

HOW-TO-WRITE WITH COLOR?

The Importance of Good Representation of
Ethnic Diversity in Young Adult Fantasy
Literature

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HOW-TO-WRITE WITH COLOR

"There is power in seeing oneself in literature." - Sandra Hughes-Hassell



CHAPTERS IN
THIS DISSERTATION:

**The Power of Counter-
Storytelling in Young Adult
Literature**

**How To Create Ethnic
Diversity**

**Recommendations
For Aspiring Writers**

The Importance of Good Representation of Ethnic Diversity in Young Adult Fantasy Literature

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PREFACE

Before you lies my dissertation “How-to-write with color?”, an advisory argument for *good* representation of ethnic minorities in young adult literature. It was written in fulfillment of the Cultural Studies program requirements at the Faculty of Arts of KU Leuven.

The topic of my dissertation is primarily inspired by the organization We Need Diverse Books™ (WNDB™). WNDB™ is an American organization that advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects the lives of *all* young people. Their mission is to give every child the opportunity to see themselves in the pages of a book and, therefore, actively search books that feature diverse characters.

Still, a diverse book has also the obligation of honoring the diverse experience. As a Goodreads user myself, I witness how books are not only reviewed on the quantity of diverse characters but also on the quality of their depiction. As if by pure fate, I found a Tumblr blog that dedicates their content to how-to-write posts about ethnic diverse characters. Writing With Color, the blog that has ultimately also lend me the final title of my dissertation, has given me much insight on how ethnic diverse character are generally depicted and how a writer can become aware of racial issues at the base of misrepresentation. The blog encourages change in the art and heart of writers, stimulating them to understand the harm and recognize the negative nature of misrepresentation, and educate them on what good and better representation entails. And as such, I found my research based in an endearing, contemporary and sometimes difficult discussion.

Hopefully, I will succeed in articulating to the reader the overall message of both WNDB™ and Writing With Color: stereotypes and common tropes need to make way for authentic and varied characters that reflect a more truthful version of the (ethnic) diversity in our world.

**“DIVERSITY IS NOT IMPORTANT.
DIVERSITY IS REALITY.”**

Malinda Lo, Chinese-American author and co-founder of WNDB™

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing this note of gratitude is the finishing touch on my dissertation. This intensive period has been one of seeking knowledge, understanding that knowledge and educating myself with the gained knowledge. This dissertation has shown me the existence of important issues in our multicultural society and shapes one of the solutions I personally believe might advance, in small steps nonetheless, the way different cultures will feel included and eventually interact with each other. It is here I would like to take a moment to write my thank you notes to the many (or few) people who supported and helped me throughout this period.

First, I thank my supervisor Prof. Dr. Anneleen Masschelein. Thank you for your willingness and time to direct me through my research and give wise and helpful feedback whenever and wherever necessary.

I like to thank my dear friends. Without your colorful presence, this period would have been rather grey.

A thank you to my siblings. Our endless discussions were motivation to search clear arguments to convey my message.

I thank my parents. Your belief in me has been my drive these last years. Thank you for the opportunities you have given me, always ever so caring and without expecting anything in return but my happiness.

Finally, I thank initiatives, organizations and blogs like We Need Diverse Books [™] and Writing With Color. Without you, the need for inclusion and representation could not, maybe would not be articulated outside the academic world. It takes a small step to begin our path to change.

Siham Machkour

NEDERLANDSTALIGE SAMENVATTING

Op heden ontvangt de creatieve industrie veel kritiek op het gebrek aan etnische representatie, zowel in hun werknemers als in hun producten. Zo getuigen wij 'whitewashing' op het grote scherm en een overaanbod aan blanke boekprotagonisten in de uitgeverijsector. Het laatste voorbeeld krijgt de focus in deze proefschrift.

Toch kunnen we spreken van een trage verandering in de uitgeverijsector. Sinds 1994, houdt de Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) het aantal boeken bij dat door Afro-Amerikaanse, Aziatisch-Amerikaanse, Inheems Amerikaanse en Latino individuen werd geschreven en/of getekend. Over een periode van 20 jaar naderde het aantal multiculturele boeken rond 10% met een plotse stijging in 2014 naar 14%. Een positieve prestatie, zegt CCB, maar één goed jaar garandeert een lange termijn verandering en niet-blanke schrijvers en tekenaars zijn nog steeds ondervertegenwoordigd in de sector. Van de 393 boeken die gepubliceerd werden over etnische minderheden, werden daarvan 57% geschreven en/of getekend door makers die niet behoorde tot diezelfde etnische groep. Met de oprichting van We Need Diverse Books™ (WNDB™) in datzelfde jaar, gelooft CCBC dat het aanbod van schrijvers en tekenaars van een etnische minderhedengroep zal stijgen in de toekomst. Bovendien sensibiliseert WNDB™ het publiek over het probleem van etnische representatie in de uitgeverijsector, een streefdoel dat ook mijn proefschrift weerspiegelt.

Deze proefschrift streeft ernaar om het belang van representatie van etnische diverse personages in YA-literatuur te definiëren, en specifieker wat 'goede' representatie inhoudt. Ruden Sims Bishop schreef dat literatuur de kracht heeft om menselijke ervaringen te weerspiegelen waarin lezers hun eigen leven en ervaringen in kunnen terugvinden. Vandaar dat literatuur etnisch diverse personages nodig heeft om die minderhedengroepen te tonen dat ze, als deel van onze samenleving, ook actief deelnemen in haar cultuur. Een uitspraak dat erg voor de hand ligt, maar praktisch niet tot zijn werking komt.

We zijn genoodzaakt om de realiteit van onze maatschappij te beschouwen. Critical Race Theory (CRT) legt uit dat racisme en zijn gevolgen een onontkoombaar deel uitmaken van onze samenleving. Aangezien racisme zich aanpast aan socioculturele veranderingen, critical race theoretici adviseren het nut van 'a unique voice of color', een term dat verwijst naar verhalen komende van etnische minderheden. Zulke 'counter-stories' of tegenverhalen kunnen ervoor zorgen dat de dominante groepen in de maatschappij de nadelige effecten van racisme gaan begrijpen. Op die manier helpen sociale minderheden de onzichtbare werking van racisme bloot te leggen. Hierbij moet uiteraard verondersteld worden dat deze individuen kennis en waarheid over onze samenleving bevatten.

Sandra Hughes-Hassell gelooft dan ook dat multiculturele YA-literatuur een soort tegenverhaal biedt aangezien het een stem leent aan verzwegen ervaringen en dominante vertellingen trotseert. Beide facetten lenen zich in positieve doeleinden waar etnische minderheden baat bij hebben. De overgang van kindertijd naar volwassenheid die een centrale rol krijgt in een etnisch diverse YA boek is belangrijk in de vorming van de etnische identiteit van niet-blanke jongeren, een identiteit die vaak een belangrijke rol speelt in hun leven. Bovendien bestrijdt multiculturele YA-literatuur het concept van een 'single story', een verhaal dat veronderstelt dat individuen van een bepaalde etniciteit allen maar één identiteit hebben (mede door het vastbijten aan een stereotiep gegeven om hun verhaal te vertellen). Vandaar dat multiculturele YA-literatuur de dominante cultuur van onze maatschappij kan onderwijzen door een instrument te zijn tijdens discussies rond ras, etniciteit, cultuur en racisme.

