Motherwork and Space:

Social and Political Participation of mothers in Sweden's racialised suburbs

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Abstract

This thesis engages with the motherwork of racialised migrant mothers in Sweden's racialised suburbs. It employs theories of racial geographies, particularly black women's geographies and motherwork to investigate the articulations of motherwork in space. Deploying a black feminist lens on empirical material from a Swedish-Somali mothers' group engaged in community activism, the thesis argues that motherwork is operationalised as a subject position of space and social transformation. To examine this argument, three dimensions of motherwork are considered. First, motherwork as a subject position of space, as the mothers studied constitute themselves as knowledgeable agents through their experiences in and of their residential area. Next, it focuses on the mothers' community-based activities concerning safety-creation as practices of motherwork. Lastly, it presents the transformative potentials of the mothers' motherwork to normative understandings of racialised suburbs and subject categories such as "Black Muslim mothers" and "migrant mothers". Ultimately, motherwork is formulated by the mothers as public, collective and political.

Keywords: Motherwork; Racialised suburbs; Black women's Geographies; Geographies of Motherwork.

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Introduction

On August 2019, Karolin Hakim was murdered whilst walking with her newborn child. The mother, described in the media as a young doctor, was assassinated in broad daylight on Ribersborg, Malmö. The child survived without physical injuries. Ribersborg is an affluent neighbourhood by the sea; and as many other rich neighbourhoods in Sweden, it is an abnormal site for public violence. Thus, the extraordinary and tragic murder of an unexpected person, a mother, evoked strong responses of public outrage and grief.

One specific response was the formation of a public Facebook group *Mammaupproret*, (Mothers' revolt) by a group of mothers based in Malmö, created the day following the killing (Mammaupproret 2019). On the online site, the murdered young mother was kept alive through (re)circulation of news and emotions shared between the bodies of those mourning, mothers and non-mothers alike, across the nation. Through this online ritual, mourning expanded beyond the dead mother; many members mourned their own or child's potential death. And the violence was broadened; violence and death are assumed to be imminent and immanent everywhere. The public grieving that incited the formation of *Mammaupproret* evoked my interest in what this specific dead mother was and had become a site for. It was clear by the national ritual of mourning that the murder of a young successful mother in an unexpected place, Ribersborg, and the outstanding grief for countless slain bodies of racialised youth in other places (criminalised and stigmatised suburbs), is an account of grievable and non-grievable bodies (Butler 2004). However, what drew my attention to the Facebook group— *Mammaupproret*, was the group's demands for harsher punishments against criminality, echoing an interesting mobilisation of the category "mother" and the work of mothers.

Almost a year before the murder on Ribersborg, I became familiarised with mother groups across the country that performed night patrolling in particularly racialised suburbs to increase safety in their areas. These areas are often sites for deadly violence and issues around gang-related conflicts and are stigmatised in mainstream media reports as unsafe and dangerous. Many of these mothers-only night patrol groups consist largely of visibly racialised women with migrant experiences. However, it was the designation of the category "mother" for social and political mobilisation and the spatial justice work done by migrant women, that specifically charged my (intellectual, political and personal) curiosity. I was interested in the significations of migrant women in these areas mobilising for safety. This is particularly relevant when it is not uncommon that parents of dead youth are blamed for their

loss, especially if they live in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (see Pascalidou 2018). Both the reactions to the death of the mother in Malmö *(Mammaupproret)* and the mothers' patrol groups incite several questions around how space and social categories such as race influence each other to shape realities, emotions (e.g. grief, sentiments of unsafety) and actions (social and political mobilisation). *Mammaupproret* and the mothers' night patrol groups are both motivated by demands to make places safer through the category of mother; however, they are significantly differentiated both in how they practice motherwork in space, and in their approach to space.

In this essay, I employ a black feminist perspective to explore how practices of motherwork are articulated in space through the social and political participation of mothers, focusing on mothers in the suburbs. Motherwork is the labour of mothering (see O'Reilly 2016); and in this essay motherwork also comprises the community-based activities of the mothers studied. With space, I refer to space that are both real and imagined, abstract and concrete (Soja 1996). Centring black women's epistemologies is the attempt to make sense of motherwork through the lived experiences of subjects (racialised migrant women) too easily delegated to the margins and momentarily rendered focus for the instrumental purposes of arguments instead of as agents leading transformative work. However, what knowledges do these mothers create about motherwork and space when they are the centre of analysis? With this theoretical position and with fieldwork material focusing on one Swedish-Somali mothers' group, I argue that motherwork is operationalised as a subject position of space and social transformation.

But why the relevance of mothers as a social category? Mother and motherhood as malleable categories offer themselves easy as sites for political, economic, social and national struggles (Yuval-Davis & Anthia 1989, p.7). Importantly, mother can figure as a meaningful identity-marker, particularly for those who engage in practices of mothering, though issues of mothering and motherhood are often rendered invisible and also insignificant categories for representations of social inequality (Jolly 2017). In feminist thought, motherhood has been marginalised as poststructuralist deconstructions of the essentialist woman also implicate the essentialist mother (Kawash 2011, p.972; O'Reilly 2016). In addition to the theoretical attention to the deconstructed subject, Andrea O'Reilly suggests that the disappearance of motherhood in academic feminism can be explained by the confusion of mothering (the labour) with motherhood (the institution) (2016, p.200). This perhaps can provide clues to the under-theorisation of mothering and motherwork in gender studies and related critical fields in Sweden. The significance of theorising about this social category, forms of labour they

engage in, and the knowledge they produce cannot be overstated, and that is what I aim to do with this essay with the experiences of a specific racialised migrant mothers' group.

Prior to outlining the structure of the essay, I aim to unpack how I use two important terms: "mothers" and "suburbs". With "mothers", I avoid any assumption of a biological essence to "mother". The starting point here is that a mother is anyone who engages in the practice of mothering, though it does not guarantee what bodies are perceived as mothers or not, which is evident in notions such as of "good" and "bad" mothers, shaped by power dynamics of race, gender, age, class, sexuality, ability, etc., as well as historical and cultural contexts (see Lewin 1994). Furthermore, the historical and cultural gendering of mothers render difficult the complete dislocation and disassociation of the mother and the maternal from specific bodies (hooks 2007a). Hence there always lies a risk of me and you, the readers, reproducing certain bodies as mothers in spite of the analytical broadness offered by the definition of mothering as practice.

With "suburbs", I refer specifically to the migrant-dense million programme suburbs of Sweden. The term suburb in Swedish (*förorten*) denotes both rich white picket-fenced suburbs and poor migrant tower block neighbourhoods, yet, has become a fixed sign for a specific geography, namely, poorer and racialised suburbs. Suburb (*förorten*) is thus often used without confusion in Swedish to encapsulate and narrate a story about entire areas. Suburb as a place has also become a discursive resistance strategy, and an important part of identity-making for those who live there (Molina 2006; Sernhede et al. 2019, p.102). I use "suburb" to denote the various signification the term alludes semantically, shaping meanings constructed about these spaces and their inhabitants.

To explore motherwork as a subject position of space and social transformation by Swedish- Somali mothers living in a Swedish racialised suburb, I structure the essay as follows. First, I offer a brief contextualisation of the mothers' group whose work inspires and directs the essay. Next I provide an overview of the literature around representations of the suburbs and forms of resistance by its inhabitants in order to situate the mothers' practices. Next, I explore the theoretical contributions around motherwork, racial geographies and black women's geographies which frame the essay conceptually. This is followed by notes on the methods and methodology used. Lastly, I set up three matters to think through the interconnections between motherwork and space, led by the empirical material collected from the mothers partaking in the study: motherwork as a subject position of space, motherwork and safety-creation, and motherwork and transformations.

Framing the mothers' group

The mothers' group in the study attributes its origin to 2015, when they witnessed and experienced an upsurge in the killings of young boys and men in their neighbourhood due to gang-related conflicts. Through grief, a group of mothers came together and developed an organised response to stop the killings and for the general betterment of the area. They formed a Swedish-Somali mothers' exclusive association with about 60 engaged mothers from ages 30 to 55, though the number of active members has today reduced to 18 mothers.

The women explain the gendered and ethnic separatism of their association as evolving naturally. The group centres around and is driven by Swedish-Somali women because of the disproportionate effect of deadly violence on youth of Somali descent as well as the need for a space for the women to define their own agenda on their own terms. The association is open to non-Somalis and Somali men/fathers, but solely at the level of partaking in the association's activities. The women have autonomy and decision-making power; they argue that this serves to minimise the risk of co-option which may easily occur with the involvement of, for example, men.

The women's activities consist of night patrolling Friday or Saturday evenings, from 6 pm to late every week. They also organise cultural and ethnic events for youth, extracurricular activities, events relevant for parents and conduct monthly meetings, where members meet physically. In addition to that, they have recently started a mothers-only group, where mothers (both members and non-members) come together to share knowledge and experiences of parenting, with the ambition to reduce the feeling of being alone in one's experiences and emotions. The women also offer less organised support, such as facilitating communication in Swedish for mothers in contact with authorities, providing information about state authorities, and offering financial support for members in acute situations, circumventing the bureaucratic wait associated with many welfare services. The relevance of a separatist Swedish-Somali women's group making spatial demands and creating knowledge about the space they live in through their experiences as mothers, requires a brief contextualisation of the representation of Swedish-Somali women.

In academia, Somali women living in Sweden are often of interest in research on prenatal and maternal care (e.g. Lundberg 2018; Essén et al. 2000; Berggren et al. 2013; Sääf et al. 2011; Essén et al. 2011) and female genital mutilation (eg. Johnsdotter 2003; Wahlberg et al. 2018; Ahlberg et al. 2004; Isman et al. 2013). In mainstream media, the problematic depictions of Somalis are captured perfectly in a municipality report released in 2019, about

the neighbourhood of Norrby. In this report, Somali culture is depicted as a social issue, with references to harmful patriarchy (female genital mutilation) and a tradition of clans (CKS 2019). Somalis as clan societies, received its latest spread, when the politician Leila Ali Elmi (of Somali descent) received a seat in parliament for the Green Party in the 2018 elections. Her political success was reduced in media as "clan voting", reproducing racist and colonial logics around Somalis as set in tradition (Petersson 2018). Bilan Osman therefore summarises the narratives about people of Somali descent, the largest migrant group from the African continent in Sweden, as "characterised by headlines about unemployment, segregation and clan systems." (2020, n.p, my translation).

Studies point at how women identified as Muslim by the veil are targets of violence, particularly in public spaces in Sweden (Abdullahi 2016; Sixtensson 2009). And the obsession over the veil, fixating it as a problem for the West (masked often in emancipatory discourses), continues in media coverages to convey certain representation of Muslim women as passive victims, yet at same time potential risks (Bilge 2010). The visible corporeality of Somali women as also black women further accounts for stigmatisation processes involving anti-black racism, Islamophobia, the coloniality of knowledge that creates the division between "tradition" and "modernity", gender and sexuality. Consequently, Somali women in Sweden occupy a specific position, described by Maimuna Abdullahi (2015) through the spatial metaphor of existing in alienation. Somali women are "alienated from a collectivity where an imagined distance is constructed between them and "the Swedish society"." (2015, p.43, my translation). Recognised and imagined *already* as outside the ("Western") norms of society and in extension, as insignificant knowledge producers, Swedish-Somali women offer a particular vantage point into structures of domination and around issues of motherwork and the suburbs. This is not to claim that these women as a collective have some form of epistemic privilege of oppression (Mirza 2009). Such a claim would contribute to producing essentialist accounts of homogenous "Somali"/ "Black Muslim" womanhood. It is rather an effort of thinking of and with their experiences as (partial and situated) interpretations of the social world.

Swedish-Somalis, Somalis, racialised migrant mothers?

How to "describe" and "name" the women is a contentious matter. What meanings do I inscribe and convey through descriptions? The women themselves describe their association as Swedish-Somali. However, what comes out strongly from the empirical material are the

mothers' experiences as racialised migrant mothers in a racialised suburb, rather than their Somali identities.[1] At the same time, to reduce their description to the broad category of racialised migrant women is also to mask the specific process of racialisation they experience through anti-black racism, Islamophobia, sexuality, etc. Therefore, in the essay I use the term "mother" to refer to the research participants, where their particular racialisation as Black Muslim mothers living in the suburbs is assumed as inseparable. "Mother" is a purposeful use, and not employed with intention of flatten or fixate the many important identities relevant for this group of women. Following next is a brief review of the literature on racialised suburbs.

Overview of the literature on the suburbs

Many Europeans states are undergoing similar economic and political trends: investments in neoliberal economic policies at the cost of deflating and disappearing welfare budgets, the rise of far right and conservative parties and governments, and inhumane asylum and migration policies causing endless death in Europe's backyards (Schierup et al. 2017). These changes are also mirrored at nation-state levels and in the physical spaces of the nation, where "[n]eighbourhoods are [seen as] microcosms at the epicentre of larger problems." (Body-Gendrot & Martiniello 2000, p.2). In a Manichean dualism, cities are juxtaposed to certain neighbourhoods, transforming these targeted spaces as dangerous, no-go zones, ghettos (ibid.).

Many of these residential areas in European cities have common features as segregated spaces with high concentration of inhabitants with migrant backgrounds. Additionally, these high-density housing projects have a specific geographic orientation to the city, placed either in inner-city centres (e.g. London and Amsterdam) or at the outskirts (e.g. Stockholm, Malmö, Gothenburg and Paris). Regardless of their location in Europe, these residential areas are often characterised by material collapse and racialised poverty (Martiniello 2000, p.120). In this section, I provide an overview of the literature on the million programme suburbs, focusing particularly on the discursive representation of the

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[1] I am however certain that their ethnic identity is an important factor shaping their mothering practices, identity and experiences.

suburbs from mainstream media. I also examine what the literature demonstrates about the forms of resistance present in the suburbs.

