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på Vestlandet

# MASTER'S THESIS

Using Queer and Black literature in the Norwegian EFL classroom to create awareness towards the intersections of multiple marginalised people

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I confirm that the work is self-prepared and that references/source references to all sources used in the work are provided, cf. Regulation relating to academic studies and examinations at the Western Norway University of Applied Sciences (HVL), § 12-1.

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## Abstract

This thesis argues that using Black queer literature in the English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, such as *Hurricane Child*, and *Felix Ever After* by Kacen Callender, and *The Black Flamingo* by Dean Atta, which depict the intersecting ways in which LGBTQ+ people of colour experience oppressive structures, can contribute to successful conversations about these structures that are based on a white supremacist hegemony. Moreover, they can assist the process of re-imagining and re-constructing discourses around race, sexuality, and gender to be more inclusive. Furthermore, using literature that provides Black queer stories in the EFL classroom is suggested to be a fruitful approach to develop intercultural competence and critical literacy.

The thesis applies Critical Race Theory, Queer theory, and the concept of intersectionality as central theoretical frameworks to conduct a cultural analysis of the primary texts, with close reading as a method. Additionally, didactic concepts such as intercultural competence, critical literacy, and the pedagogy of discomfort is drawn from to link the themes of race, sexuality, and gender to the guidelines of LK20 regarding development of intercultural awareness and the ability of critical thinking.

## Samandrag

Denne masteroppgåva argumenterer for gevinsten som kan ligge i å nytte Svart, skeiv litteratur, som *Hurricane Child* og *Felix Ever After* av Kacen Callender, og *The Black Flamingo* av Dean Atta i engelskundervisninga i den norske grunnskuleopplæringa. Desse forteljingane, samt andre forteljingar med same tematikk, kan leggje til rette for gode diskusjonar rundt sosiale strukturar for undertrykking basert på kvite ekstreme haldningar (white supremacist ideology). Dette kan igjen vere med på å rekonstruere diskursane rundt rase, seksualitet og kjønn til å verte meir inkluderande. Å nytte litteratur som løfter fram Svarte, skeive forteljingar som utgangspunkt for haldningsskapande arbeid i skulen ser ut til å vere ei fruktbar tilnærming til å fostre interkulturell kompetanse og kritisk literacy.

Oppgåva nyttar kritisk raseteori, skeiv teori og konseptet om interseksjonalitet som sentrale teoretiske rammeverk for å utføre ei kulturell analyse av primærtekstane, med nærlesing som metode. I tillegg vert didaktiske konsept som interkulturell kompetanse, kritisk literacy og ubehagets pedagogikk bygd på for å knyte tema som rase, seksualitet og kjønn opp mot LK20 når det kjem til utvikling av interkulturelt medvit og evna til kritisk tenking.

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background and topic

Diversity and inclusion are topics that are increasingly becoming important in the English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, with key terms such as intercultural competence, cultural awareness, diversity, and critical literacy being centred in the Norwegian school curricula. However, a challenge teachers encounter regarding these terms is the lack of definition and the room for individual interpretations as to what these terms entail with regard to teaching and creating an inclusive and diverse EFL classroom. For example, an interpretation of these terms must be inclusive of race, sexuality, and gender, as these impact communities who experience marginalisation. Nevertheless, experience has shown that topics of race, sexuality, and gender are often avoided in the Norwegian EFL classroom altogether due to the discomfort they might provoke. Instead, there is a tendency to focus on essentialising and celebrating cultures to promote intercultural competence and cultural awareness. I wish to challenge this take on interculturality in the Norwegian education. I suggest therefore, that looking at the possibilities created through reading Black<sup>1</sup> queer stories as a means to engage with intercultural competence, cultural awareness and diversity, and to create critical literacy, is of importance to further the incentive of an inclusive and diverse education as implied in LK20. Thus, the focus of this thesis is on the potentials of including Black queer stories in the EFL classroom.

This thesis will further engage Black queer stories and explore how *Hurricane Child* (2021c) and *Felix Ever After* (2021b) by Kacen Callender, and *The Black Flamingo* (2019) by Dean Atta illustrate the intersecting ways that LGBTQ+ people of colour experience marginalisation. Moreover, I will be looking at how Black queer literature may help create awareness around the oppressive structures that target the Black queer community. I chose this topic after acquiring awareness of the increased likelihood of LGBTQ+ people of colour to experience marginalisation and discrimination on the basis of belonging to multiple minority communities. I did, however, as a white, cis gendered, straight female, not comprehend the

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<sup>1</sup> I capitalise “Black”, following Crenshaw’s (1991) understanding that Black people, alongside other minority groups, form a specific cultural group, thus, require significance as a noun. On the premise of this, I do not capitalise “white”, because white people do not belong to a specific cultural group. Therefore, “white” is, in this context, not a proper noun.

compounded life challenges that Black queer people often face when they are part of both communities until I started reading fictional works by Black queer authors, about Black queer characters. My initial thought, when developing a knowledge of the intersections of multiple marginalised communities through reading fiction, was that this newfound awareness should be transferred to the teaching practice in Norwegian classrooms. More specifically, it should be incorporated in the Norwegian English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, in the form of Black queer young adult (YA), and middle grade (MG) fiction. However, in order to implement Black queer YA, and MG fiction in the EFL classroom's curriculum as a means of fostering awareness of experiences of marginalised groups like LGBTQ+ people of colour, teachers need to be comfortable with teaching about topics such as race, sexuality, and gender. As a majority of teachers in Norway do not belong to these communities, these topics are unfortunately unfamiliar to a lot of them. The fear of saying the wrong thing or to come across as ignorant may prevent a lot of teachers in working productively with these topics with their students, perhaps avoiding them entirely. I hope this thesis will contribute to a discussion of how EFL teachers can approach these topics by using YA, and MG literature through a lens of intersectionality.

Moreover, this thesis aligns with the values of the education and training, which are part of the core curriculum that applies to primary and secondary education and training in Norway. The core curriculum presents values and principles for education and gives educators directions for their teaching practice. I draw from these values in this thesis, more specifically the values of human dignity, identity and cultural diversity, and critical thinking and ethical awareness (The Ministry of Education and Research [TMER], 2017, pp. 3–7). The objectives clause of human dignity promotes human rights, the inviolability of human dignity, as well as acknowledgement and appreciation of difference and diversity. Equality and equity are key words in this clause. The objectives clause of identity and cultural diversity states that the school “shall give historical and cultural insight that will give them a good foundation in their lives and help each pupil to preserve and develop her or his identity in an inclusive and diverse environment” (TMER, 2017, p. 5). The goal is to guide and support the development of each individual's identity, building confidence in who they are, and “present common values that are needed to participate in this diverse society and to open doors to the world and the future” (TMER, 2017, p. 6). Critical thinking and ethical awareness are requirements for developing good judgement, as well as the ability to balance respect for already established



knowledge with seeking to disrupt and challenge these knowledges. These core values are meant to serve as a foundation for every choice we, as educators, make in our practice, from teaching material and teaching activities, to discourses and attitudes that are presented in the classroom. Based on these objectives, it is crucial to discuss how to best meet them in the teaching practice.

The rights of queer and genderqueer people of colour, seem to be moving in the right direction overall. However, in a worldwide context, Black queer people are still experiencing discrimination and marginalisation every day. This is also happening in the field of education, for instance through the “don’t say gay” bill in Florida’s state legislature, which aims to ban public school districts from “encouraging” discussions about sexuality and gender identity (Madeleine, 2022). This is a part of a legislation targeting what can and cannot be said and taught in U.S. public classrooms. According to Madeleine (2022), a report by PEN America from February 2022, found that there has been a rise in educational “gag orders” in state legislatures in 2022, including 15 bills that specifically target the LGBTQ+ community. The Florida bill does not only aim to ban discussions about sexuality and gender identities, but also to change the curriculum to be less inclusive towards LGBTQ+ people. This movement is a regression of the progress that has been made for the LGBTQ+ community throughout the past few decades. Although this is not currently happening in Norwegian education and politics, it illustrates a problem which has to be acknowledged, addressed, and fought against through creating awareness of the marginalisation of LGBTQ+ individuals. Furthermore, according to Batchelor et al. (2018, p. 29) LGBTQ+ students report that when the curriculum that is taught in school is LGBTQ+ inclusive, they are less likely to feel unsafe. Feeling safe is a right for students in Norway, following section 9 A-2 of the Education Act, which underlines that each pupil has the right to a good physical and psycho-social environment supportive to health, well-being, and learning (The Education Act, 1998, § 9 A-2). Batchelor et al. (2018, p. 29) point towards including LGBTQ+ themed literature in the classroom as a way to create a safe, supportive, and inclusive classroom culture, where LGBTQ+ voices are honoured. Moreover, they argue that LGBTQ+ themes are often neglected in school curricula, thus addressing the lack of LGBTQ+ inclusive curricula. Clark and Blackburn (2009, p. 25) share an assumption that English language arts classrooms can be significant arenas for combating and confronting homophobia and heterosexism, through the use of LGBTQ+ themed literature. However, as Batchelor et al. (2018, p. 30) write about the issue of trying to understand

sexuality by itself, they underline that “sexual identities cannot be separated from race, class, gender and other identities”. Therefore, using literature in the classroom that shows more diverse characters in terms of sexuality, race, class, and gender identity/expression is an even greater step towards a more inclusive learning environment, rooted in the core values mentioned previously.

Furthermore, raising awareness around the intersecting ways in which people who occupy multiple identities can be stigmatised, is crucial in order to promote human dignity, critical thinking, ethical awareness, and cultural diversity in the education. The marginalised communities that are centred in this thesis are LGBTQ+ people of colour, as representations of experiences or communities that face intersecting oppressions may provide insight into oppression and marginalisation in a more general sense. As the concept of intersectionality reveals, one cannot understand sexuality by itself, as it is a part of a person’s whole, multidimensional identity, with factors such as ethnicity, race, culture, religion, gender, and class, along with sexuality, playing huge parts in building each individual’s identity. Furthermore, because Black queer stories are often placed under erasure, and their voices silenced within both the LGBTQ+ community, and within the Black community, the intersections of race and sexuality should be emphasised when teaching LGBTQ+ themed literature. On the basis of this, choosing literature for the classroom that is diverse in terms of sexuality, race, gender is crucial to meet the objectives of the core curriculum. Additionally, development of critical literacy will be stimulated by providing the students with literature that challenges and disrupts societal norms, for instance heteronormative discourses, monosexism, and racial stereotypes to mention a few.

## 1.2 Research questions and scope of the thesis

Building on the notion that there is a need to include Black LGBTQ+ themed literature in the classroom and following the assumption by Clark and Blackburn (2009), that English language arts classrooms are great arenas to engage in inclusive work, the main focus of this thesis is to explore the possibilities that lie in using Black, queer YA and MG fiction in the Norwegian EFL classroom. These possibilities are specifically aimed to explore the critiques levelled by LGBTQ+ people of colour. In light of this, the main research question for this thesis is:

*How can the use of Black LGBTQ+ themed YA, and MG fiction in the Norwegian EFL classroom be beneficial in creating awareness towards the intersections of oppression with regard to race, sexuality, and gender?*

As the research question is complex, consisting of several elements, I have chosen to divide it into the three following sub-questions, all centred around the primary texts that will be analysed in this study.

1. How are the intersecting violences of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and gender stereotyping portrayed in *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo*?
2. How are the authors of *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo* re-imagining the discourses of race, gender, and sexuality?
3. What are the implications for using *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo* in the Norwegian EFL classroom?

The first sub-question addresses the discrimination and aggressions (micro- and macro-aggressions) that individuals from these communities experience, whereas the second sub-question addresses the ways in which Black queer stories of joy may assist in re-imagining how we talk about race, gender, and sexuality in a more inclusive way. The third sub-question is directly linked to the didactics of EFL learning in terms of the subject curriculum, as well as the core curriculum, and how the primary texts meet the objectives presented in these.

### 1.2.1 Presentation of the primary texts

*Hurricane Child* (2021c) and *Felix Ever After* (2021b), both written by Kacen Callender, and *The Black Flamingo* (2019) by Dean Atta, are the primary texts that will be analysed in this thesis. The authors re-visualise to a large extent what identity is, following the view of Collins and Bilge (2020, p. 226), who suggest that identity is something one *does*, and not something one *has*. By creating stories which centre Black queer characters, the authors manage to provide a more complex view of multiple marginalised communities, the multidimensionality of their identities and their experiences. Additionally, by providing Black queer stories, notions of queer sexuality, queer gender identity, Black equality, Black life, Black joy, and Black

complexity, to mention a few, are normalised. The novels illustrate how categorisation can be resisted, focusing on challenging the normalised hegemonic discourses and oppressive systems that relegate people who do not strictly fit into one category. Thus, these novels are filling a gap, with regard to re-constructing the discourses of race, sexuality, and gender, through emphasising the pathologies that exist within these discourses. This is highlighted in texts like *Felix Ever After* in a conversation between a few characters:

“I see at least one thing a day that makes me wonder if the straight people are all right.”  
“And then there was that article saying that queer TV shows are making more people gay”. “I never saw a single TV show with a gay person until, like, last year,” Leah says, “and I didn’t turn out to be straight. So.” [...] “The straights say that we’ve got an agenda to turn people gay,” Marisol says, “but then will try to force toddlers on each other and say it’s *so cute* and they’re *destined to get married*. Seriously.” (Callender, 2021b, p. 80)

Dean Atta says in a conversation with Jane Link for BigBlackBooks (an online publication platform about Black readers, writers, authors, and publishers), that queer Black joy stories are missing in the field of literature that handles themes of racism and queerphobia (Link, 2021). He goes on to say that there are heaps of tragic stories, as well as important stories of pain and trauma linked to being queer and Black. However, there are not enough queer Black stories about joy and love. The conscious choice of wanting to contribute to the literary field with stories of joy, love and empowerment is an active step towards re-imagining the discourse of gender and race. Although the authors of the primary texts portray the pain and trauma of experiencing discrimination in intersecting ways through the storyline and characters of their novels, they also manage to capture the joy that these characters experience.

Moreover, the reason for choosing these specific novels to analyse in this thesis, is the unique insights they provide as a unity and individually to the Black queer community. *Hurricane Child* illustrates experiences of queerness in children, as well as the trauma of racial abuse. Furthermore, themes of grief and pain are portrayed throughout the story. *Felix Ever After* explores represented experiences of gender queer identities and sexuality, which contribute to the discussion of including LGBTQ+ themed literature in the EFL classroom. In

*The Black Flamingo*, the main character challenges the gender dichotomy of masculine versus feminine and the author provides illustrations of how some people of mixed-race may experience a sense of betweenness and alienation from their communities.

### 1.3 Literature review

This study concerns how inclusive literature can be used to gain intercultural competence and critical literacy, thus locating it mainly within the fields of intercultural competence and critical literacy in the Norwegian EFL education. I will in this section present previous research in the aforementioned fields, which have all helped me navigate my own research.

One of the key scholars of intercultural competence is Michael Byram<sup>2</sup>, who were one of the first to use the term, and a co-developer of the concept, alongside Geneviève Zarate (Byram, 2014, p. 211). Byram introduced a model in 1997 to illustrate the competences of intercultural communication, which consists of the five elements: *attitudes, knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, and critical cultural awareness* (Lund, 2008). The linguistic part of Byram's model of intercultural competence is defined as: *Linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, and discourse competence*, thus creating a dichotomy between language and culture within the concept of intercultural competence. My understanding of intercultural competence in this thesis builds on the premises of this model. In the Norwegian landscape of intercultural competence, Dypedahl and Bøhn (2017) have been central, with Dypedahl's many contributions to the field of intercultural competence in foreign language didactics (Bjørke et al., 2018; Dypedahl & Eschenbach, 2011). Furthermore, in an article by Bugge (2011), titled *Utvikling av interkulturell kompetanse og språkopplæring – to sider av samme sak*, the interrelation between intercultural competence and language learning is discussed in a Norwegian education context. For instance, it is suggested in the article that through working with and acknowledging our own attitudes, values, and worldviews, a better understanding of others may be fostered, which is central to the argument of this thesis.

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<sup>2</sup> Other scholars who have entered the discussion of what intercultural competence means in the context of (foreign language) education are e.g. Risager (2007), Zarate (2018), and Kramsch (2011).

In the field of Critical Literacy, Hilary Janks is a recurring name, as she has contributed fundamentally to the discussions of fostering Critical Literacy in the EFL classroom. She writes that “critical literacy education focuses specifically on the role of language as a social practice and examines the role played by text and discourse in maintaining or transforming these [social] orders” (Janks, 2014, p. 349). She provides a guide to how critical literacy can be practiced in the classroom, stressing the importance of understanding the connections between the local and the global, now and the future, as well as the perceived “us” and the constructed “others”. Another major contributor to the field is Vivian Maria Vasquez, who has further inspired the understanding of critical literacy in this thesis. In *Negotiating Spaces for Critical Literacy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, a chapter in *Negotiating Critical Literacies With Teachers* by Vasquez et al. (2013), the goal of fostering justice-oriented citizens through teaching for critical literacy is highlighted.<sup>3</sup> In Norway, one of the most prominent scholars within the field of Critical Literacy in education is Aslaug Karianne Veum, who collaborated with Karianne Skovholt to write *Kritisk literacy i klasserommet* (2020). Veum (2020) writes about the importance of teaching our students to read “against” the text, as research has suggested that Norwegian students lack the literacy to critically assess texts that appear truthful. She refers to how research has shown how critical literacy should be better implemented in all learning activities, however, it is suggested that it should be altered slightly to fit the Norwegian context, for instance by drawing from the social experiences of the students in a Norwegian setting.

As mentioned previously, this thesis will be centred around the possibilities of using Black queer stories in the EFL classroom, thus, previous research on this topic is crucial to map out. Within the field of queer pedagogies, Mollie Blackburn has contributed largely with her work. She has researched the possibilities of using LGBTQ+ themed literature in the English language education, and the crucial impact of providing an LGBTQ+ inclusive classroom, with regard to queer youth and their teachers. In collaboration with other central scholars within queer pedagogies, she has brought attention to the importance of questioning gender norms, as well as heteronormative discourses within the English language classroom (Blackburn, 2002, 2003; Blackburn & Buckley, 2005; Blackburn et al., 2015; Clark & Blackburn, 2009). Other central voices within queer pedagogies are Ryan Schey (2018; 2021a, 2021b), who points to

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<sup>3</sup> Morgan (1997), and Hall’s (2007) contributions to the field of critical literacy are also drawn from in this thesis.

the vitality of a queer-inclusive curricula, although critiques the tendency to measure the inclusiveness merely in terms of absence/presence. Thus, a focus on *how* it is taught is of importance. Furthermore, a large quantity of scholars has researched the teaching of Black literature in language education. Back in 1973, West and Williams (1973), suggested that Black literature should be taught as Black literature, and not simply as literature, due to the importance of acknowledging Black authors and their impact. Price (2017) is critical to this and writes that Black literature has more to offer than to merely act as an agent for Black voices to be heard in the classroom. He instead proposes that Black literature bears both a culturally specific face, and a more “universal” face, which both should be recognised when used in teaching.

Although there are large amounts of previous research in the fields of intercultural, critical, and queer pedagogies, I have not found as much that considers the position of Black queer literature in the EFL classroom, or in language education in general. Kumashiro (2002) has, however, contributed to the field of queer-activism and anti-oppressive pedagogies with ground-breaking work, arguing that teachers need to address issues of inequity in their teaching in order to disrupt oppression. Moreover, Blackburn and Smith (2010) note that in order to successfully combat homophobia and heteronormativity in the classroom, the factors of intersecting identities are crucial to acknowledge, with regard to the Black LGBTQ+ community. However, there is still a noticeable gap within the English language education of research on the use of Black queer literature to contribute making the EFL classroom inclusive, anti-oppressive, and to build intercultural awareness through re-imagining the discourse of race, sexuality, and gender. As there is little prominent research to locate on the use of Black queer literature in the EFL classroom, this thesis will add to the already large field of inclusive pedagogy, and hopefully contribute with new insight that might be beneficial to EFL educators.

#### 1.4 Thesis structure

The structure of this thesis is divided into six main chapters, where chapter one is the introduction, providing background for, and topic of the thesis, additionally placing the study in a context as to why it is of interest. The second chapter presents the theoretical framework used to analyse and discuss the primary texts. Theories such as Critical Race Theory, and sub-

branches such as intersectionality and Black feminism, as well as Queer theory, will be of focus in this part. Following the theoretical framework, I will present the methodological approach that has been used when analysing the primary texts. The main chapters of this thesis are chapters three–five. Chapter three is divided into three sections, mainly focusing on the violences of racism, gender stereotyping and transphobia, as well as homophobia and monosexism. These sections are in turn, further divided into sub-sections. Re-imagining the discourses around race, gender and sexuality is the main focus of the fourth chapter. In this chapter the ways that expressive writing and art serves as a coping mechanism to promote self-healing are explored, as this is a recurring theme in all three novels. The way the authors are challenging and re-imagining the discourses around race, gender, and sexuality through providing Black queer stories of joy and empowerment, is further investigated. In the final chapter of the analysis and discussion, the implications for using the three novels, and other similar Black queer stories in the EFL classroom are explored, with regard to the pedagogies of intercultural competence and critical literacy. Lastly, a conclusion of the thesis will be provided.