Via etnisch diverse YA-boeken ontvangen etnische minderheden de boodschap van 'deel uitmaken van' waardoor zij het gevoel krijgen dat ze deelnemen in de cultuur van onze samenleving. Verschillende discussies tonen aan waarom dat nu niet het geval is. Eén daarvan is de vraag wie deze boeken kan en mag schrijven. 'Cultural appropriation', de handeling waarbij individuen culturele tradities van een andere etniciteit overnemen zonder de intrinsieke waarde en gebruik ervan te begrijpen, blijkt een vorm van censuur te zijn waardoor schrijvers en uitgeverijen geen multicultureel verhalen durven te schrijven of publiceren uit angst voor kritiek. De gehele discussie blijkt een impasse te creëren dat de keuze stelt tussen geen of niet representatieve etnisch diversiteit in boeken. Deze observatie leidt tot de conclusie dat schrijven met een boodschap van inclusie niet automatisch leidt tot een juiste representatie van etnische minderheden.

In de schrijfwereld is er een algemene aanvaarding dat fictie schrijvers nu éénmaal ervaringen en verhalen schrijven die niet van hen zijn. Toch blijkt dat een schrijver voorzichtig moet handelen wanneer hij andere culturen en etnische minderheden als personages in zijn verhaal wil toevoegen, zelfs wanneer hij de grenzen van de fantasie oversteekt.

Wat betekent 'goede' representatie van etnisch diverse personages in YA-literatuur dan? Het onderzoek in dit proefschrift focust op schrijfadvis in het genre van fantasie om een antwoord te vinden op die vraag. Drie hoe-schrijf-ik handboeken werden vergeleken met één Tumblr-blog dat focust op schrijfadvis rond etnische diversiteit. In kort kan er gezegd worden dat het schrijven van etnische diversiteit, zelfs in de fantasie genre, verstrengeld zit in racistische en discriminerende kwesties; kwesties zoals tokenisme, 'colorblind' of niet door huidskleur geobsedeerde ideologieën, ontmenselijking en witte/blanke normativiteit. Deze kwesties, die in schrijfadvis rond etnische advies naar boven komen, tonen de prominente rol racisme in onze maatschappij heeft.

Het komt erop neer dat een schrijver zichzelf moet onderwijzen in ras-gerelateerde onderwerpen en opzoekwerk moet verrichten rond culturen en etniciteit om etnische diversiteit te kunnen includeren in zijn schrijfsels. Vooral het feit dat het advies op de blog komt van etnische minderheden kan terug gelinkt worden naar het theoretisch kader rond 'a unique voice of color'.

Het is niet simpel om een éénduidig antwoord te voorzien op wat de term 'goede representatie' inhoudt. Deze proefschrift probeert vooral het belang ervan aan te halen zonder simultaan een perfect blauwdruk toe te reiken. Het onderzoek rond het gerelateerde schrijfadvisie duidt aan dat een schrijver eerst verschillende stappen moet zetten vooraleer zijn verhalen de boodschap van een respectvolle inclusie van etnische minderheden kan reflecteren. Opzoekwerk en communiceren met die etnische minderheden vormen het schrijfadvisie om naar dat einddoel te streven.

'How-To-Write With Color' toont dat het belang van goede representatie ligt in de uitdaging om ondervertegenwoordiging en misrepresentatie te elimineren en overheersende vertellingen die gebaseerd zijn op vooroordelen en stereotypen te ontcrachten. Uiteindelijk wordt goede representatie gereflecteerd in authentieke en gevarieerde etnisch diverse personages dat een waarachtige versie van de diversiteit in onze wereld weerspiegelt.

TABLE OF CONTENT

PREFACE	I
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
NEDERLANDSTALIGE SAMENVATTING	II
INTRODUCTION	1
RESEARCH QUESTION	1
I THEORY: THE POWER OF COUNTER-STORYTELLING IN YA LITERATURE.....	3
1 CRITICAL RACE THEORY.....	4
1.1 THE HISTORY OF THE CRITICAL RACE THEORY MOVEMENT	4
1.2 BASIC THEMES OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY	6
1.3 FROM LEGAL STORYTELLING TO COUNTER-STORYTELLING.....	8
1.4 COUNTER-STORYTELLING IN LITERARY AND EDUCATIONAL STUDIES.....	9
2 MULTICULTURAL YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE.....	10
2.1 DEFINING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE	10
2.2 MYTHS AND FACTS SURROUNDING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE.....	11
2.3 THE NEED FOR MULTICULTURAL YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE	12
2.4 MULTICULTURAL YA LITERATURE AS A FORM OF COUNTER-STORYTELLING	13
2.5 THE SINGLE STORY.....	14
2.6 CORRECT REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY.....	15
II HOW-TO-WRITE: ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN FANTASY.....	17
1 FANTASY MANUAL VERSUS ONLINE BLOG COMMUNITY	17
1.1 NARROWING WRITING ADVICE TO RESEARCH.....	18
1.2 WHO WRITES ABOUT WHOM.....	19
1.3 DIVERGENT FOCUS.....	19
2 WRITING ADVICE FOR ETHNIC DIVERSE FANTASY STORIES	20
2.1 CULTURE AS INSPIRATION FOR FANTASY WORLDBUILDING	20
2.2 CREATING ETHNIC DIVERSE CHARACTERS.....	26
3 HOW-TO-WRITE: A CONCLUSION	33
3.1 THE RIGHT TO WRITE ETHNIC DIVERSITY.....	34
3.2 THE RACIAL ISSUES OF WRITING DIVERSITY	35
3.3 WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW	37
III RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE (ASPIRING) WRITERS.....	38
1 RESEARCH.....	38

1.1 READ RACE-RELATED THEORIES.....	38
1.2 READ WRITING ADVICE FOCUSED ON ETHNIC DIVERSITY	39
1.3 READ MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE.....	39
1.4 ASK FOR FEEDBACK FROM PEOPLE OF COLOR	40
1.5 ACCEPT THAT WRITING EQUALS CRITICISM.....	40
2 ALLYSHIP	40
CONCLUSION.....	41
REFERENCES	43
SWOT-ANALYSIS	i

INTRODUCTION

At present, many creative industries receive criticism on the absence of ethnic representation, both in their employees as the content of their products. As such, we witness the phenomenon of whitewashing in Hollywood films and observe a lack of non-white book protagonists in the publishing sector. It is the latter example that receives focus in this dissertation.

Luckily in the publishing industry, we see change is on the way. The Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC) has been tracking the number of books by African-American, Asian-American, Native/First Nations, and Latino book creators since 1994. Over the past 20 years, the number of multicultural books has hovered around 10%, with a sudden surge in 2014 to 14%. Even though, this is great improvement CCBC makes the side note that one good year does not guarantee long-term change and that creators of color are still heavily underrepresented. Of the 393 books published about people of color, 57% were created by people who didn't belong to their character's respective ethnicity (Ehrlich). With the foundation of We Need Diverse Books™ (WNDB™) in that same year, the supply of creators of color is believed to increase in the future. Additionally, the organization raises the awareness of the issue of representation in the publishing industry.

