LUND UNIVERSITY

Visibly, invisible, I stick out, but I'm alone.

SOMALI WOMEN STUDENTS EXPERIENCE IN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS IN RELATION TO THEIR RACE, GENDER, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY.

Sara Yusuf Muse

Department of Social Sciences
Social Studies of Gender Msc
Major in Sociology
Supervisor: Professor Veronika Burcar Alm

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Abstract:

This research explores the experiences of Somali woman students, to gain an understanding on how the subgroup interacts within and around campus, in relation to their race, gender and cultural identity. This research aims to acknowledge the multiple barriers and factors which may aid or hinder their experiences. The findings allowed for thematic analysis. The study observed that the participants experienced racist and other oppressive encounters from both professors and other students through their lived experiences and autoethnographic components. The Somali women participants faced challenges like stereotype threat, microaggressions, and a sense of responsibility to represent their entire community. The study found that the lack of diversity among staff and lecturers affected their sense of belonging and career aspirations, and there was a distinction between the self-identification of the participants and their sense of belonging within spaces on campus. Six participants were interviewed, within the university campus, around Sweden which also included my own auto-ethnographical account of studying within the Swedish higher education system. This research overall opens the door on more analysis of the sub-group, which was significantly limited, within higher education research.

Keywords: narratives, young Somali women, Sweden, higher education, identity, autoethnography

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بسم ا’ الرحمن الرحيم

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Chapter One,

1.1 Introduction,

Young ‘people of migrant heritage constitute a growing proportion of urban youth today’ (Scuzzarello and Carlson, 2019. p.434). As this group reaches the ages of 'labour force entry…and civic participation', some people still see them as 'outsiders to the society in which they live' (Ibid. p. 434). The study examines questions of identity and the 'multiple ways in which these are constructed and negotiated' by young ethnic minorities. This research will use semi-structured interviews with young Somali women students studying in Sweden and analyse their experience in higher education and their social identity as 'Somalis'. Drawing upon, Black feminist thought practices, such as the use of intersectionality and the focus on the narrative experience.

This study aims to contextualise the specific social issues Somali young women students experience within the overlapping ethnic, gender, and cultural identity in Sweden. Ethnic minority students within the University often face a lack of accommodation, which can lead to self-isolation and non-belonging; examples of exclusions include but are not limited to not supplying 'halal' or Kosher food or basing events around alcohol consumption (Hopkins, 2011). A meaningful discussion is the impact of second-hand discrimination, where even though some individuals may not have experienced discrimination directly, collective trauma and experience of discrimination can still resonate, whether second-hand (being present) or being aware of the discrimination (after) (Scuzzarello and Carlson, 2019. p. 448).

The research addresses the overlapping of ethnic, gender and cultural identity; there is not one Somali woman experience but multiple. The sampled research participants are young Somali women students who study/studied at a Swedish higher educational institute (HEI). All the participants happened to be undergraduate students. The methods used consisted of semi-structured interviews and my own autoethnographic experiences as a Somali women student, completing my Master in Sweden.

The research questions for this study consist of:

Q. 1 The participant's experience of Somali culture and its effect or lack of on the student's educational experience.

Q. 2. How do Somali women's student's experience and identify themselves within and around the University campus? Do they experience discrimination and racism within and around the university campus? And in that case, how do they or in what way?

Q. 3. Somali women's student experience and identity within the University concerning their religion, gender, and ethnicity.

1.2 Thesis outline

The first chapter covers the introduction and aim. Following on, four more chapters are presented in this research. Chapter Two: Background and previous research to give a review of the literature covering issues related to the Somali community, and the Somali women student experience, such as the Somali migration to Sweden, Race and cultural identity, as well as POC (people of colour) students' experiences within University. Chapter three: methodology and Ethics, explains the research design and the specific methods used, as well as the ethical considerations of the research and how the study was conducted. Chapter four: Theoretical frameworks, how intersectionality and Black feminist thought were integral theories for this research. Chapter Five: Research findings, focused on discussing the research findings, specific themes and correlations and my own experiences through autoethnography, an analysis of the data results is given through thematic analysis. The final chapter concludes the research through a final discussion.

1.3 Aim

My research will build on second-generation immigrants' experience in higher education. The research aims to contribute to the literature concerning the belonging and identity of ethnic minority students within higher education. By offering a theoretical framework that accounts for the interplay of shared identities of the subgroup, in being Black, Muslim and a woman and the shared group dynamics between the socio-political environments that the subgroup lives in, in this case, Sweden. Drawn through qualitative data analysis of young Somali women studying and living within Sweden and my own auto-ethnographical account, in being a researcher-

within my participant group. The purpose of the study is to explore the participants' encounters with racism and prejudice by compiling their personal narratives and recollections, within and around the University campus. The research is framed within a transformative method (Mertens, 2021), which involves drawing awareness to the oppressive systems that are present within Swedish academia through research.

Chapter Two,

2.1 Background

This study examines the experience of young Somali women within the University campus, concerning their race, gender and cultural identity. It is important, however, to first identify the Somali population within Sweden and the diaspora that caused them to migrate.

The Somali 'Diaspora',

The term 'Diaspora' is derived 'from the Greek meaning 'to scatter'' (Abercrombie et al, 2006, p. 108). Diasporas both affect the host community/country and the experience of the migration group. By producing a considerable transformation of the 'migrant culture resulting in hybrid mixtures of tradition and innovation' (Abercrombie et al, 2006, p. 108). Although globalisation and the deregulation of labour markets and easiness of mobility have significantly increased the 'dispersion of human populations around the world' (Ibid p. 108).

Osman (2017) explains that mobility is an important aspect of Somali culture, 'from the pastoral nomads' who internally migrated to the 'seafaring adventure seekers', to those who migrated beyond colonial borders' (Osman, 2017, p. 39). Sweden has a 'sizeable Somali community', as of '2016', there were '95.960 people in Sweden', born themselves or parents born in Somalia, up from 57.753 in 2011 (SCB)'. The Somali population rose after the '2012' decision of easing requirements for family 'reunification' in Sweden, meaning Sweden together with Britain, hosts 'one of the largest Somali communities in Europe' (Scuzzarello and Carlson, 2019. p. 439). The Somali community in 'Sweden first arrived as asylum seekers in the 1990s following the collapse of Siad Barre's regime' (Scuzzarello and Carlson, 2019. p, 438).

Integration

The Somali population according to Osman (2017), may be physically distant but are still 'psychologically and emotionally' in 'their homeland'. Osman (2017, p. 78) study identified that the interviewees interacted with mainly other Somalis within their neighbourhoods, leading to slower integration within their host country and the far-out society. This is reflected by the 'myth of return', Osman (2017, p. 78) found that most of the community had the view that they

would one day return to their homeland. This wishes not to allow their permanent full integration into their host settled countries; 'Somali diasporas have remained intimately connected with their homeland' (Osman, 2017, p. 40). However, the younger Somalis in Sweden saw their social identity as 'Swedish', but they felt it was 'not validated by the majority of the society' (Scuzzarello and Carlson, 2019. p. 450). This will be an important issue that will be discussed with the research, their identity as Somali and Muslim, and how they deal with being constrained or supported by Higher education institutions and the wider society. Social identity concerning higher education is also influenced and impacted by the sociopolitical climate of the state, which is contextualised by status 'categories of identification' and 'integration policies' etc (p. 436). In Sweden, the dominant vocabulary' is invandrare (immigrant)' (Scuzzarello and Carlson, 2019. p. 437).

The Crisis of BAME (Black and minority ethnic) representation in higher education and policy such as multiculturalism within wider society often put on the ethnic minority group themselves, the burden of responsibility in integrating themselves within these spaces (Scuzzarello and Carlson, 2019. p. 451), which takes away the responsibility of the higher education institutions. This research will allow for the discussion of ethnic minority students not just being, 'passive objects' acted upon in higher education institutions (Walton et al, 2022, p. 10).

Gender and Religion,

The Somali population takes great pride in their adherence to strong Islamic values (Osman, 2017). In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, Muslims in Europe increasingly became targets of hostility and terrorism, which resulted in a shift towards prioritizing the host countries' "values" rather than embracing diverse cultures. This reactionary response fuelled Islamophobia and unjustly associated terrorism and extremism with the entire Muslim community (Dabydeen et al., 2007, p. 321).

The role of women and the concept of modesty in Islam have sparked debates within feminist discussions. Some perceive the hijab as inherently restrictive, while others view it as an empowering tool for self-worth and freedom (Hasan, 2018, p. 24). Reddie (2009) conducted interviews with numerous Black Muslim women who expressed that wearing the hijab and adopting modest attire was, in fact, liberating as it released them from the pressures of conforming to fashion trends and objectification in society (Reddie, 2009, p. 161). Similarly,

Johnson (2018) challenged the negative perception of Black Muslim women's clothing choices by employing Black feminist politics. The headscarf, often seen as something foreign in public spaces, became the subject of her auto-ethnographic approach (Johnsons, 2018, p. 1676). Her aim was to address intersectionality by focusing on the unique challenges faced by Muslim women of colour. Johnson (2018) discovered that individual identity was shaped and transformed within different environments, with the hijab representing just one aspect of a person's identity. The participants' identities experienced significant shifts in various contexts such as their homes, workplaces, and places of prayer (Johnson, 2018, p. 1677). In the workplace, Johnson (2018) found that the interviewed women felt more conspicuous and conscious of deviating from societal norms, as their bodies attracted external attention.

While Johnson's (2018) study explored the relationship between gender, religion, and physical spaces, it did not specifically focus on Somali participants. Given the significance of culture, understanding its influence becomes vital in my research. On the other hand, Oikonomidoy's (2007) study examined religious discrimination and the responses of students. Like Osman's findings (2017), Oikonomidoy revealed that the participants experienced vulnerability in their host country. Reddie (2009) explained that many Muslim students encountered racial and religious biases following the 9/11 attacks (p. 16). Oikonomidoy (2007) specifically discovered that Somali students faced religious discrimination, including intrusive questions about their head coverings and being unfairly labelled as "terrorists" in American public schools. However, these students actively resisted and thrived academically. While maintaining a strong connection to their cultural and religious heritage, the participants embraced a dual identity as both American and Somali, which was reflected in their choice of attire. Although not strictly conforming to traditional religious dress codes, many of the participants still opted to wear a headscarf (Oikonomidoy, 2007, p. 21).In conclusion, studies have shed light on the experiences of young Somali women, highlighting the impact of their race, gender, and cultural identity. Understanding the history of Somali migration to Sweden and the community's connection to their homeland is crucial in understanding their integration into Swedish society. Additionally, this research examines the complex intersections of Somali women students in higher education, particularly in the context of the current socio-political climate in Sweden. Therefore, it was important to recognise the role of religion and gender in their experience in higher education and society at large.

2.2 Previous research:

This thesis will explore the experiences and narratives of Somali women in Swedish academia regarding their experiences of discrimination in academic spaces. First, to understand the current debates and how they might seep into academia. Provided is a historical perspective on racism and racist history in Scandinavia and more specifically, Sweden.

The Scandinavian/Swedish context,

People of African heritage were still considered oddities in Scandinavia at the end of the nineteenth century (Weisbord, 1972, p. 472). When "William S. Brooks," a Black American, arrived in Gothenburg by ship in the 1890s, he was greeted by a "crowd of Swedes" who regarded him with "wonderment" and attention. Swedes typically focused their inquiries on his physical features, hair, and hands. (Weisbord, 1972, p. 473,). The 1970 article describes numerous instances of Black visitors and Scandinavian citizens being denied access, harassed on the street, and called racial slurs including the "N-word." (Weisbord, 1972, p. 477). Lappalainen (2005, p. 96). Brings up instances of "how stereotypes and racism towards Black people in Sweden were very much alive in the 1900s," such as in 1933 when Louis Armstrong visited Sweden, he was referred to as a "drunken gorilla", and his music demonstrated that "Apes do not have a language." (Andersson, 2016. p.7). Historically in Sweden during the 1970s, 'Black panther solidarity committees' were 'partly responsible for focusing Scandinavian attention on relations in the United States' (Weisbord, 1972, p. 472). The assumption of superiority, according to de los Reyes and Kamali, is a crucial factor in the development and perpetuation of "Swedishness" (Andersson, 2016. p.7)

Everything that has gone wrong is caused by migrants,

According to Weisbord (1972, p. 474), the population of each Scandinavian country is extraordinarily similar in terms of language, religion, culture, and history. For instance, after the "2008 financial crash," which had an impact on cultural pluralism and the racialized "other," increasing the decline of citizenship and social cohesion, blaming the "other" has become a dominant discourse within the public political debate across the European Union (Schieurup et al., 2018, p. 1838). "The problem of the colour line," which Du Bois (1903, p. 13) previously referred to as "the problem of the Twentieth Century," endures at the start of the twenty-first century, is identical with "culture." Its distinguishing characteristics of "colour, bone, and hair"

now function as (largely) undetectable but equally important subscripts" (Schieurup et al., 2018, p. 1840). According to Schieurup et al. (2018), "racial difference is still being biopolitically managed" through the "politics of outer and inner border control and securitization, counterinsurgency policies, urban segregation, and discriminatory social and labour market policies." The 'rapid rising of Sweden Democrats' (Schieurup et al., 2018, p. 1841) might be used to understand the so-called imagined 'threat' in Swedish discourse. They used the "Muslim Threat" to Sweden's social fabric as a justification to exclude undeserving "others" in their electoral campaign in 2010. In a situation where thousands of refugees were entering Sweden through the bridge and requesting asylum, one extreme example was when a Sweden Democrats (The Sweden Democrats is a right-wing political party in Sweden) municipal representative asked on "Facebook," "Can someone place themselves on the Oresund bridge with a machine gun" (Schieurup et al., 2018, p. 1843).