## 2.0 Theoretical Framework and methodology

### 2.1 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is rooted in the socio-political history of the United States, which places issues of race, racism, and power relations in a rather broad perspective, including economics, the law history, group- and self-interest, setting, and emotions and the unconscious. According to Delgado et al. (2017, p. 3) CRT “questions the foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law”. This shows how applied CRT allows for a deductive approach to study and challenge issues of race, racism, and power relations, as these factors are seen as contributing to creating inequality and inequity based on race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, and economy. Thus, CRT builds on the notion that issues of race, racism and power relations are to be *analysed* as symptoms of inequality and inequity through a broad perspective of underlying factors. In light of this, Khalifa et al. (2013, p. 491) refer to the five tenets of CRT that have emerged from CRT scholars, which will be used as a framework for the analysis of this thesis:

1. Acknowledging that racism is an invisible norm and white culture and (privilege) is the standard by which other races are measured
2. Committing to understanding that racism is socially constructed and expanded, and an inclusive world view is required for true social justice
3. Acknowledging the unique perspective and voices of people of colour as victims of oppression in racial matters and valuing their story telling as a legitimate way to convey knowledge
4. Engaging interdisciplinary dialogue and discourse to analyse race relationships
5. An understanding that racism is systemic, and that many current policies and laws are: (1) neither ahistorical nor apolitical; and (2) are situated to privilege whites and marginalize minoritized groups.

The tenets of CRT presented above will be at the centre of how I will analyse the primary texts in this thesis to further gain insight into how these stories may be used to acknowledge the racial hierarchy that exists as a norm, and how they might be helpful to understand how

racism is socially constructed. Additionally, I will unpack the ways in which the three primary texts, along with other similar texts may be used in the EFL classroom to acknowledge the perspective and voices of people of colour as victims of oppression and regard these stories as a legitimate source of knowledge and a way to increase awareness. Moreover, by using CRT as a lens for analysing the primary texts in this thesis, I am actively analysing representations of for instance race, systemic racism, and anti-Black racism through engaging interdisciplinary dialogue and discourse. The fifth point is explained by Delgado et al. (2017, pp. 8–11) as material determinism, or interest convergence, focusing on how racism advances the interests of whites of all socio-economic backgrounds, creating little motivation to change it. This point is crucial to be aware of when teaching about racial injustice, which is an objective for this thesis. Furthermore, Crenshaw et al. (1995, p. xiii) point out the two common interests that CRT scholars are unified by. The first is to understand how white supremacy and its subordination of people of colour has been crafted and preserved in America, examining the relation between these social structures and the supposed ideals of law and equality. The second interest of CRT scholars is to not only understand the race relations of law and power, but also find a way to *change* the dynamics of said power.

Delgado et al. (2017, pp. 4–5) explain how CRT developed in the late 1970's, built on the understandings of critical legal studies and radical feminism. As subtler forms of racism through institutionalised policies were gaining ground, there was an urgent need for a theory that combined these two, where critical legal studies inspired through the concept of legal indeterminacy. Radical feminism inspired a critical take on the power dynamics that construct social roles, as well as the many invisible factors which give life to patriarchy. CRT also took notions such as group cohesion, cultural nationalism, as well as an understanding for group empowerment from ethnic studies. In addition to drawing from other theories, thoughts and discourses, CRT draws from philosophers such as Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida, and Michael Foucault (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 5). American traditionalists such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King jr., and Frederick Douglas, among others, also inspired the development of CRT (Delgado et al., 2017, p. 5). Although CRT continues to grow, regarding other marginalised groups of people in addition to African Americans, its basic theoretical premises remain the same.

The most central figure within CRT is Derrick Bell, who is considered by Delgado et al. (2017, p. 6) to be the intellectual father figure of the theory, as he wrote several foundational

texts, focusing on the thesis of material determinism, especially linked to the unjust educational opportunities in the U.S. According to Zamudio et al. (2011, p. 8), Ladson-Billings and Tate are pioneers for using CRT to analyse inequity and inequality in education linked to race, where their work builds upon already existing analyses of class and gender inequities in education. Today CRT has become a central topic within the discourse of education across the world and is used as a tool to challenge mainstream educational practices and policies (Zamudio et al., 2011, p. 11). As the theory has gained attention within the field of intercultural, anti-racial and anti-oppressive pedagogies, it is fitting to include as a framework for this thesis.

CRT is, however, deeply rooted in U.S. social structures, and scholars have critiqued the use of CRT in other contexts which do not share the same history, values, and culture as the U.S. Cole (2009) wrote a response to Mills (1997) about importing CRT into a British context, looking through the lens of Marxism, especially critiquing the usage of the term “white supremacy” within CRT. He goes on to explain how CRT restricts racism/white-supremacy through colour-coding to a set of practices which are related directly to skin-colour, disregarding non-colour-coded racism, which is a current reality in the contemporary U.K. (Cole, 2009, p. 253). Non-colour-coded racism is racialisation that is not based on the colour of one’s skin, but rather ethnicity, cultural belonging, and accent, such as the Irish, and the Roma Gypsy travelling communities (Cole, 2009, p. 251). According to Mills (1997, pp. 78–79), what would be called “borderline” Europeans such as the Irish, Slavs, Mediterraneans, and Jews are subjected to racialisation, as they do not fit into the strict categorisation of the white/non-white dichotomy. In spite of Mills acknowledging that there is a hierarchy within the category of “white” people, Cole (2009, p. 253) is persistent in his critique towards CRT being restricted to a strict “white/non-white” dichotomy. As racialisations happen on the basis of biological, cultural, somatic, and symbolic features, thus, categorising it as non-colour-coded racism makes sense. In European countries, where the majority are categorised as white, and there is discrimination aimed at the groups of people mentioned above, Cole’s critique towards CRT seems to be legitimate. However, Mills (2009, pp. 276–277) suggests that the U.S. “whiteness” literature or Critical white Studies is misunderstood. He explains how physical whiteness is not equivalent to social whiteness, referencing to the American one-drop rule, which decided that anyone that had Black ancestors were not to be considered as white, however much they were somatically white. On the basis of this, Mills (2009, p. 278)

states that CRT is not as straightforwardly colour-coded as Cole argues, writing that racial privilege and racial subordination is not limited to only somatic features, but are dependent on a number of different factors, such as culture, class, geography, and ethnicity to mention a few. This understanding of CRT will be centred in this thesis, as the many factors that lies within oppressive structures should be acknowledged and considered.

Following the path of non-colour-coded racism leads me to view CRT in a Scandinavian, specifically a Norwegian context, due to the traditionally relatively homogenous population, with the exception of national minority groups, such as the Sami population, Finns/Kvens, Romani People/Taters, and Roma people. Brekke (2020) argues that the tradition of CRT is not relevant to the Norwegian context, as it originates in America where race and racialisation is done differently than in Norway, or, as previously mentioned, in Britain. Despite the obvious differences of social categorisations of race in everyday life in the U.S. versus in Norway, Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021, p. 2) argue that CRT “is useful for understanding the implicit, but nevertheless powerful hierarchies that exists in Norwegian society”. According to Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021, p. 2), being Norwegian is still highly associated with being white, despite the rapid growth of immigration, as well as the inclusion of the ethnic minorities mentioned above. Within the Norwegian discourse of race there is also a practice of substituting the term “race”, with terms such as “ethnicity”, “multiculturalism”, “culture”, and “diversity”, as an act of relegating a discourse of race after WWII (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021, p. 2). And although Norway, along with other Western European countries are insistent on declaring themselves as non-racist, the result has been erasing “race” from the academic and public debate almost entirely. Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021, p. 3) argue this is only further silencing the existence of intrinsic racial hierarchies in Europe, that existed before WWII and remain a part of the European society to this day. For instance, the concepts of diversity and multiculturalism, and culture are thoroughly present in the objectives of education and training in Norway (The Education Act, 1998, §1-1), as well as in the Norwegian core curriculum (The Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). Terms such as “equality” are also used exhaustively, which, together with the concepts previously mentioned create a rather abstract notion of inclusion, where differences in culture, ethnicity, and religion are acknowledged. What is missing, is acknowledging the presence of racism and perhaps the term “equity” should be used, in its place. As put forth here, the choice to discard “race” in the public and academic sphere when discrimination towards ethnic minorities is still

persistent in the labour market, and in the educational system (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021, p. 2), is reason enough to bring CRT into the Norwegian, and the Scandinavian context, even though it is created in an American setting. It also allows for opening the stage for discussing racial and ethnic discrimination and how it is experienced in Norway, instead of silencing these discussions with the claim of being a multicultural, equal, and inclusive society.

### 2.1.1 Intersectionality

Within the context of the three texts under study, I draw from intersectionality as a foundational concept. Intersectionality is established as a tool to analyse discrimination and marginalisation towards people in intersecting ways, which is the premises that I will be operating from. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991, pp. 1244–1245) is an early scholar of CRT and coined the term intersectionality, which is defined as a concept that considers the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, gender, sexuality, and class. It can be applied when analysing social structures of oppression. Thus, the concept sheds light onto the multidimensional factors of marginalised people’s experiences, with a primary focus on the intersections of gender and race (Nash, 2008, p. 2). Furthermore, women of colour experience marginalisation within the discourse of feminism, and within the discourse of anti-racism, as they are women *and* of colour (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244). Thus, marginalisation of women of colour often takes place because discourses are shaped to respond to either feminist *or* anti-racist matters but are rarely responding to issues related to their intersecting identities. Therefore, the need for a concept such as intersectionality is more prominent. Feminist discourse has, according to Crenshaw (1991, p. 1250) historically foregrounded the experiences of women who are racially privileged, which results in women of colour not receiving services and actions targeted to their needs. Crenshaw (1991, p. 1242) writes about how identity politics have failed to acknowledge the differences *within* different identity groups, as they mainly focus on the differences *between* these groups instead. Therefore, introducing the concept of intersectionality into CRT, delivers a tool for analysing discrimination and marginalisation, whilst also acknowledging the multidimensional identities of the subjects who experience violence linked to these. The intersections of race and gender, which Crenshaw (1991, p. 1245) uses as an illustration of intersectionality, emphasise “the need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is

constructed". However, she acknowledges that factors such as class and sexuality are often just as important to include in the analysis of discrimination against women of colour. Thus, the concept is useful for understanding the experiences and intersecting oppressions of LGBTQ+ people of colour.

Nash (2008, p. 3) points to the history of exclusion and essentialism within feminist and anti-racist scholarship, suggesting that intersectionality centres the lived experiences of the relegated subjects of multidimensional identities, such as queer, genderqueer, and women of colour. Scholars within CRT have created terms such as "looking to the bottom", "multiple consciousness", "iterative energy", and "outsider scholars", which are different methodologies that draw upon marginalised people's experiences of discrimination (Nash, 2008, p. 3). These methodologies or strategies, allow intersectional scholars to explore the epistemological positions of marginalised people, as they bring accuracy to the discipline. By choosing to analyse three Black queer stories, written by Black queer authors in this thesis, the texts will be analysed from these lenses. Thus, by drawing from the concept of intersectionality in the analysis of this thesis, I consider the experiences of the characters as multidimensional, painting a more accurate picture of how multiple marginalised communities are subjected to structures of oppression. Furthermore, Nash (2008, pp. 5–6) presents three methodological approaches to intersectionality, the first one being "anticategorical complexity", which draws on the notion that categorisations, such as gender and race are too one-dimensional to seize the lived experiences of multiple marginalised people. The second approach draws on the narratives of the subjects as a starting point to the analysis. "Intracategorical complexity" as an approach, uses this starting point to further illustrate the short comings of using categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality individually to investigate why discrimination occurs. The third approach, "intercategorical complexity", aims to expose the relationships that exist between inequality and the categorisations of race, gender, class, and sexuality, by acknowledging, and using these terms as a starting point. Staying with the third approach, Cho et al. (2013, p. 797) address critiques that claim intersectionality re-births the idea of identity categories, writing that such understandings of identity politics are too narrow and distorted from what intersectionality aims for. They point out how intersectionality reveals how "power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 797). Thus, the "intercategorical complexity" approach to intersectionality

has been used throughout this thesis to investigate how these themes arise in the primary texts.

According to Cho et al. (2013, p. 807), they hope that debates in intersectional studies will navigate towards looking at how categories and identities are liable under the specific dynamics that are explored. In engaging with the primary texts, I draw on Collins and Bilge (2020, p. 226) conceptualization of identity as not something one *has*, but something one *does*. By this, they mean that one's identity is not static, and is very much defined, and changed by the social context of the subject, which again are shaped by power relations that intersect. This notion is quite central in the primary texts, where the theme of identification with regard to gender, sexuality and race is followed throughout the texts.

Moreover, Bilge (2013, p. 405) challenges the way in which intersectionality has to an extent become depoliticised, for instance through limiting it to an academic practice of metatheoretical thought. She also points towards the link between feminism and intersectionality, which is a way of "whitening" the term, pulling it further away from the initial vision of introducing intersectionality into the field of identity-politics. According to Bilge (2013, p. 405), the initial vision of intersectionality aimed to "generate counter-hegemonic, and transformative knowledge production, activism, pedagogy, and non-oppressive coalitions". In explaining how intersectionality has been "whitened", Bilge (2013, pp. 406–407) pulls forth examples of movements which have been claimed to be inclusive but failed in intersectional political awareness due to a number of factors. Movements such as Indignados, The Arab Spring, Occupy Movement, and SlutWalk are used to illustrate how they, although intended to be progressive, end up missing the intersectional tools that have been made available for such instances. Marginalised groups are being silenced, excluded, misrepresented, or co-opted. SlutWalk has received criticism with regard to racial blindness, due to the exclusion women of colour and their experiences of sexual assault. Bilge (2013, p. 406) highlights the importance of including Black women in movements such as this, as their sexuality has historically been stereotyped as promiscuous and improper, and their bodies available for assault, thus creating an urgency for letting Black women speak out and be allowed the space within the movement to which they are entitled. Moreover, Bilge (2013, p. 412) points towards the discussions of whether intersectionality is a theory or a device of analysis; discussions that end up disregarding the works of feminists of colour, as well as prompting a notion that lived experiences of structured racism towards women of colour, and

queer and genderqueer people of colour cannot serve as the foundation of a theory alone. Such understandings of intersectionality are damaging towards the initial vision of the concept, as previously mentioned. I will therefore be careful not to do so when analysing the primary texts, thus aiming to use intersectionality to challenge hegemonic structures of oppression. In order to explore power-relations and its impact on unequal treatment towards minority groups, contributions from people of multiple marginalised communities (e.g. women of colour, queer, and genderqueer people of colour) are crucial. Therefore, the significance of analysing Black queer stories from this framework is highlighted.

Also problematic are the tendencies of denying the relevance of race to comprehend and challenge power gaps which are seen as an easier route than to acknowledge race as equally relevant today in discussions of power relations compared to the past. This can for instance be seen in the Norwegian education discourse, where terms such as “culture” and “ethnicity” are used instead of acknowledging racial structures. Moreover, race and racism are often denied when combined with intersectional thought, as Bilge (2013, pp. 419–420) claims intersectionality is then being misused, as the intersections are never isolated and investigated alone. Because of this, race, sexuality, and gender, which are the main intersections explored in this thesis, are acknowledged as equally important to challenge these power structures in the analysis of the primary texts. Furthermore, intersectionality should be treated as a tool that is subjective but is often mistreated as an objective tool of analysis, which contradicts the broad vision of the concept. Thus, being able to take a step back from intersectionality may be a beneficial strategy to reach certain groups regarding issues of marginalisation and oppression. This perspective will be drawn from in the analysis of the primary texts, as challenging and disrupting power structures and systemic oppression is most feasible when considering multiple, and dynamic factors at once. For instance, Bilge (2013, p. 420) points towards the strategies of intervention/teaching about naturalised privilege of dominant groups, claiming that it might be necessary to use a race-only approach in early stages in order to have white people recognise their racial privilege. By keeping the initial vision of intersectionality in mind when doing intersectional work, such as analysing the primary texts or teaching them in the EFL classroom, there is room to step in and out of intersectional thinking when studying representations of experiences of marginalised people.



## 2.2 Queer theory

Queer theory is another broad theory that does not aim to have defined borders. According to Brooks and Leckey (2010, pp. 1–2), the theory is about “resisting” categorisation altogether, for its possibilities, as well as for its subjects. Using the term “queer” instead of for instance gay or homosexual, provides a framework that can be applied to those who do not define strictly as one label or gender, thus creating space for all who do not identify as cisgender or heterosexual. Thus, the term “queer” is essential in this thesis, where characters who do not define as cisgender or heterosexual are studied. Miller (2020, p. 102) points towards Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick as the “mother of queer theory”, due to her ground-breaking work which suggested a need for destigmatising and depathologising effeminate boys and gay men through expressing a desire for queer people in the world. Sedgwick (1991, p. 19) deconstructs the cultural logic for and aspiration to obliterate gay people, following the removal of homosexuality in the U.S. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual in 1980, instead introducing Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood. She critiques the illusion of the healthy homosexual as someone who is already grown up and who acts masculine and is affluent. Although there has been a depathologisation of same-sex attraction, Sedgwick (1991, p. 21) claims that this has made place for a new pathologisation of atypical gender identification. The gay movement has shown tendencies towards not acknowledging issues concerning effeminate boys, leaving a large chunk of gay people out of the movement. This is what Sedgwick (1991, p. 20) refers to as effeminophobia, where visible femininity in men were categorised as a gender identity disorder of childhood. Due to the lack of inclusivity within the gay movement, Sedgwick (1991, p. 26) seeks an unthreatened, unthreatening theoretical framework for a concept of gay and lesbian roots, as the work done up until the point of writing the article, sought to oppress any gay person deviating from their assigned gender and its stereotypical attributions. Although Sedgwick, and other scholars following her, suggest a distinction between heterosexual and homosexual as something that structures the core modes of thought and culture in Western society, Pinar (2012, p. 14) argues that this take on Queer theory should be decentred. This is founded by Seidman’s (1997, p. 120) view on the matter, arguing that it would mean that all queer people are united through a unitary identity, following an ethnic identity model, which is a mis portrayal of the gay demographic. I draw from Pinar and Seidmans view in my study, as I understand it to be fundamental to acknowledge the diversity within the LGBTQ+ community. The notion of community through

a distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality is important to many who belong to the LGBTQ+ community, which will also be considered in the analysis of the primary texts. However, I do not agree with viewing all queer people as united through a unitary identity, which will be reflected in the analysis of the primary texts.

Following the discussion of an ethnic identity model within the gay community, Seidman (1997, pp. 121–123) highlights the struggles that lesbian women and gay men of colour have had to face with regard to belonging to the LGBTQ+ community and aspires to re-imagine the notion that the lived gay experience is socially uniform. Seidman states that through criticising mainstream gay culture, which favours the thought of a unitary gay identity based on the white, affluent, gay male, three struggles were recognised. These being the struggles around race, bisexuality, and non-conventional sexualities. This is due to the bipolar view of gender and sexuality (heterosexuality/homosexuality, and male/female), which Seidman (1997, p. 132) claims has to be deconstructed in order to follow Queer theory. Building on the argumentation of Seidman, Pinar and Sedgwick, Queer theory aims to challenge and oppose normalising social forces. Thus, an understanding that gender and sexuality are *not* binaries, and cannot be viewed as such, will be a central premise throughout this thesis. Much like CRT, Queer theory focuses on challenging conventions of hegemonic cultures that serve to oppress and stigmatise groups of people who do not adhere to the norm.

Furthermore, Miller (2020, p. 103) points out the significantly increased visibility of queer children in politics, culture, and society, which illustrates the state and direction of modern identity politics. Thus, present day Queer theory is different to how it started, suggesting that it is time for social change. As the framework has offered us the ability to develop a wider understanding of gender and sexual normativity, the importance of creating queer literacy within the field of education, law, and politics, through incorporating the tools given to us by Queer theory is being brought to the foreground of today's fight for equality and equity. Therefore, one of the aspects of Queer theory that will be drawn from in this thesis is an understanding that the queer community is rich and diverse and must be viewed as such when studying the experiences of all LGBTQ+ people.

### 2.3 Methodology

To answer the research questions for this thesis, I have used close reading as a method for cultural analysis, combined with the theoretical approaches that have been disclosed previously in this chapter. According to Nicholson (2017, pp. 183–184), close reading is important to uncover the political and cultural significance of “text, images, language and experience”, which is what I aim to do in this thesis, thus pairing it with CRT and Queer theory to explore several different aspects to the primary texts through a cultural lens. Additionally, the analysis is followed by a didactic discussion, which regard the findings in the primary texts through a pedagogical lens.

The chapters are thematically led on a macro level, however, I’ve chosen to structure the sections led by text, where each of the primary texts provide specific insights. The texts have been analysed and placed into historical, political, geographical, and social contexts in order to provide a critical understanding of these texts, and to uncover the educational possibilities they hold.

I acknowledge that in close reading, the reader’s interpretations of the texts are crucial, and therefore the understanding of the texts may be influenced by my own values and perspectives. However, I do believe that in order to teach critical literacy, one cannot be both justice-oriented, and stay objective at the same time in the process of re-imagining discourses of race, sexuality, and gender.

### 3.0 The violences of racism, transphobia and homophobia as shown in *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo*

Throughout *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo*, the authors provide thorough and authentic insight into what being marginalised because of skin colour, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual identity entails. They shed light onto what being different to the majority means in terms of having opportunities, or rather lack thereof. The authors manage to gracefully handle issues linked to privilege and discrimination, making it easier for the reader to grasp the severity and reality of white supremacy, and its impact on oppressive and discriminatory structures. In this chapter, I will focus on the violences of racism, transphobia, and homophobia. The main protagonists of *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo* are experiencing some, or all these violences, either in verbal, physical or psychological forms. I will use excerpts of the novels to discuss the ways in which the authors portray the harm, pain, and trauma that are inflicted upon them, starting with racism, followed by gender stereotyping, transphobia, and homophobia. I will also explore how these violences serve as intersecting sites of oppression.