Accordingly, this dissertation seeks to learn the importance of representation of ethnic diversity in young adult (YA) literature based on a theoretical framework and a practical research on writing advice. Chapter I 'Theory: The Power of Counter-Storytelling in YA Literature' explores critical race theory (CRT) and how counter-storytelling is employed to challenge dominant narratives within society. Moreover, counter-storytelling will be compared to multicultural literature to see the similarities in their objectives when used in educational practices. Chapter II 'How-To-Write: Creating Ethnic Diversity in YA Fantasy' parallels writing advice given by fantasy manuals and an online how-to-write blog on world-building and character creation in the context of ethnic diversity to determine what 'good representation' comprises. In chapter III 'Recommendations for Inclusive (Aspiring) Writers' a reflection is made on the observations made in chapter II to help (aspiring) writers, who seek to change the dominant narrative produced by the publishing industry, in their self-education concerning writing ethnic diversity in their own writings.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This dissertation aims to understand the importance of representation of ethnic diverse characters in young adult literature and what entails 'good representation'. I aim to define (multicultural) YA literature and their usefulness within educational and socio-cultural practices to challenge societal issues. Moreover, by centering my practical research on

writing advice within YA fantasy literature, I challenge to think about the feasibility of representation of ethnic characters in a story set in an imagined and/or alternative world. I do remark that this dissertation does not intend to provide a solid blueprint on how to correctly represent and include ethnic minorities as characters in your story. I merely seek to comprehend the power in storytelling to evoke change in societal relations between people from various ethnic backgrounds.

Despite the clear focus on ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, I ardently encourage the reader to apply the overall message on the broader understanding of the term *diversity*.

I THEORY: THE POWER OF COUNTER-STORYTELLING IN YA LITERATURE

“There Is Power In Seeing Oneself In Literature.”

Sandra Hughes-Hassell, *Multicultural Young Adult Literature as a Form of Counter-Storytelling* (2013)

“Why are they always *white* children?” This is the question with which Nancy Larrick begins her landmark article ‘*The All White World of Children’s Books*’ (1965). A genuine question that, more than 50 years later, many avid readers and writers still ask themselves. Yet, the need for diverse books is greater than ever. We live in a world where people with different backgrounds and cultures are neighbors, classmates and colleagues. Even though diversity is our reality, it is still a barrier that needs to be named and crossed before the demographic of the world we live in is reflected in our bookshelves. As Bishop (1990) explains:

“Literature 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. Reading, then, becomes a means of self-affirmation, and readers often seek their mirrors in books.” (Bishop)(Bishop, 1999).

Referring to that final part of her statement, we no longer can deny the importance of *representation* and *inclusion* of the marginalized (i.e. whether this term refers to ethnic minorities, queer people or members from the disabled community) in our society. In the context of *ethnicity*, multicultural young adult (YA) literature can communicate these crucial messages of representation and inclusion to youth of color (Sandra Hughes-Hassell, 2013). However, the need for representative and inclusive books runs deeper than mere self-affirmation of these individuals. It allows people aligned with the dominant paradigm to realize that people who aren’t like them exist beyond recurring stereotypes and, hence, contradict them.

For that reason, Hughes-Hassell presents multicultural YA literature as an alternative form of *counter-storytelling*, a framework within critical race theory (CRT), where “the examination of racism and its impact on people of color [and indigenous peoples] (p221)” is central (Hughes-Hassell). Though many might believe we live in a post-racial era, Tyson (2006) explains that “racial injustice is practiced on the sly, so to speak, to avoid legal prosecution, and it has flourished in ways that, in many cases, only its victims really know well (p367)”.

1 CRITICAL RACE THEORY

The CRT movement originated as “the work of progressive legal scholars of color who are attempting to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in [American] law and that work towards the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination (p133)” (Matsuda). In other words, CRT grew within a group of legal scholars who sought to study the relationship between race, racism and power within the context of law. Moreover, CRT encourages response and action on the findings of their studies with the goal to strive a transformation of the aforementioned relationship (Panlay *Racism in Contemporary African American Children's and Young Adult Literature*; Garcia; Delgado and Stefancic). As such, *racism* is found at the center of CRT.

Tatum (1997) understands racism foremost “as a system of advantage based on race (p127)” which cannot be “an expression of prejudice alone. [Racism] is a system involving cultural messages and institutional policies and practices as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals (p126)” (Hughes-Hassell; Tatum). Thus, racism can be defined as an institutionalized problem “that implicitly or explicitly impacts social structures, practices and discourse (p70)” (Yosso). Nevertheless, an important aspect of defining racism is to understand that “social forces [...] discriminate against and disadvantage people of color [based on] their race for the purpose of maintaining white dominance and power”.

Along with *white privilege*, racism is usually handled within the discourse of civil rights and ethnic studies. Through CRT, these systems are placed within a broader framework where liberal foundations among others equality theory and legal reasoning are critically questioned (Delgado and Stefancic). It implies critical theory to race-based human injustice (Milner) in various branches of society.

In general, CRT tries to better understand the multiple perspectives and ways race intersects with experiences of everyday life. It attempts to expose dominant discourse – norms and assumptions that appear neutral, yet systematically marginalize, silence and represent *people of color* (Ladson- Billings).

1.1 THE HISTORY OF THE CRITICAL RACE THEORY MOVEMENT

After the civil rights movement, many civil rights cases thrived, challenging different forms of discrimination. Unfortunately, the decisions of these cases did not result in fundamental changes in the sociopolitical structures. It became clear that rather than deconstructing discrimination and racism, the law served to sustain them. That same law assumed race neutrality, yet, perpetuated the conditions of racial oppression. “Critical Race Theorists have, for the first time, examined the entire edifice of contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the view point of the law’s role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination” (Crenshaw). Therefore, “new approaches and theories were needed to deal with the colorblind, subtler institutional forms of racism (p125)”.

In the mid-1970s, a collection of American lawyers, activists and legal scholars realized the civil rights era of the 1960s was being stalled (Delgado). Initiated as a recognized body of critical inquiry, Derrick Bell, (late) Alan Freeman and Richard Delgado developed a theory of law to provide alternative manners to address race and racism in American law (Ladson- Billings; Delgado and Stefancic; Panlay *Racism in Contemporary African American Children's and Young Adult Literature*). Where the civil rights movement aimed to dismantle racist political practice and social divisions, failing to recognize that "race, racism and racialization are not always fully intentional acts or processes but products of a society with a particular history and culture (p297)", CRT explores race how it "infects common interactions even among people [...] of the same race (p297)".

The insight of CRT is also based on knowledge from *critical legal studies* and *radical feminism*. Critical legal studies concern theories that state ideology as the principal component of human motivation. Here, the term *legal indeterminacy* was borrowed; "an idea that not every legal case has one correct outcome (p5)". From radical feminism, a feminist perspective that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is eliminated in social and economic contexts, the concept of power and the relationship it has with social roles, invisible patterns and unseen habits was adapted. CRT even shares notions of nationalism, group empowerment and civil rights wherein its concern about legal and social theory have practical consequences (Delgado and Stefancic).