The rewording of 'race' into 'culture', is Sweden's way of distancing themselves from their crude racism in the past, "flagging overt biological signifiers of "race", and replacing them with a more covert racism communicated through subtler metaphors of "culture" (Schieurup et al., 2018, p. 1843). Arguing deserving 'natives' should be treated differently from what they perceive as 'culturally deviant foreigners' (Schieurup et al., 2018,p, 1843). The concept of 'race' in Sweden has, according to Schieureup et al. (2018), been "abolished in usage following the Second World War (Holocaust) and the 1960s (decolonisation and the U.S. civil rights movement". Although the term resurfaces now and then in public discourse, it is often unspoken. However, the concept has become an ongoing issue with the racialisation of refugees and migrants in mainstream politics. (Schieurup et al, 2018, p, 1842).

The issue also affects Sweden's segregation problem. Vulnerable areas where immigrant groups are placed or houses are highly disadvantaged. These clusters of 'disadvantaged areas" are populated mainly by 'migrants and post-migrant generations; the areas represent the growing distance of racialised inequality', a growing process of 'precarization' undermines the trust in agencies of the state, for example, political institutions and universities. (Schieurup et al, 2018). The tension is then increased through systematically 'embedded stigmatisation and discrimination' faced by the racialised youth, through the feeling of powerlessness. Institutions that should provide services and good for the community are then turned into institutions of surveillance and exclusion, which act as a driving force against trust-building and social integration (Schieurup et al., 2018, p 1847). The paper, although not explicitly focusing on it,

does consider 'class', as an important distinction through the term "place struggle". Place struggle revolves around "the shared collective- identity work of the inhabitants of marginalised neighbourhoods and comes to be expressed in a composite political agenda addressing problems of segregation, welfare retrenchment and deepening racialised class inequality' (Schieurup et al. p, 1848).

Swedish exceptionalism,

This thesis focuses on how the intersectional identity of Somali women students can provide a new point of view on the image of Swedish academia today. In 1970s Sweden, new policies came about that 'conceived in terms of "Equality, Partnership and Freedom of Choice", confidently rephrasing the revolutionary 1789 trinity into a credo of an inclusive welfare society: a particular Swedish "exceptionalism" (Schierup & Ålund, 2011). The law was designed to provide a right to citizenship for all, independently of factors such as 'ethnic identity and national origin', which included access to asylum and 'refugee reception' (Schierup & Ålund, 2011). However, a slow dismantling of Sweden's welfare system is hidden behind a 'smokescreen of "the refugees". Terms such as the "migration crisis" is a 'symptom' of deep-rotted inequalities and the 'crisis of solidarity' (Schierup and Ålund 2011, p, 1841). The term operated through the 'construction of racialised "others"– the Muslim, the Roma, the Black or the "Migrant" in general – threatening the nation and the people". (Schierup and Ålund 2011, p, 1841). The muting of the word 'race'/' racism' contributed to understanding Sweden/Nordic countries as anti-discriminatory people (Frawley, 2019, p, 120).

The institution and research within higher education,

Systemically embedded techniques of racial-ethnic discrimination can be seen as a representation of inequality regimes. Acker (2006) coined the concept of 'inequality regimes', which they define as "the configuration of inequality-producing practices and processes within particular organisations at particular times" (Acker, 2006, p. 11). Organisations, in this case, authoritative organisations, reproduce inequality "regimes through hierarchies and methods of control"; control is then 'created and recreated through interactions' and 'behaviours are covertly-overtly expressed' (Acker, 2006, p, 11). Organisations are a primary location of the 'ongoing creation of gendered and racialised class relations, locally, nationally, and globally'; Acker speaks on organisations as 'historically, geographically and politically located, and how their actions shape the structuring of unequal relations' (Acker, 2006, p. 109).

Spade (2015) reminds us that systemic issues cannot be solved through 'plausible deniability'. Meanwhile, Durkheim's sociological method emphasised that institutions can be approached as social facts and treating them as such may risk stabilising them. Evident in sociological theories of institutions, which often assume their stability (Ahmed, 2015, p.20). As Ahmed notes, once something like a university becomes an institution, it becomes a routine part of the background for those within it, with institutional talk often focused on "how we do things here" without questioning the automatic nature of those practices (Ahmed, 2015, p. 26). However, emerging topics like diversity and inclusion threaten the habitual nature of universities, causing trouble and discomfort. Ahmed (2015, p.26-27) suggests that diversity work often feels like "banging your head against a brick wall", with the very act of addressing issues within HEI revealing the habits and routines that are otherwise taken for granted. Ultimately, addressing systemic issues within institutions like universities requires more than just surface-level attempts at diversity and inclusion.

Ahmed's (2015) examination of the "intimacy of bodily and social space" sheds light on the concept of "stranger making" and its relationship to institutional spaces, particularly those that assume certain bodies as the norm (Ahmed, 2015, p. 3). This work is especially relevant to this thesis, which focuses on the experiences of Black Muslim women in higher education. Ahmed discusses her experiences of being made to feel like a stranger and not belonging in academic spaces, such as when a faculty member dismissed the discussion of race by stating that "race is too difficult to deal with" (Ibid p. 3). Ahmed challenges the notion that the lack of diversity in certain institutions is inevitable and asserts that the belief that racism is inevitable is how racism becomes inevitable (Ibid p. 3). For visibly ethnic minority students, being in higher education often means advocating diversity, embodying it simply by providing an institution of whiteness with colour. Leading to being perceived as the "race person", the one turned to when race becomes an issue, and can contribute to the perception of one's body as inherently political (Ahmed, 2015, p. 5). The very fact of 'your' existence can allow others not to turn up" (Ahmed 2015. p.5). However, there is a sense of community and hope within the institution. Ethnic minority students recognise each other as "strangers to the institution and find in that engagement a bond" (Ahmed 2015. p.5).

Ahmed's study also focused on the issue of doing research with her own experience in working within higher education institutions; she realised how "the presumption of our criticality can be a way of protecting ourselves from complicity", how institutional spaces can mean not

critiquing oneself (Ahmed 2015. p.5). The research entails going over my experience within Swedish HEI; Ahmed says, "The university reappears when you see it from the viewpoint of a stranger, as someone who is looking 'at' rather than 'from' its environment" (Ahmed 2015. p.10). "In writing from and about my involvement, I am both an insider and outsider to the world to the world I am describing" (Ahmed 2015. p12). Therefore, ethnographers' task is to 'participate in worlds they also observe' (Ahmed 2015. p.7). Overall, Ahmed's work on the intimacy of bodily and social space and the impact of institutional norms on marginalised bodies provides valuable insights into the experiences of Black Muslim women in higher education.

Conclusion,

The literature reveals that aspects of identity such as race, culture, and gender are important in examining the individual experience of young Somali women in higher education. The effect of diaspora and globalisation has led to the adaptation of a dual identity by the second-generation Somali population within Europe, and more specifically, Sweden (Falzon, 2009). Research on gendered islamophobia and POC experiences within higher education is available, but little attention has been given to the intersectionality of these identities concerning Somali women students. As Ahmed (2015) notes, feminism 'of colour provides us with ways of thinning through power in terms of "intersectionality" to think about and through the points at which power relations meet" (p. 14). Phoenix (2011) examined the experiences of young Muslim women and identified the generational gap between Somali youth and their parents, while Johnson (2018) explored the implications of being visibly Muslim in higher education. Alienation is a crucial aspect that affects and widens the attainment gap between POC students and their white peers. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the experiences of Somali women students within higher education institutions and their interactions with the University. Further research in this area is needed to address the issues and quarrels faced by the subgroup; within past literature, the focus has often been on secondary school Somali students', which needs more understanding of Somali students' path within the University higher education system. The literature review draws attention to the need for studies examining the intersection between the distinct aspects of my chosen demographic, which my study will examine.

Chapter 3: Methodology

The study has drawn from semi-structured interviews of young Somali women students in Sweden; the data was collected through recording and focused on common themes and differences, the cohort was young women students of Somali descent, ages 18-29, being of the second generation, which was to keep the research cohesive, as first-generation immigrants often face much more difficult circumstances such as citizenship and language barrier.

1. Narrative as dialogue

Narrative as dialogue is a fundamental concept in Black feminist thought that refers to the use of storytelling and conversation by Black women to express their knowledge and experiences (Collins, 2000), which was essential for this research because it provided an opportunity for the participant's perspectives to be acknowledged in conversations that are frequently dominated by white, male, and middle-class viewpoints (Spelman, 1988; hooks, 1994). Through the sharing of their distinct experiences, the participants challenged existing narratives and generated new knowledge. The concept of narrative as dialogue additionally underscores the significance of communal and collective knowledge, acknowledging that knowledge is formed by social and cultural contexts (hooks, 1994). The method was applied in the research project through the narrative analysis of the participant's experiences within the academic environment, through their own words and experience, which they talked through within the semi-structured interviews. In summary, narrative as dialogue highlights the necessity of diverse perspectives in academic and social discussions.

2. Discussion of the sources

The research also included the use of 'auto-ethnography', which allowed for reflection in going through the project but also to bridge differences, 'Auto/ethnography is like a bridge on my body, marked in words and scripts that tell stories and secrets in invisible ink only I can see' (Boylorn, 2014. p. 313). The use of this as a method allowed for the discussion of sensitive topics and the valuing of 'lived experience as data'. This allowed me to be 'fully conscious as a writer and participant' in the narrative of the study and speak to and from both the 'margins and hyphens of subjective experience' (Boylorn, 2014. p. 316). My experience as a student in

Swedish higher institutions will be reflected upon when conducting this research. Engaging in auto-ethnography will allow new insights into the 'possibilities of bridging backwards to make sense and make meaning from difficult, painful, and complicated experiences' (Boylorn, 2014. p. 316). How I, as a student, have influenced high education spaces but also how they have influenced me in either providing security and a sense of belonging or instigating discomfort and prejudice (Boylorn, 2014. p. 316). Johnson (2018) also used a form of auto-ethnography, using "us' and 'we' to situate' herself 'within the grouping. Challenging the distance 'between the disembodied researcher and the embodied research object' (Johnsons, 2018, p. 1676).

In this sense, I am an outsider within (Collins, 1986), to discuss my own experience and have a dialogue with my findings but also how I understand and approach my experience from the outside. Minority experiences are often left unsaid under a lock of misunderstanding and discomfort (Boylorn, 2014. p. 317). Our stories, 'embodied and embedded within', are opportunities to learn about ourselves and each other (Boylorn, 2014, p.325). I am aware that my positionality can impact the results of this research product, but an essential aspect of researching vulnerable groups such as ethnic minorities is comfortability. 'Outsider roles' pose limitations to studies; for example, Scuzzarello and Carlson (2019) found that most of their participants, who were from the Somali diaspora, "were reluctant to discuss issues of discrimination and racism" faced in Sweden and the UK. Being part of the participant group by having a shared identity, such as gender and race, would have hopefully helped the participants to feel more at ease in the interview stage of my research (Scuzzarello and Carlson, 2019. p. 441). Issues such as 'cultural misconduct' and 'stereotyping' also prompted fear in Black women in research findings to, for example, giving incorrect names etc. (Green et al., 2003). Similarly, 'most social science research in communities' of colour is 'structures on deficit models and Eurocentric values, perspectives and concepts of knowledge construction' (Boylorn, 2014, p. 4: Campbell et al, 2021; Summerville et al. 2021)

Fixed stereotypes of Black women harm their place in society (Green et al., 2003; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1994). So, within my research, I aimed to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or presenting a simplistic view of Black womanhood. Instead, I focused on valuing the participants' experiences and perspectives, considering them as partial and situated interpretations of their social world; this was also the reasoning behind capitalising the B in 'Black'; this was to situate their experiences as essential and taking back of their identity. According to recent developments in academic and media contexts, the capitalisation of

"Black" when referring to people or communities of African descent is becoming more widely adopted (Davidson, 2020; The Associated Press, 2020; National Association of Black Journalists, 2020). This shift reflects a recognition of the distinct experiences and histories of Black people, as well as a rejection of the use of "b-lack/blacks" as a term historically associated with negative connotations and racial stereotypes (Davidson, 2020).

3. Research methods

The adaptation of 'multiple methodologies' expanded the qualitative data collection. Triangulation allowed for an in-depth analysis (Natow, 2019, p. 4). Coppa and Sirirmesh (2013, p. 32) explain that using multiple methods increase the validity of the findings by seeking the convergence of multiple sources of empirical evidence. The research design was based on the qualitative approach following the methodological perspective of 'Interpretivist' (Habermas, 1972). Qualitative data focuses on 'people's feelings and thoughts', which Newby (2013) describes as valid only in 'terms of an individual's representation of reality'. Semi-structured interviews were used as the main method during the research process, to aid in the narrative analysis.