The discrimination and aggressions that LGBTQ+ people of colour often face are many, and will in this thesis be categorised into verbal, physical or psychological violences, which all influence the mental health and wellbeing of the characters. The authors also explore the impacts of discrimination towards multiple marginalised communities, in terms of experiencing limited opportunities, for instance in education. These violences are understood as external abuse from public and private spheres. Verbal violence aims to hit sensitive spots, humiliating, and dehumanising the victim (Pandea et al., 2019, pp. 24–26). It appears for instance through discourses of biased, non-inclusive, hateful, or ignorant nature, which are shown through spoken or written words but may also be shown through body language. Pandea et al. (2019, p. 23) note that physical violence includes “beating, burning, kicking, punching, biting, maiming or killing, or the use of objects or weapons”. These are physical acts done out of hatred towards the subject, in the case of this thesis linked to racist, transphobic, homophobic, or misogynistic motives. Psychological violence is difficult to pin-point as all abuse, according to Pandea et al. (2019, p. 26), have a psychological aspect. They go on to explain that psychological violence “includes isolation or confinement, withholding information, disinformation, and threatening behaviour”.

Although the novels handle similar issues, I have decided to divide the focus into different areas of racism, gender stereotyping, transphobia, and homophobia, using the three novels separately for the most part. Concerning racism, Callender provides an excellent portrayal of colourism and double consciousness in *Hurricane Child*, which will be explored in the first part of this chapter. Michael, the main character in *The Black Flamingo* is going through a journey to find himself within his mixed-race identity, with multiple ethnicities and cultural belongings. His search for an identity and a sense of belonging, as well as the topic of colourism and double consciousness in *Hurricane Child*, will be explored as violences of racism. Additionally, the intersections of LGBTQ+ people of colour, and the racist stereotypes of the LGBTQ+ community as illustrated in *Felix Ever After* are also explored. The violences of gender stereotyping and transphobia are handled similarly, using the three novels to discuss different aspects within the scope of transphobia and gender stereotyping. As *Felix Ever After* has a transgender main character, the abuse Felix faces is linked to transphobia, whereas the topic of gender stereotyping is explored through *Hurricane Child* and *The Black Flamingo*. Caroline, the main character in *Hurricane Child* is a young, Afro-Caribbean girl, and is subjected to expectations of gendered behaviour, both within the Caribbean culture, and on a larger scale. Thus, a focus on Caribbean traditions, values and attitudes towards gender and sexuality is relevant to include in this chapter. Michael in *The Black Flamingo*, who also has Caribbean roots, does not feel quite masculine yet not feminine, and as a result he does not fit into the patriarchal constructed gender roles of male or female. Concerning the violences of homophobia, the themes that will be explored in addition to examples of external and internal homophobia, are the hegemony of monosexism, drawing especially from conversations in *Felix Ever After* about sexuality and labelling.

### 3.1 The violences of racism

In the three novels, the protagonists encounter violences of colourism, systemic racism, anti-Black racism, and multiracial microaggressions in different forms. Throughout *Hurricane Child*, the protagonist, Caroline, is a target to colourism. Callender also shows how Caroline has, through experiencing racism, developed a sense of consciousness towards being different to the majority and marginalised because of skin colour and ethnicity. These consequences of racism could be elucidated through Du Bois's (2007) concept of double

consciousness. Although Callender leaves the area of Felix's race in the background in *Felix Ever After*, there are still struggles that he faces because of racialised marginalisation, linked to white-privilege, and narrowed opportunities. In addition to this, the main character in *The Black Flamingo*, Michael, struggles with finding his identity as a British, multiracial boy, his father being Jamaican and his mother being Greek-Cypriot.

### 3.1.1 Colourism and double consciousness

Already in the first chapter of *Hurricane Child*, Callender manages to portray colourism and double consciousness through Caroline and her surroundings. Caroline has an on-going struggle with her teacher, who is treating her differently to the other children because "seeing as I am the littlest girl with the darkest skin and the thickest hair in the whole Catholic School, Missus Wilhelmina doesn't like me" (Callender, 2021c, p. 10). It is also conveyed that Missus Wilhelmina had a white great-great-great-grandpa, thus making her "clear-skinned" (Callender, 2021c, p. 9), something that she is very proud of. According to Keith and Herring (1991, p. 761), skin tone has played a large role in the classificational patterns within the Black community, lighter skin tones being linked to a higher status, than those of a darker skin tone. They go on to explain how historically, white people extended privilege to Black people of lighter complexions, preferring them for personal service during the time of slavery (Keith & Herring, 1991, p. 762). This classification is referred to by Abrams et al. (2020, p. 170) as an interracial system of inequality, a system which is centred around skin tone, facial features, and hair texture. Hannon (2015, p. 19) uses the term *white colourism* to describe the practice of white people sorting Black people into a hierarchy based on the complexion of their skin to ensure a white hegemonic society. However, what is shown in Missus Wilhelmina's view of herself as superior to Caroline because of her lighter skin tone, is an intraracial system of inequality (Abrams et al., 2020, p. 170). This is something Hannon (2015, p. 13) points to as being a potential fuel in maintaining white hegemony. Using the term "clear-skinned" instead of light skinned is uncommon, and it might be a conscious choice from the author to enhance the concept of colourism, and the racist act of attributing cleanliness to lighter skin complexions. This links up to the dichotomised connotations of whiteness and Blackness, where whiteness has connoted purity and decency, as opposed to the connotation of Blackness as impure and lowly (Gergen, 1967, pp. 397–398). The depiction of white as pure

can explain the usage of “clear-skinned” about Missus Wilhelmina. Looking to the history of the U.S. Virgin Islands, where *Hurricane Child* is set, people of colour who had white ancestry, were permitted legal registration as white citizens if they behaved well and had a high social standing (Harrigan & Varlack, 1977, p. 395). The lack of division between white and “near-white” citizens created an even greater division between them and Black people who did not have any visible white ancestry. According to Harrigan and Varlack (1977, p. 395), this policy was unique to the U.S. Virgin Islands, where colourism was strongly institutionalised in comparison to other Caribbean islands and countries.

Not only is Caroline subjected to colourism, but also subjected to *gendered colourism*. Abrams et al. (2020, p. 173) define this as “the sociocultural phenomenon by which perceptions of skin tone differentially impact the lives of African American women and girls than African American men and boys”, seen as girls and women are often subjected to idealised, racist beauty standards. In the novel, this is depicted through the images of African queens, which Caroline views as beautiful, in contrast to what her teacher thinks.

My skin is darker than even the paintings of African queens hanging in tourist shops, same paintings my mom would buy so she could hang the on her living room walls. Their skin is painted with Black and purple and blue, and reminds me of the night sky, or of Black stones on the side of the beach, rubbed smooth by the waves. I secretly think the women of those paintings are beautiful, but Missus Wilhelmina told me one morning that I have to be a good girl since it’ll be hard for me to get married with skin as dark as mine. (Callender, 2021c, p. 10)

In the first line, Caroline describes her skin as even darker than the skin of the African queens in the paintings. This perception resonates with what Maddox and Gray (2002, p. 251) write about dark skin tones being associated with negative attributes such as “skin colour of the person one would not like to marry”. This conception is portrayed through Missus Wilhelmina’s comment about her having a difficult time to get married due to her skin tone. Moreover, Abrams et al. (2020, p. 175) point to dark skinned African American girls as being twice as likely to be suspended from school than what light skinned African American girls are, which is a common occurrence in Caroline’s life. Although Callender illustrates the gendered

racism through Missus Wilhelmina's view on dark skinned African American girls, it is essential to highlight the beauty that Caroline sees in these paintings. This acts as a disruption and a critique towards racist beauty standards, and it challenges the discourses of race and gender. Moreover, the negative attributions to dark skinned women that are depicted through Missus Wilhelmina are countered by Callender's way of describing the paintings as majestic and beautiful.

Although Caroline experiences colourism, she proves that she is quite aware of why she is being treated poorly by her peers and by Missus Wilhelmina. As Caroline conveys the narrative of white supremacy that she has been told by surrounding relations, she shows disagreement, but at the same time seems to believe that what she has been told is true. She is for instance told that all islands in the Caribbean "are no good, seeing that they're filled with so many Black people", and that "the Caribbean is almost as bad as Africa itself" (Callender, 2021c, p. 10). Caroline is also aware of the history of slavery and has "learned in school about how slaves were sometimes dumped off slave ships before they could even make it to the island" (Callender, 2021c, p. 6). In this, she acknowledges the past, while at the same time, does not question the concept of white supremacy. However, as illustrated in the previous quote about the paintings, she does not fully accept white supremacy. This links up to what Du Bois (2007) calls *double-consciousness*. This concept is founded in the duality in African American life, which is greatly driven by racism. He writes about the realisation of being different, and of being a "problem" as "the words I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine" (Du Bois, 2007, p. 3). He further explains the duality in African American life as:

A peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, -an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois, 2007, p. 3)



This twoness is something Callender illustrates through Caroline's awareness of being different to her peers and to her lighter skinned teacher. The reader is in the first chapter of the novel introduced to a young girl of African descent who encounters prejudicial treatment due to her skin tone, and she is made aware through the discourse of those around her that her opportunities in life will be lesser. Furthermore, Du Bois (2007, p. 3) illustrates the situation of being a target to racism as "being an outcast and stranger in mine own house". This is a depiction that fits the portrayal of alienation that Caroline is experiencing. Another example of this double-consciousness in Caroline is when she reflects upon the hegemonic standard of beauty as someone with "yellow hair and blue eyes and looks the way the rest of the world thinks everyone should always look" (Callender, 2021c, p. 24). Callender challenges the racist standards of beauty, constructed by white supremacist structures of oppression, and has Caroline, as a counter voice to these structures, decide that she does not like people who have blonde hair and blue eyes. The reasoning for not liking these people is that she is automatically hated for the way she looks, whereas white people with blonde hair and blue eyes are put on pedestals.

Similarly, the topic of racist standards of beauty, and how these standards are present within white hegemonies, is also illustrated in *Felix Ever After*. In the novel, as Felix meets his best friend Ezra's new boyfriend, Austin, Callender introduces a critical view on the unquestioned adoration that the world has towards white people. The quote below does not only show the very presence of white supremacist ideology within today's society, but it also acts in favour of illustrating the concept of intersectionality through an unbalanced distribution of privilege and power.

He's the sort of person the world adores, [...] claiming that they're all liberal and that they aren't racist and that they're feminists, but not really thinking about why they're so obsessed with white men, and why they don't love any people of colour the same way. I love that I have brown skin. I love that I'm queer, and that I'm trans. But sometimes, I can't help but think how much easier my life would be if I was someone like Austin. (Callender, 2021b, pp. 154–155)

In addition to appearing conscious of racist beauty standards and seeming confident that it has nothing to do with him and all to do with white supremacy, Felix also seems defeated. He says that he loves what makes him stand out, however, he recognises a wish to be more like Austin – white, cisgender, and gay. Perhaps what Callender wishes to do is to illustrate a desire for an existence that is easier than the one Felix is experiencing. This is a topic that Callender writes about with authority because they are Black, queer, transgender, and non-binary (Callender, 2021a). This authority serves the novel positively, as reflection within the reader is encouraged without explicitly mentioning racism by instead commenting on socially constructed behaviours and oppressive structures. Moreover, Austin’s character is especially interesting, as he represents the violence of whiteness, and aspects of white supremacy relating to privilege and power<sup>4</sup>.

Furthermore, the violences that Caroline faces linked to racism in the first chapter of *Hurricane Child*, are illustrated through verbal, physical, and psychological abuse. The verbal violence is shown through condescending speech, for instance when Missus Wilhelmina says repeatedly that it’s “always something with you” (Callender, 2021c, pp. 11–12), and her father’s comments about her skin tone such as “how’d your skin get so dark, Caroline” (Callender, 2021c, p. 10). In the second chapter Callender includes these violences through bullying by peers, which take verbal, physical and psychological forms. The bullies are prompting Caroline about her missing mother, suggesting that she left her daughter for another man, and soon starts throwing rocks at her (Callender, 2021c, pp. 18–19). The psychological harm that she is subjected to is running throughout the novel, shown through isolation, the withholding of information as well as disinformation fed by the people around her. The results of being a victim of these violences are trauma, which can manifest in different ways, such as negative self-image, compensation for being treated unfair through elevating and separating oneself from the surrounding world, trust issues, and troubles building healthy relationships to mention a few. These are all trauma that can be seen through Caroline’s actions and thoughts. However, these traumas are not only caused due to racism in form of colourism, but also due to several other factors, such as having an absentee parent, being bullied, and being subjected to gender stereotyping. They are also low on money, and do not

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<sup>4</sup> This aspect of Austin’s character is further explored in section 3.2.2. (pp. 45–46)

live on the main island of Saint Thomas, where the school and her peers are. All these factors are contributing to her trauma and the ways in which she deals with what is happening to her.

What is so essential with how Callender illustrates racism in *Hurricane Child*, is how they convey the theme in a non-condescending way, through the eyes of a young girl who is experiencing these violences in a realistic manner to how a child would think and act. The way in which Callender introduces the violences of colourism, as well as portraying Caroline's sense of double-consciousness stimulates for reflection in the reader about the racism that lies within social structures due to hundreds of years of oppression and discrimination. Furthermore, Welch (2016, p. 369) states that children's literature in general implies that white characters are the norm. This is a norm which Callender disrupts with *Hurricane Child*. Not only do they shed light on anti-Black racism, but also on the issue of colourism, which is highly underrepresented in children's literature in general.

### 3.1.2 Mixed-race identity and the sense of belonging

In every aspect of Michael's life, he is reminded that he is different, that he doesn't belong and that he doesn't fully fit into any group, either it be the LGBTQ+ community, for not being "queer enough", or the Black community, specifically the African Caribbean community for being perceived to not feel "Black enough". Additionally, he struggles with finding his place within his Greek-Cypriot family because he does not feel "Greek enough" (Atta, 2019, p. 196). Atta illustrates the complexity of belonging to different races, ethnicities, and cultures throughout *The Black Flamingo* in the form of poetry. "I come from shepherd's pie and Sunday roast, jerk chicken and stuffed vine leaves. I come from travelling through taste buds but loving where I live. I come from a home that some would call broken" (Atta, 2019, p. 217). This verse of the poem *I Come From* illustrates the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-racial backgrounds that Michael belongs to, which are all a part of his identity. Whilst his ethnic backgrounds are Jamaican and Greek-Cypriot, his cultural backgrounds are British, Greek-Cypriot, and Jamaican. In addition to this, his father is Black, and his mother is white, resulting in him belonging to the ambiguous category within the racial discourse of "mixed-race". Another way in which Atta portrays the protagonist's multiple backgrounds is through the many names that Michael has acquired throughout his life. Michael Brown, Michael Angeli, Mikey, Michalis, Mike, and The Black Flamingo are all names that are used to refer to Michael

in Atta's novel. The first one with his absentee father's surname, which he later changed to Angeli, his mother's surname. Mikey is what his Jamaican family calls him, whereas Michalis is his Greek name. Mike is the name he chose to introduce himself as when he went to university, and The Black Flamingo is his drag name, which unites all of these identities into one. The different names are all representing different parts of Michael's life and who he is in relation to other people. They represent all the communities he should feel a sense of belonging to, but instead feels alienated from because he doesn't fit in to the stereotypes that are attributed to each community. During his stage performance as The Black Flamingo, Michael says that "I always saw Black excellence around me and online but I didn't feel like it was mine because I was not perceived as fully Black. I felt queerness made me even less Black" (Atta, 2019, p. 341). This line conveys the sense of not being perceived as fully one thing, due to his lack of belonging to one racial, ethnic, and cultural group. The feeling of alienation in every aspect of Michael's life is beautifully illustrated with the metaphor of a sole Black flamingo amongst a mass of pink ones: "he doesn't look like the other flamingos around him, he feels foreign to his own flock, within his own family" (Atta, 2019, p. 340). Within the scope of social science research, American literature, and popular culture, Rockquemore and Brunnsma (2002, p. 335) point towards the sense of "betweenness" and "marginality" as illustrative to the experience of mixed-race people. They go on to explain that there is a difference between being multiracial and multi-ethnic, where being multi-ethnic, but of one race, will be of little importance to their chances in life. People who are multi-ethnic, and of one race, are able to choose themselves how they identify in terms of ethnicity. Individuals of mixed-race, however, have no say about their racial identity, and how others shall perceive them, which in turn will impact their lives accordingly. There might also arise a dissonance within others who perceive Michael as Black, which does not fit into the stereotype picture of Greek-Cypriot ethnicity. He is therefore perceived as allegedly Black, both ethnically, and culturally, as well as racially. This illustrates how the "one-drop rule" of Black racial identity endures, which Leverette (2009, p. 435) explains as a rule from 20<sup>th</sup> Century USA that dictated "all those with any known Black ancestor are Black". Furthermore, Zack (2010, p. 877) argues that mixed-race people's other backgrounds are being overshadowed by their visible Black ancestry, pointing towards how Black racial identity is based on how others identify the person, an identification that is largely made based on the person's physical appearance. Michael is both multi-ethnic and biracial, which might urge a more pressing, and confusing

search for identity and belonging. The importance placed on race as equivalent to human identity is, according to Smedley (1998, p. 695), a recent concept in human history, developed throughout the era of colonisation during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. white supremacist ideology remained and was strengthened after the American Civil War, and many Americans were bound to believe that racial status, epitomised by physical attributes, determined their identity above any other attributes such as ethnic, religious or gender backgrounds. When this primary foundation of determining one's identity is divided between two races, the person is caught in-between two socially constructed racial identities, constructed by the oppressor to maintain dominance. The duality of belonging to two dichotomised races creates a dissonance between what is historically perceived as a high-status race and a low status race (Smedley, 1998, p. 695), a reality that can be damaging to an individual's self-perception. Smedley (1998, p. 696) expresses the lack of space for mixed-race individuals in white supremacist ideology, because of the myth of race being biologically separate, and exclusive to one race only. Wilson (1984, p. 46) argues that mixed-race people are unable to find full acceptance within the Black community, as well as within the white community, even though they belong to both. Mixed-race individuals who do not find their place within one of these communities, will, according to Wilson (1984, p. 46) "move uneasily between the two". To receive membership within the white community, one must share the physical attributes that characterise white Caucasian people. This is for instance how Daisy, Michael's best friend, identifies, and is perceived by others as white, even though she is mixed:

"My mum is mixed but she doesn't even say so. She's only talked to me about it once. I've never met her Jamaican family. I'm not ashamed but I have nothing to claim, nothing handed down to me. It's not something people can see to look at me; maybe if I'm with my mum but I never am. On my own I look like a white girl with a tan and that suits me just fine, I don't want to explain myself to people. I've seen how you have to do it. How people as questions like they have the right to see your family tree. I don't want that. I want to be just me". (Atta, 2019, p. 92)

Atta illustrates the ways in which mixed-race people who pass as white often choose to lean into that, to avoid the hardships that comes with recognising their Black ancestry. As

Wilson (1984, p. 46) points out, accepting membership within the Black community comes with discarding of the privileges and advantages of belonging to the white community. Thus, by resisting her Black ancestry, she won't have to abandon the privileges that white people have. Moreover, Daisy chooses to resist identifying as mixed-race as well, as she doesn't want to explain herself to people. According to Leverette (2009, p. 437) a notion that mixed-race individuals feel superior to Black people, due to their white ancestry, is often raised by the Black community. This is a projection of critique towards people of mixed-race rooted in racist elevation of people with lighter skin. Although the sense of superiority within mixed-race people can be true in some cases, for instance shown through Missus Wilhelmina in *Hurricane Child* (Callender, 2021c), Leverette (2009, p. 437) states that the sense of superiority is mostly not a reality within those of mixed-race. Despite this, Daisy rejects her mixed-race background in favour of being perceived as white, thus gaining the privileges that comes with it. In contrast, Michael is not able to adopt a racial belonging as easily, as his physical features are that of African ancestry, and cannot "choose" how to be perceived by others. Although Michael is caught in this conflict between his white and Black ancestry, Smedley (1998, p. 697) points towards the importance of understanding that race does not determine cultural behaviour. To understand why Michael struggles with the sense of not fitting in with extended family, it is significant to look at race and cultural backgrounds as separate factors in the search of identity. He does identify as Black, which, as stated before, is epitomised by physical attributes. However, the difference of cultural references between him and his Jamaican family, as well as with his Greek-Cypriot family, as he has been raised by his mother who has had a mission to "fit in and be British" (Atta, 2019, p. 143), creates a great distance between him and his ancestry.

Michael is perceived by most people as Black because of his appearance, which unfortunately results in being subjected to violences of racism accordingly. Throughout *The Black Flamingo*, Michael encounters racist behaviours from those around him, both in his central social sphere, as well as the periphery social sphere. For instance, his aunt in Cyprus refers to him and his sister as "ta mávra" which translates to "the Black ones" (Atta, 2019, p. 143). Although their aunt does not mean for it to be a racist comment, it is. It excludes Michael and his sister from the rest of the family, and it is solely based on their racial background. When his mother adds that their aunt "doesn't mean it in a bad way", it is made clear for Michael that being Black is perceived negatively as a norm. He also encounters a situation

where he is told that he is not Black but mixed. This is by someone in the African Caribbean Society at the University he goes to, who suggests he should join the Hellenic Society instead (Atta, 2019, p. 191). Michael writes a list over reasons to go to university, which includes joining African Caribbean Society, and LGBT Society. It does not say The Hellenic Society, which indicates that he has a stronger connection to the African Caribbean culture, as he wants to find his place within a society of people who share the same ancestry. When he is “excluded” due to racial matters, it might be an illustration of prejudice. This type of prejudice or exclusion is, as argued earlier, common for mixed-race individuals to experience, as they are not fully accepted into either race, leaving a sense of betweenness and marginalisation. Moreover, Atta may have purposely included this situation to represent this tension through Michael’s experiences, by overexaggerating the sense of alienation that mixed-race people may experience. Feeling ostracised from both African Caribbean Society and the Hellenic Society, Michael proceeds to write a poem titled *I Want to Be a Pink Flamingo*, a metaphor for fitting into a group where he won’t stand out as different to the rest.