The million programme suburbs: shifts and continuities

The "Million" programme that gave birth to Sweden's racialised segregated suburbs was a public housing project developed in the 1960s and 1970s. The programme was initially seen as materialising dreams of modernity where every family would theoretically have access to affordable housing constructed to a good standard. Since its conception, areas included in the programme have undergone several transformations in how they are perceived and represented in mainstream media, as their demographics have shifted from predominately (white) working classes to (non-white) migrants (see Molina 2005).

Focusing on the media representations of *Järvafältet*[2] (Järva area) in Stockholm, that forms part of the million programme and is also the recurrent interest of mainstream media, the state and local governance, Urban Ericsson et al.(2002a) identify several important media depictions of the area. Before the construction work was done, discourses of dirt and filth, particularly around Tensta and Rinkeby, replaced the expectations of modernity and have become permanent features in the characterisations (ibid.,18). Another important feature in media reports about these suburbs occurred at the end of the 1970s, placing crime and social problems at the centre, and marking the start of the prevalent representations of the suburbs as problem areas (ibid.). The final element was the issue of the category of the migrant. Ericsson et al. argue that though migrants have in one way or the other always been part of the stigmatisation history of the suburbs, in the beginning of the 1980s, they shifted as threats of an increased presence to *becoming* the problem (ibid.,19, my emphasis). Problematised as migrant-dense spaces, these areas are transformed symbolically as non-Swedish and through colonial rhetoric, imagined as outside the national landscape (Ericsson et al. 2002a, pp.18-19; Molina 2005, p.113). It is however important to note that the current image of the suburbs is not simply a consequence of media accounts. Many are descriptions entrenched by state policies regarding, for example housing, the labour market and education (see Rosales & Ålund 2017).

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[2] *Järvafältet* comprises several multiethnic suburbs such Tensta, Rinkeby, Akalla and Husby in metropolitan Stockholm.

Many researchers exploring racialised space are often united by their understanding of these spaces as peripheries. Those influenced by postcolonial theoretical frameworks, go on to pinpoint the internal colonial relationship between the nation and the suburbs. Ericsson et al. (2002b) outline the colonial gazes of journalists and researchers in temporary visitation to these places. Consider this extract from the newspaper Aftonbladet:

> Aftonbladet sent three reporters and a photographer there. They did not come home after two hours. They stayed for three weeks. They met a tearaway who was a child soldier in Beirut; they rode in a police van, chasing after violence; they made their way to a basement and found hundreds of kneeling men turned towards Mecca. They looked for the women: two minutes past four one morning, they met Rinkeby's crazy mothers and at last, found the migrant women, the shy and suppressed women in Rinkeby, a place dominated by the men. (Aftonbladet 19891226, cited in Ericsson 2002b, p.81, my translation)

In Aftonbladet's ethnographic documentation of the suburb, Rinkeby, the landscape is read and anchored as excess, foreign, unrecognizable, dangerous and uncontrollable. The people they meet – the dominating men and tearaways, and not to forget, the passive women – seem to function as figures to affirm the pleasure and power of colonial consumption. Ericsson argues that journalistic consumptions as the one outlined above, present the suburbs as "an antisocial and uncivilised spatiality, a place without the depth of time and history, forever young and undisciplined, an immature environment with inhabitants that must be controlled and trained, to reach the same level as the rest of society." (ibid.,28, my translation). At the same time, they are places of possibility and fascination (Rinkeby holds the interest of the voyeuristic journalists for three weeks), similar ambiguities embedded in the colonial binary logic commonly identified by postcolonial theoreticians. Relatedly, feminist cultural geographer Irene Molina (2005) also describes the suburbs as part of a colonial sphere. Molina contends that we must acknowledge the persistent presence of colonialism, racism, gender and class oppression and their intersections in (re)presentations of the suburbs (ibid.,115).

In other studies, recent dynamics in the colonial representations of the suburbs, namely intensification of surveillance/militarisation and the material costs of a deteriorating welfare state are in focus (Thapar-Björkert et al. 2019; Schierup et al. 2017; Rosales & Ålund 2017). These neighbourhoods have become spaces for surveillance and heightened policing, where the inhabitants (predominately people with migratory experiences from Asia, Africa, and Latin America and their descendants) are often subjected to identity

checks and stop-and-search (Ålund et al. 2017, p.333; Rosales & Ålund 2017, p.353). The criminalisation of the space and its people, particularly the youth, also comprise policy developments around gang violence including amplified police (and security guard) presence in many of the suburbs (Thapar-Björkert et al. 2019). With state and mass media approaching these areas as hotspots for crime and violence, "it is enough to live in or to be present in a certain area to be subject to control." (Ålund et al. 2017, p.334). Nevertheless, the level of control is shaped by intersections of racialisation, age, gender and other visible identities.

Another significant shift influencing the discursive representation of the space, but more importantly the representations that shape and frame the daily realities of people living there is the neoliberal transformation of the city. The weakening of the welfare state and neoliberal reforms have been particularly hard on the inhabitants in the million programme areas (Thörn & Thörn 2017, p.294). The neighbourhoods consist of housing in urgent need of renovations, and those renovated through re-regulations privatising public houses, are endowed with unaffordable excessive rent increases (ibid.). Simultaneously, these places experience increasing poverty, high levels of unemployment and decreasing quality of schools (Rosales & Ålund 2017, p.369). Within this material context, the mothers' association focused on increasing safety is a form of resistance against not only the representation of the suburb, but also the current material conditions.

Forms of resistance

Like the mothers, there are many forms of resistance against the stigmatisation of the suburbs: organised and spontaneous, formal and informal, individual and collective forms of struggle over representation, dignity and the material wellbeing of the inhabitants of these spaces. Through mediums such as poetry, films, music, organised talks and demonstrations, issues such as segregation, racism and state violence are addressed. Organisations, associations and movements explicitly overlapping spatial and social justice issues include, *Förorten mot Våldet* (The suburb against violent), *Megafonen* (The Megaphone), *Pantrarna* (The Panters), *Helamalmö* (All of Malmö), *Förenade Förorter* (Suburbs United), to mention a few. Specific to these organisations is the focus on youth; they are either led by young people and/or aim to strengthen youth awareness and participation.

In the literature on resistance in the suburbs, there is a dominance of youth organisations and movements in both academic (e.g. Sernhede et al. 2019; Rosales & Ålund 2017; Molina 2006; Dahlstedt & Ålund 2018) and mainstream media accounts. This is an

unsurprising effect of the overbearing interest by the state and mass media in the suburbs'
youth. For young men/boys, it revolves around the characterisations of this group as violent
and bearers of risk, which also comes with creation of costs for the state (for example at
riots). Whereas for young women/girls, they are often targets of state and public interest
through a regulation of sexuality, structured around ideas that they can be "saved" (see
Bredström 2003). Another reason for the youth concentration possibly lies in the structures of
organising, how actors present their activism outwardly and what is easily fixed in the public
gaze. Nevertheless, this emphasis inadvertently renders difficult the representations and the
experiences of other social categories, such *K.Ö.K. – kvinnor önskar kollektivitet* (K.Ö.K-
women wishing for collectivity) at the Women centre at Tensta-Hjulsta and *Yalla Trappan*, a
work-integrating women's cooperative in Malmö. Both organisations focus on themes of
empowerment in different ways. Moreover, there exist several unknown groups[3] organising
around similar issues as the (more well-documented) youth groups. This includes parents'
night patrol groups, community gatherings, organised demonstrations led by mothers against
deadly violence and activities within ethnic-specific associations, providing children with
cultural resources to foster a sense of self-esteem as part of battling racism, a form of "culture
work" that Umut Erel argues should be seen "as an aspect of political engagement."(2011,
p.698).

When these other forms of resistance, particularly those of parents become publicised,
they are read in relationship to their children, the youth. This means that with the description
of the "violent" behaviour of the youth in public debates, parents are often blamed for
inadequate and deficient parenting (Schierup et al. 2017, p.24; Dahlstedt & Lozic 2018).
Thus, with a dependent relationship constructed between parents and children, creating the
logic of "bad" youth and "failed" parenting, parents, particularly, mothers taking the streets
to for example protest deadly violence are framed primarily as mourning mothers (see
Pascalidou 2018). Likewise, mothers coming together to organise for the safety and well-
being of their children *and* neighbourhoods are difficult to read in other ways than extending
"natural" mothering to public spaces or as instruments to manage disruptive youth (Ericsson
2002, p.84). In both above-stated examples, these groups are depicted in ways that render
them detached of political agency.[4] With migrant women often seen as living within the

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[3] Unknown to researchers and media but known to local inhabitants.
[4] However, there are instances when migrant women, specifically mothers' agency are stressed in the literatures,
such as their participation in female genital mutilation (see Wahlberg et al. 2017; Wahlberg et al. 2018)

framework of an oppressive patriarchy, "central for the construction of the "modern" [and liberated] Swedish woman", conditions for their agency are often reduced to and determined by discourses of rescuing, freeing and transforming these women to full subjects (Mulinari 2009,p.218, my translation; Molina 2007, p.17). But what does it mean to centre the activities of mothers in the suburbs beyond the limitations of a naturalised mother-child relationship? By focusing on the mothers as a social group that also resists structures of domination (like youth), we can gain more insights on the complex political dimensions of motherwork beyond depoliticised and essentialists accounts of carework.

Motherwork and racial geographies

In this part of the essay, I introduce the theoretical concepts I use to make sense of the mothers' activities, mainly motherwork and racial geographies. Thinking with black feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks, I examine some of their contributions to motherwork as a concept. I move on to racial geographies as a conceptual pathway to understand the racialised suburbs, and next, the particularities of black women's geographies. Through insights from motherwork and black women's geographies, I examine the geographies of motherwork.

Motherwork from a black feminist lens

The figure of the "mother" is imbued with many symbolic meanings: the mother as the caregiver, the peaceful mediator, harbouring selfless love for and in protection of her children (with an unsettling proximity to violence). This character is also imagined in relation to the nation, by the womb as *the* reproducer and reconstituted as undetachable from gender, the "female" gender. However, what goes into this meaning-making is influenced by intersecting identities and shifts over time and place. For example, the "black mother" finds themselves enclosed with "overdetermined nominative properties" and meanings that lose its grip from attachment (Spillers 1987, p.65). "'Peaches" and "Brown Sugar," "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother," "Aunty," "Granny,"…markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean." (ibid.).

Within mainstream western feminist intellectual thought, the "mother" has faced some important historical transformations. It has evolved from earlier feminist perspectives

on mothering as "an instrument of women's oppression" and an obstacle to a "liberated" woman subject with equal access in the public sphere and participation (Forcey 1994, p. 359; Takševa 2018), to Adrienne Rich's (1977) contribution to motherhood studies by making two important distinctions of motherhood— as a social institution *and* an experience.

However, it is with the introduction of the concept of motherwork that we gain an analytical framework through which to study the forms and conditions of the (particular and varied) experiences of motherhood and the limitations of burdened signifiers. In particular, the semantics of "motherwork" offer attention to action/practice/process/becoming, the doing of labour and an identity in-relation that renders difficult naturalisation. Important to this theoretical shift is the work of Sara Ruddick. A mother according to Ruddick is someone engaged in the work of protection/preservation, nurturance and training, a commitment that give rise to a specific way of thinking (O'Reilly 2016, pp.27, 28). She suggests that the practice of mothering is separate from the identity of the mother; henceforth, "mothering may be performed by anyone who commits themselves to the demands of maternal practice." (ibid.28). Ruddick's emphasis on maternal practice suggests the possibility of detaching motherwork from biology and the destabilising of the gender essentialism that structures the word "mother", though the success of this disassociation is uncertain (ibid.).

Black feminist thinkers concerned with motherwork have revealed limitations in Ruddick's maternal work and other relevant aspects of motherwork for women of colour. bell hooks for example, identifies the difficulties many working-class parents, arriving home often in a state of exhaustion, face in offering the tremendous level of care outlined by Ruddick (2007a, p.150). Patricia Hill Collins (1994), on the other hand, argues that shifting the experiences of women of colour from the margins to the centre of feminist theorisations about motherhood, demonstrates other dynamics and realities. By focusing on specific structural and institutional contexts, it is evident that racial domination and economic exploitation shape mothering in different ways. Furthermore, a centring of racialised women demonstrates different experiences of work; "work and family have rarely functioned as dichotomous spheres for women of color", rather these two spheres are interwoven (ibid.,46). Black women specifically in the context of slavery, have always existed in relation to and *in* labour. For the enslaved, labour premediated life/the social; motherwork is therefore not a choice for those already evoked in work prior to existence. In the aftermath of slavery, motherwork as labour has also meant something different for black women, as dichotomies such as private and public, family and work, individual and the collective are less sharpened (ibid.,47-48).

Collins (1994) argues against the generalisability of Ruddick's: preservation, nurturance and training for all women. By highlighting the experiences of women of colour, she proposes the themes of survival, power and identity as shaping the mothering experiences of all mothers, but in different ways. Comparing Collins' survival with Ruddick's preservation is to underline that the possibilities of preservation are not a taken-for-granted option for many groups of racialised mothers. Physical survival can be assumed for white and middle-class children, argues Collins, but for racialised families and communities, survival of children is an important dimension of motherwork (see Lorde 2007). This is demonstrated plentifully in black diasporic literature and other creative productions. Take for example Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. For Seth, the main character, preservation of her children is an impossibility in America. Seth's killing of her own children is a freeing act against the death machine of slavery. The relation between (Ruddick's) preservation, sacrifice and resistance are difficult to disentangle for Morrison's character.