The researcher's race has raised concerns in recent papers concerning interviews. Mizock et al. (2011) found that sharing an identity with the research group allowed for a discussion through 'shared experience and understanding' and meaning making (p. 2). Similarly, Walton et al. (2022) acknowledged the hypocrisy of the insider/outsider debate, where often Black researchers are discouraged or told of accusations of bias if they interview Black participants. However, the same debate is not directed towards 'white researchers with white participants' (Mizock et al., 2011, p. 2). Individual interviews provided extensive value in yielding 'rich and meaningful data' in this research, ensuring that participants feel more 'safe and comfortable' during the interview process (Mizock et al., 2011, p.2).

Another potential ethical question that was specific to this research was the sensitivity of the participant's information; depending on their university major, it meant that participants could be found through their study major or university if they are the only Black women in the classroom; therefore, Universities were not mentioned within this research and participants names were anonymised, through pseudomonas (Walton et al., 2022). Similarly, Ahmed's (2015) research highlighted the need for safe spaces and anonymity in talking about

experiences. So, respondents do not feel obliged to speak in "happy talk" for fear of talking about their experiences and being punished by the university, faculty, or broader society (Ahmed, 2015, p. 10), which was one of the reasons for the anonymisation of the university name in my research. Anonymity also allowed for a non-threatening environment for the participants to feel safe to disclose their inner thoughts and feelings (Ahmed, 2015).

Following up with the Interpretivist (constructivist) paradigm, the study also included Autoethnography. Belbase et al. (2008, p. 88) defined it as comprising of three words: 'auto, ethno and graph, focusing on the 'textual representation of one's experiences. The form of auto-ethnography that will be used can be described as 'analytical autoethnography', which Anderson (2006) refers to as 'research in which the researcher is', "(1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in published texts, and (3) committed to developing theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena" (Anderson, 2006, p. 373). This method was appropriate for the research as it situated my own experience as a Somali woman accessing and going through-in the cultural and social context of higher education- studying and completing my master's in Sweden.

The sampling technique used to identify my participants was 'Purposive sampling' (Marshall, 1996). As factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity were crucial in this research, strategically picking participants gave the advantage of asking participants about their specific experiences in fitting the sampling framework needed (Marshall, 1996. p. 53). The data was collected by recording the interviews and my reflections as I went through them, this was the process of auto-ethnography, not as a primary source of data, but as a perspective for data interpretation.

The data were analysed through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a valuable method for Black feminist research as it helps researchers deeply explore and understand Black women's experiences historically marginalised in research and society (Collins, 2022). The thematic analysis used involved identifying patterns and themes within the qualitative data collected which revealed themes related to experiences of oppression and resistance. The themes were divided through the structure of the interview itself; they were founded during the pilot study and analysis of what themes were critical to the women interviewed through the participant's help. The data was then analysed manually by chapter (the chapters were developed during the pilot study), due to the sensitivity of the information and the need for my reflections throughout the analysis. To ensure that Black feminist research is grounded in the experiences and

perspectives of the participants, the participants were involved in all parts of the study design, including data collection and analysis and sharing findings (Collins, 2022). It was also essential to consider intersectionality, recognising the multiple factors that shape Black women's experiences, such as race, gender, class etc within the analysis (Crenshaw, 1990). The use of thematic analysis helped explore these complex experiences from an intersectional perspective .

4. Ethical considerations

The insider/outsider debate in sociology centers the researcher's position concerning the research participants and the phenomenon being studied. Researchers who are part of the group being studied are referred to as insiders, while those who are not are known as outsiders (Walton et al, 2022). The debate centers on whether insiders or outsiders are better equipped to conduct research that accurately reflects the experiences and perspectives of the participants; proponents of insider research argue that they have a better understanding of the group and can access information that outsiders cannot, while proponents of outsider research argue that they can maintain objectivity and avoid potential biases. The debate stresses the significance of reflexivity and transparency in research, regardless of the researcher's position (Walton et al., 2022). Similarly, according to Farahani (2010), the insider/outsider debate cannot be easily distinguished because a researcher's personal history, including race, gender, and class, influences their approach to the field, despite efforts to keep "academic distance." This personal history shapes the researcher's interpretation of the material, affecting the research outcomes. To summarise, I am aware of my position as an outsider-within in this research. Which is why I focused on reflexivity throughout the process to give the participants a space of comfort and conversation, which has been quite labouring but also rewarding.

The idea of self-reflexivity in this research is consistent with the practices of feminist, queer, and postcolonial researchers in various fields. These researchers highlight the significance of contextualising research by engaging in critical reflection about how their positionalities and experiences shape the research questions they ask, the findings they obtain, and the way they interact with individuals they encounter during the research process (hooks, 1994; Haraway, 1988; Spivak, 1988).

5. Selection of participants

This study aimed to amplify the voices of Somali women within the geographical location of Sweden. By focusing specifically on Sweden, their lived experiences could be better understood in the political and social context of the country. Furthermore, the conditions imposed on Swedish universities and the connectedness of experience and bodily position within the institution. 5/7 of the participants also studied in predominantly white institutions in Sweden (PWI). The participants were recruited first through word of mouth, someone who knew someone and then through a shared social page meant for Black/African women in Sweden. (For the sake of the safety and privacy of the group, I will not share the name). As the participants themselves were situated in different localities and studied in different faculties within their universities, the experience of academia on the target group was therefore different but also comparative at the same time. One of the participants was a Black woman from a mixed background, which was to highlight the nature of my study in not just focusing primarily on Somali women students but also how the study could be referred to in the discussion of Black women's bodies in academia in Sweden and elsewhere.

The goal was to enlist participants with varying backgrounds and levels of education. Upon making initial contact, I apprised them of the study and their entitlement to take part, which was restated at the interview's outset. I conducted seven in-depth semi-structured interviews during March 2023; all interviews ranged from 40-60 minutes. Four were held face-to-face, and the other three were conducted via Zoom; this was also because of geographical location; The interviews were recorded and then transcribed a week later. This allowed for the additional analyses of emotion, for example noticing pauses, and silences after talking, w The interviews were followed up a month later to discuss how the participants felt about the interview and to discuss new thoughts and experiences they had. Some participants also evoked that the interview pushed them to think more deeply about situations they had not thought of before.

5b. Participants

This section presents a summary of the participants, the interviews have taken place all over Sweden from the north to the south. The ages of the participants also range from 19-24, and their study major (the specific universities are not named). *An important indication is that all the participants were studying for a bachelor's (Kandidat) degree.*

Pseudonyms	Study major	Age
Nasteexo	2nd year of Economics	22
Ubah	1st year of social work	23
Seynab	3rd year of Nursing	22
Munira	3rd year of Sociology	22
Layla	3rd year of PPE- (philosophy, politics and economy)	24
Lail	1st year of Development studies	19
Sumaya (Only participant that has lived outside of Sweden before, lived in Kenya for 6 years, before completing high school and starting studies here)	2nd year, Physics	23

Chapter 4

Theory,

The theoretical approach of this research will be based on intersectionality and 'Black feminist thought'; intersectionality focuses on 'the multiple forms of disadvantage compounded in Black women's lives based on their race, class and gender'; it should be noted that this research will also focus on 'religion' as a factor (Crenshaw, 1991). Similarly, 'Black feminist thought' (Collins, 1989) situates the 'oppression that Black women experience', which will allow for the articulation of a 'conscious that already exists', intentionally centring 'Black women's identities' (Walton et al., 2022, p.5). An important distinction that aided the narrative analysis of the participants in the discussion section of this thesis.

Black feminist thought and intersectionality,

McClaurin defined Black feminist thought (BTF) as: "An embodied, positioned, ideological standpoint perspective that holds Black women's experiences of simultaneous and multiple oppressions as the epistemological and theoretical basis of a 'pragmatic activism' directed at combating those personal, individual and structural and local and global forces that pose harm to Black (in the widest geopolitical sense) women's wellbeing". (McClaurin, 2001, p.63) The life stories, perspectives, autoethnography, and narratives compiled in this thesis have transformative qualities in and of themselves. Moreover, incorporating this practice can serve as an effective means of participating in collaborative ethnographic knowledge production, which can potentially induce transformation (McClaurin, 2001, p. 64).

BFT's primary goal is to challenge the dominant paradigms that have historically marginalised the experiences and knowledge of Black women and to draw attention to how multiple forms of oppression (Collins, 2000). Central to Black feminist thought is the concept of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), which recognises the complex interplay between various systems of oppression that impact Black women, such as racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism (Collins, 2000). It also acknowledges the unique experiences of Black women, which have often been overlooked in feminist and anti-racist discourses. An essential contribution of Black feminist thought is its emphasis on standpoint epistemology (Collins, 2000), which asserts that knowledge and understanding are shaped by the social and historical

context in which they are produced, which means that the experiences and perspectives of Black women are valuable and necessary for understanding the world and cannot be reduced to generic categories of "women", etc. By centring the experiences and perspectives of Black women, Black feminist thought offers a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of feminism and social justice. In summary, Black feminist thought provides a critical lens for analysing how power and oppression operate in society, emphasising the importance of centring the experiences and perspectives of marginalised groups, particularly Black women, in social and political discourse.

Marginalised bodies as "other",

This thesis is inspired by Ahmed's (2009) idea that women of colour represent diversity in predominantly white spaces. According to Ahmed (2009), women of colour are expected to embody their assumed categories, serving as evidence of the room's "multicultural" and "diverse" nature (p, 44-46). However, when one raises concerns about structural and institutional racism in these spaces, their diverse body is often used against them. Ahmed suggests that the emphasis on "diversity" is a form of branding and marketing that creates the illusion of a less white university without challenging the prevailing whiteness of academic spaces. (Ahmed, 2009. p,41-46). Similarly, Adenji's (2010) study explored the issues faced by Black academic women in Sweden; they found that issues of identity, discrimination and representation were faced from a lack of support from the institutions to a lack of understanding or recognition regarding discrimination. These issues, both Adenji and Ahmed, address the challenge of inclusion and the lack of diversity in academia. Although this study does not discuss employment after graduation, Di Stasio and Larsen (2020) found that issues that Black women faced in Sweden universities, such as stereotyping, exclusion, and invisibility, followed onto their employment, where they faced a lack of diversity and discrimination in entering the labour market.

The fundamental aspect of "othering" found in all the research mentioned concluded that an intersectional approach was needed to understand and combat Black women's issues in Swedish academia. The " othering " aspect was also prevalent in research on Muslim women students and the veil (Johnsons, 2018). Their research explored the 'intersectional experiences' of Muslim women, which focused not only on the university but on various contexts such as public and workspaces. It considers how gender, class and ethnicity interact and impact the experience of religious freedom and access to spaces. They concluded that Muslim women

faced multiple barriers, including gendered stereotypes influenced by islamophobia and racism, which limited their opportunities in the labour market and educational spaces. It highlighted the importance of religious freedom and the protection of their identity (Johnsons, 2018).

Studies such as (Oikonomidoy, 2007; Scuzzarello and Carlson, 2019). Tied in the specific experience of Somali women and the negotiation of their identities; gender, race, ethnicity (in being part of the Somali community), religion and being part of the diaspora in the context of the broader society, but also the transnational Somali community (USA, UK and Sweden). They emphasise the need to understand the complex identities and the barriers to participation but also recognise the push against the Somali women themselves. Participation and challenging stereotypes were the overlapping themes within most past research in empowering the communities and moving towards recognising issues faced.

Belonging and the institution, issues of race and class,

hooks (1994) argues that the academy can offer possibilities for growth yet also presents obstacles for "other" bodies. Despite limitations, she argues that the classroom remains where freedom can be pursued through collective imagination and an open mind, which is what education as a practice of freedom is. However, academia categorises bodies, positioning some as belonging and others as out of place. The meritocracy system, based on individual merits such as education, skills, and abilities, disregards factors like race, gender, and class, resulting in inequality and injustice (Wolgast and Wolgast, 2021). Often leaving disadvantaged individuals feeling out of place and struggling to achieve the same opportunities as others, as mentioned in previous research. Academia also conditions those who enter; Based on these arguments, a Black woman should be the subject of research rather than the one conducting the research.

Access to academic spaces is linked to class, with people becoming classified in a social status hierarchy based on appearance, speech, and behaviour. Wolgast and Wolgast (2021) argue that a person's socioeconomic status can indicate competence and racialised characteristics can activate stereotypes about competence (language, slang, clothing etc.). Middle-class bodies can present themselves as more respectable, while working-class bodies are judged differently, according to Skeggs (1997, 2004). Respectability and competence are indicators of a person's position and how they will be perceived, but academia upholds certain bodies as inhabitants and others as strangers. Black women's bodies become subversive when they occupy academic

spaces, as they do not fit into the dominant historical and contemporary bourgeois relations that generate the practices and knowledge in the academy.