I Want to Be a Pink Flamingo

Pink. Definitely pink.

I want my feathers to match

the hue you imagine.

I want to blend in.

Nothing but flamingoness.

David Attenborough would say,

“Here we see the most typical flamingo.”

Though I don’t want to be the most,  
just typical. A wrapping-paper pattern.

I don’t want to stand apart.

Nothing different about my parts.

My beak just a beak, my head just a head.

My neck, body, wings. Simply fit for purpose.

Standing on one leg, just like the rest.

Pink. Definitely pink.

(Atta, 2019, p. 194)

The violences that he has experienced throughout life due to his mixed-race and multicultural background have manifested in a wish to become like the majority. When he also experiences not fitting into the LGBT Society either, because he does not feel “queer enough” (Atta, 2019, p. 197), he concludes with having to find a group that is just right for him. Through Michael’s character, Atta presents one of many possible alternatives to acquire a sense of belonging for multi-racial individuals. This is shown through Michael’s revelation of wanting to re-imagine his identity through something other than his racial, cultural, and ethnic background. This illustrates a way to find a sense of belonging within a society, determined by his whole being, instead of fragments of his identity. As Atta manages to convey throughout the novel, being perceived as different both inside and outside of the communities in which Michael should feel a sense of belonging to, suggests that he is robbed from feeling like one whole individual. Or rather the understanding of identity constructed by the hegemonic society, with one identity made up of one culture, one race and one ethnicity. Atta weaves everyday racism and microaggressions into the plot through Michael’s poems, through other characters’ lines and behaviours, as well as how Michael perceives topics of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality. This serves as a powerful tool to convey the message of the complexity of people’s identities, and how being caught in the middle of the different fragments of identity can be difficult. Thus, when Michael discovers Drag Society, he knows that this is a space where he can be whoever he wants to be, and draw from the many aspects of his identity, where no one else can determine where he fits in. This is where *The Black Flamingo* is born. A character which consists of Michael’s full identity, where his multi-ethnic, multicultural, and mixed-race backgrounds come together with all of his other identities to create art.

In addition to the theme of mixed-race identity, internalised racism is also a theme which is illustrated through different characters in *The Black Flamingo*, especially through Daisy. When asked if she fancies Kieran, a Black footballer in their school, she answers that



she does not fancy Black boys (Atta, 2019, p. 107). This serves as a portrayal of internalised racism impacted by white supremacist ideology. Michael, who is on the receiving end of this comment, is subjected to an instance of verbal and psychological micro-aggression from his best friend, even though he questions: “can you be racist when you’re a quarter Black?” (Atta, 2019, p. 107). Furthermore, the preference of dating non-Black men is mirrored by Michael in a later instance, where he describes his type of guy as “tall, white, big biceps and a killer smile” (Atta, 2019, p. 260). His explanation is that he does not know anyone Black and gay, which is a nod towards the stereotype of gay men being white, affluent men (Hollibaugh & Weiss, 2015, p. 19). His Black friend calls him out for this, saying that:

“You both need to understand  
the Black woman, Black man,  
Black trans person is always the last  
to be thought of as attractive  
in this white supremacist society.  
We are all – Black and white alike  
– shown a beauty standard of light  
skin and “good hair”, maybe big lips,  
maybe a big bum, but hardly ever  
on someone with darker skin.  
When a Black person says  
they’re only into white people  
that’s internalised racism.  
When a white person says  
they’re only into Black people  
that’s fetishisation, which is also  
a form of racism. If their skin  
or racialised features matter more  
to you than the person within,  
that’s racism. I can’t be your friend

without calling this out. You're ignorance  
may be innocent but the racism is real.  
I want you both to think about how  
what you just said might make me feel".

(Atta, 2019, p. 262)

Here, Michael and his friend are made aware of how they are showing internalised racism through their racial dating preferences, which degrades people as subject to preference with regard to their racial features. Moreover, Atta calls attention to how white supremacy impacts Black people's expectations of themselves and their preferences of dating. Furthermore, in this exchange, Atta does the important job of recognising the racist beauty standard that Black people are subjected to, and calls attention to the tendencies of fetishisation of racial and ethnic features that lives within white hegemonic cultures. Thus, challenging these structures of oppression, and having readers acknowledge a problem within the discourses of race and racism.

### 3.2 The violences of gender stereotyping and transphobia

The main characters in the three novels experience abuse justified by gender stereotyping, which are often linked to social, political, and cultural expectations of gender behaviour patterns. Michael, Felix, and Caroline all challenge gender norms, by portraying a more fluid expression of gender embracing both masculine and feminine energy. Felix does not identify with the gender he was assigned at birth and is going through a journey of discovering his gender identity. Michael channels his inner femininity, straying from the stereotypical attributes that are expected of men due to patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity, as well as African-Caribbean men, due to Caribbean history and culture. This is also skewed by racist ideology of the colonial era. Furthermore, Callender challenges through Caroline the stereotypical expectations that are placed upon girls universally, as well as Black girls in the Caribbean, by questioning the norm of heterosexuality, as well as being subjected to gendered racism. The following sections will explore *The Black Flamingo* and *Hurricane Child*, looking at gender and sexuality discourses from a Caribbean point of view, investigating how gender and sexuality is perceived as the same, centred around a heteronormative

discourse. Examples of gender stereotypes which are strongly related to the Caribbean culture, as well as gender stereotypes attributed to people of colour within the white hegemonic culture will be provided throughout the following section. Additionally, the following sub-sections will put forth a focus on queer gender identities, which do not fall into the binary categories of male or female. This discussion will be rooted in analysis of relevant excerpts from *Felix Ever After*.

### 3.2.1 Gender and sexuality in the Caribbean

Women and men are subjected to gendered expectations based on stereotypes, which steer how they should look, act, think, and talk to fit into their respective gender groups. However, when people deviate from these gender stereotypes by presenting counter behaviours, for instance, women acting too agentic, and men acting too unassertive and modest, Wen et al. (2020, p. 2511) claim that they tend to be more disliked. Both Callender and Atta challenge the socially constructed stereotypes of gender through Caroline, Felix, and Michael's experiences. To understand the constrictive gender discourses that these characters are placed within, it is crucial to look to how gender and sexuality has been and is perceived through a white supremacist patriarchy. Similarly, it is essential to explore these discourses through the lens of Caribbean history, culture, politics, as Caroline and Michael, as well as both Callender and Atta have Caribbean roots (Callender, 2021c, p. 215; Jennings & Atta, 2019, p. 94). Callender grew up on St. Thomas of the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Atta is British, Jamaican and Greek-Cypriot like Michael. It is however important to point out that although Michael is half Jamaican, he has grown up in London, meaning that he has not had any direct contact with the Caribbean, in the way that Caroline has. Nonetheless, his tie to the Caribbean culture is present, and affects how the character experiences different aspects of life, for instance expected patterns of behaviours linked to gender and sexuality. Due to the strong connection to the Caribbean culture, the gender discourses found throughout the three novels are coloured by it. Kempadoo (2003, p. 59) writes that gender "is discursively and materially produced, is thoroughly indigenised, located socially, politically and theoretically as a pillar of Caribbean identity". In this, she gives gender identity, thereby also stereotypical gender roles an important place in Caribbean culture. As it has acquired such a strong place within the Caribbean culture, it is natural to assume that Callender and Atta's literature is affected by it.

Furthermore, Kempadoo (2003, p. 60) states that there has been little distinction between gender and sexuality in Caribbean studies, where sexuality as a subject has been somewhat silenced and absorbed into the dichotomy of gender – femininity or masculinity. This becomes an issue because sexuality then subsides to a heteronormative discourse, driven by the biological nature of male and female. For instance, when Caroline and her friend Kalinda are walking down a street and see two grown women holding hands (Callender, 2021c, p. 78), Caroline’s initial reaction is disbelief as she has never seen two grown women do such a thing. It does however seem to wake a curiosity in her, whereas Kalinda immediately utters “disgusting”, followed by “They can’t see they’re both women? [...] Does one of them think that she’s a man?”. Kalinda’s reaction of disgust at seeing two women holding hands mirrors the perception of heterosexuality as a norm within the Caribbean culture and society. She raises the question of one of them thinking that she is a man, because, in a romantic and sexual relationship, Kalinda has most likely been taught through her culture that there needs to be a man and a woman. Kempadoo (2003, p. 62) points towards creating a separate space within the Caribbean feminist discourse for queer women, as the boundaries of the existing gendered categories are too narrow. There are similar preoccupations in Callender’s work with regard to the conflation between gender and sexuality within the Caribbean culture, which consists of the binary categories of female and male who inherits a fixed, cross-gendered sexual orientation in accordance with their assigned gender. Callender disrupts this through Caroline’s behaviours, reflections, and words, which do not align with the stereotypical picture of how young girls are expected to behave in the society and culture she belongs to. Slocum and Shields (2008, p. 696) refer to Caribbean state discourses of gender which privilege men as “natural citizens”, whereas women either gain citizenship through marriage or having children. These discourses treat the genders unequally, as women are dependent on men to be granted citizenship, whether through being wives or through their reproductive roles as mothers. For Caroline, these heavily implied gender discourses in Caribbean culture, society, and politics, measures her worth in whether she succeeds by becoming a wife or a mother. As explored in a previous section, Missus Wilhelmina tells her that she has to be a good girl if she is to be married (Callender, 2021c, p. 10), emphasising the importance that women hold in terms of family life in the Caribbean. Moreover, Rheddock (2000, p. xvii) writes about the unnatural woman centred family dynamics (matrifocality) which has characterised Afro-Caribbean families and can explain the gendered discourses that

are present in Callender's novel. Throughout the novel Caroline comes across as an ill-tempered girl, who is mean to those around her. Although these behaviours can be explained through her constant exposure to trauma, through bullying, being lied to, and not being treated well by those around her, she still deviates from the behaviour that is expected from young girls, not only in the Caribbean, but universally. Girls are generally expected to be respectful, obedient, quiet, to play calmly, and to not voice their opinions as loudly as what Caroline does. These expectations draw from the Victorian ideology of "separate spheres" which instructs women to be *feminine*, and subordinate to men, who are expected to be masculine (Gorham, 2013, p. 4). The constricting and contrasting gendered expectations which bloomed during the Victorian age, and was distributed throughout the world due to colonialism, are still very much a part of gender stereotypes and expected behaviours today. By creating a female protagonist that expresses a more masculine energy in comparison to the general expected behaviour in young girls, Callender challenges a gendered discourse which holds women to a different standard than men.

Additionally, there are stereotypical gender norms that are attributed to men in the Caribbean, which Atta illustrates and challenges through Michael's portrayal and his experiences in *The Black Flamingo*. In the same way that gender and sexuality are hard to distinguish from one another, sexuality is often submerged by gender. Masculinity and men may also be difficult to separate. Thus, expectations of gender performance of men are restricted, and fuse sexuality, gender, sex, and masculinity together. Nurse (2000, p. 5) points to the importance of distinguishing between masculinity and men, because "values of the former may not correspond to the personality or preferences of some biological men", which is the case for Michael's character. Moreover, Nurse (2000, p. 6) describes hegemonic masculinity as a white, middle-aged, heterosexual, married, educated male in the upper middle class. This "ideal" is met by few, including Michael, as well as Felix in *Felix Ever After*, because they do not identify with any of these stereotypical traits of the "ideal" man. Hegemonic masculinity as a norm is a universal issue, as it gives power to the men who align with the hegemonic forms of masculinity, but relegates men who hold alternative forms of masculinity, which according to Nurse (2000, p. 6) include non-Western men, gay men, ethnic minorities, or working-class men. Following these descriptions, Michael belongs to the large group of subordinate masculinities, perceived as "effeminate", or as he is called in the novel – a "Batty Bwoy" (Atta, 2019, p. 113). This term is equivalent to the highly offensive word

“faggot” in U.S. English. “Batty Bwoy” means “less-than-man who is penetrated or penetrates another less-than-man” in Jamaican Patois. Thus, being queer or flamboyant, is through a discourse of hegemonic masculinity perceived as wrong. Consequently, men who express alternative forms of masculinity are seen as “less-than-men”. Moreover, Nurse (2000, p. 8) writes that homosexuality is seen as a negation of masculinity and suggests that homophobia is a foundation for hegemonic masculinity. There are strong homophobic tendencies found in Caribbean cultures, due to patterns of “a masculine ideal stressing domination of women, competition between men, aggressive display, predatory sexuality and a double standard” (Connell, 1995, p. 31). According to White and Robert (2005, p. 349), Jamaica is the most homophobic Caribbean territory, attributed by norms of hypermasculinity. Atta (2019, p. 160) brings attention to homophobia in Jamaica through a poem that Michael writes titled *People Like Me*:

I'd love to go to Jamaica  
with Granny, Uncle B, Aunty B  
and the rest of the family

but I've looked it up  
and you can go to prison  
for having gay sex there.

I'm old enough here,  
why would my equal  
rights not travel with me?

It doesn't seem fair  
for people like me in Jamaica,  
to hide, to live in fear.

(Atta, 2019, p. 160)

Here, the difference in equal rights between countries are explored and questioned. Drawing from the lack of equal rights for same sex couples is a powerful way of critiquing hegemonies of homophobia. Moreover, Atta includes a comparison of Michael's rights as a queer person in the U.K., referring to age as the only possible restriction for engaging in sexual intercourse, is a clever way to point out the pathologies of homophobia.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Michael experiences verbal violence having someone shout "Batty Bwoy" after him (Atta, 2019, p. 113). This illustrates a homophobic discourse rooted in the norm of hypermasculinity and hegemonic masculinity. To put this into a historical context, African-Caribbean masculinity has always been subordinated, due to enslaved Black men being owned and oppressed by white men. Beckles (2000, p. 229) points to being owned and oppressed as symbolic of submissive inferiority, and due to hegemonic masculinities, African-Caribbean slaves were gendered feminine, as their masculine nature of providing and protecting were denied. According to Beckles (2000, p. 236), as a result of losing all masculine pride, enslaved men developed irresponsible parental and sexual attitudes, which is still present in the culture today. When Michael deviates from this re-claimed form of toxic masculinity, allowing femininity into his being, he disrupts the common perception that ties masculinity to men. As mentioned, matrifocality is a norm within the Afro-Caribbean family, where men are, according to Rheddock (2000, p. xvii), being marginalised and characterised as irresponsible and absent as fathers and husbands. Both Atta and Callender reinforce these stereotypes through male characters in *The Black Flamingo* and *Hurricane Child*. Michael's father who left him and his mother when he was a baby, lives with Michael's grandmother and is not acknowledging his son at all. His absence and lack of responsibility towards his son, might be a result of the expectations of men as husbands and fathers in the Afro-Caribbean culture. The irresponsible sexual attitudes that are held as a stereotype for masculine African-Caribbean males, can also be seen in *Hurricane Child*, illustrated through Caroline's father, who had a daughter with another woman, whilst still being married to Caroline's mother (Callender, 2021c, p. 130). Kempadoo (2003, p. 67) puts forth the norm established within the Caribbean culture accepting forms of polygyny for men. It is, however, crucial to point out that Caroline's mother has left her family and re-married, which contradicts the norm of matrifocality, and responsibility laid on women in the Afro-Caribbean family. Perhaps, by disappearing, she can escape the expectations, and the attributions placed upon women who stray from their marriage and family. Here, Callender raises tension with

regard to the expectations of motherhood and challenges what constitutes a “good mother”. Moreover, by choosing for Caroline’s mother to be absent, Callender plays into the strong bond that children often have with their mothers. This special bond is beautifully illustrated in the novel, where Caroline reminisces about how her mother would do Caroline’s hair whilst singing softly under her breath (Callender, 2021c, p. 14). This is a powerful tool encourage empathy within the reader towards Caroline’s grief of her mother being gone. Empathy that would perhaps not come as easily if it was her father who went missing, because of the expected behavioural patterns of men and fathers as more likely to be absentee or emotionally unavailable to their children and partners.

### 3.2.2 Some men have vaginas

Michael, Felix, and Caroline all show gender counter behaviours or traits, as Caroline is portrayed as agentic, angry, self-confident, and not at all modest. Michael is flamboyant, wears dresses and wants to play with barbies, and Felix is transgender, but does not identify as either man, or woman. Moreover, Atta critiques how patriarchy enforces gender stereotypes with a poem lifting a metaphor of men as sandcastles. “Men are sandcastles made out of pebbles and the bucket is patriarchy: if you remove it, we fear we won’t be able to hold ourselves together, we pour in cement to fill the gaps to make ourselves concrete constructions” (Atta, 2019, p. 240). The poem highlights how fragile patriarchal constructions of gender are, as they lack substance. Once patriarchy is removed from the equation, constructions of gender fall apart. Furthermore, the poem brings forth the constant pressures that are put on men, as well as women as opposites, to fit into gender binaries. The challenge is then to create a space for those who do not fit into said groupings, or for them to create radical spaces for themselves. When Michael goes to his first meeting with the LGBT Society, he encounters a norm within the society where everyone announces their pronouns when introducing themselves (Atta, 2019, p. 195), which deviates from assuming someone’s gender identity based on their appearance or their sex. This norm must be implemented into modern society to establish a more inclusive gender discourse for those who do not fit into the binary groupings of male or female. Further, Michael encounters a trans man who explains how he wishes people would acknowledge and understand that “some men have vaginas” (Atta, 2019, p. 195), which is the case for Felix in *Felix Ever After*, who made the transition from female to



male, but still has a female sex organ. Throughout *Felix Ever After*, Callender (2021b) raises the issues of gender identity, both linked to the binary gender groups, as well as a more fluid experience of gender. Through Felix's reflections, Callender critiques how society "forces" stereotypical gender roles onto children, creating divisions between girls and boys, with no place for people who do not identify with their assigned gender.

I'd always hated being forced into dresses and being given dolls. The dresses and dolls weren't even the real issue. The real issue was me realising that these were things society had assigned to girls, and while I didn't even know what *trans* was, something about being forced into the role of *girl* has always upset the hell out of me. I'd always tried to line up with the other boys whenever teachers split us up. I followed those boys around the playgrounds, upset that they'd ignore me and push me away. I had dreams, sometimes – dreams where I'd be in a different body, the kind of body society says belong to men. I'd be so effing happy, but then I would wake up and see that nothing had changed. I remember thinking to myself, *Hopefully, if I'm reincarnated, I'll be a boy.* (Callender, 2021b, p. 23)

Although Felix has transitioned from female to male, he starts to question his gender identity, wondering if he is a guy after all (Callender, 2021b, p. 68). The only thing that he is certain of is that he is definitely not a girl (Callender, 2021b, p. 180). Callender invites the reader to explore different gender identities alongside Felix, as he slowly learns about transgender identities, such as non-binary, gender fluid, agender, bigender, transmasculine, transfeminine, gender queer, gender non-conforming, and the gender identity that he finds to be true for himself; *demiboy* (Callender, 2021b, p. 278). Demiboy is, as described by Callender, someone who identifies as mostly or partly male, which again rocks the foundations of two dichotomised genders. Exploring the alternatives to understanding gender as binary and a dichotomy, is important to expand the perception of what gender is, which Callender does by including this storyline.

In addition to the violences of gender stereotyping applied by social and cultural norms, holding binary gender identities as a hegemonic standard, Felix experiences the impact of

transphobia, through verbal and psychological abuse by the people around him. He is for instance deadnamed by his father:

My dad points at the roll of paper towels in my hands and says my name to get my attention – but not my real name. He says my old name. The one I was born with, the one he and my mom gave me. The name itself I don't mind that much, I guess – but hearing it said out loud, directed at me, always sends a stabbing pain through my chest, this sinking feeling in my gut. (Callender, 2021b, p. 22)

Johnson et al. (2021, p. 548) describes deadnaming as “the practice of referring to transgenders by their birth name instead of their newly adopted and legally changed or preferred name”. The act of deadnaming can, according to Johnson et al. (2021, p. 549) lead to experiences of gender dysmorphia, which is also illustrated in the novel, as something Felix has developed. Through Felix's character, Callender describes Felix's experience of body dysmorphia as “the feeling I have when I see myself and I know that I don't look the way I'm supposed to – the discomfort I used to have, in seeing my hair long and a chest that wasn't flat” (Callender, 2021b, p. 172). Moreover, when Felix experiences being deadnamed by his own father, the abuse may be more traumatising, due to it coming from a loved one. Supporting environments, such as being accepted, especially by his father, can in turn impact his psychological health positively. Johnson et al. (2021, p. 549) claim that adolescent transgender boys experience a moderation in psychological distress and social anxiety if their fathers accept their non-conforming gender identity, as opposed to those who experience social intolerance for their transgender identity.

Furthermore, in addition to experiencing instances of transphobia from his immediate family, Felix is subjected to transphobic abuse from someone in his school who has created a gallery of pictures of him before his transition, in addition to exploiting his birth-name for the whole school to see.

