



LUND UNIVERSITY

Bathing into Belonging

*An Exploration of International Students' encounters at
the Swedish Sauna*

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Abstract

This thesis is an ethnographic exploration of Swedish sauna practices as experienced by international students at Lund University. The research objective is to navigate experiences of belonging and community formation that occur in the sauna, but also highlights how experiences of outsidership and exclusion come to the fore in this highly sensorial environment. The sauna is analysed as a microcosmic space that reflects the larger picture of Swedish society. This thesis is a cultural analytical attempt to contribute and widen the research field of the international student homemaking experience in Sweden by exploring the emotional and body experiences in the public sauna space. More particularly, this thesis is constructed around autoethnographic fieldwork and the collaboration of eight informants that moved to Lund as international students. Furthermore, theories of affect are applied; by doing so, it examines how emotions and power circulate through bodily practices. Sara Ahmed's concept of affect is utilised to highlight the relationality of embodied experiences. Emotional and affective experiences move between bodies and play a role in power structures and community formations

Meanwhile, according to previous research, there is limited research conducted on sauna practice through a more critical lens. This research project unpacks how whiteness and heteronormativity claim the sauna space, affecting each individual's sense of belonging in a variety of ways. To acknowledge these structures, this thesis turns a sharp eye to the institutionalised whiteness of the Swedish sauna space. By dissecting how individuals talk about partaking in a culturally institutionalised activity like sauna bathing from the perspective of newcomers, we gain insights into what it means to create inclusive and inviting public spaces. This research offers tools for upcoming international students to find their own sense of belonging in Sweden. As such, the sauna becomes a site of analysis that provides a unique perspective on the complex social dynamics at play in Swedish society.

Keywords: sauna; body; autoethnography; home; affects; Sweden; Sara Ahmed

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1. Introduction

The sauna is packed with women, the sky is dark, and the Malmö city skyline is lit in full view. There are two saunas in the Kallbadhus, one where you can talk, and the other is silent. I choose the chatty one, hoping to overhear some enlightening conversations and perhaps join in on one. The room was noisy, filled with chatting friends, all speaking Swedish. Sitting amongst the chatter, notebook in hand, I am restless. I take myself off to the quiet sauna, leaving my notebook outside. I sit down and look out the window, watching the water and the black sky. I was surprised by myself; I wondered if my two years living in Sweden had led me to prefer this new kind of anti-sociality.

We dip our bodies in the freezing, black Baltic Sea to cool off. It tastes like lake water; bird feathers and algae float on its surface. I miss the salt. We take our turns, gently walking down the metal staircase, allowing the woman in front of us to dip first and return up the stairs, exchanging smiles and shivers.

The moonlight reflected on the bodies that dipped.

(Fieldnotes 01/12/22)

The first time I visited the sauna, I fully realised the wonder of Sweden. I was awestruck by the sociality of it, a total contradiction to my preconceived notion of public space in Sweden. Women were chatting and laughing and sweating. Nude! I sat in the sauna box, gazing out the window and onto the beautiful wooden pier that led out to the Baltic Sea. Sitting naked on the dock, under the Swedish sun, were two older women, sharing a cream cake, laughing and chatting. This image is lodged fondly in my memory.

After the novelty of the experience started to wear off, I slowly became more attuned to how the sauna is used and by whom it is used. I also became more considerate of the challenges faced by migrants to find community in the society I am now part of.

The sauna is a fierce sensory experience that brings the body to the forefront, bombarding bathers with an intimate experience of being 'in place' with others. In Sweden, the Scandinavian sauna is deeply ingrained in the country's social life, serving as an institution in its cultural history (cf. Fryckman, 2016). It is a space that can bring all kinds of bodies into intimate contact. Sense of identity is heightened at the sauna by one's immediate connection to their body, thus creating a fascinating site for cultural analysis.

1.1 Aim

In this thesis, I will explore subjective experiences in the sauna. Through studying sauna practices and exploring the effects of the Swedish sauna experience on international students, I aim to unpack and analyse how they navigate their otherness in Swedish public space. I will use autoethnography and interviews to examine the field material through themes such as home and belonging, whiteness, gender and queer embodiment. As a theoretical toolbox, I lean on the work of Sara Ahmed and her use of affects to study emotional and embodied encounters between bodies. This research will reveal insights into the international student's experience in Sweden. I will portray how the sauna may be a tool for interconnection among individuals, exploring how power and emotions circulate in this highly sensorial environment.

I aim to explore the international students' sauna experiences by concentrating on these questions:

- 1) How does the sauna generate a sense of being in or out of place?
- 2) What feelings, thoughts, and emotions are evoked by being in direct contact with your naked body as it encounters others'?
- 3) How does the Swedish sauna constitute a place where homemaking practices are made visible?

1.2 Disposition

The thesis is structured into six chapters, the first being this introduction, which poses my research questions and aims. The second chapter introduces the materials and methods used

in the study. It also introduces a definition of the field and reflections on ethical and methodological choices. The third chapter will contextualise this thesis by providing previous research in sauna studies, embodiment and international student experiences. Fourthly, I will introduce the theoretical framework of affects, grounded primarily on the works of Sara Ahmed, alongside an entanglement of various other perspectives on affects, body and emotions. Next, my analysis will combine my theoretical and methodological approaches with heavy, dense descriptions from the field. Writing ethnography can take many forms. Each informant had a different story to tell, and we had a different way of interacting with each other, too. In order to appropriately analyse the breadth of field material I have received, I will divide the analysis into four subchapters: Home, orientation and belonging; Embodied Whiteness; Affect Aliens; Gender and Queer Kallis. These chapters mirror the subsections of my theoretical framework. This structural echo will hopefully streamline the text so that it is accessible and easy to follow, whereby my empirical material, theoretical grounding points and methodological choices are in symbiosis. Each subchapter in my analysis will commence with a personal field note, then will follow with an analysis of my informant interviews. Lastly, the concluding chapter highlights the main points made through the thesis. It will offer a final discussion on the issue of belonging practices in Sweden as faced by international students and will provide a suggestions regarding the applicability of the findings. As a result, the thesis offers to shed light and raise suggestions to the questions raised.

2. Materials and Methods

This chapter will offer an overview of the ethnographic methods I have used to gather research material. The field is presented, and the trajectory that led me to it. I will introduce the reader to my informants and conclude with reflections on my methodology, ethical considerations and the methodology's benefits and limitations.

2.1 Overview

I wish to show how international students' lived experiences in sauna spaces offer insights into how belonging is navigated in Sweden. This thesis focuses on theories of affect, embodiment and sense of place. The methodology must mirror this. I have chosen to employ autoethnography and interviewing as my primary research methods to connect with the field.

Combining these particular methodological tools has proven to be an effective way to examine lived experience. By "lived experience", I refer to subjectivity, focusing on human experience and the bodily, emotional and socio-cultural context of particular sauna experiences as interpreted by my informants. The following quote is an apt depiction of "lived experience".

Lived experience accommodates our shifting sense of ourselves as subjects and objects, as acting upon and being acted upon by the world, of living with and without certainty, of belonging and being estranged. (Jackson, in Ellis and Bochner (1992), p99)

Through interviewing, I have gained insights into how my informants sensed, used, and experienced the sauna. My autoethnographic reflections have situated me in the field and filled in the gaps of insider knowledge that I would not be able to acquire based on a singular conversation with another individual.

2.2 The Field

The 6 km stretch from Lomma to Bjarred, two small seaside towns near Lund, provides a footpath along the seaside. The sea is flat, and the sky is blue behind the cracks of the large clouds tracking the length of the

horizon. The crisp air and strong wind alert our bodies into being. The water is clear and shallow; the bridge connecting Malmö to Copenhagen is visible until it dissolves into the clouds. The participants consisted of about 20 people from all over the world. As we walked, talked and breathed in the fresh sea air, the participants moved in and out of conversations. Many shared what the beaches are like, where they are from, or if there are beaches at all. We learned of the wild, stoney beaches of Georgia, the gender-segregated beaches of Iran, and the tropical, tourist-filled beaches of Italy, where bubbles of sunscreen, forgotten goggles, and blow-up frisbees float in the still waters. I spoke with a woman from Sudan who reflects that water in Africa is not used for swimming: "Europeans know how to swim very well, and it is very important". A participant from Pakistan tells me of her frustrations with her Swedish husband's swimming-teaching methods. Many people speak about not living on the coast and how that has impacted them. Everybody has a story to tell about their relationship with the water.

These are my field notes from a Vitamin SEA event that I initiated for a work placement at a social inclusion organisation, *EOS Cares*, in Lund throughout 2021. The purpose of Vitamin SEA was to bring people to water, to allow immigrants from all over the world access to activities that generate friendships and connect us to the blue spaces in our new surroundings. As the Local Discoveries programme manager at the organisation, I was responsible for facilitating weekly outdoor excursions. Vitamin SEA included various water-based activities: yoga on the lakeside, cold water swimming activities in the Baltic Sea, coastal walks, and team-building events. This work placement has led to my interest in unpacking and critically analysing how belonging is navigated around bodies of water. My interest in how Swedish public space orients itself around the bodies of those on a quest to find their sense of home also developed. I shifted my focus to sauna practice specifically as it is so deeply embedded in Scandinavian culture (cf. Edelswärd, 1999; Fryckman, 2004; Tsonis, 2006). Following this, I began my deep dive into learning about how non-Swedes experience it, thus forming the genesis of this thesis.

I have limited my field to two saunas ("bastus" in Swedish) near Lund, Sweden: Ribersborgs Kallbadhus in Malmö and Bjerreds Saltsjöbad Kallbadhus in Bjärred, a seaside town on the west coast of Skåne. They are both open to the public and located on the water at the end of long piers anchored above the Baltic Sea. I chose these two particular saunas because of their proximity to Lund University. My informant interviews have been particularly based at Ribersborgs Kallbadhus, while one informant and some autoethnographic fieldnotes have been conducted at Bjerreds, too.

Ribersborgs Kallbadhus, or Kallis as it is colloquially known, is an iconic piece of late 19th-century Swedish architecture. Juxtaposed against the Turning Torso skyscraper in Malmö, the contrast between past and present is beautiful yet jarring. As you approach the building, the long pier stretching over the water creates a sense of anticipation for the experience that awaits. Upon arrival, it feels like you have crossed a threshold into another space. Although open for public access, Kallis has an air of exclusivity and privacy. The structure stands solidly and proudly as an important landmark of Malmö's waterscape. The site is located behind a cafe and is divided into two gendered sections, each opening up to a large bathing area. Enclosed pools of Baltic water are marked off by wooden jetties where swan feathers often float atop the contained waters. Step ladders provide a more sheltered dip, while another jetty offers access to the open sea, with the Øresund Bridge visible in the distance.

Both sections of Kallis contain two saunas. One sauna where talking is allowed has a sign reading "speak quietly," while the other is a silent sauna. The saunas are woodfired and dry. Wooden benches in three inclining rows face a window with a sea view. A shared steam room, or "Aufguss," connects the dividing sauna spaces.

Bjärred's sauna has a more intimate atmosphere, with two gender-separated saunas perched on high stilts above the shallow Baltic waters. The pier leading up to the saunas is longer than Malmö's, creating a heightened sense of anticipation as small waves crash against the dock.

Both sauna facilities include changing rooms, showers, lockers, toilets, rest areas, and a space to eat or drink. The simple design is unobtrusive, ensuring visitors' needs are met and they can relax and enjoy the experience.

The following are pictures I have taken of the saunas in question:



Queer Kallis, Ribersborg Kallbadhus, Malmö 06/03/2023



Winter inside Ribersborg Kallbadhus, Malmö 19/12/2022



View of the Turning Torso from Ribersborg Kallbadhus, Malmö 24/03/2022



The long pier to Bjerreds Saltsjöbad, Bjärred 10/10/2021

My field notes have been gathered throughout winter 2021 and winter 2022. I have dipped in and out of the field throughout my time in Lund. All interviews have been conducted during the winter months in Lund, but informants' accounts of their experiences in the sauna are not situated in particular temporalities. Field accounts have been observational. Sometimes I brought my notepad into the sauna, pages dampened, and the ink dried up as I wrote down what I saw, how I felt, and whom I spoke to in the present. Other times, I took notes after my visit, writing down key moments I could remember, or feelings left with me.

2.3 The Interview: Encounters

An interview is the most prevalent and established form of ethnographic methodology. It can take many forms (Davies, 2008). However, I am drawn to Sarah Pink's (2009) depiction of interviews as social, sensorial and affective. Pink encourages the reader to avoid the emphasis on "talk" and instead re-imagine an interview within a theory of place whereby a culmination of bodily experiences comes together (Pink, 2009). Also, Carolyn Ellis advises researchers to understand the interview as an interactive conversation where both researcher and informant hold space and responsibility for the flow of communication (1999).

Like all human interactions, the ethnographic interview is contradictory, it is relational, and the outcome can be unexpected. Sometimes it is disappointing, and other times, with the added perspective of another individual's subjective experience, the interview can open the researcher's eyes to blind spots in their understanding.

"Both parties to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably active. Each is involved in meaning-making work. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and communicatively assembled in the interview encounter." (Holstein and Gubrium (1995) in Davies (2008), p109).

The interviews conducted sway between semi-structured and unstructured. In this context, semi-structured interviews are interactions that differ from typical social engagement insofar as they are located in a particular time and place. There was a prepared set of talking

points in advance, yet nonetheless has vital elements of conversational fluidity that set it apart from a questionnaire or a survey (Davies, 2008). Other interviews remained unstructured and were conducted amongst close friends. These interactions sort of ‘just happened’ yet proved valuable and insightful for my research (Davies, 2008). The interviews are to be understood as encounters where the boundaries between researcher and informant were blurred, where we were both actively involved in co-creating a shared place of connection (Pink, 2009).

Thesis writing can be a solitary practice. I have found this process to be isolating at times. There were moments in my writing when I worried that I was spending too much time "in my head" and losing sight of the myriad ways other individuals can navigate the world. The interviews ensured that there was no over-reliance on my own experiences with sauna practice. Interviewing is a beautiful way to learn from others, ensuring that more voices and perspectives enrich the research project and provide a multi-layered portrait of the field. I like the idea of using a research method that requires face-to-face encounters: One that situates my body and another body in the same place, where value is placed on human connection, relationships are cherished, and work is produced that reflects the lived experiences of my peers.

2.4 Transcription

My interview data is collected from one-on-one conversations with nine individuals. These interviews were recorded at local cafes and libraries on Otter's transcription app.

I have learned that there must be ethical considerations surrounding the process of transcription.