When exploring matters of racism and discrimination, differentiating between individual acts of racism and institutional or structural racism can be difficult. Structural racism is ingrained in society's organisations, norms, and institutions, stemming from ideologies that justify discrimination (Fledderjohann et al, 2010). Even though the discriminatory effects of seemingly harmless practices may be unintentional and indirect, they still harm marginalised groups and individuals. Institutional and structural racism sustain oppression by neglecting to acknowledge how their supposedly impartial and non-political practices can result in harm and discrimination. To combat institutional racism, Fledderjohann et al (2010) suggests that individuals and institutions must collectively acknowledge and challenge these discriminatory patterns.

Yuval-Davis (2006) defines belonging as a process that "tends to be naturalised and becomes articulated and politicised only when it is threatened" (p. 197). The politics of belonging refer to political efforts that aim to establish a sense of belonging among specific groups while also shaping the nature of those groups. It is crucial to distinguish between belonging and the politics of belonging to conduct critical analyses of nationalism, racism, and other forms of belonging. Edenborg (2016) observes that Yuval-Davis's approach highlights the contested nature of boundary-making in forming communities, revealing power dynamics, domination patterns, and social inequalities. This approach enables us to investigate the construction of belonging and evaluate how individuals are positioned to participate in and challenge these discourses. Yuval-Davis (2006) stresses the importance of utilising an intersectional perspective to examine social contexts, acknowledging that the imagination of communities is influenced by factors such as experiences, social position, and resources. Different people imagine communities differently, and not everyone is equally affected by these imaginings or has the power to determine their placement within imagined boundaries. Black individuals are acutely aware of their difference from predominantly White individuals in the same space. They are shaping their experience of space, which is not just an abstract concept but a lived and embodied one that engages their emotions, body, and mind. Space is not static, but influenced by culture and history, making it essential to note how Black women in academic spaces are impacted by the social and historical context, which can affect their bodies, mind, and emotions (Ahmed, 2015; 2006).

A process that is directly related to spaces of belonging, the 'stranger other" is essential in defining the spaces of belonging. Places of the community relies on the "us" and "them" dynamic; Ahmed (2015) notes that the discourse of the "stranger" is central in the discussion of what belonging is. Stereotyping of the "Other" or other results in them being portrayed as a spectacle with a set of limited, naturalised, and essentialised characteristics that differentiate them from the rest of the community (Hall, 1997). Such characteristics may trigger fear, desire, and fetishisation (Laskar, 2015). The "colonial gaze" is an instance of this, where the colonised Other is sexualised and exoticised, allowing the viewer to purify their identity by not being the colonised Other (McClintock, 1995). This symbolic purification through projecting difference and disorder onto the outside world (Butler & Spivak, 2010) not only reinforces the boundaries between inside and outside but also reinforces the concept of a stable Self-defined by notions of alterity.

Who are you? Racialisation, space and body,

In Western European societies, minorities are often labelled as second, third, or fourth generation immigrants, revealing how migration is racially assigned to non-white bodies and creating a feeling of never genuinely belonging (Tudor, 2017). Molina (2005) contends that "racialisation" (Rasifiering in Swedish) signifies action, process, and creation, implying that it is something actively accomplished (2005, p. 96). According to Molina (2005), neither "race" nor "racism" possesses any intrinsic ontological importance without considering the practices and norms that convert racial ideas into efficient and seemingly natural tools for distinguishing individuals and groups hierarchically.

Racialised others are positioned as "the outside of the inside," stabilising the internal notions of normalcy and emphasising belonging (Collins, 2022, p. 77). Molina (2005) argues that racialisation functions in two ways: societal racialisation involves hierarchies based on race, while individual racialisation occurs within a society where race is a constitutive element of social institutions, norms, and everyday life. Gilmore (2007) suggests that this process dehumanises people and produces racial categories. Furthermore, Weheliye (2014, p.3) contends that race, racialisation, and racial identities are ongoing political relations that require constant perpetuation through various means to exclude non-white individuals from the category of the human as performed in the modern West. Thus, racialisation analysis can help us understand how historically specific and contextual notions of race are connected to boundary-making processes and corresponding normative intelligibility grids. The persistent

existence of racialisation and racist ideologies in Western-European countries, as evidenced by the continuity from colonial racism to biological racism and contemporary cultural racism, underscores how deeply entrenched these processes are in social organisation. This justification has been used to justify domestic and colonial exploitation, as discussed by (Weheliye, 2014; Gilmore, 2007; Scuzzarello & Carlson, 2019). It legitimises the portrayal of migration from non-Western countries as a threat to Western societies and culture, including the notion of failed multiculturalism (Scuzzarello & Carlson, 2019). El-Tayeb (2011) argues that religion, particularly Islam, is closely intertwined with the process of racialisation and becomes an ethnocultural identifier instead of solely a religious one. According to El-Tayeb (2011), race and religion function as central but invisible factors in European concepts of identity. According to postcolonial scholars, the notion of whiteness as the normative standard for humanity has been constructed and sustained through objectification via binary thinking, whereby the meaning of each term is derived only concerning its opposite (Collins, 2022). If "whiteness" (Ahmed, 2007, p.159) is the norm, then to be non-white is to be nonhuman. Ahmed's (2007) "Phenomenology of Whiteness" provides an understanding of the conceptualisation of the 'body'; she describes whiteness as "an ongoing and unfinished history, which orientates bodies in specific directions, affecting how they 'take up' space" (Ahmed, 2007, p.159). Within the institutions, those who cannot fit into 'whiteness' become 'bodies out of space'; they stick out in those spaces (Ahmed, 2007).

Chapter 5

Data Chapter,

The interviews provided a dialogue into the experiences of Somali women students studying in Sweden; the transcripts from the interviews have been analysed, and four key themes have been drawn out. The four key themes include The Somali 'culture' and its effect or lack of in their educational experience, engagement such as the fulfilment and the need for relatability, discrimination, and racism: within and around the university campus and experience and identity within the university. These Key aspects provided a baseline for understanding and engaging with the differences and similarities of the participant's experiences, which allowed for an in-depth account of the lives and experiences of the subgroup within higher education in Sweden, as narrative analysis. The focus was on second-generation Somali women students. An added analysis is on Lail (a Black women student), the participant who was interviewed to show how Somali women students share similar experiences as a Black women student—opening the discussion on how Somali women's experiences can overlap with Black women students' experiences.

1. The Somali ‘culture’ and its effect or lack of in participants' educational experience

The participants all had their own understanding of what Somali 'culture' is. However, in summary, they saw the culture as a 'community' that provides a sense of 'collectiveness' in food, music, clothing, and experience. To them, it was a 'way of life', a 'warm community'. Layla argued that the collectiveness of experience was pushed by the idea that 'if you are not a born Somali, you could never understand how it is to be a Somali'. In addition, the community provided them with a sense of belonging. *'Although I was born in Sweden, I would say I am Somali 100%' (Munira).*

> *'Whenever you see a person, you know the person looks Somali. It is like home,’ (Samira).*

> *'It is a community that will always help each other out, like if you are ever in need of help, much civic engagement, people care for each other' (Munira).*

To the participants, more specifically (Nasteexo) there is a contrast between the good and bad in being part of a strong-knit community. *'In some senses, I get treated nicely'* (Nasteexo). Her mum also influenced her experience of religion, *"My mum is very traditional in a way, her way of teaching me, I would say it comes with much guilt, for example, my mum does not like that I live with boys'*. Like Nasteexo's experience, my parents were hesitant when I first moved into a corridor room, but as I have grown older, they have become more respectful of my decisions. According to Collet (2007), being culturally Somali is also rooted in religion, 'Islam is a fundamental element of a Somali national identity' (Collet, 2007). Evident in the interviewers' narratives, religion was brought up by all six participants in relation to their identity. The participant's understanding of their culture was an important starting point in talking and opening the conversation on their own experience and how being part of the 'Somali culture' and sharing a religious identity 'Islam', shapes their everyday life.

Subject choice and influence,

With educational research, groups mostly follow their parents' educational trajectories (DuBois, 2001). Thus, a student's background influences subject choice and higher education. Although only one of the participants chose a subject directly related to what their parents considered *'proper education'*, all the participants highlighted the push towards higher education. *'They just wanted me to study; they did not care what I studied'* (Nasteexo). In addition, rhetoric pushed them from a young age, *'I have been influenced since I was a kid to do higher academic studies'* (Ubah). The push was also influenced by two of the participants' roles in their family, being a good older sibling's influence and being the first in their family to pursue university.

> *'I have always been an independent person, and being the older kid in the family, I was influenced' (Ubah)/'I am the first child too, of course, I need to have a proper job' (Seynab)/'no one in my family studied at university before me, so you like no girl in my family' (Munira).*

O'Shea (2020) examined the experience of first-in-family students; they argued they are more 'likely to experience a range of socio-economic, cultural, and academic 'barriers' that can impact their ability to transition to and succeed in higher education." (p. 96), which can impact their sense of belonging as they navigate what it means to be a successful student and navigate the boundaries and challenges that occur. However, challenges like these can be combated through support from the university and the community (family, friends, schooling etc).

"Although my family are immigrants, I was born in this country. I have not had many problems when it comes to my mum understanding my education in school. My mum could communicate with my teachers and did not need an interpreter and being a woman, has helped me stay away from troubles."
(Munira)

Studies have shown that social and cultural factors can significantly influence individuals' career choices. For example, Boo et al. (2022) found that college students' social influences, including family and peers, played a significant role in career decision-making. In addition, Gati et al. (1996) have also shown that cultural factors can impact individuals' career decision-making, with culture shaping values, beliefs, and expectations about work, career success, and career paths. Therefore, counsellors must recognize these cultural factors and their influence on career decision-making (Lent & Brown, 2013). However, Seynab was the only participant who followed her parents and the community's influence on degree choice.

"Everyone was very pushy, especially to become a doctor or something like that, and I am thinking, my God, did I choose something right for me, or should I have taken something else? " /Seynab.

Similarly, Layla debated a nursing degree before pursuing PPE (Philosophy, politics and economics), *'I mean the choice of going to like nursing school people around me influenced it because I saw a lot of Somali girls doing it'. To her, the security of nursing was enticing, 'you get a job, you get good pay, and you will be done after three years, and you don't have to worry about not getting a job'.* The sentiment reflects Sumaya hesitation in pursuing physics, *'as a typical African family, the options are more like doctor, engineer…my mum wanted me to do engineering*'. Ubah also emphasized her parents' push towards either *'medicine or social work*'. A struggle that is reinforced through the cultural understanding of specific career sectors being seen as *'valid'/' invalid'*.

In contrast, four participants emphasised their independence in their subject choice. The participants referenced the support of their parents in being '*chill*' or aiding their *'free will'* by choosing something they wanted to become. *'My mum has always told me to do whatever is fitting'* (Munira). Similarly, Layla was pushed to pursue her political interest through her father. *'My dad was the one that talked me out of it and said, "Hey, you should go with what you want to learn more about"'*. Mohamoud's (2011, p. 24) study of Somali parents found that 'high

expectations' were set for their children, similarly within this research. The emphasis on "*getting an education*" was also what I grew up with. Growing up in the West, education is a way to prove yourself in a country that is not ours. However, that also comes with the added pressure of succeeding. In turn, they have the negative impact of spiralling down; past research has found BME (Black and minority ethnic) students to be more "stressed" and "tired" in juggling their own needs and succeeding in education for their parents (Mohamoud, 2011). This pressure from the community and family was also illuminated by the political climate now. Seynab felt her time was now because of the future fear of the political climate in Sweden.

'I do not know if I have that privilege to study in the future, now politics, how it is in everything, are leaning to become more rights like extreme right' (Seynab)

Mohamoud's (2011) findings are further supported by research conducted by Hsiao (2016), who found that the pressures of academic success on Black, Minority, and Ethnic (BME) students led to increased stress and fatigue.

Moving out,

Turley's (2006) study discussed why some parents want their children to stay home for college instead of studying away from home. The author argues that this decision is influenced by the parent's socioeconomic status, cultural background, and educational values. For example, the study found that parents who value education but have limited resources often want their children to stay home to save money. Additionally, cultural values and family expectations can play a role in the decision, with some parents seeing it to maintain family harmony or as a sign of respect for tradition (Turley, 2006). Although none of the participants expressed that their parents would give them a direct "*no*" if they moved out, they saw that hesitation would occur. For example, Seynab was the only participant who did not move out for university,

"Thinking about now when getting older like I kind of cannot understand moving away, it is going to take a lot of economy, but also I am away from my family, I do not have my friends…that much support when I am more independent maybe, but now I just study at home because of my support system here." (Seynab)

Similarly, the worry was the emotion of Ubah's family, whom she talked about praying for her every day. "*My grandma prays for me daily for my safety and everything like that*." Nasteexo and Sumaya talked about their experience that it is uncommon in Somali culture for women to move away, especially from her parents. "*The one idea that every Somali parent has -- a girl living alone -- it is not it*" (translated from Somali) (Sumaya). Nasteexo recalled her mum saying, '*I would feel comfortable if you moved away either for studying or marriage*', if things aligned, Nasteexo recalls she would have studied in Scotland or Amsterdam. Asking for permission was a stressful process for both Nasteexo and Sumaya. This frustration Nasteexo recalls as reaching a point, "*I think I reached a point of ok, stop asking for permission and just do it, I am moving...she did not know I applied*". From my experience, my parents knew vaguely that I applied but only knew I had accepted a month before my move. Like Nasteexo, "*I was like, ok, so I am moving.*" Moving out was also a way for the participants to find themselves in university.

