näin normista poikkeavia yksilöitä ei suljeta ulkopuolelle yhtä herkästi.

Lastenkirjojen didaktinen ominaisuus tulee esille erityisesti antirasistisina strategioina, joiden avulla rasismiin pyritään puuttumaan tekemällä se näkyväksi. Tutkimuksen mukaan lastenkirjallisuus tarjoaa lukijoille mahdollisuuksia kyseenalaistaa yksinkertaistavia oletuksia itsestä ja muista. Näin lastenkirjallisuus voi tukea lukijan kulttuurisen tietouden kehittymistä.

**Asiasanat:** intersektionaalisuus, kirjallisuudentutkimus, lastenkirjallisuus, monikulttuurisuus, representaatio





*To my grandmother, who always read bedtime stories to me, and to my son, who taught me new ways of enjoying reading.*



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It was never an obvious choice for me to pursue a PhD. During my master level studies in Intercultural Teacher Education (ITE) programme I loved reading and writing – and still do – and the freedom we were given in our studies to choose research topics that we were passionate about. I owe my greatest gratitude to my supervisor Professor Maria Järvelä for encouraging me to continue for doctoral studies with the topic that I was, and still am passionate about. Thank you, Maria, for believing in me in the beginning and supporting me during these years. Another person who has had a great influence on my research journey is Emerita Professor Rauni Räsänen. Rauni has been there to advise and support – and to give an incredible model of dedication to the matters in which one believes the most. And, thank you Gordon Roberts, for all your support. You encouraged me to believe in what I was doing, you also encouraged me to take part in the North-South-South programme, which led me to have a chance to share my thoughts with teachers and students at the Universities in Windhoek as well as in Cape Town.

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30<sup>th</sup> October 2015, Oulu

Jaana Pesonen

## List of original publications

This doctoral thesis is based on the following original publications, which are referred to throughout the text by their Roman numerals:

- I Pesonen J (2013) Anti-racist strategies in Finnish children's literature: Physical appearance and language as signifiers of national belonging. *Children's Literature in Education* 44(3). URI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10583-012-9186-z>: 238–250.
- II Pesonen J (2013) Nationality in Finnish children's literature: From representations of ethnic difference to representations of culturally diverse society. In: Ommundsen ÅM (ed) *Looking out and looking in: National identity in picturebooks of the new millennium*. Oslo, Novus Press: 119–132.
- III Pesonen J (2013) Xing, Sikuriina, Tatu ja Patu: Monimuotoinen monikulttuurisuus 2000-luvun lastenkirjoissa. In: Rastas A (ed) *Kaikille lapsille: Lastenkirjallisuus liikkuvassa, monikulttuurisessa maailmassa*. Helsinki, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: 62–82.
- IV Pesonen J (2015) Reconstructing multiculturalism: Social categorizations challenged in the Förskolan Rävlyan and Tatu and Patu series. *Barnboken – Journal of Children's Literature Research* 38. URI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14811/clr.v38i0.197>: 1–17.

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## Foreword

I have loved books since I was a child. I learned from very early on that the library was an exciting place to go to, a place with endless opportunities to enter different worlds. Before my early teens, I also went through ‘a time of devouring’ when I read practically all the books from *Nancy Drew*, *The Famous Five* and *Pikku vampyyri (Der Kleine Vampir)* to *Watership Down* and *The Moomins*. Reading, no doubt, had a great impact on my identity and how I grew up to understand the world. On one hand books, like the *Tiina* series by Anni Polva and *Ronia the Robber’s Daughter* by Astrid Lindgren affected how I grew up to understand myself as a girl and as a woman. On the other hand, books such as *Three Musketeers* and *Anne of Green Gables* took me to different periods and locations. Thus, I want to address my appreciation to those creating memorable children’s books.



# 1 Introduction

Marius laughs when he remembers those girls. The only thing they saw in him was his skin colour. They don't know him, and they don't know who he is under his skin. But mum and dad know (--) and everyone really important, those whom he loves and who love him. At this moment, Marius sees his own reflection in the mirror, and for the first time, he feels that he really sees his true self: 'I am me,' he says out loud. 'I'm real and right'. (Kellomäki 1986: 110–111).

The extract above, taken from a Finnish children's book *Aurinkopoika* (Kellomäki 1986 [*Sunboy*<sup>1</sup>]) illustrates the metaphors of 'mirror, window and a door' in defining multiculturalism in children's literature. It is generally thought that children need to identify themselves with the characters in the book, to see their reflections as if through mirrors to affirm who they and what the communities around them are. Children also need to learn about the differences in the world, as if through windows. Yet, literature can also function as a conduit, as a door by engaging the reader in social practices that function for social justice. (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009: 1).

*Aurinkopoika* is the story of Marius, a small boy who faces racism and exclusion due to being 'different' because of his skin colour and being an adopted child. For Marius, a mirror is also a concrete thing through which he can reflect upon his existence and belonging. According to the metaphors of 'mirror, window and a door', literature offers three types of possibilities for the reader: when readers see reflections of their own lives, they gain a sense of involvement and pride. When they encounter images of others they learn how a range of experiences can exist, different from their own (Temple *et al.* 2011: 109). As a third dimension, literature invites the reader into interaction (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009).

In this thesis the focus is on the representations of multiculturalism in children's books. The approach that the 'mirror, window, door' metaphor provides for examining children's literature has been insightful in this study, as it supports the idea of examining how multiculturalism and diversity become represented, but also performed in children's literature. The above quote from *Aurinkopoika* (Kellomäki 1986: 110-111) represents multiple themes discussed in this study as it deals with racist exclusion based on skin colour, the internalised racism of the child

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<sup>1</sup> The original title of the book is in Finnish and has been translated by the author for the purpose of this research.

character, as well as experiences of empowerment and ‘liberation’ from outside pressure.<sup>2</sup>

The above-mentioned *Aurinkopoika* represents Finnish children’s literature. As for research on children’s literature in Finland, it has not very often dealt with multiculturalism. In fact only a few researchers have focused specifically on multiculturalism in children’s books (e.g. Heikkilä-Haltonen 2013, Oikarinen-Jabai 2009, Rastas 2013a, 2013b) or in young adults’ books (e.g. Aerala 2010, 2013). Some researchers have focused on diversity issues in Finno-Swedish children’s and young adult literature, but with an emphasis on gender (Österlund 2011, 2013, Österlund *et al.* 2011).

Multiculturalism has been an important research topic in the international field of children’s literature for decades. These debates have focused strongly on authentic representations of racial minorities, including questions of underrepresentation and misrepresentation of African Americans, Native Americans and Mexican Americans, in most cases (see e.g. Broderick 1973, Cai 2002, Gilton 2007, Henderson 2005, MacCannan 2001, Temple *et al.* 2011). In this study multiculturalism is seen as a wide concept encompassing cultural differences, similarities, values, norms and actions. In addition, multiculturalism is seen to be intimately linked with political and economic decisions including the idea that culture and power are interconnected. Thus, this study takes into consideration power relations of class, race and gender (see e.g. Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009, Bradford, 2007, Stephens 1990, 1992, 2011) and also acknowledges the tensions that surround the concept of multiculturalism and what follows from these tensions (*cf.* Dudek 2011).

In this study the research focus is on representations of minorities and various cultural groups, which corresponds to the current needs of depicting multicultural societies. With reference to the topicality of multiculturalism in children’s literature, British children’s books writer Sita Brahmachari (2015) highlighted right after the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France that now “it’s more important than ever to write stories that explore our differences and our common humanity”. This study shares a similar understanding with Brahmachari (2015), in that children’s literature can help us make sense of some of the great divides that exist in today’s world. It can provide children with knowledge and viewpoints of the increasingly fractured world by providing narratives of refugee experience, religious diversity and

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<sup>2</sup> *Aurinkopoika* (Kellomäki 1986) is part of the research data, thus the book is further analysed and discussed in Articles I and II, as well as in the results chapter.

tolerance.<sup>3</sup> The significance of these narratives is continuously increasing due to the growing number of people seeking asylum in Finland.

This is an interdisciplinary study located at the crossroads of literary criticism and education. On one hand, as my background is in educational sciences, a significant part of the study deals with the values and norms that are proposed to the reader in the representations of multiculturalism. On the other hand parts of the study, such as the methodological choices, are closer to literary criticism than traditional educational research. The field of children's literature studies is significant in both literary criticism and education, because children's literature is a form of socialising children into the values and morals of our societies (Colomer 2010, Hunt 1994, Stephens 1992). Children's literature also guides child readers when they negotiate their identities, in other words their 'place' in the world (Lampert 2007: 7, Sundmark 2009: 110, Zipes 2002: 97).

The foundations of this study are largely based on Maria José Botelho and Masha Kabakow Rudman's (2009) as well as John Stephens's critical approaches to ideology and sociopolitical contexts in children's literature. Botelho and Kabakow Rudman's theory on critical multicultural analysis has provided conceptual as well as historical perspectives. The advantages of applying their theoretical notions are in locating children's literature amongst the societal discourses, which display social, political and economic actions and ideologies. However, Botelho and Kabakow Rudman's arguments are strongly based on analysing children's literature in the context of the United States. Finnish history in relation to multiculturalism as well as the current context is widely different, which needs to be taken into consideration. As for John Stephens's (1990, 1992, 2011) role in this study, it is significant in the sense that acknowledging the different ways of representing multiculturalism – the explicit and non-explicit – is crucial. Stephens's problematising of what multiculturalism in the end is, and could be in children's literature, has enforced my own understanding of these issues to go further.

The aim of this study is to take part in the ongoing discussions on multiculturalism in contemporary children's literature but also to provide knowledge and new perspectives of the shifting social categories conveyed through cultural products. Thus, Stuart Hall's (*e.g.* 1992, 2013) theorising related to

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of tolerance is critically examined further in this research (see *e.g.* Article III, Chapter 6.5). The rhetoric of the concept is perceived to carry hierarchical ideology in which the majority accepts and tolerates the minority cultures (see *e.g.* Dudek 2011, Suurpää 2005).

language, representations and identity in particular has been fundamental in this research process. For understanding language as performative, Judith Butler's (1990, 1993, 1997) writings have been of great importance. Her theorising has challenged me to question, for example, the normative presumptions about difference/normal. In the specific field of children's literature, Jo Lampert's thesis (2007) has contributed greatly to my research; while examining books as responding to but also shaping our cultural understandings, she focuses on identity construction, and particularly on ethnicity and nationality.

In this study, literature is seen as a social construction which is why intersectionality is employed as a means to critically examine sociocultural categorisations. Therefore, I examine representations of different social divisions, such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, dis/ability and age by conducting an intersectional analysis of the selected children's books. The examined social divisions are seen to exist in parallel, appear simultaneously and even take contradictory forms in societies. In addition, the intersectional approach acknowledges the hegemonic discourses which enable the questioning of a homogenised 'right way' of being a member of a certain social category (see *e.g.* Crenshaw 1989, 1991, Dhamoon 2011, McCall 2013, Phoenix & Pattynama 2006, Yuval-Davis 2009).

This thesis consists of seven chapters. In Chapter 1, the position of the study, as well as my role as the researcher, are briefly discussed. Chapter 2 introduces the conceptual-theoretical framework with the main concepts (such as multiculturalism, diversity, difference and racism). This being an interdisciplinary study, the main task in this theoretical chapter is to contextualise and conceptualise the research in both fields, *i.e.* cultural studies and social sciences. Chapter 3 introduces the social constructionist approach which forms the ontological and epistemological basis of the study. This chapter also includes some discussion on language as a social construct that is historically, sociopolitically and discursively rooted in social ideologies that maintain power relations. In this discussion the essential concepts are performativity, discourse and representation. As will be demonstrated in Chapter 3.3, intersectionality forms a crucial element of the conceptual-theoretical foundation of the study as it functions both as a theoretical framework which guides the understanding of multiculturalism, as well as an analytical tool in examining the data. In Chapter 4 the practical realisation of the research is explained, including the data selection process and the deliberation of the method of close reading. Chapter 5 features overviews of the articles, while Chapter 6 elaborates the main findings of this doctoral research. In the final Chapter 7 I draw some conclusions

based on my results, and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of this doctoral dissertation.

## **1.1 Aims and research questions**

The main research task is to find out how multiculturalism is represented and performed in contemporary Finnish children's literature. The research questions of this study are the following:

1. How is nationality represented in Finnish contemporary children's literature?
2. What kinds of representations of Finland as a multicultural society are presented in children's literature?
3. How do representations of diversity in children's literature challenge traditional social categorisations of ethnicity, gender, age, social class and dis/ability?

These questions are deliberated in the four peer-reviewed articles (see Chapter 5, List of original publications). The focus is on Finnish children's literature, yet to answer the third research question, Swedish picturebooks were also analysed to gain a broader understanding of the phenomena (see Article IV, Chapter 5). The results are summarised and further discussed in Chapter 6. In addition, Chapter 7 takes a critical look at the results with a focus on children's literature in constructing and deconstructing our reality. In all, the study also aims to draw conclusions on how the dominant cultural assumptions are built into language and images.

## **1.2 Positioning the research and the researcher**

In this interdisciplinary study, the balancing between different fields and disciplines is a challenge. In a broad sense interdisciplinarity means "any form of a dialogue or interaction between two or more disciplines" (Moran 2002: 16). Here the interdisciplinary approach brings together several perspectives from both social sciences and cultural studies. The central questions are based on social sciences while the data is produced through means of literary analyses. The role of researcher is seen to be active in data collection processes, as well as in the analysis. In this chapter I briefly describe what interdisciplinarity means in this particular research. Apart from this I also locate myself in relation to this study.

In cultural studies (especially in feminist cultural studies) as well as critical multicultural studies, it is emphasised that the researcher is always part of the study,

but is also 'bound' to one's place. This place is always eventually defined by the researcher's physical subsistence, her bodily existence and place in the world – which includes characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and language. To acknowledge one's position is to bear in mind the inequality of the world and to question platitudes (Nieto 2010, Pöysä *et al.* 2010).

In children's literature studies, the interdisciplinary approach supports seeing literature as an institution which functions with corporative, educational, social and familial determinants which keep shifting, depending on the subject of study and historical periods (Zipes 2002: 36–37). I have continually had to balance and evaluate my study in both frames: in social sciences and in cultural studies. Thus I have also repeatedly crossed the boundaries in order to make connections between disciplines. Interestingly Jack Zipes (2002: 37) has argued for crossing boundaries between disciplines in order to understand “what we and others do to children's literature and to children”. By locating this study at the intersection of disciplines, I have aimed to acknowledge the importance of sociohistorical understanding of power: to see what historical, contemporary, and potential value a given text may possess (Zipes 2002: 76–77).

In addition, I have often struggled to locate myself as a researcher. I have had to negotiate and critically reflect whether I discuss my topic more from an educational perspective or a cultural studies perspective which has, at times, also made it challenging to situate the results of the study into a specific discipline. As a consequence, I have understood that interdisciplinarity can be a transformative force as new knowledge is produced by engaging with discrete disciplines (Moran 2002: 16). As for being critically aware of the procedures for organising knowledge, I consider important what Moran (2002: 78) argues that “there is no such thing as non-disciplinary knowledge: we cannot just dispense with disciplines altogether in the hope of discovering a higher or purer form of truth, because the institutionalisation of knowledge is inevitable and necessary”. Moran's argument is based on John Frow's (1988) writings concerning production and reproduction of disciplinary knowledge.

Based on this realisation, the methodological-theoretical framework of this study includes discussions on language not merely as reflecting but also as constructing reality. I understand literary analysis as a sociocultural process and locate the focused texts into specific social, cultural, political and economic circumstances. Hence, a social constructionist approach is applied to place the study ontologically as well as epistemologically in a scientific landscape. This approach enables focusing on meaning-making shaped by language as a social



process (see *e.g.* Berger & Luckmann 1966, Hall 2013, Schwandt 1998). Next, I move on to explain the conceptual-theoretical framework of the study, which I begin by introducing the key concepts. In addition, the chapter focuses on contextualising and conceptualising the research in both relevant fields: cultural studies and social sciences.



## 2 Conceptual-theoretical framework of the research

This chapter introduces the conceptual-theoretical framework and the most important concepts of the study, such as multiculturalism, identity, difference, ethnicity, racism and anti-racism (see Chapter 2.1). During the research process, these concepts turned out to be most relevant in analysing the representations of multiculturalism. These concepts are also necessary for understanding the essential questions of the study, such as: *How is nationality constructed? Who is similar/different? What is normality? What processes and structures maintain and reconstruct these understandings?* Clearly, these concepts are multi-layered and gain different meanings in different academic contexts. Since this research is located in the two fields of cultural studies and social sciences, an interdisciplinary approach is needed. This again means that the concepts and theories employed in this research cannot and should not be defined to be ‘either or’, as they are used in both fields, albeit with different nuances. The second chapter (see Chapter 2.2) gives an overview of the most influential debates within the research field of multicultural children’s literature – including the need to produce more research on the topic in international, and particularly in Finnish academic forums. Finally, in the third chapter (see Chapter 2.3) the double role of children’s literature as an art form and as a pedagogical device is examined.

### 2.1 Contextualising and conceptualising the research

According to Lawrence Grossberg (2010: 8) cultural studies are concerned about “describing and intervening in the ways cultural practices are produced within, inserted into, and operate in the everyday life of human beings and social formations, so as to reproduce, struggle against, and perhaps transform the existing structures of power”. Cultural studies are also about empowering and disempowering structures in societies, thus a vast amount of work in cultural studies focuses on studying and challenging the construction of marginalised or dominated identities – though contemporary research is interested in the social construction of dominating identities too (Grossberg 1996: 8, 90).

In the field of cultural studies, literature is often considered as a social construct that is historically, sociopolitically and discursively rooted in social ideologies that maintain power relations (Eagleton 1983, 1991). Therefore, children’s literature is examined here as a cultural product that does not only reflect, but also reconstructs

our social reality (for more details, see Chapter 3.2). As Douglas Kellner (2003: 9) has argued, cultural products, like children's books, "provide materials out of which we forge our very identities; our sense of selfhood; our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class; of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality; and of 'us' and 'them' ". Considering this, the research task of studying how multiculturalism is represented and performed in Finnish children's literature raises questions of identity (national, gender, ethnic and so forth), similarity and difference and what we consider as the 'Other'. I will discuss in more detail matters related to identities (see Chapter 2.1.2, Chapter 2.1.3) below. However, I will begin (see Chapter 2.1.1) with the concepts of culture and multiculturalism, as they provide the very basis for locating this study as well as for describing the research phenomenon.

### **2.1.1 Culture and multiculturalism**

Culture is exceptionally complex, one of the most difficult concepts in human and social sciences (Hall 2013: xvii, Williams 1981: 10). Culture can be studied from different perspectives and on national or community levels, or even in terms of how it is constructed and reconstructed in social groups. This is how culture is understood in this study; that is, people's ways of living, including their shared values and norms. Thus culture is not only 'a set of things' (e.g. literature, paintings or TV programmes), but also a process, 'a set of practices', in which meanings are given, changed and interpreted (Hall 2013: xviii–xix). Culture and society are always intertwined, offering a great variety of perspectives to examine human life in the past, present and future (Järvelä 1996: 7).

In this study, due to examining the interconnectedness of social reality and cultural artefacts, such as children's literature, it is essential to consider the changing nature of all the components; social reality, culture and children's literature are not static, but in continuous movement. Despite the idea of original and autonomous cultures still existing, no cultures are 'pure', as national cultures have always been influenced by other cultures, creating and being created and containing many new subcultures – in this sense all cultures are multicultural (Lehtonen & Löytty 2003: 7, Räsänen 2000: 117). In addition, culture should not be seen as separable from social or material reality but as part of "organization and distribution of affects (intensities) within and across the social formation" (Grossberg 2010: 170).

Multiculturalism as a word has been used so widely across all possible fields during the past decades that it has suffered a kind of overuse, or ‘inflation’. As a consequence, concepts such as tolerance, racism, ‘Other’ or nationalism have been used to depict different matters (Huttunen *et al.* 2005: 18–19). The term ‘multicultural’ is also said to align with concepts of nation, nationalism, language, culture, ethnicity and race (Dudek 2011: 155). In Finnish public discourses, multiculturalism is often used in reference to immigration, with the emphasis on the assumed ‘threats’ this phenomenon imposes on Finnish society (Keskinen *et al.* 2009, Lehtonen & Löytty 2003: 7). While writing this summary part of my doctoral thesis, the Finnish debates for or against multiculturalism have been vigorous. As a counter-reaction to the increasing nationalist and racist discourses, political, religious, labour, and even sports and cultural leaders have expressed their critical views against racism and hate speech.

Depending on the discussants and the context, the concept of multiculturalism is sometimes viewed through a very narrow understanding of culture. Alistair Bonnet (2000) criticises these kinds of views as diminishing culture into purely community ‘folk’ traditions. In a similar way Nieto (2010: 9–10) warns of sentimentalising a past that never existed, because it might result in producing a mere simplification – “a romanticised and uncritical understanding” – of culture which in reality is contradictory, even messy. Stanley Fish (1997) also criticises the surface-level understanding of culture and cultural differences. Fish (1997: 378–379) makes a distinction between boutique and strong multiculturalism, and argues that the first one promotes an understanding of multiculturalism as ethnic food and festivals, whereas the latter recognises cultural differences as central to human identity. Interestingly, what Fish (1997: 385) argued almost two decades ago, about differences, tolerance and whether or not we affirm or reject multiculturalism, is valid even today (as discussed above): “[S]aying yes or no to multiculturalism seems to make about as much sense as saying yes or no to history, which will keep on rolling along irrespective of the judgement you pass on it”.

In this research, the understanding of multiculturalism beyond simply learning about others (see *e.g.* Bonnet 2000, Nieto 2010, Räsänen 2000) has been a determining factor. Multiculturalism is seen to be actions, political decisions, encounters and differences, *i.e.* life in all its diverse forms (Huttunen *et al.* 2005: 19). Multiculturalism is a demographic fact (*cf.* Fish 1997) and should be acknowledged as more than just values, customs, beliefs and practices of people, because power always cuts through all levels of society (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009: 71). Rauni Räsänen (2000) writes how due to multiculturalism

becoming more visible, many cultural groups which were not earlier recognised have now had their voice heard. Räsänen also emphasises that as the concept of multiculturalism has become more diverse and structured, it has become more acknowledged that nationality is one vital part of the cultural background, just as other aspects like ethnicity, social class, gender, religion, rural/urban background, age group and especially languages are important too. (Räsänen 2000:117). To be able to take into consideration all the different issues of power relations that affect how people are seen, treated and represented in children's literature, an intersectional approach is applied in the analysis. Intersectionality as a means to examine sociocultural categorisations is further explained in Chapter 3.