There's a gallery in the lobby walls. [...] What does surprise me are the images. Photos blown up to about 16x16. Photos of my Instagram. Photos of who I used to be. Long hair. Dresses. Pictures of me with these forced smiles. Expressions showing just how

uncomfortable I always felt. The physical pain is strained across my face in those photos. [...] A placard underneath has a title with my deadname and the photo's year. (Callender, 2021b, p. 31)

Throughout the novel, it is revealed how traumatic this event has been for Felix, feeling anxious when he nears the location of where the gallery was put up, always being on edge in case something similar will happen again, as well as knowing that the one who did it goes to his school and is in his presence without him knowing who it is. He also receives hateful transphobic messages from the person responsible for the gallery anonymously on Instagram throughout the story, where his doubts about his worth and about his rights continue to increase. The messages question why he pretends to be a boy, refusing to acknowledge that although he was born a girl biologically, he is not a girl (Callender, 2021b, p. 144). In another message the person insinuates that being transgender is a trend, and not real (Callender, 2021b, p. 186). It is revealed in the novel, that Austin, a white, gay, cisgender male, was the one who put up the gallery of Felix and sent him the anonymous transphobic messages on Instagram. Austin explains his actions, saying that:

“It felt unfair,” he says. “It’s not like it’s easy to be gay, even if we are in Brooklyn, even if this is New York City, and now we have to deal with people like you taking our identity, taking our space.” [...] “And it’s annoying, too,” he says, “seeing you – I don’t know, pushing it in our face that you’re transgender. Not everyone can be as open. Not everyone gets to be out. I don’t get to be out. My parents wouldn’t accept me. But you’re just flaunting it every chance that you get”. (Callender, 2021b, p. 321)

Although this is portrayed as an act of transphobia, there are other layers and nuances to his actions, linked to the privilege and power of white supremacy, as well as lack of diversity within the LGBTQ+ community. Austin is threatened by Felix’s outness, and in order to regain the power and privileges he feels threatened to lose, he must restore a hierarchy that works in his favour. Due to Felix’s intersections, Austin needs to remind Felix of his place within a white supremacist, gender dichotomised, and toxic masculine hegemony. Thus, Callender has created a character through Austin who symbolises the violence of whiteness, and the actions

which are taken to not “lose” privilege and power. This is likely a conscious choice by the author, creating a privileged character within these different social hierarchies, being white, cisgender, male, and gay – the complete opposite to how Felix identifies. Therefore, the character acts as a critique towards the stereotypes which are attributed to people within the LGBTQ+ community, as well as a critique towards the violence of whiteness, and the discriminations of multiple marginalised people. Moreover, Felix is experiencing what Parmenter et al. (2021, p. 291) point out as a struggle that is unique for LGBTQ+ people of colour. He experiences violences of discrimination and oppression within the social context of the LGBTQ+ community, as well as feeling alienated from his racial community, which is a theme that is also explored in *The Black Flamingo*. Thus, Callender contributes to the reconstruction of how the LGBTQ+ community should be perceived. Furthermore, shifting away from a community centred around middle class white, gay, cisgender men, and embracing a more diverse demography, including plurisexual, genderqueer individuals of colour. Through not separating the stress that Felix is exposed to into isolated categories of racism, transphobia, homophobia, or other discriminatory factors, YA readers are provided with a narrative that shows the importance of understanding intersecting discrimination and oppression, on both internal and external grounds.

Furthermore, Felix is told by classmate that he is a misogynist because “you can’t be a feminist and decide you don’t want to be a woman anymore” (Callender, 2021b, p. 30). Accusing transgender people of misogyny illustrates the transphobic perception that gender is something one chooses, thus, believing that being transgender is a choice, which is not true. This comment, to someone who already questions their identity and self-worth, may add to their trauma. When the gender discourses in society are primarily considering male and female as the only two genders, gender non-conforming people will pick up on the hegemonic notion of gender roles and gender stereotypes which they do not fit in to. According to Cronin et al. (2019, p. 80), exposure of ongoing social discrimination and prejudice can impact the well-being of gender non-conforming people, as social-cognitive resources are depleted. This is apparent in Felix’s reflections of self-doubt and self-worth. Moreover, Callender chooses to highlight Felix’s exposures to transphobia within the public sphere:

**Why're you pretending to be a boy?** I stare at the message. [...] Besides the gallery, I've never really had to experience this kind of hate for who I am before – not directly. I always see it on the news. The way the government is trying to erase me, the ways politicians try to pretend transgender people don't exist, even though we do exist, and always have, and always will. I see the articles, the stories about transgender people being refused health care, students like me bullied and forced into the wrong bathrooms, teens my own age being kicked out of their homes, adults being fired from their jobs just for being who they are, so many of us attacked and killed just for walking down the street – so many of us deciding to take our own lives because we aren't accepted.

I know that, as a trans person of colour, my life expectancy is in my early thirties, just because of the sort of violence people like me face everyday. (Callender, 2021b, p. 124)

Mentioning erasure of transgender lives by the government and by politicians, transgender people being refused health care, stories of transgender teens being kicked out from their homes, being attacked, and being killed, but also taking their own lives, serves as a powerful tool in fighting for trans rights. Although these experiences are not a reality for all transgender people, exposure to these experiences through media where people face discrimination with regard to their intersecting identities, impacts the lives of all transgender and gender non-conforming people. Not only is Felix abused by non-queer people, but there is also an issue of transphobia within the LGBTQ+ community which is explored in the novel. For instance, during a gender identity discussion group at the LGBT centre, Bex, a non-binary character, conveys how it can be difficult for transgender and non-binary people, especially people of colour, to feel included in the community. This perception which is challenged by the characters of *Felix Ever After*, by noting the reality of who belong to the LGBTQ+ community, which according to Parmenter et al. (2021, p. 290) is considered to be multicultural, including transgender and non-binary people of colour. The intersections of LGBTQ+ people of colour are illustrated in *Felix Ever After* through a discussion of pride and its sometimes perceived lack of inclusivity:

“The pride march is in a couple of weeks,” they say. “But sometimes, it can be difficult to find pride for ourselves. There’s very little visibility for people of all genders, and many cisgender people don’t believe transgender and non-binary people deserve the same rights. It’s even more difficult for transgender and non-binary people of colour, and especially transgender women of colour. Though we have transgender women of colour to thank for the Stonewall Riots and the Pride march, they’re often erased and ignored, even by other queer people within the LGBTQIA+ community. How do we find and cultivate pride for each other and ourselves when we’re in a world that seems like it doesn’t want us to exist?”. (Callender, 2021b, p. 273)

As Callender illustrates in this exchange, it is more difficult for transgender and non-binary people of colour, even more so for transgender women of colour to partake in Pride. The explanation being that they experience intersecting forms of discrimination from within and outside of their own communities due to racism, homophobia, queerphobia, transphobia, sexism and more. This acts as a counter voice to the conventional practices of inclusiveness which are often only extended to the white, cisgender, gay men, and poses a need for narratives such as Felix’s in YA literature. The way Felix serves as Callender’s voice is crucial to depict the marginalisation that they may face as a Black, queer, and genderqueer person. The reader is forced to engage with the reality of intersecting identities, which are true for all. And through the concept of intersectionality, it is brought forth that people belonging to multiple marginalised communities experience discrimination, microaggressions and stress in ways that are interlinked.

### 3.3 The violences of homophobia and a monosexual hegemony

The three novels, all engage the theme of homophobia, both externalised and internalised homophobia. As discussed in section 3.2.1, Kalinda’s homophobic statements towards the thought of two women being romantically involved with each other (Callender, 2021c, pp. 78–79) represents what is later revealed as fear. Moreover, Caroline’s classmates bully her for loving a girl, calling her disgusting, telling her that she should “get ready to burn in hell”, and that she “shouldn’t even be alive” (Callender, 2021c, p. 127). Using these homophobic threats and statements, are representative of the discrimination that a large part

of the LGBTQ+ community experiences. Thus, by voicing them in the novel, they become visible, and the readers may reflect upon the impact of such verbal abuse.

When Kalinda finds out that Caroline has a crush on her, she uses Christianity and the bible as a reason for her homophobia, saying that it is wrong for a girl to have such feelings towards another girl. Using the Bible, or any other religious scripture to justify homophobia is, and has been a common practice throughout time, due to the traditional interpretation of passages and verses such as Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, which prohibit homosexual intercourse between men. However, as Joosten (2020, p. 3) claims, the two verses do not condemn a sexual orientation, only a sexual behaviour, which does not include female same-sex relations. The behaviours that are condemned in Lev. 18:22 and 20:13 are linked to non-consensual, adulterated or incestual intercourse, and do not include other forms of same-sex relations. As Caroline and Kalinda go to a Catholic school, they are taught catholic ethics and norms, which are traditionally conservative and heteronormative. This builds a foundation and a justification of the homophobic abuse Caroline faces. Moreover, by alluding to the bible, Callender points out the excessive impact religion has on the perceptions of sexuality, which is in line for critique, as people often resort to a religious explanation to justify homophobia.

It is later revealed that Kalinda fell in love with Caroline (Callender, 2021c, p. 196), which poses the issue of fear of being exposed as queer, or of being ostracized from her peers and her family, as they are in a Catholic environment. A fear of experiencing violence may also be present. Moreover, as discussed in a previous section, the Caribbean culture is largely based on heteronormative norms, which serves as a reason for bringing more queer female characters into the landscape of Caribbean literature, as a way to disrupt and re-construct these hegemonies. In a letter to Caroline, Kalinda reveals her love for her, and about how she was afraid:

My dearest Caroline, I've agonized over the way I left you, but I couldn't bear the thought of saying good-bye. I was too afraid. Will you ever forgive me? [...] This was at least a happy ending, wasn't it? I so wish that ours could've been a happy ending as well. But maybe it still can be, one day. I love you, and will continue to love you forever, and even if we never see each other again and when we're fully grown adults and I have married someone else, I'll think back to the time I spent on Saint Thomas and fell in love

with Caroline Murphy. I hope you can think of me in the same way, and when you remember me, you only think about how you'd fallen in love with Kalinda Francis. But even as I write now, I can't help but think that it would have been an atrocity to let our ending come like this. I'm on Barbados, and you're on Water Island, but we're both alive. Think about how amazing that is, Caroline. An infinite number of universes and an infinite amount of time, and we were able to meet each other. We could have been born millions of years apart, but we were able to meet each other and fall in love. That's a true miracle, isn't it? Maybe it doesn't have to end this way. (Callender, 2021c, pp. 195–197)

In addition to conveying that she was afraid of loving Caroline, she does not see it a possibility to ever marry her, as she writes that she'll marry someone else when she is older despite writing that she will love her forever. This reflects the heteronormative hegemony by which she is cultivated into and illustrates the impact that homophobia may have on the lives of queer people.

In *The Black Flamingo*, Michael is exposed to acts of verbal violence by three girls named Destiny, Grace, and Faith, which are grounded in the beliefs that homosexuality is a sin (Atta, 2019, p. 72). The contrasts between the semantics of their names and the way they act towards Michael is a clever choice by Atta, as their names suggest kindness, hope, and love, but instead they portray the complete opposite. The girls let Michael know that they're not judging him, because God is already doing so (Atta, 2019, p. 74). Again, religion, especially Christianity, is raised as a justification for uttering homophobic statements. In addition to being subjected to verbal violence by his peers, he also experiences this with his best friend Daisy, who claims that "It makes me feel sick, the idea of two women sleeping together" (Atta, 2019, p. 177), adding that she isn't bothered by two guys together. Although Michael does not belong to the group that she is rejecting, it is a homophobic statement towards women who date women, which he calls out and chooses to end their friendship. Atta invites the reader to reflect upon how discrimination is defined by the person experiencing it, and not by the person performing those judicial acts. Thus, ending their friendship because of a homophobic statement is essential to the story line, and to highlight the importance of calling



out discrimination. Moreover, similar to the storyline of Kalinda in *Hurricane Child*, it is later revealed that Daisy is queer, and she tells Michael that:

“I didn’t realise how offensive I was being. My girlfriend – yes, I said girlfriend – Chloe explained to me it was because I was in denial about my sexuality. [...] I already knew what I said was awful. I’m sorry Michael. Chloe said that I said what I said because of internalised homophobia. That I was homophobic towards myself as well as towards you. I think that’s what Chloe said. Does that make sense?”. (Atta, 2019, pp. 247–248)

In her apology to Michael, she and her girlfriend provide an insight into some of the ways internalised homophobia can manifest. Internalised homophobia is defined by The Rainbow Project (Project, n.d.) as something that “happens to gay, lesbian and bisexual people, and even heterosexuals, who have learned and been taught that heterosexuality is the norm and “correct way to be”.” When hearing and seeing negative depictions of LGBTQ+ people, one can as a result internalise negative messages. This may lead to mental distress, which manifests in different ways. Although Daisy’s statements were a result of internalised homophobia, it is important that the author chooses to criticise how people tend to make excuses for their harmful behaviour, whether racist, homophobic, or transphobic. Internalised homophobia is a recurring theme in *The Black Flamingo*, portrayed through Daisy, and also through Jack, a “straight” guy who takes Michael’s virginity and projects his own insecurities through verbal and psychological violences of homophobia aimed towards Michael (Atta, 2019, pp. 352–353). After they sleep together and Jack never contacts Michael again, Jack’s brother explains the situation to him:

“My brother didn’t give me a blow by blow account but he told me enough and I figured the rest out. I don’t think it’s the start of something for you two, it was just one of those things he needed to do. I’ve known him all my life and he’s not gay, he just feels a lot of things. People would always say he was different but it doesn’t take much to be different where I’m from – people took the piss out of me for reading and coming to university. Where we’re from there’s not much diversity and he’s just full of so much curiosity; whenever he comes to visit me he sleeps with someone. Granted, you’re the first guy

and I can see why you caught his eye up on that stage, all confident with your words and sense of self, speaking and being heard. It's amazing what you do, I applaud you and I'm sure, in the moment he adored you. You see, he's never had that, we've never had that, but he's had you know, Mike, and that's that". (Atta, 2019, p. 232)

This is an interesting storyline, as it reflects the experiences of so many closeted queer people. Jack's brother amplifying where they came from as a place with no diversity, coupled with his own claims of knowing his brother's sexuality illustrate why it may be hard for Jack to be open about his queer identity, to himself and to others. What Atta does by adding this layer to the story, is creating awareness around internalised fears linked to being queer and to becoming part of a stigmatised group within society. Newcomb and Mustanski (2010, p. 1020) regard this as an inward direction of the homophobic attitudes of society, by the LGBTQ+ individual themselves. It is thus a result of external violences of homophobia illustrated through verbal, psychological, and/or physical discrimination.

### 3.3.1 The hegemony of monosexism

Not only do the authors engage the theme of homophobia through their writing, but they also challenge the hegemonic notion of a sexual dichotomy, where it is assumed that people are either straight or gay. This is such an important topic that is raised, because in addition to experiencing homophobia, bisexual experiences are being placed under erasure outside of, and within the LGBTQ+ community. They also experience the delegitimization of bisexuality as a unique label, and stereotypical attributions of negative traits. Bisexual people are often understood as being a combination between homosexual and heterosexual, which deprives them of their own unique identity, without a single definition of what the term "bisexuality" means. According to Callis (2013, pp. 85–86), bisexual people often feel excluded from both straight and gay communities and receive a lot of prejudice towards their sexual orientation, as it is believed that they are not fully gay, not fully straight, and overly sexual. The stigma and prejudice around bisexuality might be due to the dominance of monosexism, where bisexuality, according to Corey (2017, p. 191) is disturbing the dichotomised hegemonic institution of heterosexuality and homosexuality as its queer counterpart. There is little place for plurisexual identities in such hegemonies, resulting in bisexual people and their narratives

being erased. Callis (2013, p. 89) explains how bisexuals are often viewed as illegitimate, going through a phase, or simply confused individuals on their way to identify as either gay or straight. The topic of sexual orientation is central in *Felix Ever After*, where Felix and his friends have conversations about what it means to be gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual, or not into labels at all. There is an instance where Felix is asked by a friend if he is into both girls and boys, and what label he identifies with (Callender, 2021b, p. 78). The reader then gets to know about Felix's journey of questioning his sexual orientation, and his thoughts around labels. He has gone through stages of liking only boys, and stages of liking only girls, and he "thought, for some reason, that I had to figure out which I was more attracted to, – either I was gay or I was straight" (Callender, 2021b, p. 80). Felix's fixation on having to figure out whether he is gay or straight, instead of considering bisexuality as a legitimate and permanent label resonates with Callis's (2013, p. 89) points about bisexuality as being a journey towards labelling as either straight or gay. Furthermore, although Callender legitimizes bisexuality as a sexual orientation equal to other queer orientations through the character of Felix, they do also acknowledge that for some, one can also identify as bisexual, and then chose to identify differently at any point. This is illustrated through the character of Leah, who says:

"I was just wondering if you consider yourself bisexual or pansexual or anything. I thought I was bisexual," Leah tells us, "but I think it was only because it was like I had to be. It was almost like a habit, until finally one day, I was like – wait, why do I say I'm attracted to guys when literally the last guy I thought was cute was Simba?". (Callender, 2021b, p. 78)

Including that she thought she was bisexual, because she thought she had to be, although a legitimate experience, may feed into the hegemonic view of bisexuality as illegitimate, and not an end destination alongside labelling as gay or straight. This could potentially be problematic; however, the setting of the conversation serves as a space for reflection on labels altogether. Moreover, through this conversation, Callender legitimizes the characters' rights to self-discovery and exploration. This is also illustrated through Ezra's character in the novel, who resists labelling for himself, and does not wish to attribute labels to others either.

“I don’t get it,” he said, eyebrows pinched together. “Why do you have to choose?” [...] “I honestly don’t care that much about labels. I mean, I know they’re important to a lot of people, and I can see why – I’m not knocking them. It’s just... I kind of wish we could exist without having to worry about putting ourselves into categories. If there were no straight people, no violence or abuse or homophobia or anything, would we even need labels, or would we just be? Sometimes I wonder if labels can get in the way. Like if I was adamant that I’m straight, does that force me into only liking girls? What if that stopped me from falling in love with a guy? I don’t know,” he says again. “I get that labels can be important.”

“They connect us. They help create community,” Leah says. “I can see what you’re saying. If the world was perfect, maybe we wouldn’t need labels. But the world isn’t perfect, and labels can really be a source of pride – especially when we’ve got to deal with so much crap. I’m really freaking proud to be a lesbian”. (Callender, 2021b, pp. 81–82)

Here, Ezra questions the importance of labelling others and ourselves. He proposes an alternative and reflects upon how society would be if no one used labels for themselves or others, raising the question of homophobia and discrimination against queer people as being a result of placing people into categories, instead of just “being”. This is an important view on sexuality and labels, which Callender manages to portray through these reflective conversations that are being held between Felix and his friends. Today, as queer identities are becoming more accepted around the world, conversations about other labels of sexual orientations, for instance plurisexual identities, are needed, as there is a severe lack of diverse representation of them in popular culture. Corey (2017, p. 203) argues that there is not necessarily any need for a massive increase in number of bisexual characters and experiences being portrayed in television, but rather portraying them in a more nuanced and dynamic manner. Bisexual individuals are for instance in television often portrayed in a stereotypical fashion, as “promiscuous, untrustworthy, and greedy” (Corey, 2017, p. 194). Throughout *Felix Ever After*, Callender disrupts these stereotypes through the many conversations the characters have about sexuality as something more than “either-or”. Callender introduces

characters who identify as straight, gay, bisexual, non-labelling, and questioning, providing a more accurate and inclusive depiction of the experiences of LGBTQ+ people regarding sexual identity. Moreover, when including these critical conversations in the novel, Callender portrays the psychological violence of a monosexual hegemony for the characters who do not identify as gay or straight. For instance, how Felix has been through difficult phases trying to figure out whether he is gay or straight because identifying as neither does not seem to be a legitimate option.

## 4.0 Re-imagining the discourses of race, gender, and sexuality: Shifting the power from the oppressor to the oppressed through queer Black joy stories

The discourses of race, gender, and sexuality are highly influenced by the hegemonic power structures of the world, grown from white supremacy, heteronormativity, and patriarchy. Proof of the presence of these power structures not only lies in these discourses but also how we resist acknowledging these issues, or for instance how multiple marginalised people are being excluded or silenced from taking part in the discussion all together. In this chapter, I aim to bring forth the ways in which YA and MG literature about and by Black, queer authors, can dismantle oppressive narratives of power. This will be done by analysing excerpts from the three novels, *Hurricane Child* (Callender, 2021c), *Felix Ever After* (Callender, 2021b), and *The Black Flamingo* (Atta, 2019), looking specifically for strengths in terms of re-imagining the discourses of race, gender, and sexuality.

As the previous chapter of this thesis focus on the violences of racism, transphobia, homophobia and gender stereotyping, this chapter will specifically look for the ways in which the authors challenge experiences of discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people of colour. They do this through creating a positive counter voice to these experiences, providing strong, multidimensional characters who, through their different journeys, re-define how their identity is perceived. The authors of these novels depict how it may feel to be subjected to stereotypical expectations of behaviour by the hegemonic society, even though these attributions are not reflecting how the protagonists see themselves. They have chosen to create characters who are unapologetically themselves, challenging the hegemonic norms of gender, race, and sexuality, thus actively resisting constructions that attempt to define them.

Callender and Atta both manage to create what Atta describes as “queer Black joy stories” (Link, 2021), by including moments of extreme joy for their characters. For instance, the joy that is portrayed in *Felix Ever After* through Felix’s character when he discovers his gender identity (Callender, 2021b, pp. 277–278), when reconciling with his father (Callender, 2021b, pp. 329–332), when he lets go of the relationship with his mother (Callender, 2021b, p. 327), and the moment of joy and love between him and Ezra at the pride parade (Callender, 2021b, pp. 335–338). Moreover, by including a diverse cast of Black LGBTQ+ characters in

their novels, readers are provided with the opportunity to get to know characters who have different life experiences than them, or to see themselves in them. The metaphor and concept of mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors, developed by Rudine Sims Bishop in 1990 (Harris, 2007, p. 153), as a response to the lack of multicultural diversity in children's books, is also used throughout this chapter when analysing excerpts of the novels which provide mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors for the readers. The vision of the metaphor is to give the readers access to either see themselves represented in literature, or provide readers with a view into lives and experiences different to their own, which in turn can foster curiosity, compassion, critical literacy, and collective action (Enriquez, 2021, p. 104). According to Enriquez (2021, p. 106), using literature as a way to open a door, stepping into the shoes of someone else by interacting with these stories and the identity groups they are presented with, which often are different to their own experiences, is beneficial in order to change the discourse of difference in a more positive direction. In *Felix Ever After* and *The Black Flamingo*, the authors shed light onto the history of Black queer people, and how it has been erased. They do so by calling attention to the issue of Black LGBTQ+ erasure. A lot of these themes are handled more in-depth in the two YA novels, whereas in *Hurricane Child*, which is a middle grade novel, themes such as racism and gendered discrimination, as well as homophobia are portrayed in more subtle forms. However, all three novels include complex characters, who are their authentic selves and resist stereotypes, which is important to turn the narrative of multiple marginalised people into one of empowerment, joy, and pride.