> *"I wanted to develop a new identity that did not involve the influence of my family " (Ubah) / "I wanted more independence.I got to be independent and choose what I wanted. If I mess up, I must deal with it" (Sumaya).*

Layla and Munira moved for the sake of their program. For Layla, her passion for the PPE program was what pushed her. Her mother disapproved:

> *'She was like, why don't you go to nursing school. I was like, I do not know if I want to do that. My dad, he was very supportive'/ For her mum, she just 'wanted to keep me close, as we have a good relationship…she just got lonely… I am her only daughter' (Layla).*

In summary, the pressures of academic success on BME students can be further understood through the lens of intersectionality and Black feminist thought. According to Crenshaw (1991), intersectionality theory recognizes that different forms of oppression intersect and interact, creating unique experiences of marginalization and discrimination. Culture, class and the participant's self-identity were important markers of their university experience. Mohamoud's (2011) and Turley's (2006) findings reinforce the need to understand the intersection of identity, in alignment with the principles of intersectionality and Black feminist thought (Collins, 1986).

2. Engagement such as the fulfilment and the need for relatability

Representation of minority groups in leadership roles is crucial for promoting diversity and inclusion in higher education (Patton et al., 2018). When asked if the participants see themselves represented in leadership roles within their university, having a role model or looking up to someone, all the participants first replied after a minute pause, hesitation before answering, *'not at all/no I do not*", a reflection on their *'very white department/'70 % white'*. '

> *'I was the only Black person in that class, in the department, maybe. And the only hijab, the majority, were white men'. (Munira)*

Similary, Ubah reflected on from 16, *'going to new places and seeing' that she was not represented 'in a way they should be'*. The only option being a token position for her was a sad realisation, a '*reality*' in how she is seen in those environments throughout her life growing up in Sweden'. Research suggests that having a sense of belonging and being recognised for one's identity can positively impact academic and career outcomes for minority students (Kenny et al., 2006). Nasteexo recalls having her first Black lecturer, a surprise, two years into her degree, that gave her a brief sense of passive representation, *'I just never expected it to happen, and then it did'.* Although she feels underrepresented within her gender identity, *'it is also a male dominated faculty*'. Similarly, Layla talked about her male-dominated department, she did not see herself within the faculty, but she did have a great experience with a one lecturer of hers, who provided her with mentorship during her study, '*I felt like he was a very good mentor…he was not what I expected him to be. He was even better'*. Similary for Munira, a lecturer who was knowledgeable about residential racism was a mentorship moment for her, '*It is also a given as a professor, but it is not a given that all teachers are aware of those points, I still like him'* (Munira, in a social welfare class). Feeling seen within the classroom, Sumaya related to as well. For the first time, one of her lecturers *'included her in class*'; the small act of learning everyone's names made her feel seen. She shared the experience of being a woman in a physics department from an ethnic minority background.

Seynab also talked about an impactful moment with one of her lecturers, which she argues helped her in her career trajectory. *'I had one lecture in which she expressed how I am scared and vulnerable she felt during her first years of becoming a nurse'*. Studies have shown that having role models who share one's identity can increase self-efficacy and motivation to pursue

similar paths (Bhopal, 2020). This is particularly true for students from underrepresented backgrounds, who may face additional challenges and barriers (Bhopal, 2020). The paper also identifies some challenges and barriers to mentoring, such as limited access to mentoring opportunities and the need for more diverse and inclusive mentoring schemes (Bhopal, 2020). *'I feel like I would learn more…right now I am hesitant to enter that field because I do not see role models, especially women, who look like me'* ، (Nasteexo). The lack of representation was also prevalent in her career choices; she walked into a bank and realised she did not belong there, *'I was like this is not the environment that I want to work in'*. (Nasteexo). The feeling of sticking out in career fields is a fear of mine also. Although Nasteexo explained that she would want to be the role model she never had, *'sometimes you get tired of having to pave the way, you just want the doors to unlock for you'.*

When discussing their plans for higher education, the group had a range of aspirations. Some, like Nasteexo and Ubah, were more practical, with Ubah stating, "*Not a PhD, no*". Seynab expressed a desire to pursue a PhD or become a lecturer someday but felt uncertain about the path forward, saying, *"For now, I do not know*". Munira shared that she also aspired to higher education but felt a need for more role models. She explained, "*Since I do not have any role models or mentors, I do not know how it would be for me to go into those types of roles, or have someone to ask, I feel a bit lost."* Layla shared that she was currently applying to pursue a Masters in human rights. Similarly, Sumaya echoed the sentiment that a master's was necessary for her desired career path. Despite the uncertainties and challenges, they faced, the group demonstrated a solid drive to set goals and make their aspirations a reality.

Engagement with activities,

Research has shown that participation in extracurricular activities can positively impact academic outcomes, such as GPA and retention rates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Participants in the study shared their experiences of finding community in university through shared identity. Being part of a group with similar identities also reduced feelings of exclusion and provided a sense of community.

> *'Most of the people come from a similar background. Which is positive' (Ubah)/ 'My friend and I founded an BME association, I am most engaged with that, (Nasteexo). / 'I was not really in university student life until joining the African association. I always feel comfortable with other Black people*

(Munira) ./ I tried to join the physics society. I feel like; it was primarily boys there. The African association was a place to have my own space… Connecting in that way is nice. I really love it. It made my university easier (Sumaya).

For some of the participants, this came through joining other POC and Muslim student associations, which provided a sense of belonging and comfort in shared experiences. Research has shown that individuals tend to form social networks with others who share their identity (Quaye et al., 2019).

I know there is like a prayer hall in our university, and having I see people like me pray' (Nasteexo and Seynab) or having a Black friend group 'if I go to a student nation party, I am not going to be the one person that sticks out… because a lot of them are white' (Nasteexo)/' I do not feel alone anymore, I did go to a few nations, and I would be the only Black girl in the room or the only hijabi before' (Munira),

Additionally, some individuals did not feel included in the party culture of their university and felt excluded as a non-drinker or persons of diversity. For Layla and Seynab, student life was not for them; they needed access to a community within their university. They both did not feel comfortable engaging in social activities like *'having a beer after an exam'/'drinking in a pub',* a culture they did not really fit into. Being a non-drinker, they felt excluded, Ubah's novice (novish) period was the toughest for her, "*I was the only person of diversity, but I also felt not seen since no one wanted to talk to me… I do not know if I just was very delusional and felt isolated or if it was the fact that I felt isolated".* Overall, the participant's answers suggest the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students in university settings. Studies have shown that involvement in ethnic-specific student organisations can enhance a sense of belonging and provide opportunities for cultural exploration (Museus, 2008). 'I think it saved my university experience' (Nasteexo). However, we both agreed that it is annoying that we had to create our own spaces to find a sense of belonging.

To be a minority is to be controversial, friendship circles,

The participants in the discussion expressed a need for friends who shared similar racial and ethnic backgrounds, as it provided a sense of belonging and a safe space to be themselves. This sentiment is like Tatum's observation that "racial identity is a source of strength and resilience,

particularly when it is affirmed by others who share that identity" (Tatum, 2017, p. 23). Whether unconsciously or not, all the participants expressed a need to have POC or more specifically Black friends, a decision Nasteexo notes being because she got *'tired of being the only one outside the group'*. Being seen as a representative of a vast community was also a fear of theirs, *'I think that is too much pressure and also, why do I have to do that in my friendship…sometimes the questions get too much'*. Munira felt 'calm' in her connection to the African association, *'this year I met a lot of Somali/Black people I would call my friends'*—a difference compared to her first two years of studies, where she felt disadvantaged in making friends.

Having an easier time with friendship circles was also Layla's view; she was growing older and wanted to be closer to her community; most of her friends she made were Somali in her university city, *'I grew up in a community where I did not have many friends, and I always wanted that, never had a sister growing up, I always felt like I wanted to get closer to my community…I think with age. I am 24; I chose to be closer to my Somali friends'.* Ubah and Seynab, in contrast, discuss that their choice of friendship groups was an unconscious decision,

> *'It is a very unconscious process really but for me making friends is a process… when I am with people with similar ethnicity, I click with them instantly' (Ubah)/ I do not choose, but indirectly majority are Black because I connect more to them' (Seynab).*

The Swedish friends that they both have also come from an 'immigrant background'. Making ethnically Swedish friends, they found a lot harder until they become *'comfortable*'. A lack of trust in being the *'only Black friend'.* For Sumaya, gender also played a part. She went to a girl's school her whole life, mirrored in her university friendship circles, with women she feels she can *'be 100% with them.*' The experiences shared by the participants in the unconscious nature of the participant's decision to form friendships with people of similar ethnic backgrounds is also discussed in Tatum's book, as she notes that "our racial and ethnic identity influences our social networks in ways that are often not conscious" (Tatum, 2017, p. 26). The participants also shared their experiences of being the only person of colour in their friendship groups, which can be emotionally and mentally exhausting. A common experience among people of colour, Tatum notes that it can lead to feelings of isolation and invisibility (Tatum, 2017, p. 33). Furthermore, the participants expressed a desire for friendships free of the burden of being a representative of their racial or ethnic group. Tatum notes that "the pressure of representing

one's race can be overwhelming" (Tatum, 2017, p. 37), and the participants' experiences highlight this point.

In summary, the participants shared their experiences of being the only Black person, the only hijabi, or the only woman of colour in their classes or departments. These experiences reflect the intersection of their racial and religious identities and how it affects their access to representation and mentorship in academia. Intersectionality theory suggests that individuals have multiple social identities, and these identities intersect to create unique experiences of oppression (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). This study highlights how the participants' identities as Black and Muslim women intersect to create specific challenges in navigating higher education. For example, they may face discrimination based on their race, gender, and cultural identity, which can impact their academic and career outcomes. Overall, the study emphasises the importance of recognizing and addressing the intersectional experiences of underrepresented groups in higher education.

3. Discrimination and racism; within and around the university campus,

Sue's (2010) "Microaggressions in Everyday Life" explored how subtle acts of discrimination, such as microaggressions, can impact people of marginalised identities (such as race, gender, and sexual orientation) in everyday interactions. Therefore, it was essential to understand the participant's first contact with their university as an institution. This part of the thesis also illustrates the complex experience of the Somali women participants, who face both individual and systematic challenges within higher education.

Beware the brochure,

The need for more diversity in participants' universities is a common issue faced by higher education institutions across the globe. A study by the European Commission found that European universities have a long way to go in diversifying their student and faculty populations (European Commission, 2018). While universities due, to some extent, reflect larger society, they are not always an accurate reflection of the surrounding community. *'A microcosm of mostly white students*' (Layla). Even the international students were more *'European or North African'*, and she struggled to fit in (Ubah). The struggle to fit in reflected their broader societal experience; '*the outside in Sweden was heavily ethnically segregated, so why wouldn't the university reflect that? Sadly, it is like a pattern in every class, and it is a*

pattern in the rest of society, too' (Seynab). Research has shown that segregation can adversely affect social interaction and integration (Sue 2010).

"*Catfish*" was what Nasteexo described her faculty; a falseness compared to her admission process; where were the *'POC students?' Or the 'other hijabis?*'. The *'diversity'* she was promised from the university website pictures. Her home city was a lot more diverse, and the small town she went to sharp change, "*everyone was white*". Ubah also felt incredibly out of place, walking into the lecture hall for the first time and being the only visible ethnic minority student. She did her own work finding and seeking other POC students—a frustrating process.

> *'It is very sad; I feel left out whenever I see there is group activities. I am the only one with an immigrant name. I thought I would be seeing a lot of like people of colour' (Seynab), a contrast to her dentistry programme before, where 1/3 were people of colour; now 10/100 are POC in her course. For Nasteexo, it was 3/115. Munira 1/110*

The lack of diversity within their faculty mirrored the course catalogue; with course material, the participants have different experiences and opinions about the diversity and inclusivity of their courses. Nasteexo expressed disappointment with the lack of diversity in their class, despite the course material focusing on outside Europe. "*Our course material focuses so much on outside Europe, but most of it is based in the EU, which my lecturers are more comfortable with. They could do more.*" They also felt that when the class discusses South America or Africa, they only talk about development, her first semester covered the topic of colonisation, and they had a South American instructor who would bring personal stories. But when it came to Africa and Asia, "*it was just Swedes*". Ubah acknowledges having had seminars on intersectionality with a Swedish professor who studies ethnic studies; However, the professor was Swedish herself and not an ethnic minority; Ubah felt better that the professor was aware of ethnic minority issues. Seynab discusses the importance of considering health issues from an intersectional perspective as a nurse. Sumaya felt that the course has focused more on gender disparities, not acknowledging race disparities at all. Munira approved her faculty's caution against thinking of themselves as "*white savior's*" but also believes that students should take the initiative to seek out non-Eurocentric viewpoints within her development class. Finally, Layla appreciates the one course that resonated with her,

"*In terms of relevance for ethnic minority students, I feel like the course material is lacking. I have only had one course that resonated with me in my three years. I went to the professor and told them, "You are doing a great job." They asked me why. I said, "I am turning 25, and you are the first person in that environment that has brought up something that I could identify with - Black philosophers, Black authors."*

However, they also expressed sadness that it took three years to encounter that kind of representation. Overall, the participants have different experiences and opinions about the inclusivity of their courses, with some expressing disappointment and others acknowledging areas of improvement.