Another dimension of motherwork, particularly for African-American communities is that of the collective. Collins (1994; 2000) argues for the significance of the work of "community othermothers", different from biological mothers that care for children in their extended family networks and the broader community. Black women's involvement in the development of the community as othermothers form the basis of a maternal power that is community-based (Collins 1994, p.56). Additionally, this work is a form of political activism, that makes significant contributions to establishing a different type of community, in often hostile political and economic contexts (Collins 2000, p.191).

In this essay, I follow the lead of black feminist thinkers such as Patricia Hill Collins (1994; 2000), bell hooks (2007a; 2007b) and Audre Lorde (2007) on motherwork, particularly motherwork in relation to survival and community, to understand the articulations of motherwork by racialised mothers in the Swedish suburbs. Looking momentarily at the suburbs in Stockholm and comparing them to other areas in the city, these are places with weaker performing schools (Sernhede et al. 2019, p.108), segregation, growing poverty and long-term unemployment (Rosales & Ålund 2017, p. 369). In short, spatial conditions marked by racism and class that make it difficult for parents not to be concerned about the survival of their children in a different way than parents living in other areas. Furthermore, the above-mentioned thinkers' theorisation of the collective and communal element of black women's motherwork reflects the motherwork of the mothers in this research. The mothers' social and political participation in their neighbourhood is part of

their motherwork. It is a collective and community-centric type of motherwork. However, the motherwork of these mothers in a Swedish suburb is shaped by the racialisation of space.

Race and Space: The margins and racial geographies

The Swedish suburbs as racialised has almost become an uncontested knowledge claim, both among those who associate the issues of the places as symbiotic of the operation of power and those who blame the individuals who live there and their "cultures" as the source of all evil. The entanglements of race and space find grounding in contemporary geographical theories, where "the mutual constitutivity of the social [race, gender, etc.,] and the spatial" have been stressed (Delaney 2002, p.7). Racialisation shapes space (even space produced under the auspices of colour-blindness): the colonies, slave ship, the board rooms, the third spaces, the margins, hybrid spaces, classrooms, etc. Likewise, spatialities constitute and/or highlight features of the social (ibid.). I approach an understanding of race and space through the framework of racial, in particular black geographies, via readings of Achille Mbembe (2019) and Katherine McKittrick (2006; 2011; 2013), rather than via the metaphor of the "margin".

The issue of the metaphorical margin

The language of the margin and periphery serve to trace the ways "identity and subjectivity can politicise absences, erasures, and oppressions." (McKittrick 2006, p.55). These imaginative locations have provided subjects with authority over their perspectives and situated knowledges (such as mestiza consciousness, double consciousness), and a location from which to scrutinise power. Yet, at the same time, it is a location that McKittrick argues "denies deep geographic inequities" (ibid.,54-55). Lights are cast on the margins, but the margins and those identified as occupying these spaces never seem to have the possibility to exist outside the margin/periphery. The metaphors generate "an exclusively oppositional unalterable site that cannot be easily woven into the ongoing production of space because the bifurcating geographies…prohibits integrate processes" (ibid.,57). Phrased differently, in the metaphorical utterances of margins (where the margin remains a margin), real margins and centres are materialised.

There is a necessity to think about the margins (under which the suburbs fall) as a space with geographic depth. It is also important to think about who we (researchers) place in this space — subaltern communities — and what the implications are of continuously

reconstituting them there. It is not uncommon to think about the subjects occupying these spaces as agents (resisting oppressive structures), yet in geographies left without *real* possibilities of transformation, they become (unintendedly) ungeographic. How can we think about the theoretical spaces of margins without simultaneously enclosing the geographies of those in and also relegated to the margins in our analysis?

Racial geographies

Mbembe (2019) offers an understanding of race and space not confined by metaphors of margin, rather demonstrates how the sovereign power exerts control of social and spatial relations in its right over death. The sovereign control of life through killing, producing what Mbembe describes as "the status of *the living dead*", arguably produces geographies of death, particularly when "space [is]…the raw material of sovereignty and of the violence it bears within it." (ibid., 92;79 original emphasis). The examples figured in Mbembe's text on both historical and contemporary forms of necropower are all spaces of decay and death: the colonies and the plantation. We can also trace the materialisation of necropolitical experimentation in other spatialities: the slums, the Mediterranean, detention centres, camp sites, ghettoes, the suburbs. And racism is central to the articulation of biopower and in the regulation of the distribution of death, argues Mbembe (2019, p.71).

In congruence with Mbembe, McKittrick reflects on how geographies of slavery and postslavery provide knowledge on how "the right to be human" comprises practices that "spatialize acts of survival." (2013, p.2). Using the framework of the plantation, McKittrick offers a conceptual pathway to think about the ways black life and histories are linked to articulations of geographic violence in the postslavery Americas (ibid.,4). The planation is not cited as a narration of an exclusive oppression/resistance chart, or as a prophecy of antiblack violence and dreary futures. Rather, McKittrick evokes the plantation "as a location that might also open up a discussion of black *life* within the context of contemporary global cities and futures." (ibid.5, original emphasis). The city from a plantation conceptual lens is rooted in relations of violence and domination that marks human existence. However, it is also "geographies of survival, resistance, creativity, and the struggle *against* death." (ibid.,14, original emphasis). Thus, it offers space to foster and debate about the futures of place and belonging, to re-imagine racial violence from fractured and multiple perspectives (black and non-black), and take a relational approach to place, as a contrast to bifurcated alternatives (McKittrick 2011, p.950; 960).

While the history of the plantation does not form an explicit part of Sweden's imperial history in a similar way as the Americas, it still remains relevant. Sweden is implicated in the aftermath of slavery and its global aftershocks in the form of anti-black racisms, with a settler colonial history as well as investments in non-settler colonialism and trans-Atlantic slave economies (see Sawyer & Habel 2014; Small 2018). The plantation therefore offers an interesting and more relevantly, useful analytical sensibility to geography and violence. From here, racial violence as always geographic is highly visible and thus, inescapable. Also, it incites a different thinking about contemporary black life in global cities and the futures of black and other racialised marginalised communities. It is a shift from the metaphors of margins to a focus on spatialised acts of survival and creativity within these geographies of death.

Black women's geographies

From Mbembe (2019) and McKittrick (2011; 2013) we acquire that past racist paradigms and their enduring hierarchical patterns shape current spatial organisations. Likewise, the ways in which racism and sexism are mapped out spatially (and not just bodily) have been underlined by different theorists (see Ahmed 2007; Molina 2007; Fanon 2004 & 2008). However, and for the purpose of the essay, the specific negotiations of place by racialised gendered bodies will be in focus. To that end, McKittrick's (2006) seminal book, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* offers intimate details of black women's geographic experiences and knowledges as shaped by transatlantic slavery and its aftermath.

Blackness is often translated as ungeographic. In Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask*, the everyday undoing and constituting of black ungeographicness is demonstrated. Take for example his oft cited encounter with a white child, afraid of the presence of a black body: "Mama, a Negro! . . . Hell, he's getting mad". (Fanon 2008, p.85). The surprise of the child presents blackness as a disturbance in a geographic order shaped by an ideology of blindness to imperial history: "you are not supposed to be here". Yet the surprise is not really one, as the child recognises blackness in well-too-known racist tropes: "he's getting mad". The surprise is hence a symbolic (re)memory of the black body as part of the place (though unequal to the white body), even when it is been undone.

"[T]he ungeographic is [however] a colonial fiction", influencing how we see black geographies only in hierarchies, as stereotypes, human/inhuman terms, as impossibilities (McKittrick 2006, p.5). And for black women, imagined outside of the production of space

(placed in the margins of knowledge), their place is considered unrecognisable, in line with the denial of their ontological existence through regimes of colonialism, transatlantic slavery, patriarchy, white feminism, European intellectual system and capitalism (ibid.,133).

On the contrary, black geographies, "[i]maginative and material are critical of spatial inequalities, evidence of geopolitical struggles, and demonstrative of real and possible geographic alternatives." (ibid.,17). McKittrick proposes that the relationship between black women and the geographical is the opening up of a conceptual site where "more humanly workable geographies can be and are imagined." (ibid.,xii). In short, black women's geographies are sites of struggles, meaning-making, knowledge production and relationality.

McKittrick (2006) provides an example of black women's geographies during slavery in the autobiography of Harriet Jacobs/Linda Brent[5], *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published in 1861. In it, Brent recounts her experiences in her grandmother's garret, small enough to restrict movement and standing. The garret, "'the last place they thought of'" becomes a space for Brent to enable an escape from her abusive owner (ibid.,42). It is a place Brent spends seven years holding her body captive (and from capture); it is a place where she could observe and hear activities not meant for her to hear or see. The garret presents several geographic possibilities, experiences and boundaries; Brent is separated from the world of slavery yet bounded in the garret by its violent limitations, connected and disconnected from the world of her grandmother and children, free but bounded to physically painful restrictive and unfree space. Importantly, Brent's experience of the garret also facilitates her persistence for seven years because, for her, she is *not* enslaved in the garret; rather, it is her retreat of and towards freedom (in McKittrick 2006, p.41). In addition to declaring her emancipation as starting from within the garret, Brent also repeatedly refers to the garret as her cell, prison, the dark hole (ibid.).

The garret is transformed into, what McKittrick suggests as "workable paradoxical space", and it is from this perspective that we can make sense of Brent's geography (ibid.,42). From there, Brent experiences freedom and racial captivity, corporeal boundaries and destruction, at her own will rather than from the violence of her abuser and the slave system. The garret becomes a paradoxical space because Brent *creates* that meaning, the geographic workings of the space through her experiences, observations, and memories (ibid.,41). Brent's geographic experiences demonstrate how black women's material and

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[5] Harriet Jacobs wrote her autobiography under the pseudonym Linda Brent. I will be using Brent throughout the text as that's the literary persona Jacobs have constructed for the narrative.

conceptual geographies are not marginal, ungeographic or impossible, even when they are often relegated to and thus become the last places to think of.

Geographies of motherwork

Black women's geographies offer a way of rendering geographic the mothers studied and other racialised mothers in the Swedish suburbs often (unintentionally) made ungeographic through their absence as political agents in many literatures on the suburbs. Further, Abdullahi's (2015) theorisation of Somali women as marked by exclusion in Sweden provides clues about the specific ways this group's ungeographicness is constituted and is indivisible from their identities as black Muslim women. From McKittrick, black women's geographies are not solely about producing space, but it also involves their knowledge, experiences and negotiations. Nevertheless, how does motherwork look from the perspective of black women's geography?

The spatialising contour of motherwork is for example evident in bell hooks' (2007b) concept of "homeplace". The construction of homeplace has been significant for African-Americans historically and carries a subversive element (ibid.,267). It is a place where black women are not merely working to maintain a household but making "a safe place where black people could affirm one another [away from white supremacy] and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination." (ibid.). hooks argues that "[d]espite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could *freely* confront the issue of humanisation, where one could resist." (ibid., my emphasis). It is a making of a community of resistance within the private realm, which according to hooks is shared among black women globally, particularly those in white supremacist societies (ibid.).

The political potential of the homeplace is burdened by hooks' approach to power and domination, depicted as possible to be contained within specific spatialities. With that, I mean that by conceptualising homeplace as a refuge, free from white supremacy, hooks fails to acknowledge the workings of other power dynamics within the home that can make it less subversive and more constraining. Furthermore, power as assemblages of network render difficult the possibility of "shutting off" white supremacy from the home; white supremacy flows and infests everywhere and anywhere regardless of intention. Nevertheless, homeplace as a concept is useful in thinking about the space of motherwork and black women's geographies. Homeplace as an indispensable temporary retreat from white supremacy,

provides insight into the subversive work of black women within the private sphere (a space often refused as a potential site of resistance in relation to motherhood), and viable possibilities within geographies of domination.

Another example of motherhood articulated in relation to space, is "community othermothers" involved in community-work in their neighbourhoods. Nancy Naples (1992) has shown the relevance of the neighbourhood for the motherwork of Black and Latinx women. For the community-worker mothers in Naples study, *good mothering* […] comprise[s] all actions, including social activism, that addressed the needs of their children and community." (ibid., 448, original emphasis).With the concept, "activist mothering", Naples (1992) attempts to make sense of the broader mothering practices of Black and Latinx women and the complex ways these women make sense of their motherwork, that unravel the distinction often made between social reproduction and production. For most of the women in the study, their initial community activism is described as influenced by the myriad issues their neighbourhoods faced – housing, care, sanitation, crime and safety – and their desire to improve the lives of their own family and community members (ibid.,447). Furthermore, as people with lives shaped by experiences of socio-economic difficulties, racism and sexism, they "learn to mother as activists fighting in their homes and communities against the debilitating and demoralising effects of oppression." (ibid.,457)

But what is the actual relationship between black or racial geographies and motherwork? Both Naples (1992) and hooks (2007b) suggest that geographies of violence shape the conditions of motherwork for racialised mothers, which gives us one possible reading of the relationship between space and motherwork. We can flip the argument to also suggest that race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, etc, and social relations shape the construction of space (Massey 1994). Hence motherwork has the possibility to shape, make, and imbue meanings within space.