### **2.1.2 Socially constructed identities**

Throughout human history, multiple meanings and definitions have been given to the concept of identity. In the social sciences, questions of identity have been central since the Second World War, due to the legacies of colonialism, migration, globalisation, and the growth of new social movements and forms of identity politics (Weedon 2004: 1). The concept of identity should always be considered as a product of its time or “at least of the dominant epistemological stance in which it is being considered” (Coats 2011: 109). In this study, identity is a crucial concept because it is closely related to representation: how different identities (such as national and ethnic) are presented have an influence on what kind of subject positions are produced (*cf.* Coats 2011, Hall 2013, Stephens 1990, 1992, Woodward 1997). Identity is also an essential concept because language and its meanings “mark the terrain of human beings, interpreting the reality and producing identities” (Lehtonen 2000: 4). Apart from language, cultural products influence how we make sense of our experiences and consequently how our identities are produced (Woodward 1997: 14). As Karen Coats (2011: 111) reminds us, children use their literature as a site for identification.

In contemporary studies, postmodern subjects are usually referred to as multiple and situational identities (Grossberg 1996, Hall 1992, 1995, 1996). Narrowing down identity into singular dimensions (such as cultural identity, gender identity, *etc.*) with the idea of an authentic or original way of living an identity is a result of essentialist thinking (see *e.g.* Dharamoon 2011, Grossberg 1996, Hall 1996, Woodward 1997). In the present study, identities are seen as socially constructed, never singular or fixed, purely objective or biologically determined, but multiple and often intersecting even ambiguous, and disunified subjectivities (Grossberg

1996: 93, Hall 1996: 4, see also Butler 1993). Stuart Hall (1995: 598) argues that the idea of unified identity is ‘false’, ‘a fantasy’, and possible only because of “a comforting story” or a “narrative of the self”. Thus identities are never neutral; while we express and construct our identities we also have to face the differences and inconsistencies in our selves (Weeks 1990: 88–89).

Identity matters: it offers us an opportunity to understand our subjective experiences of the world (Gilroy 1997: 301) and through identity we also gain a sense of personal location. We have a need to belong. This could mean belonging to a national culture, a local community or subculture, related to music, for example. According to Hall (1995: 611), national cultures into which we are born are one of the principal sources of cultural identity. However, we are not born with national identities, because as Hall (1995: 612) and Grossberg (1996: 90) point out, identities – also other than national – are formed in relation to representation.

Benedict Anderson (1983) has claimed that national identity is based on the idea of an imagined community. This imagined community, together with the ideas and images of it, are represented to us through discourses. For example, belonging is constructed through an ongoing story of nationhood. What it ‘means’ to be English, German or Finnish is imposed on us through repetitive ideas and images of national cultures (Hall 2013: xxi). The notion of specific nationalities is not only based on these specific national characteristics, but also on the assumption that we can identify the difference to ‘others’, as in ‘Britishness’ is not French, not German, not Pakistani and so on (Hall 2013: 224–225).

In this study the focus on defining identity is on what Hall (1992) and Grossberg (1996) both say about identity: it is to a great extent constructed out of difference. The process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has come to be understood as more open-ended, variable and problematic (Hall, 1995: 598). National cultures can be viewed as discursive devices that represent difference as unity and identity, though in reality there are deep internal divisions and differences. Hall (1995: 616) argues that despite the fact that the members of different nationalities are different in terms of class, gender or race, a national culture aims “to unify them into one cultural identity, to represent them all as belonging to the same great national family”.

National identity as a way of identifying differences between us and others has also been studied in children’s literature. Margaret Meek (2001) has argued that books intended for children have been used in a patriotic way, to promote nationalistic agenda, and to reinforce the ‘us and them’ division. Even archaic rune stones served nation-building purposes. Thus children were taught about shared

mythology, language and history even before nation states were created. (Sundmark 2013). During the Second World War a lot of literature for children was published to strengthen patriotic views and to justify the war. Many events of the Second World War have been interpreted stereotypically as nostalgic versions that reinforced the national myth. (Fox 2001: 43–45). Clearly, wars and conflicts provide “ready-made plots of conflict” between ‘us and them’ (Meek 2001: xv). Also in Finnish young adult’s fiction, war was often represented as an adventure, and the books promoted strong patriotic attitudes (Rajalin 2001: 318–319). In literary products a significant question is also what is left unsaid. Therefore, it is important not to forget that also critical and alternative versions of the war were told; those books, often written from the viewpoint of outsiders, helped the reader to gain contrasting ways of knowing (Fox 2001: 45–46).

Historical fiction for children has long been used for promoting values related to nationhood and citizenship. However, these narratives located in historical settings such as the Middle Ages do not only depict contrasts in relation to religious, ethnic or other cultural differences, but present also a complex view of national and political movements, thus avoiding repetition of cultural practices in which nations “exclude their others”. (Bradford 2013: 210, 220).

### ***2.1.3 Diversity, difference and the ‘Other’***

As early as in 1993, Stuart Hall argued that the capacity to live with difference would be the question of the twenty-first century: “cultural diversity is, increasingly, the fate of the modern world” (361). In this study, cultural diversity refers in a broad sense to dynamic, changing cultural characteristics including ethnicity, language, nationality, class, religion/ideology, gender, dis/ability, age and sexuality. Cultural diversity is connected to differences, as people often understand and give meanings to ‘us’, to ‘our culture’, based on comparison to ‘others’ who are thought to be different. This kind of division of the world into ‘us and them’ produces exclusive differences. Cultural differences can also be seen to exist within cultures and cultural groups, thus producing an inclusive view of differences (Lehtonen & Löytty 2003: 11–13). In this study the representations of diversity are examined critically by acknowledging the complexities of power relations that affect our understanding of these differences (*cf.* Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009: 89). Therefore, the concept of diversity in this study is understood as a broad, dynamic concept referring to a variety of cultural differences and similarities that keep on changing according to dominant ideologies.



Why does ‘difference’ matter? What explains the fascination with ‘otherness’? Stuart Hall (2013: 224) argues that one of the most important reasons why difference matters so greatly is linguistic: meaning is born in language, in which difference matters. This refers to the Saussurian argumentation according to which meaning is relational, and born from oppositions, for example black/white: we know what black is due to contrasting it to its opposite, white. “It is the ‘difference’ between white and black which signifies, which carries meaning” (Hall 2013: 224). What is extremely meaningful here is to acknowledge how these binary oppositions often over-simplify and restrict what can be said (Hall 2013: 225, see also Chapter 3.2).

In this study, the focus in relation to difference is on those who are in any way significantly different from the majority, and thus become presented as ‘them’ rather than ‘us’. Hall (2013: 219) argues that these people are more often subdued to the binary forms of representation. These binary forms are polarised divisions such as good/bad, masculine/feminine, civilised/primitive or, for example, ugly/attractive. When the diversity of the world is captured within binary opposites – the either/or extremes – meaning is produced in a crude and reductionist way (Hall 2013: 225). It is still worth emphasising that because difference is ambivalent, it can be both positive and negative: “It is both necessary for the production of meaning, the formation of language and culture, for social identities and a subjective sense of the self as a sexed subject – and at the same time, it is threatening, a site of danger, of negative feelings, of splitting, hostility and aggression towards the ‘Other’” (Hall 2013: 228).

In Western popular culture the ‘Other’ has often been racialised. Hall (2013: 228) claims that there are three major moments that have impacted strongly on the popular representations marking racial difference. These are slavery, colonisation and post- Second World War migrations. The imperial encounters produced an image which emphasised the contrast between the ‘primitive’ and the ‘civilised’ world, and slavery produced a similar story of simplicity and lack of culture in relation to black people. The colonisation and the exploration of Africa in the 19th century produced a substantial growth of popular representations of black Africa. Especially in Britain this meant the popular press and literature (*e.g.* drawings, photography, newspaper illustrations, diaries, reports, adventure novels and advertisements) in which the imperial project was given visual form (Hall 2013: 229, Solomos & Back 2000: 14). These images of ‘Other’ were closely tied to racial stereotypes and mirrored the relationship between the colonised and the coloniser (Solomos & Back 2000: 13–14). The imperial images were used in the advertising

of soap, for example. Soap became a symbol of domestication of the colonial world; it had the capacity not only to cleanse, but to purify, to wash black skin white (Hall 2013: 229–231).

The racialisation strategy meant – and still means – the practice of reducing the cultures of certain groups of people to nature: ‘naturalising differences’. Innate primitivism, simplicity and lack of culture have been used as reasoning, or the logic, for subordination. Originally this logic included an idea that the differences between black and white people were not cultural (*i.e.* open to modification and change) but natural; “beyond history, permanent and fixed” (Hall 2013: 234). The ‘naturalisation of differences’ links to the findings of this study (see Chapter 6.2, Chapter 7.1).

### **2.1.4 Racism and critical race theory**

The theme of *racism* is discussed as part of the framework since it occurs in the data. The concept of *race* has been used when trying to construct a unified national identity. However, race is not a biological or genetic category with any scientific validity, thus it cannot be used to distinguish one people from another. Race is a discursive, social construction used to differentiate people based on their physical characteristics (*i.e.* skin colour, hair texture, physical and bodily features) (Gillborn 1995: 2–3, Hall 1995: 617). On the other hand, the term *ethnicity* has been used to explain and justify the idea of one nation or one culture which, according to Hall (1995: 617), is false justification because all modern nations are cultural hybrids.

According to Tzvetan Todorov (2000: 64), racism is “usually a manifestation of hatred or contempt for individuals who have well-defined physical characteristics different from our own” and a matter of ideology: “a doctrine concerning human races”. The classical version of doctrines of racism (or ‘racialism’) can be reduced to five: 1. the existence of races, 2. continuity between physical type and character, 3. the action of the group on the individual, 4. unique hierarchy of values, and 5. knowledge-based politics (Todorov 2000: 64–67). Racism in the contemporary world is still based on ideas of the first doctrine that physical characteristics (*e.g.* genetic or skeletal) differ so profoundly that different human groupings should not be racially mixed. The second doctrine contains the idea that races are not only groups of individuals who look alike, but also differ in moral characteristics, *i.e.* physical and moral characteristics are interdependent. The third doctrine insists that the behaviour of the individual depends on the racio-cultural group s/he belongs to. The fourth doctrine is ethnocentric in its origin; it

suggests that the beliefs of some races are superior to others. The last doctrine related to knowledge-based politics connects the ‘facts’ from other doctrines to moral judgements and political ideals: “Thus, the subordination of inferior races or even their elimination can be justified by accumulated knowledge on the subject of race” (Todorov 2000: 67).

In more recent arguments, the earlier biological notions of race have been displaced with *cultural definition of race*, in which cultural differentiation between people is emphasised. According to Paul Gilroy (1992: 53): “We increasingly face a racism which avoids being recognized as such because it is able to line up ‘race’ with nationhood, patriotism and nationalism, a racism which has taken a necessary distance from crude ideas of biological inferiority and superiority and now seeks to present an imaginary definition of the nation as a unified *cultural* community”. Gilroy (1998) goes further with his criticism of new racism and suggests that we should move on and abandon the concept of race as we know it, since it is still utilised to practice racism based on the ideas of biological race. Gilroy’s demand can be explained as a concern of essentialising human existence.

Alana Lentin (2000: 100) argues that despite different explanations and conceptualisations of racism, the institutional and political reading of racism should not and cannot be avoided. It has also been argued that approaches that question the need of the concept of ‘race’ possibly ignore both past and present racism. One such viewpoint is the colour-blind view, which includes an understanding that to be non-racist one must be colour-blind, *i.e.* not to recognise a person’s ethnic background and identity. However, this would mean that the problem of ethnocentrism no longer exists, which is not the case (Andersen & Hill Collins 1995: 60–61).

There is no question that racism has relevance in contemporary societies: “Racism and discrimination should be brought back to the domain of the political, but this cannot be done without paying attention to contextual transformations – particularly in the urban environment where racism and anti-racism are most often played out” (Lentin 2000: 93). Even though biologists, geneticists, anthropologists and sociologists all agree that race is not a scientific reality, the arbitrary genetic differences (like skin colour or hair texture) have been and still are used as a mechanism for creating hierarchy and the ideology of white supremacy (Ladson-Billings 2013: 38–39). Jan Nederveen Pieterse writes in *White on Black: Images of Africa and Blacks in Western Popular Culture* (1992: 9–11) how the images of Africa and blacks provide one-sided and distorted information, and depict relations of domination, not of dialogue. These images and stereotypes maintain the old

juxtaposition of, for example, black/white and dirty/clean. These stereotypes are real in their consequences and they tend to function as self-fulfilling prophecies.

Nederveen Pieterse (2009: 114) also points out that racism, classism and sexism all have one thing in common: social inequality. In social relations inequality is maintained through hierarchy; therefore, if stereotypes are to be deconstructed, the existing hierarchies need to be challenged. The need to challenge hierarchies is also emphasised by feminist writers (*e.g.* Dhamoon 2011, Yuval-Davies 2009). hooks (2000: 374) remarks that there are conscious and unconscious ways of people becoming oppressed. Therefore, it is necessary to look not only for the explicit but also implicit representations of racism, such as prejudices and stereotypes – which is what I have done in this study.

Critical race theory (CRT) also offers useful perspectives on examining how racism operates, especially in language. CRT originates from the field of legal studies, though it has more recently influenced many scholars in education studies (see *e.g.* Bell 2009, Ladson-Billings & Tate 1995, Ladson-Billings 2009, 2013). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009: 19) who has written about critical race theory, especially in the field of education, argues that CRT is an intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction and construction of human agency and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power. Interestingly in CRT, stories and storytelling are effective techniques in communicating about an emotionally charged subject, such as ‘race’ (*e.g.* Bell 2009, Ladson-Billings 2009). Ladson-Billings (2009) claims that storytelling can and should be used to explore and unmask racism in its diverse forms in societies, since there is a constant danger that members of minorities themselves internalise stereotypical images constructed by the power elite in society. Therefore, in order to understand the complexities of racism, communicating the experiences and realities of the oppressed should be the first step (Ladson-Billings 2009: 23). Hence in applying CRT in teaching philosophy for children (Chetty 2014), storytelling techniques are valuable in educating about privilege, power and racism (Mendoza & Reese 2001).

For this study, critical race theory has provided knowledge to examine race as a cause but also as a context for unequal social conditions, thus CRT has also supported seeing reality as being socially constructed. In addition, CRT has provided support in analysing children’s books as texts that can communicate about and make sense of experiences of those not coming from majorities (*cf.* Bell 2009). Understandably, the focus of CRT is on race as the primary tenet of inequality. However, the approach of intersectionality (used in this research) should not be understood as conflicting, but rather complementing the analysis of texts written

for children. In intersectionality as well as in CRT the emphasis is on exposing and challenging the oppressive structures of societies (e.g. Ladson-Billings 2009).

The different theories of racism, even the wide controversies that exist, should not necessarily be seen as a weakness, but as part of avoiding a uniform and homogenous conceptualisation of racism. Therefore, the debates about ‘a proper definition’ should be treated with caution, as “these definitional issues are not arcane technical matters, but politically significant decisions” (Gillborn 1995: 5). According to Solomos and Back (2000: 20), a growing number of scholars have sought to develop a more rounded picture of contemporary racial imagery by examining at the role of literature, the popular media and other cultural forms representing changing images of race and ethnicity. For this study the arguments from Solomos and Back are extremely relevant. They argue on emphasising the relevance of seeing racism and ideas about race as changing and historically and geographically situated, instead of focusing on questions of race as an ontologically valid concept. The task set in this study also raises questions of the social construction of difference (in relation to race, ethnicity, gender or class).

### **2.1.5 Anti-racism – Fighting oppression and discrimination**

Racism and xenophobia have increased in many European countries in recent years, which makes it even more urgent to focus on these issues in research. The ongoing economic crisis continues to push people to seek easy targets of blame and to make them more open to extremist ideologies. Therefore, xenophobic parties, some with openly neo-Nazi agendas advocating racist actions of violence in particular against immigrants, have attracted increasing support and are represented in the parliaments of several European countries (The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2013). A significant concern across Europe should be “the persistence of racism and the success in various countries of far-right wing parties with a strong anti-immigrant manifesto” (Lentin 2000: 94).

It is the duty of all educators to fight racism. The forthcoming Finnish National Curriculum states that people should not be treated differently because of their gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, opinion, sexual orientation or disability. In school communities, bullying, violence, discrimination and racism are not accepted. These definitions are based on the Finnish Constitution. (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014 2015).

In brief, anti-racism means identifying racism and acting against it (Bonnet 2000, Gillborn 1995). Alastair Bonnet’s book *Anti-racism* (2000) has provided a

substantial part of the theoretical foundations for this study when examining the cultural products especially from the anti-racist perspective. For Bonnet (2000: 132, 179), the underlying view is clearly related to race and racial oppression and discrimination, but he also talks about the sexualised and gendered nature of racism. Solomos and Back (2000: 23) have also argued that the analysis of racism should be integrated with a conceptualisation of related issues, such as gender and sexuality. In this study, anti-racism includes the ideas of denaturalising and problematising taken-for-granted assumptions about human differences (*cf.* Bonnet 2000: 139).

One of the debates related to anti-racism concerns the idea of fixed essence. Some anti-racists have, according to Bonnet (2000: 137), demanded ‘liberating races’, or ‘respecting racial differences’. This is problematic as they at the same time validate the existence of racial essences (Bonnet 2000: 137). Gilroy (1992: 50), for instance, has blamed anti-racism for trivialising the struggle against racism and failing to acknowledge the interconnectedness of racism to other political antagonisms (*e.g.* inequality between men and women). However, according to Lentin (2000: 98), the accusations that anti-racism promotes culturalist racism fail to recognise that racism of this type is not a new phenomenon but “is inherent in state, institutional, class-based and individual participation in the legitimisation of an established dominating culture”. Also, according to Bonnet (2000: 124), the tensions in understanding, describing and acting in anti-racism have to be acknowledged to also “animate its debate and provoke the heterogeneity of its activism”. In this study, anti-racism is not seen only as a battle against racial discrimination, but as a broader social process related to the discriminatory categorisation of people. Thus anti-racism can offer a critique and a response to inter-community discrimination, homogenisation and stereotyping (Bonnet 2000: 124).

Anti-racism in children’s literature has been studied, especially in the United States. In the collection *Antiracism in Children’s Literature*, published in 2001 in the journal *The Lion and the Unicorn*, anti-racism was studied with an emphasis on equality, justice and aesthetics. In this collection many of the writers express disbelief about the fact that racism and its underlying white supremacy myth still dictate poor living conditions, schooling and health services for people of minorities (MacCann 2001: 337–338). The editor Donnarae MacCann (2001) explains how the push, starting in the 1960s, to recognise cultural pluralism in children’s literature alarmed many. MacCann gives examples of how scholars and editors downplayed the quality but even the need for books depicting stories about

marginalised groups. Surprisingly, for many critics the rise of social issues into children's books meant communism, or even the death of art. In the 1980s and 90s, those arguing for more pluralistic depictions of cultures were accused of tribalism and political correctness, which were associated with an agenda to promote "own special interests". (MacCann 2001: 344). According to MacCann (2001: 341) the connection between politics and art needed to be recognised, although many scholars failed to acknowledge that children's literature was social and political.

MacCann (2001: 339) points out that the mission in anti-racism is to carry forward a progressive agenda. The standpoint that anti-racism can and should actively aim to change the status quo is supported in this study. While many academics limit the discussions on multiculturalism mainly, if not only, to 'race' and ethnicity, I argue that anti-racism in children's books can educate readers against various forms of discrimination, homogenisation and stereotyping of marginalised people. Further, I believe that ethnicity, despite being a more powerful social division than age, class or sexual orientation, for instance, can be examined together with other categories. Unequal treatment and discrimination of people is often based on multiple social categories, as will be discussed with reference to intersectionality in Chapter 3.3.

In the present study, anti-racism has also offered insights into examining the role of language. Bonnet (2000: 10) writes about individuals struggling within and against their social context. As will be discussed in later chapters (especially in Chapter 3), the stereotyping or even racist context in children's literature is (in most cases) an unintended result from the fact that we all operate with language that reinforces the binary oppositions that we precisely try to avoid. As Bonnet (2000: 17) states: "respecting difference can easily turn into asserting hierarchy".

## **2.2 Defining multicultural children's literature**

The debates about the meaning of multicultural literature reveal the sociopolitical nature of the topic (Cai 2002). In order to locate this particular study, these debates need to be addressed. In children's literature studies, books presenting ethnic, racial and cultural groups are often referred to as 'multicultural books'. It is argued that these books give children chances to develop their understanding of others, but also to "affirm children of diverse backgrounds" (Mendoza & Reese 2001). In the discussions the emphasis is often on how these multicultural children's books present the cultural practices and mores of the characters. Presentations of racial groups, especially with the black/white paradigm, have been central topics,

especially in the United States where race questions are historically rooted in power relations (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009: 1, 30).

According to Mingsui Cai (2002), multicultural literature can be divided into three dimensions: *aesthetic literary* creation, like any other kind of literature, a *political weapon* in cultural war, or an *educational tool* to change people's attitudes towards cultural diversity. In this study the aesthetic, political and educational aspects are seen as being interrelated, although acknowledging that each aspect provides different emphasis to research. Cai (2002: xvi) reminds us that these aspects offer very different objectives, but also different criteria for evaluation. For instance, the criteria for selecting books to use with children is different from the criteria for evaluating books in terms of literary criticism.

Teachers, writers and publishers have developed checklists to evaluate what is a 'good multicultural book'. Bonnet (2000) writes about the guidelines of *Interracial Books for Children* which was founded in 1967 by a culturally diverse group of writers, librarians, teachers and parents. These guidelines advise the reader to check whether the minority representatives are illustrated in active or passive roles, or whether the minority persons and their settings are depicted unfavourably in contrast to the norm of white middle-class suburbia. Bonnet suggests that these guidelines can promote people to consider how diversity is signified. He also argues that the guidelines go further than just demanding that "few symbols of other lifestyles" are included, but that the "social ambitions and histories of 'other peoples' be represented, and indeed, that 'other peoples' should be seen to be representing themselves". (Bonnet 200: 96–97). The guideline lists differ with their missions. The aims of different lists range from simple listings of 'books to avoid' to guidelines for selecting bias-free books. Some lists, like *Ten Quick Ways to Identify Racism and Sexism in Children's Books* are still used today in the United States in libraries, national teaching associations and amongst adults working with children (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009: 75).