No ethnographic research exists in a vacuum. The researcher brings to the research their own cultural contexts and lived experiences. Therefore, there can be no such thing as an objective transcription, and like all ethnographic methodology, it is entangled with power relations. I have learned that the act of transcription “includes a selection process” whereby researchers must choose what aspects of collected data should be transferred to paper (O'Dell and Willim, 2013, p4). While a transcriber aims to record the words, emphases, mood and tone of an interviewee so that it mirrors exactly what the speaker is saying, “the

conditions of the transcribing act are often visible in the text: the transcriber's goals; her or his theories and beliefs about the speakers” (Bucholtz, 2000, p1463). This subjectivity is still present within the transcription app. When comparing the app to the audio recording, there were several discrepancies. Firstly, voices got confused between myself and the interviewee, particularly when I was interviewing another woman, and important remarks in between the lines got lost in the transcription. This then led to an ethical question about how we represent the humanity of the participants. According to Bucholtz, “all transcripts take sides, enabling certain interpretations, advancing particular interests, favouring specific speakers, and so on... Embedded in the details of transcription are indications of purpose, audience, and the position of the transcriber toward the text” (2000, p1440). The transcription practice was an interesting learning experience about how a researcher can never truly separate themselves from their research to position themselves in total neutrality. The app was efficient and easy to operate, yet its lack of humanity led to transcriptions that were merely extracted data, reductive of the emotional and sensory elements of the interview. O’Dell and Willim argue “for a need to understand transcription more as a sensory process that mobilises utterances and sounds and represents them as filtered and manipulated representations” (2013, p13). Even a research tool, assumed to be without emotion and human bias, has the power to manipulate and influence research material. This highlights the importance of understanding ethnography as an embodied composition that requires understanding the nuances of human experience. Transcription is more than words: “They pull both the ethnographer and the recipient of the ethnography into new worlds of sensory understanding” (O’Dell and Willim, 2013, p18). The app has the potential to mislead and misrepresent the informants. It mixed up voices, omitted certain words and did not account for pace and tone. In short, the technology had limitations. Nonetheless, when transcribing, I made sure to listen back to the audio recording as I followed the text it produced in order to represent the conversation as accurately as possible (cf. Stein, 2019).

2.5 The Informants

My informants are all international students at Lund University. Seven moved to Sweden for their masters, with one informant being an exchange student. Some of my informants are friends of mine. However, most of the informants’ contact information was shared with me through word of mouth by those who insisted they were avid sauna lovers and would

be interested in being interviewed. Interviews were held in cafes and libraries across Lund to ensure a relaxed and cosy atmosphere. Each formal encounter with the interviewees only happened once. Therefore, the data collected have been from a once-off conversation about the informant's experience with Swedish saunas. A once-off conversation will give a partial picture of an experience, thus providing limits to the analysis. Getting a complete picture of how an individual relates to a space is impossible. Agar speaks about the longstanding concern faced by anthropologists to distinguish the difference between what people say and what people do (Agar, 1996, p107). It is certain that when informants give accounts in interviews, they will leave certain things out or decide to talk about one thing over the other. Also, in this case, an informant might have had a recent very positive experience at the sauna; therefore, the conversation will follow this sentiment. If I had interviewed them on a different day, their attitude to the sauna might have been more critical. Before commencing my fieldwork, I toyed with the idea of interviewing IN the sauna. That way, I would have been able to analyse informants' accounts of the sauna in an immediate space and time and observe their actions and body language in the field.

However, this would have had several ethical barriers, given the intimate nature of the sauna experience. There is a very privatised aspect of sauna bathing that I wanted to respect. I worried that had I conducted interviews in the sauna; this private ritual would have been intruded upon, affecting the sauna experience for my informants, myself, and the other visitors. Also, there would have been practical issues when interviewing men, as most saunas are gender separated. Nevertheless, it is sufficient to examine the way sauna practice is represented. I will never be able to be in the body of my informants. There are rich insights to be gained from how the informants chose to talk about their experiences. I did not need to watch them move through a sauna space to justify their words, as their stories and accounts form the basis of my research analysis.

"International students" is by no means a homogenous group. Gender, racial, ethnic and class distinctions impact each individual's migration experience. These factors also influence interactions with public space and affect how individuals can "fit in". My informants are all international students at Lund University, one of Sweden's oldest and most prestigious universities (Lund University, 2022a). There is a large diversity of nationalities for those privileged enough to learn. 23% of the university's students are

international, and there are exchange agreements with 640 universities in 70 countries (Lund University, 2022b). This international presence creates a complex multicultural space where diverse experiences are represented. The student experience is thus lived from a variety of social positions.

Nevertheless, I chose international students as my target research community to offer limits and particularities to my scope of the study- there is similarity and common ground as to why each participant is here in Sweden; there is a certain sameness in experience. However, each individual approaches the world and takes up space differently. My informants belong to a variety of national and cultural backgrounds. They are positioned along a variety of gendered, sexual ethnic lived realities. However, it is important to note that my informants are able-bodied. My research is limited in that it does not extend to include the perspective of individuals with disabilities. Given this, I do not hone in on the sauna as an able-ised space. Some informants were super chatty and confident with their responses, which allowed me to take a more passive role in the conversation. Still, others were much more reserved, and I needed to share *my* thoughts, feelings and experiences to encourage the interviewees to share theirs. It is tricky when interviewing not to prioritise the speakers who are more articulate in English or perhaps more expressive and confident with their words. I have highlighted as many voices as possible to avoid a narrow view of the international student experience.

I began my interviews with the open-ended lead:

I would like to hear about what the sauna is for you. How does it factor into your life here in Lund?

Informants could speak for as long as they wanted without interruption. Follow-up questions stemmed from the response to the first question. This structure ensured the informant could steer the conversation to their preferred talking points. All names have been changed for anonymity. Informants have chosen pseudonyms, and written consent for the informants' participation in this study has been provided.

I want to introduce you to my informants:

Riktig- From the United States, is a regular Kallis sauna go-er whose first sauna experience "felt like almost psychedelic... colours felt a little brighter. Like my heart was racing"

Blue- From China who shares insightful comparisons between the Chinese and Swedish bathing cultures.

Pada, from Japan, is an exchange student who, when visiting the sauna, "forgets time."

Belinda, from Ireland, is an expert cold-water swimmer. The sauna has played a significant role in navigating her attitude towards nudity.

Maria, a student from Columbia, routinely visits the sauna with her cousin. The sauna is her "secluded piece of heaven."

Rupert, from Germany, **enjoys taking "the silence and space for (him)self.**

Rua from Northern Ireland dissects why the sauna is a "*kind* space" for them.

Tomazzo - an Italian who does not like cold water. The sauna, for him, is "not so special" but has lots to say about how "it's a big part of the Swedish culture".

2.6 Autoethnography

At my first thesis meeting, my supervisor warned me that if I employed autoethnography as my primary research method, I must "go hard or go home". I took this to mean that when

providing personal field notes or reflections, I must give a complete, complex and detailed account of my experience in the field without glossing over the messy bits that may leave me vulnerable. He told me that autoethnography is exposing. He suggested I read *Auto(erotic)ethnography* (Blinne, 2012), a dissertation based on a researcher's masturbation practices. If I still feel comfortable with this method, we should go for it...

Autoethnography is a method that incorporates my personal experiences as well as my own self-reflections to describe and interpret how a sense of place is established through sauna practice (Ellis, 2011, *Autoethnography*: 3). Reflexivity allows me to become aware of my connection to the research and thus the effect that my subjective position can have upon it (Davies, 2008).

Given the intimate nature of the sauna experience and the personal, exposing character of my interviews, it would seem neglectful (both to my informants and my research) to refrain from writing about my own experience. By "personal experience", I refer to my thoughts, observations and emotions that emerge when interacting with the field, albeit in the sauna or in interviews. Self-disclosure helps fill gaps in my research. For example, I cannot access my informants' immediate responses to their experiences in the sauna. I can use my insider knowledge to add depth and value to my writing and situate my writing in direct contact with the field (Davies, 2008). Personal experience also, and perhaps most importantly, highlights my position in the field and thus provides context for the reader to get an overall understanding of where my analytical position stems from (Davies, 2008).

2.7 My Body

By making intricate details of one's life accessible to others in public discourse, a personal narrative bridges the dominions of public and private life. Telling a personal story becomes a social process for making lived experiences understandable and meaningful (Ellis and Bochner, 1992, p80).

In light of the importance of self-positioning in autoethnography, this section will introduce my body to the reader. My white skin, my able body, my inconspicuous body hair, my upbringing in a home where nudity is normalised, as a researcher in a Scandinavian sauna space, my body is my armour; it embalms me with privilege.

When I am in the water, I think of my mother. I was raised with the Irish Sea. She took me there often, and I fell in love with its power from a young age. Jumping in monstrously high waves with her beside me. She is a great swimmer; the cold never overwhelmed her. We would dress into our swim togs; it always took her much longer than me to undress, making quips about her ageing body. We would stride together, but I am always first in, first out, jumping straight in headfirst. I jump in the water and mutter "thank you" aloud, conscious not to turn my back to the horizon; otherwise, the ocean may feel offended. Mom took her time, inhaling, exhaling, a smile so big. I would hold her glasses as she dunked her head under, letting out a big "WHOOOP". Mom could sometimes stay in the water for an hour or two, swimming back and forth between the buoys. Other times she would float there, only her toes pointing up out of the water visible from the shoreline. I would wrap my small, goose-pimpley arms around her neck, my teeth chattering with the cold and the excitement of sharing that time with her. Being in the water with my mother felt like companionship; day-to-day stresses on land would slide away. My relations with my mother softened and shifted to another dynamic. Swimming in the sea with her felt like companionship.

It is impossible to separate ourselves from our research. Our methodology and fieldwork tactics are inextricably tied to our lived and subjective understandings of ourselves. In this sense, all ethnographic research can be considered autoethnography. However, Ellis (2020) argues for the value of personal narratives in research to extend sociological understanding. It is important to situate my socio-cultural context in this text. It is important to situate my voice and position as a woman researcher and thus producer and sharer of knowledge in a field traditionally held for "bourgeois white men" (Skeggs, 2002, p19). But also, it is essential to clarify that my body is in place by the water. As the sea is a scape that connects me to my mother, that brings me home, this experience will shape my research perspective. The following extract is from a recording between friends of mine as we discussed how sauna practice in Sweden has helped with our perception of nudity

Giulia: Sweden helps with nakedness

Kara: yeah, it's made me become less aware of my body, I think.

Everyone agrees

Kara: Now, I don't know if that's because I fit into the uniformity of what Swedish people's nakedness is. Cuz like, yeah, because of my being white and the height that I am and everything. You can kind of plop yourself into the stereotyped picture of Sweden. Everyone's like a clone of each other but, at the same time, not really seeing each other. Like in the sauna. I'm also one of a full room of other white ladies. There's nothing about me in that space that is particularly worth making note of because no one's looking at anyone anyway. So I guess if I had an added element of being physically appearing or representing very different, then I'm sure I do something else. Probably. Like in a sauna. I don't think about my body. But I wonder if I think about my body more in a sauna. If I was a different colour to everyone else.

My position emerges from a place of belonging rather than disorientation. Being at home by the water, comfortable with the exposing nature of public nudity, led to feeling at ease in the sauna space. This position of privilege provided the launchpad for my research. It made me question how these spaces, where I feel so at ease, can be experienced as places of discomfort and unease for others.

Autoethnography is an intimate research method where the boundaries between your personal life, the field and your academic work are undefined; rather, they are enmeshed and intertwined. As Ellis puts it: "there is no distinction between doing research and living a life; the autoethnographer is both the researcher and the researched." (2020, p359). This method is attractive in many ways, the most being that good autoethnography tends to be written from the heart. The creative, narrative style of writing brings cultural analysis closer to an art form:

Autoethnography implies connection: the stories we write connect self to culture; the way we research and write these stories blends tenets of social science with the aesthetic sensibilities of the humanities, ethnographic practices with expressive forms of art and literature, and research goals of understanding

with practical goals of empathy, healing, and coping. (Ellis, 2020, *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, p360)

Effective autoethnography uses connection (of the researcher to experience) to uncover insights that are difficult to discover at a distance. I must do empathic research, where lived experience is the focus of the work, meaningful relationships are cultivated, and several voices are uplifted and heard. Connecting the "real world" with the academic is the whole idea of cultural analysis; however, it is easy to maintain an invisible border between the two spheres. Cultural analysis can be an opportunity to connect the academic and the practical, the applied and the theoretical. It can offer a small attempt to produce work that can aid in dismantling the ivory tower. This, however, requires academic voices that take responsibility for their position in the field, for the relationships they build and save space for the nuances of everyday life (cf. Ellis, 2020).

2.8 Ethics

As friends, we long to have trusting relationships that care for others. As researchers, we long to do ethical research that makes a difference. To come close to these goals, we must constantly consider which questions to ask, which secrets to keep, and which truths are worth telling. (Ellis, 2007, p26)

Ellis (2007) provides valuable advice when dealing with relational ethics in ethnography. As I am incorporating others' personal stories, some of whom are individuals with whom I already have a developed relationship, there are particular ethical dilemmas I must consider. As a researcher, I have the power to choose how I use these stories. The input from informants shaped my text significantly, and the by-product of our conversations was a collaborative project. Nevertheless, I will be the one to earn prestige for the research. I must use my informant's input honestly and effectively so that when they read it back, their words will resonate and ring true to them while still maintaining the role of researcher. How do I appropriately shed light on lived experiences in a way that does not skew their words to fit my argument, nor belittle or undermine what they are trying to say? Also, how do I manage if my informants become offended or our relationship suffers because of this research? It is always challenging when navigating relationships of any kind. I will follow Ellis' advice to "act from our hearts and minds" (2007, p4). I have kept in touch with my informants throughout the process and checked in to see if they still consent to be part of

this research project. I have allowed my informants to read the sections where they are referenced and continue with the practice of "process consent" (Ellis, 2007, p23).

Autoethnography and interviewing are two methods that pose particular challenges relating to objectivity. I must be careful not to universalise personal experiences and be sensitive to other experiences I have not considered. There is a newly placed value on the role of reflexivity over "naive attempts to objectify the research encounter" (Davies, 2008, p8). All research reflects the position of the researcher. As Agar puts it, "Objectivity" is perhaps best seen as a label to hide problems in the social sciences." (1996, p41). While grappling for neutrality and objectivity, we may lose sight of the myriad ways we encounter the world. Instead, autoethnography and reflexive research uncovers the nuances of subjective experience and strives to provide a more three-dimensional view of the inconsistencies of human experience. Agar reiterates: "An ethnographer carries more baggage than a tape recorder and a toothbrush" (1996, p41). We carry the weight of our cultural inscriptions, personal baggage, memories, and emotions. Our identities will always shape our research findings.

3. Previous research

This chapter is to position this thesis in its contextual fields: Sauna, embodiment, and international student experiences. This triad is hard to find. Sauna studies through an ethnographic lens is a relatively understudied field. Most sauna research originates in Finland, given that sauna is a national and cultural symbol for the Finns. Previous sauna research exists predominantly in areas of health science. However, regarding cultural studies, sauna research "is scattered, unconnected, significantly non-English, and, to date, largely undigitised" (Tsonis, 2016, p60)

3.1 The Sauna and Public Bathing

Most research about sauna bathing in Sweden is unavailable in English and has yet to be established as an academic field in and of itself (Tsonis, 2016). According to Tsonis, there was ample research done on sweat bathing from 1950-1990, "but impetus has faded, and there has been minimal transference to digital research culture" (2016, p24). Jack Tsonis provides a coherent overview of various works conducted on this phenomenon and argues the need to formalise the research given the importance of social bathing on human culture. In his article, *Sauna Studies as an Academic Field* (2016), Tsonis inform us of the limited resources in sauna studies:

"We have no authoritative general work, no encyclopaedias, no book series, no systematic analysis of national and industrial archives, and hardly anything in the domain of ethnography, sociology, and cultural theory" (Tsonis, 2016, p60).