For Layla and Munira, their first two years were swallowed by the pandemic, but that did not mean they were exempt from the feeling of being isolated, *'my first contact was through Zoom, and I remember everyone having their cameras on, and I was the only Black girl, and the only like visibly Muslim in a class of like 110 people, it was not a good first impression'*. Being Black and visibly Muslim and coming from a bigger diverse city was a sharp contrast. However, Layla, from a small town, expressed excitement*, 'You see all types of people… I would even claim it is more immigrants than white Swedes. It is a very diverse university'.* In all the participant's experiences, whether their university city/district or hometown was diverse or not diverse, they still faced ***'vardagsrasism' (everyday racism).*** An expression-less violent than their '*high school experience'* but still very prevalent (Layla). Essed's (1991) "Understanding Everyday Racism" provides an interdisciplinary theory for understanding racism in everyday life. The book argues that racism is not just an individual problem but is also deeply embedded in social structures and institutions. Therefore, much work must be done to achieve diversity and integration in higher education and society.

"Every person of colour has a story about their experience…one of the teachers was really sour against me. I do not know why; I was like 12 " (Seynab)

Although the participants themselves went to university and studied, they noticed the pattern that going to university was *'not a given'*; for students who looked like them, *'it is also like the space is not made for you*' (Munira). One of my interests in conducting this research was why

the university is seen as less inaccessible in Sweden for ethnic minority youth, while tuition fees are free for all EU/EUAA and national citizens in Sweden; "*the problem lies in societal barriers, many people think university is inaccessible to them, even though it should not be."* (Munira)

> *"In a social sense and educational sense. People do not feel motivated. It is not a financial aspect for them; it is what society kind of installed in them. Especially if you are from a vulnerable area, a 'suburb', and I know a lot of people who said they want to go to university, but because they went into bad troubles when they were younger and they flunked school, it is a lot harder for them to go into it, and see the progress they want to and because there is a high standard to go into university in Sweden" (Munira)*

Munira and the other participants observed this phenomenon; unfortunately, I have not found a study about this finding; of course, the language barrier might be an issue. However, I still wanted to include this discussion on the participation of second-generation immigrant youth or lack of in the Swedish higher education system.

How discrimination impacts grades,

Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) "Pygmalion in the Classroom" study found that teacher expectations can influence students' intellectual development. Students who were randomly labelled as "bloomers" (with high potential) by their teachers showed more significant academic gains than those who were not labelled as such, even though the "bloomers" did not have higher IQ scores. During the conversation, the speakers discussed the demoralising impact of discrimination on academic performance. Even the act of reporting discrimination is a barrier due to how lecturers may view the student. This section of the thesis highlights the participants' stories and their narratives during moments of discrimination and the aftermath. The participant's experience of discrimination in university settings is unfortunately not uncommon, as studies have shown that incidents of discrimination can be challenging to recognise, and individuals may feel hesitant to report them due to fear of retaliation or lack of support from those in positions of authority (Sue 2010).

During their first lecture at university, Sumaya felt out of place and struggled to connect with their classmates. "*These people are not my people",* but they did not believe it was due to discrimination. However, they did have a negative experience with one of their teachers, who made them feel uncomfortable about their religion and questioned their work to the point of making them cry. The incident affected their confidence and caused them to fail the class. They believe incidents of discrimination can impact academic performance, as confidence is a big part of a student's life. This form of discrimination can be seen as less overt, which makes it harder to articulate. "*Colour-blind racism*" refers to a form of racism that is more subtle and less overt than traditional forms of racism. Colour-blind racism perpetuates racial inequality by ignoring how racism still exists (Bonilla, 2006).

Although Layla, like the other participants, hesitated at first in thinking about moments witnessed or faced discrimination. She recalled the most violent discrimination she faced during a Zoom lecture. When reading out a segment of older philosophers' work (in discussing the hypocrisy of racist remarks by highly idealised philosophers), *'the professor said the "N-word" without hesitation or acknowledgement on how the word would be heard'.* She was shocked that a professor who should have known better *'read it out'.* A confusing process, "*Why did this man have the audacity to say the N-word, I remember that everyone got so quiet, and I was the only Black person in the lecture that day, and I paused for a moment, and he just switched to another topic".* Moments like these catch you off-guard, which often means it is harder to swallow, she did not have the time to contemplate the moment. "*I was just shocked. I was thinking after, should I report him, write something down? But I have not seen him since then; I think someone else might have reported him"*. It followed her for the next two years,

> "*Because I was like, am I stupid? Why didn't I say anything? I had a conversation with a friend of mine, and they said that sometimes you are tired, and it is okay not to say anything; it is okay. And you have done this your whole life, and sometimes you will not have the energy to fight; you should not let a moment like that affect you. And there are other ways, emailing and talking to the institution" (Layla)*

Within a university setting, it felt even more purposeful for her, "*in that setting, it made me feel even smaller; this man is smart. He is a professor. He knows that it is wrong, and that made me feel I was at a disadvantage, and I could not speak up because it is a power position".* A power position that made her feel insignificant during that moment; in another class, she remembers the lecturer coming in and *'was like, guys, be scared today; the police just caught people smuggling cocaine in this side of town. And I was like, why is that necessary to our class or to talk about? It had nothing to do with the lecturer or what we were reading. I did not like that at all (Layla). 'This side of town'* ، meaning the ethnic minority neighbourhood. A comment that angered her, but she did not, of course, have ample evidence of the discrimination present in that comment; comments like these have a harmful effect on the mental health of ethnic minority students.

A constant bombardment of othering. Similarly, Lail had complex feelings towards incidences of discrimination; they acknowledged they often do not recognise racism until after it happens, which they attribute to a trauma response*, "its sounds weird, I do not see racism until after it happens".* They express concerns about bringing up discrimination with course advisors or student advisors, fearing that their concerns will not be recognised and that it may come back to hurt them somehow, "*it takes much energy from me to bring it up, make a deal out of it".* Additionally, they note that discrimination can be subtle and difficult to recognise, even by others who are not the target of it. This exhaustion in catching subtle discrimination is also part of the problem, "*It is also very exhausting catching it all the time and explaining that it is not all in your head"* (Lail). DiAngelo's (2022) "White Fragility" examines why it can be difficult for white people to talk about racism and how this difficulty reinforces racial inequality. The book argues that white people often feel defensive and uncomfortable when confronted with racism and that this can prevent them from engaging in productive conversations about race and, in consequence, how issues of discrimination are dealt with. Seynab encountered a patient who made a racist comment towards them during their practicum. Their supervisor present did not intervene, which made them angry, "*he asked me can you dance as you danced in Africa when I was helping him one day".* To retaliate was also a scary process for the participants; Munira asserts that they would not tolerate discrimination and would fight it if it did happen to them, adding, "*I will handle it by myself (not violently)",* but Seynab did express regret in not speaking up against racist, misogynistic, or anti-Black comments in the past. *"I feel like now*

when I am older, I really [want] to actually set a barrier against...racist comments... I am more aware of it too." (Seynab). For Ubah, the experience of discrimination, although she has not *'felt it yet'*, was profoundly aware of its existence in university settings, in her view she has not experienced it *'not yet',* anticipation that being within her othered body, it was going to happen sooner rather than later. A sad realisation that discrimination would catch up to her. Overall, the conversation touched on the complex and ongoing issue of discrimination on the university campus.

"I live in a fucked-up world. I know the world is fucked up, and discrimination. But when it hits you like that, I do not know how to deal…" (Seynab)

Goff, Steele, and Davies' (2008) "The Space Between Us" discusses the concept of stereotype threat, which refers to the experience of anxiety and reduced performance that can occur when individuals are aware of negative stereotypes about their social group. The article argues that stereotype threat can contribute to the achievement gap between racial groups. For Sumaya, her experience of a lecturer bullying her during a presentation was a moment of emotional distress; from the get-go, she was targeted by him, *'He made me feel uncomfortable',* but the aggression did not escalate until a presentation when he decided to tell her, her work was not her own, *'I was about to cry, so I quit the zoom, and he immediately went on the look and put my grade as fail. He failed me for the whole class because of this homework that was irrelevant."*. Universities must recognise and address discrimination issues, as they can negatively impact the mental health and academic performance of those who experience discrimination (Berger & Sarnyai, 2015). The fear of consequences makes it difficult for students to speak up against discrimination in the classroom; some participants shared their experiences of discrimination and grading.

Seynab shared an experience of a friend who faced racism from a supervisor during a program but was too scared to confront them because it could affect their grades, *"I remember her supervisor said something very racist about a patient and that should, they should not be talking about"*. Similarly, Layla talked about a friend's lecturer, who would look at the POC students in the classroom when handing out bad results on anonymous exams, and *'automatically assumed that the POC students would not write good Swedish'.*

Correspondingly, in her own experience after an exam, during the feedback session, she felt pointed out as a lecturer relentlessly criticised her and the only other POC students in class. However, their paper was already approved and passed. *'Did you do it harder towards us because we are people of colour or? I do not know; I felt weirded out by that whole interaction'. (Layla).* Munira recalled a friend told her lecturer would constantly berate their work and tell them to work ten times harder, not as motivation but because of their skin tone, *'in a way where, because you guys are who you are, you guys must do ten times better, even though their project was better and both sides could agree. So yes, it does impact grades'.* In Mohamoud's (2011) study, respondents expressed a sense of annoyance at the lack of aspiration teachers had for them compared to their white peers, often leading to a lack of motivation (Mohamoud, 2011), raising issues such as self-doubt which has a direct impact on educational attainment.

The topic of micro-aggressions and racial aggression in university settings was also discussed. Layla shared their experience of receiving pushback from a lecturer when they submitted a paper on a subject. A belief that their *'ethnic'* name had influenced the comments they received on their assignments; the only time she received a bad grade, she submitted a similar style essay anonymously and got the highest grade. Layla discussed the issue of bias in the university system, mentioning the Rosenthal theory and the need for better anonymous exams. Munira was also aware of this bias, *'when you write sitting exams, that is why you only write your personal number and not your name because teachers will grade you differently based on your name as well*'. Munira also shared the story of students who changed their name to make their lives easier in finding a job in the Swedish labour market and navigating the university, *'it made it so much easier for them to get a job here'* (Munira). Khosravi's (2012) study examined why immigrants change their names and how name-changing affects their sense of identity and social integration. Although many immigrants change their names to improve their chances of finding employment and fitting in with Swedish society, a strategy for social and economic advancement, name-changing can also be a source of emotional conflict and identity negotiation (Khosravi's, 2012). The conversation highlighted the ongoing challenges of addressing bias and discrimination in academic settings.

When asked if they trust the university is doing something to address bias, the participants expressed scepticism, highlighting the issue of complaints being handled within the institution and the potential for conflicts of interest. As Layla put it, "*It should be outside the institution...whys it inside the institution."* (Layla). Yes, 100%. Sumaya they were hesitant at first to speak up due to fear of dismissal and a lack of awareness of the complaint process. But when they did complain about the teacher who discriminated against them, the university did nothing, *'he is still there'*. Distrust in the university was an internalised view of the participants, which echoed their insecurity of 'feeling heard' within the institution. "*In university, I don't know who to turn to, and whom to report it to,"* and expressing doubt about the response they would receive if they did report it: "*because I don't believe that higher-ups will do anything about that because they are white Swedish also, and even if I do report it, who do I report it to?" (Munira).* Their sentiment was also influenced by known issues within the university; Nasteexo mentioned a study where a researcher collected data on the correlation between beauty and grades based on his Zoom lectures (Mehic, 2022). She stated, "*It is still a published paper you can refer to, and it is still in the economic department."* She also expressed her disappointment with the university's handling of such matters and its lack of ethical considerations. However, although Nasteexo and Ubah do not trust the university to handle a complaint, they would feel better if they reported it anyhow. As it would be acting against the discrimination they faced. As the speaker said, "*If there is no action after, then at least I have done something." (Ubah)/"I would still report it" (Nasteexo).* By having this dialogue with the participant's experiences, my study calls for higher educational institutes to recognise and support the experience of Black and Muslim women by fostering an inclusive and fair academic environment.

Black feminist thought recognises that discrimination can have a significant impact on academic performance, particularly for students from marginalised identities (Collins, 1986). This recognition highlights the importance of creating more inclusive and diverse academic environments that prioritise the needs and experiences of marginalised students. This perspective is relevant to the discussion of diversity in higher education institutions and the prevalence of everyday racism, as it emphasises the importance of centring the voices and experiences of marginalised individuals. Which was an important segment of this part of the discussion, in hearing the participants' own accounts of their university experience.