As discussed above, the term 'multicultural book' is in most cases used specifically in reference to children's books that depict a variety of ethnic, racial and cultural groups. Naturally, the research done on misrepresentations of ethnic, racial and cultural groups is valuable and has brought a lot of knowledge and awareness to people producing (writers, illustrators, editors) but also selecting (librarians, teachers, parents) books for children. However, in contemporary children's literature researchers have called for a paradigm shift. This shift is based on the idea that there is a need to move from the paradigm of race relations to one that would combine power relations of class, race and gender. Maria José Botelho



and Masha Kabakow Rudman (2009: xiv) argue for critical multicultural analysis and putting more emphasis on examining power – “the complex web of sociopolitical relations” – in the study of multiculturalism in children’s literature. Botelho and Kabakow Rudman’s theory demands that children’s literature needs to be problematised and critically examined based on issues of diversity and social injustice.

For this study I propose that defining multicultural literature can include foci on different sociocultural categorisations, such as gender, nationality, language, class, dis/ability and age, but still acknowledge the importance of those cultural groups that have been historically silenced. I agree with Jack Zipes (2002: 37), who argues that scholars and critics should be more careful when using terms like ‘multicultural’, because to understand differences and contradictions in societies, we should not settle for explaining them with token acknowledgement of different ethnic, class, and regional backgrounds.

In *Keywords for Children’s Literature* Debra Dudek (2011) summarises multiculturalism to be, in the best cases, about readers negotiating a complex and culturally diverse community. This kind of children’s literature can support the child reader in developing a stronger understanding and respect for cultural differences. Dudek points out that in representing multiculturalism, tensions are unavoidable. Thus books that might aim to strive for acceptance of cultural differences can end up repeating unequal ideological positions, in which one culture has superiority over another. (Dudek 2011: 155).

Stephens pointed out as early as in 1990 that those books that *specifically* aim to acknowledge current social issues – such as multiculturalism – address these issues in a somewhat simplistic way (1990: 180–181). According to Stephens, the superficial representations of multiculturalism are frequently due to the focalisation; difference is often the starting point, and the narratives are focalised by members of the majority culture. Due to this, meaning is continuously located within the dominant and/or majority culture’s perspective. (Stephens 1990: 181, 2011: 18–19). Clare Bradford (2006) warns in a similar way about ‘weak multiculturalism’. Weak multiculturalism can be seen as a result of naïve optimisms, which leads to representations of minorities as ‘others’, also resulting in consignment to the ‘cultural periphery’ (Stephens 2011: 18–19).

The challenges related to representing multiculturalism without settling on just othering the ethnic and other minorities can also be addressed through postcolonial theory. In her pioneering work *Unsettling Narratives* (2007: 3), Bradford examines the representations of the colonial past to child readers of today. She studies

children's books from the former settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the United States and shows how texts can "reinvoke and rehearse colonialism in a variety of ways". This takes place, for example, by engaging with history in realistic ways, but also by proposing ideas and values about postcolonial cultures, as well as about individual and national identities. Although Bradford focuses specifically on indigenous cultures, her arguments on diverse, self-conscious, and informed representations of cultural differences also open up viewpoints for my study.

In this study the approach to examine multiculturalism which manifests as complex and intertwined social categorisations is supported by the theory of intersectionality. This approach in studying children's literature has also been suggested by Mia Österlund, Maria Lassén-Seger and Mia Franck (2011), who examined the intersectional perspective in relation to studying Finnish-Swedish children's literature. They propose that when an intersectional perspective is combined with a transnational perspective, representations of ideological and societal tendencies in children's books can be examined as complex, parallel or even conflicting discourses. I fully agree with them that the ideological and political views written into children's literature need to be examined critically; furthermore I agree that the intersectional perspective makes the interrogating of how texts can produce, reproduce but also shake (*omskapa*) social, cultural and political value systems possible (Österlund *et al.* 2011: 64). I will further discuss the intersectional theory as an approach to multicultural issues in Chapter 3.3. Next I continue to further discuss multicultural children's literature. First I examine the debates related to authenticity, after which I introduce some of the research done in Finland on multicultural children's literature.

### **2.2.1 Authenticity and political agenda**

The topic of multiculturalism has been intensively debated in children's literature research and there are still today disagreements about what aspects are included in multiculturalism, as already discussed above. Internationally, and particularly in the United States, the general discussion regarding meaning and terminology has continued for over half a century, and the *authenticity* debates have been particularly intense, even contentious (*e.g.* Botelho 2015, Cai 2002, 2003, Henderson & May 2005, Mendoza & Reese 2001, Short & Fox 2003, Temple *et al.* 2011). The debates about accuracy and authenticity usually culminate in arguments about who can illustrate and tell the stories about or on behalf of minorities in the

right, respectful and correct ways. The research on multicultural children's literature has been mostly concerned with the questions of underrepresentation and misrepresentation, and with authenticity and accuracy of representations of racial minorities, in most cases African Americans, Native Americans and Mexican Americans (see *e.g.* Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009, Broderick 1973, Cai 2003, Gilton 2007, Henderson 2005, MacCannan 2001, Short & Fox 2003). The main argument for the authentic representations of minority groups, and cultural groups in general, has been that authentic multicultural literature helps children learn about their own heritage (see *e.g.* Temple *et al.* 2011, Tolson 2005).

Some scholars, like Mendoza and Reese (2001), concede that studying the images of people outside the mainstream should also include "respectful portrayals of gay/lesbian people, women, people with disabilities, and religions other than Christianity". Regardless, the analysis of multiculturalism is still often tied to examining ethnicity and race and especially the cultural markers indicating accuracies, inaccuracies and authenticity. Especially in the United States, in research about multicultural children's literature the concept of the ethnic is at times used almost synonymously with the concept of multicultural (see *e.g.* Gilton 2007). This emphasises how strongly connected the issues of race and major ethnic groups are to discussions of multicultural children's literature.

At times multiculturalism has also been examined as misrepresentation of religions. However, these analyses also often focus on right and wrong portrayals of specific groups and their habits and values (see *e.g.* Lehman 2005 on Amish and Jewish). Others (see *e.g.* Knoeller 2005 on Native Americans), who also argue for the addressing of problems of misrepresentation and stereotyping, emphasise the importance of plurality of voices in texts. A few scholars, such as Wendy Smith-D'Arezzo (2003) have also argued that in discussions about multiculturalism in children's books, the diverse representations of ability should also be recognised. She points out that books should have realistic and positive images of children with disabilities to be able to reduce prejudices related to special needs and special education. However, also for Smith-D'Arezzo (2003: 91), one of the focus areas in detecting quality literature is accuracy; to portray a "true picture to children of what special education is".

The rise of multicultural literature can be seen as a political movement: "It is a movement to claim space in literature and in education for the historically marginalised social groups, rather than one to renovate the craft of literature itself" (Cai 2002: xiv-4). The misrepresentation of racial minorities has been, and still is, an important agenda in children's literature not only because it is hurtful and gives

false knowledge on the values and habits of people, but also because it perpetuates unequal treatment (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009).

In this study the misrepresentations of marginalised groups are examined by analysing the exoticising, romanticising and patronising of the ‘Other’ (see Article I, Article II, also Pesonen 2010, Pesonen, 2011a). The work of those mentioned above who have fought for acknowledging the importance of analysing the representations of marginalised groups in literature has set the standard for the critical examination of issues of multiculturalism, nationalities and differences. However, the subject matter of authenticity is extensive and complex, and so is the issue of insider/outsider. The question of whose voice is actually heard in the books is even more complex and multifold than only simply the insider/outsider perspective of writer/illustrator. As discussed in this study later (see Chapter 3.1), representations are born in specific social, political and economic circumstances. This means that the constructions of oppressive discourses are not (in most cases) intended, but indistinguishable even for the producers. Hence, I argue that the debate on right/wrong representations actually also concerns the debate about essentialism (the discussion on essential/anti-essential perspective continues in Chapter 3.3).

### **2.2.2 Multicultural children’s literature research in Finland**

Multiculturalism and diversity are rather rare research themes in Finnish children’s literature studies. One of the few books on multicultural issues in children’s literature is *Kaikille lapsille* [For All the Children] which was published in 2013 and edited by Anna Rastas. One of the articles of this dissertation was published in the book (Article III). A major concern brought forward in the articles of the book is how children’s literature in Finland speaks to children from diverse backgrounds. In other words, the book asks: can all children find ‘someone like me’ in the books they read?

In the book Anna Rastas (2013a) addresses questions which are also central to this study: what does the concept of multicultural (children’s) literature actually mean and how can it be applied in Finnish context? Rastas writes that the concept of multicultural literature does not function unproblematically in the Finnish case if it is understood according to most research literature from North America, as in “books by and about people of colour”. (Rastas 2013a: 13). I also see challenges in narrowing down the concept of multicultural literature only into issues of ‘race’ and ethnicity. Altogether, I agree with Rastas (2013a, 2013b) that the existence and

effects of racism should not be excluded from multiculturalism discussions or from the conceptualisations of multiculturalism.

In the book mentioned above, Juli-Anna Aerila (2013) examines the use of young adult's literature in multicultural education. Also Aerila, like many other researchers internationally, defines multiculturalism as themes related to cultural differences. Aerila's research provides interesting knowledge on how stereotypical the representations of people with a non-Finnish background often are in young adult's literature. Aerila argues that these stereotypes might be useful as they can make the reader see the differences and similarities between people. Yet she also acknowledges the risks of these stereotypes possibly reinforcing inequality, and thus reminds the reader that the discussions based on these kind of books need to move on to a more critical level than simply confirming stereotypes. In addition, she calls for teachers to be 'multiculturally competent', *i.e.* to be able to choose the 'right kind of books' and to raise discussion on the 'right kinds of topics'. (Aerila 2013: 165–166, 170).

Although in Finland the issues related to multiculturalism, *i.e.* diversity, racism, minorities and othering, are still rather rare topics in children's literature discussions, research based on feminist theories has been dynamic. As mentioned earlier, Mia Österlund, Maria Lassén-Seger and Mia Franck (2011) have done intersectional research with a focus on Finnish-Swedish children's literature. Österlund (see *e.g.* 2011, 2013) has also written about girlhood, femininity and masculinity as well as racialising practices in children's literature. Helena Oikarinen-Jabai (*e.g.* 2009, 2013) has done creative research related to Finnish multicultural art. Her work provides views of representations of transnational and hybrid spaces and identities in children's literature, but also in photographs and videos. As regards to my study, Oikarinen-Jabai's experimental approaches in examining how conventional images (of *e.g.* ethnicity or nationality) can be challenged have been inspiring.<sup>4</sup>

Päivi Heikkilä-Halttunen (see *e.g.* 2001, 2010, 2013) has written and edited a large number of books and articles related to Finnish children's literature. She has examined extensively children's books dealing with sensitive, even difficult themes, such as divorce and death. Furthermore, her analysis on colonialist and racialising depictions of Africa and other exotic locations in Finnish children's books from the

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<sup>4</sup> In addition, for representations of traditional/old minorities of Finland (*e.g.* Sami and Roma), Eila Rantonen (2010) has edited a compilation of articles including discussions on issues of ethnicity, race, identity and power relations in adult literature.

1950s and 60s have provided new knowledge and viewpoints which have also been significant for my research work. Heikkilä-Halttunen (2010, 2013) has argued that even though contemporary children's literature also covers difficult issues, nevertheless traumas, crises and other misfortunes are resolved more easily than what might be the case in real life situations. It is still typical of children's literature to 'sugarcoat' real life problems (Heikkilä-Halttunen 2013: 45).

I agree with Heikkilä-Halttunen's (2013: 30–31) view that there is indeed a great need in Finland to do more research on multiculturalism in children's literature, and also to recognise the possibilities of using children's literature, especially picturebooks, in early childhood education and in primary schools (see more in Chapter 7.2).

### **2.3 Children's books: Art and pedagogy**

The discussion related to picturebooks as an art form or educational tool emerged properly in the 1980s (Colomer *et al.* 2010: 1) but perhaps most markedly in the 1990s (Weinreich 2000: 16). Many academics have argued very strongly about the issue (see *e.g.* Hunt 1994, Weinreich 2000, Zipes 2002). This study is in many ways located at the centre of these debates, as the research has been carried out crossing the two fields, *i.e.* as interdisciplinary research located at the intersection of cognitive and aesthetic aspects. Of course it is natural that the discussion of the pedagogic nature of children's books highlights educational rather than aesthetic aspects.

The terminology in defining children's literature as educational or aesthetic is connected to the basic question of how to define a child and childhood. Another significant question is how children read the literature intended for them, not forgetting the perspective of author-reader relationship. A fundamental part of the discussion about whether children's literature is more defined by aesthetics or pedagogy depends on how we define children's literature. What do we actually mean when we talk about children's literature? In this study the definition of children's literature refers to books written and published for children, which is also the most common definition in the field (*e.g.* Weinreich 2000: 36). Many academics, such as Perry Nodelman (2010) and Torben Weinreich (2000), have argued that because children's literature is produced in terms of adult ideas about children, it is a distinct and definable genre of literature. Nodelman (2010: 19–21) has also stated that because those ideas are inherently ambivalent, the literature is also therefore ambivalent. He validates this argument with the binary standpoint: children's

literature offering an adult view of childhood and thus inscribing the division between adult and child.

How childhood is defined influences what adults want children to know, learn and experience through literature (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009: 18). Thus seeing children as limited, unfinished adults or as competent and with a variety of special characteristics is reflected in children's literature from different periods. In the West the desire to instruct and educate children to be "good Christians and good citizens" dominated the literature for children until very late in the 20th century (Weinreich 2000: 16–20). This kind of pedagogical approach resulted in the fact that often books were solely didactic treatises and preachy (Knowles & Malmkjaer 1996: 39), but also religious and serious (Zipes 2002: 46). The active interest in a degree of moral intimidation can be detected especially from eighteenth century and early nineteenth century English stories for children (Tosi 2009). According to some academics (see *e.g.* Knowles & Malmkjaer 1996: 39), modern children's fiction was born in the 1840s when traditional juvenile fiction was established. This brought forward a change to the above-mentioned morality and preaching.

In contemporary research there has been more emphasis on children as competent and critical readers and furthermore, individuals with these qualities (see *e.g.* Murriss 2013, Reynolds 2007). This means, according to Murriss (2013: 147), that children are not seen only as problem-solvers, but also as problem-posers. This kind of approach to childhood, and especially to children's reading, also demands a change to adult/child hierarchy as it challenges our preconceived understanding of 'right' and 'wrong' questions and answers. Interestingly, some studies also point out that specifically contemporary Nordic children's literature would promote a view of a child as a competent, active individual (Christensen 2013).

Nodelman (2010: 19–20) writes about the double-vision of childhood, that we simultaneously both celebrate and denigrate childhood desire and adult knowledge, and therefore simultaneously protect children from adult knowledge and work to teach it to them. Zipes (2002: 44) has argued that one of the major differences between children's literature and literature intended for an adult audience is the censorship. Reynolds (2007: 3) claims similarly that children's literature is a "paradoxical cultural place" due to being simultaneously orthodox and radical, and didactic and subversive. This discussion echoes the idea of the Kantian paradox of the educational aim: how to educate children, to make them obey the rules, but still encourage them to become independent thinkers? In other words: how does education in the sense of external regulation lead to the internally regulated

autonomy of thought and action? Below I will discuss the pedagogical nature of children's books and examine the concepts used in reference to this.

### *Pedagogical nature of children's books*

Several academics agree about the socialising nature of children's books. John Stephens (1992: 3) has stated that children's books are supposed to generate positive appreciation of sociocultural values in children – values which are assumed to be shared by author and audience. These values contain contemporary morality and ethics that can give us knowledge of what is seen as being valuable in the cultures. Teresa Colomer (2010: 42–43) describes children's literature as an instrument of socialization in our culture. She says that the values and forms of social relationships (such as verbalisation of problems and their constant negotiations) are translated into the pedagogical propositions of books for children and young people. Lampert (2007: 10–12) emphasises especially the socialising nature of stories in identity production; instructing children on who they may become, what identities to safely take and in which identities they will be rewarded. Since children's books contribute to identity production, they are also by nature politicising (Lampert 2012). Furthermore, some academics such as Maria Nikolajeva (2013) emphasise that children's literature can be a major tool for socialisation, because in fiction, situations in which emotions are simulated are created.

Torben Weinreich, a Danish academic, has written specifically about the societal, pedagogical and aesthetic context in children's books. Weinreich (2000) published a book called *Children's literature – Art or pedagogy?* in which he argues that children's literature should account for both the child's needs and society's needs. However, Weinreich (2000: 16) also questions whether or not we can or should refer to a child's needs, as those are defined by adults who produce – write, publish and distribute – the books for children. When the pedagogical nature of children's books is discussed, the concepts of 'didacticisation' and even 'purification' have also been used. According to Klinberg (2008:12–16), *didacticisation* refers to the intention of passing of knowledge and/or teaching attitudes and behaviour, whereas *purification* means a change in readers' assumed values. Weinreich (2000: 54) questions this definition of didacticisation by arguing that it does not have much meaning as all literature influences the reader and gives new knowledge



Jack Zipes (2002), who is known for his arguments in relation to the socialising nature of children's literature, criticises in *Sticks and Stones* the patronising attitudes of adults: "We desperately want to save our children from the future that we have planned for them" (Zipes 2002: xii). His criticism is mostly targeted at mass consumerism which he refers to as 'the cultural homogenisation of children'. Whether we see children as innocent, passive victims of mass media and literature or as creative and independent (Zipes 2002: xii), substantially affects even the research design, data collection and analysis. The viewpoint – that Zipes (2002) calls realist – of seeing children as active and imaginative participants has strongly influenced this research. Having said that, I want to point out that children need support from adults to become critical readers, to be able to question and challenge stereotypes in cultural artefacts, for example (see Chapter 6.5).

Part of the pedagogical nature of children's literature is that the imposed meaning can be very obtrusive, sometimes almost invisible (Bradford 2007, Hollindale 2011, Stephens 1992). When talking about 'the hidden imperative' of children's books to do more than merely entertain (Cullingford 1998: 54), I believe it is crucial to emphasise how difficult it is to demonstrate whether the writer was/is aware of the cultural meanings included in the story. Dennis Butts (1992: xiii) points out that literary creation should be seen as a process in which the writer often struggles with the world he or she aims to depict.

The visions of the perfect reader, who never misinterprets the texts, have luckily nowadays been largely abandoned, yet the difference between the author's intention and the book as an artefact of a particular ideology is not always acknowledged. Bradford (2007) emphasises this strongly: "It is perfectly possible for text to be skilfully written and at the same time racist, or classist, or sexist, just as it is possible for readers to admire skilful writing at the same time that they resist the ideologies that inform particular texts". Significantly, in some books the visible ideologies ought to be viewed as expressions of a collective will rather than the author's wish to do good (Cullingford 1998: 5–7).

As stated above, both cultural studies and social sciences form the frame for the research design and analysis. Thus the study is located in the 'middle ground' – seeing contemporary children's books in an ideal situation providing both aesthetic and pedagogical experience. All in all, I agree with Peter Hunt (1994: 3) who has written that children's literature "cannot help but reflect an ideology and by extension, didacticism". However, simplicity should never be viewed as an inherent quality of children's literature since texts for adults can be very simple whereas texts for the young can be remarkably complex (Sundmark 2013: 161). It

has been one of the starting points in this study to acknowledge that the ideological presuppositions are embedded into children's fiction using a different style and manner – and especially that these imposed meanings can sometimes be explicit, sometimes invisible. Because children's literature is located within societal discourses, the social, historical, political and economic actions and ideologies affect the books. Therefore, any genre of children's literature should not be seen as completely innocent or ahistorical.

### 3 Literary analysis as a sociocultural process

The conceptual-theoretical framework discussed in the previous chapter provides tools for analysing how multiculturalism is presented but also performed in children's books. In this chapter the methodological-theoretical choices of the study are explained. I begin by discussing the ontological and epistemological basis *viz.* the social constructionist approach, including the main concepts of performativity, discourse and representation. This discussion guides the understanding of language as a social construct that is historically, sociopolitically and discursively rooted in social ideologies. In the latter part of this chapter, intersectionality is also discussed as it functions both as a theoretical framework guiding the understanding of multiculturalism, and as an analytical tool for examining the data. The intersectional approach supports seeing language not merely as reflecting but also as constructing reality. All in all it must be pointed out that making a strict division between theory and method is futile – in this type of literary study in particular (see *e.g.* Lampert 2007).

#### 3.1 Reading the word and the world

Paulo Freire (1970/1972) referred to reading as both 'the word and the world'. In this study these words have been supportive when balancing between the two fields, cultural studies and literature on one side, and education and pedagogy on the other. Freire's words, in my understanding, put emphasis on understanding the world – the local and the global – as the goal of all education. In this study, literature and reading are seen to have transformative potential; the potential to teach us to better understand the world, ourselves and others. Rebecca Powell (1999: 29) writes:

*Literacy as a moral imperative envisions language as functioning in a transformative way – as a means for seeing the world differently – so that we might begin to construct a more humane and compassionate society.*

Lawrence Grossberg (2010: 6) argues similarly that cultural studies ought to contribute to the struggle to change the world and to make it more humane and just. The understanding that cultural studies describe "how people's everyday lives are articulated *by* and *with* culture" (Grossberg 2010: 8, emphasis added) is fundamental to this study.

In children's literature, questions of pedagogy intertwine with aesthetical and other values. In consequence, language plays an intricate role in children's books.

Nodelman (2010: 23–24) points out that, despite the aim of adults to produce literature for children that signals that they are “less than adults, in need of child-like texts”, children still share the language with adults – language in which the complex meanings and values of the culture are written. Some academics have also argued that because in children’s literature the relationship between writer and reader is a relationship of domination, the texts “illustrate particularly clearly just how language can be made to serve the ideological purpose in such a relationship” (Knowles & Malmkjaer 1996: 262).

The field of literary studies is vast and filled with various debates and arguments on what literary studies actually are or should be about. Terry Eagleton (1983) claims that there are no distinctive methods for literary study nor one comprehensive definition for what is ‘literature’. In his work *Literary Theory* Eagleton (1983) asks whether literature even exists at all. Anthony Easthope (1991), on the other hand, reminds us that the definitions of ‘distinctive method’ or ‘distinctive object’ (meaning literature itself) depend on different scientific paradigms. Easthope (1991: 52) also asks what actually counts as distinctive method or distinctive object. In this study both Eagleton’s and Easthope’s arguments have a place, as introduced in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 2.3). Indeed in children’s literature studies, many different definitions, approaches and emphases are employed. Even the very definition of ‘children’s literature’ changes depending on whether the focus is put on the reader, the writer, the text or publishing.