However, thinking through the social from a black feminist lens where the current paradigms of racial domination can be read in the wake of slavery (with ripples across the globe) (see Sharpe 2016; Hartman 2007 & 2019; McKittrick 2006; 2011; 2013), other possibilities for space and motherwork are potentially possible to deduce. I find myself thinking about Harriet Jacobs/Linda Brent, who hides in the garret also as a means of protecting her children. "Fearing the brutalization of plantation life, she [Brent] removes her physical body in order to safeguard her maternal sensibility… She prefers to disappear rather than to live beside her children without the strength to care for them." (Li 2006, p.25). The reading of Brent's geographic acts described by McKittrick (2006) as "workable paradoxical

space" is *also* motherwork. Brent needs to make the space workable as the source of her emancipation to free her children from the violence that is slavery. Thus, if black women's geographies are organised by the past of slavery and colonialism as well as present articulations of racial violence and if black (women's) lives and practices are spatial (though not recognised as such) as proposed by McKittrick (2006), motherwork can be suggested as spatial. More importantly, I would like to propose thinking of motherwork as *inherently* spatial. An orientation towards motherwork's spatiality is especially important for black and other racialised mothers, whose experiences of racial violence are always geographical. Motherwork as spatialising offers theoretical and real spaces for social struggle for racialised subjects and the possibility to imagine lives and livability in impossible, dying and dead geographies.

Prior to examining how the mothers I have conducted research with engage with the spatialising dimensions of motherwork, I outline the methodologies and methods I have used, as well as critical reflections around issues arising during my fieldwork.

Methodological framework and methods

With the ambition to explore and understand the social and political participation of racialised migrant mothers in the Swedish suburbs, I decided to conduct fieldwork through in-depth interviews and participation in some of the activities organised by the mothers. For this, I have followed the Swedish Research Council's ethical considerations and guidelines, concerning providing information about the research, consent, confidentiality, use of the result and striving to not harm research participants (Vetenskaprådet n.d.).

In the essay, I use pseudonyms and anonymise the participants' neighbourhoods. Though all the research participants have no concerns about publicising their names and place of residence, danger of harm and what is done with a study when it is published publicly added on to the complexity of ethics of responsibility and confidentiality, and finally led to my decision on anonymity. It is important to give knowledge producers their due credit; however, writing in the political context of increasing far-right politics in Sweden and across the globe, there is a heightened responsibility on researchers to "protect" (to the extent possible) the archives they contribute to.

In this section, I outline the methodology and methods used for the research, by first exploring my methodological influences shaped by concerns of representation of the suburb and its residents. Secondly, I introduce my trajectory to the field: gaining and negotiating access and the methods I used. Lastly, I examine and reflect critically about some of the challenges in the field, particularly around the negotiation of identities and difference and the figure of the "researcher". The field here is the women's residential areas and is developed through the conversations we shared in their homes and meeting places, and as I conducted their community-based activities with them.

Methodological influences

Research can have a role in exerting and perpetuating violence, and this has been the case for many marginalised communities. Linda Tuhiwai Smith suggests that in indigenous communities, collective memories of how imperialism shaped knowledge collection, classification, and representation have created a distrust for research and researchers (2012, p.1). In the Swedish context, representation of the suburbs and those who live there bears also a close relationship with violence, notably in representation work done in mass media and also in academic research (Ericsson et al. 2002b; Molina 2005). In these representations, people from the suburbs and the space itself often act as the "field"— sources of knowledge, but rarely producing knowledge on their own terms. In particular, the women in the suburbs, often determined as "migrant women" are placed even further away from knowledge creation through ambivalent fantasies of their subjectivities as passive, docile, ignorant, sexually challenging and at times, infantilised (Molina 2007, p.16).

Not wanting to perpetuate or contribute with more violence towards this research group and their neighbourhoods, I had to think of ways to document and later, write about the complex identities and narratives of the participants. In preparation for fieldwork, I was preoccupied with questions of how to limit the violence intrinsic to research (see Smith 2012). How do I practically and ethically conduct such a research? Linda Alcoff (1991) suggests that "[w]e should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others."; we should do so with a concrete analysis of the discursive and material effects of our acts of representations (ibid.). I engage with the risk of representations in my methodological choices and in what I choose to write about the mothers, remaining attune to how words affect the worlds of the people we write about.

Storytelling/*Testimonios*

Storytelling provided a methodological framework to the challenges of representation framing the research context, specifically the research subjects. Mainly, I drew insights from the forms of storytelling in African-American and Chicanx/Latinx oral traditions. In these traditions, story creation and telling provide openings to examine challenging periods, gather wisdom and empowerment (Banks-Wallace 2002, p.417).

In African-American oral traditions, dialogue is the central feature of storytelling (Collins 1990; Banks-Wallace 2002). According to Collins, dialogue provides a means for black women to assess knowledge claims, which are often developed in conversations with community members (1990, p.260). The community (family, religious community or other organisation) is central in ways of knowing and evoking knowledge and wisdom.

Similarly, the community remains a definitive feature of storytelling in Latinx and Chicanx traditions. In Latin American human rights struggles and by Latinx and Chicanx feminist thinkers (e.g. Anzaldúa 1990; Moraga & Anzaldúa 1983), *testimonio* has for example been used to reveal violence, interrupt silences, and create solidarity among women of colour (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012, p.363). Furthermore, through this approach, new understandings have been produced about the ways marginalised communities create solidarity, react to and contest the dominant culture, laws and policies that reproduce and sustain inequalities (ibid.).

Storytelling as dialogue or *testimonios* are forms of stories that provide context for the individual to identify struggles as well as ways to overcome them through sharing within a community (Evans-Winters & Espositio 2018, p. 872). Through storytelling, the narrator gains a greater consciousness of both their vulnerabilities and agency (ibid.,873). Moreover, this form of storytelling, demands of the individual to situate their personal experiences within collective social-political realities (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012, p.364). It requires the narrator to reflect upon their experiences as mediated through structures and processes such as gender, race, class and power, connecting narratives to bodies, histories, and politics (Evans-Winters & Espositio 2018, p.866).

However, storytelling is not a one-way communication, but also places demands on the listener. The strength of storytelling is the requirement on the listener to truly pay close attention to the personal accounts that provide understandings about the conditions of the many (Delgado Bernal et al. 2012, p.368). Listening becomes paramount in research

situations when the history of listening relations has often revealed an asymmetry[6] and has consequently produced misrepresented accounts and experiences. It places a responsibility on me, the listener, to be open and be conscious of my own agenda and positionalities that might affect my ability to hear. Moreover, listening requires labour/engagement and constant reflexive work, which involves several stages of listening during and after fieldwork to uncover the layers of what is being told, *how* they are being shared, and also, the silences and gaps (see Back 2007).

Trajectory to the field and used methods

Most of the data collected for this study is from one racialised neighbourhood and one specific Swedish-Somali mothers' group. Thus, the analytical sections of the essay focus primarily on the material from them. These Swedish-Somali mothers are all organised within the same association, there is immense depth in the interviews we conducted, generated by their shared experiences around the association and activities. At the same time, their stories present differences in how they experience their neighbourhood and the effect of their work, providing an important starting point in understanding the social activism of racialised migrant mothers in the suburbs. However, in the methodological reflections, I draw from my experiences with all the research participants.

Accessing the field was a lengthy process. Through acquaintances, I gained contact with Maryam, an active member of the Swedish-Somali mothers' group. Nevertheless, even with a foot in with one of the mothers, coming closer to the group demanded time and constant negotiations. Operating in the wake of harmful representations of the suburbs, meant that I needed to build a structure of research relationships embedded in trust. Maryam, who became my key contact and facilitator[7] throughout the research process, helped me gain the trust and interest of other mothers in the association, which comprised several stages of negotiation. I first met Maryam alone to introduce myself and the study. She forwarded this information to the rest of the members. After that, I was invited to visit the women and share my research agenda in person, which was helpful in gaining more interest from other mothers. Aside from the process of navigating access, language (insufficient Swedish level

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[6] This is often listening relationships set by the terms of race, class, gender, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, ability, etc.

[7] Maryam was clear from our first conversation that she was interested in the research because my work was similar to her and the mothers' contribution to their community, henceforth important.

for some of the women and I to communicate and my lack of knowledge in Somali) was a limitation that shaped how many women and who could partake in the research.

Also, through Maryam, I gained direct contact with another night patrolling mothers' group (also of Somali descent) in a neighbouring suburb. However, this time, I circumvented the process of negotiation. With the presence of Maryam to introduce me and my study, I could interview one of the women. Lastly, through personal links, I interviewed an activist organised in the non-profit association, *Förorten mot Våld* (The Suburb against violence), who was the only participant not organised in a separatist mothers' group. In total, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 7 mothers, which ranged from 30 minutes to 2 hours. 5 of my interviews were conducted with the Swedish-Somali mothers' group (who are the focus of the essay) and 2 were with mothers from other suburbs. One of the interviews was an unanticipated group interview with two mothers.

What pre-existed my choice of methodology was the use of storytelling by the women interviewed in their respective associations (communities) to asses knowledge claims, for clarity on systems of oppression and for support and strength. Thus, being present in spaces where aspects of storytelling were already operative, I wanted to learn more about the reflections the women made about their social and political participation in their neighbourhoods, their individual experiences as mothers', inhabitants of a space and connections to the experiences of other mothers with whom they organise. In line with the storytelling tradition, I was interested in the stories of the women and how they contextualised their individual experiences in the current social-political context. I entered the research context with research questions aimed at understanding how the mothers' labour shapes understandings of their neighbourhood and subject positions as mothers, from a black feminist theoretical lens around motherwork and space. In addition to the interviews, I participated in the activities of the mothers' group (upon their invitation), including two patrol nights, three meetings, a public talk with one of the mothers and a panel discussion.

Negotiating identities and differences in the field

Research is undeniably an embodied experience. "We insert our bodies in the field. Our bodies come up against the bodies of our participants." (Evans-Winters & Espositio 2018, p. 867). Bodies coming against those of the research participants charge corporeal and intellectual insights about what it means to be in the field and make sense of people's understanding of their experiences. Some of the challenges and concerns during fieldwork

include the positionality of "outsider"/" insider", unexpected sites of bridging differences and fieldwork relationships.

Prior to fieldwork, I had imagined that our shared identities as Black Swedish women with migrant experiences would help bridge some differences. However, to my surprise, they were not as important as I had assumed. Though this shared experience of racism opened a first level of dialogue, what mattered the most for the research subjects and shaped the research relationship was rather whether one belong to the suburb or not. The relationship to place evokes important epistemological as well as theoretical thoughts on identity and space and subjugated knowledges, which I will return to later on in the essay.

The "outsider"/ "insider" position shaped the research participants' perception of my intentions with conducting such a research. Can I be trusted with doing a just work of representation? Though one can argue if anyone can be trusted with "complete" representation, perceptions of "insider"/"outsider" status can shape who is assumed to be capable of writing "truer" accounts of the realities of the suburbs.

One significant proliferation of the "outsider"/ "insider" was evident in the forms of stories that were told about the suburbs, *how* the mothers chose to represent the suburbs for an "outsider" and make sure that I get and tell the story right this time. For example, when asked about what they thought were the dominant representation of the suburbs and those who lived there, the women rarely spent time to describe these representations as there was an assumption that I already knew (I too read and consume dominant media narratives). Most importantly, they were interested in sharing *their* realities rather than challenging descriptions alienated from them. What they chose to share *and* not share are underlined by an awareness of how their narratives can be used, not only by myself but also others.

Some of the ways the "outsider"/ "insider" position and its challenges were mediated was to have a longer process of gaining access and building trust, facilitated also by being transparent about my personal and academic agenda for conducting the study. However, this sharing of self was not always sufficient on its own to help build trust and diminish distance. Differences were also negotiated around unexpected identities. Age was for example an important category to establish relationship with some of the research participants. With Maryam, who is in her 50s, I quickly occupied a position of a pseudo-daughter/niece. It created an easiness between us. However, I realised during my fieldwork time that this relationship was not specific to me, but rather a relationship she often creates with younger people. As Maryam moves through her neighbourhood, she is often greeted by youth and children (regardless of ethnicity) as "aunty" and it is an identity-marker she assumes with

pleasure. So, it was not strange that she quickly became an "aunty" to me as well. Another manifestation of age to mediate differences occurred during a group interview I had with two younger women, Sahra and Amaal, who are close friends of similar age and very comfortable with each other. The interview from the start was a conversation between the women and I, rather than a structured interview exchange. They spoke equally to each other as to me, learned new information about one another and confirmed each other's stories and experiences. Age was an important factor (all of us 3 were close in age), directing a conversation between friends, rather than explicitly at me. This facilitated the transcendence of some barriers.

The figure of the "researcher"

The "outsider" position is partly a symptom of historical and contemporary practices of misrepresentations of the suburbs and those who live there. These representations have in effect assisted a creation of distrust among some people in the suburbs towards the figure of the "outsider", which also comprises the "researcher" as well as the journalist, the social worker, etc. Thus, my non-belongingness was also marked by academic institutional association, class privilege, deracialisation. And the experience of fieldwork was conditioned by this reality. It is however important to acknowledge that who falls under the categories and the conditions shaping them are neither definite nor unchanging, rather the categories are processes arguably shaped by factors such as interpersonal identifications, class and moral as well as political commitment to the suburbs.