4. Experience and identity within the university

> *"At the end of the day, you are not seen as an individual, you are seen as a collective; it is not you, Sara, it is [the collective identity of Black people] ...The Black experience is so different from a man or a woman; if you put religion into that, it is even more different. How do we make that unique, and how do we go from Black to just individual? (Layla)/*

When talking to the participants about their experience in university, it was first essential to contextualise how they saw their own identity within the classroom. The participants emphasised their identity as Black, Somali, second-generation immigrants, Swedish, and Muslim women. The self-identification of the participants as "*Black*" provided a psychological bond with other Black students that 'tends to serve a psychologically protective function' (Mohamoud, 2011, p. 208). When asked what people first see when they meet them in the classroom, they all believe they are seen as Black women, *"I think they see a Black woman very much emphasis on Black"* (Ubah). Layla, like the rest of the participants, also harboured collective identity in speaking about their narrative, "*In philosophy now, we are talking about narratives, in Sweden we call it, like what makes you unique basically. In correlation with things that make you unique, but from a Black point of view, it is a collective thing"*. The respondents adopted a *'pan-ethnic racial identity'* of being African or labelling themselves under 'Black' and 'Muslim' (Mohamoud, 2011, p. 202).

According to research, experiences of shame and stereotype threat are common among individuals from marginalised groups, such as people of colour. These experiences can manifest in various settings, including public transportation, classrooms, and workplaces. A study by Steele and Aronson (1995) found that stereotype threat, or the fear of confirming a negative stereotype about one's group, can negatively impact academic performance among Black students. For Seynab, "*I do not want to give any badness, it more unconscious, but I want to be myself too. We are all Black, but we have our personality*." However, she also feels that this responsibility is enforced upon her and that she is seen as a representative of the entire Black community:

"I feel like they see me as the only reference. It is an enforced responsibility to do anything to bring a bad image. Here it is enforced; it is not like I chose to; if you misbehave, it is your community. " (Seynab)

These experiences can also contribute to developing a 'collective identity', where individuals need to constantly be aware of how their behaviour reflects on their group (Cokley, 2007). Layla shared her experience of being perceived as a leftist due to her identity as a Black person. She said, "*I feel like if you are a Black person or a person of colour, you are a leftist. It is not wrong, I am a leftist, but it is the prejudice that comes from the right wing that your views are some ways."* Layla also talked about the stereotypes associated with her religious identity as a Muslim, saying, "*People perceive me that way because of my name and majority of the Black community in Sweden are Somalis, and I think the Swedish people are aware of that, and they know the majority of Somalis are Muslim*." She expressed her sense of responsibility as an ethnic minority student, saying, "*I do; I feel like there are so many prejudices against you, and within that comes responsibility you never asked for*". Similarly, Sumaya within the classroom, was "***more aware of my Blackness, I know I stick out. I know I am Black but being reminded 24/7 is exhausting."*** She explains that she loves her Blackness, but it is tiring to be constantly reminded of her position in society, which also adds to her loneliness within her identity, ***'visibly, invisible, I stick out, but I'm alone'***. Sumaya recalls a time in class when she felt like everyone was staring at her, "*I remember this time, every time I looked up, their eyes were on me."* The participants were aware that they stood out within the classroom in talking about their experience as a minority student in a predominantly white classroom: "*I stick out in a way... A white class I go to"/" I feel like I stick out so much, and in my Black skin as well"* (Nasteexo)

Goff, et al (2008) article argues that stereotype threat can contribute to the achievement gap between racial groups. The participants also noted the feeling of being visible and invisible in the classroom regarding discrimination. Sharing a personal experience of mistaken identity and how it made them feel dismissed: "*They do it all the time. [The professor] hesitated and blamed it on the other girl being talkative and sharing a first name initial' (Nasteexo)/ "we tend to think about moments like these as dismissals because it hurts less to blame them on their lack of effort." (Ubah).* They explain how this can be frustrating and reinforces the idea that people only see their skin colour rather than their individuality:

"They could tell the difference between them, but then again, when there are three Black women, and they do not even have the same height same hair

anything like that, and they still confused my name. ***So,*** *it is very, that shows that you only see Black, you do not see an individual." (Ubah).*

Adapting in language and behaviour,

> ***"It is almost like you put on a mask whenever you go out; it is not only university. It happens when you exit the door****; you are going to automatically think you cannot be loud on the phone on the subway because there is a stereotype of Black women being loud. It is just all these things that have followed you; that's maybe the things I will bring to the university, just I am always aware of my environment." (Layla)*

The role of adapting for the participants was not only within the institution but was a direct reflection of their experience within and outside, an issue that directly formulated out of the fear of behaviour being seen as a collective wrongdoing; for Lail, the loud ethnic minority school teenagers on the bus, misbehaving was a direct reflection on her, in being visibly an ethnic minority, *"I felt almost ashamed that is going to be associated with me and then they are going to associate those people with everybody who is POC, and maybe I feel like maybe it is in the classroom as well".* A shame that she is trying to move away from; the teenagers on the bus were just teenagers, and the loud woman on the phone was just a loud woman on the phone. However, shame is deeply ingrained through experience; Seynab gave an example about a friend mocked for using slang in a predominantly white high school. She was often told that even the teachers "*used to use the 'N word' in front of her.*" She himself refrains from using slang with Swedish people: *"I am never using slang to Swedish…whenever I am with Swedish people, my Swedish accents on, I say proper things."* There are always specific societal pressures that the participants need to be aware of. Layla mentions that being a Black Muslim means that she is always aware of how she is perceived and that any mistake she makes could negatively affect her entire community. As a result, she feels that she must be more careful than others, which affects her ability to be herself. She says, "*Automatically, you will be more careful as a Black person, and you will automatically not be yourself.".* "*It is the way they look at you; I expect that majority of them will act like that. It is just another white person wanting me to act like that."* (Layla). Participants also noted that this experience is not unique to the university environment, saying, "*I think. Also, it is an everyday experience, not just a university experience."* (Seynab). However, they note that this can be exhausting, and sometimes they do

not have the energy for it. When asked about how this affects their experience at university, Seynab stated the toughness of finding friends, *"firstly, I did not find my friends; I was sitting alone, it was very...lonely, have to say."* They go on to mention a friendly older Swedish man who talks to them sometimes, but overall, they express a desire to connect with others on campus, *"sometimes I want to talk to people."* (Seynab).

Nasteexo initially admits to having felt the need to adapt but, *'Not anymore; I used to when I was younger'.* They do not feel accountable to answer correctly or make sure their statement is a good reflection anymore. However, they do feel that their tendency to adapt to their environment is something innate socially, *'it is a self-defence mechanism…I would not know how it would be if I were 100% acting myself',* a learnt behaviour influenced by the predominantly white environment she grew up in. Similarly, Layla and Munira expressed a sentiment of pushing back on people's perceptions of them. Munira expressed her confidence in being true to herself, stating, "*The thing about me is, I am very confident with myself, in the way that I speak, and I present myself. I am the way that I am."* She mentions that she has different dialects and uses slang and has never felt the need to change those aspects of herself. She questions why she should change when others are not doing so for her. Expressing caution in building relationships with others who may not accept her for who she is, "*I will not willingly converse with you. I do not need to build those types of relationships."* Additionally, as a political science student, Layla explains that she must be careful about certain topics, such as women's rights, as her opinions might not be taken as seriously as a white person's. She says, *"Maybe my opinions will not be taken as seriously as a white person's because that person automatically is seen as more liberal than what I would seem."* Similarly, I have been in scenarios where I have felt attacked by an Islamophobic individual in class, my white friends would speak for me because in that sense I was not retaliating and they were seen as less' *bias'*, a feeling that Layla was also very aware of, *"that is exactly how I feel*." (Layla).

I am not going to be your funny Black friend,

The participants shared the feeling of pressure to be the "funny one" to be accepted. They discussed the stereotype of the "funny Black friend," which they feel pressured to fulfil but would rather not be someone else's entertainment: "*I do not want just to be the entertainment for someone else."* (Ubah). The article titled "The End of the Sassy Black Friend" (Mason,

2022) discusses the harmful and limiting portrayal of Black women as the "sassy Black friend" in Hollywood films and TV shows. The author argues that this trope perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces the notion that Black women are only valuable as supporting characters or comic relief. The article also highlights the impact that these portrayals can have on real-life perceptions of Black women, with the author citing studies that show that exposure to negative stereotypes can lead to decreased self-esteem and increased anxiety and stress.

> *"When you are Somali, there are some expectations, especially as a Somali girl, you have to be loud, you have to be funny and extroverted, all these things were I just feel, I do not reflect, I am not going to be the loudest person in the room" (Nasteexo)*

Consciously perceived,

All the participants have shared their experiences of feeling perceived as less capable by academic staff or peers due to their identity in some form. Nasteexo believes it is related to their self-confidence and the absence of a role model so they can mimic their behaviour. Nasteexo recalled a time when they knew a guy in their class saw them as less capable, but they did not feel motivated to prove him wrong, "*I also did not have the push to prove him wrong.*" They note, "*So, in a sense, yes. They must think I am not capable, but I am putting myself down before they can put me down. Maybe it comes back to the whole leadership/role model thing. I have never had a role model; someone I can mimic my behaviour."* They go on to explain that they think having a role model would help boost their confidence, but they have never met anyone doing economics who looks like them. Ubah feels the need to work twice as hard to be perceived as capable, "*It is sort of a perception for you in that you work twice as hard, and you put the effort in before they can even think of you as less of a worker."* Working *"twice as hard"* is important in understanding the pressure young Somali students face in achieving a perfect grade; these findings are also reflected in Mohamoud's (2011) research, where parents stressed that they would have to 'work harder than other groups to get ahead' a sentiment that I grew up with also (p, 215). Due to their identity. Seynab has not personally felt this way but believes other POC women have experienced it, and language skills can also impact how someone is perceived; Layla also believed Language was a factor, *"Yes, I have; back to language if someone attacks, it will automatically hit back because I am an ethnic minority and I speak multiple languages."* They further added, "*But at the end of the day, I am*

not considered 'Swedish'. So yes, you are put in that box; they see you as less likely to succeed". They explained, *"People perceive you in a type of way that they might not want to associate with you, and they look at you like 'bloat' (immigrant child)."*

For Sumaya, the transition from Kenya back to Scandinavia was a hard struggle,

> *"When I came back from Kenya, it was really hard. Racism was not a part of my daily life. When I came here, I could not pinpoint. I felt like maybe they just do not like me. Racism was a weird concept. Is it me, or is it because I am Black?* ***I knew from a young age, because my mum told us, that people would dislike you for no reason for being Black, but when I got a break from it in Kenya. It felt weird to come back to all this."*** *(Sumaya)*

The *'talk'*, was something that all the participants were aware of, in being told as a child, that people may not like you for your melanin and you should not put the blame on yourself, I remember being seven, and realising the deep hatred adults could have, for people who look like me, a talk that Black parents sadly have to have with their children. Sumaya adds, "*It is just really hard, especially when you do not have many people who look like you."* They talk about the isolation they feel and how it is difficult to connect with others in their cohort. The environment also impacted the participant's self-esteem and confidence levels.

When asked about their participation and interaction with peers in their cohort, Ubah replied, "*I am sometimes in the background, sometimes I speak with them, but then it is only some."* Similarly, Layla said they had made few friends in their three years of university and mostly interacted with other ethnic minorities only. However, they emphasised that their perception is based on their experiences and what they see in their surroundings. They also mentioned that their friends who are also ethnic minorities have similar experiences and had also witnessed internalised racism. Internalised racism was also witnessed by Seynab, by the PhD students who aided her class, "*Some of them, I do not understand, but I can understand. Why do they hate where they come from? They do not like they are on people. Some of them need white validation… It is internalised racism; you feel sorry for them. Just for a white person, a laugh from them. You can see a lot of that, but you understand some of them grew up in white environments, but at the same time, it puts me in a weird position".*

"For me to be seeing that, I know it is something that exists... it is a part of their environment, we believe in that, but we do not. It shaped us, the environment that we grew up in". (Seynab)

The participant's experience with student activities,

Nasteexo recounted an experience where she felt uncomfortable by someone who asked where they were from. Nasteexo often struggled with how to answer this question and typically responds with *"Somalia*" because they anticipate the follow-up question. *"So, I did tell him, 'I am Somali,' and then he goes ', So have you heard about all the bad stuff they say about Somalis in Sweden' and obviously I was like, no, I have not? he wanted to make a joke; very weird, we met for two seconds." (Nasteexo)*. Samira shared a similar experience where she felt pressure to conform to social norms in a pub, "*I remember once we are in a pub, and I remember like I went with my friends like come on let us go out. I was like, ok. I am going to drink Coke. I am not going to drink, you know. "* She felt uncomfortable being the only one in the group not drinking and quickly left the situation. *"I was only there for 2 minutes, and I was like, oh yeah, my friends are calling me; I ran; I did not want to be there."* This experience highlights the pressure to conform to social norms in these types of environments and how it can make individuals feel uncomfortable and excluded. Sumaya shared that she felt at a disadvantage in the physics department because it was mostly men. Overall, the participants acknowledged the challenges that come with engaging in student nations/associations.