Therefore, my research is novel in its subject matter. However, its groundings in the concept of home, belonging and sense of place are heavily studied in cultural analysis.

Mikkel Aaland's *Sweat* (1978) is the most famous ethnographic work on the global phenomenon of Sweat bathing. He takes the reader on a tour of sweat practices across the globe. From a Mayan Temescal, a Russian Banya, to a Japanese Mushu-bur and a Native

American Sweat Lodge, and, of course, a Finnish sauna, Aaland highlights the importance of sweat bathing in shaping cultural ideals and forming societal connections. His approach combines autoethnography and history to paint a picture of the sauna culture he explores. Aaland offers in-depth information about the physical benefits of sweat bathing and a narrative approach to the global history of sauna bathing. He ends his book with a manual for sauna bathing. He provides the reader with ways to use and build your own sauna, with suggestions for spices and essential oils, rituals and social ways to enjoy the sauna.

Lisa Edelswärd has researched the cultural significance of the Finnish sauna. In her works, *We are more open when we are naked* (1991) and *Sauna as Symbol* (1991), Edelswärd deep dives into how the sauna generates community and brings people together: "The sauna is a powerful facilitator of social relations." (1991, p9). For Edelswärd, the naked aspect of the sauna is paramount for social connection because when you are naked, "you can be yourself" (Edelswärd, 1991, p194). She argues that the sauna brings essentially contradictory realms into intimate contact, be it the private and the public, the actual and the ideal, nature and culture, and the individual and the society. Her work highlights the importance of sauna bathing as a ritual in Finnish society. With this focus on ritual, Edelswärd pays much attention to literature on tradition and liminality and utilises a survey, unstructured interviews, and personal experience as her field material. She looks to the sauna as a window into which we can understand how social life in Finland is lived.

In his book *Ten Commandments of the Public Bath* (2016), Toivonen also provides an insightful cultural analysis of sauna practice in Finnish society. In the late 1940s, the Finnish Union of Commercial Saunas issued a single-page document, *The Ten Commandments of the Bather*, to be displayed at all public saunas. Toivonen's work dissects each commandment and provides them with historical and cultural context. It is a salient text highlighting the deep-rooted importance of sauna etiquette. These rules for sauna conduct were developed in response to an influx of newcomers to Finnish public saunas. Considering the premise of my analysis is an examination of how newcomers experience saunas, this article shows that the sauna space has had a long-standing need to develop tools to create a more inclusive and integrated sauna experience.

Charlotta Forss is researching conceptions of health and morality in the 17th and 18th-century Swedish sauna. While there are yet-to-be-published books on her subject, Forss has offered us access to her blog posts and videos discussing the topic. Her blog, *Some Like It Hot* (2019), provides informative discussions on the perception of sauna practice in the early modern period. What is interesting is that Forss makes use of the accounts of foreign travellers in Sweden to highlight the history of sexual and moral connotations attached to sauna practice. Many of the accounts show international travellers writing in wonderment at the eroticism of the sensual, nude aspect of sauna practice.

Forss shares the following commentary from Charles Ogier, a Frenchman who was in Stockholm on a diplomatic mission in 1635. He shares his experience of the sauna with his community at home:

sweat flowed from the whole body, and if it did not come forcefully enough, one brought it forth by whipping with a bunch of birch twigs. This service to the bathers was strangely enough made by girls, dressed only in linen garments; it seemed that they without a feeling of shame – indeed maybe without understanding, that there was anything to feel shameful about – treat the naked men, rub them with the fingertips, wipe the dirt from their body and head, lather them, rub them, and wash them. Here men and wives and young girls come together among each other. The women have only linen on. The men hide their secret parts only with a bunch of birch twigs. Custom and benefit have here driven away shame. Not even the most chaste women hesitate to visit these hot bathhouses, rather going there with husband and children.

Ogier's employee, another Frenchman, shares his own experience of the sauna: "I have been there [to the bathhouses] more than twenty times, not because I needed it but to look at the beautiful and wholly naked girls, and also to see what the practice was."

Forss explains how this representation of the sauna through the lens of international travellers as a highly sexualised space contradicted the rather apathetic perception that the locals had towards the space. It is interesting to note the impact of outsider bodies on sauna spaces and how that represents itself today.

Discussions on Sweden's perception of nudity are further addressed in *Burqinis Bikinis and Bodies* (2013). Pia Karlsson Minganti discusses encounters with burqinis at Swedish public

swimming pools. She provides compelling insights into the Swedish attitude towards nudity in public baths, highlighting that the acceptance of nudity is 'place' specific. This acceptance is also dependent on when these spaces are gender separated: "in Sweden, nudity is viewed as natural and decent within the context of gender-separated saunas and the showers at public baths" (2013, p41).

Minganti explains how this view of nudity as natural is linked to the progressive modernity of Sweden's national identity. She provides examples of familial practices whereby nudity is expected, for example, between parents and children, in summer houses where there are saunas, and in public changing facilities: "A dominant pattern is to wash undressed in public baths and to laugh at others' apparently irrational and outdated fear of nudity and exaggerated sexualisation of the human body" (2013, p40). Minganti discusses how Swedes claim that a threat to this "pragmatic" and "liberated" approach to nudity is due to the presence of migrant bodies:

Many Swedes claim this perceived moral dissolution in public baths stems from immigrants who are still held back by cultural traditions and religion. Also accused are American and global popular culture and the fashion and pornography industries, which are all believed to reinforce outdated norms (2013, p41).

Jonas Frykman, in his text *I hetluften: Svensk bastu som ideologi och praktik* (2004), locates his historical research in Sweden, where he explores the emergence of sauna practice. He argues that by studying sauna bathing, we can understand how identities are shaped and communities are formed amidst a tension between "order and sensuality". (translated) Frykman focuses on how hygiene was a cultural and political tool for Swedish national identity. He also discusses the paradoxical role that the sauna plays in the perception of Swedish identity. The sauna exists as a site of hedonism and pleasure alongside a culture generalised to be "washed up, boring, rational, shy and grey" (2004, p102). For Frykman, the sauna is an intimate space for "uninhibited nudity, relaxed conversations about the trivialities of life, quick jokes and musings... The sauna has become our cafe" (2004, p105).

Given the lack of established autoethnographic work on Scandinavian sauna practice through the lens of non-Swedes this thesis fills a gap in sauna research. It is novel in its approach to examining social structures within sauna practice through a more critical lens.

Most research in the field takes on an overtly positive approach to sauna bathing. According to Tsonis, "Sauna is one of the most joyful activities humanity has ever created." (2016, p41). Edelswärd's attitude is similar: "In Finnish culture, the sauna is not a bath: it is described as a necessity of life (1999, p6). This thesis aims to dissect the eutopic notion of sauna practice and rather use the sauna as a site for social and cultural enquiry.

3.2 Embodiment

Embodiment permeates a myriad of literature within social research. However, I will introduce the work of Astrida Neimanis as it has laid the foundations and inspired this research project. Astrida Neimanis, a cultural theorist whose research interweaves with poetry, painting, and photography, focuses on bodies and water and bodies *of* water. Her phenomenological approach to affective embodiment allows us to reimagine how to protect our environment consciously. Embodiment, for Neimanis, is bound up in the interrelations between people and the planet. Her book *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology* (2016) offers a perspective on embodiment as a shared, relational experience, whereby bodies exist in the world as sites of affects, sites of feelings and sites of sensory perception. She discusses the influence of power/ patriarchy/ capitalism on how we are embodied, highlighting the importance of recognising the socio-cultural forces at play in shaping emotional identities. Her text, *Learning Feeling* (2021), explores the entanglement of all beings, humans, animals and nature and how we can protect our intimate places with the awareness of this connection. "Feeling is bodies learning from other bodies. Learning feeling is to be in relation" (2021, p3).

On Being at Home With Myself: Blackgirl Autoethnography as Research Praxis (2016) by Robin M. Boylorn uses the theme of homemaking to approach her embodiment research.

The home I have been journeying toward is centred and grounded in my own self. Home is brown and decadent, beautifully bland and predictable, composed of curves and angles that carry the legacy of ancestors and the heat of humidity, with darkened edges and thick skin. There are eyes and feet and hands at home. Big legs, wide arms, and mysterious eyes that see in/side out, marking places beneath birth marks a road map can't point to. Home (2016, p.45)

Boylorn beautifully uses "blackgirl" autoethnography and combines her fieldwork with interviews with women she has shared "home" spaces to situate her embodied experience

in the world and argue for a space for women of colour to locate themselves in research. Her connection between home and her body ties in nicely with this thesis. It highlights how embodied experience can be artfully represented. For Boylorn, writing blackgirl autoethnography forges knowledge "for/about/from marginalised others." For Boylorn, writing autoethnography "made me at home with myself."

Embodiment literature is plentiful. The research I have provided here takes on two different approaches. Nevertheless, both shed light on ways to represent embodied experience and the ability of this representation to protect and pay attention to the marginalised voices that often go unnoticed. These approaches to embodiment studies have laid a foundation for this thesis, which attempts to widen embodiment research into the field of sauna studies and international student relations. This research will examine embodied representations of sauna encounters and explore their role reimagine the sauna space as a site for homemaking practices.

3.3 Studies in International Student Relations

There is ample research regarding international student experiences. However, these works refer to international student relations within the confines of the university. Lorraine Brown (2013) focuses on friendship patterns of international students in a British university. Her findings highlight the importance of conational friendships for students to feel at home in their new environment. She discusses the need for universities to have more effective strategies for internationalising their campuses. Students from international backgrounds were more likely to build community with other individuals from their countries of origin. There was very little evidence of cross-cultural friendships. Also, international students rarely build an attachment to the cultural and social practices of the host country. Bochner (1985) echoes this in his work, highlighting that international students' connection with domestic students tends to be primarily for instrumental and practical purposes, i.e. for further employment/ access to a local network. Additional research suggests that international education can contribute to social inequalities and mental health issues among students. Having nationally diverse student communities does not simply create tolerance and bridge intercultural gaps (cf. Waters (2021); (cf. Gan, Helen and Mewett (2019)) .

Siikavaara Wester (2021) writes about the international student experience at Uppsala University. He concludes that international students struggle with experiencing belonging

at Uppsala due to the language barrier, the dark and cold days, and the temporary, short-term aspect of an exchange programme. Brunette et al. (2019) discuss the importance of outdoor activities in facilitating international students' transition to their new environment. The literature on international student experiences is manifold. They all stress a need for universities to take responsibility to ensure that their campus is fit to support the culturally specific needs of migrated students.

Despite the variety of work on international students' experience, as mentioned, there is little research on international students' experience outside of academic spaces. This thesis highlights the embodied experience of international students as they navigate public spaces of their host country. When conducting research on the international student experience, it is important to recognise that their home-making practices depend greatly on their encounters and relationship with the rituals, spaces and expectations of the host country. When students move away for studies in a new country, the desire to move is much more than the pursuit of education. Factors that assist people in feeling at home, in feeling safe, stable and content go well beyond the classroom, well beyond what the university can offer. Discussions on racial discrimination faced by migrants, economic and housing inequality permeate the social sciences, fine arts, human geography and humanities. However, this thesis focuses primarily on the experiences of a particular group of migrants. International students are not a homogenous group. The position as an international student comes with immense privilege, yet confining my research group to international students narrows the scope of the study to a more focused and concise argument. My research does not aim to offer a singular understanding of home. Instead, this thesis will perhaps offer another way to make sense of the lived experiences of a particular group of international students as they interact with a particular space, in this context, the sauna, and how homemaking can be understood within these interactions.

As clearly can be understood through looking at the previous research into the sauna and its various homemaking abilities and positive (affective) connotations, there is an ample need for a more critical review of sauna experience(s). Therefore, I have chosen to dwell on the experiences of the sauna, as experienced by international students in Sweden,

through the lens of affect. Hereafter I will explicate the theoretical toolbox of affect, looking at embodiment, home, whiteness and gendered and sexual identities.

4. Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will introduce theoretical perspectives that inform the analysis. I have approached my subject by diving deep into how the concept of “affect” is theorised. Developing a method to understand the ambiguities of the central theoretical themes of this thesis: home, embodiment, space and place, requires effective use of affect theory. Affect theory prioritises studying feelings, senses, and other non-linguistic emotional experiences. Felt experience is salient for understanding how the world is navigated or encountered. It allows an academic examination of emotional responses to real-life occurrences. This chapter is grounded in the works of Sara Ahmed, and touches on insights made by Frykman, Yi-Fu Tuan and bell hooks. The work of Ahmed, Tuan, Frykman and hooks together highlights these somewhat ambiguous themes' complex and multi-dimensional nature. They each emphasise the importance of recognising social and cultural structures' role in shaping our experiences of space and place. By exploring the interactions with the themes of body, home, power, gender and whiteness, these scholars provide a rich framework for understanding the complex and dynamic nature of affects.

Affect theory will be used to study home as it is experienced emotionally. Given the enormity of this subject, I have chosen to focus on three particular dimensions to ensure a concise and compelling argument. The central themes of my theoretical analysis incorporate belonging, gender and queer embodiment, whiteness and home. Indeed, these themes require that I navigate how human beings encounter other human beings and relate to the intimate places they inhabit. With this approach, we can better make sense of the sauna as an affective place fraught with emotional encounters. We will gain insight into how the sauna is shaped by the bodies it holds, and conversely, we can understand how the sauna shapes its users.

Ethnographic research, according to Frykman, "provides a fertile ground from which to capture the ambiguities of affective and emotive experience." (2016, p10). As a field of analysis, the sauna is a space understood through the body, feelings, senses, encounters and bodily responses. This research explores a bodily experience. Fieldwork is based on my sweaty observations, experiences and encounters, and the sweaty encounters of my participants. These experiences can be described as intangible, visceral and sensorial. When we sit in the sauna, we feel our bodies heating up, beads of sweat form on the skin, we can smell the wood fire and are moved by the ocean view. A sauna experience is a sensory explosion that generates a whirlpool of emotions, affects and bodily movements. Utilising the study of affect provides a theoretical framework that can adequately examine these experiences.