Truly, the foundations of CRT can be traced to Marxist theories from Antonio Gramsci (i.e. *cultural hegemony* propagates the high-class values as the norm of society which working-class will identify as their own and eventually maintain) and radical American figures such as W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) and Carter G. Woodson (1993) who both criticized the social inequities African Americans had to experience at the start of the twentieth century considering "race as the central construct for understanding social inequality" (Ladson-Billings).

The fact that CRT puts various racial issues under a wider scope, concerning itself with every subject related to race, the movement is overtly aware of the inherent complexity of race. An important insight herein is the intersection of race and everyday experiences (Paxley, x). It is in this perspective, Delgado and Stefancic (2012) argued the need of a new theory that tackles "the subtler forms of racism (p4)".

Subsequently, CRT has also splintered into many sub-movements. Its theoretical frameworks were (re)constructed to allow people that do not fit in the Black-White binary to adapt their own ethnic background. Each eventually developed their own priorities and concerns.

Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit), a "theory that elucidates Latinos/Latinas multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism and classism and other forms of identity" (Dolores Delgado)(Bernal, 2002, p. 108) with a focus on relevant issues

for Latinx individuals, namely immigration policies, language rights and discrimination based on accent or national origin, cultural identity and ethnicity. Many of these issues are also of importance for Asian Americans. The Asian Critical Theory (AsianCrit), pioneered by Chang (1993), further address the needs of American citizens with an Asian heritage in the legal system, criticizing discriminating systems such as nativism and model minority stereotype. The Tribal Race Theory (TribalCrit) investigates indigenous people's rights, sovereignty and land claim. It was developed by Brayboy (2005) to examine colonization through the perspective of indigenous people. The commonality of all of these theoretical frameworks is their legacy of resistance and change and their focus on social justice (Baxley). Despite the various facets in application of CRT across disciplines and individuals, there are basic themes critical race theorists will agree upon.

1.2 BASIC THEMES OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

An imperative premise in the general perspective of CRT is that racism is pervasive. It is a common practice within society and a universal experience of people of color, implying the permanency of racism and how difficult it is to address or diminish. Racism adapts to socio-cultural changes by altering its expression. Advocates of CRT suggest that previous overt racism have evolved in more subtle representations. This results in racism becoming normal and an endemic within our society but moreover, almost invisible. Furthermore, a color-blind or formal concept of equality, expressed in rules and laws can only solve the most obvious practices of discrimination (Baxley; Delgado and Stefancic; Yosso). In this sense, CRT has a central critique on liberalism and, thus, rejects the idea of a colorblind policy that can result in racial equality and racial equity for the supposed change is a "camouflage for the self-interest, power and privilege of dominant groups in [U.S.] society p73-74" (Yosso)

Here, it is important to acknowledge the existence of white privilege. The dominant societal group (i.e. whites) carry with them rights and privileges which help them to gain success in such society more likely in contrast to those who do not belong to that group. The issues here are the fact that these individuals are unaware of their 'superiority' within society which reinforces the idea that success is a result of mere effort, rather than an accompanied, inherent social advantage over 'the other' (Delgado and Stefancic).

Subsequently, racism also advances the interest of the white elite and the working-class. This is known as *interest convergence* or *material determinism*, an "analytical construct that considers the motivating factors [...] to eradicate racial discrimination or provide remedies for racial injustice (p57-58)" (Donnor). Even though, people in power may agree that the implementation of policies and practices are necessary to end oppression and discrimination, yet do not want to give up their power and privilege to achieve equality. Therefore, within CRT, there is a belief that large societal segments, in reality, have little motivation to eradicate racism. Certain popular incentives are only a result of self-interest

of the white elite, a white flag displaying efforts to vanish racism though real change stays absent (Baxley). As such, "the interest of people of color in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of Whites (p523)" (Bell).

A recent development within CRT is *differential racialization*. The dominant portion of society racializes different groups of minorities at different times. In response to the ruling need of society on a given time, standard stereotypes and images of minority groups would change. An example in this context is comparing the depiction of Indians in America. Native Americans were first portrayed as vicious warriors when white men took their lands. Only when treaties were broken and both parties had to contest in court, their image was changed to drunk and lazy figures with feathered headdresses which showed their presumed incompetence (Delgado and Stefancic).

Another recent concept is the understanding of *intersectionality* and *anti-essentialism*: "no person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity (p8)". People's identity cross-sect different social roles and social identities which can either conflict or overlap and correspond with identifiers such as privilege and oppression. The variable overlap in social hierarchies (i.e. gender, class, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, disability and race) of an individual also require a specific manner of analysis within the theory, touching discriminative environment to achieve individual and group empowerment (Delgado and Stefancic).

Within the abovementioned perspectives, another tenet of CRT, namely that race is a product of *social construction*, is a fundamental insight. Critical race theorists accept the fact that race is a category made based on invention and manipulation wherein biology and genetics find no basis. Even though one can argue the shared similarities in skin color, physique and hair texture of humans with common origin, these physical traits constitute a small percentage of the genomic make-up of an individual and are, of course, not related to *human* traits (i.e. personality, intelligence and moral behavior) (Delgado and Stefancic).

By including the 'unheard voices' of society, racism's harmful effects can be better understood, especially by their dominant counterparts; an approach of CRT which is referred to as a *unique voice of color*. Within the context of law, theorists use the method of *legal storytelling* to recount racist experiences within the legal system through the eyes of writers from the marginalized community. The voice of color negotiates that considering the history and experience with oppression, minority groups should communicate to the white community racial issues or situations they are not aware of, and so expose the invisible workings of dominant racial ideologies. In contrast, this also means accepting that a voice of color holds knowledge and truth about the society we live in. The true benefit of reauthoring one's own story and reality delineates with shattering silence and, through this

action, become empowered, liberated and, most importantly, visible (D. G. Solórzano and T. J. Yosso; Solorzano and Yosso; Dolores Delgado; Baxley; D. Solórzano and T. Yosso). With these tenets, CRT draws on both theoretical as well as practical dimensions, interwoven with the subtle appeal of activism. It draws on a multilevel approach to race-based criticism, presenting new and alternative models to explore intersectionality of social hierarchies with power relations (Delgado) As Delgado and Stefancic explain: “[CRT] tries not only to understand [our] social situations, but to change it; it sets out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies, but to transform it for the better (p7)” (Delgado and Stefancic).

1.3 FROM LEGAL STORYTELLING TO COUNTER-STORYTELLING

The use of storytelling is actively advocated within the tenets of CRT. For, through everyday experiences and stories, critical race theorists found a way to better comprehend how (American) views on race are constructed. In the different minority communities, the power of storytelling resurfaces: slave narratives written by black captives to show the truth about the white plantation society or Indians preserving their culture through history and myths (Delgado and Stefancic).

In the context of narrative theory, an effort is made to understand why some stories work and others do not. Others study why lawyers construct narratives the way they do in court. Legal storytellers in CRT are a means to make the dominant societal group perceive what it means to be nonwhite, to be ‘the other’. The narratives that have grown corresponding with this perception show the injustice, the inequality and many issues in different domains of society that minorities face. The narratives are in a way a counter attack coming from ethnic minorities to underline the (still) existing gap between white and nonwhite: a *counter-story* or *counter-narrative*.