### **3.2 Social constructionist approach**

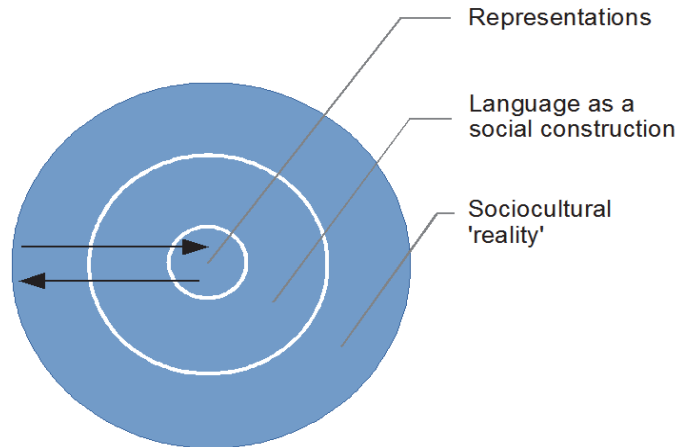
In 1966 Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann wrote their pioneering work *The Social Construction of Reality*. They claimed that in a social system, concepts and representations are born in the interaction between people, and when people act according to these expectations (*i.e.* typifications), over time they become institutionalised. Part of institutionalisation is, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966: 72) that the reciprocal expectations between human beings become predefined patterns of conduct that direct people’s actions. Therefore reality, as we know it, is a social construction. Yet, seeing reality as being constructed, rather than given should not make it less real (Grossberg 2010: 23). Children’s literature can be considered as *discursive practice* or *cultural practice* because it is a crucial part of the construction of the specific contexts and forms of human life (see Grossberg, 2010: 23).

Cultural studies are by nature interdisciplinary: because contexts – and even culture – cannot be analysed in purely cultural terms; understanding contexts and, within them, specific cultural formations, requires looking at culture’s relations to everything that is not culture (Grossberg 2010: 24). Here, literary analysis is understood as part of cultural studies, as literature is seen as a social construct which historical, political and other societal discourses have an influence on. Literature is seen to contain value judgements that are closely related to social ideologies. These value judgements can possibly reproduce structures that enable certain social groups to exercise and maintain power over others (Eagleton 1983: 16). Hence, literary analysis is understood as a sociocultural process and thus a *social constructionist approach* is deployed in this study (see *e.g.* Hall 2013, Schwandt 1998).

Grossberg (2010), referring to cultural studies in general, claims that the aim since the very beginning has been to understand the present and to shape the future: to question and criticise or even to unravel unequal and discriminatory societal structures and practices. Cultural studies have been driven by an ethical imperative to defend the oppressed and marginalised (Vakimo 2010: 97). Accordingly, I claim that literary study contributes to social change. Botelho and Kabakow Rudman (2009) demand that texts should be challenged from a critical multicultural perspective, meaning that the embedded ideologies should be revealed and that the dominant discourses, in their case, of the United States society (*e.g.* race, class, gender and individualism) are deconstructed. Similarly to Botelho and Kabakow Rudman’s argumentation, Grossberg (2010: 23) states that in cultural studies it is possible to examine how specific context is “made, challenged, unmade, changed, remade, etc., as structures of power and domination”. Thus texts can criticise how things are, and in addition through texts we can also imagine – even suggest – how things could be different (Oikarinen-Jabai 2009: 139). Consequently it should be recognised that readers, both young and adult, can process issues of social transformation and justice through what they read (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009).

Through language we make sense of things; it enables communication, but also defines what can be said. Berger and Luckmann (1966: 53) state that language forces us – all users – into its patterns. To be able to communicate, one has to take into account the prevailing standards. And though language develops all the time, we are forced to use the “ready-made possibility for the ongoing objectification” of our experiences (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 53). Lehtonen (2000: 9) explains that in the world of meanings we might have freedom of choice, but our power to decide

from which selection to choose is limited. Art, such as children’s literature, is a symbol system in which language becomes an essential constituent of the reality of everyday life and of the common-sense apprehension of this reality (Berger & Luckmann 1966: 55).



**Fig. 1. The social constructionist nature of language; representations and sociocultural 'reality'.**

Figure 1 describes the social constructionist nature of language and illustrates how meaning is produced as a social convention. The arrows in the figure are there to remind us that there is no one-to-one correspondence between language and the real world; “Language does not work like a mirror” (Hall 2013: 14). Thus representations are examined not only to reflect the dominant discourses but also to produce and circulate them. This social constructionist understanding of language is further discussed in Chapter 6 as well as in Chapter 7.1. Below I will discuss in more detail the concepts of performativity, discourse and representation. In this research these concepts are central in understanding the social constructionist nature of language.

## *Performativity*

In this study, children's literature is understood to be socially constructed, but also as constructing reality. Thus meaning-making needs to be seen as affected by power relations; "certain meanings concerning reality are in hegemonic positions in relation to others" (Lehtonen 2000: 14). Judith Butler's (1990, 1993, 1997) theorising of performativity as a type of socialisation has influenced greatly how language is understood and examined in this study. Hence, referring to Butler (1993), the sociopolitical categories can be seen to function as normative regulatory practices that produce the bodies they govern. According to Butler (1993: 1), ideal constructs of different sociopolitical categories exist which have productive power – power to "demarcate, circulate, differentiate".

Austin (1962: 5) argues that the utterance performs the action: "[T]he uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action". Jo Lampert (2007), who has examined ethnic, national and heroic identities in children's books about 9/11 also views texts as performative. Lampert (2007) is especially interested in how political and ideological work is performed in children's literature. Lampert (2007: 58) writes: "[L]anguage (in all forms) does not merely describe, explain or represent what we are, but plays a significant part in how we become ourselves". Lampert (2007: 58), like Hall (2013) and Berger & Luckmann (1966) above, also draws attention to the constraints of our discursive option, in other words, language enables us to explain ourselves and the world, but within a given range of circumstances.

Language circulates the dominant ideologies of race, gender and class: "How we use language constructs also who we are as people, as cultures and as society" (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009: 2). Thus our understanding of natural/unnatural or us/them is culturally constructed through repetition. Stephens (2002) writes specifically in reference to children's literature about the importance of acknowledging the performative nature of narrative fiction in the process of self-formation. Stephens' argument about strategies of narration and visual representations affecting how particular representations become naturalised within discourse is important since it highlights how readers are invited to understand behaviour – desirable and undesirable – in the actual world. (Stephens, 2002: xii).

To conclude, in the present study performativity of language means analysing how words, phrases and other linguistic utterances perform (*i.e.* show and produce) multiculturalism, manifest in the representations of difference, otherness and exclusion, which constitute for the reader places for identity construction. Lampert

(2007: 71) calls this type of interest of discursive practices a dual objective of performativity: “both as textual events (words and illustrations) and as a social-cultural embodiment of identity”.

### *Discourse*

Seeing language as a social construction also influences how the concept of discourse is understood. In this study the understanding is mainly based on Norman Fairclough’s (e.g. 1992) theorising. Fairclough (1992) explains discourse in a Foucauldian sense, *i.e.* language use in speech and writing means different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice. Similarly Hall (2013: 29), referring to Foucault, emphasises that discourse is not purely a linguistic concept, but attempts to overcome the traditional distinction between what one says (language) and what one does (practice). In this study, discourse is also understood to be socially constitutive; both in the sense that it helps to maintain and reproduce the social status quo, and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258). Discursive practices can produce and reproduce unequal power relations between social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258). Hence the analysis of language is needed in creating, maintaining and challenging existing power relations and ideologies (Fairclough 1992).

These theoretical notions discussed above have provided support in reading the books as cultural products shaped by historical and sociopolitical circumstances. Foucauldian arguments, particularly in relation to the appropriation and domination taking place through language, coincide with the way meaning production is understood and examined in this study. In addition, analysing the power structures when fighting inequality is seen as an important premise for literary analysis. Though Foucault’s theory is not as such examined here, it is important to acknowledge that the critical multicultural analysis (by Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009) is grounded on the ideas of power and knowledge by Foucault, thus it has also implicitly affected this study.

### *Representation*

Since meaning is constructed through language, it plays a central role in the social construction of reality. According to Stuart Hall (2013: xx) languages (written,



spoken, musical, physical gesture, *etc.*) work through representation: “because they all use some element to stand for or represent what we want to say, to express or communicate a thought, concept, idea or feeling”. Yet language is not the property of the sender or the receiver of the meanings, because it is a shared cultural space (Hall 2013, see also Gay 1997). Thus Hall (2013: xxvi) talks about the dialogic nature of representation: “The ‘taking of meaning’ is as much a signifying practice as the ‘putting into meaning’”. The specific culture that people belong to influences their meaning-making. Of course there is always diversity of meanings given, and multiple interpretations made inside different cultures, but basically, cultural meanings are produced and circulated between members of a society or a group. (Hall 2013: xviii–xix).

In this study, texts and images in children’s literature are examined as representations of social, cultural, political, economic and historical circumstances. However, the meanings given should not be seen as fixed. Stuart Hall, whose theory on representation has been the most influential in this study, points out that language is a signifying practice. Hall (2013: 16–19) explains how terms signifier and signified were developed by the linguist Saussure who argued that language (*i.e.* written words, images and sounds) is a system of signs. In Saussure’s theory, signifier means the form (the actual word or image, *etc.*) and signified means the idea or concept with which the form is associated. He emphasised that both signifier and signified are needed to produce the meaning, though it is the culturally fixed relationship between them that sustains the representation. Saussure claimed that in meaning production, the marking of difference is fundamental. This ‘system of differences’ functions, so that the meaning of a word is defined in a relation to its opposite, as in day/night. These alleged binaries, and the meanings produced through them, are one of the key questions in this study. Although Saussure focused on the formal aspects of language and did not take into consideration the questions of power (*e.g.* between speakers of different status), his theory did expose language to new kinds of examinations. (Hall 2013: 16–17).

Saussure’s theory has contributed to this study, especially in relation to meanings being produced within specific cultural contexts, thus being always subjects to change. In relation to Saussure’s theory, Hall (2013) refers to the changing ‘conceptual map of culture’ that implies how words shift their meanings as the context they refer to changes. In a similar way, though in relation to cultural economy, Paul du Gay (1997: 5–7) argues that meaning is made in an ongoing, dynamic process, to which he refers as the circuit of culture. According to du Gay, meaning is encoded into cultural products, like literature, but it is through reading

that this meaning is consumed. Stephens (1992: 246) also describes the unstable relationship between the signifier and signified. He suggests that cultural markers and practices have a tendency to change when the contextual circumstances change. Thus, culture is a key dimension explicating how the transformation/construction of reality is an ongoing process (Grossberg 2010: 24).

Consequently, representations are not only seen as reflections of societal phenomena, but also playing a major role in how people see themselves and others. Dyer (1994: 1) states that “how social groups are treated in cultural representations is part and parcel of how they are treated in life, that poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination (in housing, jobs, educational opportunity and so on) are shored up and instituted by representation”. In order to understand how powerful representations can be, it is of utmost important to acknowledge that they always result from specific codes and conventions of the available cultural forms of presentation (Dyer 1994: 2).

### **3.3 Intersectionality as a means to examine sociocultural categorisations**

In this study, multiculturalism in children’s literature is examined using an intersectional approach, which means acknowledging the different social divisions, such as ethnicity, nationality, gender, dis/ability and age existing in parallel, simultaneous and contradictory forms in societies. Intersectionality functions as both a theoretical framework guiding the understanding of multiculturalism, and as an analytical tool in data analysis. On the whole, intersectional analysis discloses the complexity and contradiction of how power is organised along multiple axes and dimensions, thus avoiding single and narrow categorisations. The acknowledgement of these divisions is also relevant because through repetition they affect the existing social, political and economic structures of societies (see *e.g.* Crenshaw 2010, in children’s books Österlund *et al.* 2011).

The term ‘intersectionality’ was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, and since then it has become a well-known concept beyond women and gender studies. Intersectionality was originally used when forms of oppression (experienced especially by black women) were studied. The term also became popular and widely used in various United Nations and non-governmental organization forums, in addition it has been used for legal, political and policy purposes, thus different understandings and constructions related to it have been developed. An important emphasis is in the acknowledging of hegemonic

discourses in identity politics that further the construction of a homogenised ‘right way’ of being a member of certain social category (Yuval-Davis 2009: 46–51). In contemporary research it is often emphasised how the concept of intersectionality rests on a “richer and more complex ontology” than approaches which attempt to reduce people to one category at a time (Phoenix & Pattynama 2006: 186).

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter (see Chapter 3.2), the social constructionist approach to language emphasises seeing literature as a social construct which is discursively rooted in social ideologies. Thus in this study the representations of sociocultural categorisations are examined in terms of how individuals experience inclusion/exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage. This includes the understanding of people about themselves and their communities but also their attitudes and prejudices towards others (*cf.* Yuval-Davis 2009: 50). I also take into consideration what is highlighted in the theory of intersectionality that social categories should be seen as interacting and possibly producing unjust social relations (McCall 2013).

According to intersectionality, it is important to take into consideration different categories because members within one category are diverse, and because differentiation functions in multiple axes: economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential. Therefore, one of the starting points in intersectionality is to oppose the idea that identities are unified or autonomous (Dhamoon 2011: 231). As discussed in the chapter about socially constructed identities (see Chapter 2.1.2), in this study human identity is seen as multiple and situational (*e.g.* Grossberg 1996: 89, Hall 1992), even ambiguous and disunified (Butler 1993). Intersectional theorists such as Rita Kaur Dhamoon (2011) and Trina Grillo (1995) warn about the essentialist view of identity, since the experience of being a member of any group is a not a static one, “one with a clear meaning, a meaning constant through time, space, and different historical, social, political, and personal contexts” (Grillo 1995: 19).

In addition, it has been argued (especially in terms of racial and gender discrimination) that if a single-axis framework – meaning focus on one social division – is maintained, research fails to recognise how marginalised people are vulnerable on multiple grounds, not only because of race or gender alone (see *e.g.* Crenshaw 1989, Dhamoon 2011). Importantly, Dhamoon (2011: 232–233) argues that a major challenge in this kind of essentialising identity claims is that when differences are placed into easily recognisable categories, the norms that were initially to be challenged can actually end up being confirmed by reiterating them. This is precisely why the theory of intersectionality is applied in this study; to be

able to examine different social divisions as multiple, overlapping and relational, and to avoid reducing people to one category at a time. Below I describe more in detail how intersectionality is understood as well as applied in this study.

### *Representations and intersectionality – Examining categories and processes*

The term intersectionality has been used in a variety of ways, depending on the paradigm and emphasis. Social divisions should be seen to have multiple forms, such as experiential and organisational (see *e.g.* Yuval-Davies 2009), yet in this research the focus is on the representational forms. In practice, this means that when representations of multiculturalism and diversity are examined, the intersectional approach provides a broader understanding of diverse sociocultural categorisations. Earlier research on multiculturalism and nationalism in children's books has shown that minorities have been patronised, exoticised and mystified in children's books for decades (*e.g.* Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009, Bradford 2007, Hani 2009, Pesonen 2010). This is why I consider it crucial to see beyond the individual societal categories, and to understand that identities are combined – or intersecting – and even contradictory.

In addition, terms such as interlocking, multiple jeopardy and discrimination-within-discrimination place an emphasis on different parts of the processes, categories or systems related to differentiation and marginalisation (Dhamoon 2011). Dhamoon (2011: 232–233) argues that intersectional research includes four aspects of sociopolitical life; identities of the individual that are marked as different (*e.g.* a Muslim woman or a black woman), the categories of difference (*e.g.* race and gender), the processes of differentiation (*e.g.* racialisation and gendering) and the systems of domination (*e.g.* racism and sexism). According to Dhamoon (2011: 233), each term (such as black, race, racialisation and racism) emphasises something different in our understanding of subject formation, difference and power. However, she also admits that often these categories exist as combinations or are even merged into one another.

Out of Dhamoon's (2011) four aspects of intersectional research, particularly the categories of difference, are central to this study. The representations of categories of nationality, ethnicity, language, gender and class are examined in terms of how they reproduce differences, and occasionally also similarities. Furthermore, because language is seen here as performative, the processes of differentiation are examined as well. Like Österlund, Lessen-Séger and Franck

(2011: 65), I also admit that by taking an intersectional perspective, one cannot take into account all possible social categorisations that have an effect on processes of differentiation. However, an intersectional perspective can open a continuum for studying the hegemonic discourses that reproduce the ideologies that keep alive ideas of Finnish-Swedishness (Österlund *et al.* 2011: 65) or as in this study, ideas of Finnishness. Hence, intersectionality as a framework for multiculturalism supports the examining of the constructive, deconstructive and reconstructive nature of representations.

To conclude, intersectionality offers a critique of the effects of power, critique meaning here a form of analysis that denaturalises what is taken as given – the status quo stories; the beliefs that shape our world – thus showing us that subjectivity is structured by language (Dhamoon 2011: 231, Keating 2009: 83). The meaning-making and performance of language is further examined in the discussion part of the study (Chapter 7.1).



## 4 Practical realisation of the research

In this part of the summary of my doctoral dissertation the practical realisation of the research is discussed. First the data selection criterion is explained and the selected books are introduced (see Chapter 4.1). The second part of this chapter discusses the method of this study, close reading (see Chapter 4.2). This chapter ends with a discussion about the role of the images in the analysis.

### 4.1 Selection of the data

The selection of children's books is an integral, determining part of this study. The rationale for the selection of focused texts is built on three criteria. The first criterion is that multiculturalism is part of the book. The second criterion about the genre is twofold; the texts should fall into the genre of realistic fiction, but also the genre of picturebooks. The third criterion is, for the data collection done in Finland, that the book is originally a Finnish publication, and similarly for the data collection in Sweden that the book is a Swedish publication.

During the research process, the selection criteria were questioned multiple times. Only exception to this was the third criterion, as it was self-evident which books were Finnish, or Swedish publications. First of all, the criteria related to multiculturalism can be understood, defined and outlined in multiple different, even contradictory ways, as discussed earlier. During the research process the approaches to the research phenomenon, *i.e.* multiculturalism, changed as the researcher's understanding deepened. This change in understanding as well as the subsequent reformulating of the criteria will be further discussed in the chapters below. Secondly, neither the genre of realistic fiction nor the genre of picturebooks is too easily defined either. The genre of realistic fiction was chosen as it functions to recreate realistic situations and characters related to multiculturalism. These realistic situations and characters can offer readers mirrors on their own lives, but also doors to the lives of others (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009, Chaudhri & Teale 2013). Most of the analysed books fall easily into the category of realistic fiction, but one set of books, the Tatu and Patu series, demonstrates many characteristics of the postmodern picturebook, such as the comic strip features and the fragmented storyline, but especially the aspect of metafiction, *i.e.* questioning the relationship between fiction and reality by means of irony (Arizpe 2010: 69, Temple *et al.* 2011: 76). This series also shares the characteristics of a postmodern picturebook to ridicule reality and tease the reader and the subject matter (Botelho

& Kabakow Rudman 2009: 206). The Tatu and Patu series could also be described as slapstick; humour and absurd situations characterise the whole series (see more in Article IV).

As for the criterion of picturebooks, it is not unequivocal either, as various criteria for the concept of a picturebook exist. In this study the theory of word-picture dynamics and understanding of different concepts in relation to picturebooks is based on Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's (2006) *How Picturebooks Work*. Nikolajeva and Scott (2006: 1) explain that pictures in picturebooks are complex representational (also referred to as iconic) signs, and words in picturebooks are complex conventional signs. That is, the function of pictures is to describe or represent and the function of words is primarily to narrate. Most picturebooks fall into the category of symmetrical picturebook, meaning the words and pictures tell the same story. However, words and images can also provide alternative information or contradict each other. These kinds of picturebooks can be called expanding picturebooks and counterpointing picturebooks (Nikolajeva & Scott 2006: 11–17).

The selected books, introduced below (see Chapter 4.1.2), represent mostly picturebooks. However, in the Sikuriina series (Lehikoinen 2003, 2005) and *Aurinkopoika* (Kellomäki 1986 [Sunboy]) the verbal narrative is illustrated by several pictures that subordinate the words, thus also the term illustrated book is applied. Therefore, when referring to all of the books selected, the concept of picturebook is used, but when the emphasis is on the different word-picture dynamics or the differences of meaning-making, the different, more detailed terms of illustrated book, symmetrical picturebook or expanding picturebook are used. The different word-picture dynamics are discussed more in articles, but also in results and in the discussion part of the study.

#### **4.1.1 Selection of the focused texts: Use of search engines**

The selection of focused texts was conducted mostly through libraries' search engines. The preliminary collection was put together with the help of the Kakaravaara database. The content of this database was and continues to be selected by the staff of the children's and youth department of Oulu City Library. The books included in the database are picturebooks, storybooks and non-fiction books suitable for pre-school and primary school-aged children. The search engine Kakaravaara was originally, in the 1970s, started as an information system for librarians. Kakaravaara functioned as a manual card file until the late 1990s, when



it was converted into an electronic database and opened up to customers. Since then everyone, not just the librarians, has been able to use the database. One of the main criteria has been to keep Kakaravaara user-friendly, and not to make it too heavy and difficult to use. (Alarto 2014).

As discussed above, most of the criteria for selecting the texts needed to be re-evaluated as the research progressed. The criterion of multiculturalism proved to be the most challenging out of the three criteria. The selection of the material according to the criteria of multiculturalism was carried out using different keywords provided by the search engine. I used terms such as *international education*, *tolerance*, and *difference*. Also key words such as *adoption* were tested. Search words such as *multiculturalism*, *prejudices* and *immigrants* have been very recently added to the system, but they did not exist at the time of data collection of this study. In all, the search with the Kakaravaara database provided data on hundreds of children's books, out of which many were preliminarily examined. However, for the final data only those children's books that fell into the genre of realistic fiction were selected. This meant, for example, that all fairy tales and anthropomorphic (animals as people) books were not examined further.

As stated previously (see Chapter 4.1), my understanding of multiculturalism changed slightly during the process. From the beginning of the study, multiculturalism was understood as a wide concept, meaning ethnicity, nationality, gender, dis/ability, age and sexuality. However, the intersectional approach, which is applied particularly in Articles III and IV and beyond, brought forward how these different social divisions exist and function in parallel, simultaneous, intertwined and even in contradictory forms in societies. To find children's books dealing with multiculturalism with a focus on social divisions other than ethnicity or nationality, the help of the information specialists working at the libraries was also significant.

As a result of this change in understanding of multiculturalism, the criterion of multiculturalism was reformulated in Article IV to cover books in which multiculturalism is presented as non-explicit. For this article I also collected data from Sweden. The search engine ELSA, Elektroniska Lagrings- och Söksystem för Artiklar och böcker, accessed at the Svenska Barnboksintitutet (the Swedish Institute for Children's Books), contains a vast number of options for collecting data. Thus, in Sweden more versatile keywords such as *racism*, *ethnicity*, *identity*, *nationality*, and *the other* were used. Preliminary reading in Sweden included hundreds of books as the search engine provided an enormous amount of possible texts. A more specific search was done with the parameter of *picturebooks*. In comparison to Kakaravaara, which is a database of a regional library only, ELSA

gives a lot more possibilities for suitable data. For picturebooks, search words such as *multicultural* or *different* provided a lot of items that were examined more closely.