Affect has been widely discussed across a variety of interdisciplinary studies. There are infinite texts negotiating the concept of affect, discussing the split between mind, body, cognition and bodily experience, emotion and affect. All efforts have enriched the study of affect, yet there still needs coherence among the myriad of affect theorists. There is a flurry of voices in the ongoing contestation regarding the difference between affect and emotion, leaving researchers needing a clear-cut definition of the concept. Ben Anderson focuses on this very vagueness in his work. He has coined the term "affective atmospheres" (2009) to discuss the "deeply personal and embodied" effect of an atmosphere that "is hard to describe" (Fryckman, 2016, p11). Atmosphere, like affect, emotion, and experience, is ambiguous. Anderson highlights how the very ambiguity of affective atmospheres allows us to explore how subjective experiences are formed (Fryckman, 2016). Yi-Fu Tuan refers to something similar in his discussion of "intimate experiences of place", which he also explains are challenging to express due to their sheer subjective nature. Intimate experiences "lie buried in our innermost being so that not only do we lack the words to give them form, but often we are not even aware of them" (1977, p136). However, Ahmed argues that affect is not solely located in subject experience. Emotion, like affect, does not have a location. It is neither inside nor outside, neither a property of subjects nor a property of objects. Ahmed suggests that we think about how emotions circulate to better understand the multiple ways in which the world is navigated: "even when we feel we have the same feeling, we do not necessarily have the same relationship to the feeling" (2004, p10). Affect theorist Margaret Wetherall is critical of Ahmed's work on affect, arguing that there needs

to be a clear-cut differentiation between emotion and affect (2015). Ahmed tends to make use of these terms interchangeably. Ahmed's approach to affect theory is positioned in the intersection of feminist theory, lesbian feminism, queer theory, critical race theory and postcolonialism. I will lead the discussion with Sara Ahmed's approach to affect.

Hereafter, I will dive deeply into how Sara Ahmed explores affects. Ahmed looks at what affects do rather than what they are (cf. Frykman 2016). Ahmed centres her discussions around emotions. She discusses how they move between bodies and play a role in power structures and community formations. I gravitate towards Ahmed's work as it provides excellent insights into how human beings are shaped by one another and how feelings of belonging and estrangement are located in emotional and affective practices. She challenges the notion that emotions belong to any individual; instead, they are relational:

Emotions are not simply something "I" or "we" have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the "I" and the "we" are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others" (2004, p10)

4.1 Ahmed and the Study of Emotions

When we interact with others, we generate an emotional response; we *feel* something. Emotions do not exist without a human being experiencing them. However, they also shape human beings and the space they inhabit. Affect, for Ahmed, is expressed in how bodies orient themselves: "We move toward and away from objects through how we are affected by them." (2010, p32). She explains how we consider something good or bad depending on how it affects us, whether it gives us joy or misery. For instance, Ahmed uses an example of the pleasure of eating grapes. If we like the taste, we are oriented towards the grapes. We are moved by the joy of the grapes, their taste, the memories they evoke, the environment around them, and the meanings we attach to them. (2010, p31) Conversely, if we experience dislike for something, we move away from the object in question. In *Strange Encounters* (2000), Ahmed provides an anecdote by Audre Lorde, highlighting how emotions are passed through bodily movements and communicated with emotions which thus shape the surrounding environment. Following is an account from Lorde's childhood sitting beside a white woman on a subway.

On the other, a woman in a fur hat staring at me. Her mouth twitches as she stares and then her gaze drops down, pulling mine with it. Her leather-gloved hand plucks at the line where my new blue snowpants and her sleek fur coat meet. She jerks her coat close to her. I look. I do not see whatever terrible thing she is seeing on the seat between us – probably a roach. But she has communicated her horror to me. It must be something very bad from the way she's looking, so I pull my snowsuit closer to me away from it, too. When I look up the woman is still staring at me, her nose holes and eyes huge. And suddenly I realise there is nothing crawling up the seat between us; it is me she doesn't want her coat to touch... Something's going on here I do not understand, but I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate. ((Lorde 1984: 147–148 as seen in Ahmed (2000), p38)

Hate is communicated without words, but through the gestures of withdrawal of the white body, her nose holes and huge eyes, her coat jerks, and her way of looking are bodily signs that reduce the child's body to a contaminated body "out of place". The white body is aligned "with the bodily form of the community" (Ahmed, 2000, p39). Due to the woman's bodily movements, the child is disoriented and thus excluded from the affective community. Emotions can thus create dynamics of power, which play out on the body. Emotions are relational and become affective in encounters like this one, whereby both bodies are "de-formed and re-formed, they take form through and against other bodily forms." (2000, 38). This encounter has described a particular dynamic between two people. However, the affective impact of this encounter permeates the space in which they are sharing. The subway thus becomes entangled in this encounter. It is also shaped by the bodies it holds; it moulds and forms by the emotions that pass through it.

4.2 Home, Orientation and Belonging

The issue is that home is not simply about fantasies of belonging (where do I originate from?) but that it is sentimentalised as a space of belonging ("home is where the heart is "). The question of home and being at home can only be addressed by considering THE QUESTION OF AFFECT: being at home is a matter of *how one feels or how one might feel*. (Ahmed, 2000, p89)

What does a body at home signify? To feel at home, or in place, is when space and subject "leak into each other" (Ahmed, 2000, p89), a body that feels connected and part of the space it inhabits. Ahmed highlights that bodies at home are familiar and create community by "being together as like bodies" (2000, p59). She reiterates a similar idea in her discussion

of orientation, whereby orientation involves the alignment of body and space: "Orientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from 'here'" (Ahmed, 2007, p151). According to Ahmed, being orientated means having our bearings; we know where we are when we turn this way or that, one could say, we belong, or we are "in place": oriented towards something familiar. Moreover, we are at home in a place that anchors us. The sauna can be a site that orients us if it "helps us to find our way" (2006, p1).

For example, when we sit in the sauna and gaze out to sea, we may feel a certain connection to place. This connection can be rooted in familiarity with this particular sea, this acquainted view of the Baltic horizon. For a migrant body new to this view, it can evoke memories of the sea of their homeland. Facing this horizon could help one to find their way in their new home. Orientation brings us home and guides us to a familiar sense of being "here". Home is inextricably linked to memory. As hooks puts it, "We are born and have our being in a place of memory" (2009, p5). Tuan echoes this in his discussion on intimate places. For Tuan, home is an intimate place because of the memories it evokes. The sounds, smells, and feelings of being at home are fragmented into fleeting intimate components of memories (1977). Therefore, leaving home, as well as being at home is "always a question of memory, of the discontinuity between past and present" (Ahmed, 2000, p91).

Furthermore, Tuan discusses how attachments to a homeland are evoked. The homeland, for many, is viewed as "the centre of the world" (1977, p149). He explains how public spaces in an individual's homeland, such as landmarks, monuments or shrines, enhance one's sense of identity. Following this, he explains how attachments to home can also be "deep" and "subconscious", which comes with "familiarity and ease, with the assurance of nurture and security, with the memory of sounds and smells, of communal activities and homely pleasures accumulated over time" (1977, p159).

However, "strange bodies" that are not at home in the world are "expelled from bodily space" (Ahmed, 2000, p50). Strangeness or difference is an affective experience that is more conscious and more etched in memory than sameness. This is exemplified in Lorde's memory of the subway experience. The woman in the fur coat communicated emotions of disgust and hate towards the child, impacting the child's experience of belonging. The child

was made a stranger, recognised as somebody out of place. This experience has never left Lorde's memory: "*I will never forget it. Her eyes. The flared nostrils. The hate.*"

4.3 Belonging Continued

"Many folks feel no sense of place. What they know.. Is a sense of crisis" (hooks, 2009, p1).

bell hooks, in her book *belonging*, writes of the overwhelming uprootedness or alienation that comes with moving away from home for studies: "Madness was more acceptable away from home"(2009, p57). Exile, in her words, can "utterly transform one's perception of the world of home" (2009, p13). Ahmed echoes this; she explains how narratives of migration, "insofar as the experience of a body that once inhabited a particular place, re-inhabits or re-orient itself in another place", allow us to deconstruct what "home" means: "Migration can hence be considered as a process of estrangement, a process of becoming estranged from that which was inhabited as home." (1999, p343). In other words, we understand what home means when we leave home (Ahmed, 2006). For Tucker, however, the migration experience impacts all of us as we are all "descendants of immigrants... we are born with legs that can move us, migrate us across multiple spatial temporalities" (1994, p186). He explains how the home search is multi-levelled and has always existed: "home-searching is a basic trait of being human" (1994, p186).

The idea of home is a complex, ever-evolving concept to reflect upon, one that is not shy of nostalgia and romanticism but also a trope that scholars throughout various disciplines have offered perspectives on how to study. Home is inextricably linked to identity, to people's lived realities, memories and movements: It offers questions on belonging, emplacement, community and thus estrangement, otherness and alienation (see Mallett 2004, see Ahmed 2000; 2006). We cannot dissect this experience without considering the political, racial, gender and class implications on our feelings of connection, home, and emplacement (hooks, 2009, p3). Our identity markers are deeply embroiled in how we inhabit space and place. The meaning of a sense of home is very different for every individual. Not everyone has a place they can call home. hooks in her writings highlight how making meaning of home is a sensitive and fragile undertaking for those who have

been colonised, for those whose location of identity was fraught with political and racial oppression: "the effort to speak about issues of "space and location" evoked pain" (hooks, 1989, p16). A "sense of place is not static... but dynamic, always subject to further negotiation" (Massey, 1991, p28). In short: to be at home is not a state of being, but rather an affect, a feeling (Ahmed, 1999)

4.4 Embodiment

"To be embodied is to be capable of being affected by other bodies" (1999, Weiss in Ahmed, 2000, p47).

It is salient to lay out the meaning of "embodiment" to clarify my theoretical positioning. To study affect, we must explore embodiment, more specifically, 'embodied experience that often remain unseen, unnoticed and unrecognised' (Åhäll and Gregory, in Frykman 2016, p12). Embodiment places the body in focus. It highlights how perception and other bodily senses offer a way to make sense of our lived reality. Embodiment also aids us in developing a theory of "home" relevant to this thesis, as home can be understood as an emplacement of the embodied self. The body is embodied at home, and embodiment is the body at home. Belonging, for Ahmed, is also a body at home (Ahmed, 1991). Conversely, the experiences of not being home, of non-belonging "are felt at the level of embodiment, the lived experience of inhabiting a particular space, a space that is neither within nor outside bodily space." (Ahmed, 1991, p92) A person's feelings and experiences of home are tied to their corporeality. The theoretical perspectives I have drawn argue for an understanding of embodiment that is not singular nor autonomous. Instead, the understanding of embodiment is relational. We need to encounter other bodies to understand our own. Ahmed describes this idea as "inter-embodiment", whereby the lived experience of embodiment is always "*the social experience of dwelling with other bodies*" (2000, p40).

What is the body? I will argue that there is no body as such that is given in the world: bodies materialise in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other bodies, including bodies that are recognised as familiar... and those that are considered as strange" (Ahmed, 2000, p40).

Each body moves through space in different ways. The sauna is interesting to navigate as a gendered, sexualised, racialised and able-ised space. Following Ahmed's words, we can argue that bodies both create space and are created by the space in which they are embodied.

4.5 Affect Aliens

You can be affectively alien because you are affected in the wrong way by the right things. Or you can be affectively alien because you affect others in the wrong way: your proximity gets in the way of other people's enjoyment of the right things, functioning as an unwanted reminder of histories that are disturbing, that disturb an atmosphere (Ahmed, 2010, p67).

Ahmed's concept of affect aliens provides a method of understanding how feelings of exclusion or belonging affect a sauna experience. Affect aliens are individuals or groups who tend to be excluded or marginalised because their affective experiences do not fit with the dominant norms of the society in which they live. This also links to how she discusses how strangers are recognised "as not belonging, as being out of place" (Ahmed, 2000).

When we feel pleasure from such objects, we are aligned; we are facing the right way. We become alienated—out of line with an affective community—when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are already attributed as being good. (Ahmed, 2010, p37)

Ahmed presents certain social groups that move through space as affect aliens: Those who, by their orientation, call to question the promise of happiness. She calls these groups feminist killjoys, unhappy queers, and melancholic migrants. These groups can be individuals who "expose the bad feelings that get hidden, displaced, or negated under public signs of joy". (2010, 39) In other words, Ahmed argues that affect aliens disrupt the dominant affective norms of their societies. A feminist who points out a moment of sexism or a migrant whose presence highlights a history of racism that a community deems inexistent are examples of affect aliens. Affect aliens challenge norms and render inequalities visible (2010).

By understanding these group members' sauna experiences, we can better understand how belonging or exclusion is experienced. For Ahmed, affect aliens are "alienated by virtue of how they are affected by the world or how they affect others in the world" (2010, p164). In other words, affect aliens feel out of place when they do not feel the same emotional experience as the "affective community". The "affective community" is the community

who are aligned in their happiness (2004). The affective community holds the dominant norms of affective experience. They have a shared orientation towards certain things being good or bad. Members of an affective community carry bodies that are in place. For example, spaces are oriented around whiteness. They are also oriented around heterosexuality (Ahmed, 2006). Members of the affective community carry these dominant norms, which make those who do not share a likeness with the community feel out of place:

The effect of this ‘‘around whiteness’’ is the institutionalisation of a certain ‘‘likeness,’’ which makes nonwhite bodies uncomfortable and feel exposed, visible, and different when they take up this space (Ahmed, 2006, p133)

For this thesis, the affective community is the sauna goers, or macro cosmically, Swedish locals. The affect aliens are those who open our eyes to the ways in which the sauna can be examined with greater complexity and sensitivity towards those who do not find happiness or pleasure in the sauna or, macro cosmically, in Sweden.

Ahmed uses the concept of affect to suggest that the emotional experiences of belonging or estrangement through sauna practice are not just individual or subjective but also shaped and influenced by social and cultural structures and practices. By paying attention to these affective dynamics, we can shed light on the complexities of sauna practice as a site of cultural and emotional experience and work to create more inclusive and welcoming spaces for all individuals.

Overall, Ahmed's theory of affect aliens suggests that affective experiences are deeply intertwined with social and cultural structures and that those who do not fit within the norms of the affective community can provide valuable insights into the ways in which the affective world is understood.

4.6 Benefits and Limitations

The study of affects is an effective theoretical starting point for examining sauna practice. It academically grounds a practice, so felt, so experienced within an academic framework fit for a thesis. It focuses on the ambiguous, the felt, and the lived. However, there are

limitations to this theoretical cassis. There always reaches a point where the written word, particularly the written word under academic guidelines, fails to represent *feelings*. How one feels about something is constantly in flux, it is weather-dependent, mood dependent and incorporates a variety of sociocultural relations. A common dilemma faced in the affect theorist world is the worry that academic discourse reduces an emotional experience to a “matter of fact” (Frykman, 2016, p16). However, Frykman explains that it is not beneficial to juxtapose bodily experience with conscious thought. He states: “By juxtaposing corporeal and cognitive processes in fieldwork or interview situations, much of the potential for understanding affect seems to get lost” (2016, p16). Narrative or “wordy” representations can still ensure an appropriate examination of affective experiences. Interviews, for example, can provide rich insights into affective experiences. The same can be said about theorising these experiences. In our attempt, as researchers, to lay out an understanding of the ambiguous, we are also doing meaning-making work. The purpose of this theoretical chapter is to map out a way to give words to the experiences of my informants. There will always be limitations to written representation. There is not one approach alone that can encapsulate or appropriately represent the complexity of an emotionally affective experience.