In 2002, Solorzano and Yosso defined the term *counter-storytelling* as “a method of telling the stories of those whose experiences are not often told”. These unvoiced individuals include people of color and ethnic minority groups. The aim of these stories is to counter the dominant narrative, to debunk the existence of myths surrounding the unvoiced. It is a powerful employment to expose racial discourses within the framework of white privilege and how it supports unequal relations between the majority group and the minority groups. Counter-stories serve as effective opposition to the majoritarian stories that circulate. Counter-narratives are a way to “cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially held by the majority” (Delgado and Stefancic) but also to “creat[e] a space for resistance and agency” (Panlay *Racism in Contemporary African American Children’s and Young Adult Literature*). Therefore, counter-stories have a destructive function and can be utilized as a theoretical, methodological and pedagogical tool to challenge racism, sexism and classism to work towards social justice within society (D. G. Solórzano and T. J. Yosso).

Yet, “[h]ow can there be such divergent [counter]-stories? [And] why do they not reconcile? (p41)”. To these questions, Derrick Bell would answer experience, interest convergence and a lack of empathy. The problem that exists is that within literary and narrative theory it is believed that an individual occupies a *nomos* (i.e. a normative universe) from which it is hard to dislodge. Even though everybody loves a good story, the message of a story does not always reach its audience. Describing the reality of ethnic minorities in an engaging and well-written/told story helps bridge the gap between white and non-white views of the world, will show what is life like for the other and invite the reader into a new world (Delgado and Stefancic).

Therefore, counter-storytelling benefits everyone. Counter-stories help the marginalized and oppressed in finding healing from their historic oppression. The fact that counter-stories exist shows them that they are not alone in their pain. Others share the same thoughts and experiences as themselves. Therefore, they will stop blaming themselves. The counter-story explains that the position they find themselves in has grown on a societal basis. Together, these insights will help these individuals construct their own counter-stories, expanding the variety of the previously existing voices-of-color and give additional layering to the overall narrative (D. G. Solórzano and T. J. Yosso).

1.4 COUNTER-STORYTELLING IN LITERARY AND EDUCATIONAL STUDIES

Clearly, CRT tries to reach change in different domains of society and for that reason, one of its strength is its disciplinary character. Even though, it started as a movement giving criticism on constitutional law, it has spread to many other academic disciplines such as humanities where researchers in education, political science and ethnic and gender studies call themselves critical race theorists. CRT’s theoretical framework contributes to research within these disciplines, lending itself as a useful tool to investigate racial issues within these disciplines, though mostly without an activist dimension (Panlay *Racism in Contemporary African American Children’s and Young Adult Literature*).

Storytelling is a valuable tool to initiate conversation about racial experiences. It gives a means to researchers to “creative collective transformational spaces, constructing knowledge about self, further deepening [our] understanding about the role of race”. Until recently, CRT has been unfamiliar ground for literary scholars. Still, Panley (2016) states CRT can “become a valuable addition to the field that clearly deserves more critical literary research”. In this context, she uses CRT as a theoretical framework to understand Children’s literature. A such, CRT has become a tool within literary studies but foremost educational studies. Today, CRT is used in education to understand issues of school discipline and hierarchy, tracking, controversies over curriculum and history, IQ and achievement testing. Herein, multicultural literature has had a grounding role to discuss racial issues in the classroom but also pre-educational service teachers!

2 MULTICULTURAL YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

“There is power in seeing oneself in literature” (Hughes-Hassell). This statement summarizes the effect literature has on individuals. In the context of ethnic diversity, the statement evolves into a strong argument that pleads the importance of representation and inclusion of people of color in YA literature.

According to Sandra Hughes-Hassell, multicultural YA literature serves as a form of counter-storytelling, foremost because they challenge stereotypes about ethnic minorities. Moreover, counter-stories give voice to the marginalized youth and can present an accurate depiction of the complexity of their racial and ethnic identity formation (Hughes-Hassell, 2013). As Bean & Rigoni (2001) stated “multicultural YA offer a context in which issues of power and identity can be explored in a critical fashion” (Bean and Rigoni). In addition, books about individuals from various ethnic groups give insight into other cultures and this should, indeed, only enhance their value.

Here, we arrive at the first problem of (multicultural) YA literature: belonging to a shelf of books considered to be sub-literature. Though, YA literature has been earning ground, its value within research, specifically educational research, is only recently being established (Crowe; Hayn, Kaplan and Nolen).

2.1 DEFINING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

YA literature, a formerly American tradition, is utilized to classify fictional literature that appeals to teenagers – “literature tended to be written about and for adolescents” (Garcia). According to guidelines from Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA), YA is specified for twelve to eighteen-year-old teenagers, though it is generally accepted that a ‘true’ YA novel aims at a teenage market that starts at fourteen-year-old adolescents where others stated that YA is “anything that readers between the ages of twelve and twenty choose to read (p13)”. Yet, in practice, the label YA refers less to age, experience and social group and more to product and lifestyle (Waller). Therefore, what is assumed to count as YA literature needs to be analyzed in a critical fashion.

Garcia (2013) explains that when discussing YA, it is important to recognize its origin in the commercial world. With the emergence of new youth culture in the late 1930s, targeting the youth was profitable for they became a new market to attract (Garcia). These commercial blooming aligned with new emerging genres such as comic books and graphic novels (Thomas).

Consequently, one can argue that the term ‘YA literature’ is rather a construct used by the publishers as a strategy within their marketing plan where the terms ‘teenage books’ or ‘adolescent literature’ were less appealing to the public. In addition, since the release of the *Harry Potter* series by J.K Rowling, the market environment of YA novels has changed. The YA genre is also openly read by adults in greater numbers than before. Now, one might

say that does not change the way YA books are being styled or marketed but it does contribute to shifted priorities for the publishing industry because their clientele has enlarged (Garcia).

With this evolution, YA literature has less in common with children's literature and aligns more with adult literature, not merely because of their readers but also because of their thematic content. Changes in society mirrored changing in YA literature's content resulting in controversy and appropriateness of this literature to the youth.

2.2 MYTHS AND FACTS SURROUNDING YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

The subject(s) in/of YA literature resulted in frowned faces. In 1998, Crowe already stated that "YA has been exiled to the realms of sub-literature". Many myths have been circulating surrounding YA which confirm Crowe's statement. These myths comprise that YA literature is simplified, accommodating to the low reading skills of teenagers, for all YA novels are the same; avoiding taboo topics and serve didactic purposes. And yes, myths ring (some) truth. Some YA books can serve one or more of these myths mentioned. Still, that does not mean their entire shelf should be doomed and refrain to serve purposes beyond its function (Waller).

In contrast, YA has the potential to be a medium through which one can reach teenagers in literature classes. Many researchers, Hayn among them, advocates for more empirical research on YA literature as it would eventually lead to more legitimacy and establish YA's jurisdiction within educational research (Hayn, Kaplan and Nolen).