One of my most difficult interviews occurred directly after a panel discussion about dominant representations of racialised suburbs. An academic (an "outsider") who was part of the panel presented generalised, simplified and well-known racist tropes of the suburbs, descriptions which enraged and were challenged by the audience (majority from or with associations to the suburbs). One of the research participants and I, were both present at the event and this experience set a tone for our interview. I shifted in and out, between, the categories, insider/outsider throughout our interview. We initially bonded over the shared sentiment *against* the academic we have listened to. Nevertheless, as the interview formally started, my identity as a researcher became pronounced. Justly, she feared and worried that I too might generalise, particularly around the category "mothers". An "outsider" coming in once again temporary, only to (re)present back to them distorted accounts of their lives. And largely, this anxiety around representation done by someone "not-from-the-suburbs" was a

palatable and shared sentiment that I had to actively address and constantly negotiate during my fieldwork. In most cases, the knowledge about some of my personal and academic investments and interest, I believe helped frame an entry to the interviews (though not sufficient on its own). But in this specific instance, my position as a "researcher" and proximity to the academic we both had witnessed, became almost an insurmountable barrier to overcome.

However, like some of the women, I was also consumed with how I will represent outwardly. Thus, during and after my fieldwork, I developed a feeling of needing to represent accurately which at times, I realised I reduced to "positive representations" (see Ali 2015). This is shaped mainly by my own anxieties of my researcher role and heightened by the relationship of trust I developed with many of the women. Yet, it is a (self-consuming) position that does not reduce the risk of misrepresentations, rather possibly exacerbate the risk of reading the data uncritically. By using methods from grounded theory analysis to interpret the data which involves multiple layered readings (Charmaz 2006), I have worked at listening and then listen again, to what the women have said and how they have shared it.

Dimensions of motherwork

In the forthcoming sections are a close analysis of the empirical material I have collected, which has been divided into three main chapters. What is central is the ways in which the mothers make sense of and define motherwork through the work they do in and for their community. In the first chapter, "Motherwork as a subject position of space", I discuss how the women's motherwork is shaped by their experiences of living in their neighbourhood. From these experiences, the women offer geographic knowledge about the suburbs as well as evoke themselves as valid knowledge producers. In the second chapter, I explore one central aspect of how they enact motherwork in practice, namely, by contributing to safety. In the final chapter, I examine the possible effects of the mothers' work, first by focusing on how they perceive how their work contribute to change and also other transformative potentials of their work.

Motherwork as a subject position of space

Tsigeweini Tirfe
/…/
A name placed
Over there
Elsewhere
At the bottom of humanity
Name

Tsigeweini Tirfe
Slaves of the monster
Victim of statics
There is no glamour in being barred
Behind one's name
Behind one's brown-burnt skin
/…/

No glamour in seven people
forced to jostle in a three-bed in Farsta
No glamour in the architect's hands
Moving in monotonous movements
No glamour in shutdown schools
/…/

I want to live in a place of well-being
Where purses do not echo hollow
No fucking discount coupons from
Mitt-I- newspaper
/…/
Please
I need more than nothing
I want to live in a better place than nowhere
/…/

There is no glamour where we live
Just the struggle
of a black single
five-children mother /…/

(Girmay 2018)[8]

In Yodit Girmay's poem, *Glamour*, the geographic dimensions of racial violence are painfully written out. Unlike the experiences of the Aftonbladet reporters' (see section: Overview of the literature on the suburbs) in another suburb, who immersed themselves in the thrill and excitement of "difference", Girmay's use of "glamour" (sharing similar

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[8] I have translated the poem from its original language, Swedish to English.

qualities as the "exoticness" the reporters experienced), points to the experience of those (re)produced as Other, as a fixation in Otherness. The destitution of a place is articulated in the clear imagery of coupons, overcrowded living spaces and disappearing schools. It is a spatialised racial violence, that is draining towards nothing: geographies of inhabitability due to the status of death forced upon these spaces. Yet at the same time, Girmay alludes to the struggles of surviving under almost impossible structures and systems. And the demand for "better place than nowhere", leaves splinters of hope for/ dreams of, other realities than the current. In the poem, we importantly receive knowledge about black *life*, specifically that of the black single mother in the city. In this section, I focus on how the mothers I have studied also provide geographical knowledge about the suburbs, capturing the differences between dominant negative representations of the place and what people living there tell about the place. Next, I discern how the women's motherwork are connected to their identities as inhabitants of the suburbs, and lastly, how the mothers make sense of racialisation and class through space.

Inhabitable geographies

From my empirical material, it is clear that the mothers' formulations of their understanding of their residential area are in conversation with the ways in which racialised suburbs are constituted homogenously as inhabitable zones in mainstream media and policy suggestions and developments. A political proposal that the mothers addressed specifically was the suggestion to send the military to the suburbs.

In 2017, the conservative political party, *Moderaterna*, proposes a bill to send the military to fight criminality in "particularly vulnerable areas"[9]in Stockholm (Sjögren & Grönvik 2017). The far-right Swedish Democrats have repeatedly suggested in debates the need of military presence in the suburbs (Bråstedt 2018; Thåström et al. 2018) and the incumbent Social Democrats has opened up for the possibility of the proposal becoming a reality (Thåström et al. 2018). For the mothers, whom I spoke to and shared everyday events, these proposals around crime and violence refer directly to the youth of the suburbs (even more specific: boys and young men), though often masked as gang criminality. But in the discursive specificity of gangs, is the incrimination of *all* youth as possibly violent around race, gender, class and place. The women experience that the proposal is about their children.

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[9] " Particularly vulnerable areas" (*särskild utsatta områden*) and "vulnerable areas" (*utsatta områden*) are terms used by the police to describe a geographic area with low socioeconomic status and influence of criminals (Noa 2017).

It is about their neighbourhood. Accordingly, they have a lot to say about it. Sahra responds
to the idea of the military:

> It is [just] a neighbourhood (Amaal: what do we have here? Do we need that much?)
> It is felt from the media, and it is felt from the police, who wanted to show
> their power…and can't use their resources in the right way. Instead they wanted
> to come here heavy-handedly…come with the military. But that creates, once again,
> wrong headlines about […] [our area] and image of us. It makes it seem like we are
> small animals, that can't take care of anything. And then when one comes here,
> it's a different picture: you hear people laugh; you hear mothers speak
> on the phone…So, there's life here, you understand? (Sahra)[10]

Sahra alludes to what "the military" suggests of a place and people. Symbolically, the
military, as the legitimate protector of the state from external threat has a clear relationship to
death and life. Thinking through Mbembe's (2019) arguments of the sovereign's power as
lying in distributing death and life chances, I suggest that the military occupies the role of
executors, violently protecting the interest of the nation. So what does it then mean to have
the military at work within the internal spaces of the nation? In the bill and political
suggestions from politicians, the military is merely instrumental, a force to control the up-till-
now unmanageable inhabitants of the suburbs. In this case, the normal way of order for
legitimate exercise of violence and control by the state – the police, is insufficient:
aberrations that requires extraordinary measures. For Sahra, the extraordinariness also assigns
those who live there in abnormality, out of humanness; "It makes it seem like we are small
animals, that can't take care of anything", as Sahra phrases it. Anything outside the human is
usually deemed inferior, more easily placed in proximity to death at the hands of those
assigned the status of human (from anthropocentric perspectives). Processes of
dehumanisation are also identified by Hodan, in her understanding of how her neighbourhood
is constructed from the outside:

> It's exactly what the media writes about the suburbs. Everyone stands outside.
> They don't live here, and then want to aim the camera towards the suburbs and
> talk when they stand behind the walls and don't come in. It's the same problem
> with the police. "The youth here throw [things]; they burn cars…" But why? Why
> do they do that? Have you come close to one of these youth and asked why they
> do what they do?...Have you asked? No. So, what I would do instead is to treat
> them as people, speak to them. They are competent. They are people.
> They can speak. (Hodan)

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[10] All the interviews were conducted in Swedish and all translation to English are mine.

Hodan provides an imagery of voyeurism in what she perceives as the foundation of how the suburbs are constructed in inaccurate descriptions. The wrongful narratives about people of the suburbs and the areas can only be produced by those standing outside, aiming their cameras from behind the walls. Also, Hodan explains the perception the police have of the youth as unruly, to the same distance the media uptake to create certain representations of the suburbs. A closeness to the space might provide other understandings. By visiting the place (actually stepping in), Sahra argues that, "there's life", and Hodan, stresses the humanity and capacity of the youth of explaining the motivations behind their actions and grievances.

"This is home": (Other) narratives about the suburbs

To counter non-human conceptions of their neighbourhood, the women provide their own understanding of their area and the inhabitants. Though the discursive representations of the place do not reflect a pre-given "reality", what is implied in the descriptions has a materiality that feels very real for the women, as the discourses are exercised through subjects, including the mothers. From my interviews and fieldwork, I was met with the sentiment of love, sense of responsibility and boundedness in place, as many of the women expressed and *felt* for their residential area. By boundedness, I mean a relationality to space that is cultivated by investing time and important aspects of life in a place, which many of the women had done in their neighbourhood. All the women have experienced essential elements of their life processes, including their identities as mothers in their residential area. Some of them moved to the place in their formative years, as children or teenagers, but all have given birth and cultivated lives there for many years. It is "home", as many of them told me; and none of them had plans of moving away. It is a place where a sense of belonging has been developed. Faduma explains her unwillingness to move to another area to the "warmth and hugs, and smiles [she] receives everyday [in her area]") (Faduma). Her sense of belonging stems partly from never been asked where she is from (a question often asked to signify visible racialised bodies as foreigners, permanently outside the boundaries of the nation). For in her area, everyone is from somewhere. It is in other words, a place where inhabitants can form other ways of relating to place and "home", particularly when belonging is not guaranteed in the spaces outside of the suburbs. The experiences and perceptions of home can be traced in the women's descriptions of the place as filled with beauty, community, familiarity; tragic things do happen there, but as everywhere else.

Also, in the women's descriptions of place is a specific form of telling. The less positive aspects of the place and material difficulties are not centralised, either in the form of silences or non-specifications of the problems the area and inhabitants face. It is not because the negative does not exist, but there is so much more that actually forms part of their daily realities, yet rarely gain a broad publicised interest. In their narrative style, which includes what they choose to share, not give details about, and the silences, are exertions of power over the production of the meaning of the place, outwardly for (an) "outsider(s)": myself and other readers (though this meaning is not guaranteed). The struggle over meaning is "not just of the abstracted sign but also of the ''real'' of lived experience" (Lewis 2000, pp. 195-196).

The women want "us", those who do not live in or are not associated to the racialised spaces, to know specific things about their area. It is an active place, with activated citizens. They stress that people that live in their area have jobs and are in higher education, in opposition to the strong stigma that associate the suburbs as welfare cases and with criminality. The women themselves are illustrative of *active* (model) citizens: they all work either within the school system or at the municipality; two are also university students *as well as* being engaged in non-paid community work. As working citizens, the women also challenge racist assumptions about Somali women residing in Sweden, in relation to labour, where they are often reduced to reproduction (criticised for bearing "too many" children) (see Okumus 2015; Abdullahi 2015). However, though the women's active and activated lives are not illustrative of the realities of every inhabitant of the suburbs, particularly as places with higher proportions of unemployment, by activating the suburb, the women infuse the place with life, rather than at standstill. They also suggest the possibilities of the space. For Faduma, for example, the suburbs as imbued with life within the structural conditions of decay, is clear in the "multicultural global promise" through which she sees her area.

> To be able to proudly say…that we have 50-60 nationalities in just a small area.
> Eat kebab, eat rice, eat whatever you want. We have it all here. You don't
> have to go to Turkey to eat kebab. We have pizza Italy here, you know. One
> could have presented this place with pride, instead of just showing burning
> cars, every time […] [my area] is mentioned. That's what I *hate* the most. Instead of
> showing the nationalities, the global village (*hela världens by*), burning cars
> [are shown]. You're hurting our image, our everything… (Faduma)

Faduma draws on the language and dreams of the multicultural society. She describes her area as a global village within the city, to incite ways of living positively with the plural differences present in the space. A similar plethora of multiculturalism that liberal cultural politics often praise for its difference, but which Molina argues "has been criticised to render

invisible the real and significant difference in living conditions" (2006, p.184, my translation). The same multiculturalism that has increasingly become known as the source of endless possibilities of violence, seclusion, segregation and parallel worlds, particularly in relation to the suburbs. Yet, I do want to suggest that Faduma articulates multiculturalism for different ends; for her, the global presence and conviviality within her neighbourhood are signs of productivity and (capacity of) *living* with difference.

From the women's sentiments and how and what they narrate about their area, are other geographic knowledges of the suburbs, beyond what is suggested by politicians and in media representations. Sahra in her reading of the military suggestion and Faduma's global village offer us specific formulations of geographic knowledge about their residential area and similar suburbs, where the flourishing of life can be read in Sahra 's elicitation to laughter ("you hear people laugh") and Faduma's prideful reference to the multiple nationalities her suburb contains. These are articulations of other possibilities within the structures of racial violence and inhabitability. It does not necessarily eradicate the conditions of decay and deterioration Girmay points at in her poem or dominant discourses of the suburbs which find themselves translated in policy developments to shape housing, schools, job opportunities, and distribution of other resources, and leave their traces on the freshness of vegetables and fruits in the supermarkets. Rather, the mothers are expressing geographic experiences that also exist.

The women's specific way of presenting the suburbs can by read and criticised by some as a romanticisation and a rendering invisible of the difficult material conditions. A reading I argue will be too simplistic. Firstly, the material realities of the suburb (though not detailed in the women's representation) inspire their community-based activities. They engage in activities that contribute explicitly to the safety and well-being of the children and youth of the area, bearing witness to failures on various societal and institutional levels, causing unsafe conditions. Within the critique of romanticisation are certain assumptions around what transparency can evoke: that citing every issue is in some way a barrier against simplifications. Nevertheless, I argue that *how* we constitute a space discursively does not guarantee against either producing flat representations or risk of fixation where poor black and brown and marginalised communities are repeatedly placed in "spaces of absolute otherness" (McKittrick 2011, p.954). Thus, another way of thinking about the women's forms of representation, I would suggest, is simply as accounts reflecting their lived experiences. Within the women's narratives of their neighbourhoods are interpretations of their experiences in, emotions, memories, histories developed within the suburbs. It is from

their lived experiences the women produce geographic knowledges about the suburbs, as spaces instilled with aliveness and agency, everything that provides an alternative to the discursive suggestions of death, violence and the non-human.