In examining sauna practice, focusing on affects can help to understand how the emotional experiences of belonging or estrangement are produced and circulated. The sauna is seen as a site of connection within Swedish culture. The sauna can produce affective states of belonging and connection through shared experiences of cleansing, relaxation, and social bonding. On the other hand, if an individual does not share the cultural norms or practices associated with Scandinavian sauna practice or if they experience exclusion or discomfort within the sauna environment, affective states of estrangement or disconnection may be produced. These affective states may be reinforced by social and cultural structures that create barriers to full participation in the sauna experience, such as gender or cultural differences or discomfort with communal nudity.

5. Analysis

Sauna bathing can be described as a practice where people sit in a sweltering room, often made of softwood. A stove heats the room, usually between 80 and 100 degrees. A sauna bath tends to be done in courses; a short time in the sauna to heat up and begin to sweat, followed by a cooling off outside the sauna bath. The process is commonly repeated. (cf. Tsonis, p45).

For Blue, sauna practice is depicted as

a Nordic thing. They go to the sauna, jump into the water, go to sauna again and then dunk into water. They like doing this but you know, in Chinese thought, we say, if you went to the sauna, basically all your pores open and then you jump in the cold sea and all the coldness may like invade your body or something. In China, they will advise you to go to the sauna after the sea instead of going back to the sea after sauna. Because the sea feels super cold and then the sauna will heat you, like cold comes out you know. but if you like do it the other way around, it's not good for your health like at least according to traditional Chinese, like doctors. It's, it's more like a common sense. When you have a cold, you need to drink some hot ginger. Its more common sense Everyone agree with it but there's no scientific proof.

(Interview with Blue 09/02/22)

Or, in the words of Tomazzo,

Ehh what do they do? Like objectively what do they do? They arrive to the sauna. They choose a sauna that they like based on location or size of the sauna or i dunno. Then they go the changing room they get changed, they enter the sauna. They enjoy the sauna, They sit in the sauna until they become very hot. And then they jumped in the water which is crazy to me because I would never do that it- it's a very cold in Sweden. They also show off a little bit, how expert they are. They show their expertise by, well... they put water on the stones. They are all completely naked. They have two different towels, one for inside the sauna, the other for outside. They go into the water and they sit at the top (bench) because it's warm.

(Interview with Tomazzo 12/12/22)

More than an objective explanation, both Blue and Tomazzo's description of the sauna process is fraught with identity signifiers. References to the homeland of the participant,

gender expressions, and cultural insights freckle the text; thus highlighting how a sauna practice is experienced bodily through the lens of one's own cultural and personal history. Both of their descriptions also take on the position of the outsider. The sauna is something “they” do”: “It’s a Nordic thing”. It is not a space that they have claimed to be part of, “crazy to me because I would never do that”. These descriptions alone already reveal insights into how these individuals situate themselves in their new home, thus highlighting how emotionally affective experience shapes one’s sauna practice (Ahmed, 2010). It is important to pay close attention to the ambiguous (Fryckman, 2016) and how feelings of belonging or exclusion are represented. Sauna practice is perceived in various ways, subjectively based on our socio-cultural positioning. As we continue to dive deeper into the subjective experiences of sauna practice in Sweden, as experienced by internationals, we can explore what establishing belonging in this society means.

This analysis will combine my theoretical and methodological approaches with thick descriptions from the field. I will move between my own personal reflections from the field and insights from my informants. To reiterate, this analysis will deal with the themes of home and belonging, whiteness, gender and queer embodiment. I will approach these themes by focusing on how bodily encounters and emotional experiences shape the sauna space. Analysing them allows us to understand how public space is navigated and sheds light on how feelings of emplacement or outsidersness are brought to the fore.

5.1 Home, Orientation and Belonging

Belinda and I started with a dip in the sea. It was her idea, and I could never turn down the challenge. It was fucking freezing. I felt the cold in my throat, I always imagine that feeling as though there is a whole watermelon stuck in my throat that can't quite make it further down my oesophagus. The sky is grey, a very Malmö grey and the wind is harsh. Snow covers the rocks and blankets the wooden jetty. We lower our bodies into the sea, clinging onto the ice-cold bannisters, a few deep breaths and some escaping shrieks. The Swedish girl who dipped at the same time is silent, her face doesn't seem to flinch,

All kinds of women are here, one very large lady with a bright pink body towel and another pink turban sits in the centre of the sauna. The rest of us surround her. She looks regal to me.

No one looks at each other, I can never help but look around, take note of my fellow sauna goers, their faces, their bodies, the books they are reading, their tattoos. Everyone in the room faces the window, gazing at the grey beyond. The sea and the sky are two different shades of grey, never quite dissolving into each other.

The air is dry, the skin on my face is tight. I don't know if I am comfortable, I am definitely hot.

Five women cover their hair, some with delicate hair shawls, others with tight swim caps, straggles of damp hair escaping through the sides

The room was silent, even though we sat in the "talking allowed" sauna. A sign in front reads Tala dampet/ speak quietly, we speak in hushed tones.

A woman walks in, smelling of soap and soaked in water, she must have just taken a shower. She positions herself in front of the benches, rings her hair out on the hot rocks and dries her body down with her towel as the rest of us sit, gazing past her, but definitely watching

We dip again. I climb down the stairs alongside a lady in her 70s, on the neighbouring staircase, nude, yet fashioning a bright orange hat. As she lowers into the freeze, she lets out a moan, but she remains collected. Now it's my turn: deep, audible inhale, dunk, squeal, deep, audible exhale, "fuck fuck fuck" under my breath. Belinda cheers me on, "fair play, good woman!", a typical Irish note of encouragement that warms me. She goes next, dunks, remains for two long breaths, her eyes closed, zen and then "fuck, shit fuck its freezzzing!" We run back to the warm sauna, giggling, 2 laughing crazy foreigners, "wow I feel amazing" Belinda exclaims, then "gosh, were so loud"

The other ladies smile softly at our theatrics.

It gets too hot to take notes, I am too sedated, sweaty, and calm.

(Fieldnotes 19/12/2022)

These field notes demonstrate the multifaceted nature of sauna culture. As Belinda and I brave the freezing sea, the theme of home and belonging comes to mind. We are both newcomers to Sweden, and this shared experience brings us closer together, creating our own sense of community in this new land. However, the cold and harsh weather also reminds us that we are outsiders, making efforts to adapt to the Swedish way of life.

Affective experiences are evident in these field notes, as the physical sensations of the cold water in the throat and the fear of the cold shock create a visceral response within the body. The physical sensations described, such as the dry air and tightness of the skin, are

accompanied by emotional responses, such as the discomfort of not knowing if one is truly comfortable. The hushed tones in the talking allowed sauna also suggests a shared understanding of the etiquette of the sauna experience. These experiences are physical and emotional, with the shared laughter and shrieks creating a sense of bonding and release. The experience of dipping into the freezing water is documented with deep inhales, moans, and squeals, all accompanied by strong emotional language such as "fuck fuck fuck" and "it's freezing". These visceral responses generate a sense of bonding and camaraderie, with Belinda's Irish note of encouragement fueling a sense of shared cultural identity.

The snow-covered rocks and a wooden jetty also highlight the importance of the physical environment in shaping our experiences. The orange hat worn by the older lady creates a striking visual image, highlighting the individuality and sense of expression found in the sauna community.

In my conversations with my informants, we frequently talk about our homelands, comparing the cultural practices of our home countries to Sweden's. These discussions have offered insights into the different cultural landscapes in which they grew up and how it has shaped their sauna experiences. I have learned that homemaking in a new place makes us more conscious of our homeland; thus, home becomes more realised when we move away (Ahmed, 2006, hooks 2000). Yi-FuTuan expresses how a place can become totally knowable "when our experience of it is total, that is, through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind." (1977, p18) The homeland can be known intimately because it is somewhere where we have spent a long period of time, however, "its image may lack sharpness unless we can also see it from the outside and reflect upon our experience" (1977, p18). Through reflective and affective practices, the homeland can become sentimentalised, evoking fond memories of security and community. This can be seen in Maria's description of how the sauna is considered a home space:

for me, I grew up all over the place. So I've never actually had a like, family home or a home country because we moved around a lot. So for me, my home was always just been like my safe space. So usually just my room like not even the house, just my bedroom and I value those places a lot because yeah, like I've never had them growing up. so like having my own space where I can really relax. so I do connect (the sauna to home) because I just feel safe. I just feel at ease there.

(Interview with Maria. 10/01/23)

Leaving home also involves a process of estrangement (Ahmed, 1999), whereby we begin to leave behind a particular understanding of our identity and reform and shape ourselves as we navigate a new layer of self-understanding. By estrangement, Ahmed means a "process of transition, a movement" (1999, p343). Almost as if it is a movement from one way of knowing ourselves to another. The migration process can be understood through emotions and feelings, "felt through the surprises in sensation: different smells, different sounds as night" (1999, p342). Homemaking does something to how we make sense of our very selves. Ahmed describes the experience of moving to a new home as "a transformation in the very skin through which the body is embodied" (1999, p342). My informants are all undergoing this transformative process of identification in their adjustments to life in Sweden.

Being at home as well as the lived experience of being away from home, is thus considered through affective practices.

Where is home? On the one hand, 'home' is a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination. In this sense, it is a place of no return, even if it is possible to visit the geographical territory that is seen as the place of 'origin'. On the other hand, home is also the lived experience of locality, its sounds and smells. (Brah, 1996, p192 in Ahmed, 1999, p341)

This quote from Ahmed appropriately sums up an understanding of "home" from the perspective of those who have moved away from their homeland. Home is both the memory and attachment to the homeland and a sensorial practice of daily life in the new spaces we inhabit. These two experiences are not mutually exclusive. Homemaking becomes a dance between these memories of where we came from and new understandings of how we make sense of ourselves in our new homes. Hereafter, my field material will show how the informants perceive their homelands and how the homemaking process in Sweden has influenced their perspective of their socio-cultural backgrounds. Comparisons between the homeland and Sweden are described using affective language. My informants talk about body practices, smells, sounds, feelings and emotions that have emerged in their homemaking process and what these experiences have done to shape their perception of their homeland as well as their perception of Swedish social life.

In an interview with Belinda, the same Belinda who joined me in my sauna experience above, discusses how sauna practice has highlighted awareness of the difference between attitudes to nudity in Sweden, compared to Ireland:

That's something that's definitely definitely different in Ireland versus in Sweden. Also maybe that's because I'm I'm, like, more comfortable in myself. You know, it's hard to know specifically if it's just the location, but oh my gosh, I feel much more comfortable getting changed here than I do at home. Like I can let my towel drop, without feeling really embarrassed or like, you know, I don't have to be completely wrapped in my towel the entire time I'm getting changed, whereas at home, no one can see your underwear when you're getting changed by the sea. You know, like you can't drop your towel when you're in your underwear to put your jeans on. I don't know why it is, I guess it's the residue of Catholic shame. Or just the culture. I'm not really sure what it is like no one would. Okay, people wouldn't look if you were naked. No one's actually paying attention to you as you're getting changed. I think you just feel more self conscious in [Ireland's] environment for some reason.

I don't know that I would feel any more comfortable like walking down the street naked in Sweden. Yeah, but I guess it's probably the sauna culture as well. That is the reason why you can feel more comfortable. I would assume because you can swim naked and that's kind of all fine whereas in Ireland you swim in a bathing suit, you sauna in a bathing suit, you know?

(Interview with Belinda. 02/02/22)

Through Belinda's move from Ireland to Sweden, her perception of particular socio-cultural dynamics is realised. Notice how it is through bodily practices, such as covering herself with her towel, that these cultural understandings are represented. Her body is almost undergoing a process of transition, as Ahmed describes, whereby Belinda is re-negotiating a way in which her body carries itself, and covers itself, thus reinforcing how moving away from home can be understood as "a transformation in the very skin through which the body is embodied" (Ahmed, 1999). This is reiterated in the following extract, Blue explains to me what she believes her parents would say about the Swedish sauna culture. She also discusses her perception of Sweden's 'openness', comparing the attitude towards nudity here to her home in China. Similarly to Belinda, Blue considers how the body dresses itself, when it chooses to cover up and when not, reinforcing the bodily process of transition in homemaking:

Blue: I am the kind of person who's kind of open to culture shock you know, like I live here. I need to kind of accept it to integrate here.. But for some people, like for example, my mom she's definitely not gonna accept this and like she's quite conservative. Yeah. And also like she would have, oh, you shouldn't go there .

Kara: so if you went would you tell her?

Blue: No, of course not.

Kara: Right. Right. What do you think they would think about the Swedish sauna?

Blue: They will just think Swedes are so open. Yeah. They won't think much. It's just like, they won't understand. They just think they are, like, more open than us. And to be honest, I can't tell if it's a good thing or bad thing. I mean, if it is us being too conservative or if it is them being too open, like, I don't know.

but to be honest, as far as I noticed, there's not much Swedes like wearing bras on the streets, but you can see people wearing anything in the clubs. But like in daily life, you can't see that. So that makes me wonder if they are like actually kind of open or, you know. It's hard to say if they are really open you know Like they are open but they are still partly open.

(Interview with Blue 09/02/22)

Rua's parents "would never go (to the sauna). We've talked about it and they're like, What the hell is wrong with you?" Tomazzo's also:

My family? No. but because I know that they wouldn't like it as an activity No, I know. I know. Because my mother doesn't even swim in the Mediterranean Sea. so she will be cold and probably she wouldn't like to be naked with other people, don't know. I don't think they would like it.

Riktig talks about his mother's attitude to nudity surrounding public bathing and how their shared cultural identity shaped these perceptions, too:

Public nudity was so strange to her and you know My mom was raised Mormon and it was kind of an extra layer. And as it was obviously, just like a whole nother layer for me as well.

The reference to the informants' families provides a deeper understanding of how an individual's personal history influences the sauna experience. The concept of home and family are deeply connected. As Yi Fu Tuan puts it: "To the young child the parent is his primary "place"" (1977, p138). How we make sense of place, and how we navigate our own orientations in space are through embodied and affective acts, shaped by cultural memory as it intertwined with sensorial experiences located in the present. According to Tuan, "the feel of a place is registered in one's muscles and bone" (1977, p184). In other

words, the way we make sense of place is experienced played out on the body. A sense of place can be understood through human relationships, locating connections forged with people from other spaces to the present.

Maria and Belinda both connect their nervousness towards nudity to their cultural background.

Maria: "I was nervous. I do remember because yeah, it was gonna be naked. And I'm quite hesitant like also cause in Latin American cultures, you're not very nude and like, that's not something that's quite common."