YA literature is often described as *coming-of-age* novels, reflecting the adolescent experience as a journey to reach adulthood. It has the apparent desire to help adolescents to find their 'true self'. Therefore, it is a separate form of literature, able to give voice and vision to a range subjects where the author takes the reader on the search of truth in the adolescent experience. It is a space where youth can form their moral and ethical judgements. In contrast to adult literature, YA novels hold "a kernel of hope in [young adult] books, and a sense of purpose and potential. It might be broken, they say, but we can make it better" (Dougherty).

Herein, YA literature does not shy away from real-world problems or complex issues like drug abuse, racism and war. YA novels can provide a platform in which adolescents can confront social contradictions and complexities that comprise adolescents' lives. According to Groenke, YA literature is a useful and valuable medium to confront adolescents with 'hot topics' in a format aiming on their reading experience (Groenke, Maples and Henderson). One of those 'hot topics' is racism, especially invisible and/or internalized racism. Through YA literature we can communicate needed messages of inclusion within our society. Hence, we need to represent people of color as main characters within YA literature. Unfortunately, there remains a lack of diversity within YA, though, the number of multicultural books is

steadily increasing (Garcia). Yet, we need to underline why the need for multicultural YA literature is of such importance.

2.3 THE NEED FOR MULTICULTURAL YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

The fact that YA literature is observed as sub-literature, Crowe opined that multicultural YA is 'double-damned'. Much like bell hooks argues that the convergence of sexism and racism contributes to black women having a lower status in American society. This phenomenon can be reflected to a basic theme within CRT, namely intersectionality. Individuals intersect different social classes which shape their overall status within society, leading them to face different forms of discriminations. Principle-wise, a similar fate has occurred for multicultural YA literature, resulting in their limited number on the market.

A large portion of YA focuses on the interest of white teenagers, depicting American culture and life choices. Garcia (2013) proposes that "in depicting a specific set of cultural practices, YA – in general – defines and reinforces these practices over time". Here, I understand that the underlying reason is the merchandizing characteristic of the publishing industry is at the basis. The implications for ethnic minorities is that these books do not entirely reflect their life experiences (Garcia). Similarly, multicultural books that are published are shelved differently, given less attention in terms of marketing and visibility for readers and generally have a 'white-washed' or generic cover that doesn't depict their content as inclusive and representing ethnic diversity.

Crowe (1998) counters that novels which involve various "ethnic groups are first and foremost *good* books" (Crowe). The author argues their value on two bases: 1) "multicultural YA books can help adolescent readers to find common ground with young people who [, on the surface] seem to be very different [or almost 'alien']" and 2) multicultural YA novels are sometimes even more appealing than 'mainstream' YA novels because of the adolescent novels are compounded by tensions accompanying minority groups (Crowe). His promotion of multicultural books is firstly based on the similarities that the dominant youth and youth of color share as merely adolescents. Aspects of adolescence are universal where "their roads through adolescence take them in different direction, the experience they encounter along the way are very similar". Secondly, Crowe focuses on the differences between these distinct groups of adolescents. These differences can evoke conflict within a novel's plot that change mainstream books in more engaging stories (Crowe).

I understand Crowe's latter perspective, but not necessarily agree with it. The need for multicultural literature goes beyond merely engaging their readers. One important aspect is that ethnic minorities need to discover who they are as their self-identity is more complex (e.g. biracial teenager) than the 'average' teenager. As stated earlier, multicultural stories

must reflect messages of inclusion and aspire visibility of existing societal relations with the hope for future change:

"Youth [of color] needs to know that we are aware and understand the fear and anger they experience [daily]. Youth [of color] need to know we desire to work in solidarity with them to combat racism and other forms of institutional and structural oppression at work in our society" (Groenke).

With this statement, we arrive at the center message of my dissertation. Multicultural YA literature sends positive messages of inclusion. It shows ethnic minorities that they belong and partake a role within society and the dominant culture. It is an essential way to fight against underrepresentation and misrepresentation. The content of multicultural YA literature can intersect with many tenets of CRT, especially contributing to the ultimate goal of the counter-story.

2.4 MULTICULTURAL YA LITERATURE AS A FORM OF COUNTER-STORYTELLING

When Hughes-Hassell (2013) started to tackle the issue of reading multicultural novels in the classroom, a white student declared that he didn't understand the issue explaining that one can imagine the characters to be of your race and ethnicity for, in essential, you are reading about people. Of course, we are reading about people, yet, you should imagine the book being read by someone of the same ethnicity as the book's character(s). In the context of self-identity, Haghess-Hassell (2013) gives her clear reasons why she advocates that multicultural YA can act as a counter-stories to the dominant narratives:

"There is a power in seeing oneself in literature; to make personal connections with characters; [...] to identify with their culture and an appreciation for diversity within and between cultural groups (p214)" (Hughes-Hassell)

Most noticeable, multicultural YA lends voices to teenagers whose voices have gone unheard, whose lives are underrepresented and often, also misrepresented. This reflects on the overruling character of whiteness as the neutral, norm and mainstream in the daily lives of these teenagers.

A prevailing aspect of multicultural YA as a form of counter-storytelling, according to Hughes-Hassell, is that it will fulfill the need of teenagers of color to form their racial and ethnic identity. Researchers have stated that youth of color are more likely to actively explore their racial and ethnic identity than white adolescents do. The reason for this observation is that people of color see themselves in the context of race and identity, basically as how the rest of the world sees them (Tatum). Beliefs and values of the dominant culture are absorbed by children of color resulting in their belief that being white is better and, eventually, develop the need to assert to dominant culture. As they reach adolescence, youth of color grow aware of racism and experience difficulties with the knowledge that they are part of a group that is racially targeted (Tatum).

"To find one's racial or ethnic identity, one must deal with negative stereotypes, resist internalized negative self-perception, and affirm the meaning of ethnicity for oneself (p165-166)" (Hughes-Hassell).

It leads them to the question of *who am I?* To find the answer, people of color find support and aid from others who belong to the same minority group (i.e. based on race, ethnicity, cultural and/or religion). These individuals understand the position they live in, the perspective they have and the experiences in relation to prejudice and stereotypes, they have to endure (Hughes-Hassell).

Here, multicultural YA literature can give insight in how youth of color, who share their racial, ethnic and cultural background, affirm(ed) their identities. As such, these stories are in fact counter-stories that "give voice to lived experiences of groups that traditionally have been marginalized and oppressed (p219)" (Hughes-Hassell)). These stories show the possible challenges ahead, providing role models that might be missing which will result in strength and confidence while searching for who they truly are.

Still, a central aspect of counter-storytelling is unraveling the inner working of racism. Through multicultural literature, the difficult dialogue concerning this topic can start. "[A counter-story] is non-confrontational. It invites the reader to suspend judgement, listen for the point or the message, and determine the truth the story contains (p221)" (Delgado). As such, the counter-story raises awareness of the struggles that people of color face: "[Multicultural literature [makes] the oppression and victimization of [people of color] visible – visible to themselves and to the majority culture (p225)". These readers might start to reconsider the world, pointing out that racism, white privilege and inequality still exist in society and how this world is perceived through the eyes of the marginalized. It helps them understand how racism is defined; a system of advantage which "perpetuate[s] when we do not acknowledge its existence (p9)" (Tatum). Therefore, to battle racism, conversations about racism need to be held and these conversations can be built by reading multicultural YA novels. An essential role of counter-stories (and thus, also multicultural YA literature) in this battle is challenging the single story.