"I know best"

In the stories the women shared with me and participating in their community-based activities, I gather that it is with the body (bodily labour), experiences, negotiations, and relations, the mothers create and provide meanings to and about the suburb, and their motherwork are connected to their subject positions of being from the place. They articulate their identities in relation to their place of residence, which in turn shape their organising, and affirm Bench Ansfield's observations that "space attains meaning from body, and body from space" (2015, p.133).

The women see themselves as legitimate knowledge bearers of the place and relate to the space with an "I know best" (*jag vet bäst*), which can only be developed from being in and of the place. Referring to themselves and other inhabitants with words such as "expert", "professional" and descriptions of themselves as "knowing best", they position themselves as both knowledgably and credible references. However, though they are valuable community resources, they find themselves deprioritised and not considered, asked to impart their knowledge for positive improvements of both symbolic representations and material inequalities of their area. The (re)production of silences and subordination of the gendered Other, which the women identify with, find resonance in the long tradition of critique of the marginalisation of the gendered subaltern subject (Spivak 1988; Mohanty 2003). The process of silencing is shaped by discursive reductions of the complex lives of Somali women in Sweden, where their actions and knowledge are rendered sensible solely within simplified and stable categories. And every action that fall outside the categories they are placed within are deemed unrecognisable and unreadable. Importantly, it is a silence some of the women argue to be a refusal of the agency of the inhabitants of the place, a denial that in the end, make them incapacitated.

Furthermore, the women's self-identifications as experts of their area allude to who gets to be "experts". Abdullahi (2015) examining the hypervisibility of Somalis in Swedish integration debates connects the construction of the "expert" to Eurocentric and civilisation logic around differences. Within the colonial logic as argued by Abdullahi (2015), we can understand how certain people are readily reproduced as objects of knowledge, even when it

comes to the intimate details of their lived realities. However, for the mothers, it is from a place-boundedness that they evoke their knowledge of the area. Their claim of expertise stem from their material and experiential realities gathered as inhabitants within a space and shaped by specific experiences as Swedish-Somali. Expertise as connected to a place, also means that one can simply not claim legitimate knowledge about the neighbourhood and its residents as an "outsider".

Understanding race and class through space

Space figures as a significant category as the women convey certain knowledge about their neighbourhood. It is through space that the women make sense of racialisation and class that underpin the material conditions of many of these racialised suburbs. Also, the relation to place and space shape their subject position as mothers living there, and in extension particular articulations of motherwork.

Stuart Hall has "insist[ed] on the internality of race in all social processes and, in turn, to see race as a lens through which broader structures can be explored, rather than a 'thing' in and of itself" (Alexander 2009, p.469). That is to say, through race, we can make sense of for example, experiences of poverty and operations of capitalism. However, I argue that the women's experiences, accounts of space and place-belonging reveal a different relation between space, race, and class. The women on the contrary to Hall's approach assume space first to account for experiences of unequal distribution of welfare and racist representations, rather than the analysis of race and racialisation to make sense of life in the suburbs. The privileging of space, as the lens through which other social categories and processes can be examined, was for example what influenced how the women perceived my presence in the field. I was seen as having a specific class and social capital due to my academic association and assumption of not being of the suburb. And what I took for granted before entering the field, namely, our shared commonalities of experiences of racism as visible black women, were not a unifying factor. Place was and is the most important category.

This is not an argument that the women are unconcerned about race and racialisation, because they are. Rather they point at racism and structural inequalities through their experiences of material realities in the place as well as discursive constructions of the place. Neither is this an argument that space is the only *or* the most significant category through which people from the suburbs make sense of inequalities; race and racialisation play a central role in many activists' and social and political commentators' critique against the

territorial and cultural stigmatisation of the suburbs (see Rosales & Ålund 2017). Rather, the privileging of space as the primary analytical lens (thus dislocating race) draws attention to a possible tension between first- and second-generation migrants, regarding how they response to racialisation. And beyond potential differences in intergenerational relations to racialisation, and based on the mothers' associations to their area, I point at space as a way in which class becomes racialised and the analytical possibilities it can generate.

Motherwork and safety-creation

The women's experiences and knowledges of their area shape how they enact motherwork in practice. They articulate their motherwork in relation to the spatial, particularly around promotion of safety. Prior to gaining insight on their practices, we first need to understand what brought them together as a group and the nature of their motherwork, which is a collective and shared relationship. For this group of mothers, the forming of the association, from which they organise as night patrollers and also offer social and cultural activities for children and youth, was sparked during a critical moment in time. The women's separatist organisation was created in 2015, and 2015 was also the year, the mothers' experienced the killings of youths of Somali descent they felt connected to, either by being former teachers of the victims and/or knowing them via their family ties. The personalised grief of parents, particularly mothers, became a shared grief, from which the women were unable to detach themselves from. As explained by Faduma, "for all the mothers, it was very…private, emotionally very close; it can be my child tomorrow, so should I wait till that happens? No, I must become engaged; I must come out." Another mother reflects on the way grief moves and exchanges between bodies with the potential to incite action as experiential (see Ahmed 2014). "It can be due to the fact that we mothers that live here experience and have the same situation. It gives us a commonality. A feeling and experience of our lives." (Hodan).

The women explain the violence and deadly killings as stemming from broader structural and institutional gaps: failed school systems, lack of real job opportunities for teenagers and young adults that finish upper-secondary school (principally those graduating without pass grades), insufficient or underfunded extracurricular activities[11], particularly for

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[11] The consensus here was that children who are not engaged, for example, in extracurricular activities after school often find things to occupy themselves with, which can also include criminal activities.

girls, and self-fulfilling prophecies (expectation that children from the suburbs will end up in criminality propels some of them in that direction). This knowledge of the realities of the space and the commonality of experiences as mothers have shaped the formation of the women's group and community-based activities. Their activities and activism can be understood as doing different things, including an aim to stop the killings, promote more safety and welfare in public spaces, and affirm children and youth's multiple identities and sense of self-worth with extracurricular activities. However, in the remainder of this section, I focus on the safety promoting aspect of the women's night patrol activities, by first examining various conceptions of safety from the perspectives of the mothers. Secondly, how the mothers enact collective forms of mothering in public to foster safety for the community at large. Lastly, I focus on how the mothers are performing and providing different knowledge about safety-work.

Diverse conceptions of safety

they accuse us for crimes we haven't committed, yet/
welcome to the suburbs (Anyuru 2003)[12]

When it comes to the suburbs, there are various conceptions of safety and security, depending on who is asked, and where they are located. The women reflect on safety and space in a similar way as the poet, Johannes Anyuru, with a logic of dichotomies, "*they*"/"*us*" and the presumptions of an inevitability reflected in Anyuru's "*yet*". As a matter of oppositions, the women contrast their sense of safety to the fact that they *lived* in the neighbourhood, though there is a specific sense of insecurity they associate with the public realm, which I will shortly expand on. The women reaffirm their sense of safety by sharing how late they can walk in their area alone without fear and how youth (that might be criminalised from the "outside") greet them and offers to follow them home at late hours or with groceries. Those who often feel unsafe in their area, they argue, are people who actually do not live there. Amaal shares a conversation she had with a colleague who has previously been scared to come to the area for work:

> …she was really scared. She had her bag like this [Amaal demonstrating a bag coming closer to the body] …But…please can you just walk normally? But it's not only her.

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[12] My translation from Swedish to English.

> I had a colleague that also worked with me a while ago. She said, "I didn't know that you were like this. It is beautiful here and you help each other…". Even as an immigrant, she had a bad image…She said, "you are very kind, and very good, and you have a good heart." But we are many like this here; it's not only me. She replied, "I know, but I was scared before I started coming here…but now it feels very good. People…are good." She is not scared anymore…It is very good here…sometimes I go and buy milk at 2 am…[and] I feel safe (Amaal)

Amaal colleague's perception of the place as unsafe are associations of security/insecurity to physical environments and in extension, how place attaches itself to people. The assumption the colleague made about the area as unsafe also came with a specific perception of the people living there. The connection between space, bodies and insecurity, do not necessarily need to have a structural relationship, but it is a relationship easily presumed for racialised bodies in poor neighbourhoods. To phrase it differently, the probability of the colleague being robbed of her bag in the richer whiter city-centre might be similar or even higher. However, the association between the space as dangerous and rough and the people residing there may not necessarily be made. Furthermore, Amaal's mention of the colleague's migrant experience as irrelevant to the person making relations between space and security, brings attention to what is most important in gaining accurate perception of the suburbs, that is an experience of the place. Consequently, from the quote above, by coming to the area and spending time there, one can receive a better understanding of the place and cultivate feelings of security. Amaal's colleague has come to learn of Amaal and the other inhabitants as "hardworking", "good" and "very kind". These are arguably non-exceptional adjectives to describe other humans but lend clues (contrasting adjectives: lazy, bad, uncompassionate, etc.) about existing dominant perception of people who live in the suburbs, from those detached physically from these areas.

Moving from Amaal's reflections, I want to turn to the perspective of state representatives on crime and insecurity in the suburbs. With terms such as "particularly vulnerable areas", "vulnerable areas" and "risk areas", the police for example identify and distribute risk hierarchically across various geographically areas in Sweden (Noa 2017, p.41). These areas of risk are described as geographies with the characteristics of criminality and low socioeconomic status which captures many million programme suburbs (Noa 2017). The Social Democratic government on the other hand, proposed on the autumn of 2019, after a series of publicised gang-related killings, the largest package so far to fight gang criminality (Justitiedepartementet 2019). In the 34-point programme presented, there is a clear emphasis on sanctions and harder punishments to impede gang criminality and the violence. Eight (from 27 to 34) of the thirty-four points are reserved for preventive measures, which

communicates at least how the current government approaches and relocates resources to issues of safety and security within the country, with a top-down approach.

State allocated resources are also relevant for the women as they make sense of their current situation of insecurity. In terms of state investments in increasing policing as solutions to gang criminality, the women are particularly critical on the upsurge of security guards in the area. To which they refer to as misallocated funds, actually exacerbating criminality and feelings of insecurity. For a few of them, the disproportionate budget for policing (increase of security guards) to the budget for education in the area is an expectation that the children living in the area will not make it academically. Rather, focusing on policing is an investment in criminality:

> "They have already decided. There will not be high investments in schools as they
> [the children] will not make it there. They will find themselves as criminals, so
> let's build that up…You can see that they expect us to be criminals. So,
> we have been branded…" (Maryam)

Here Maryam, suggests that expectations of criminality are in turn internalised by children and youth growing up with beliefs of themselves as problems. Ideas about the suburb and its futurity, (the "*yet*", Anyuru draws our attention to and the mothers' rationalisation of you-produce-whatever-you-invest-in), can in other words be traced in the allocation of the local government's resources. Instead of allocating funds to more police and security guards, the women suggest that the money can be of better use: increasing the funds for youth centres and extracurricular activities for children, keeping the football fields well-lit during the nights and increasing the funds for associations so they can properly carter for the children. "I think every guard cost quite a lot, in monthly salary. Our kids cost less"; Faduma rationalises.

The Swedish police and security guards, though with different rights to sanctioned exertion of violence, levels of training, and relationship to the state, form part of a similar structure. Privatisation and externalisation of state violence to private security firms, arguably make the differentiation between the police and security guards along with the role of the security guards in terms of violence blurry at times. For the women, these two groups are differentiated symbols of (in)security. The security guards are for some, an excess, an *addition* to the police, further emphasising the expectation of something could happen.

The police on the other hand, usher more complex and at times conflicting views from the women. Some of them interpret the presence of police in their area as a (potential) symbol of security, that everything is as it should be. The police as a sign of functioning community is a contrast to the previous absence of the police in the neighbourhood, creating a vacuum

for criminals as one mother argued, and I would add, an absence that functions as a signal of the place, consistent with characterisations such as "no-go" zones. What is stressed particularly about the police in the community, is how they *should* practice community and demonstrate their presence. To that, Sahra and Amaal assert that the police need to be present at all times, and not just in the form of routine check-ups, because their sporadic presence causes more worry than feelings of safety. Without real integration in the community, inhabitants are unaware if the police's presence is because something has actually happened or if they are merely there on a scheduled patrol. Sahra and Amaal go on to suggest how the police can be in the community: the police should not come in briefly in their cars and on their walkie-talkies, rather should "come in on foot, without dogs, without helmets" (Sahra). Moreover, they should not just come when something has happened; they should be present.

However, other women shared another understanding of police and (in)security, namely more police as not the answer to the issues of insecurity. Hodan, for example, argues that the increase in police presence have not translated to change in the situation to ensure safety. She claims: "They [local government and the state] want to solve an issue but don't want to go in depth. Go out there and solve the issue. Maybe if they came in [the suburb], it wouldn't have required as much money and resources. It would have been easier. But that's how it is. We must just stay put and watch." (Hodan). She consequently proposes that investments in more policing might figure as distractions from actually identifying the core issues, which can be done with a grounded approach.