(Interview with Maria. 10/01/23)

Belinda: I was scared before going, nervous that I would feel awkward but also very conscious that I should feel okay with this, I was aware that I was being socialised into being scared of it. So I kind of just tried to get past that and just think that everybody else is doing this. It's fine, you know? So just kind of get out of your head again. I will say though, that I think like, prior to coming here, I thought nudity was extremely just a no go zone. And then as a result of like the sauna culture and then swimming here and people just being more free. Like I found when I went home during the summer and was getting changed. I was laughing at the fact that I was getting changed so carefully under the towel

(Interview with Belinda. 02/02/22)

Riktig also experienced feelings of nerves and excitement regarding the nude aspect of sauna practice, yet this was also something that sparked great excitement and curiosity for him. Riktig's nationality is introduced from the outset, highlighting his lack of experience with Scandinavian sauna practice and public nudity. Despite this, there is a sense of upbeat and hopeful excitement for new experiences. His navigation of the sauna space is represented similarly to Belinda and Blue's in how he faces a new attitude to nudity. Riktig arrives at the sauna in his bathing suit, an act that brings to the fore his outsider positioning. Throughout our conversation, Riktig's cultural background is referenced multiple times, providing insight into the different cultural landscape in which he grew up and how it has shaped his sauna experiences, which again links to the idea that in the process of moving away from home, a body undergoes a transition whereby the way our body is embodied is partially transformed.

So something that of course I had heard of when I came to Sweden was sort of like the sauna culture and it was very kind of, you know, spiritual or you know, health oriented. But for me, it was mostly about the novelty. You know, I was aware of this kind of healing or you know, relaxation kind of side of it, but there were so many other parts that just kind of like took my immediate attention or just sort of like, wow, that's never something I've done before. A lot of it surrounded the like public nudity. It was really hard for me to imagine. I'd been in one nude sauna before but it was in a very different circumstance. And it was, yeah, it was it was just different. It was more like in a gym. You know, in the United States. It was nothing like this. Yeah, so I went with two other people. I showed up in my swimming suit. I thought it was like optional to be naked. So you know, it's separated between men and women. So my two friends were on the other side. I walk out and feel lost and confused. I was in this swimsuit and a woman working there is like "Hey! You can't be wearing that! I was really nervous and embarrassed but also excited

(Interview with Riktig 05/12/22)

For Pada, her cultural background allowed for a more comfortable approach to Swedish sauna practice, "Actually, I'm from Japan. Yeah. So we have hot spring culture. So I'm kind of like familiar with sauna and being naked", whereas, for Rua, their first sauna experience was, "definitely a culture shock as an Irish person, you walk into this like, massive area full of naked people".

Discussions surrounding attitudes to nudity take precedence in a chapter on home and belonging to emphasise the close link between the body and the home. When somebody experiences feelings of belonging, these emotions and sensations play out on the body. (cf. Ahmed, 2010) This can be seen in Riktig's first experience at the sauna:

The sauna experience itself was incredible. It was much warmer than I thought it would be, much drier than I thought it'd be compared to these real like steam rooms that they had the gyms in the US. Yeah and like jumping into the ocean was just such a shock. It almost felt like I could totally feel such a rush of endorphins ... Then I felt like almost psychedelic ya know?., colours felt a little brighter. Like my heart was racing. So so so cool. Yeah, it was kind of emotional. It was a very empty day at the sauna. So it really just felt totally novel, isolated experience. So it's kind of my first impression... The people in the sauna were really warm and kind, They were telling me that they were so happy I was there and all this stuff

(Interview with Riktig. 05/12/22)

Riktig's first sauna experience offered a profound sensorial encounter that brought his body and senses into sharp focus. His detailed description painted a vivid picture of the sauna experience felt on his body, from the hot dryness to the rush of endorphins and bright colours that created an emotional experience. Through these dynamic practices, the sauna space took shape for Riktig, and he connected positive experiences with how they affected his body and the kindness of other sauna-goers. Feeling a sense of belonging created this highly visceral bodily response that "was kind of emotional". It brings us back to Ahmed's argument that a body at home is anchored and connected to place (Ahmed, 2006). For Maria, her feelings of belonging are tied to a sense of safety, thus heightening her connection to the sauna space: "I Just feel very at peace, you know? I feel very safe. So that makes me feel like I belong" In other words, feelings of belonging connect a body to the environment in which they inhabit.

Similarly, when somebody experiences a disconnect from the environment in which they inhabit, the body is also impacted. This disconnect can be seen in how Blue describes her dislike of saunas, "I hate it because it's really hot and I have kind of low blood pressure. So I feel dizzy for some time". Notice how her feelings of dislike are played out on the body, disorienting, and distressing her senses. In the upcoming subsection on Affect Aliens, we will explore how experiences of outsidership or non-belonging affect sauna practice. As Ahmed puts it, navigating a new home is an uncomfortable process involving "a partial shedding of the skin" (Ahmed, 1999, p342). She described this discomfort as if it were an itchy irritation. These tactile, corporeal images tie the body and the home together. Feeling at home means that one feels at home in oneself, in one's body. Nudity and nakedness play an exciting role when considering the idea of home, exemplified by Belinda's experience described prior: "I feel much more comfortable getting changed here than I do at home". Pada echoes this with her comparison to feelings of emplacement in Sweden and Tokyo, "it's a pretty crazy city it is busy. So I sometimes forget, like where is me, myself. Here, I feel comfortable, cosy, peaceful and close to nature." In short, feelings of belonging connect the body intimately with its surroundings, contrastingly, feelings of disorientation are evoked when experiencing feelings of disconnect. As we have seen by the informants' perceptions of their home after moving away, these feelings become viscerally realised.

When we question what it is that allows an individual body to feel at ease alongside other nude bodies, it is interesting to dissect the difference between nudity and nakedness. Edelswärd states that “removing one's clothes is removing one's public mask” (Edelswärd, 1999, p8). Nakedness is indeed exposing. Being naked is being vulnerable, flawed, and open, exposed to experiences. Riktig exemplifies this aptly: “It's hard to be like, putting on this sort of social mask of acting a certain way when you're like sitting there, sweaty and naked”. However, in my deep exploration of sauna practice, I have learned that this “mask” can never truly be removed. We are constantly influenced and shaped by the bodies in which we encounter (Ahmed, 2010). Our bodies carry the weight of our cultural inscriptions, memories, and histories. Each of my informant's naked, sweating sauna experiences are shaped and formed by their own identities. The socio-cultural practices of their homelands influence their encounters in their new home space. Nakedness is dynamic, in motion, whereas nudity connotes a certain passive stillness, as though a nude body is one to be viewed. There is a sense that nudity is an adornment, whereas nakedness is bareness. Nakedness allows for heightened exposure to experience. My informants' descriptions of their sauna practice depict an awareness of their bodies. They show how experiences of home searching or homemaking are emphasised in a heightened sensorial space. These experiences shed light on their understanding of themselves as they inhabit a new home space.

5.2 Embodied Whiteness

“Hej,” an elderly woman with big energy, greets me. When I respond in English, she apologises. Swedes tend to always apologise in this situation.

“Usually, there are no tourists here in the winter months. But You could pass for a Swede.”

I laugh and tell her I guess I could, with my height and white skin.

“Well”, she pauses as if to contemplate what she's about to say, “My son's wife is more black than black, and she's a Swede. Everyone can pass for a Swede nowadays.”

“My son has red hair and freckles, so they look very different. They get a lot of racism from people like you and me, both being told to get with someone of their own race. And much worse things are said too... And now I do not know what's going to happen after the election.”

“They have children?” Another lady chimes in as she's putting her socks on.

“Not yet. My son's wife is still studying, so we will have to wait. But they will be so beautiful.”

(Fieldnotes 26/01/2022)

This interaction is emblematic of my research topic. My outsidership has been brought to the fore as she refers to me as a "tourist" however, her statement, "you could pass for a Swede", is loaded with significance. It highlights an assumed link between whiteness and Swedishness, emphasising how white bodies claim the sauna space. The encounter also raises a question about the perceived link between being non-Swedish and being a tourist. In this subsection, I will explore how my informants navigate their way through belonging practices as they face a variety of encounters in a white, Swedish space.

To be white is to be Nordic; to be Nordic is to be white. [...] Nordics have long functioned as whiteness standard bearers in pseudoscientific race typologies. Alternately, in the contemporary world, non-white residents of the Nordic countries experience themselves as perpetual outsiders—as eternal “immigrants”—regardless of their place of birth or degree of integration (Lundström, 2017, p151)

It is important to keep this passage in mind as I examine the embodied experiences of my informants as they confront the hegemonic whiteness of the sauna space. This quote requires an examination of the impact of this pervasive whiteness on homemaking and belonging practices for newcomers in Sweden.

In *A Phenomenology of Whiteness* (2007), Sara Ahmed discusses an experience at a conference when “four black feminists arrive”. Ahmed explains that the fact we notice such arrivals “tells us more about what is already in place than it does about ‘who’ arrives. Someone says: ‘it is like walking into a sea of whiteness’”(2007, p157). The sauna space can be understood as a white institution, shaped by the white bodies that gather and claim its space. For me, the number of white women in the same space was one of the first aspects of the sauna that I noticed, I would argue that because everybody in the sauna is nude, the skin is emphasised, the shape of the women's bodies, their tattoos, nail polish colours, body hair become their fashioning, the ways to recognise social positioning. Belinda describes how the sauna can be a space of acceptance and comfort regarding body image, yet also claimed by whiteness.

I think the sauna is somewhere that makes you feel like all bodies are different, you know, because you can literally see everybody's everything so I think in those situations, I'm usually thinking oh, look, everyone looks different, but actually they don't you know, because everybody is usually able bodied and white

(Interview with Belinda. 02/02/22)

Ahmed argues that whiteness is “invisible and unmarked”, only “for those who inhabit it, or those who get so used to its inhabitation that they learn not to see it, even when they are not it” (2007, p157). People assume Riktig is Swedish based on his appearance: “I can blend in pretty well”. For a white body to blend in in this space highlights that the sauna space is a white institution. The connection between whiteness and Swedishness also says something about how Swedish public space is oriented, thus reinforcing Ahmed’s idea that the world is made white, where white bodies are invisible, unmarked, and unconsciously belonging. Riktig contemplates the privilege he experiences as a white person in a sauna space.

At face value, if I don't open my mouth, people assume I'm Swedish

It feels like I can blend in pretty well... you don't have to kind of like out yourself as a tourist...just kind of feels like people just kind of like let you move through kind of thing.

(Interview with Riktig. 05/12/22)

My informants have observed a connection between being white and embodying "Swedishness." Although Swedishness can be performed and expressed in various ways, in a sauna setting, it often takes on a default whiteness that renders it invisible, much like the privilege of being white. This invisibility of whiteness makes other markers of difference, such as skin colour, more conspicuous. For instance, when Riktig commented that "you don't have to... out yourself as a tourist," he acknowledged that non-Swedish sauna goers are likely to be treated differently.

For some of my informants, as white internationals, there is a notable internal conflict in the sauna space. It is important to consider what happens to an individual's sense of emplacement when they feel like an outsider in Swedish society but are assumed as local. Rupert described a situation where he was approached by a fellow sauna goer speaking Swedish,

Random old Swedish people starting talking to me while I was sitting and steaming away. Like I can't really recall, since I was just briefly there and I didn't break the appearance of not being Swedish.

I don't like people to greet me in Swedish because it's more like a shame on my side that I haven't learned Swedish yet. But it has nothing to do with them, they obviously can approach me in Swedish that is totally fair and square. Yeah. Like I just don't like letting them know if not need be

(Interview with Rupert 12/12/22)

For Rupert, this "looking Swedish" or his whiteness can evoke feelings of shame, as he is regularly in situations where he is assumed Swedish and has yet to learn the language. This experience is salient when making sense of the complexities of identity as it is embodied in a shared world. To "fit in" is a multilayered concept. I maintain that the feelings of shame that Rupert experiences shed light on how the sauna space is oriented. Ahmed argues that spaces are made "for some kinds of bodies more than others" (2006, p52). We can understand that when a space is made for a certain body, that body is at home in that space. In a world that is made white, "then the body at home is one that can inhabit whiteness" (Ahmed, 2006, p111). Based on Rupert's appearance, the old men at the sauna assume that he is Swedish and thus speak to him in Swedish. This encounter raises a question about what it takes to fit in truly in Swedish society. Ahmed, when explaining how bodies align, puts it down to encounters. Familiar bodies, according to Ahmed, "can be incorporated through a sense of community- being together as like bodies" (2006, p50). She explains that registering this "likeness" is tactile, felt on the body and produced through encounters. In other words, Rupert and the old men's "likeness" is realised because the old men and Rupert's bodies come into contact. Diprose suggests that 'the ease of an encounter with another is limited by the extent to which you already have gestures in common.' (1994, p122 in Ahmed, 2006, p50). Because the old men speak to Rupert in Swedish, this can be seen as an encounter approached with "ease" based on his familiar appearance and behavioural know-how of sauna etiquette. Whereas Maria longs to be interacted with, but believes it does not happen because she does not "look Swedish":

Sometimes when I'm alone, I do wish people would talk to me but because I don't look Swedish. I think the only one to ever talk to me was some old Swedish man at the common saunas and that was NOT what I was looking for.

(Interview with Maria. 10/01/23)

Rupert aligns with the affective community at the sauna. Nonetheless, a break in the alignment occurs when he does not speak Swedish, making him feel ashamed. Rupert's encounter suggests that "a body at home" in the sauna aligns with bodily expectations, the language and behavioural know-how of sauna etiquette. Rupert's whiteness or "Swedish likeness" and knowledge of sauna etiquette leads to the assumption that Rupert IS Swedish and, therefore, emplaced. The sauna space is more 'made for Rupert' because he is white, male and embodies the etiquette of the sauna. However, even with this "likeness", Rupert's shame for not speaking the language is disorienting; it positions Rupert as an outsider. These feelings are felt in the body, creating a disconnect between Rupert's social body and his environment. One could argue that to fit into Swedish society, a certain level of conformity is expected of individuals. This includes looking Swedish, acting per social etiquette, and speaking the language. This is seen in how Maria prepared herself for her first time at the sauna: "I knew the etiquette going in... I was guided like this is what you do this what you don't, you need this many towels, water I came very prepared." Maria seems to know that a particular behavioural expectation of sauna goes is required to fit in. However, it is important to note that this expectation of conformity perpetuates the idea of default whiteness in Swedishness and positions those who do not fit this mould as outsiders.

5.3 Affect aliens

Arrivals

A sea of whiteness can make "non-white bodies feel uncomfortable" (Ahmed, 2006 p157). What happens when a non-white body enters a white space? What happens when a *noticeable* outsider enters a Swedish sauna? Ahmed's concept of affect aliens is a helpful approach to this discussion. When we focus on the presence of affect aliens in a Scandinavian sauna setting, the power dynamics and social norms that underlie a seemingly innocuous cultural practice are rendered visible.

Riktig shares an anecdote of when he observed the arrival at the sauna of international students from China:

There were two, like exchange students who were from there from China. They came in, they didn't sit on a towel or you know, these sorts of things. In a way, I was almost kind of excited. I was thinking: Oh, wow, now they're gonna experience the same kind of like welcoming ritual that I got where it really just felt like people kind of brought me into this. And instead, there was kind of like this laughter or kind of, you know, people weren't like assholes overtly...everybody's kind of like chatting amongst themselves in Swedish about how they were just tourists and you know... one thing one person says, "Oh, they're not taking this seriously". Like, they're just here to like, you know, check it off their list kind of thing.