#### 4.1 Exploring the powers of expressive art forms

Both Atta and Callender explore the healing powers of writing and art through the novels. In *Hurricane Child*, Callender has Caroline's headmaster give her an empty journal for her to "write letters to your mother, [...] and one day – if you do meet her again – you can decide whether you would like to give these letters to her or not" (Callender, 2021c, p. 21). However, Caroline doesn't write to her mother. Instead, she picks the journal up, "thinking that maybe I will write a letter to my mom after all – but then I throw it as hard as I can" (Callender, 2021c, p. 26). Although she does not write to her mother, she does end up writing a letter to Kalinda.

I roll onto my stomach and pick up the purple journal that's been resting at my bedside since the night I threw it like I meant to throw it out of this world and into another. Pick it up and stare at the blank paper. It's not a letter to my ma at all. It's a letter to Kalinda. And it's telling her the things I'm too afraid to say out loud. (Callender, 2021c, p. 118)

What Caroline experiences here is how, although not directed to her mother, she finds a way to express her feelings through writing in her journal. The writing serves as an outlet of her pain and anger, and perhaps helps her understand her feelings a bit more clearly.

The theme of expressive writing is also explored in *Felix Ever After*, as well as in *The Black Flamingo*. Felix, unlike Caroline, writes emails to his absentee mother, but he keeps them drafted, and does not send them off. He ends up sending an email in the end, after realising that he is a demiboy, and is ready to let go of the anger he feels towards her, telling her how she has hurt him (Callender, 2021b, p. 284). This is a clear sign of character development, Callender showing through Felix that choosing to be vulnerable might help process emotions and after a period of time, might actually be freeing. Felix accepts that he will not get an answer from his mother and has a moment of realisation in the end of the novel that he is indeed worthy of love, and that he will stop running from it. He decides to delete all 477 drafts for his mother, and immediately feels a sense of relief for daring to let go of her (Callender, 2021b, p. 327). The quote below, shows a different side to expressive writing as a way to re-focus pain and anger.

I hesitate, pause – then click on *delete*. There's so many that it takes a second for my laptop to reload. As it does, and as I see the emails disappearing page by page, I can feel a lightening. Something I'd been holding in my chest, anger and hurt and pain, starts to fade away. It wasn't anger and hurt and pain I'd had for my mom. Though I've got plenty of that, too, this was anger and hurt and pain I'd had for myself, for writing all those fucking emails in the first place – for refusing to let go. (Callender, 2021b, p. 327)

Baker and Mazza (2004, p. 141) cite James Joyce, Anne Frank, and May Sarton as examples of people who turned to writing for comfort in trying times. Further, they explain that novelists and poets have used writing for centuries as a means of transformation and



healing. In later years, expressive writing has been gaining attention from the applied sciences of medicine and psychology as legitimate forms of therapy. Baker and Mazza (2004, pp. 144–145) claim that writing gives the writer a form of control in light of traumatic events and emotions, as they become more manageable when put into words. Writing can “lead to greater self-understanding, clarification, resolution and closure” and “reduce inhibition of emotions and the negative impacts on the immune system”. For instance, studies by Dr. James Pennebaker show substantial changes in the psychological and physiological health of subjects who participate in expressive journaling (Baker & Mazza, 2004, p. 142). Thus, the writing that occurs in *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo*, might act as a metareflection on the potential of literature to offer healing and to express pain.

Moreover, it’s important to mention the long history of using literature, art, performance, and other forms of cultural output as a means to engage, name, oppose, demolish, and think through alternative, subversive, and oppositional ways of being within oppressive spaces. In the African American context, the African American orature, which is the corpus of oral discourse created by the Black diaspora to deal with a variety demands, requirements, and other pressed situations, hold severe importance (Abarry, 1990, p. 380). For instance, spirituals, Blues, work songs, sermons, proverbs, and tales were, and still are historically significant, as they portray the hardships of enslavement, and the hope and visions of a better, alternate world (Abarry, 1990, p. 180). According to Abarry (1990, p. 386), alongside the African American orature, Black diasporic literature such as that of W. E. B. Du Bois, Paul Laurence Dunbar, and Charles W. Chestnut portray modern African American literature. Within this literature “pertinent ideas on specific literary and cultural issues of African Americans in the United States” were articulated through mastered literary craftsmanship. Not only do Atta and Callender acknowledge the psychological effects of expressive art forms, including writing, but they also carry on the tradition of African American literature as a means to challenge and break away from oppressive spaces.

In addition to the therapeutic benefits of expressive writing, Baker and Mazza (2004, pp. 143–144) mention poetry writing as equally beneficial, which is what Atta has done in *The Black Flamingo*. In an interview with Isaac-Wilson (2012) for *The Guardian*, Atta explains that he first started writing poetry as an opportunity to vent, claiming that “the power of poetry is limitless”. Through Michael, the reader is met with a boy who uses poetry writing as a coping mechanism and a form of creative expression throughout his journey towards self-

identification. The first poem that Michael writes in the novel is inspired by Maya Angelou's poetry.

Maya Angelou's words  
Are so clear. She writes about love  
and standing up for yourself  
in the face of inequality.

Even though

She's American,  
Her words speak to me.

Her poetry is everything  
I hope mine could be  
one day, for somebody.

Even if

That somebody is me.

(Atta, 2019, p. 70).

This poem conveys the power that lies in poetry and in other forms of expressive art. It points towards the collectiveness that is provided through art, and the way in which art can erase borders and build bridges. Especially the line "even though she's American, her words speak to me" speaks volumes about the possibilities of writing and consuming poetry with regard to defying geographic or cultural borders. Furthermore, the mention of standing up for oneself in the face of inequality is linked to the tradition of using expressive art forms to challenge and re-imagine social structures of oppression. According to Stuckey and Nobel (2010, p. 260), the use of poetry has been described to help people find their voice and unlock

the wisdom that they already possess, which is especially important for people who experience oppression, as their experiences are often silenced in the general society. Moreover, turning to poetry instead of other forms of expressive writing, might be beneficial for those who cannot find the words to express themselves in everyday words.

This is closely linked to how the use of visual arts are portrayed in *Felix Ever After*, for instance to express emotions that are difficult to put into words. This is illustrated in a scene where Felix has what seems to be a trance-like experience as he is painting a self-portrait, “confronting myself – in searching for the beauty, in admitting to the flaws” (Callender, 2021b, p. 173). This scene in the novel is incredibly powerful, in giving Felix a way of coping with the stress that he is subjected to, both externally and internally. In choosing to do a self-portrait, Callender promotes the empowering act of forcing us to see ourselves in a different light, recognising and accepting what’s on the outside as well as on the inside, flaws and all. Self-portraits can be a true picture of who you really are and how you want to be perceived. When Felix steps out of the creative zone, the self-portrait is described as:

It's beautiful. I hate how arrogant that sounds, but it's true. Not me – I don't think that I'm beautiful – but the painting itself. My skin is flecks of red and gold, as though I'm on fire. The colours almost look like a piece of galaxy, twisting together bits of light blooming out of the darkness. My eyes hold the same fear, the same dread, but there's a strength, an intensity, a determination I hadn't really noticed. (Callender, 2021b, p. 174)

As this is rather early in his journey of self-discovery in the story, and although the sense of empowerment that this experience gives him, it is still an undiscovered method of coping for him. However, the way in which he perceives the portrait after the session, it is as if he is seeing the beauty within him for the first time, using colours such as red and gold, resembling fire, which illustrates the strength, passion, and life in him. He also paints a galaxy of light growing out from the darkness, illustrating how there lie beauty and a positive energy underneath the surface, ready to break free. Callender still makes sure to get across that he has a long way to go on his journey, with the portraits reading as a metaphor for how he sees himself, and how he develops throughout the story. In parallel with the emails, and the way

he gains confidence enough to send one off to his mother, and also realises that she will not answer, the self-portraits follow this development. After a build-up of emotions, where neither of the boys he is into wants to speak with him, the situation with his mother's rejection, and the constant abuse from an anonymous user on Instagram, he has an important heart-to-heart with his father. They conclude that Felix should use his energy on himself, choosing to not accept hurt and pain, but rather building love and acceptance for himself (Callender, 2021b, pp. 287–288). He pours himself into his self-portraits, muting the noise from the outside world, creating the components for his portfolio to submit to Brown. "There I am, on fire, underwater, skin like the swirling universe, flying through the sky, lying in the grass, sitting in the dark while a blur of colours rushes around me, smirking with a crown of flowers on my head" (Callender, 2021b, p. 288). When presenting his portraits for his peers, he recounts how the process has been more helpful than he first expected as it has been empowering to portray who he knows he is, not how everyone else sees him. He goes on to say that he is the only one who gets to define who he is (Callender, 2021b, p. 350). How the portraits turned out is a direct portrayal of his journey and how he now sees himself, a process which has helped him be true to who he is and dare to find and use his voice.

Both Callender and Atta have chosen to include these powerful tools to have their characters explore and navigate through traumatic experiences and finding themselves. By using expressive art forms as a tool, the reader is provided with more direct insight into the protagonists' perspective, bringing the reader along on their discovery of their identities. It serves as a window, as well as a sliding glass door to explore and understand the experiences of the characters, thus creating a space for the reader to gain insight into some experiences from people of marginalised communities. Within the context of the novels, the experiences of the characters, as part of the Black LGBTQ+ community, are also authentically illustrated through using expressive writing and art as a part of the storyline. It also may provide some readers with the possibility to see their own lived experiences through the characters, which aligns with the metaphor of the mirror. Touching upon how the authors have provided readers with authentic literature that represents queer, and genderqueer Black characters, there is a general surge towards shifting the power from the oppressors to the oppressed. For instance, Callender writes that they hope what the readers take with them after reading *Felix Ever After* is empowerment and validation, as well as having the reader learn more about themselves

and their identity through reading the novel. They also mention the importance of knowing that becoming who they truly are is a possibility (Callender, 2021b, p. 357).

#### 4.2 Queer Black joy stories and reclaiming the power of definition

Reclamation of power, more specifically, the power of definition, is a theme that is followed throughout all three novels. In *The Black Flamingo*, Michael always seems to be longing for acceptance and a sense of belonging from his family and his friends, as well as within the communities he is a part of. He does, however, stay true to who he is, leaning into what makes him different to the hegemonic norms of society. For instance, channelling his feminine energy, choosing to be open and proud in his sexuality, and learning to accept his multiracial background throughout the novel. However, in the poem *I Want to Be a Pink Flamingo*<sup>5</sup>, he conveys a wish to “blend in” (Atta, 2019, p. 194), pointing towards the constant wish to fit in and belong somewhere. He quickly finds the Drag Society, a community where the common denominator is a love for expressing oneself, not determined by gender, sexuality, skin colour or ethnicity. The poster of the Drag Society is described as: “a photo of a group of people of many shapes, colours and gender expressions in costume and make-up” (Atta, 2019, p. 198), which is a subtle way of conveying a message that one does not have to be defined within the strict categories of society in order to find community and happiness. This can be perceived as a way of drawing attention away from difference by focusing on unity through what we do, rather than who we are. However, it may also be an act of celebrating difference. This may encourage the reader to focus more on the areas in which we are alike, thus, re-defining the ways society is channelled to view identity. To a large extent, Atta is idealising a world where identity is in fact, as Collins and Bilge (2020, p. 226) suggests, something one *does*, and not something one *has*. They write that “rather than a fixed essence that a person carries from one situation to the next, individual identities are now seen as differentially performed from one social context to the next” (Collins & Bilge, 2020, p. 226). What this translates to in relation to the celebration of difference that is presented in the Drag Society poster, is that the concept of identity is based on social context, shaped by intersecting power relations. Furthermore, the reconceptualization of individual identity and subjectivity

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<sup>5</sup> The poem is provided in section 3.1.2, pp. 33–34

as determined by social contexts, has, according to Collins and Bilge (2020, p. 227) created a space for individual empowerment for multiple minority people.

Similarly, there are various examples of Black queer celebration in Callender's work, which also help categorise both *Felix Ever After* and *Hurricane Child* as queer Black joy stories, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter. Focusing on the joys of friendship, love, family, and youth is a crucial element to re-imagining the discourses of race, sexuality, and gender through YA, and MG literature. Queer Black joy stories may for instance disturb the misconception that "Black people can't be gay", which Callender answers to, writing that "I'll happily fight every day as a proud Black queer person who loves to write about Black and queer characters" (Callender, 2020, p. 23). This love comes to show in *Felix Ever After*, as Felix gets to experience the joys and empowerment of being a part of the Black LGBTQ+ community. For instance, the positive feelings he experiences when going to the pride parade, after a journey of self-discovery.

I usually hate this parade – hate the noise, the crowds – but when I see the Callen–Lorde float passing by, I feel an urge to scream, too. I *do* scream when the LGBT Centre float passes and I catch Bex in the parade, waving a yellow, white, purple, and Black flag tied around their neck like a cape.

Once I start screaming, I can't stop. I scream so hard my throat feels raw and my heart pounds. I'm screaming with joy. I'm screaming with pain. I'm screaming with the awe that I'm here, that we're all here, and that we're here because of the people before us, the people who couldn't be here, and I'm screaming for myself too. Screaming and cheering and a little bit of crying. I try to wipe my eyes as if it's just dust, but the person beside me catches me with a smile, also wiping their eyes. I don't know this person, don't know their name, probably will never even see them again after this parade, but for that one second, I feel like they're a friend, or a part of my family, and that's pretty fucking amazing. I never really got it before, why Ezra is so obsessed with Pride, but I think I'm starting to get it now. (Callender, 2021b, pp. 335–336).

This excerpt depicts how it may feel to belong to something bigger. Especially for Felix, who has always felt out of place, for instance within the LGBTQ+ community, within the Black

community, and within the socially constructed borders of gender. Another instance in the novel shown below, illustrates the great joy of belonging and discovering one's identity, as Felix labels himself as a demiboy. This joy is equally important as the joys of discovering love, purpose, and acceptance to mention a few.

I have my laptop open and on a Tumblr post that lists the hundreds of different transgender identities. Non-binary. Agender. Bigender. Transmasculine. Transfeminine. Genderqueer. Gender nonconforming. [...] I keep reading, scrolling, eyes becoming glazed, when one word catches my eye. *Demiboy*. A person who identifies as mostly or partly male [...] but may also identify as non-binary some of the time, or even as a girl.

[...] I try saying it out loud. "Demiboy." Demiboy, demiboy, demiboy. I smile a little. I smile, and then outright laugh, and I might even begin to cry a little, because I know what Bex was talking about now. The confidence that spreads through me. I know that this is right. It's kind of amazing, that there's a word that explains exactly how I feel, that takes away all of my confusion and questioning and hesitation – a word that lets me know there are others out there who feel exactly the same way that I do. (Callender, 2021b, pp. 277–278).

In *Hurricane Child*, the joys of developing a crush on someone is beautifully portrayed through Caroline's infatuation of Kalinda. Simple topics of developing crushes and friendships, and experiencing love towards self and others, are crucial for queer Black joy stories to be available for all. By including these universal topics of joy and excitement into the field of literature that handles themes of racism and queerphobia, the mounds of tragic stories, and important stories of pain and trauma linked to being Black and queer, are balanced out with more positive depictions of Black queer experiences (Link, 2021). Thus, by introducing readers to stories of joy, love, and empowerment, such as the excerpts previously presented in this sub-chapter, as well as the text excerpt below, an active step towards re-imagining the discourse of race, gender, and sexuality is taken.

She catches me staring at her all the time, but she never seems to mind. Just keeps smiling like there's nothing strange about it, nothing strange at all, that she would catch

me watching her. I try to stop, but I can't. One look at her sends my heart beating and bouncing against the walls in my chest, and sometimes it feels like it gets lodged in my throat too, and even though it feels like we've known each other since the moment we both came out of our mothers' wombs, I look at her and I can't speak a word.

We sit in her bedroom. I love her bedroom now even more than I love my own. I love seeing her, her dark skin the kind of brown that can't be found anywhere else in nature, only on her, and I love seeing her twisted locks piled up onto her head. I love being near her. Love how she always smells like lemongrass, especially in the early mornings, yellow warmth radiating from her skin and clothes. (Callender, 2021c)

This scene in *Hurricane Child* is coloured by descriptions of how Caroline recognises beauty and is challenging the racist beauty standards that were previously discussed in chapter three. This is due to the positive connotations that are attributed to Kalinda's physical features through Callender's carefully chosen words of adoration, which contributes to re-define how beauty is perceived. Moreover, Black girls who read content like this, will presumably benefit from being exposed to stories that portray Blackness as something beautiful, again reconstructing racial discourses.

As discussed previously, the powers of queer Black joy stories on re-defining the discourses of race, sexuality and gender are many. This re-defining is also in progress through directing attention to the transgressive history of women, queer, and genderqueer people of colour. Callender (2020, p. 23) sheds light onto the erasure of queer Black history, noting that the intersecting experiences of queer and Black identities are important to raise awareness around. This is a topic which is included in *Felix Ever After*, in a scene previously discussed in section 3.2.2, when Felix takes part in a discussion group at the LGBT Centre. When lifting the topic of pride, the leader, Bex, who identifies as non-binary says "[...] we have transgender women of colour to thank for the Stonewall Riots and the Pride march, they're often erased and ignored, even by other queer people within the LGBTQIA+ community". By including this in the novel, Callender directs the attention towards the importance of acknowledging queer Black individuals who have been crucial in developing a broader understanding of the Black LGBTQ+ movement. Atta pays a tribute to these identities through the poem *What it's Like to be a Black Drag Artist (For those of you who aren't)*, mentioning the queer Black activist



Marsha P. Johnson (Atta, 2019, p. 335). According to Steinmetz (2020), Johnson was directing attention towards issues like class, homelessness, and racism, alongside having an active role in the LGBTQ+ movement, and actually being part of the Stonewall Riots. Johnson also struggled with mental illness, poverty, and HIV, but despite all of these hardships, she remained politically engaged, fighting for LGBTQ+ rights. The rest of the poem mentioned above continues as following:

It's a Black queen who threw a brick  
that built a movement. It's building  
yourself up from zero expectations.  
It's reviving your history. It's surviving  
the present. It's devising the future.

It's afro futurism. It's afro centric. It's Black,  
Black, Blackity-Black. It's batty bwoy, sissy.  
It's queer, gay and faggy. It's yours  
And it's yours. It's mine. It's time to step  
Out of the shadows and into the spotlight.

(Atta, 2019, p. 335).

What Atta does with this poem is to acknowledge the importance of queer Black history and re-claims it through Michael. The revival of queer Black history, along with the hopefulness of re-imagining the future through breaking the expectations that the hegemony places upon youth, is what Michael demonstrates when doing drag. Atta makes sure to let the reader know that it is about much more than putting on a dress and getting on stage, but it is activism for the Black LGBTQ+ community, and their right for equality. In the last verse, Atta is using terms such as “afro futurism”, “afro centric”, and “Black”. By doing this, he shifts the focus away from the oppressors, the whites, and the white queers, and turns it towards queer Black people. This is a part of re-constructing the discourse of race and sexuality, and it illustrates a reclamation of a power that has solely been held by a white, heteronormative

hegemony. The last verse also changes the semantics of the racial, homophobic, and sexist slurs Michael has had thrown his way throughout the novel. In using these slurs about himself, he re-defines what they mean to him and instead attributes connotations of power and freedom. According to Coles (2016, p. 437), by derogated identities reclaiming terms like “queer”, they challenge “the assumption that difference from heterosexual behaviour [is] something to be ashamed of”. The same goes for reclaiming the term “Black”, linking it to that of “Blackness”, calling attention to the beauty of Blackness, both intellectually, socially, as well as physically. This reclamation is redemptive in nature, which means that it is linguistically implied that these terms have been misunderstood, but are not false (Coles, 2016, p. 438). “Batty bwoy”, “sissy”, and “faggy”, are terms that Coles (2016, p. 438) suggests are restricted reclamations, as they are symbolic for solidarity and unity within the derogated group. This is a powerful rhetorical tool to gain power, as it is called attention to the historical prejudice of these words in a mocking way, which Atta seems aware of when having Michael write this poem as a tribute to the Black LGBTQ+ community. Additionally, the last line of the verse is a brilliant metaphor for bringing the history and experiences of queer Black individuals out in the open, and not allow further oppression.