The women themselves are perceived by other community members (particularly the youth and children) as symbols of safety shaped and strengthened by societal and cultural norms around mothers and motherhood, as well as how they identify and are identified by others as community members. Furthermore, in their roles as mothers, they occupy a specific position in their own Somali ethnic community as leaders and the most important persons in the lives of children. "The mother" often overburdened by cultural and social specificities and variations of "nature/culture" divides, often must navigate and negotiate these expectations. For these mothers specifically, they see themselves as responsible for the education, well-being, and cultivation of children. The burden and obligation of the responsibility is not lost on them; however, it is an assigned role that helps them establish a specific relationship to their blood-and community children and youth. There is a respect associated to the symbol of mothers, of which the women strategically draw on to establish a relationship with children and youth (regardless of ethnicity) in their work. Nevertheless, mothers and parents in the suburbs in general, are often blamed by the personnel in schools

and social services, police and civil servants as contributing to youth unrest and criminality (Dahlstedt & Lozic 2018). While within their own communities and close networks, they may also be susceptible to be blamed for failing to properly raise children, away from drugs and criminality.

Safety-work in practice: collective mothering in the public

The women share how they were identified as *the* problem rendering possible the deadly shootings in 2015 by fathers. They were blamed as youth were (are still) the actors and victims in the violence and due to the women's assigned responsibility for this specific group. At the same time, the mothers' greater charge for children and their well-being, along with the close presence of loss and lived experience in the area, influenced their decision to take to the streets. Sahra explains the blame from the fathers (though the men did not attempt to intervene to change the situation), as partly provoking the mothers to do something. She explains the mothers' incitement to action as follow:

> "We must come out to the society. We must be heard and take more places in
> the public realm and do something about our children. Because this shouldn't
> lead to that today, we come to you to express our condolences, then tomorrow at
> her place…and the day after tomorrow at my place…We can do something; we
> will do something." (Sahra)

The public realm marked by uncertainty remains a potential space of danger. Though many of the women themselves feel safe navigating public spaces, it is the non-knowingness and the notion that anything could happen out-there (which also includes discriminatory practices by the police which can unfairly target their children), that make them worry about their children being outside the homes. The public space is important to the sociality of youth and are spaces very few parents can practically and completely restrict their children from as they grow older. Thus, for these mothers, there is a need to alter the spaces from potentially unsafe to safer spaces, particular for young children who have yet to demonstrate a greater interest of spending time outside by themselves, an interest they saw as inevitable. The children moving to the outside requires the parent doing a similar act. The women's moving from their homes, the private to the public, is retold by the mothers as a significant act, almost denoting a ritual of spatial transgression, of a parent-child relationship that has previously been bounded mainly in one realm. Thinking about Naples' (1992) suggestion of "activist mothering" as challenging binaries between private and public, and reproductive and

productive labour, as well as imagining carework as political, I suggest that, with the mothers outside, practices of mothering are rendered in collective and community-centric definitions.

Engaging in a form of collective public mothering, the women relate to night patrolling as motherwork strategically and pragmatically, shaping how they approach youth, in a different manner than the police and other state representatives. They demonstrate an awareness of how their bodies are read in space (enhanced by the fact that they conduct their patrol wearing highly visible identical bright jackets). When identified as mothers, particularly as a collective, they disrupt the order of the space; children and youth interact differently with them than their peers, and those conducting activities (such as drug selling) not meant to be seen or heard by parents and other unconcerned adults, are disturbed by the mothers' conscious visibility at unusual hours in spaces that normally are not for parents. The mothers draw advantage from the knowledge of their bodies in space. However, they are also very adamant of their presence not being perceived as policing, surveillant or disciplinary. This was clearly demonstrated by Maryam, as we both sat in a cultural house, also home to a youth centre, waiting for another mother. Maryam moved from where she was previously sitting in the sofa, to sit with her back towards the youth who were hanging out in the same room. Uncertain about why she moved, Maryam explained that she didn't want the kids to feel uncomfortable by her presence or feel that they were being watched.

The women work to convey safety (*"trygghet och trivsel"*) in public spaces, but though "safety" is also an important terminology for authorities such as the police to describe their work in society, the women differentiate themselves from the police. "We are not police. We are not security guards. We are extra mothers to youth, just showing love and greetings, nothing else.", as Faduma reminds me when describing their work. The strategies the mothers deploy to ensure that they are conducting safety-work in a non-disciplinary and surveillant way include moving around in different small groups of maximum four mothers, to avoid evoking fear. This stands in stark contrast to police operations, where safety is connected to large intense presence in neighbourhoods. As I am currently writing in Malmö, the streets of my neighbourhood are overflowing with police, as part of a planned operation (Rimfrost) to reduce criminality. The language of safety is once again cited as justification (Galinon 2020). Further, the women draw on existing relationships they have with the youth and children they meet along with cultural and social normative associations attached to mothers, to build new or strengthen existing relationships. Yet interestingly enough, they put an effort in trying to engage with the children from their perspective and in a playful and participatory approach, in lieu of the normative parent-child hierarchy.

Moving around their area with them, I observe how they put these strategies and tactics in practice. For example, as the mothers have identified building relationships primarily with the youth when night patrolling as a significant strategy for their work, they translate this in practice by greeting the youth and children they meet on their patrol and establishing an acquaintance. "People think we go out and then everything is calm. No, this is building relationship with the youth, and then the day he or she does something stupid, the chances are big that they will listen to us[mothers], than the police who arrives fifteen minutes [after the incident]." (Faduma). Thus, visiting youth centres with the women, I observe how some of them stay to speak a bit longer with the youth they know, while others are engaged in games that are being played. If they come across young children outside at late hours, rather than strictly telling the child to go home, they curiously ask the child whether they are afraid to go home by themselves and offer to walk them home. Though expressing love and care for the community's children and youth through playfulness, does not dissipate the difference in power positions between parents/adults and children (the mothers are still perceived as mothers in their friendly non-disciplinary approach), the mothers' conscious methodology provides another meaning around safety and security.

Doing safety-work differently

From the women's work with safety, I propose that they provide insights on approach and practice of safety/security, different from that of the state and its representatives. And as exemplified by *Mammaupproret* (mentioned in the introduction) and their call for harsher punishments as means to ensure safety, these specific mothers I have engaged with, are demonstrating other ways. With a grounded approach, they allude to safety and security as connected to the community – having a community-based presence and coming to the suburbs. That is to say, solutions to issues of (in)security in policy suggestions and developments need to be reflective of the needs of the inhabitants, where the local issues expressed by inhabitants are taken seriously. The women's enactment of safety involves several transgressions of spatial boundaries; it is mothers' coming to the public spaces and also state representatives having to come "in" and try and understand the issues at hand. Moreover, it is a methodology of doing safety that is different from the state (who prioritises harder punishment responses). The state and the mothers (inhabitants of an area) have different role and responsibilities in contributing to community safety, in a literal sense. However, with the mothers' using care practices and opting for relationship-building over

surveillance and disciplinary approach to the community children and youth, they provide alternative options to security: what safety means and how it can be articulated for the benefits of communities.

Further, the women's methodology of community-centric safety-work has implications to perceptions of youth and the suburbs. Firstly, by showing youth and children care in ways not always readily available in normative safety-creation procedures, the mothers convey a particular description of the youth, as simply *youth*. This is a contrast to the dominant portrayal of this group as unapproachable, dangerous and unpredictable, in criminalising and dehumanising discourses. But as one of the mothers proposes, speaking to the youth and children will provide state authorities and the local government with solutions to the grievances. "Treat them as children, as youth, as humans, and you would find out.", Hodan advises. With the mothers' approach to safety-creation as grounded in human-based interactions and relations, particularly in areas associated with discourses of criminality and reproduced discursively and materially to convey a status of unlivability, they contribute to altering the understanding of their area and other racialised neighbourhoods.

Motherwork and transformations

Within the mothers' work, lies the potentiality of transformation of both the subject and place, from which action takes its inspiration. The mothers explicitly aim towards concrete spatial and social changes in their area, an approach to transformation shaped according to the women's affective and experiential relations with space. With power and domination infused into the geographies which form part of our daily realities (Soja 2010), actors, such as the mothers, attempt to change or amend the configurations of geographies of injustice. In this section, I examine how the mothers try to contribute to change and the transformational effects of their work. To do so, I first explore how the mothers engage with change through building bridges and mediating between different actors. Secondly, I provide an analysis of the mothers work as transformative and lastly, challenges that shape the conditions of their motherwork.

Building bridges, meditating relationships

The mothers reflect on change as a long-term process as well as developed through strategic and practical relations. One of the principal components of transformative work they have identified and engage in is building bridges and mediations between different actors, principally state representatives (the police and social services) and inhabitants (youth and other parents).

The mothers work involves collaboration with the police, field assistants, recreation leaders, other night patrollers and activist parents, as well as relevant staff from the city district, to coordinate the night patrols in the area. The collaboration between various actors is centred on sharing information and updates about the area. Nevertheless, the police hold a difficult status among the youth in marginalised neighbourhoods due to historical and continued nature of discriminatory policing: racial profiling, unfair treatment, violence, racism, etc. (Mulinari 2017). Mustafa Dikeç explains the hostile relationship between the police and surburban youth (focusing particularly on France's *banlieue*) as stemming from strong territorial stigmatisation and discriminatory practises (2007, p.148). In Sweden, the police killing of the 69-year old Lenine Relvas-Martin in Husby that ignited the 2013 riots in several places in the country, police controls on neighbourhood squares, the Reva project[13] (Megafonen, n.d.), and racial profiling not limited to residential neighbourhoods: at airports, while driving, at the tube stations, at clubs, are a few examples of the daily violence and microaggressions racialised persons experience in their encounter with the police (Mulinari 2017). From this history and context, the police are often seen as the visible representative of state violence and reprisal, creating a sore and difficult relationship between youth and police, reproduced by a mutual distrust between the two groups.

The mothers' relationship with the police is influenced by the understanding of the perception of the police in the community. Working within this reality, they attempt to reduce the gap between the youth and police. The mothers instruct the police on how to approach the youth, namely with softness and learning to speak with them, that is to say, by reading them as youth, rather than harmful and violent subjects. The police learning how to communicate also comprise how they show up in the community. From the mothers' perspective, this involve exchanging their presentations as symbols of state monopoly of violence to

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[13] Reva was a collaborative project between the Swedish Police, the Swedish Prison and Probation Service and the Swedish Migration Agency for effective deportations of undocumented persons (Mulinari 2017).

embedding themselves in the community through practice and persistent presence. On the other side of the relationship, the mothers try to show other aspects of the police to the youth, though they are aware that their collaborative relationship with the police can negatively affect their image in the community. Despite the difficulties involved in mediating relationships, particularly a strenuous relationship between the two groups and the mothers' critical view of the police's policing practices, the women underline the relevance of collaboration between state representatives and inhabitants for long-term and sustainable structural changes.

Additionally, the mothers' function as bridges between parents of Somali descent, the police, and social services. Maryam summarises the role of the mothers as following:

> We [the mothers] can make a difference. We want to reach the parents that need our help, because we want to build a bridge between the people and the authorities. Because we know many parents that feel that, "no one can help me; no one wants to help me. If I say something, they will take my children." No, that's not true. But if I was to get the opportunity to meet this group, these people, parents often, they would feel comfortable. They will talk about the problems they have [and] we can help them…So, we say that we must come in and build bridges, because they [parents] don't trust you. (Maryam)

The weakened trust towards state representatives, due to past experiences of their actions in the area and what Maryam alludes to, insufficient knowledge of the functions of different state authorities in relation to restricting the rights of individuals, shape some parents' perspectives, knowledge and experiences of these representatives. As a result, the mothers explain how parents were at first sceptical about the mothers' collaboration with the police. The police are perceived to take away younger children (together with the social services) and create issues for children and youth in public spaces. Thoughts and perceptions the mothers try to change, by depicting the police as channels, with whom they and other inhabitants can work with to enact change.

The work of the social services is another source of concern and is a role the mothers work to provide greater knowledge about. The social services are associated with taking children away from their families, which some of the mothers argue create broad shared anxieties among the families they are in contact with, anxieties exacerbated with insufficient available information to address and possibly shift sentiments of worry. The mothers particularly point at the invisibility of the social services in their area and other suburbs close to them. They experience that there is a need for the social services and social workers to be more physically present in the neighbourhoods and convey accurate knowledge of the nature of their jobs, particularly around the process that results in children being removed from their

family homes. For without a proximity to inhabitants in the suburbs, the mothers are often placed in positions to educate and correct misinterpreted information about the social services. To which Sahra expresses: "It feels like that we the staff working in the schools, day cares, we must be their representatives. We must say, "…they are not like that. They don't just come to take your children. You can speak [to them]"".

Working to reduce the experience of alienation from the state and connect actors strained from each other due to the changing nature of the welfare state and the historical and current stigmatisation of the suburbs, the mothers occupy the position of mediators between the state and citizens. Precisely, the mothers describe their mediation as "making things easier for both the Swedish society and specifically, these children and youth [living in the suburbs]" (Hodan). They provide in their practical work fuller and complex understandings of the youth and their grievances, as well as the functions of relevant state authorities, knowledge that helps parents in particular understand their rights in relationship to service providers. Though the mothers recognise the significance of their work and roles, both socially and politically, they pinpoint decision-makers' failure in recognising the importance of mothers in the suburbs. The women reference not being invited a seat at the table at the city council to share their knowledge, even though their community-work is visible and known. Further, all the women refer to the unpaid nature of their work as not a hindrance to their activism; they will continue with their work with or without financial funds[14] from the local government. However, Faduma suggests that their unpaid work whilst other work to enhance community safety (for example by field assistants) is paid, insinuates a devaluation of their labour by the city district. A lack of interest in the politically transformative possibilities of their work, that suggests a depoliticisation of motherwork as naturalised, hence voluntary carework. The disacknowledgement of the women's work as politically significant by the local government, gestures to Linda Brent's "the last place they thought of"; the women are not assumed to be sources of insights on geographic experiences and possibilities. For who in the racial landscape that is Sweden would have thought of these mothers (of Somali descents) as producers of significant geographical knowledges? Too frequently, the mothers and other black women find their spatial (and other) knowledge cast as inadequate, insignificant or impossible.