As discussed, the criteria for data selection was re-evaluated, but also reformulated during the process. In addition, it is important to clarify that the sampling of data is not comprehensive:<sup>5</sup> the two search engines (Kakaravaara in Finland and ELSA in Sweden) provided different data regarding the number and difference in keywords. Therefore, especially with the selection of Swedish picturebooks, the chosen texts represent only a small portion of the children's literature dealing with multiculturalism. The chosen texts, specifically in Article IV, illustrate the theme analysed, which in this case is multiculturalism and particularly multiculturalism as non-explicit.

In relation to my data selection, I find significant what Grossberg (2010: 16) states about cultural studies and accepting that things are always more complicated than any one trajectory, any one judgement, can thematise. Acknowledging that the world is complex and changing means that we cannot always anticipate and expect where we end up in our analyses and results. In cultural studies the disjunctive rhetoric (of either/or) is usually disregarded, and the conjunctive logic (of yes that is true, and so is...) is favoured (Grossberg 2010: 16–17). Recognising this way of thinking meant that the data collection was conducted in multiple rounds in different periods between 2010 and 2012. In my data selection process I followed what Grossberg (2010: 53–54) argues about the continuous reflection in cultural studies on its own contextuality: Questions asked ought to be questioned, but also the categories and concepts need to be critically reflected along the way.

#### **4.1.2 The selected books: Contemporary children's picturebooks**

Below is a list of the selected books. The original books are in Finnish, thus the titles are translated into English by the author for the purpose of this research<sup>6</sup>. As the articles of this doctoral thesis contain different combinations of this data depending on the focus of the specific article, I have included a table after this listing. Table 1 shows which books were utilised in each article. It also briefly explains the specific focus of each article (for more details, see Chapter 5).

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<sup>5</sup> For further discussions on children's literature with similar data selection, see *e.g.* Botelho & Kabakow Rudman (2009).

<sup>6</sup> Exception is *This is Finland* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2007, original *Tatun ja Patun Suomi*) as it was translated into English by Owen F Witesman.

From the Tatu and Patu series:

- Havukainen A & Toivonen S (2004) Tatu ja Patu päiväkodissa [Tatu and Patu at the Kindergarten] (A Havukainen & S Toivonen, Ill.). Helsinki: Otava.
- Havukainen A & Toivonen S (2006) Tatu ja Patu työn touhussa [Tatu and Patu Go To Work] (A Havukainen & S Toivonen, Ill.). Helsinki: Otava.
- Havukainen A & Toivonen S (2007) This is Finland. (A Havukainen & S Toivonen, Ill.). Helsinki: Otava.

The Sikuriina series:

- Lehikoinen A-M (2004) Sikuriinan salaisuudet [Sikuriina's Secrets] (T Valve, Ill.). Helsinki: WSOY.
- Lehikoinen A-M (2005) Sikuriinan kesäjutut [Sikuriina's Summer Stories] (T Valve, Ill.). Helsinki: WSOY.

The Xing series:

- Virtanen L (2004) Pikku Xing [Little Xing] (S Savolainen, Ill.). Helsinki: Tammi.
- Virtanen L (2006) Xing ja superkaverit [Xing and Super Friends] (S Savolainen, Ill.). Helsinki: Tammi.
- Virtanen L (2010) Xing ja sukulaiset [Xing and the Relatives]. (S Savolainen, Ill.). Helsinki: Tammi.

The Förskolan Rävlyan series:

- Widerberg S (2009) Förskolan Rävlyan: Kolla! [Kindergarten Fox Earth: Look!] (C Torudd, Ill.). Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren.
- Widerberg S (2009) Förskolan Rävlyan: Ojdå! [Kindergarten Fox Earth: Oh Dear!] (C Torudd, Ill.). Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren.

Individual books:

- Kallio K & Lindholm M (2005) Bibi muuttaa Suomeen [Bibi Moves to Finland] (M El-Ahmar, Ill.). Helsinki: Otava.
- Kallio L (2003) Lentävä talo [The Flying House] (L Kallio, Ill.). Helsinki: Lasten Parhaat Kirjat.
- Kellomäki UM (1986) Aurinkopoika [Sunboy] (S Reed, Ill.). Porvoo: WSOY.

- Mikkanen R (1984) Thuongin päivä [Thuong's Day]. (M Hellström, Ill.). Helsinki: Otava.
- Riikonen T (1991) Kuka pelkää mustaa poikaa? [Who's Afraid of the Black Boy?] (S Poijärvi, Ill.). Helsinki: Tammi.

**Table 1. Summary of the selection of focused texts in the articles of the doctoral thesis.**

Article	Selection criteria	Focus of the article	Data
<b>Article I:</b> Anti-racist strategies in Finnish children's literature: Physical appearance and language as signifiers of national belonging.	Multiculturalism as a theme. Genres: Realistic fiction and picturebooks Finnish publications.	Nationality, Signifiers of nationality, Anti-racist strategies.	Thuongin päivä Aurinkopoika Kuka pelkää mustaa poikaa? Bibi muuttaa Suomeen
<b>Article II:</b> Nationality in Finnish children's literature – From representations of ethnic difference to representations of culturally diverse society.	Multiculturalism as a theme. Genres: Realistic fiction and picturebooks Finnish publications.	Nationality, Cultural and ethnic diversity.	This is Finland Bibi muuttaa Suomeen Lentävä talo Sikuriinan salaisuudet Xing ja superkaverit + Aurinkopoika Kuka pelkää mustaa poikaa?
<b>Article III:</b> Xing, Sikuriina, Tatu ja Patu: Monimuotoinen monikulttuurisuus 2000-luvun lastenkirjoissa. [Xing, Sikuriina, Tatu and Patu: Diverse multiculturalism in 21st century children's books]	Multiculturalism as a theme. Genres: Realistic fiction and picturebooks. Finnish publications.	Multiculturalism in 21 <sup>st</sup> century.	This is Finland Sikuriinan salaisuudet Sikuriinan kesäjutut Pikku Xing Xing ja superkaverit Xing ja sukulaiset
<b>Article IV:</b> Reconstructing multiculturalism: Social categorizations challenged in Förskolan Rävlyan and Tatu and Patu series.	Multiculturalism presented as non-explicit. Genres: Realistic fiction and picturebooks. Finnish and Swedish publications.	Multiculturalism as non-explicit.	Series: Tatu and Patu (Finland) Förskolan Rävlyan (Sweden)

## 4.2 Close reading as a method

In this study a method of literary criticism, *close reading*, was employed in the analysis of the selected children's books. As this study belongs to both fields of

research, *i.e.* social sciences and cultural studies, close reading as a method supports the interdisciplinary premise as it is said to be a travelling method – a method that can operate productively and as stimulating in interdisciplinary research (*e.g.* Pöysä *et al.* 2010).

In this research close reading means analysing the data, the representations of multiculturalism, in reference to context. The principal object of close reading is to unpack the text (Jasinski 2001: 93) but as the field of literary studies is vast, the method of close reading has been described and utilised in various, even contradictory ways depending on which school of literary theory we talk about. Close reading is often connected to a demand to concentrate only on the written work and to leave out the societal influence.<sup>7</sup> This emphasis on texts only, separated from the surrounding social context, as a strategy or method has been referred to as literary autonomy (Eagleton 1983, Pöysä 2010: 336–337).

Terry Eagleton (1983: 44) argues strongly that the illusion that any piece of language could be adequately understood in isolation needs to be eliminated. He further argues that in contemporary research the emphasis has been directed more onto the reader and to the surrounding society (Eagleton 1991: 63–91). In this study, as stated above, the awareness of the sociopolitical conditions in which the texts are written and read is important (see *e.g.* Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009, Stephens 1992, Mallan & Bradford 2011). The perspective of intersectionality enables analysing texts as reflecting political and ideological standpoints, and the distribution of power (Österlund *et al.* 2011: 64–66). This kind of close reading of the literature, *i.e.* analysing texts against their sociopolitical context, is demanded in Botelho and Kabakow Rudman's (2009) model on critical multicultural analysis. James Jasinski (2001: 95) also proposes a similar approach when suggesting that

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<sup>7</sup> New Criticism, the most well-known tendency of close reading, is often presented as emphasising the focus on the 'text itself' (*e.g.* Gallop 2000, Lentricchia 1995, North 2013). This means that in the analysis the historical or political contexts are disregarded in order to be able to purely critique the text (North 2013: 141–151). The New Critics have also been regarded as the developers of close reading (see *e.g.* Gallop 2007). On one hand, it has been argued that also academics coming from practical realism, like Ivor Armstrong Richards, strongly supported the idea of close reading of literature without regard to history or context (*e.g.* Mallan & Bradford 2011: 2). Richards' theory has been criticised for denying that people's critical responses are deeply entwined with their broader prejudices and beliefs, with the result that 'pure' critical judgement or interpretation is impossible (see Eagleton 1983: 14–15). On the other hand, the close reading practised by Richards and that developed by the New Critics can be seen as very different methods, or at least emphasising different aspects in the analysis of texts, although it is usually agreed that both disciplines (by New Criticism and by I.A Richards) demand that emphasis should not be put on the context of the production (see Lentricchia 1995, North 2013).

close reading can provide a way of understanding the discursive mechanisms through which ideologies do their cultural and political work.

Reading against the grain has been a practical tool to take into consideration the sociopolitical contexts. This type of reading is encouraged especially by scholars of critical race theory (see *e.g.* Mendoza & Reese 2001, Temple *et al.* 2011). Reading against the grain can be described as “a way to examine the unexamined, question the unquestioned, and hold up to scrutiny the unspoken assertions the text is making about the way lives are lived in society” (Temple *et al.* 2011: 42). Thus close reading has meant putting emphasis on questions of stereotypes, power as well as activity and passivity expressed by the characters. This type of reading should also include examination of whether the literature confirms, or possibly resists the status quo (Mendoza & Reese 2001, see also Keating 2009). Next I will explain in more detail the use of the chosen method, close reading. Further on, in Chapter 4.2.2, I will discuss the importance of illustrations for meaning-making.

#### **4.2.1 Context-bound analysis of representations**

In this study, the close reading method has been theoretically informed, which means that the reading of the material does not indicate registering and analysing all aspects of the texts, but those chosen specifically (see *e.g.* Pöysä 2010). The focus is on representations of multiculturalism, which are examined with approaches based on the theoretical understanding provided by the concepts and theories introduced in the conceptual-theoretical framework. Additionally, as explained in Chapter 3, the intersectional approach is used to provide a deeper and more extensive understanding of multiculturalism, and especially of the complexity of the sociopolitical dimensions written into cultural products.

According to Pöysä (2010), one of the fundamental techniques in close reading is repetition. In this study, the texts were read multiple times, though not similarly each time – instead they were read against the grain or in parts, for instance. In the process of close reading the different reading techniques are expected to produce more aware reading, while even the first reading of the text should not be considered innocent or pure. Our expectations, related to the genre and content, guide the understanding right from the beginning (Pöysä 2010: 338–339, 344). However, it needs to be pointed out that this kind of close reading is rather different to the one dominating the field of literary studies. The arguments are diverse. On one hand, Jane Gallop (2007) refers to the more contextual emphasis of close

reading as “a disciplinary suicide”. On the other, Stephen Greenblatt (1995) points out that close reading and cultural analysis should not be seen as opposites in literary analysis. The close reading applied in this study is more in line with Greenblatt’s theorising, since he argues for the acknowledging of literary study as a way to understand cultures, thus underlining that it is not enough to focus only on “what is within a text” (1995: 227). His emphasis on works of art as educational tools that ought to be critically examined, as they can help to “shape, articulate, and reproduce” the dominant beliefs and social structures is significant (Greenblatt 1995: 229, 231).

In this study part of the process of close reading is writing – writing notes during different readings. Pöysä (2010) argues that writing as part of the close reading becomes more analytical as the process goes on. Writing based on studied texts becomes more reflective, including claims about the meanings. (Pöysä 2010: 340). In this research this meant multiple rounds of reading and writing. The writing proceeded from reading and marking down repetitive themes (such as nationality, ethnicity or language) to re-reading and questioning the identified themes. With more readings, new questions emerged. In this type of close reading it is exactly the writing that provides a central medium for ‘externalising’ oneself from the analysis – to become aware of the incorrect interpretations and the different aspects dismissed (Pöysä 2010: 340). In this study a prime factor in doing close reading was to acknowledge the understanding that no analysis is definitive, as another interpreter could always find new aspects of the texts (*cf.* Pöysä 2010: 340–341).

The demand in the field of close reading has often been to focus on one text at a time: to be constrained within a text’s formal boundaries (Lenttricchia 1995: 431). However, the ‘comparative’ close reading has enabled the examining of the interfaces and differences of specific themes (see *e.g.* Pöysä 2010: 341). In consequence, part of close reading was the intertextual analysis that also contributes to understanding the complexity and interconnectedness of the themes, and in addition makes the examining of the temporal dimensions possible. In addition, the above-mentioned reading against the grain technique has provided help in asking questions when examining the language and illustrations in representations of people. The questions related to word-picture dynamics are discussed below, but also in the individual articles, and in the main results and the final discussion.

#### **4.2.2 Role of image in meaning-making**

All illustrations – black and white drawings, multi-coloured pictures and photographs – play a crucial role in this study. In the analysis, the images are considered consistently alongside texts. The term *text* is used as encompassing and inclusive of image too (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009, see also Lampert 2007). Mia Österlund, Maria Lassen-Séger and Mia Frank (2011: 66–67) use the term integrated visuality to remind us that illustrations deserve as much attention as the texts. In this study, close reading means both textual and visual narratives, including the cover illustrations as well as paratexts (*e.g.* foreword by the writers). Bal (2002) explains that illustration can be considered as visual texts, and this type of examining of illustration can support the analysis and function as a reminder that lines, motifs, colours, and surfaces, like words, contribute to the production of meaning. Images, like texts, require the labour of reading. (Bal 2002: 26).

Each reader, of course, makes meaning of the visual (and linguistic) signs based on their own knowledge, cultural experiences and other discursive positionings (Lampert 2007: 77, see also Hollindale 2011, Stephens 1992). Although this study does not focus on understanding the implied-reader encoding or decoding the visual (and/or the literal) communication, it is crucial to acknowledge that visual literacy is as important for the child's intellectual growth as the ability to read verbal texts (Nikolajeva 2010: 27, Nikolajeva 2013). Nodelman (2010: 15–16) argues that adults tend to see pictures as simplified, not recognising that pictures can offer complex information about the things they depict. The pictures bring forward ideological information about the culture illustrators are located in. Illustrations can provide information that the textual narratives do not reveal, such as information about age, appearance and clothes. Through these visual narratives the reader can learn about the class, country and lifestyle and the cultural and genetic background of an individual. Illustration of any specific matter – for example home – is never just a picture, but it becomes representative for all homes. Thus it is important to be aware of all the meanings and connections to specific cultures, values and ideologies that the images carry (Nodelman 2010: 15–17, 24). Just like textual meaning-making, visual meaning-making may also include prior knowledge of cultural symbols and their use in the illustrations about whether the symbol is used conventionally or not (Lampert 2000: 77).

In this study the interpretation of the illustrations means taking into consideration the very basic elements of design. These elements are line, space, colour, light and texture (*cf.* Temple *et al.* 2011: 68–69). However, the emphasis is



more on the analysis of images producing meanings independently – even contrarily – to texts. Picturebooks can carry dual meanings, as in words and images providing alternative information or contradicting each other (Botelho & Kabakow Rudman 2009, Nikolajeva & Scott 2006, Stephens 1992). Acknowledging dual meanings in picturebooks is a crucial part in this study as it makes it possible to discuss and analyse the non-explicit representations. To be able to examine the dominant sociopolitical categorisations, the meanings provided by the illustrations take a key position. Analysing the word-picture dynamics enables us to focus on textual gaps and silences (what is not said, but maybe illustrated), contradictions and multiple meanings. In reading the illustrations, I find what Botelho and Kabakow Rudman (2009) say about critical multicultural analysis and the emphasis on questions related to in/visibility and power to be highly relevant: Who is invisible? How is power exercised?



## 5 Overview of the articles

In this part of the summary of my doctoral dissertation the main contents of each article are introduced. All articles deal with multiculturalism, yet from different perspectives. Article I (Anti-racist strategies in Finnish children's literature: Physical appearance and language as signifiers of national belonging) focuses on the issues related to belonging and exclusion. Article II (Nationality in Finnish children's literature: From representations of ethnic difference to representations of culturally diverse society) deals with questions of nationality. In Article III (Xing, Sikuriina, Tatu ja Patu: Monimuotoinen monikulttuurisuus 2000-luvun lastenkirjoissa [Xing, Sikuriina, Tatu and Patu: Diverse multiculturalism in 21st century children's books])<sup>8</sup> I examine the representations of 21<sup>st</sup> century Finland as a diverse society. Finally, in Article IV (Reconstructing multiculturalism: Social categorizations challenged in the Förskolan Rävlyan and Tatu and Patu series) I discuss representations on non-explicit multiculturalism in two Finnish and Swedish picturebooks series.

### 5.1 Article I: Anti-racist strategies in Finnish children's literature: Physical appearance and language as signifiers of national belonging

The article focuses on the representations of nationality in Finnish children's literature and the educational messages generated in relation to nationalities. More specifically, the article discusses different signifiers of Finnish and non-Finnish nationalities, and the consequential presentations of belonging and exclusion. In the article the possibilities of anti-racist strategies in children's literature are discussed with reference to four children's books: *Thuongin päivä* (Mikkanen 1984 [Thuong's day]), *Aurinkopoika* (Kellomäki 1986 [Sunboy]), *Kuka pelkää mustaa poikaa?* (Riikonen 1991 [Who's Afraid of the Black Boy?]) and *Bibi muuttaa Suomeen* (Kallio & Lindholm 2005 [Bibi Moves to Finland]).

In this article the theory of anti-racism (Bonnet 1999) is central to providing a framework for examining the representations of national identities, and a lens to contemplate the morals and values written into the visual and textual narratives. Stuart Hall's (1996, 1997) and John Stephens' (1992) works were central to the

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<sup>8</sup>Article III was originally written in Finnish. The title has been translated into English by the author. From here on, the article will be referred to with the translated name.

foundations of the article. These two writers have illustrated how political and social structures affect literature, and also that educational messages are inseparable from the political, economic and social structures within a given culture. One of the main aims set in this article is to examine the effects of the changed social atmosphere in a cultural product such as children's literature. Some comparison between books is possible since the publication period ranges from 1984 to 2005.

The findings of the article consist of two signifying markers of nationality – physical characteristics and language. As the article examines how nationality, in this case Finnishness, is represented, the portrayals of national identity, differentiation, discrimination, stereotypes and prejudices are also studied. The discussion on the signifying markers highlights how physical characteristics (such as skin and hair colour) and language become significant markers for including and excluding individuals, in this it means exclusion of children who are 'different' from the stereotypical image of a 'proper Finn' – a blue-eyed, blond-haired person. The article emphasises that the idea of Finnishness is kept alive by reproducing certain representations of Finnishness. However, it is obvious that a change in definitions of Finnishness has taken place. The analysis shows that as diversity in Finland has increased, the understanding of differences has also developed. The analysis shows a change in representations of nationality and also changes in signifiers of national belonging (language and physical appearance). The arguments of changing the conceptual map of culture (Hall 1997: 32) and the unstable relationship between the signifier and signified (Stephens 1992: 246) match the results.

The results show that anti-racist strategies function in children's literature as means to educate the reader about racism, prejudice and exclusion. However, the anti-racist strategies can also become counterproductive if the morality is too overt. Regardless, there is no doubt that all of the books offer an opportunity to see exclusion through the eyes of someone excluded, and a lesson in empathy. In this article I also argue that the didactic quality of children's books should be acknowledged, including the capacity to direct social interaction. This didactic quality includes 'a moral lesson' on how people, both children and adults should, or should not, treat each other. Nevertheless, the anti-racist morality, when too overt, can turn into pathos, whereupon the intended education can potentially reinforce the discourses of othering and victimisation. Finally, I argue that a more subtle anti-racist agenda makes it possible to present 'those excluded' as active agents, and in control of their own lives, rather than just victims of other people's normative

expectations – whereby the characters’ experiences in their respective communities are represented as empowering.

## **5.2 Article II: Nationality in Finnish children’s literature: From representations of ethnic difference to representations of culturally diverse society**

This article examines presentations of nationality in Finnish children’s literature with an emphasis on ethnic and cultural diversity. The multidimensional, even problematic nature of nationality as a concept is taken into account by acknowledging the repetitive one-dimensional and stereotypical public discourses. In this article, a guiding perception is considering nations as imagined communities (Anderson 1983) but also seeing national identity as a cultural way of identifying differences between us and others (Meek 2001).

The analyses consists of five children’s books – four of which are more ‘traditional’ picturebooks, yet with different word-picture dynamics, and one illustrated book. The books analysed for this article are: *This is Finland* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2007), *Bibi muuttaa Suomeen* (Kallio & Lindholm 2005 [Bibi Moves to Finland]), *Lentävä talo* (Kallio 2003 [The Flying House]) *Sikuriinan salaisuudet* (Lehikoinen 2003 [Sikuriina’s Secrets]) and *Xing ja superkaverit* (Virtanen 2006 [Xing and Super Friends]). In addition, the article has a retrospective aspect – two books *Aurinkopoika* (Kellomäki 1986 [Sunboy]) and *Kuka pelkää mustaa poikaa?* (Riikonen 1991 [Who’s Afraid of the Black Boy?]) are also included in order to provide a historical overview on the topic of nationality in Finnish children’s literature.

The results show changes in representations of markers of nationality. The theme of difference – as in not fitting into the bodily markers of the normative view of a Finn – is clearly visible in the books. The stereotypical imagery is present in the books as the protagonists encounter racism, bullying and exclusion. The classificatory systems of black/white and dirty/clean are displayed with a strong educational intention. However, the moral tone in the stories published before the 21st century is rather overt, which creates a danger of becoming patronising. It is more than obvious that the educational intention is to teach readers about empathy and understanding towards others, and to prevent discrimination.