Moreover, in re-imagining the discourses of race, sexuality, and gender, providing literature with strong, female characters is of importance. In *Hurricane Child*, Caroline is a character who is never afraid to stand up for what she believes to be right, even though it might result in unpleasant reactions from those around her. A beautiful example of this is how Callender writes out the reflections of Caroline as to why she is always sat alone and don't have any friends. Her reason being that she got “so many bum smackings and because I asked too many questions in class and because I knew too many answers too” (Callender, 2021c, p. 22). However, instead of showing regret and a will to change how she acts, she reassures herself that it is the lonely children who grow up to be someone that everyone else looks up to. What Callender does here, is creating a space for the readers who feel lonely for being different to the majority, signalling that it is going to be okay, and not to compromise oneself to better fit in. This follows Bishop's take on literature as something that “transforms human experience and reflects it back to us, and in that reflection we can see our own lives and experiences as part of the larger human experience” (Bishop, 1998, cited in Harris, 2007, p. 153). By reflecting experiences of marginalised children, who are subjected to unjust treatment, Callender provides literature for children who may be in search for themselves in

the literature that they read to not feel alone. There is a power in claiming one's space as equally important to one's peers, something Caroline does by refusing to adhere to the standards and expectations of the hegemony. Caroline is different to those around her in a lot of areas of her life, for instance having a darker skin tone, developing romantic feelings towards another girl, not living on the main island with her peers, as well as having a broken family. These are struggles that most children can relate with to some extent. Moreover, Callender challenges the gendered expectations of girls, and more specifically Black girls in this story. Morris (2007, pp. 490–491) writes about how Black girls are encouraged to act ladylike, however, their already existing femininity is constructed as overly assertive, harsh, and loud. Ladylike behaviour and femininity, as explored in chapter three of this thesis, are highly linked to white women and expectations towards white women. According to Morris (2007, p. 492) Black women have worked outside the home, which is not the case for white women, historically. They have taken prominent positions in Black communities, which means their experience of womanhood is different to that of white women. Furthermore, Morris explains how girls who do not fit into the hegemonic definitions of femininity as quiet and passive, “may construct alternative embodiments of femininity”. What this results in is that they will unlock tools to challenge the hegemonic ways of understanding what female is. Callender uses Caroline and her experiences to overthrow the hegemonic notions of femininity, channelling strength through her voice. This energy is what has Caroline dare to question the actions of the grown-ups surrounding her. By presenting a strong, Black, female character who challenges the structures of oppression towards Black women, and Black queer women, this too, alongside queer Black joy stories, are crucial to re-imagine these structures.

## 5.0 Implications for using *The Black Flamingo*, *Felix Ever After*, and *Hurricane Child* in the Norwegian EFL classroom

*The Black Flamingo*, *Felix Ever After*, and *Hurricane Child* lay the foundations for multiple teaching opportunities in the Norwegian EFL classroom, both in terms of developing critical literacy, and intercultural competence, as well as activities linked to language learning. Although these novels may be used to foster language learning, for instance the basic skills of writing and reading, the analysis provided in the previous chapters of this thesis indicate that the novels may be useful to teach critical awareness towards topics such as race, gender, and sexuality. Thus, this chapter will offer a discussion of the implications to teach these novels, and other novels like these in the Norwegian EFL classroom. The discussion will specifically be linked to the term intercultural competence, where an alternative terminology to foster the intercultural competence in students is suggested, namely critical literacy. The pedagogy of discomfort will also be discussed as an approach to teaching about difficult topics, such as those mentioned above.

### 5.1 A critical perspective on intercultural competence

The concept of intercultural competence is of large focus within the Norwegian curriculum. According to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, Utdanningsdirektoratet [Udir] (2020, p. 2), English is an important subject to promote *cultural understanding*, all-round education, and identity development. This highlights the position that culture, and in a sense also unity and sameness have in the Norwegian education discourse. Furthermore, In the subject curriculum for foreign languages, one of the core elements of the subject is intercultural competence. Intercultural competence is defined as:

Knowledge about and an exploratory approach to other languages, cultures, ways of living, and ways of thinking, which open for new perspectives on the world and ourselves. Intercultural competence includes developing curiosity, insight in and understanding of cultural and linguistic diversity, both locally and globally, to interact with others. (Udir, 2019, p. 2).

This concept is also embraced in the subject curriculum for English, although not explicitly tied to the term intercultural competence. For instance, the relevant and central values of the subject are greatly similar to the quotation above (Udir, 2020, p. 2). Additionally, it is stated that “English shall help the pupils develop an intercultural understanding of different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns”. Moreover, Udir (2021) has published a digital guide for teachers and teaching institutions to use when evaluating and selecting teaching material that are in line with the objectives for English language learning in Norwegian schools. In this knowledge-guide, the concept of intercultural competence is also a central focus. The foundation argues that texts should be used in the EFL classroom, writing that:

Language learning takes place in the encounter with texts in English. The concept of text is used in a broad sense: texts can be spoken and written, printed and digital, graphic and artistic, formal and informal, fictional and factual, contemporary, and historical. The texts can contain writing, pictures, audio, drawings, graphs, numbers, and other forms of expression that are combined to enhance and present a message. *Working with texts in English helps to develop the pupils’ knowledge and experience of linguistic and cultural diversity, as well as their insight into ways of living, ways of thinking and traditions of indigenous peoples.* By reflecting on, interpreting and critically assessing different types of texts in English, *the pupils shall acquire language and knowledge of culture and society. Thus, the pupils will develop intercultural competence enabling them to deal with different ways of living, ways of thinking and communication patterns.* They shall build the foundation for seeing their own identity and others’ identities in a multilingual and multicultural context.

(Udir, 2020, p. 8)

However, the objectives of raising intercultural awareness and overall intercultural competence are difficult to grasp and may easily be interpreted differently within the teacher

community. Dervin (2016, p. 9) critiques the overused concept of culture, stating that “one cannot meet a culture, but people who (are made to) represent it – or rather represent imaginaries and representations of it”. Following this take on the concept of culture, the focus within the Norwegian education discourse on meeting and gaining knowledge of other cultures, as if they are easily defined and perhaps placed as opposite, or “the other” to the hegemony, is counterproductive. As explored in earlier parts of this thesis, cultures consist of various individuals who belong to various communities. Thus, suggesting that culture is the sole explanation for why someone behave the way they do, is misleading and reifies stereotypes of different cultures and of those who belong to them.

Moreover, Dervin (2016, p. 14) writes about the position of identity within interculturality as a more useful way to explore the concept. He suggests that although education discourses often illustrate identities as constant and stable, identities are context based, changing from one situation to another. However, it should be acknowledged that using stereotypical knowledge of cultures, and intercultural competence as a starting point to understand, or discuss experiences of others, may be beneficial in some settings. In the Norwegian EFL classroom, it may be a necessity to build on the preconceived assumptions of the students. Although they may be rooted in stereotypical attributions, it creates an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of what culture really is, and the importance of separating culture and identity. Thus, intercultural competence in the context of education, is a way to approach inclusivity in a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-racial context, with an ever-changing diversity. However, although intercultural competence is a key word within the Norwegian school curricula, experiences have shown that there is a lack of awareness around what intercultural competence entails. Thus, a better alternative to using the term *culture*, should be explored. With the fluidity of the term culture, teachers and schools are free to interpret it in different ways, which could be contradictory to the anti-racial and anti-discriminatory values that are claimed to be important in the Norwegian education. For instance, one could interpret culture as something determined by location, ethnicity, language, or skin colour. However, loads of identity groups are not included in this understanding of culture, such as LGBTQ+ people. They are often understood as a homogenous group of people, with a shared set of values, attitudes, and beliefs, which is not true, as they belong to several different cultures and communities paired with being part of the LGBTQ+ community.

In addition to the critique of interculturality as a counterproductive term in promoting an anti-racial and anti-discriminatory values, it is not implied how one should approach topics of race, sexuality, gender, and power structures, which are emotionally triggering to many. In a study by Eriksen and Stein (2021, pp. 8–9), it is suggested that the perceived ideal of the “objective” teacher is not attainable in anti-racial and anti-discriminatory pedagogy, if the aim is to challenge structures of racism, homophobia, transphobia, and gender stereotyping. This ideal of the objective teacher is often understood as a norm within Norwegian schools, where teachers should not convey personal political, nor religious standpoints through their teaching. Additionally, there is a fear amongst Norwegian, especially white Norwegian student teachers, of discussing the existence of prejudiced attitudes, ideas, and practices towards marginalised groups of people (Eriksen & Stein, 2021, p. 9). The misconception within the Norwegian educational discourse, that by acknowledging the presence of racialisation, one reproduces racism, mirrors these reluctances from the student teachers. Furthermore, Eriksen and Stein (2021, p. 10) provide an overview of the alternative approaches that are often used by Norwegian teachers to maintain the narrative of assumed objectivity. The first approach mentioned is celebrating diversity and de-politicising the ways that social differences are constructed and engaged. This approach shows the privilege of choosing to avoid addressing social and political injustice and inequality. The second approach is linked to “white discomfort”, which is, according to Eriksen and Stein (2021, pp. 11–12), framed as care for their students. As discussions about race and racialised structures may trigger discomforting emotions, the easiest way to avoid these emotions is to avoid these challenging discussions. Although the commitment to anti-racist values and attitudes are conveyed by the teachers in this study, Eriksen and Stein (2021, p. 14) suggest that “by upholding the ideals of celebrating diversity, discourses of individuality and value-neutral education, they fail to address the underlying power structures and epistemologies that reinforce unjust structures through knowledge production and everyday social relations”. Thus, the aim to foster anti-racist and anti-discriminatory values and attitudes through the production of intercultural incompetence falls short. Therefore, as Eriksen and Stein (2021) point towards, an alternative to intercultural competence as the main pedagogical framework for teaching about topics such as race, sexuality, gender, and social justice, is essential to look at.

## 5.2 Critical literacy and the pedagogy of discomfort

An alternative to focusing on the concepts of *culture*, such as intercultural competence, is to aim for critical literacy. According to Morgan (1997), English in all its forms can never be seen as neutral communication, between its speakers, to convey factual information and fictional truths. Therefore, a focus on power relations, uncovering who the sender of the message is, and who the receiver is, seems crucial to include in the EFL education to achieve a more socially just education. Moreover, this type of literacy challenges how language is used as a tool to maintain oppressive, discriminatory, or non-inclusive power structures. The concept of critical pedagogies is then relevant to include in this discussion, which is explained as:

A theorised practice of teaching that opposes the dominant ideologies, institutions and material conditions of society which maintain socioeconomic inequality. Within education this radical movement aim to develop students' critical awareness of those oppressive social forces, including school structures and knowledges. So enlightened, the students will be empowered and will demonstrate their emancipation by practicing active citizenship to help right society's wrongs. Thus individual selves and society at large will be transformed through this language of critique and possibility and through social action. (Morgan, 1997, p. 6).

In teaching critical literacy, the hegemonic norm, which is presented in language through text and media, is challenged. The learners are acquiring a skill which will guide them on their way to become justice-oriented citizens, which Vasquez et al. (2013, p. 8) suggest should be the goal in order to re-define and dismantle oppressive power structures. The justice-oriented citizen is someone who has the ability to go beyond the surface structure of issues, and "engage in sustained work to contribute to change that could have transformative effects for the communities in which they live and the people who live there" (Vasquez et al., 2013, p. 8). This does however demand a teaching practice that dares to acknowledge issues of discrimination, marginalisation, and oppression, dares to question, and challenge those issues, and engages in discussions of how these structures may be dismantled and re-constructed in a socially just direction. Vasquez et al. (2013) present multiple pedagogic



strategies for achieving critical literacy, for instance disrupting commonplace, which forces us to re-think everyday practices and beliefs that have been taken for granted. They suggest that common sense is cultural sense, which should be questioned, because whose gets to define what common sense is? A teacher could for instance use excerpts from the chapter *Barbies and Belonging* from *The Black Flamingo* that call attention to gender stereotyping through colours and toys, and then challenge the students to question why barbies and the colour pink are marketed for girls, rather than all genders. In addition to disrupting commonplace, Vasquez et al. (2013) points towards the idea of education as inquiry, instead of passively received knowledge. Thus, interrogating multiple perspectives is an important part of developing critical literacy. For instance, using the situation of the gallery from *Felix Ever After*, where Felix experiences transphobic abuse such as deadnaming, could stimulate the skill of interrogating multiple perspectives in the EFL education. One could have the learners answer questions such as *what are three possible perspectives you could have taken to better understand the act of deadnaming? and how might each of these three perspectives help you to think differently about it?* (Vasquez et al., 2013, p. 12). Furthermore, Vasquez et al. (2013, pp. 12–15) suggest that teachers need to adopt a critical perspective, which entails interrogating privilege, status, oppression, as well as using resistance, dialogue, and debates as tools to engage politically in everyday life, inside and outside the classroom. They also point out that by focusing on the non-normative in working to develop critical literacy, the students become aware of the socio-political forces at work, thus are able to disrupt, and re-write these norms. Lastly, critical literacy involves action. Not only should critically literate citizens be able to point out an issue, for instance hunger, and draw connections between hunger, racism, discrimination, and poverty, but they should also have the ability to see how their own practices personally engage in maintaining hunger, racism, discrimination, and poverty (Vasquez et al., 2013). Therefore, in order to actually partake in social change, we need to become aware of our personal involvement in maintaining status quo.

Achieving the level of critical literacy that is expected from the justice-oriented citizen, entails daring to experience discomfort in interrogating issues of social injustice. According to Røthing (2019, p. 44), “Pedagogy of Discomfort” was introduced as a pedagogical framework by Megan Boler in 1999 to engage educators and students to handle themes linked to difference, social justice, and racism, in ways that may trigger emotional discomfort. Furthermore, the concept of discomforting pedagogy builds on various anti-discriminatory

and anti-racial traditions, aiming to dismantle social injustice. These pedagogies draw from the knowledges of critical theoretical frameworks and perspectives, such as CRT, Queer theory, intersectionality, critical whiteness studies, feminist studies, postcolonial studies, as well as multicultural pedagogy (Røthing, 2019, p. 44). The pedagogy of discomfort raises critique towards the tendencies of multicultural and intercultural pedagogy to essentialise cultures and difference, which may eventually reify stereotypical attributions to cultures that deviate from hegemonic constructions. According to Røthing (2019, p. 45), these pedagogies come short in anti-racial and anti-discriminatory work, due to the centred focus around culture and cultural differences, thus developing a de-racialised discourse. However, as discussed earlier, in de-racializing the discourses of discrimination and racism, the root of these issues is overlooked and devalued. In engaging in discomforting teaching, the students are guided to critically assess their ideological values and beliefs, looking at how these are subordinated on the basis of race, gender, class, and sexuality. As Zembylas and Papamichael (2017, p. 3) point out, “pedagogy of discomfort, then, has as its aim to uncover and question the deeply embedded emotional dimensions that frame and shape daily habits, routines and unconscious complicity with hegemony”. Moreover, it is suggested that educators’ emotional attitudes and positions towards race, racism, and intercultural education also call for critical assessment. Thus, the educator must be willing to experience discomfort, when handling topics of race, sexuality, gender, and social injustice.

### 5.3 Examples from the novels to use when teaching for critical literacy and raising awareness around the intersections of LGBTQ+ people of colour

Using *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo* in the Norwegian EFL classroom gives a way to open conversations about marginalisation and difference, with a focus on the intersections of LGBTQ+ people of colour. *Hurricane Child*, being a MG novel, is aimed at children from 8-13 years of age. The novel would be both suitable to use in year 5-7 in the Norwegian EFL classroom, as well as in year 8-10, where more in-depth conversations could take place about themes of racism, gender, sexuality, and identity as a whole. The novel allows for using a variety of strategies for learning the English language. For instance, having the students write letters, such as the one Caroline writes to Kalinda would be a great way to practice expressive and creative writing. Communication and oral skills could also be practiced

through discussions about themes and topics of the novel, where reflection is actively encouraged. This resonates well with developing critical literacy, as well as daring to handle discomfiting topics. Whilst *Hurricane Child* is a MG novel, *Felix Ever After* and *The Black Flamingo* are categorised as YA fiction, and due to the mentions of drug abuse, and engaging in sexual relations, they might be less suitable for the classroom. However, they provide examples of what some multiple marginalised people may experience in a genuine way. On the basis of this, it would be fruitful to implement *Felix Ever After* and *The Black Flamingo* into the EFL classroom through carefully selected text excerpts. Furthermore, all three novels provide excellent starting points to acknowledge, and challenge structures of oppression and power relations.

To place the concept of critical literacy and discomfiting pedagogy into of the teaching practice of the Norwegian EFL classroom, using *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo* allow for exploring the discomforts of race and racism, and heteronormative and gender stereotype hegemonies. As Norwegian classrooms, especially in rural parts of Norway, are majorly consisting of white children, bringing in different perspectives might be crucial to lead our students towards developing intercultural competence, critical literacy, and a better understanding of the past and present of race relations in the world, among many objectives that are in the schools' mandate for the education. Farag (2021, p. 20) states that teachers, in this case social studies teachers of white students are doing their students a disservice by not assisting them in exploring perspectives of people of different races. He also writes that "one of the most important roles we have as educators is to help students sift through competing perspectives and develop well-rounded political views and identities" (Farag, 2021, p. 19). However, to be able to teach and navigate through discomfiting topics, such as racism, teachers need to gain sufficient awareness around marginalisation and difference, which follow the concept of discomfiting pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (2009, pp. 34–35) explains how white teachers often struggle with acknowledging difference, opting for the colour-blind approach to racially and culturally diverse classrooms. This approach is flawed, as one cannot claim to not see race and ethnicity in a classroom full of ethnically and racially diverse students. At the same time, teachers are including diverse stories of marginalised communities as part of the curriculum. But as Farag (2021, p. 20) points out, these stories are often pushed "to the fringes" of the teaching practice, for instance Black history month. They should instead, make an effort to weave the experiences of marginalised people throughout

the whole curriculum (Farag, 2021, p. 20). This can be done through carefully selecting teaching material for the EFL classroom that presents the students with instances of racism, racial identity struggles, and gendered racism, to mention a few.

Selecting these materials may be difficult, as they must fit the students' proficiency levels of the English language, as well as their reading skills. However, because *The Black Flamingo* is a novel in verse, and presents as a collection of poetry, it reads differently than a chunk of text. There are metaphors and imagery that colour the story that is conveyed. Using a novel in verse, such as *The Black Flamingo*, increases the accessibility and provides breathing space for the reader. In many ways it becomes less overwhelming than prose, and it might be easier for the reader to grasp what the author is aiming to convey, which is a reason for choosing to include this novel in this study. According to Atta (Link, 2021), he is aiming to be accessible to those who do not share the experiences of queer and Black marginalisation, as well as creating a space for those who are queer and Black. He says that he wants "a window for people to understand what it is like to be Black and queer", which is reflected in the way Atta has written the novel, making a choice to be accessible for reluctant readers and dyslexic readers, as well as white and straight people, in order to let them read a Black queer story. He also argues that if they are given a way in, they will appreciate these stories (Link, 2021).

### 5.3.1 Talking about racism in the EFL classroom

Some of the poems in *The Black Flamingo* are well suited to use in the Norwegian EFL classroom as a door to challenge the discomfiting issues of racism, privilege, and racial and ethnic identity. For instance, a scene depicted in the first chapter of the novel, where Michael's mother reassures him that he is not half anything, saying that "don't let anyone tell you that you are half-Black and half-white. Half-Cypriot and Half-Jamaican. You are a full human being. It's never as simple as being half and half" (Atta, 2019, p. 35). The poem *I Come From* (Atta, 2019, pp. 217–218) could also be used to explore what it means to have several cultural, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. Furthermore, there is a monologue in the novel which highlights the ignorance of racist beauty standards and fetishization of individuals based on racial features.

“When a Black person says they’re only into white people that’s internalised racism. When a white person says they’re only into Black people that’s fetishisation, which is also a form of racism. If their skin or racialised features matter more to you than the person within, that’s racism.” (Atta, 2019, p. 262).<sup>6</sup>

This whole monologue is brilliant to use as a starting point in challenging racialised beauty standards, as well as internalised and hidden racism. Another poem by Atta (2019, pp. 334–335) that is powerful with regard to building awareness around marginalisation and discrimination against Black people, as well as lifting the joy and pride that can be found in being part of a community, is *What it’s Like to be a Black Drag Artist (For those of you who aren’t)* (Atta, 2019, pp. 334–335). The potential of these poems to raise awareness around the marginalisation and discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people of colour is great. However, in order to achieve this, whilst avoiding the pitfalls of intercultural approaches, as discussed above, the focus when presenting these poems for the EFL classroom should be on challenging what is perceived as the norm.

Likewise, in *Felix Ever After*, the topic of race and racism is thoroughly explored in the novel. Below are three excerpts from the novel, which will also be beneficial as conversation starters in anti-discriminatory, and anti-racial pedagogy. The first text excerpt below, is fitting to use to explore the racialised beauty standard that is present in societies around the world, especially within Western societies. However, to deal with this topic in fruitful way, acknowledging these standards are crucial, which requires developing critical literacy.

The first time I saw him in acrylics class, I kind of immediately hated the guy. He’s the sort of person the world adores, just based on the way he looks, a little like the way people obsess over men like Chris Hemsworth and Chris Evans and Chris Pine and all the other famous Chrises, plus Ryan Gosling, claiming they’re all liberal and that they aren’t racist and that they’re feminists, but not really thinking about why they’re so obsessed with white men, and why they don’t love any people of colour the same way. I love that I have brown skin. I love that I’m queer, and that I’m trans. But sometimes, I can’t help

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<sup>6</sup> The entire monologue is quoted and discussed in further detail in section 3.1.2, pp. 35–36.

think how much easier my life would be if I was someone like Austin. (Callender, 2021b, pp. 154–155).<sup>7</sup>

In *Hurricane Child*, the topic of colourism is explored, and the following excerpt could be used in the EFL classroom to discuss how and why darker skin tones are being discriminated against in larger numbers than those of lighter skin tones. This is also crucial to gain knowledge of if the students are to become aware of oppression that is rooted in anti-Black racism, as well as racist standards of beauty.