2.5 THE SINGLE STORY

In her 2009 Technology, Entertainment and Design conference (TED) talk, Nigerian writer Chimamanda Adichie coined the term *single story*. Single stories are counter-narratives used as the 'majoritarian' narrative for people of color. They are basically the stereotypes that fill the representation of people of color on the 'ethnic diversity' bookshelves of today. In her TED talk, Adichie explains the danger of a single story: readers will miss critical nuances and differences that emerge from including more voices, namely a single story is told by dominant voices of society. Based on a single account, the single story describes a single thing as the only thing, again and again. A single story creates a stereotype that

targets people of color. According to Adichie, "the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete."

The prevalence of the single story needs to be recounted to the youth, says Garcia (2013). Youth (of color) need to understand that "the subaltern cannot speak – cannot even find spaces for representation – in today's YA novels (p75)". Already in 1997, Willis (1997) argued that only when discussing the context of multicultural literature, unknown assumptions about culture, class and power begin to be recognized and addressed. Therefore, it is important to know that the study of race, identity and culture needs awareness of its complexity and variability of meaning.

This is also true for writing a multicultural YA novel. One needs to be aware of the complexity of such character within themes of culture, identity and hierarchy within society. Bean & Rigoni (2001) explains that "characters should move beyond simple stereotypes, otherwise a multicultural novel runs the danger of sustaining the 'normative boundaries between the real and reality'" (Bean and Rigoni).

2.6 CORRECT REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC DIVERSITY

Multicultural YA literature can only reach its set goal if, and only if, its content is handled with care and above all respect! In other words, we need to be careful and respectful with the representation of people of color. The single story is only one of the issues here. *Tokenism* (i.e. secondary characters with an ethnic background who can be easily removed from a story without impact on the plot resulting in a distorted message of inclusion) will not benefit the youth. Inclusion, for the sake of inclusion, also misses the point entirely. What is important is not mere representation of marginalized groups within our society, but also understanding that such representation needs to shy away from harmful representation. We need to ask ourselves: What is defined as correct representation of ethnic minorities?

Bean & Rigoni (2001) opiniates that "a well-crafted multicultural YA novel introduces main characters whose cultural identity is fluid, multidisciplinary and at times contradictory" (Bean and Rigoni). It is a shame that such statement needs to be articulated so directly for people to understand this basic aspect of a character within a story. Groenke (2010) reflects this when stating that "one would think we wouldn't have to work so hard to humanize youth of color" (Groenke).

In the context of my dissertation, I started to wonder in what extent this concept of 'inclusion' and 'representation' applies to a specific genre within YA literature, namely the *fantasy* genre. When an author draws imagination to build a fantasy world – which, in theory, is completely unrelated to 'the real world', how should real-world themes related to racial issues be handled? How do concepts such as *cultural appropriation* inquire thoughtfulness when creating a fantasy novel that represent ethnic diversity? When we enter the imaginative and leave our own world, is there still place to challenge dominant narratives and the single story?

II HOW-TO-WRITE: ETHNIC DIVERSITY IN FANTASY

“[W]hiteness Never Has To Speak Its Name, Never Has To Acknowledge Its Role As An Organizing Principle In Social And Cultural Relations.”

George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness* (1995)

Whiteness has grown to be the norm of the western world. A synonym for neutral. This is a constant given that is reflected in how our society perceives and treats people. It becomes more apparent when we observe the creative industries. Not so recently, Hollywood has been accused of whitewashing film characters. Roles who ought to be played by people of color are given to their white actors and actresses. Even in the publishing industries, we observe this trend. Book covers mostly depict white models without clear confirmation that the characters in the story have indeed white skin tones. Yet, even books with confirmed diverse characters are given ‘whitewashed’ book covers or illustrative covers that do not indicate the book’s diversity (Garcia). Another example is the famous and most-read fantasy book series following the adventures of Harry Potter by J.K. Rowling. The well-crafted story is filled with presumed white (main) characters which is also reflected in the cinematic translation. Nevertheless, there are many online artists, fanfic writers and fans who depict J.K. Rowling’s universe as a more diverse one; Harry Potter is believed to be half-Indian or a full-Indian adopted child while Hermione Granger is mostly depicted as a Black girl (which J.K. Rowling later confirmed to be possible and made it *canon* when she casted a Black actress to play her character in the two-part West End stage play *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*). The best part is, since J.K. Rowling never explicitly stated the ethnicity of her characters, these fan theories are in fact very possible. The fact that there are people of color who create such fanart and fan-based theories about fantasy stories, we start to see the importance of inclusion and representation.

With these short examples and the previous section in mind, we hopefully see why writers should start writing inclusive and create ethnic diversity in fantasy literature. But how do we write inclusive? How do we create ethnic diversity in literature? What ultimately defines ‘good’ representation of ethnic diverse characters in YA fantasy literature?

I FANTASY MANUAL VERSUS ONLINE BLOG COMMUNITY

The questions I will try to answer are essentially how-to-write questions. To find answers on these questions, I have chosen to base my research in the world of writing advice. Writing advice is presented in different platforms: how-to-write manuals, workshops and online writing communities. Since workshops were not a feasible option, I have directed

the extent of my research on the two-remaining media. I investigated three fantasy manuals (kindly provided by my promotor Prof. Dr. Anneleen Masschelein) and an online blog, titled Writing With Color (WWC). My research entails both media's writing advice concerning inclusion and representation of ethnic diversity within the fantasy genre. I specifically focus on aspects related to worldbuilding and character creation.

Of course, when comparing these distinguishable media, it is important to be aware of their differences before making any observations and conclusions. Content provided by a printed medium is limited in comparison to an online media. A manual needs to limit its content because of printing demands, and can only elaborate on certain aspects by releasing a new edition or another manual with a specific focus or theme. On the other hand, a blog, limited by the choice of topic, still interacts with input from contributors and followers, as such expanding their own content based on possible feedback or criticism.

1.1 NARROWING WRITING ADVICE TO RESEARCH

The fantasy manuals I studied are *The Complete Guide™ to Writing Fantasy: Volume One* (2002) by Darin Park and Tom Dullemond, *The Complete Guide™ to Writing Fantasy: Volume Two* (2004) edited by Tee Morris and Valerie Griswold-Ford, and *The Writer's Complete Fantasy Reference* (1998) by Writer's Digest Books. In these three publications, I focused solely on the chapters related on worldbuilding and character creation in the lights of ethnicity, race and culture-related topics. These chapters include: "Race Creation" (p63) by Michael McRae and "World Building" (p75) by Tina Morgan in *The Complete Guide™ to Writing Fantasy: Volume One* (2002); "Culture Shock: Worldbuilding in Asian Cultures" (p37) by Lai Zhao in *The Complete Guide™ to Writing Fantasy: Volume Two* (2004); and "World Cultures" (p31) by Michael J. Varhola and "Fantasy Races" (p154) by Andrew P. Miller and Daniel Clark in *The Writer's Complete Fantasy Reference* (1998).