According to the analysis, the identification of differences is more obvious in the older books as is the division into ‘us and them’ and classifying (different,

outsider, nigger, *etc.*) those coming from the margins. Conversely, the newer books give recognition to the existence of the old paradigms related to binary oppositions, but show awareness related to reproducing them. The change in the educational tone reflects the change in the Finnish social climate of the publication periods. The diversification of society is mirrored in children's books, and the change in representations of nationalities supports this argument. Different aspects of diversity (ethnicity, gender, ideology, age or class) are presented in the books from the 21st century as more complex, but also as parallel to each other. This argument is supported by the theory of intersectionality, as in different categories intersecting, and thus creating different positions for individuals in societies.

In conclusion to Article II, I argue that the multiple layers of diversity challenge the ideas of national cultures as unified entities, and thus prevent the exclusion of those considered as outsiders. The multiple, often overlapping categories (*i.e.* ethnicity, age, gender, ideology) can deconstruct the understanding of difference and question the categorisation of those marginalised, as shown in the analysis. To conclude, the educational role of children's literature offers readers implicit assumptions about the self and the other. Hence, children's literature can contribute to people becoming more culturally aware and sensitive, but it can also promote critical thinking and understanding the multiple perspectives of human life.

### **5.3 Article III: Xing, Sikuriina, Tatu and Patu: Diverse multiculturalism in 21st century children's books**

This article discusses representations of multiculturalism in Finnish children's literature published in this millennium. The research task is to examine what kind of representations of multicultural Finland the analysed books contain and what kind of stories depict Finland as a multicultural society. The data consists of three book series: the *Tatu and Patu*, *Sikuriina* and *Xing* series. Six books from these series are examined closely: *This is Finland* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2007), *Sikuriinan salaisuudet* (Lehikoinen 2003 [Sikuriina's Secrets]), *Sikuriinan kesäjutut* (Lehikoinen 2005 [Sikuriina's Summer Stories]), *Pikku Xing* (Virtanen 2005 [Little Xing]), *Xing ja superkaverit* (Virtanen 2006 [Xing and Super Friends]) and *Xing ja sukulaiset* (Virtanen 2010 [Xing and Relatives]).

In this article some very fundamental concepts, such as multiculturalism and 'tolerance' [suvaitsevaisuus] are examined. Multiculturalism is understood with reference to presenting the developmental state of Finnish society regarding the diversity of ethnicities, religions, ideologies, gender, class and age. The concept of

‘tolerance’ is critically examined as it has multiple possible meanings. In addition, the educational and political role of children’s literature and children’s books as products of each given social environment is addressed.

The article suggests a more affirmative approach to children’s literature in educating for solidarity and empathy, instead of understanding books merely as part of ‘passive tolerance education’. The results show that the representations of multiculturalism include themes such as difference, exclusion and nationality. These themes are examined from the educative perspective in particular: what do they possibly aim to teach to the reader? Anti-racism is clearly part of the educational agenda in these books, though subtly, in a more concealed manner, as the books take a stance to make racism both visible and to reduce it. Children’s literature could be seen to ‘advise’ on how to live in the multicultural society of today and in the future.

The article also reveals that in the children’s literature of this millennium, physical characteristics are not the only markers, but also other features such as abilities are used when presenting diversity. Different positionings (such as immigrant, or an adoption background) that could be used to portray someone as different from ‘most Finns’ are represented as casual and everyday matters, which creates a story of Finland where diversity is part of schools, neighbourhoods and other sectors of society. In consequence, minorities do not become represented as outsiders.

In the discussion part it is argued that the illustrations are the key factor when representations of diversity do not emphasise differences. The focus is on examining the dual messages of picturebooks, meaning that cultural variety can be present in pictures, but not explicit in texts. The results show that when social differences are presented as non-explicit, they are more unlikely to reproduce exclusive discourses. The importance of illustrations is also examined through the idea of a counter-discourse. According to the analysis, the illustrations can oppose the dominant discourses related to the categorisation of people, for instance by questioning the stereotypical views related to school success of children with immigrant backgrounds.

#### **5.4 Article IV: Reconstructing multiculturalism: Social categorizations challenged in the *Förskolan Rävlyan* and *Tatu and Patu* series**

The article focuses on social categories represented in children's literature. It is based on the data that consist of analysis of one picturebook series from Finland and one from Sweden. The book series are: *Tatu and Patu* (see Havukainen & Toivonen 2005, 2006, 2007) from Finland and *Förskolan Rävlyan* (see Widerberg 2009) from Sweden. These two series were chosen since they represent multiculturalism as non-explicit. The article asks: how is diversity represented in the *Förskolan Rävlyan* and the *Tatu and Patu* series? While diversity is seen as a wide concept including ethnicity, gender, nationality, age and dis/ability, the focus is more on representations of nationality and ethnicity. The article also examines if the representations of diversity in these two series of books can challenge the dominant sociocultural categorisations that produce and reproduce unequal power relations between ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent things and position people.

In the article, the intersectional approach is applied when examining of representations of diversity in order to gain a broad understanding of diverse sociocultural categorisations. These sociocultural categorisations are seen as existing in as well as reproducing the social, political and economic structures of societies. This is due to the power of these social divisions to legitimise social exclusion and inclusion (e.g. Crenshaw 1989, McCall 2013, Österlund *et al.* 2011). The theory of performatives as discursive practices that enact and produce what they name is used when examining the performativity of gender, but also other social categorisations, such as ethnicity and nationality.

The analysis indicates that when multiculturalism is presented as non-explicit, differences do not become highlighted. This results in the main themes of the books being something other than ethnic differences, like mutual learning or human emotions. The results of the analysis correlate in multiple ways with John Stephens' (1992, 2011) writings on non-explicit multiculturalism. Similarly to Stephens' theory, my findings show that when a heterogeneous group is presented as a group working for a common cause, the representations of class and ethnicity are produced as 'normal social markers'. Hence, I also argue that presenting diverse groups of children and emphasising the commonality or 'normality' of their actions functions as an anti-racist strategy with the intention of reminding readers about the diversity of today's societies.



I argue that the analysed stories present diversity in society without reinforcing the existing understandings of different categorisations, such as nationality, gender or dis/ability. Thus they do not settle merely on teaching about ‘acceptance of others’, but present human ‘differences’ as something perfectly normal, which is a form of didacticism in these books. These two series are samples of books which can also challenge some of the traditional, even fixed understandings of social categories, thus creating more inclusive representations of multiculturalism.

In the discussion part, the arguments related to seeing texts as performative acts and consequently seeing literature as having the capacity to change reality are deliberated in relation to the results. It is argued that the knowledge children learn from these books – the plurality of voices, for instance – provides an orientation to the world. This knowledge also guides one’s behaviour and thinking of and relating to others and oneself. Furthermore, it is argued that the intersecting and simultaneous representations of gender, ethnicity and other human ‘differences’ contributes to making stereotyping and labelling visible. The books also demonstrate a sense of intercultural awareness, which is based on the insight that life, including people and their communities, are complex and diverse.



## **6 Main results of the research: Towards reimagining sociocultural categorisations**

In this chapter I will discuss the main findings of this doctoral thesis. Articles I and II answer the first research question (Chapter 6.1). Article III answers the second research question (Chapter 6.2) and Article IV will respond to the third research question (Chapter 6.3). However, as the themes are interconnected, all the articles provide some perspectives on each research question. In Chapters 6.4 and 6.5 I discuss the most important results combined in order to evaluate them with reference to other relevant studies

### **6.1 Nationality is represented as the division between us and them**

On the basis of my results, in contemporary children's literature presentations of multiculturalism are strongly connected to the ideas of nationality. Nationality appears in relation to belonging and exclusion – often meaning the Finnish/non-Finnish division. Belonging involves questions of physical characteristics and shared cultural markers, such as language. These characteristics and cultural markers become signifiers of nationality. At the same time, exclusion – here indicating, for example, active differentiation of individuals – occurs based on these same signifiers. The interconnectedness of representations of multiculturalism and nationality speak of traditional understanding of nation and nationality still affecting people's thinking (see Article I).

The representations of nationality also express awareness related to reinforcing the old, dividing discourses emphasising differences and exclusion. The questions related to exclusion and discrimination regarding individuals' nationality are also relevant in recent Finnish children's literature, which clearly indicates that racism still exists in Finnish society. However, as shown in Article II, in the 21st century books, the representations of nationality are more varied, and appear in parallel to other categorisations, such as gender, age or ideology. I will next describe in more detail the representations of belonging and exclusion experienced by the characters. I will also explore the change that has taken place in children's literature in understanding nationality.

### *Nationality as belonging and exclusion*

The representations of nationality describe belonging and exclusion that follow from the division between Finnish and non-Finnish characters (see Article I, Article II). Exclusion, which emerges as a process that actively leaves out particular people, is based on physical characteristics and language. By excluding the individual, meaning a child in all cases of data, the physical characteristics and language become signifiers of a particular nationality. These signifiers were critically examined because they carry different meanings – and those meanings can change as the context changes. Physical characteristics, especially white skin, is one of the signifiers presented as an evident sign of Finnish nationality. As white skin is presented as a signifier of Finnish nationality, dark skin colour becomes a sign of otherness. Also other characteristics, such as dark and curly hair, or different eye shape, are represented as signifiers of non-Finnishness. The books published in the 1980s and 1990s contain more examples of the physical appearance being the most powerful signifier of the individual's country of origin. These old, stereotypical markers also 'permit' the children and their origin, and family background to be continuously questioned by others. These children are constantly determined to be 'different' because they do not share the same physical features or life history with the others. The severe consequences of prejudice and discrimination – worry, fear, insecurity, and low self-esteem – are highlighted to raise awareness of the hurtfulness of these actions, and to fight the existing racism in society (see Article I, Article II).

The prejudices, discrimination and racism that the children encounter in their daily lives based on their physical appearance and lack of language skills are expressed and executed by other children, but also by adults. Racism is presented in forms of verbal and non-verbal insults, but also as physical actions. Name-calling, racist jokes, staring, and unwillingness to touch (because of dark skin colour) are just a few samples of racist actions. As discussed in Article I, physical appearance is a powerful social marker and a signifier of a particular nationality. This becomes evident in the two books (*Aurinkopoika*, Kellomäki 1986 and *Kuka pelkaa mustaa poikaa*, Riikonen 1991) in which two black boys (Ana and Marius) try to wash away their dark skin colour. The desire to be like others is also presented in another book (*Bibi muuttaa Suomeen*, Kallio & Lindholm 2005) revealing intertextual connections to Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970). As Pecula (in *The Bluest Eye*) wishes to have blue eyes, Bibi wishes to have golden hair.

It is evident that anti-racist didacticism is present as promoting empathic imagination in readers. The wish of these excluded children to become like others, to adapt, is presented to be so coercive that even at the cost of hurting themselves, the children try to adapt to the norm. The illustrations and texts picturing children scrubbing their skin and hair to become white address the paradigm of purity. Both children, Marius and Ana, also question their belonging to Finnish society, which further describes how they have internalised racism, and thus have been harmed by the racialised practices in society.

These illustrations and texts have another intertextual connection with an old rhyme used in a Finnish ABC-book (see Article II). The racist rhyme was supposed to help children memorise the letter N: “Nigger is washing his face, but never does he get it clean”<sup>9</sup>. This kind of intertextuality functions as a reminder of how meaning is produced through language; the way children are depicted to wash their skin and hair is an example of how culture circulates the ideas of the racialised ‘Other’. Although these examples provide an opportunity for the reader to identify with the excluded one, thus offering a powerful lesson in empathy, they also reproduce old dichotomies (of black/white and dirty/clean) (see Article I, Article II, Article IV).

As shown in Article I, apart from physical appearance, language is presented as another signifier of non-Finnishness. In some cases language is the key determinant to illustrate the character’s deviation from the norms of Finnishness, consequently leading to the exclusion of the individual. Language becomes not only a meaningful signifier when the individual does not speak Finnish, but also when the language skills are still deficient. As a result of poor language skills, the rough physicality of these children not fluent in Finnish is taken as bullying, causing even more severe feelings of exclusion.

On the other hand, language can also offer safety. A mother tongue other than Finnish (*e.g.* Vietnamese) provides a safe arena for communication and feelings, and reminds the individual of the former home, friends and family and most importantly provides a sense of belonging. One additional, very significant aspect of language is that it is occasionally depicted as a stronger indication of nationality than physical appearance. When an individual is excluded primarily because of his/her ‘different looks’, mastering the Finnish language can be presented as an indication of being ‘a normal Finnish child’.

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<sup>9</sup> Sample translated by the researcher for the purpose of this research. Original rhyme in ABC-storybook *Satuaapinen (Tynni 1955:4)*: Neekeri pesee kasvojaan, muttei valkene ollenkaan.

The representations of nationality are tightly interconnected with the division between us and them, as shown above. The idea of Finnishness, as any other nationality, is kept alive by reproducing certain presentations of Finnishness. Even though the normative view of a Finn is often presented as something to be questioned and criticised, the retelling of this norm, in both pictures and texts, keeps it alive. The continuously reproduced representations of Finnishness as something stable, clearly structured, definable and based on unchangeable traditions are still common in children's books. However, it must be pointed out that there is a lot of children's literature which, while showing remarkable awareness of the pressure of normativity, questions the stereotypical images and signifying practices (see Article I, Article II).

### *Changes in representations of nationality*

The discourse of an excluded child as 'the odd one out' is very strong in books published in the 1980s and 1990s, whereas the more recent publications (in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) clearly indicate that change has taken place in this respect (see Article I, Article II). Despite this, issues of exclusion, discrimination and racism are still present in the more recent books too, hence the fact that presentations of nationality demonstrate some discriminatory structures and practices that exist in society. However the portrayal of those individuals who could potentially become the different and excluded ones as active, versatile characters, positions them differently, not merely as victims, but as active agents, in charge of their own lives. As discussed in Article II, the theory of round/flat characters from literary studies also supports these findings.

Acknowledging differences by presenting children struggling with the feelings of being different is characteristic of 21<sup>st</sup> century children's literature. This is necessary to point out, as the privileged and oppressive positions related to binaries, such as black/white, are still present. Nevertheless, when presenting nationality in more recent children's literature from the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the emphasis is not so strongly on differences as it was in previous decades. The child characters also construct their self-images based on factors other than external features which mark them as 'the odd ones out'. Different aspects of diversity – related to ethnicity, age, gender or ideology – are presented in parallel to each other, resulting in the fact that individuals' identities are represented as influenced by different intersecting categories. In consequence, ethnicity does not become highlighted as the only signifier of difference. As shown in Article II, these kinds of multiple and parallel

presentations of intersecting categories produce a more complex image of people and society.

The previously dominant presentations of Finnishness are challenged by intersectionality, which reveals the complexity and multiple layers of diversity in representations of Finland and Finnish people. Representations of nationality, which include multiple intersecting categories such as ethnicity, ideology, age and class in *Sikuriinan salaisuudet* (Lehikoinen 2003 [*Sikuriina's Secrets*]) challenge the idea of national cultures as unified entities. Some of the stories question the meaning of nationality rather explicitly, as in *This is Finland* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2007) where national icons and symbols, even a 'typical Finn', are challenged through humour and irony. These kinds of representations of nationality can also deconstruct the dominant understanding of difference by challenging *what*, or *who* in the end is different (see Article II).

Children's books depict the societal issues and cultural climate of their time, therefore the claim that the discovered change in representations of nationality, and furthermore, of differences, is justified. Having been to a certain extent a multicultural country even before, during the 21<sup>st</sup> century Finland has become all the more diverse (see Article II). The books from this millennium still deal with the topic of nationality, yet they introduce a broad and more versatile understanding of Finnish nationality. As discussed in Article II, the over-emphasised differences between nationalities become rarer; instead, the presentations of multicultural Finland and diversified Finnishness become more common in the most recent literature. This change will be further discussed in Chapter 6.4. Exclusive and inclusive representations of multiculturalism.

## **6.2 Diversity is presented as a 'natural' phenomenon in Finnish society**

As shown in Article III, the analysis of Finnish children's literature draws a picture of Finland as a multicultural country. This kind of image of Finland as a multicultural society is modern day, as the data analysed is all from 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, even those books that present Finland as a multicultural country contain presentations of exclusion and racism. Nevertheless, racism is not presented as an individual issue (as it often was in previous decades; see Article I, Article II), but as a difficult and scary matter for the whole family of the discriminated and excluded child. The reader is invited to ponder the reasons and consequences of discrimination. These books demonstrate an active attitude towards anti-racism; the

existence of racism is acknowledged and the discriminatory practices of society are addressed. However, racism or discrimination do not become the main topics of these children's stories. The concern and care for the children experiencing discrimination is not embellished with pity, but with responsibility to interfere and act against injustice. Furthermore, these books rather directly express wishes of Finland to become more multicultural.

A dominant discourse in the data is that Finland is a diverse, multi-ethnic and multi-religious country (see Article III). This comes across as neighbourhoods and schools are presented as being diverse in terms of nationalities, languages and ethnicities. Book series like *Xing* (Virtanen 2004, 2006, 2010) and *Sikuriina* (Lehikoinen 2003, 2005) have an active view of multiculturalism by presenting very diverse main and minor characters. In the *Xing* series, the children have Chinese, Somalian, Russian, Cuban and Finnish backgrounds and the family models are multiple (e.g. single parent, nuclear family), and are also multi-religious. In the *Sikuriina* series, Sikuriina's own family is also diverse in terms of ethnicity, class (working class and upper middle class), age (diverse grandparents) and ideology (e.g. veganism). Furthermore, in the *Tatu and Patu* series, and particularly in *This is Finland* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2007), the different levels of diversity multiply when multiple social categorisations are presented as overlapping each other. Categorisations related to language (e.g. Finnish, Swedish, Sami, different dialects) and ethnicity (e.g. Finnish, Finland-Swedish, Somalian), or age and different family models (e.g. blended family, domestic partners, single parent) intermingle in these books, which to top everything else is exactly about Finland.

Ethnic, religious, gender, and age diversity as part of schools and neighbourhoods create a discourse of diversity as a 'natural' phenomenon in Finnish society. For the children in these stories, physical characteristics like skin colour are not only signifiers of difference, but simply features among others. Different backgrounds, such as adoption or immigration, are depicted positively, and as strengths for these individuals. Instead of highlighting the difference of one individual, everyone's particularity is presented as the standard. In consequence, nationality or any other 'social marker' does not as such become as strong signifier of belonging or exclusion as before (see Article II, Article III).

The theory of non-explicit multiculturalism is applied when examining the representations that show diversity as a 'natural' phenomenon in Finnish society (see Article III, also cf. Article II, Article IV). In the books the multiple and overlapping ethnic, religious and national categorisations, for example, do not become emphasised, but are left for the reader to identify – or to ignore (see Article



III). These non-explicit representations of multiculturalism enable the diversity to appear as an ordinary and casual part of Finnish society. These kinds of representations can be seen to comprehend a normative outtake on how multiculturalism, and especially differences that arise from cultural pluralism, should be treated in society. Significantly, since racism and its consequences for individuals and families are portrayed in a direct manner, these representations do not project a colour-blind view of racism as in denying privileged and oppressive positions, or imply that the history related to racial discrimination has been or should be forgotten (see Article II, Article III).

In the research data, the illustrations often carry more meaning related to multiculturalism than the texts alone. This is often a prerequisite for the non-explicit representations of multiculturalism. Furthermore, the illustrations enable different, even ‘opposite’ presentations of children who used to be marginalised. An example of that is *Xing ja sukulaiset* (Virtanen 2010), in which Ali is illustrated easily performing a multiple digit calculation as the other children, Anna and Xing, struggle with much simpler two digit calculations. Ali, who is told to have Somalian background in a previous book from the *Xing* series, is clearly very talented in mathematics – which is a different, even opposite representation of an immigrant child compared to the dominant discourses of immigrants with a Somalian background in Finland. As shown in Article III, this kind of questioning and challenging of dominant discourses can be seen as counter-discourses. Hence these counter-discourses also enable presentations that challenge the categorisations of individuals, which is further demonstrated below, as well as in the discussion part.

### **6.3 Children’s literature challenging the dominant sociocultural categorisations**

One of the main findings in this research is that children’s literature can challenge and question some of the traditional sociocultural categorisations. Intersectional analysis was employed in order to understand different sociocultural categorisations and the possibility that these categories can be deconstructed as well as reconstructed (see Article III, Article IV). The theory of intersectionality provided tools to understand the representations of multiculturalism and the multiple layers of diversity. To examine and explicate the functioning of language performativity, two book series *Tatu and Patu* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2004, 2006, 2007) from Finland and *Förskolan Rävlyan* (Widerberg 2009) from Sweden were

examined from two particular perspectives, *viz.* non-explicit multiculturalism and representations of intersecting sociocultural categories (see Article IV).

As indicated in the previous chapter (Chapter 6.2) presentations of non-explicit multiculturalism enable the portrayal of different ethnic backgrounds without highlighting any particular child, thus making him/her the ‘odd one out’. When ethnic divisions are not brought to the fore, the exclusion/belonging division does not result in separating people into ‘us and them’. In *Tatu ja Patu työn touhussa* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2006), a Finnish primary school classroom is shown when the teacher’s profession is introduced (see Article IV). In the classroom, the children are presented as a very diverse group in terms of ethnicities and religions, but also in terms of dis/abilities. In children’s literature disabilities are often depicted in a normative way, which means emphasising differences instead of similarities (see Article IV). Individual children with disabilities, learning difficulties and visual disabilities do not appear ‘different’ as their particular characteristics are not emphasised more than those of others.

These kinds of non-explicit representations of multiculturalism enable more multiform – but also more respectful – representations of minorities. Thus individuals belonging to minorities are not represented as tokenistic characters, as stereotypes, just to make the books ‘appear multicultural’. In addition to children and adults having diverse ethnic, age and gender features, even social class differences are handled with sensitivity. In the *Tatu and Patu* series, as also in *Förskolan Rävlyan* series, versatile gender and class representations are clearly on display when different professions (such as nurse, farmer, carpenter, cleaner, janitor, journalist or teacher) are introduced. When, for instance, gendered representations of different jobs are avoided, the books do not fall back into reinforcing binary dichotomies (of male/female; strong/weak, *etc.*).

The illustrations play a key role when intersecting sociocultural categories are presented in children’s books. Because the books in the *Tatu and Patu* series and the *Förskolan Rävlyan* series are expanding picturebooks, the illustrations provide more complicated narratives than the texts alone. This also serves as a reminder that picturebooks have a dual mode (texts and illustrations) of addressing diversity. As discussed in Article IV, due to the intricate text-picture relationship, the existing social categories can be reconstructed in children’s literature. In other words, this ‘disunity’ of the texts and illustrations makes it possible to challenge the discourses of traditional, often very tight sociocultural categorisation; when the illustration shows diversity of ethnicities, religions, dis/abilities, age, gender and so forth, but

these social divisions are not addressed textually, means that differences do not become highlighted but instead become a ‘natural’ part of human existence.