Missus Wilhelmina had a great-great-great-grandpa from Saint Martin that she likes to talk about all the time because he made her clear-skinned. Missus Wilhelmina says that Saint Thomas and Saint John and Saint Croix (but not Water Island, because she always forgets about Water Island) and all the other islands in all the Caribbean are no good, seeing that they're filled with so many Black people. In class, she says that the Caribbean is almost as bad as Africa itself.

My skin is darker than even the paintings of African queens hanging in tourist shops, same paintings my mom would buy so she could hang them on her living room walls. Their skin is painted with Black and purple and blue, and reminds me of the night sky, or of Black stones on the side of the beach, rubbed smooth by the waves. I secretly think the women in those paintings are beautiful, but Missus Wilhelmina told me one morning that I have to be a good girl since it'll be hard for me to get married with skin as dark as mine. My dad never says anything like that, but he likes to ask me, "How'd your skin get so dark, Caroline?" Both he and my ma have skin as brown as honey. "How'd your skin get so dark?"

Seeing that I'm the littlest girl with the darkest skin and the thickest hair in the whole Catholic school, Missus Wilhelmina doesn't like me – no, not at all. I get a smacking on my bum for everything: not looking her in the eye when spoken to, laughing too loud during playtime, thinking I'm better than everyone else because I know the answers to her questions in class, for asking too many questions in class, for not crying

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<sup>7</sup> An analysis of this excerpt is provided in section 3.1.1, pp. 27–28.

after those bum smackings. I always refuse to cry after a bum smacking. (Callender, 2021c, pp. 9–11).<sup>8</sup>

### 5.3.2 Queering the EFL classroom

If one is to teach about identity, which is a part of the core curriculum, as stated previously in this chapter, including gender identity into the discussion is important. Inclusiveness, openness and allyship around genderqueer identities are significant to encourage our students to gain knowledge. This may help shift the discourses of gender and sex, for instance to differentiating sex and gender, as well as provide insight into different experiences of gender identity. As shown throughout this thesis, the three novels are well-suited as learning materials that can create awareness around genderqueer experiences, as well as how the presence of a dichotomised view on genders can be non-inclusive for a large number of people. For instance, there are multiple excerpts and poems in *The Black Flamingo* that present the topics of gender stereotyping, gender identity, and understandings of what masculinity and femininity means. The poem *Some Men Have Vaginas* (Atta, 2019, p. 196), and the depiction of the drag performance at the end of the novel (Atta, 2019, pp. 340–341) are great illustrations of this. Gender identity is also huge theme throughout *Felix Ever After*, as the plot follows Felix’s journey towards discovering his gender identity:

Hey mom,

Here’s something I haven’t told you yet: even though I came out to you as a trans guy in an email – yeah, exactly, that one you never responded to – I’m not sure if I’m actually a guy. It’s a hard feeling to describe. It’s like... just this sense, this feeling, in my gut that something isn’t totally right. I know that I’m definitely not a girl. But that’s all I know.

I’ve been doing research. trying to look up different definitions and labels and terms. Some people say we shouldn’t need labels. That we are trying to box ourselves in too much. But I don’t know. It feels good to me, to know I’m not alone. That someone else has felt the same way I’ve felt, experienced the same things I’ve experienced. It’s validating.

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<sup>8</sup> An analysis for this excerpt is provided in section 3.1.1.

But it's embarrassing, too. I made this big deal about being a guy. And now I'm, what, changing my mind? Or is it my identity evolving? I don't know. (Callender, 2021b, pp. 58–59).

In this excerpt, the restrictions of gender identities are explored. Felix's letter to his mother opens up the possibility for classroom discussions about the necessity of labels, and whether we need to "box ourselves in", which is an important social structure that should be challenged and questioned.

According to Cahnmann-Taylor et al. (2022, p. 132), language education use curricula, pedagogy, research, and materials to create what is described as a "mostly heterosexual space". They suggest that studying language from a queer perspective provides teachers and students with opportunities to deconstruct the norm, and question what is conceived as normal. Furthermore, they imply that by queering the pedagogy, space is created to re-imagine what is "possible, equitable, and inclusive in our real and imagined world" (Cahnmann-Taylor et al., 2022, pp. 149–150). This can be done through guiding our students through conversations about what normal is when it comes to sexuality and gender identity, and why it is perceived to be normal. However, introducing queer literature to the EFL classroom, some content may reify heteronormative stereotypes, or not live up to the full potential of disrupting commonplace. Nevertheless, if the material is used correctly to engage students to reflect and challenge the status quo, queering the pedagogy of the EFL classroom may be possible. For instance, using the conversations between Felix and his friends, as shown below, about heteronormativity, monosexism and labels might be a starting point for discussions and teaching activities that explore these topics.

"Is everyone here queer?" "Yeah, of course," Marisol says. "I only hang out with gay people". [...] "Straight people are so exhausting." "Did you see that article on whether women have any value if they don't get married and have children?" Austin asks. "I see at least one thing a day that makes me wonder if the straight people are all right." "And then there was that article saying that queer TV shows are making more people gay." "I never saw a single TV show with a gay person until, like, last year," Leah says, "and I didn't turn out to be straight. So." "The shows aren't making people gay," Austin says.



“They’re just making people realise it’s even... I don’t know, a possibility. It’s like we’re all brainwashed from the time we’re babies to think that we have to be straight.” “The straights say that we’ve got an agenda to turn people gay,” Marisol says, “but then will try to force toddlers on each other and say it’s *so cute* and they’re *destined to get married*. Seriously.” (Callender, 2021b, pp. 79–80)

This quote, alongside Ezra’s reflection on the necessity of labels (Callender, 2021b, p. 81)<sup>9</sup>, are disruptive of the preconceived norms of monosexuality and heteronormativity, as they criticise them, and also re-construct the discourses of sexuality and labels. The excerpt above dismantles heteronormativity as a status quo and challenges a double standard within that structure, whereas Ezra’s reflection raises the question of what the world would be like without labels. This would be interesting to explore in the EFL classroom through a learning activity, for instance through an assignment where the goal would be to present an ideal world. Would the world be a better place without labels, or would there be negative outcomes as well? Again, the skill of interrogating multiple perspectives will be of importance here and is a factor in developing critical literacy.

In the three novels, the authors have provided the readers with situations where the characters experience violences of homophobia, and transphobia, as well as discrimination fuelled by gendered stereotypes. These situations would be rewarding to include in the EFL classroom to portray what someone who experiences discrimination and marginalisation might go through, and the severity of it. For instance, there is a part in *Felix Ever After* where *Felix* is called a misogynist for being transgender:

Finally on the third date as we sat at Starbucks, Marisol suddenly said, “You know, I haven’t been able to put my finger on why I’m not interested in you, but I think I understand now. In the end, I just don’t think I can date a misogynist.” [...] “You deciding to be a guy instead of a girl feels inherently misogynistic.” She told me, “You can’t be a feminist and decide you don’t want to be a woman anymore”. (Callender, 2021b, p. 30).

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<sup>9</sup> Ezra’s reflection is quoted and analysed in section 3.3.1, pp. 54

The conversation between Felix, Austin, and Leah where Austin is defending himself for the transphobic actions he has performed (Callender, 2021b, pp. 319–323), will also be of interest to use in this context. In *Hurricane Child*, the part where Caroline is outed for her letter to Kalinda telling her she loves her is also a good way to introduce a conversation about homophobia, and perhaps more accessible for the younger students. “There is a moment of silence. And then the hyenas jump to circle me instead, all of them attacking at once, saying I’m going to hell and they should light me on fire now to get a head start” (Callender, 2021c, p. 126). This situation is one that most children within the Norwegian EFL classroom would recognise as abusive and could be an opportunity to reflect upon how to treat others whose identity might differ from our own.

### 5.3.2 Intersections of marginalised identities

*Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo* can be used to create awareness around the intersecting ways in which queer, and genderqueer people of colour are discriminated against in the Norwegian EFL classroom. The novels are filled with situations where the characters’ intersecting identities are the focus of attention, for instance this line in *Felix Ever After*: “What is it about me that no one likes, that no one wants? It’s like it’s too much for other people – me having brown skin, and being queer, and being trans on top of that...” (Callender, 2021b, p. 74). Callender also calls attention to the lives of trans people of colour, and the violence they face. “I know that, as a trans person of colour, my life expectancy is in my early thirties, just because of the sort of violence people like me face everyday” (Callender, 2021b, p. 124). These two quotes provide the learners with a foundation to learn about intersectionality, and the discrimination that multiple marginalised people are experiencing. Namely, because there is an implied connection between being Black, transgender, queer, and having a lower life-expectancy. These are all intersecting factors which close the window of opportunity considerably with regard to education, career, and relations. Juan and Colin (2008, pp. 18–19) point to the high risk of queer, transgender people of colour facing discrimination in employment, which can also be linked to stigmatisation of the same group of people in the educational system. Hollibaugh and Weiss (2015, p. 21) claim that transgender people are four times more likely than the general population in the U.S. to live below the poverty rates. They continue to explain that as much as 34 percent of

transgender people of colour have an income below \$10.000 per year. These are the outlooks which Callender depicts through Felix's concern for his future, as he is uncertain that he will be admitted to Brown University. Moreover, according to Alonzo (2020, p. 73), African American students suffer academically from what he refers to as institutional microaggressions with learning environments where white students are favoured, resulting in generally lower grades for African American students. Microaggressions such as these contribute to difficulties for African American students getting accepted into higher education due to being placed in lower tracks. Furthermore, Alonzo (2020, p. 74) points toward low levels of self-esteem and self-efficacy as a result of institutional microaggressions, such as academic tracking, as it may reduce motivation and drive in the student. It is not explicitly stated in the novel why Felix feels as if he will never be admitted to Brown, but his low self-esteem and self-efficacy is likely a product of knowing that he does not have the same academic privileges as white, cisgender people.

Furthermore, the following text excerpt challenges the marginalisation and discrimination towards people of multiple minorities, whilst also calling out the heteronormative, gender stereotype and racial hegemony of literature and media. This excerpt would be especially beneficial to use to challenge the students to critically assess what they read and see online, and point out instances of heteronormative, gender stereotype, and racial hegemony, thus developing critical literacy.

The fact that I'm Black, the fact that I'm queer, the fact that I'm trans. "it's like every identity I have... the more different I am from everyone else... the less interested people are. The less... lovable I feel, I guess. The love interests in books, or in movies or TV shows, are always white, cis, straight, blond hair, blue eyes. [...] It becomes a little hard, I guess, to convince myself I deserve the kind of love you see on movie screens." [...] "I guess it feels like I have one marginalisation too many, sometimes. So many differences that I can never fit in with everyone else." (Callender, 2021b, pp. 219–220).

This quote portrays the complexity of Felix's identity, and his inner struggles of not fitting white hegemonic standards of beauty and worthiness. These depictions of the ideal have been normalised through racist, sexist, transphobic and homophobic discourses within

the hegemonic cultures involved. Being majorly exposed to popular culture where white, cis, straight, blond-haired, blue-eyed people are standardised and romanticised, when he is none of those, builds a foundation for low self-esteem and damages his sense of self-worth, which are apparent through Felix's words.

Additionally, the stereotype for LGBTQ+ people is noteworthy to mention in this context, as it is constantly being challenged in Callender's work. According to Hollibaugh and Weiss (2015, p. 19), LGBTQ+ people are usually portrayed as wealthy consumers with high incomes, which is not the reality for the majority. "The love interests in books, or in movies or TV shows, are always white, cis, straight, blond hair, blue eyes" (Callender, 2021b, p. 219) is an example of the misrepresentation of the demographic within the LGBTQ+ community, which is discriminatory towards LGBTQ+ people of colour without high income and successful careers. Felix does not meet the stereotype for LGBTQ+ people that Hollibaugh and Weiss (2015, p. 19) describe, nor is someone like him represented in a lot of books, movies, or TV shows, as he mentions, which is a topic that would be fruitful to discuss with students. Throughout *Felix Ever After*, Callender disrupts the common misconception of LGBTQ+ people being white, wealthy, and only consisting of gay cisgender men, thus also demonstrating the access of privilege for gay cisgender men. This is illustrated when Felix's character comments: "gay cis men, especially white men – it's like they're one identity away from being what they'd consider *normal*" (Callender, 2021b, p. 273).

Furthermore, introducing the EFL classroom to the erased history of transgender and non-binary people of colour in the LGBTQ+ movement, creates further possibilities for understanding the intersections of multiple marginalised communities. A question to explore in the classroom to encourage critical thinking using the following text excerpt from *Felix Ever After*, would be to explain why these important figures have been removed from LGBTQ+ history. Perhaps pointing the students towards exploring systems of oppression.

"The pride march is in a couple of weeks," they say. "But sometimes, it can be difficult to find pride for ourselves. There's very little visibility for people of all genders, and many cisgender people don't believe transgender and non-binary people deserve the same rights. It's even more difficult for transgender and non-binary people of colour, and especially transgender women of colour. Though we have transgender women of colour

to thank for the Stonewall Riots and the Pride march, they're often erased and ignored, even by other queer people within the LGBTQIA+ community. How do we find and cultivate pride for each other and ourselves when we're in a world that seems like it doesn't want us to exist?"

[...] "Gay cis men, especially white men – it's like they're one identity away from being what they'd consider *normal*, so they hold that identity over us, enjoy their privilege and power in their little elitist group, try to push the rest of us away." (Callender, 2021b, pp. 273–274).

These examples from the novel would be valuable to include in the EFL classroom as a means to develop critical literacy. To have the students interrogate the connections between these intersections leads the way to compare and contrast the privileges that are often overlooked and underappreciated by a majority of the Norwegian learners. Furthermore, the poems *I Want to be a Pink Flamingo* (Atta, 2019, p. 194), *What it's Like to be a Black Drag Artist (For those of you who aren't)* (Atta, 2019, pp. 334–335), and Michael's final drag performance (Atta, 2019, pp. 338–345) from *The Black Flamingo* are also of significance to use in the classroom when aiming to raise awareness around intersecting identities. The excerpt below presents how Michael experiences his multiple minority identity as something empowering, yet structures of oppression are acknowledged and challenged. Thus, providing a Black joy story suitable to use in the EFL classroom, which challenges and re-constructs social structures of discrimination towards LGBTQ+ people of colour.

As a young flamingo

I was given pink toys.

My family loved me,

My colour and flamboyance.

My difference was noted, not degraded.

It still made me feel separate.

The Black Flamingo looks in the mirror

of the salt lake's surface and doesn't  
understand why a shadow stares back  
at him. He doesn't look like the other  
flamingos around him, he feels foreign  
to his own flock, within his own family.

I always saw Black excellence around me  
And online but it didn't feel like it was mine  
Because I was not perceived as fully Black.  
I feel queerness made me even less Black.

Being both Black and queer,  
Affirming that I exist,  
I am here and I have been here  
Long before this moment,  
The first people were Black  
And queerness predates its modern meaning.  
Queerness predates its derogatory meaning.  
Queerness predates colonialism  
and Christianity.  
Queerness predates any hate attached to it.

I call myself Black.  
I call myself queer.  
I call myself beautiful.  
I call myself eternal.  
I call myself iconic,  
I call myself futuristic.

You can call me  
The Black Flamingo.  
(Atta, 2019, pp. 340–341)

## 6.0 Conclusion

The primary research objective for this thesis has been to explore the possibilities of using Black queer YA, and MG literature in the EFL classroom, as a means to foster critical literacy and awareness around the intersections of multiple marginalised people. Throughout writing this thesis and analysing the primary texts both with regard to discriminatory discourses of race, sexuality, and gender, alongside the joy and empowerment that lie in these queer Black joy stories, I understand the potential that *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo* hold. Along with other similar stories, these might serve the EFL classroom with possibilities for developing critical literacy and awareness with regard to structures of oppression.

In choosing to focus on the discrimination and marginalisation that the characters are subjected to throughout the storylines of the novels, has allowed for a critical view towards the hegemony of race, sexuality, and gender, powered by the experiences of the characters. Furthermore, it has been beneficial to look into the hegemony of gender and sexuality in the Caribbean because of the relations between the authors, the primary texts, and the Caribbean. Thus, exploring Caribbean traditions, norms, and values through the lens of the novels, provided a bigger picture to understand these aggressions. Moreover, the larger context of oppressive structures, such as history, geography, cultures, and traditions, emphasises the complexity of how these structures are constructed, and how they are actively maintained by hegemonic discourses. The intersecting violences that are illustrated throughout the three novels, are many, and are portrayed realistically through the experiences of the characters. Some of these violences are obvious and easy to point out, whereas some of them operate at the level of the everyday. Thus, Black queer literature, such as *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo* are amazing sources for opening up conversations about oppressive structures, where they are acknowledged and re-imagined, all whilst providing empowering, joyful stories of Black queer characters.

Furthermore, when exploring the intersections of multiple marginalised people through literature and the violences they may encounter, there is a need to look for strengths that may lie in Black queer stories of joy with regard to inclusiveness, joy, and idealisations of a better world for Black queer people. As a counter voice to Black/LGBTQ+ themed stories that mainly focus on conveying experiences of discrimination, aggressions, and marginalisation, using



queer Black joy stories seems to open up for a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of the experiences of queer people of colour. Moreover, in order to re-imagine the discourses of race, gender, and sexuality, it is just as important to provide readers with stories of joy, empowerment, love, and acceptance.

The benefits of introducing these novels into the EFL classroom are many. For instance, the possibility of guiding the students to reflect and develop critical thinking skills, which can be linked to the recurring theme of expression through writing and art, as discovered in the three novels. Here, the authors' choice to include expressive writing through letters, e-mails, and poems, as well as the expressive art of painting, more specifically creating self-portraits, provides our students with examples of how expressive writing or art can assist with the exploration of our own minds. This can be beneficial in the process of developing critical literacy, as one has to be aware of oneself in order to be aware of others.

Another theme that was explored in this thesis, was the way in which the characters of the novels are able to reclaim the power of definition. The power of definition is here linked to the act of reclaiming the right to define ourselves, not letting other people or oppressive powers define who we are or who we should be. For instance, both authors provide a journey for their characters to discover their own identity, which may deviate from the stereotype notions of what it means to be for instance queer, transgender, genderqueer, Black, or mixed-race. Moreover, the authors turn the reader's attention towards the Black queer history, which has been more or less erased from the LGBTQ+ history. To re-imagine the discourses of race, sexuality, and gender, providing readers with awareness towards the Black voices of the LGBTQ+ movement, is essential in understanding the intersections of LGBTQ+ people of colour. This is also transferable to the EFL classroom, as being able to define ourselves is crucial when re-constructing the discourses of race, gender, sexuality, and identity. Moreover, guiding our students towards understanding how marginalised groups of people, are the only ones who should hold the power of defining themselves could be done by the use of queer Black joy stories, such as the primary texts of this thesis.

Furthermore, this thesis has argued for the inclusion Black LGBTQ+ themed literature in the EFL classroom, where didactic theories linked to concepts such as intercultural competence, and critical literacy were natural to explore. The raised focus on intercultural competence and critical literacy in the Norwegian school curricula clearly suggests a wish, and

a need to stimulate cultural awareness and inclusion. Moreover, by focusing on developing critical literacy, educators and students will presumably acquire the skill of identifying discrimination within institutions of power through critically assessing texts and multimedia. In understanding the relations between power and language, students will be more equipped to recognise and challenge discrimination, social injustice, and marginalisation of minority groups. This also provides a possibility to create awareness of the intersections of multiple marginalised communities. What has become evident with regard to this, is that when the most marginalised members of society are liberated, all are liberated. Thus, by using Black queer literature to raise awareness about the most oppressed, the ability to raise awareness of other oppressed marginalities is opened up.

The challenges that might arise when using Black queer literature in the Norwegian classroom should also be considered, such as the possibility of reifying stereotypes. For instance, the ability to recognise racial stereotypes, heteronormative stereotypes, or gender stereotypes is important when bringing minority texts into the classroom. Also, being careful and talking about the systems of injustice and oppression, rather than people and individuals has shown its importance in re-imagining the hegemonic discourses of race, sexuality, and gender. Having the ability to view these texts as fiction, and not actual representations of the experiences of all minority groups is crucial as an EFL teacher, because this will influence the students and the way they approach these themes. If teachers of these texts are able to do this, bringing texts such as *Hurricane Child*, *Felix Ever After*, and *The Black Flamingo* into the Norwegian EFL classroom to raise awareness around the intersections of LGBTQ+ people of colour, may be feasible. Furthermore, I suggest that the inclusion of Black queer literature in the classroom, even if it's not worked with through the approach of critical literacy, will be beneficial to further an inclusive education by introducing our students to a variety of characters and storylines that show diversity and encourages reflection.

### 6.1 Further research and final reflections

This thesis has provided an insight into how using Black queer literature may be beneficial in the EFL classroom when stimulating for critical literacy, as well as open up conversations about structures of oppression and how these can be dismantled. When starting the work on this study, I was interested in how these texts could be used in the EFL

classroom. However, I chose to focus on the potentials that lies within these novels with regard to understanding the intersecting forms of oppression faced by LGBTQ+ people of colour. Nevertheless, as this study has been a textual analysis, didactic approaches to using these novels, and other similar texts in the EFL classroom to further the awareness of intersectionality, have not been explored in this thesis. Moreover, through coupling literary analysis with didactics research and reflection, it has led to further understanding the importance of using literature in the EFL classroom. Thus, creating interesting objectives for further research. For instance, researching different didactic approaches to teaching these, or similar texts, with regard to developing critical literacy and awareness around the intersections of multiple marginalised people, would be beneficial to EFL teachers in Norway. Furthermore, the application of CRT and intersectionality within the education is broadly researched in U.S. contexts, as well as in British contexts, however, there is still a lot to explore in the Norwegian setting, as the demography, traditions, values, and history are different to that of the U.S. and the U.K. Thus, I urge scholars to research this in a Norwegian context, and its implications for Norwegian schools and primary and secondary education.

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