Black history month,

The participants noted they did not or in the past have not celebrated Black History Month because it's not celebrated in their country or taught in their educational system. They learned about it through social media, with Seynab saying, *"Like Twitter has made me much more aware."* Sumaya believes it's important, especially when universities don't teach about their own people, and shared her hesitation to explain her experience to others, saying, *"I do not want to have to educate people on matters that are a normal experience for me."* The participants noted a lack of focus on BHM in their universities. Sumaya shared that they celebrate Somali international day, and, in Kenya, they did not have to celebrate Black History Month because *"everything we studied was about Black people*." The first of July was a much bigger celebration, marking Somalia's Independence Day. However, Sumaya believes that

Black History Month is important, especially when universities do not teach students about their own people. She shared, "*A time where they can celebrate their ancestors. Learning about "Arawelo" and 'Xawo Taako' and how they both, as women, fought for Somalia's freedom was amazing; representation matters a lot."*

In summary, the chapter discusses the collective identity of the participants studying in Swedish universities, who faced challenges such as stereotype threat, microaggressions, and a sense of responsibility to represent their entire community, a topic heavily references by intersectionality and Black feminist thought scholars, Crenshaw (1989) hooks, (1994). The participants felt pressure to fulfil stereotypes such as 'the funny Black friend' and struggled with isolation and perceived incompetence (Collins, 1986). This section highlights the impact of harmful stereotypes on the self-esteem and confidence levels of young Somali women in academia.

5.2 Conclusion,

Somali women's experiences within the University can be difficult to understand, in there not being a homogenous 'one for all' experience. The research project found overlapping themes and contradictions within the literature review and the interview findings. The methodological qualitative approach, in asking open-ended questions of a small sample aided the examination of Somali women student experiences. Fitting into the subgroup myself, allowed me to access key information that the participants might not have felt comfortable discussing with someone who "does not look like them". Being an already avid member of spaces in which my subgroup accesses, such as Black event spaces, African association, and social media pages. I was able to interact with and openly ask some of the respondents if they wanted to participate. The research has directly answered the research questions mentioned at the beginning of the research. As it compliments larger qualitative studies that cover experiences of POC and Muslim students within the campus, as well as specifically Black women experiences within higher education. Through specific questions drawn past studies and my own experience as well as from the pilot study, the questions and the themes presented better fit the participants experiences, such as the effect of the Somali culture on their overall experience, racism and discrimination within campus and experience concerning their cultural identity, gender and race. To see if the same themes were followed in the findings, ideas around pattern findings were also looked for, through thematic analysis.

A unanimous understanding between all the participants', however, was the lack of diversity with staff and lecturers. Which in turn affected their sense of belonging and in turn, thoughts about career trajectory and continuing into higher education. Although some did feel that the student body was diverse, University staff was still to them "all-white" or "all-male", ethnicity and gender identity meant the participants did not feel a sense of belonging. Students also demonstrated a change of behaviour such as "using fewer colloquialisms" or talking more softly within university campus. Reflecting a subconscious adaptation to behaviour due to racialised stereotypes.

Therefore, the question as to how the subgroup differs lies with their self-identification. All the participants labelled themselves as "Black" adopting a pan-African identity but also saw themselves as more specifically 'Somali'. Feeling more of a pull towards Somali spaces. Some participants also expressed not being fully accepted in Muslim spaces. The research was able to differentiate between the respondent's self-identification and their belonging within spaces on campus. The final contribution of the research is the understanding of gender on their experiences, literature and past research on Somali students within education lacks the acknowledgement on the differences between Somali men and women, the research questions aimed to understand the gendered barriers and differences of the respondent's experiences, which was covered by the findings of the research. The research found that all the participants felt a sense of gendered pressure when applying for university, where culturally they saw moving out as "unacceptable". Even with the participants that chose to move out, it was a tough situation to be in, in asking permission from their parents, although only one participant chose to live at home. Something which they blamed on their parental upbringing and patriarchal standards of more freedom for "boys". My research also focused on higher education, research on Somali women's experiences within the University is virtually non-existent in Swedish research. All the findings from the literature review to the interview discussions, serve to inform an understanding of the lives and the experiences of Swedish Somali women students. The success of the research lies with my own experiences and relatability, into gaining more insight into the subgroup. Calling for more qualitative research on ethnic minority groups within Sweden. This covers the aim of the research, in obtaining an in-depth analysis of the experiences of the subgroup.

Limitations and reflections,

Challenges are bound to occur with every research project, which can be easily reflected. Firstly, although my choice of methodology fits into the qualitative approach I aimed for. It did present the limitation of time, as having a semi-structured interview process meant there was less control given to the researcher and more control given to the respondent. It also meant respondents had varying degrees of answers.

Furthermore, because the interviews were conducted with in different spaces, two through zoom and the rest in university spaces and around campus. There was a hesitation with the participants to talk about their negative experiences around campus. The participants that were interviewed in a more relaxed environment, the student café, were more willing and open to elaborate on their experiences. Compared to the participants who were interviewed in the library. Upon reflection, location is just as important when interviewing respondents. However, the research triumphed in accessing the experiences of the subgroup in allowing the students to open a dialogue. The research could be expanded upon, on focusing on and increasing the dialogue of Somali women student experiences in other cities, through comparison, for example the north and side divide within Sweden, I of course, was very aware on keeping my respondents identity safe, which was one of the reasonings of not mentioning specific universities or cities, as the students were often the sole Black student within their faculty, sometimes even the only POC student.

Another limitation was during the research process, I was happy that my interest in the topic was approved, however as I went further along into conducting the research. I was told, my research was ethically uncomfortable, especially for my department, which begs the question if my research is about women who look and embody my identities, am I in being a minority, a ‘controversy’, in studying within this institution? The universities’ view in following as advised by my faculty (Sensitive personal data and GDPR in Sweden) of blacklisting topics such as religion, race etc. due to potentially what is deemed ‘ethical violations’. Discourages research done and by, communities that deserve to be of focus.

On language, during some parts of the interview, some of the participants were less able to articulate themselves and we had to take a couple of minutes, I think it was a limitation that I was not able to conduct the interviews in Swedish. One of the participants struggled and

showcased translations throughout, which slowed down the interview process as she felt better talking in Swedish, and my lack of fluency in Swedish meant there was some words I could not quite understand at that moment. However, my knowledge of Somali also allowed the interview to flow better, participants shared aspects of the culture, that was better understood in being part of the community, it also meant that at some points without both of us noticing, we conversed in Somali and then went back into English.

Glossary:

POC and BAME is used interchangeably, BAME/BME is a prominently British category for ethnic minorities, meaning: Black and Minority Ethnic, whereas POC, is translated as; people of colour, which is more widely used to describe and categorise the ethnic minority community in the Global west.

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Appendix 1. Informational letter

LUND UNIVERSITY

Hej,

My name is Sara Yusuf, and I am studying Gender studies MSc in Lund University and I'm looking for participants for my study. **I am conducting a study on Somali women's experiences in higher education/University, in Sweden for my master's thesis**. The purpose of the study is to understand how Somali women experience themselves within and around the university campus.

I'm a Somali woman myself, but the interviews will be conducted in English due to my Swedish not being my native language, as I grew up in the UK.

To be part of the study you need to be either studying a Bachelors/Kandidat, masters or PHD in a Swedish institution and identity as a Somali Swedish woman. The interviews will take place at an agreed place and can be taken over zoom. I'm based in Skåne, so for example, if you're from the north of Sweden, .then it will take place over Zoom. The interviews will last maximum 60 minutes. The interviews will be recorded however I will be the only one who will have access to it, and it will be deleted after the thesis is finished. The interviews are on a voluntary basis. Confidentially is key, and my study is a sensitive topic, I will make sure you

cannot be identified. Individual identity will be anonymised. The purpose of this is to reassure and to create a mutual safe space, which is important within this context. No compensation is provided with this study.

Feel free to contact me if you want to participate from my email below:
sa5365yu-s@student.lu.se

I look forward to hearing from you,
Sara Yusuf

Appendix 2. Interview consent form

MSc Social studies of Gender (Major in Sociology)

Information about the study

I hope you are willing to take part in the study investigating Somali women students' experiences in university, in Sweden. The purpose of the study is to understand how Somali women experience themselves within and around the university campus. To carry out the study I need to collect the following data through semi-structured interviews during the period of Feb-March 2023.

We ask for your approval to use the data collected for the study. Participation is always voluntary. To collect data for the study, we need your signed consent on the second page of this form. Even in the case that you sign the form at this point, it is still possible for you to withdraw from participation at any time without giving a reason why.

During the student working on the study your personal data are protected and will not be disclosed to unauthorised persons. We will store recordings and other details in a safeguarded manner. Any video/sound collected in the first phase will be anonymized, coded, and transcribed as text. This will be done immediately upon transmission to disable any potential for detecting that you have participated. The consent forms will be kept in locked storage so that they may not be linked to our recording. When the study is completed and the thesis has passed assessment, we will destroy the original data that has been collected (e.g., sound files).

The results of the study will be published in the thesis in a manner that will not reveal the participant's identity. The study adheres to the guidelines on research ethics and common laws. You may read more about these at page 2. To complete the study, it is very valuable for us to receive your consent.

Consent Form

I have taken part of the information of the study and accept that the material is recorded and stored for use in the master's thesis.

□ Yes

□ No

The name of the informant, date and signature……

Print name…….

Further regarding guidelines and legislation related to the study.

The personal data essential for carrying out the study are regulated according to the requirement of consent (samtyckeskravet) in the Swedish legislation (the Personal Data Act, in Swedish) Dataskyddsförordningen. Stockholm University is responsible for personal data. According to the law of protection of Personal Data Act (dataskyddsförordningen f.o.m. 25 maj, 2018) you are entitled free access to all information involving you and if needed, to have incorrect information amended. You also have the right to request deletion, limitation or objection to the use of personal data, with an opportunity to lodge a complaint to the data security officer at Lund University, alternatively the Swedish Data Protection Authority at https://datainspektionen.se/kontakta-oss/. Please approach the supervisor or student for further information.

Interviewer:

Signature:

Print Name

Date

Appendix 3. Interview questions

<u>Data chapter themes:</u>

1. What do you define as Somali culture and community? (Make this a question) The Somali culture and its effect or lack of on their educational experience:

1a. Moving out for university.

1b. Educational attainment and pressure

Questions:

1. How did you choose your university subject? Was your subject choice yours? (Did you feel pressured by your family/community/friends)

2. Did you move away from home for university? Why, why not? If not, what would your parent's reaction be?

3. Would you say your upbringing has influenced your university experience in any way? In your opinion, does your identity/upbringing hinder or aid your university experience? Can you elaborate? (Study more or feeling left out/ strong community)

2. Engagement such as the fulfilment and the need for relatability 2a. Engagement with activities and student social life

2b. friendship groups and inter/outer group relations.

Questions:

1. Do you see yourself represented in leadership roles within the university? Do you have any role models, do they share the same identity as you? Tell me about a situation where you felt represented or an experience with a mentor?

2. Are you going into 'Higher Education' as a career? Why/why not? (Reflect the diversity of the student body)

3. What activities do you engage in outside of your course? Student associations, sport clubs, nation volunteering (exclusion, drinking culture)

3b. If not why is that, if yes, how did you get involved with these?
(belonging + pressure of studies reduce push to join societies-why did you decide to join this club + prompts, did you go Novish period)

3c. If you are involved, are there people of the same background, or similar background to you? (Ethnicity and religion/gender)

4. To follow on, in your friendship groups, do your friends tend to be the same or similar race/ethnicity to you? Is that something you've noticed before?

5. Is the African association, Black or any form of POC association/ Muslim association (if your university has one) a vital part of your university experience? Why? (Do you think there are events allowing for you to interact, intellectual sense, interesting ideas)

3. Discrimination and Racism within and around University Campus:

3a. Question of capability: staff expectations and racial stereotyping 3b. Racism and discrimination within and outside the classroom

1. Tell me about your first contact with your university? Do you see your university as a reflection of the rest of society? if so, does racism/islamophobia exist in a university setting?

2. In your view, could incidents of discrimination impact academic performance?

3. Tell me about a time where you possibly faced or witnessed, discrimination in class, or around the university campus? Have you ever challenged the barrier by raising issues of ethnicity/religion/gender in class, making a formal complaint about discrimination? (Fired up to challenge restrictive curriculum or demoralising, tiring, known as the kid who talks about

'race')

4. **Experience and identity within university 4a. Learning and supporting.**

4b. Black history month and what it meant to them:

4c. Being Black and Muslim.

1. How would you describe your identity within the classroom? (Gender, race, Islam) Do you feel more responsible for your image as an ethnic minority student? (Act different, twice as good as a 'white peer')

2. Do you feel like you must adapt to certain ways of behaviour while on campus? (Compiled by non-norms on campus and in placements: imposter, fake, accent, front 'you can't be yourself') how does that affect your experience within university?

3. Have you ever felt consciously or unconsciously perceived as less capable by academic staff or peers because of your identity? (Accent, scrutinised, overlooked, eroded their self-confidence). Elaborate? Do you participate and talk to peers in your cohort?

   3b. FOLLOW UP: Is your course material restrictive or lacking relevance for ethnic minority students (diversity a garnish)?

4. Have you ever felt at a disadvantage or uncomfortable engaging in Student nations/associations because of reasons related to your identity?

5. Do you celebrate Black History Month and what does it mean to you?

5b. What is your opinion on Black history month focus within the university, did you get to the events, were there any events? How would you feel having to explain the significance of Black history month to others/ would you want to explain?