Children’s literature can also challenge and question the dominant discourses related to existing social categories by representing women in traditional male professions – such as janitors in *Ojdå!* (Widerberg 2009) or a machinist in *Tatu and Patu Go to Work* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2006) – or vice versa, presenting male characters in professions traditionally associated with women. Moreover, compared to some older literature in which differences often became the main topics of the stories (see Article I, Article II, Article III), the *Tatu and Patu* series or the *Förskolan Rävlyan* series do not represent any social division as *the* central topic. Differences are never the main topic, instead this is left to individuals’ emotions or mutual learning (as in *Förskolan Rävlyan* series) or for example, different professions, kindergarten or even Finland as a country (as in *Tatu and Patu* series).

The study also shows that when different social categories are presented as overlapping and intersecting, individuals are not strictly positioned based on one social division. Consequently identities do not become presented as simplified categorisations. Instead nationality, ethnicity or age are presented in contexts that challenge the dominant discourses. The challenging of dominant discourses of homogenous Finland, for instance, is done through the presentation of language diversity. In the *Tatu and Patu* series the book *This is Finland* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2007) presents Finnish, Swedish and Sami languages, but also the diversity of those speaking different languages and dialects. This multi-linguistic and multi-ethnic representation of Finland functions as a reminder that there is always diversity, even in those groups that are considered as homogenous in nature in dominant discourses. These dominant discourses can also be challenged in children’s literature through humour and irony, as in the above-mentioned *This is Finland* (Havukainen & Toivonen 2007). By positioning the two main characters of the *Tatu and Patu* series as ‘outsiders’ coming from Oddsville, the writers enable the continuous humorous and ironical questioning of commonalities related to, for example, national symbols.

#### **6.4 Exclusive and inclusive representations of multiculturalism**

One of the most significant results of this study concerns the changes in representations of multiculturalism. In this chapter I will further discuss these changes in order to bring additional knowledge to how differences and similarities

are reproduced as well as challenged in cultural products. Here the results from the articles are combined and re-evaluated with reference to other relevant studies. I discuss the exclusive and inclusive representations of multiculturalism by first viewing the representations which construct the 'Other'. However, as my results show, the division between 'us and them' is also challenged in these texts. Thus the discussion proceeds from the rather racialising and exclusive samples, to further evaluation of those findings that represent nationality and difference in more complex and inclusive ways.

#### **6.4.1 Defining and positioning the 'Other'**

As discussed in the first results chapter, in children's literature nationality is often a question of belonging and exclusion: as white skin is presented mostly as a signifier of Finnish nationality, dark skin colour becomes a sign of otherness. The findings show how certain children are constantly determined to be 'different' because they do not share the same physical features or life history as the others. Based on what Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 258) remark about discursive practices producing and reproducing unequal power relations between social classes, women and men, and ethnic/cultural majorities and minorities through the ways in which they represent and position people, it is crucial to ask: *What positions and locations are there for those coming from marginalities? What kind of possibilities of identification are there for children (of the majority and of minorities) in these texts?*

As the findings from older Finnish children's books show, children with non-Finnish (ethnic) background at times become represented as 'others'. The results indicate that when the emphasis in the story is on the ethnic differences instead of ethnic or other cultural similarities, the individual has an even greater risk of becoming 'the odd one out', a marginalised, even racialised character. These kinds of representations of 'others' found in this study remind us of the theory of the Marginal Man. According to the Marginal Man theory (Chaudhri & Teale 2013: 371) biracial people are mentally, physically and socially unstable. In literature this becomes manifested as the 'tragic mixed race orphans' and 'other mentally unstable characters'. The discourse of biracial people as "inherently troubled in various ways" is still alive in children's literature, as racial identity is represented as a source of conflict in one in every three books in the United States featuring mixed race characters (Chaudhri & Teale 2013: 371). Similarly to Chaudhri and Teale's

(2013) results, the findings from this study show low self-esteem, isolation and unhappiness as a result of internalised racism.

As in culture in general, in children's literature the idea of Finnishness is kept alive by reproducing certain representations of Finnishness. The findings related to nationality reflect an understanding of 'us Finns here'. This is particularly obvious in older books published before this century. The normative view of Finns seems to produce a binary division of 'us' (Finns here) and 'others' (elsewhere). This is in line with Sundmark's (2009: 110) argument about national belonging at times being exclusive and territorial, and thus alienating those who feel or are told that they are not fully qualified citizens. My results also coincide with Bradford's (2011) writings about nationhood being defined in relation to difference. While referring to Australia, Canada and New Zealand, Bradford continues that national identities are fed by national mythologies which produce social and cultural cohesion. Hence in the data the discourse of national belonging, and the entailing presentations of us/them could be seen to exacerbate the exclusion of minority groups.

As shown in this research, in children's literature, the most powerful discourse for dividing people into 'us and them' is ethnicity, which is represented through physical markers. This finding is in line with what is argued in intersectional studies (see *e.g.* Dhamoon 2011, Phoenix & Pattynama 2006, Yuval-Davies 2009), *i.e.* race as a social division, in addition to gender, being often more important than other categorisations in constructing specific positionings for individuals in society. My findings show that amongst all the social categories, physical markers remained most exclusive throughout the research data. This suggests that some of the categories become more easily presented as fixed, producing more fixed positions for individuals.

According to my previous studies (Pesonen 2010, Pesonen 2011a), the representations of 'far away' cultures and people as romantic, mystic and exotic play a major role in reasserting the binary dichotomies of 'us and them'. This is especially evident in stories in which Africa becomes represented as one homogenous continent with all people living in harmonious symbiosis with nature and animals. These kinds of divisions into 'us and them' also reinforce the binary oppositions of urban/rural and civilised/uncivilised. At times, children with 'different' ethnic backgrounds are represented as primitive 'children of nature', producing the metaphor of the noble savage. The patronising and exoticising representations of the 'Other' are often the result of well-intended didacticism reflecting the social concerns of their time, yet they also reinforce the image of these children as troubled 'odd ones' who are in need of our help.

The mystifying, exoticising and patronising representations of children with other than a Finnish (ethnic) background contain features of multiple forms of racism – racism happening at schools, workplaces and playgrounds – in everyday situations, but also in institutional hierarchies and societal power structures. These representations also involve the juxtaposing of superior/primitive, as presented in relation to the older data (from the 1980s and 90s). Findings from this study also highlight cases with binary setting of superior/primitive, as in *Thuongin päivä* (Mikkanen 1984 [Thuong's Day]), which is the only refugee story in the data. In *Thuongin päivä*, due to his kindness, the Finnish boy Pasi becomes almost a hero because he makes friends with the Vietnamese Thuong, 'the refugee boy'. The friendship between these boys resembles a relationship between father and son, as Pasi teaches and guides Thuong at school and in learning the Finnish language. The binary setting of superior/primitive is clearly unintended, but represents the moral outlook of the time. Thus it is important to recognise the well-intended educational message about care and empathy towards those who are in a more vulnerable position in society.

As with any nationality, the discourse of 'us Finns' can reproduce the classic doctrine related to 'existence of races', in which physical characteristics are seen to differ so profoundly that different human groupings to 'us and them' can be justified. The existence of race is still present in contemporary children's literature, depicted as physiological markers (e.g. skin colour, hair texture and eye shape). Representations of these differences can function as a mechanism for recreating a hierarchy of white/black (Ladson-Billings 2013: 38–39). This is why parents, educators and writers choosing and also creating books for children should be aware of this mechanism. In addition, referring to what Nederveen Pieterse (1992: 9–11) has argued, stereotypes need to be considered as real in their consequences as they tend to function as self-fulfilling prophecies. The stories and images of 'others' are known to provide one-sided and distorted information, and depict relations of domination, not of dialogue.

My results related to national belonging demonstrate what Hall (1992: 16) says about racism securing the division between 'us here' and them 'over there'. Through these repetitive ideas and images of national cultures we learn again and again what specific nationalities are, and are not (Hall 2013: 224–225). My findings are supported also by what Kellner (2003: 9) writes in relation to cultural products providing material based on what people build their very identities on, including notions of male/female, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality and understanding of 'us and them'. In consequence, if we accept, even insist that people have permanently

fixed positions, we deny the possibility that these agencies can change. Critical examination of the fixed positions is fundamentally important because marginalisation is not a spatial position but a vector defining access and mobility (Grossberg 1996: 100–102). Thus the texts with representations of differences, otherness and exclusion constitute places for identity construction for the reader.

#### **6.4.2 Essentialising identities**

As discussed above, the ‘Other’ is at times given fixed positions according to the dominant markers of difference. The fixed positions also give the impression that people are born different in different parts of the world. Part of positioning the ‘Other’ is the question of voice: whose voice is heard? Especially in the field of children’s literature research, a controversial question has been: whose duty or privilege is it to ‘report’ the experiences of the marginalised and/or oppressed? As discussed earlier in this study (see Chapter 2.2), the question of authenticity has been and still is a heated topic in the field of children’s literature research. In relation to authenticity of voice, it has been debated whether a writer or an illustrator with majority status can, or even should, write about minorities (see *e.g.* Botelho 2015, Cai 2002, Henderson & May 2005, Mendoza & Reese 2001, 2003, Short & Fox 2003, Temple *et al.* 2011).

As Cai (2002: 45) points out, writers’ and illustrators’ culturally specific experiences – direct or indirect – exceed relying only on imagination. Clearly, the personal first-hand experiences that many of the writers have had in relation to the topics influence their ways of representing diversity in society. In this study, all the books except *Bibi muuttaa Suomeen* (Kallio & Lindholm 2005 [Bibi Moves to Finland]) are created by native Finnish, or in the case of the *Förskolan Rävlyan* series, Swedish writers and illustrators. However, many of the writers have in one form or another gained experiences from other cultures, which may have provided more ‘authentic’ knowledge about the phenomenon they are writing about.<sup>10</sup>

However, I believe that the question of authenticity is more complex than evaluating the national, ethnic or personal background of the writers and illustrators. I believe the demand of authentic representations of minorities (especially in

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<sup>10</sup> One of the writers of *Bibi muuttaa Suomeen*, Maggie Lindholm, is originally Lebanese, and the illustrator is her sister Marie El-Ahram. To mention briefly, the writers of the *Tatu and Patu* series, Aino Havukainen and Sami Toivonen, like the creator of the *Xing* series, Leena Virtanen, have adopted children from China (Pesonen 2011b). Similarly, the writer of *Aurinkopoika* [Sunboy] UllaMari Kellomäki (1945–2003) was the mother of two adopted children (Kaseva 2003).

relation to race and ethnicity) connects to what and how *identity* is seen as and considered to be. As discussed in the theoretical framework, the essentialisation of identity refers to how identities are narrowed down into singular dimensions (such as cultural identity, gender identity *etc.*). When the experience of belonging (to a group) is described as constant through time and space, in different historical, social, political and personal contexts, diversity may be rejected, even denied.

Bradford (2007: 11) argues, although specifically in relation to indigenous people, that there is no single correct mode of being. Thus there cannot be one right story – one right way of representing – of an immigrant, a refugee or someone ‘different’. Voice should not be treated as an essentialising concept with an assumption that people in different cultural groups have a fixed identity. Books can and should change their ways of presenting cultural differences and similarities according to the sociopolitical climate – assuming that the change is towards a more inclusive, anti-racist society. In this study I have wanted to acknowledge that all humans with a voice, or multiple voices, are not equally heard (Baker 1999), thus it is important that those in majority positions are also aware of the uneven possibilities to become heard, and also act accordingly.

### **6.4.3 Challenging the categorical representations**

According to my findings, in more recent 21<sup>st</sup> century children’s literature, the emphasis is not as strongly on exclusion based on physical markers. The findings related to more recent children’s literature also indicate that nationality becomes presented in different, more inclusive ways. This can signify a change in understandings of nationality and citizenship. My results echo what Christensen (2013: 187) says about books that simultaneously introduce a local and global perspective of the world, which is not limited by national or regional borders. The books that present a world without national or regional borders do not reproduce the division of ‘us and them’; instead they further ideas of global citizenship, rather than ethnocentric and patriotic nationalities.

The previously dominant monolithic presentations of Finnishness can also be challenged by representations of multiculturalism that allow complexity and multiple layers of diversity. Thus when multiple intersecting categories, such as ethnicity, ideology, age and class are presented as overlapping, even contradictory, they can challenge the idea of national cultures as monolithic entities. The intersectional perspective has demonstrated how differentiation functions in multiple axes, yet it has also made it possible to challenge the dominant



sociopolitical discourses, because if we understand 'us' in a more inclusive way, we do not exclude people as strictly as before. Hence, the challenging of what or who in the end is different, is a crucial part of deconstructing the understanding of difference which enables questioning of the categorisations of people.

When racism is not presented as a problem caused by individuals but as a structural problem in society, the discriminatory practices become addressed in the texts. Instead of pitying the 'different child' because of the discrimination and exclusion s/he faces, the reasons and consequences of racism are more adequately addressed. These kind of books demonstrate an active attitude along the line of anti-racism, as they suggest taking responsibility for intervening and acting against injustice. My results indicate that the reproduction of the old dichotomies can be challenged by empowering those individuals who are marginalised in the dominant discourses. Part of challenging the division between 'us and them' is whether individuals are presented as 'passive others' or 'active agents'. When the child characters in the books construct their self-images on the basis of factors other than external perceptions of them as the 'odd ones out', a subtle anti-racist agenda allows presentations of 'those excluded' as active agents, in control of their own lives rather than just victims of other people's normative expectations.

It has become obvious in my research that racism and ideas about race are changing and how they are historically and geographically situated (Solomos & Back 2000: 21), although it is evident that discrimination based on ethnicity or race are still very much modern day problems in society. The timing of the publications alone cannot explain the differences in ways of representing nationality. As Sundmark (2009: 112) argues, nation and nationality can be presented in children's texts from the same era with completely different ambitions ranging from pacifist peace education to militarist patriotism. My findings indicate a change in the representations of differences during the past decades, however this does not mean that minorities would not be any more located in the margins. I have shown how understandings and presentations of differences define what positions are made possible for those coming from outside the majority. These limited positions could be also read as representations of 'weak multiculturalism', since in the data minorities are at times left with the roles of 'others' (*cf.* Bradford 2006, Stephens 1990, 2011).

My results are in line with what Dudek (2011) argues about representations of societies as complex and culturally diverse communities producing less likely stories in which acceptance of differences interlocks with tolerance, as a result reproducing hierarchical power relations between minority and majority cultures.

Thus, in order to move on from the myth of the exotic and romantic ‘Other’, a critical understanding and acknowledging of unequal and racist societal structures is needed. As Bradford (2011: 33) writes, to be able to acknowledge the differences respectfully, we have to be willing and able to critically scrutinise our own histories of selfhood and scholarship, to “re-think our agency”. Children’s books can expose the fixed societal structures that enable racism by challenging the status quo.

## **6.5 Didacticism in children’s literature**

This is the last chapter on results and it focuses on didacticism in children’s literature. In this chapter I will review some of the findings to gain a more profound understanding of the educative role of children’s literature. Throughout this study I have had to evaluate and critically discuss what didacticism in children’s books is, although, in the research task I did not set a specific goal to study this. However, the findings include various aspects of the educational messages generated in relation to diversity. In addition, the results include discussions about the didactic quality of children’s books. This didactic quality, as defined in my results, includes ‘a moral lesson’ on how people, children and adults alike should, or should not, treat each other. Hence the capacity of books to direct social interaction should be acknowledged. Since children’s literature offers possibilities for readers to question implicit assumptions about self and other, these books can support readers in becoming more culturally aware and sensitive, but also promote critical thinking and multiple perspectives. In the chapters below I draw conclusions of didacticism in children’s books based of the findings.

As discussed in Chapter 2.3, one of the very premises of children’s literature is the socialising and pedagogical nature of books (*e.g.* Colomer 2010, Gruner 2009, Hunt 1994, Stephens 1992, Weinreich 2000). The didactic quality has been named and framed differently amongst scholars in the field. My findings are in line with Hunt (1994: 3) and Hollindale (2011: 39) who both claim that didacticism is an inevitable part of children’s books. Thus in this study the concept of didacticism is used to discuss the educational goals and pedagogic contents of the analysed material. My findings also indicate that children’s books carry a potential to change the assumed values of the reader, which means that didacticism could have a purifying quality (see Chapter 2.3). However, I prefer to discuss the transformative power of children’s books, because as we have seen, books can offer multiple, alternative viewpoints and support critical thinking. This transformative power of children’s books is discussed further in Chapter 7.1.

### **6.5.1 Didacticism as intended and unintended**

There are various debates on how didacticism is or should be manifested, and some writers are explicit while others are more implicit in their meanings. It has been one of the most interesting but also challenging questions in this study to examine the intended and unintended didacticism of children's literature. I see the conscious and unconscious intentions of the writers as a crucial part of the discussion. Cullingford (1998: 57) writes about 'sugaring the pill' when conveying the moral and patriotic messages in such a way that the readers would enjoy them – and more easily 'swallow the central messages'. I agree with Cullingford in questioning whether the conscious work of some writers to hide their moral messages with a strategy of 'sugaring the pill' can actually make the morality more attractive.

Even though the theories related to reading have not been the focus of this study, they ought to be recognised as it is extremely relevant to acknowledge the plurality of readings. Nowadays the sacrosanct view of a text is distant, and individuals are known to bring personal (psychological and social) requirements and knowledge to readings (Cullingford 1998: 7, Mallan & Bradford 2011:5). Hence, the multiple meanings of texts to different readers are generally accepted, but there are different views considering the question of whether the didacticism of the books is intended or unintended.

The findings of this research contradict to some degree what Weinreich (2000: 54) argues about writing without being didactic. I argue that it is impossible for a children's book not to be educational or influential in some way, not to reflect some ideology (*cf.* Hollindale 2011, Hunt 1994, Stephens 1992, 2011). The findings are in line with Zipes' (2001: 45) argument that even if the author is open about having a religious or political doctrine, there is always something more hidden in the narrative. This idea is supported by Cullingford's (1998: 100) writings in reference to Enid Blyton's books where the class, ethnicity and nationality stereotypes are "almost innocent". Cullingford claims that the naïve unawareness of Blyton is undeliberate and symbolic in the way she approached her writing. Blyton has herself explained that she tried to think like a child when she wrote. (Cullingford 1998: 100).

Based on my findings I see that the question of intended and unintended didacticism is tied to how a child and childhood are understood. There is correspondence in seeing childhood as a state of incompleteness, assuming that books for children need very clear educative messages. As Weinreich (2000: 48) points out, writers adapt, or 'match the text' with the reader, when they intend to

take the assumed reader into account. This approach to writing for children views children as lacking experience and knowledge, and the books are aimed to provide these. Thus when child is not seen to lack experience, but to possess different experiences and knowledge, didacticism is less on display because the assumed reader is thought to be able to understand the messages without emphasis on them.

My results support Cullingford's (1998: 5–7) argument about didactic texts, presuming that the implied reader is in need of instruction, which is why didacticism can at times be very strong, even overtly emphasised. On the other hand, strong emphasis on didacticism can become counterproductive, meaning that the intended educational content, *e.g.* an anti-racist agenda, is lost. In consequence, even well-intended didacticism can lead to patronising representations of 'others' if the morality is strongly underlined in the texts. These results are in line with Hollindale's (2011) theorising about the 'ideological burden' of texts.

Books containing mystifying and patronising as well as other exclusive representations of the 'Other' can be viewed as projecting societal discourses of their time, rather than direct presentations of views or values of the writer or the illustrator. This can be seen as a consequence of language circulating the dominant ideologies. However, literature should not be seen as a straightforward response to social conditions (Butts 1992: xiii). As Dudek (2011) argues, the goal of acceptance of cultural differences proposed can be at odds with the politics of the book. Thus the superiority of one culture over another may produce simplistic representations of cultural differences.

In a similar manner, Bradford (2007: 225) emphasises that texts are as much produced by cultural discourses as by authors. Based on my results, the intended and unintended didacticism in the representations of multiculturalism does not only reflect the dominant cultural understanding of difference/normal but also produces and circulates it over again (*cf.* Figure 1 on page 52). Thus the aim can be to educate the reader about inequality, even in those texts that end up reinforcing the old dichotomies (of *e.g.* black/white and dirty/clean). These contradictions and ambiguities in texts share similarities with what Bradford (2007: 24–25) refers to as children's books produced in settler societies being caught in between discursive pressures. These pressures are due to the socialising agendas that influence the production of these books, the dominant discourses that constitute cultural platitudes, and the counter-discourses that aim to challenge them.

My findings complement what Westin (1991: 37–38) suggests with regard to the commitment of writers to address the issues of society. Despite all good intentions, addressing social issues can become adult-oriented due to the political

aims of the time period. Referring to the politicised literary climate of the 1960s to 80s, when children's books in Sweden often addressed questions of social problems, Westin (1991: 37) says that the so-called political children's literature was only a marginal phenomenon, but it paved the way for books about contemporary issues. Similarly, the Finnish books from the 1980s and 90s – *Aurinkopoika* (Kellomäki 1986 [Sunboy]), *Thuongin päivä* (Mikkanen 1984 [Thuong's Day]) and *Kuka pelkää mustaa poikaa?* (Riikonen 1991 [Who's Afraid of the Black Boy?]) – were definitively marginal texts at the time of their publication, and have perhaps paved the way for the more contemporary books about multiculturalism.

The findings indicate a change in the contents and goals of didacticism in the books. The emphasis of didacticism varies between different decades. The changes in didacticism of the books could also be viewed from the perspective of implicit pedagogy instead of content-based pedagogy. Implicit pedagogy has been used to explain books in which more holistic explorations of the topics are provided (Gruner 2009: 218). The perspective of holistic exploration is especially visible in the Tatu and Patu series; despite being very informative, the books do not slip into conservative pedagogy or patronise child readers; instead they offer complex settings and multiple viewpoints, which through humour and irony invite readers to be critical.

### **6.5.2 Didacticism and anti-racism**

In this study the anti-racist strategies in children's literature are seen as aims in making racism visible and reducing it, but also as educating the readers in issues such as their world view and self-knowledge. When books promote plurality of voices, and present human differences as 'normal', they convey anti-racist didacticism. Thus children's books can promote active understanding of empathy and solidarity, instead of passive 'tolerance education'.

The findings related to representations of diversity as a 'natural' phenomenon in Finnish society could also be seen as a sign of colour-blindness, as in denying the ongoing impact of racism on individuals' lives. On the other hand, Bonnet (2000: 139) argues that anti-racism includes the ideas of denaturalising and problematising taken-for-granted assumptions about human differences. Thus the representations which normalise diversity can be read as challenging the dominant discourses in relation to 'difference' and 'normality'. It is extremely important to consider that respecting differences can turn into asserting hierarchy (*cf.* Bonnet 2000: 17). As far I can see, when the emphasis changes from differences to diversities, multiple

perspectives are made possible. In addition, multiple possibilities for identity positionings are enabled for children of minorities, as well as majorities.