(Interview with Riktig. 05/12/22)

Riktig's experience sheds light on several topics discussed in this thesis. We can examine the arrival of the Chinese students as affect aliens, who "disrupt the dominant affective norms" by not being familiar with the Swedish sauna conduct. Their unfamiliarity with sauna etiquette and physical differences makes them stand out and be regarded as tourists. For Ahmed, a stranger is a "body out of place" (2000, p55), understood as a predetermined figure, marked as other, objectified as different from what is perceived as good (2000). Ahmed argues that the stranger "is an effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion" (2000, p6). In other words, the strange body is rendered visible through encounters. If we examine the arrival of these Chinese students at the sauna through this lens, we can understand that they are marked as "other" or strangers based on the bodily responses of the other sauna goers. It can be argued that the Chinese students' "difference" is determined through this encounter. As such, encounters between bodies have a significant role in shaping and forming social and bodily space.

How do you know the difference between a friend and a stranger? ... Smelling the difference involves a practice of differentiation: those we know we treat with kindness, we let you in, we allow a relation of proximity or closeness. Those we don't know turn us into the savages (Ahmed, 2000, p56).

This quote is apt for examining a difference between Riktig's first experience at the sauna and that of the Chinese students. Riktig wore a swimsuit on his first day at the sauna; he was unaware of the sauna etiquette as an international student. Riktig experiences a "welcoming ritual" from his fellow sauna goers "where it really just felt like people kind of brought me into this". Conversely, the international students from China were laughed at and regarded as tourists who were not taking the practice seriously. These different introductions to Swedish sauna practice can highlight how social encounters shape the

sauna experience significantly. Riktig was treated as a friend, whereby the sauna became a site of belonging, while the Chinese students were marked as strangers. To reiterate, for Ahmed, a strange body is a body that is seen as different and unfamiliar. This difference is recognised in how members of the affective community respond to their arrival.

Riktig, on the other hand, is an outsider who has become an insider by learning sauna conduct and speaking Swedish. His ability to “blend in” highlights his own emplacement in the sauna space. We can argue that this emplacement is earned through understanding and following the rules and physically embodying “Swedishness”. However, the encounter with the Chinese students also reminds Riktig of his own outsidership, despite his appearance. Riktig’s position as a non-Swede provides him with the experiences of disorientation and non-belonging, enabling him to pay closer attention and empathise with the challenges these students face. As Ahmed puts it, ““Not all those at the borders, such as tourists, migrants, or foreign nationals, are recognized as strangers; some will seem more ‘at home’ than others” (2006, p141). The distinction between the “welcoming ritual” experienced by Riktig and that of the Chinese students that Riktig observed highlights the reality that it is easier to feel at home in Sweden if you are white. This encounter portrays how difference is generated based on the embodied experiences of co-existing with other bodies. Furthermore, it implies that occupying the position of an outsider in a sauna environment allows for the formation of a community and connection among individuals with varying subjective identities who all share this outsider status.

Quiet Power

“A sauna is a place for peace and quiet. Remain Calm.” The sauna house rule sign reads.. The calmness and the quiet leave me restless. I miss the chaos and energy of a packed sauna. I miss the people-watching.

(Fieldnotes 26/01/2022)

I have heard many stories, including my own experiences of being silenced in the sauna. My field notes are filled with the many ways my friends and I attempted to navigate the noise level etiquette. A sign that reads “Speak quietly” provides no gauge, no specific measurements. For Pada, there is little opportunity to socialise with other sauna goers because of this etiquette: “In

Malmö's sauna, I didn't talk with other people. I was talking with my friends, in a small voice, not to bother other people." However, for Maria, being told to be quiet was experienced as an attack on her own cultural identity. She shares a memory of when she and her cousin were told to be quiet in the sauna. The following extract highlights how emotions move between bodies, showing how the upset at the woman silencing them was translated into feelings of outsidership, anger and nonbelonging.

I do notice my foreignness when i'm there. First of all, because everything's in Swedish. But one time I was with my cousin and we were in the "talking sauna." We talk a lot when we're there and we're Latin, so we do talk Spanish and quite loud. But everybody else was talking and then some women kept calling us out for like talking too loud. That made me so mad because everybody else is talking just because we're talking in Spanish ...I don't think I said anything. I just looked at her like what are you doing? And then at some point...she even said something in Spanish and I was like ugh my god that so problematic. I think she said like "silencio" .

Like at first she was just in English like "keep it down" like touching our shoulders and we were like "it's the talking sauna, Everybody else is talking". Yeah, like, what's the difference? Just because we're talking in Spanish and maybe more energetic because that's just how I talk. So that was annoying. I wish I would have said something. But it didn't feel like it was the space and also it didn't feel like anybody would like, support us because again, it's Sweden. So nobody would support it apart from me and my cousin and also my cousin who's lived here longer, just kind of like let it die down. Which I think, I don't know maybe it was with a friend who was also less integrated into the culture. I would have said something but yeah, I don't know.

(Interview with Maria. 10/01/23)

The upset in this passage is palpable. Notice how Maria says, "Because again, it's Sweden. So nobody would support it". This suggests she has become familiar with a particular social attitude in Sweden. It is important to look at how her cultural background was made into something she needed to defend in a space where she was made to feel "other". This encounter causes the circulation of emotions that expels Maria's body from a place of belonging at the sauna to a place of exclusion (cf. Ahmed, 2006). The sauna atmosphere, as experienced by Maria, shifts in accordance with these emotions. It calls to question the presupposed expectations of how one should be embodied in the sauna, highlighting how "Swedishness" is homogenised. Maria and her cousin speaking in Spanish instead of Swedish are noticed and then silenced: "We're Latin, so we do talk Spanish and quite loud. But everybody else was talking". I argue that this encounter depicts a lived experience of

not being Swedish in Sweden. Whether or not the woman silenced them because they were speaking Spanish and not Swedish, Maria was made to *feel* that it was because of her difference that they were personally hushed.

Maria then shares with me how she perceives sociality in Sweden.

So my view of Swedish society is that it's very, like very non-confrontational, right, to the extent that you can't even admit that you have seen something that's a little bit like more awkward if that makes sense? Like, people see it, obviously, like in any scenario, but then they like immediately move away.

(Interview with Maria. 10/01/23)

A sociality of silence holds power in the sauna space. Coming from a culture like Ireland, where social interaction is built on conversations and storytelling, it can be a shock to be confronted with the unwritten rule of the quiet sauna. During my first sauna experience in Sweden, I arrived alone and enthusiastically greeted everyone in the sauna box: “Hello, everyone, this is my first time here! It is wonderful!”. I was met with a stern response from a lady in the sauna who informed me that “Shh. This is the quiet sauna. You are not allowed to talk”. This anecdote has provided many laughs from my family and friends. “Trust you to be told to be quiet even when you are on your own!” Similar to Maria’s experience, this quiet power, or ‘non-confrontational’ attitude has played a significant role in shaping many of mine and my informants processes of belonging at the Swedish sauna. We have been navigating our social identities in this new country, attempting to develop our sense of belonging in Swedish public space.

Maria shares her approach to how she has learned to hold on to her own Columbian social identity as she navigates Sweden’s social norms:

I think you just have to find a good balance between adopting what you find here like all the norms, and also maybe integrating some of your own because yeah. I noticed when I was in Colombia during the summer, and I noticed when I was there, or just generally away, how I become like Swedish, like, not really smiling at people on the streets not really like interacting in casual conversation, which is something I love to do. And when I was in Colombia, I developed that again, and when I came back, I

was like, No, I like this part about myself. I'm gonna keep doing it, even if people don't smile back. Or, you know, yeah, if people don't really appreciate it as much there will be people who do and I have met a couple of Swedish people who do appreciate it and then I'm like, Okay, nice.

(Interview with Maria. 10/01/23)

The experience of being an outsider in a new country is marked by the challenges of negotiating social identities and conforming to the cultural cues that hold significant power. Maria's encounter of being silenced exemplifies the struggle to assert oneself in such situations (cf. hooks, 2014). Through Maria's approach to navigating the social space in Sweden, we see how homemaking is a dynamic and ongoing process of self-identification, a continuous push-pull that involves inner dialogue and self-re-negotiation. Although challenging, this process is a source of creativity and active self-making. Her way of bringing her home of origin to her new home space is seen through acts of encounter such as smiling at people on the streets even when she does not expect a smile back. Thus, reinforcing the significant role of boldly encounters in producing social space.

5.4 Gender

Two large pride flags waved in the sunset. There were a lot of men, a lot. Sweat and penis stench permeated the usually smokey aromatic sauna. My friends kept their towels tightly wrapped around their bodies. One shared aloud that she was uncomfortable, while I, on the other hand, remained totally naked, perhaps in defiance. We found little corners of space in the sauna where we chatted amongst ourselves, our backs to the other sauna goers, who, well, were looking at us. "They take up so much space; I've never seen a woman spread herself so much in the sauna. I could see the man's butt hole". My friend exclaims. The sauna was 95 degrees, we were burning, our body piercings scorching our skins.

A man approached my friend and began conversing, taking not-so-subtle glances at her butt as she politely turned away from him to fill her water bottle. We left the sauna, relaxed but maybe not so free.

(Fieldnotes 06/03/23)

There is a notable masculine dynamic to the experience as a sense of male entitlement permeates the sauna space. Our reactions to the sauna environment reveal different approaches to this exposure. While my friend expresses a very valid discomfort, my choice to remain naked can be explored as an attempt to challenge gender norms and cultural expectations around modesty and covering the female form. The bodily encounters highlight the intersection of

gender and sexuality, as the female body in the male-dominated space can be objectified and scrutinised.

This dynamic significantly impacts the sauna space, particularly regarding the negotiation and control of space. It is seen in how we try to create a zone of privacy and intimacy by positioning ourselves in the corners of the sauna, with our backs turned to the other sauna goers. Nonetheless, we felt as though the men invaded our space as their gaze and physical positioning encroached on our bodies. Ahmed explains how emotions involve “affective forms of (re)orientation” (2006, p2). In other words, how we feel about something moves the body toward or away from it. The encounters in the sauna impacted how our bodies were oriented. We turned our backs to the men, thus, “creating distance through the registering of proximity as a threat” (2006, p2). This affective encounter then influences the sauna space. In sum, “the orientations we have toward others shape the contours of space by affecting relations of proximity and distance between bodies” (2006, p2). The way that the sauna's heat “scorches” the skin shows how discomfort is played out on the body, how a practice that can be soothing and relaxing in certain moments can be transformed into unease and even pain when a body feels out of place.

Overall, the fieldnote passage illustrates how gender, sexuality, and embodiment intersect in the sauna space, particularly during events like Queer Kallis, where the promise of inclusion and acceptance is contested. It depicts how bodily orientations and encounters shape how we make sense of the world and, “who” or “what” we direct our energy and attention toward” (2006, p3). Space is dependent on the bodies that claim it. It highlights how the sauna is not a great equaliser but is shaped by cultural expectations, social norms, and individual experiences.

Gender plays an important role in sauna practice. This subchapter will deal with various themes surrounding how gender is embodied in a sauna space. It will discuss how the gendered bodies that claim its space shape and feel the sauna environment. We will discuss the impact of the male gaze (cf. Mulvey, 1975), exploring what creates a masculine space, as well as what it is that generates a feminine space. The gender division of the sauna space is discussed extensively by my informants. The “women's” section is described using many adjectives that are reminiscent of a sentimentalisation of home, such as “safe”, “friendly”, and “comfortable”. Anecdotes from Queer Kallis are shared, raising questions about the fragility or perhaps

impossibility of the existence of a totally inclusive space. We will discuss what a space with all women does to create feelings of community and safety. I argue that these experiences can all be understood through affects. Social and bodily space is created by human encounters (Ahmed, 2010, p9). This is seen in how Rua shares their insights into what makes the women's side of the sauna a feminine space. They make a point to highlight how femininity is created by the encounters between the people at the sauna:

I would hesitate to say bodies because I don't think everyone would agree with me, especially not many of the older Swedish people...but you know if there was a trans woman in that space, I think it would still feel the same for me in that way. You know, so it's not necessarily about the presence or absence of a penis. But as I say, I'm sure not everyone would agree with that. So I'm not sure I think it's just like the respect everyone treats each other with and everyone will make sure that there's space for you to sit down and with a smile usually, you know... I think mostly, it feels like a *kind space*. Maybe that's what helps make it more feminine.

And also, I think, like, women being able to go there and do whatever they want as well, like, you know, sitting and reading a book for ages and just being like, not bothered. Yeah, it's quite enjoyable to see people take that time.

(Interview with Rua. 16/01/23)

Rua's portrayal of the women's section of the sauna as a "kind space" is emblematic of Ahmed's concept of "inter-embodiment," where embodied experiences are relational, and space is shaped through interactions between people. However, creating a feminine space requires more than just the presence of female bodies. As Rua asserts, "it's not necessarily about the presence or absence of a penis." It necessitates the circulation of specific emotions that promote a comfortable environment where women feel at ease (cf. Ahmed, 2006). This requires the removal of masculine power and the implementation of social structures that prioritise women's needs. In a world dominated by patriarchy and white supremacy, those who do not fall under these power categories do not have the privilege to simply "be." As Rua puts it, women's ability to read a book and not be "bothered" is a result of a space being centred around women. A feminine space can allow for all bodies to coexist under a social dynamic led by femininity.

Similarly, Maria describes the feelings she attributes to being in the women's section compared to the mixed sauna. Notice how, like Rua, Maria shares how in a feminine space, she can let her "guard down", there is a safety element about the women's side that connote

feelings of “respect” and “friendliness”. Her experiences in the sauna depend on how the encounters she experiences make her feel:

it's such a, like, secluded piece of heaven... just I really enjoy it. Also, the respect that you have, I like being more in the women-only section. I feel a lot more safe there but it's not like I've ever felt unsafe in the like mixed ones. It's just a bit less relaxing. Yeah, because I think in the woman only areas I just kind of can let my guard down and then you actually enjoy the experience a lot more. I think like there's no judging like friendliness from what I've received. People just like come as they are and nobody's staring and yeah, and for the men I tried to not even look at what they're doing. So I have gone to the mixed ones like if I go with a friend who is on the other on the other side, or if they have like, sometimes they have like special ritual, aufghass in the mixed section, I will also go there like I wont let it stop me but it is a different level of comfort.

Kara: Do you notice yourself covering up?

Maria: yes! And avoiding eye contact because I don't want to see anything else. I don't want to see what other people like see of me?