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[14] The mothers' association group have membership fee, and mainly create an association budget from funds they receive from their members.

Practicing motherwork, transforming space

The practice of building bridges and relationships between the state and inhabitants as necessary for change is the women's understanding of how transformation of conditions of living in the area can take place. However, I suggest that their motherwork also offers reflections on transformation of space and practices of citizenship. These contemplations on transformations are explored below.

From the theorisation of black women's geographies by McKittrick (2006), transformation can be suggested to lie within the knowledge the women create about the suburbs, particularly the possibilities that exist as part of the space and also arise with intentional work. "Black women's geographies open up a meaningful way to approach both the power and possibilities of geographic inquiry.", McKittrick argues (2006, p.xii). The suburbs are an effect of geographic domination, where racialised subjects (descendants of slavery, colonialism and its legacies in the contemporary) are seemingly condemned to physical degradation of the built environment and with limited distributed life chances, articulated discursively, transmitted politically and to unavoidably materialise on bodies and psyches. The mothers constitute themselves as knowledgeable of their space (though their knowledge is often rendered incompetent, if even acknowledged), by outlining what exists beyond the symbolic representation of decay (framed as criminality, vulnerable spaces, dangerous, no-go zones etc.,). Their area, the women claim, is filled with life, living, conviviality and depict a formula for living with difference, though I am less optimistic about the neoliberal state and its interest in difference, beyond consumption and reinforcing fixed ideas of (cultural) differences. The mothers offer a suggestion to physical geographic transformation by putting the body to work to evoke safety creatively and in a different way than the state. Through pragmaticism and conscious strategies, they build relationships and bring attention to the configuration of change as multirelational. In addition to that, they propose a symbolic transformation of the suburb in the other knowledges they provide of the space and its occupants. These are ideas about alternative justice and community-centric futurities of the suburbs, where creativity of conducting life and community is possible, even within structures of domination.

In their transformative work of the spatial exists an observation about agency. Transformation necessitates an agentic subject. But how is agency articulated here? Both Lila Abu-Lughod (1990) and Sirma Bilge (2010) have argued that agency should not solely be seen as resistance, a position against the romanticisation of resistance. Bilge from her

theoretical positions: "an intersectional approach to agency, informed by the poststructuralist deconstruction of the humanist subject", offers a consideration of agency, where there is a focus on the specific contexts and social formations from which agency develops (2010, p.23). Bilge's context of agency shares similitude with Abu-Lughod's Foucauldian reading of resistance as "a diagnostic of power" (1990, p.42). Resistance as a diagnostic of power provides indication of some of the ways power is exercised in relation to specific subject groups and relevant for us, within space. Some of the mothers' arena for resistance include defiance against institutions and individuals who blame the mothers for the deadly violence in the suburbs[15], on the basis of gendered responsibility for children and racialised and classed constructions of "migrant women". Power is exercised (on various levels) to inscribe gender-sexual (and racial) grid responsibility to the subject position of mothers, which the women embrace in their recognition and uptake of the responsibility, while resisting, not necessarily the responsibility per se, but the liability of failure. For the mothers, the issues of the suburbs can be traced in failing social structures and systems. Furthermore, the mothers' resistance include an inversion of policing, which not only reveals the operations of power, in those instances where "power is [just] power" (Farrokhzad 2019, p.31, my translation), but also the subtilities of power which allows for the dehumanisation of the people in the suburbs (as suggested by the fact that state representatives and media never really approach or consult the inhabitants about their realities and experiences).The mothers respond against the dehumanisation with care and by affirming the identities of particularly children and youth. Nevertheless, what I find most interesting in the mothers' transformative work is the parameters of agency as not merely resistance but an expansion that comprises strategies and pragmatism (with actors who are often seen as "possessor" of (transient) power) to create the ideal conditions for *real* transformation within space. A form of hyperrealism of infusing hope without disconnecting from the realities of racial geographies.

Practicing citizenship and more?

Beyond offering visions of transformation within space, the mothers' work around safety and mediating relationships assume something about the category of "black Muslim mothers", and other categories that are associated with the women, such as "migrant mothers". Though

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[15] This includes fathers, though intra-community and family tensions were not the focus of the women's narratives (affirming the women's exertion of control over their stories). However, I assume that the mention of some fathers blaming mothers for the deadly violence in the area is a possible source of antagonism that requires future exploration.

this form of community-activism can be analysed as shaping subjectivity, here, I am more interested in briefly teasing out the possible challenges of the understandings of the categories the women bridge. Bilge brings our attention to how the Muslim woman, "has been turned into an allegory for undesirable cultural difference", in her paradoxical portrayal as both victim of an oppressive culture/religion and their men, as well as, threats to the West and its modernity and cultural freedoms (2010, p.10). McKittrick on the other hand, accentuates the dispossession of black women as "their ontological existence is both denied and deniable" due to regimes of colonialism, Eurocentric intellectual systems, transatlantic slavery, racism-sexism, and patriarchy (2006, p.133). The forms of denial of existence and multiple forms of threat assigned to the subject positions the mothers occupy, are what I propose, justifications of their political, social, and economic exclusions and conditioned inclusions, which also comprise the boundaries of citizenship (see Erel 2011; Erel et al. 2018). Citizenship is one of the realms the mothers make clear their knowledgeable positions of physical and experiential geographies, though the specificities of the mothers and citizenship fall beyond the scope of this essay. The women contribute to the welfare of their neighbourhood and other citizens. In doing so, they do not only challenge the racialised limiting parameters of citizenship (Erel et al. 2018), they also reveal the limitation of the state's engagement with its citizens, and the specific matrix of domination that creates and facilitates this distance. (For it is after all poor and racialised citizens of the suburbs from which the state maintains distance that produce and reproduce their material status).

Furthermore, I want to suggest that the mothers' motherwork is more than practices of citizenship and identification of a distance between the state and inhabitants. Their work reveals the grey zone between the delivery of welfare by the state and civil society; the mothers are in fact providing significant aspects of welfare. In their safety-work, they engage in practices that ensure the safety of their community in ways that centres community well-being. They represent state authorities in realms they are perceived as lacking. By providing essential information about provision of social services and the role of social workers, the women facilitate other inhabitants' access to citizenship, particularly with information about aspects of rights and obligations embedded in the content of formal citizenship.

The women assuming the role of welfare providers leave us with questions about the state. Where is the state? Here, I argue that the women comment through their work about the status of a changing welfare state, where the centralism and social inclusion of social and welfare policies have been shifted towards "autonomy" and "responsibility" of the individual (Dahlstedt & Lozić 2017). Within this political context, where individualism is privileged

and promoted, the diminishing presence of the state is rendered sensible. Parallel to this (neoliberalising) development, is heightening social inequalities, "favouring the well off and skinning the already disadvantaged on the margins of the social welfare system." (Schierup et al. 2017, p.13). Thus, the women occupying the role of the state (and becoming *more* than citizens in their community-centric activities), communicate an ideal state-citizens relationship than what currently exists in the suburbs as a consequence of neoliberal politics (Schierup et al. 2017). That is, a relationship based on closeness (e.g., visibility of welfare services and investments reflected in the needs of inhabitants), willingness to understand the conditions of life in the suburbs, and a care approach where perception and sentiments of alienation and disregard for human life can possibly and potentially be altered.

Challenges to motherwork

Nevertheless, to discuss the transformative effect of motherwork demands a consideration of the challenges that motherwork comprise, both on collective and individual levels. On a collective level, the mothers identify practical challenges in building a sustainable and long-term transformative work; the most important thing for them is the lack of their own permanent space to organise from. The mothers describe a permanent space as necessary for the running of their operations, which include extracurricular activities and mothers-only events and avoiding the labour of constantly finding and re-installing their operations in new places. The mothers have been asking for a permanent place from the city district for years but are for now left with unfulfilled promises. A permanent own space also bears a symbol of legitimacy and professionality, from where the women can recruit other mothers. Faduma speaks to that: "We don't even have a place…and that's the least [we can get]. Because when we recruit other mothers, we have nowhere. We're just outside…but if we have a place…they would have known where we were based, but now we have nowhere. We are homeless." (Faduma). Faduma's mention of homelessness and another mother's response of "how does one move forward?" without a physical space both allude to a feeling of being stuck in place incited by a sense of being not in place. A lack of place forms part of the devaluation of their work and the effects it can bring about. A lack of place is as an additional burden on an already overburdened form of work, which unpaid community work is.

Apart from the practical demands of motherwork, it also a form of labour that involves several costs for those involved (Collins 1994 & 2000). Sahra reveals the burden of being a representative for several things: the suburb, the mothers of the suburbs, Muslim

mothers, particularly Somali mothers is one example of how motherwork can involve a cost of individual autonomy. Correspondingly, motherwork can invoke tensions between community work and other forms of labour: paid work, family life, educational work, etc., (Naples 1992). With all the women in the research having paid work, some combining their work with university studies and all engaged in unpaid community work, the demands these different but interconnected spheres of social life require are factors the women must constantly negotiate and shape the realities of their motherwork.

Yet, it is the expectations (from the community or elsewhere) on "strong" mothers that allow for a glorification of the mothers' community work, contributing to myths of the "strong black woman". The women attest to the cultural position mothers uphold culturally as strong leaders as facilitating the skewed responsibility mothers have in parenting. However, at the same time, the mothers' creative and practical approaches to mothering under oppressive structures is a recognition that mothers and motherhood can serve as a site to foster empowerment, self-reliance, independence, and the power of self-definition (Collins 2000, p.195,176). To this contradiction, Collins suggests of black motherhood to be both dynamic and dialectical (ibid.,176). Nevertheless, the image of the "strong mother", masks several power dynamics. Collins exemplifies how African-American women are glorified as mothers (particularly by U.S. black men), through claims of black women as "richly endowed with devotion, self-sacrifice, and unconditional love" (ibid.174). Like Collins, I believe that the seemingly positive image of black and other racialised mothers requires enormous labour to maintain and come at the cost of individual needs (ibid.). However, drawing from the mothers I have studied, I argue that the deification of these mothers helps maintain the unequal division of labour within the private sphere, on one hand. On the other hand, it disguises the reproduction of gendered inequality at the level of the local community; the mothers continue to contribute to important state-responsible sectors, where praise comes at most with words, and without proper compensation. It is a maintenance of the status-quo of racialised women sacrificing their bodies, needs, and interests, often unnoticed, to patch the permanent crevices of what once used to be a welfare state.

Conclusion

This essay has reflected on how motherwork is articulated in space to produce geographic knowledges and various forms of transformations. Motherwork as inherently spatial, provides understanding to the ways in which geographies matter in the practices of mothering. The mothers define motherwork through their community-based activities as public and collective. And with a motherwork shaped by and shaping their racialised neighbourhood, motherwork is indicated as political and transformative.

Theorising motherwork in relation to black women's geographies, provides a needed departure from the theoretical stagnation of the margins, and bringing the concerns of these mothers and other racialised migrant women and their challenges to dominant oppressive structures to the forefront. Through an understanding of the role of space, I have demonstrated how the mothers provide geographic knowledge about the suburbs, different from the discursive production of these spaces as inhabitable geographies as well as the inhabitants as outside the realm of humanity. Importantly, they evoke the suburbs as sites of life, humanness, and relationality. As the women exert themselves as actors and knowers of their area, I have also contended that they offer us another methodology of doing safety-work, differently from that of the state and other civil society initiatives who argue for increasingly severe punishments against gang-related criminality and violence, despite these different actors all claiming to want safer communities. Lastly, I demonstrated how the mothers envision transformation, as a long-term process that requires relationship building and mediation between state representatives and other citizens. In their work lies the transformative potential of space, along with the expansion of the parameters of citizenship.

Writing within the context of undertheorised work on motherwork in Sweden and centring migrant women, most importantly, Black Muslim mothers is to contribute to the theorisation of the lived experiences of a disregarded group and the analytical work on mothers and motherwork in relation to spatial issues. This study also advances work on the suburbs and black women's geographies, by taking space seriously and not as an additive dimension. Furthermore, it is importantly an interdisciplinary work in the possibilities available in the encounters of feminist studies, black feminist studies and human geography, which include how racialised migrant mothers generate significant geographic knowledges and challenge their various constructions as non-agentic Others. As an experimental work, it

also offers possibilities for future studies where other dimensions of motherwork in the suburbs are examined. This includes expanding the knowledge about other factors influencing the mothers' motherwork; motherwork of other social groups; more detailed knowledge about the role of social services and social workers within the neoliberalisation of welfare delivery; intra-community tensions and other challenges of motherwork.

The mothers leave us with important knowledges. Their work is a representation of the lacks in welfare service deliveries and state-citizen relationships in poor and racialised neighbourhoods. They also expand the space of imagination about the present reality and futures of the suburbs and racialised lives, in ways denied or rendered impossible in the current geographic status. Finally, in their recognition as agents (capable of) inciting social transformations, these mothers leave us with reflections around the resistance of subjects with marginalised identities. With a focus on the mothers' motherwork as a specifically (demanding) labour, little room is left to assign this group to either side of the binary, as either passive victims or heroes of limitless agentic capacities.

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