In consequence, I agree with Laura Tosi (2009: 168) that crossing and deconstructing the boundaries between the centre and the margins challenges the unity of meaning of a text, which again produces multiple perspectives. In my findings I have shown that anti-racist strategies can promote the existence of multiple viewpoints, and thus support children's critical thinking. Similarly, Tosi (2009: 171) argues that the possibilities in challenging and negotiating definitive sets of values can invite the implied-reader to turn from passive recipient into a perceptive critic of outmoded or unrealistic standards of morality.

Chaudri and Teale (2013) speak of 'believable ways' of responding to racism and prejudices. They suggest that the fact that racism has a powerful effect on people's lives – it hurts and confuses – can be said without being "heavy-handed in their positive representation of biracial identity" (Chaudri & Teale 2013: 373). In my results, racism is shown to affect the child in question but also his/her family and others close to them. To avoid making the moral counterproductive, more subtle ways of presenting differences are needed. In addition, the acknowledging of complexity of intersecting social divisions that affect people's lives provide more viewpoints and voices for examining diversity. However, I want to be careful not to claim that there would be certain 'right ways' of presenting racism. All the findings that portray children experiencing exclusion and discrimination based on physical markers of race and ethnicity are to my understanding 'believable'.

As discussed in the theoretical framework, anti-racism is not seen in this study only as a battle against racial discrimination, but as a set of broader social processes related to the categorisation of people and thus as a tool to fight any form of oppression. Thus anti-racist contents in children's literature can offer critique and response to inter-community discrimination, homogenisation and to stereotyping (*cf.* Bonnet 2000: 124). As shown in this study, children's literature can legitimate the existing social order (*e.g.* nationality politics and gender ideologies) but it can also challenge the existing marginalising processes by addressing social issues.

## 7 Discussion

In this chapter I will draw some final conclusions based on the results presented in greater detail in the previous chapter. First I will concentrate on the theoretical implications. Here the focus is on the different meaning-making strategies and on the counter-discourses in particular, as they play a major role in challenging normativity in children's literature. The second chapter is about the practical implications of the study. In Chapter 7.3 I will briefly ponder the strengths and weaknesses of this doctoral dissertation. The thesis comes to an end in Chapter 7.4, where I finish by making some remarks on some potential prospects for the future.

### 7.1 Children's literature confirming and challenging norms

In this study I have discussed how language enables communication, but also limits what can be said and presented. I agree with Knowles and Malmkjaer (1996: 266) who insist that writing and reading are both constraining and constrained. Earlier in this study I also discussed how language circulates the dominant ideologies of race, for example, despite the possible aim to educate against them. This is because language forces its users into its patterns (*cf.* Berger and Luckmann 1966, Bradford 2007, Hall 2013, Lampert 2007). In relation to Saussurian understanding of language producing meanings in binary positions, my findings indicate that cultural factors are a crucial element in the meaning-making process, and further, when cultures are contextualised, they also reveal something of the surrounding society to us. As discussed above, the representations of multiculturalism result in representations of differences, otherness and exclusion, but also those of diversity and inclusion, that constitute places for identity construction for the reader. These findings are in line with what Botelho and Kabakow Rudman (2009: 2) say about language constructing who we are as people, as cultures and as societies.

The anti-categorical approach to language brings forward the importance of examining language as creating the categorical reality rather than mirroring it. The findings demonstrate how the discursive options are constraint: while a normative view of a Finn is presented as something to be questioned and criticised, the retelling of this norm, in both pictures and texts, keeps it alive. Thus the norm is repeated and rearticulated, enabling continuous representations of Finnishness as something stable, clearly structured, definable and based on unchangeable traditions, which according to my findings are still common in children's books.

Fish's (1997) theory on boutique multiculturalism confirms the complexities in representing cultural differences. The representations that do not settle for a focus on ethnic or, for instance, religious categorisations through differences that mark us externally coincide with Fish's claim about strong multiculturalism. However, as Fish (1997, see also Dudek 2011) also suggests, the dividing line between boutique multiculturalism and strong multiculturalism is ambiguous. The same representations of multiculturalism that produce the superficial signifiers of cultural differences (skin colour, hair, eye shape, language, *etc.*) can also construct a complex image of cultural belonging. Nonetheless, many books in my data that aim for more than the superficial celebration of differences still fall into representing the majority culture as the norm.

These results related to children's literature confirming and challenging norms are supported by Butler's (1993: 7–8) writing about language performativity and the *naming* which sets the boundaries, and enables the repetition of a norm. In this study the naming of a 'different' and the 'other' has been shown to function similarly to what Butler (1993: 8) claims in reference to naming a 'girl'. Based on Butler's theory, my findings about exclusive and inclusive ways of presenting multiculturalism also show how our understanding of humanness is delimited and sustained. Furthermore, Butler (1993: 9) claims that construction is neither a subject nor an act, but a process of reiteration, which has materialising effects. As discussed above, the positions of identification that the analysed texts offer to the reader play a major role in how people see themselves and others. The acknowledging of representations as reiterations that also have materialising effects is supported by Dyer (1994: 1), who emphasises cultural representations being part and parcel of how people (of minorities) are treated in life.

I agree to some degree with Grillo (1995: 20), who argues that due to the restricting nature of language we cannot speculate what the categories might be because we understand our world by through the categories given to us by the dominant culture. However, as I have tried to emphasise throughout the study, meanings are produced within specific cultural contexts, thus they are also subjects to change. The findings from this study are in line with what Hall (2013) and Stephens (1992: 246) claim about words shifting their meanings as the context they refer to changes. Hence, children's literature can both reflect the dominant discourses but also move beyond binary thinking. It is crucial to challenge the dominant discourses conveying a binary world view, since if they are not questioned, we are trapped with our existing ideas and beliefs (*cf.* Keating 2009).



### *Counter-discourses in meaning-making: 'Normalising' differences?*

This part of the discussion is dedicated to the possibilities of representing multiculturalism 'differently' by questioning and challenging the dominant discourses. The findings of this study imply that the literature from 21<sup>st</sup> century Finland is constructed in terms of a narrative in which the cultural diversity of society is embraced. In addition to embracing cultural diversity, the results also show different, even new ways of representing people known to be marginalised and discriminated in hegemonic discourses. The transformative potential of children's literature lies, according to the results, in the possibilities of deconstructing the normative assumptions of people. As presented, books can have an input in transforming people's understanding of sociocultural categorisations, such as nationality.

According to my findings, *counter-discourses* (also counter-stories, cf. Chaudri & Teale 2013) enable presenting differently, *i.e.* against the hegemonic discourses. As shown (especially in Article III), through a counter-discourse a child, who due to her/his different background is in danger of being marginalised in hegemonic discourses, can be represented as a skilful, competent person. Thus an individual who is in dominant discourses often located in the margins, can be represented positively, as an active agent. The power that counter-discourses carry in presenting differently is also based on not depicting differences as exoticised and romanticised representations of 'other cultures'. These findings are in line with Rantonen's (2010: 187) argument about strong emphasis on ethnic and cultural differences possibly increasing racism and othering. Hence counter-discourses can challenge the hegemonic discourses that reproduce overly simplistic, status quo thinking based on stereotypes. In consequence, participation and agency are also written about for those coming from minorities.

Counter-discourses enable speaking against the dominant narratives (Chaudri & Teale 2013: 361). Based on my results, counter-discourses seek to create a diverse and complex story of human experience. The concept of *retellings* is also used when standard formal conventions are challenged (see *e.g.* Tosi 2009). In fairy tales in particular (*e.g. Little Red Riding Hood* or *Cinderella*), the retellings have been used to update and subvert conservatism. Like counter-discourses in this study, the retellings can address serious issues, such as oppression, egoism or chauvinism in a light vein (Tosi 2009: 165–168). Bradford (2007) also points out that dominant discourses, in her study specifically the colonial ideologies, can be rejected and subverted through counter-discourses. Bradford refers to contest and parody as one

of the oppositional strategies of counter-discourses, but reminds us that the colonial discourses also persist in the signifying systems of language and pictures. (Bradford 2007: 13, 23–26). As shown in my findings, counter-discourses enable the challenging of the paradigm of ‘exotic, romantic and noble savage’, and thus have a powerful role in exposing people to other, new ways of thinking and seeing.

Representing multiculturalism differently in more inclusive ways has transformative power. This means on one hand that fixed ideas related to nationality are questioned or even given new meanings. Thus national symbols (such as sauna, traditional instruments or other well-known artefacts, such as Kalevala jewellery, or Nokia phones) can function in challenging the traditional understanding of (Finnish) nationality, instead of being symbols of exclusive patriotism. On the other hand, books can, by representing multiculturalism as intersecting and simultaneous categories, deconstruct binaries such as ‘us and them’. In consequence, the dominant discourses of ethnicity, gender and age, for instance, can be undone and decomposed. These findings are supported by McCall’s (2005: 1777) argument about the deconstruction of normative assumptions, as she claims that if most people agree and endorse similar understanding of nationality and national belonging, for example, it can contribute to opportunities for positive social change.

Normative assumptions are deconstructed also in those findings that point out how in more recent texts the gendered representations of different jobs are avoided. This means that the books do not fall into reinforcing binary dichotomies (of male/female; strong/weak, *etc.*). My findings are in line with Österlund’s (2011) argument about new and different ways of presenting challenging normative assumptions. I agree with Österlund that children’s books can be a possible arena for renegotiating gender, and I want to add that they can also function as an arena for renegotiating other social categorisations.

I agree with Rastas (2010: 187) that dark skin, or any other physical markers, should not be interpreted as ‘foreign’, as in the context of modern day Finland, the individual might easily be a native Finn. The findings show that a good deal of representations of diversity in Finnish children’s books emphasise similarities rather than differences. Because of this emphasis, ethnicity does not become highlighted, with the result that children with ‘different backgrounds’ *i.e.* through adoption or being a refugee, do not become represented as ‘the odd one out’. These results are coherent to what Oikarinen-Jabai (2009) claims about ethnicity and nationality in Finnish children’s literature. According to Oikarinen-Jabai (2009: 132), childhood is normalised as white, middle-class and eurocentric in Finnish children’s books. Thus the representations of children with diverse backgrounds

*not only as* immigrants, refugees, or adopted, can produce new ways to view those children that would often become marginalised in dominant discourses. Creating new and different textual and visual representations can open up “diverse approaches of epistemology and understanding of the different subjects and subject positions in the narratives that are directed to children”. (Oikarinen-Jabai 2009: 138–139) These kinds of representations comprehend a normative outtake on how multiculturalism, and especially differences that arise from cultural pluralism, should be understood and encountered in society.

Representations of differences as ‘natural’ and ‘ordinary’ can challenge the dominant discourses of ‘normal’. Hall (2013: 248), Butler (1993: 8) and Yuval-Davies (2009: 50) all state that our understanding of ‘normal’ often maintains social order, *i.e.* functions as normative, and is also utilised for dividing people into ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. My findings show that the hegemonic discourses that propose an understanding of social categorisations as fixed, or permanent, and thus reproduce boundaries for ‘us and them’, can be challenged when our understanding of differences and similarities changes. Hence, challenging what is ‘normal’ can produce representations of minorities where they are not outsiders but are ordinary members of society.

The role of illustrations in counter-discourses is crucial. There are dual meanings produced in picturebooks and this is one of the most important literary strategies in creating counter-discourses. In other words, in picturebooks different levels of meaning can be articulated. Hence the ‘disunity’ of the texts and illustrations mean that the discourses of traditional, at times strict sociocultural categorisations, can be challenged. As Nodelman (2010: 14) points out, even a simple outline picture has the capacity to imply more information than a word.

In this research the data contained both picturebooks and illustrated books, hence a variety of word-picture dynamics were analysed. As discussed in the results, the word-picture dynamic between a symmetrical picturebook and expanding picturebooks is crucial when examining the different levels of meanings in these books. My findings are in line with Stephens’ (1992, 2011) argument about representations of non-explicit multiculturalism in illustrations producing narratives in which social differences are effaced. The findings from my study show that expanding picturebooks have the most transformative power in challenging the conventional understanding of ‘normal’. In expanding picturebooks the visual narratives of ethnic, religious, gender, age and dis/ability differences can be shown without textual emphasis, which means that differences as fixed and exclusive do not become reproduced in these stories. I conclude by quoting Stephens (2011: 13–

16) who points out that the possibilities of text-picture interaction in presentations of multicultural society allow children's literature to have transformative potential in increasing positive perceptions related to self/other divisions and thus books can foster equity and social justice, and even social action.

## **7.2 Applying children's literature in education**

Teachers, early childhood educators, and others working with children need knowledge and material about using children's literature in education (see *e.g.* Aerila 2010, Hélot 2002, 2011, Mendoza & Reese 2001, Murriss 2014, Rastas 2013a). Findings from this study can be used in developing children's cognitive skills as well as promoting anti-racism and other forms of social and intercultural awareness. Based on my results, as well as experiences based on teaching in early childhood education and in teacher education programmes, I see great potential in applying children's literature more in literacy education, especially in supporting critical literacy, and education for intercultural sensitivity.

The results of this study are in line with Nikolajeva's (2012) claim about children learning social skills, such as understanding other people's emotions from the verbal and visual components of the stories. It is important to value and support children's reading because it provides "a way of helping us understand other human beings" (Nikolajeva 2012: 289). Stories that narrate about multiculturalism teach us about ourselves as well as others. In addition, children's literature enables the processing of sensitive, even difficult matters, such as experiences of racism and depression, but also themes related to friendship and caring. I agree with Reynolds (2007) that young adult literature and children's literature teaches us about values and ethics, and can also shape and change attitudes. These findings are in line with Zembylas' (2015) argument about the possibilities of utilising art, such as poems, paintings and literature, as practical starting points for social justice education.

In today's globalised world, many children need to handle more and more texts, images, videos, news and other forms of communication on a daily basis. To support children, and indeed adults, in navigating different messages, even confusing and contradictory ones, a variety of skills need to be taught to individuals to enable them to develop a personal moral landscape (Bajovic & Elliot 2011). Thus the need to promote critical literacy is crucial. This is taken more into consideration also in the forthcoming Finnish National Curriculum (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet 2014 2015). In addition, in modern-day information societies, children should not be seen as passive recipients, but as active individuals

in meaning-making processes. As Skaret (2011) points out, children's understanding of cultural encounters in picturebooks needs to be acknowledged. Similarly Reynolds (2007: 35) and Murriss (2013) demand from adults the acknowledgement that children can be creators, interpreters and innovators when reading, but also when listening to stories. Children, including the youngest ones, should be seen as able meaning-makers and problem-posers.

This study has shown that children's books do not only support passive tolerance education, *i.e.* passive empathy, but also promote active understanding of empathy and anti-racism. Furthermore, literature can offer critical viewpoints and support in becoming aware of hegemonic power relations in culture, and in society in general. Since my findings suggest that books can promote awareness of exclusive categorisations of certain groups and individuals, it needs to be acknowledged how children's literature offers great opportunities for teaching critical thinking and multiple viewpoints.

I see practical implications for my study in relation to teacher education. Murriss (2013) argues quite rightly that different approaches to reading literature should be promoted as part of teacher education. According to Murriss, teacher education should emphasise the opportunities of using literature more. This would further future teachers' knowledge of different reading strategies and different theories of knowledge. (Murriss 2013). Along a similar line, Mendoza and Reese (2001) demand that we acknowledge the potential, especially in early childhood teacher education, of using children's literature as a vehicle to explore the issues of bias and power relations in society. I fully agree with Powell (1999: 3–4) that future and current teachers could be supported more in finding alternative ways of knowing, and further in seeing the multiple and complex realities in their students and in their own lives.

### **7.3 Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of the study**

In this study I aimed to examine and understand how cultural products, such as children's books, are part of the social construction in which racism, discrimination and marginalisation become reproduced but also challenged. When acknowledging the social constructionist nature of language, it is important to remember that meaning is given in different social, historical and economic situations and thus texts always have 'more meanings' than intended. Since reading is already meaning-making (*cf.* Knuuttila 2010: 33), I cannot suggest that my analysis is the only possible one. In this framework it would be contrary to argue that any 'one

truth' of a text exists (see *e.g.* Hall 2013, Schwandt 1998). Acts of reading are always culturally placed (McLaughlin 1995). However, to ensure as much credibility and conformability of my analysis as possible, I have aimed to provide the reader as much transparency about my data collection and analysis as possible (*cf.* Lincoln *et al.* 2011).

As discussed with reference to data collection in chapter 4, the criteria for data collection changed during the research process as my understanding of the phenomena developed. This change should not be seen as a weakness, as in cultural studies it is emphasised that cultural phenomena are complex and changing, thus we cannot always anticipate and expect the results we find (see *e.g.* Grossberg 2010). To be able to work towards change for to a more equal society, we ought to keep on questioning things presented as fixed, stable and 'natural'. In addition, we should be able to question ourselves too, since it is not only the research objects that are produced by the binaries, contradictions and paradoxes that form our lives, but our identities – identities we bring and create in the research process, too (Lincoln *et al.* 2011: 124). Surely we all have a limited view of the world, but as Trina Grillo (1995: 30) says, the privileged may not themselves recognise being privileged.

In this study the research phenomena are examined in four independent peer-reviewed articles, which all approach multiculturalism from different perspectives. In my data, ethnicity and nationality are more emphasised than other social categories such as gender, dis/ability or sexual orientation. This emphasis reflects the dominant discourses in multicultural studies. At the time of my data collection, there were no Finnish books related to same-sex parents, for example. However, after my data collection *Ikioma perheeni* (Marttinen & Salminen 2014 [My Own Family]), featuring two families with same-sex parents, was released. Hopefully, this indicates new directions in representing multiculturalism in Finnish children's books.

## **7.4 Final remarks**

As a conclusion to this study, I want to bring forward some future prospects and challenges in relation to children's literature and multiculturalism in particular, as well as some interesting research themes that could be further developed.

Multiculturalism is not an easy topic to write children's books about. As my results show, even those representations of multiculturalism that aim to educate in the anti-racist spirit can bring forward to a certain extent patronising divisions of

‘us and them’. However, as argued before, this is not criticism towards the writers or illustrators, only an example of how problematic it is to deconstruct and reconstruct existing societal categories if the language used reinforces them all the time. In fact, I see it as an interesting possibility to focus on the views of multiculturalism held by writers and illustrators. In Finland there is no research on this, but internationally there are some studies of this thematic field (see *e.g.* Zipes 2002). It would be interesting to examine how writers perceive multiculturalism and how they depict diversity of gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation, for example, and whether they identify taboos connected to these social categories. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see if the writers and illustrators recognise some self-censorship in pushing the boundaries too far, perhaps.

The implications for educators is also a possible direction for future research. As discussed in the earlier chapter about applying children’s literature in education, it has been shown that teachers, early childhood educators and others working with children need knowledge and material for using children’s literature in education. Hence one interesting and useful future research topic could be to examine how educators use certain texts with their students, and how they encourage their students to become critical readers. It is essential to ponder how children’s literature as texts rooted in sociopolitical discourses can be more efficiently employed in educating children and young people about privilege and unfair structures of society. Through critical literacy future educators can themselves become more aware of how language circulates dominant discourses, and thus enables discrimination and exclusion of certain minorities to continue. Encouraging educators to teach critical literacy in early childhood education is a personal ambition of mine.

Acknowledging the powerful role of language in constructing the social reality is crucial. Children’s literature has radical potential, as it can go further than just repeating the existing norms. Certain representations of multiculturalism can unintentionally reproduce and circulate the discourses of differentiation, and thus legitimise exclusion and marginalisation of people. The strength of children’s literature lies in offering representations of multiculturalism which challenge the normative assumptions of ‘difference’ and ‘normality’. Consequently, children’s literature should be seen as contributing to the “social and aesthetic transformation of culture by, for instance, encouraging readers to approach ideas, issues, and objects from new perspectives and so prepare the way for change” (Reynolds 2007: 1).

Throughout this research process I have asked: can art change society? Art reflects people’s lives, their values, norms and habits, but at the same time art also

affects the environment we live in. Children's stories can inspire people, open up their worlds, help them to understand our common humanity; thus books can have the power to transform and expand all of our worlds (Brahmachari 2015). The driving force of this study can be read in line with what both Grossberg (2010: 55) and Kellner (2002: 19) argue: though research on culture cannot save the world, cultural studies can be part of making societies – and the world – a more just and equitable place for all people.

This year, primarily due to Charlie Hebdo, the old saying 'the pen is mightier than the sword' has again become highly pertinent. Edith Honig (1988: 12) has claimed that children's literature has the capacity to foster 'a quiet rebellion' fuelled only by pen and ink in pursue of equality. Honig's argument focuses on gender equality, thus I agree with her, but suggest further, that literature can make a difference and promote change for a better world – making societies more equal, anti-racist and anti-patriotic. Thus children's literature can and should be used to promote critical and creative thinking. Children's books can indeed create new and different worlds, therefore they can make us reimagine the existing realities.



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## Original publications

This doctoral thesis is based on the following original publications, which are referred to in the text by their Roman numerals:

- I Pesonen J (2013) Anti-racist strategies in Finnish children's literature: Physical appearance and language as signifiers of national belonging. *Children's Literature in Education* 44(3). URI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10583-012-9186-z>: 238–250.
- II Pesonen J (2013) Nationality in Finnish children's literature: From representations of ethnic difference to representations of culturally diverse society. In: Ommundsen ÅM (ed) *Looking out and looking in: National identity in picturebooks of the new millennium*. Oslo, Novus Press: 119–132.
- III Pesonen J (2013) Xing, Sikuriina, Tatu ja Patu: Monimuotoinen monikulttuurisuus 2000-luvun lastenkirjoissa. In: Rastas A (ed) *Kaikille lapsille: Lastenkirjallisuus liikkuvassa, monikulttuurisessa maailmassa*. Helsinki, Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura: 62–82.
- IV Pesonen J (2015) Reconstructing multiculturalism: Social categorizations challenged in the Förskolan Rävlyan and Tatu and Patu series. *Barnboken – Journal of Children's Literature Research* 38. URI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.14811/clr.v38i0.197>: 1–17.

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144. Lutovac, Sonja (2014) From memories of the past to anticipations of the future : pre-service elementary teachers' mathematical identity work
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146. Kaunisto, Saara-Leena (2014) "Täällä sai puhua sen, mitä kenties muualla ei" : opettajien vertaisryhmä kerronnallisena ympäristönä
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