(Interview with Maria. 10/01/23)

When I asked Rua the same question, they replied: “I'd probably cover like my bottom half. Yeah. I would probably be topless. But I was Yeah. Covered”. For Pada, her experience in a mixed sauna causes her to feel “a bit uncomfortable. Because they're naked men, next to me.” It can be considered that the presence of men in the sauna cultivates a distinct power dynamic routed in masculine dominance (cf. Ahmed, 2006). As Pada puts it, the sweating, naked man is a potent, visceral, and hyper-sensorial representation of this gendered power dynamic. The following fieldnote extract conveys the sensory impact of masculine dominance:

Went to Bjerreds with my boyfriend as on Sundays there are mixed-gender saunas. The room is packed, there are about 14 men and 3 women squished into a tiny sauna floating above the sea. The sauna smells of dick. There are penises everywhere... It feels different than being in the women's sauna. It is not that I feel uncomfortable or watched, but I feel smaller, I sit up straighter and squeeze in my stomach a little.

(Fieldnotes 09/01/23)

The field note passage above highlights the sensorial prevalence of the male gaze. The pungent odour of male genitalia and the overwhelming presence of male bodies in the sauna

create a distinctly male-dominated environment. Feeling smaller and more self-conscious in the presence of all these men indicates a sense of being objectified. Maria, Pada and Rua share these feelings as they feel the need to cover their bodies in the sauna, to avoid this feeling of objectification. Note how Maria says, "I don't want to see what other people like see of me," highlighting the power of a masculine gaze over a woman's body (Mulvey, 1975). This objectification is tied to a masculine dominance that permeates the sauna environment.

My informants have described the men's side with terms such as "hierarchy", "competition",

In the words of Riktig:

I haven't obviously been on the other side of this. (womens side) But just what I've heard and very anecdotally is a very different culture. Where I feel like there's much more of this sort of like hierarchy competition kind of thing on the menside. Like, who's gonna be first to the aufghass or who gets to sit on the top level without having to wait in line or even who stays in the longest? Yeah, it's so clear, like one person gets up and then everyone else leaves because they weren't the last one... You're always kind of aware of this. Uncomfortable is the wrong word. It's more just this constant feeling like I can't relax completely, you know?

(Interview with Riktig. 05/12/22)

The home space has been highly gendered throughout history: "Early writers on gendered perceptions of the home claim that men consider it to be a signifier of status and achievement whereas women view home as a haven" (Mallett, 2004, p75). Considering this, the home has also been identified as a site of oppression and patriarchal domination (Mallett (2004), Douglas (1991), Crenshaw (1994) hooks (1990)). Notice how the informants' relaxation levels depend on the gendered encounters in the sauna space. When the male gaze permeates the sauna, these feelings are expressed through bodily gestures such as squeezing my stomach in, Maria and Rua's covering up and Riktig and Pada's feelings of not being completely relaxed. In the sauna, this power is sensory, located in the smell of male body odour, the competition of who can stay in the sauna the longest is in the tactility of their sweat. The sauna space can be analysed with the same lens as the home: a site of security and belonging that can transform into a space of objectification and even

oppression when scrutinised under the male gaze. In sum, the highly complex nature of sauna practice cannot be deduced without considering gender dynamics

5.5 Queer Kallis

Queer Kallis, the monthly event at Malmö Ribersborg, is a day where both sides of the sauna are open for anyone to move between. Queer Kallis is an attempt to create an inclusive space where all bodies feel like they belong. However, based on my material, it can be seen as a day that can cause discomfort among some sauna goers due to the presence of many men, thus pervading the space with the male gaze and masculine dominance. I argue that queer Kallis still maintains patriarchal-heteronormative dominance despite its attempt to ensure otherwise (cf. Ahmed, 2006). “Queerifying” space is complex. We must pay attention to the lived encounters between bodies at the sauna to gain insights into how to generate a space that can engender a sense of belonging for queer bodies (cf. Ahmed, 2006). Rua exemplifies this in the following passage:

they do Queer Kallis but I've only been to that once. And it was really a lot of older men really I'm not saying that in any way about what their sexuality is. But it was just like a lot of male bodies, which I was like, I kind of prefer the non-queer because there's always queer people there usually and I don't know I shouldn't I guess it's hard when you have an assigned day and you never know who's gonna show up. But yeah, that was like probably one of my most like ugh, not uncomfortable but like my minorly stressful visits to Kallis.

(Interview with Rua. 16/01/23)

According to Ahmed, to make something queer means to “disrupt the order of things” (2006, p95). The disorientation felt at Queer Kallis can be understood as though the alignment of the space is turned on its head. Given that the sauna space is oriented towards heterosexuality and “heterosexuality functions as a background to social action” (Ahmed, 2006, p95), it shakes things up when this space is made queer. The queer space is a rocky space to be in, one without pre-set expectations for social action. In this rocky space, social issues that usually go unnoticed are rendered visible. In other words, the queering of a space leads to the challenging of norms and thus sheds light on the inequalities and power dynamics at play.

Rua identifies as transmasculine. His feelings of fondness towards the woman's side of the sauna are considered through encounters he has witnessed, highlighting how embodied experiences are relational and understood through interactions between bodies in a shared space.

I mean, my housemate is a very English, satirical kind of guy but he always jokes like, I have the best of both worlds because I get to be a guy and also go to the women's section of the sauna. Because like I use he/him and they/them pronouns. I identify as trans-masculine but I really enjoy the like, femininity of the space on the woman's side. Yeah, like kids playing with their grandmother. Their Moms having a break and you know, just like so many little interactions or like older woman just going there to talk to other people. Even that happened to me once this woman wouldn't like wouldn't stop and she was talking with everyone. And it was quite sweet. So yeah, I think it's not so bad because the normal days are usually quite nice for the people that are there.

(Interview with Rua. 16/01/23)

Notice how the interactions that Rua witnesses, such as kids playing with their grandmothers or women talking with one another, leave them with positive feelings: "it was quite sweet". These encounters, for Rua, reinforce the "femininity of the space". Encounters shape who we feel comfortable around and whom we do not.

As I have discussed, the bodies that claim power in the sauna shed light on how the space is oriented. The experiences of those who have been made to feel uncomfortable allow us to understand how this power is circulated. These experiences are played out through their bodily responses of unease and discomfort, as seen in how my friends and I cover our bodies tightly with towels when the masculine energy permeates the space, or in the way Maria is made to feel upset when a Swedish woman silences her when she speaks in Spanish. These encounters highlight who it is that holds power in the sauna space.

One can question how a space can truly be made queer. The sauna is a white, heteronormative institution. I argue that it is not enough to wave a rainbow flag and open the doors to everybody in order to make a space feel safe for queer bodies. Even in a space assigned as "queer", such as queer Kallis, patriarchal and heteronormative power structures still reign. These power structures are rendered visible within sauna encounters where

certain bodies feel at ease, but others experience discomfort or stress; in the words of Rua, their experience at Queer Kallis was their “minorly stressful visits to Kallis.”. Those who carry the hetero-dominant norms must consider their position in the affective community. Given that encounters shape feelings of belonging or exclusion, there is a need for those who are not experiencing discomfort to recognise that they might be making others feel out of place. To create a supportive and inclusive environment, the responsibility lies on those carrying the dominant normative identities to make space for those who do not, to be attuned to bodies that share the same space and to call out moments of disrespect.

6. Conclusion

This question of forming a community through the shared experience of not being fully at home – of having inhabited another space – hence pre- supposes an absence of a shared terrain: the forming of communities makes apparent the lack of a common identity which would allow its form to take one form. But this lack becomes reinscribed as the precondition of an act of *making*: how can we make a space which is supportive? How can we become friends? What can we build from the very fact of our coming together – being thrown together – in this place, having come from other places? How can we write (as) a collective given the absence of a collective past or a familiar terrain? (Ahmed, 1999, p345)

This thesis has portrayed the sauna experiences of a group of international students at Lund University. I have shown how unique and individual each person's process of belonging is. Some bodies begin from a more accessible form of departure to this process than others. Gender, racial, political, cultural, and social dynamics are at play that influence this experience. Some bodies have more hurdles to overcome than others. The black body, the queer body, the body that smells, the fat body, the female body, the body that speaks loudly, the disabled body, the migrant's body, the list could go on- when they enter the sauna, they enter a white, heteronormative, Swedish, hyper sensorial space. Nobody in this study has been born into this mould; in fact, this mould is unattainable. All bodies push up against these hegemonic standards of being embodied. Despite the different embodied histories of the participants in this study, we share one thing in common: We are all on a quest to find our sense of home. To yearn for a connection to place, to grapple for a sense of belonging in a shared world, is universal.

This thesis has been an investigation of three central questions:

- How does the sauna generate a sense of being in or out of place?
- What feelings, thoughts, and emotions are evoked by being in direct contact with your naked body as it encounters others?
- How does the Swedish sauna constitute a place where homemaking practices are made visible?

To address these questions, I have focused on how emotions and affects shape sauna experiences, particularly for international students in Sweden. The sauna is seen as a microcosmic space that reflects the larger picture of Swedish society. Through the three

key themes of gender, whiteness, and queerness, this research explores how the sauna experience highlights the embodied experiences of international students as they navigate bodily encounters.

By analysing body practices, power dynamics are navigated, and the nuances of gender dynamics, queerness, and whiteness are embodied. The sauna experience becomes a heightened and extreme version of daily life, emphasising how identity is realised through being naked. Being in the sauna can heighten our sense of identity. It has a marvellous capacity for meaning making. Through this lens, the research shows how international students experience otherness and exclusion but also acceptance, belonging, and community.

Based on my research, gender dynamics significantly shape sauna experiences. Individuals who use the women's side of the sauna tend to feel comfortable and enjoy the feminine space, whereas the presence of men in the sauna often creates discomfort and unease as the male gaze invades the space. It is interesting to consider how the binary separation of genders affects these feelings. Creating a separation produces a sense of the unknown, possibly generating unease when all genders share the sauna space. My findings have shown that the utopic ideal of a queer space doesn't really translate to Queer Kallis as it is experienced in actuality. The non-separated environments can cause less of a sense of belonging for the informants involved in this study. However, this experience does not need to be universalised. For many bodies, belonging can be found when a space is shifted from its binary norm. A non-separated sauna environment can generate a sense of belonging for bodies that do not feel at home in a binary space. When the sauna becomes a queer space, open for all bodies to move between, there is space to challenge norms and render inequalities visible. This research advocates the need for a queer sauna space, removed from patriarchal, heteronormative, white dominance. There is home to be found in discomfort, as from discomfort, acceptance and community can also be formed. Nevertheless, my findings have shown that these power structures still reign even in Queer Kallis' attempt to open its doors for all bodies.

The research has highlighted how the sauna space is oriented around whiteness and heterosexuality. It has shown how certain bodies hold power over others through unspoken

bodily gestures. For bodies that do not blend into this homogenous mould, the sauna space can become a site where exclusion and otherness come to the fore. Sauna practice in Sweden is an institution claimed by Nordic Whiteness, because of this, it is easier to belong in the sauna if you are white. Blending in renders bodies invisible, visible bodies are marked as different. In a space where whiteness and heterosexuality are the expectation, power and social dynamics become realised through the disruption of this norm.

My research findings have highlighted the issues faced by international students at Lund University as they navigate their homemaking practices. A fellow international student, a friend, once told me: "Even if you are an outsider in Sweden for ten years, this place will never feel like home". I asked Rua if they would recommend the university to international students, and they responded: "I mean, as a trans student, it's not great. As a queer person, not great; it's crazy that there's such a massive university, and there's no dedicated space or money being put into, you know, queer students or disabled students. You know, a lot of people fall through the cracks". Given the melting pot of identities cohabiting in and around Lund, we must consider the embodied experiences of those who fall through the cracks, of those who exist in Lund as outsiders. I have sought to explore how home can be understood through a shared sense of "out of placeness."

The perpetual state of outsidership for those who do not fit into the hegemonic social mould of their host country is a problem that needs addressing. Ahmed's questions in the opening of the conclusion: "How can we make a space which is supportive? How can we become friends? What can we build from the very fact of our coming together – being thrown together – in this place, having come from other places?" are highly relevant and vital. The outsider's embodied experience plays a valuable role in shaping social spaces. International students need jobs, friends, affordable housing, and affordable and effective transport systems. They need bars, parks, museums and cafes that they enjoy going to. They need practices, rituals and access to nature and water.

What can we do to ensure that international students are protected? Without the support systems established in their pre-established homes. I am not claiming that this thesis has an answer. My argument is neither for nor against the effects of sauna on individuals' experiences of belonging. Instead, I raise a huge question about the responsibility of public

space and whether Swedish public space supports the international students it welcomes. The sauna and its practice is a layered study. Is the sauna an inclusive space? Can it do more to open its arms, welcome others into its space and permit as many people as possible to experience its healing, grounding ritual? By analysing the sauna space, we have an insight into Swedish public space, how it interacts with non-locals and how non-locals interact with Swedish public space.

6.1 Application

This thesis delves into the experience of sauna bathing and how it can have far-reaching applications across various fields such as human geography, inclusion and diversity studies, cultural studies, environmental studies, student mobility services, youth management, leisure studies, anthropology, and tourism.

By examining the perspective of newcomers towards the culturally embedded practice of sauna bathing, this research provides valuable insights into creating a welcoming and inclusive environment. It highlights the relevance of understanding the social dynamics at play in Swedish society and offers tools for international students to find a sense of home in Sweden. The sauna, therefore, becomes an analytical site that provides a unique perspective on how the interplay of cultural practices affects social interactions and the importance of creating an inclusive and welcoming environment for all.

Insights from this research can be valuable for social and urban planning organisations to create inclusive public spaces. It is essential for such organisations to raise awareness about innocuous power dynamics in social spaces and provide information to individuals who hold dominant norms about their position in the affective community. For instance, in a sauna space, codes of conduct for interacting with newcomers, people of colour, women, and queer bodies can be established and promoted, highlighting certain bodily positions and gazes that can make others feel uncomfortable. Additionally, cultural diversity among sauna-goers should be emphasised to avoid assumptions that all participants are Swedish. Encounters can shape feelings of belonging or exclusion, so it is necessary for those who are not experiencing discomfort to recognize that their actions or words may make others feel out of place. To create a supportive and inclusive environment, it is the responsibility

of those with dominant normative identities to make space for those who do not share the same identity, to be attentive to others sharing the same physical space.

To conclude, this research has sought to amplify the multiplicity of what it means to be an international student, representing the international student experience from an embodied, sweaty perspective and shining a light on issues that can often go unnoticed. When we take a sauna, meaning is generated, connection is generated. Sauna practice can be an opportunity to unearth valuable insights into our relationships with others and ourselves. Sauna practice can bring us home.

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Empirical Material

Belinda (02/02/2022) Interviewer Kara Stein

Blue (09/02/2022) Interviewer Kara Stein

Maria (10/01/2023) Interviewer Kara Stein

Pada (14/12/2022) Interviewer Kara Stein

Riktig (05/12/2022) Interviewer Kara Stein

Rua (16/01/202) Interviewer Kara Stein

Rupert (12/12/2022) Interviewer Kara Stein

Tomazzo (12/12/2022) Interviewer Kara Stein

Fieldnotes (26/01/2022) (01/12/2022) (19/12/2022) (09/01/2023) (06/03/2023)