The online community I investigate, is titled Writing With Color (WWC). This Tumblr-blog states that their content is "dedicated to writing and resources centered on racial and ethnic diversity" and "share writing advice, guides, book recommendations and more". The blog runs since the Summer of 2014 and at this moment (Summer 2017) maintained by six full-time moderators and seven part-time moderators, thus, a total of thirteen 'official' Tumblr-bloggers that oversee the communication with followers and contributors. During my search, I found no other free-resource blog that mainly centers around sharing writing advice about ethnic diversity in the same extent as WWC, though the content provided highly mirrors the specific fantasy-related information provided by the fantasy manuals. I have used various blog posts that consist of fantasy-related asks and answers searched through the following tags: *fantasy*, *worldbuilding*, *race*, *creatures*, *stereotypes* and *tropes*. As such I believe to search for similar content presented, or expected to be presented in the fantasy manuals chapters I selected.

Before I explain my findings concerning the content of both media, I want to clarify two general observations I made. These observations consist first, who wrote the how-to-write content presented by the manuals and the blog and second, the general focus of both media.

1.2 WHO WRITES ABOUT WHOM

A first difference between the how-to-write fantasy manuals and writing advice given by the online blog is the number of authors/moderators. Each chapter of a manual is written by one or two authors concerning a certain topic within the fantasy genre while the Tumblr-blog is a much larger community with thirteen moderators who interact with various contributors and followers. Of course, there are certain ask-related blogposts that are more likely to be answered by a certain moderator based on their field of expertise.

Another profound aspect to note is the individual profiles of the authors/moderators. The profiles of the author-contributors of the fantasy manual chapters are not very clear concerning their social identities. From what I have searched and could find, I am more inclined to identify them mostly as middle-aged White individuals. Even Lai Zhao who, at first, I assumed to be of East-Asian heritage is in fact a pseudonym for a White middle-aged woman named Danielle Ackley-McPhail. In contrast, the profiles of the 'full-time' moderators in the About section on WWC confirms their identification as people of color: Colette is African-American and half Nigerian, Alice is a mixed-race (Black/White) Dutchwoman, Jessica is Chinese-Taiwanese-American, Lesya is a Canadian Native, Najela is an African-American female and Stella is Korean-American. In their short bio, these individuals indicate their experiences and area of expertise within the blog. Since there are part-time moderators, who is a moderator at a given time changes. Therefore, it is possible that certain blogposts are written by moderators who at this moment are no longer an 'official' moderator on the blog. In any case, the moderators educate aspiring writers on problematic issues of ethnic representation in stories and that knowledge comes from persons within the groups that is being written about.

I highlight this great difference in author/moderator profiles since it reflects a great part of my research and a relevant discussion within the publishing industry, advocating organizations, (aspiring) writers and readers: who may write about whom? In truth, there is no simple answer. Various people have various answers and those answers are never straightforward. A more elaborated answer will be provided in one of the following sections.

1.3 DIVERGENT FOCUS

When we look particularly at the content of both the manuals and blog, we see a divergent focus. When it comes to the fantasy genre, worldbuilding is an important step in the creation of the story, an aspect especially transparent when observing the content of the fantasy manuals. Many chapters I have chosen to highlight concern inspiration to build a

fantasy world where insights on its inhabitants and magical rules are given. Similarly, the Tumblr-blog has many blogposts concerning world building but since their content is mainly focused on ethnicity and cultures within the fantasy genre, these blogposts focus on the do's and don'ts when it comes to worldbuilding with ethnic diverse characters and taking inspiration from other cultures than European or western culture.

Secondly, because of the difference in number and, especially, profiles authors/moderators, the content is incomparable in the sense of what is individually contributed. As already mentioned, the content of the blog is heavily based on question (or asks) send in by readers and followers. As such, their content is ask-and-answer based, a feature not possible when it comes to fantasy manuals. In any case, because of that architecture in their blog, answers given on those ask-related blogposts are written considering *inclusive writing*.

Inclusive writing indicates that the (aspiring) writer who sends in an ask on WWC is aware of the importance of including ethnic diverse characters in their writings. Therefore, the difference in focus between the fantasy manuals and the how-to-write blog lies in portraying what is writing versus inclusive writing respectively. Both the manual and blog's goal is to educate people on the craft of writing. Though, not of unimportance is the fact that there is an emotional component involved in the online blog community. Their vision ties in on many issues discussed in the previous theoretical chapter of this dissertation. These individuals have chosen to start this blog with the mission to educate people on what lies at the basis of ethnic diverse representation, namely good representation.

2 WRITING ADVICE FOR ETHNIC DIVERSE FANTASY STORIES

To investigate how to create and construct ethnic diverse characters in a fantasy setting, I have compared the divergent content of the fantasy manuals and the online blog community. The next paragraphs will elaborate on writing advice in that context. How do the manuals advice the use of other cultures for fantasy worldbuilding? How does the WWC blog differ in their advice? What are their respective approaches when it comes to mixing fantasy and world-based cultures? What is their respective view on representing ethnic diverse characters and their culture? What are key elements of concern within good representation when it comes to race, ethnicity and culture in ethnic diverse fantasy stories?

2.1 CULTURE AS INSPIRATION FOR FANTASY WORLDBUILDING

The Complete Guide™ To Writing Fantasy: Volume One opens the manual with John Teehan exploring what defines 'fantasy'. He concludes that "fantasy is an applied mythology, a creation in the mind of an author (p8)". His statement reflects endless possibilities. Whatever comes to mind to the fantasy writer is at use for his story for fantasy uses magic and/or fantastic creatures that are "improbable in the real world". There is no need for

scientifically based explanation in that context. The only thing needed is a base of rules that apply to and define your fantasy world. This premise repeats itself in many ask-based blogposts of WWC. The very concept of worldbuilding in fantasy entails the imagination of the author to use magic, supernatural powers or fantasy creatures that are restricted by specific rules. Within this concept, the possibilities are indeed endless.

Of course, it is common sense to understand that "worldbuilding is not done in a vacuum" as moderator (mod) Najela explains in one of her many worldbuilding-tagged blogposts. It is true that fantasy worlds do not come without references to the real world. Take for example Tolkien's Middle Earth. How much his world is perceived as an exceptional fantasy setting, his story is still heavily inspired by medieval Europe. This is not to discredit his imagination within his fantasy universe but it shows that even the most unique fantastical places are in a certain way inspired by our real world. Therefore, it is undeniable naïve to think you can make 'unique' fantasy culture that doesn't resemble a real-world culture. Here we arrive at an important point within the aspect of world-building that is encouraged by the fantasy manuals I investigated.

2.1.1.1 AN ALTERNATIVE WAY OF WORLD-BUILDING

In the chapter "World Building" Tina Morgan recommends non-European medieval settings as a source for inspiration by stating that they "creat[e] a variation on the theme (p76)" and are "alternative[s] worth exploring (p76)" (Morgan). In "Culture Shock: Worldbuilding in Asian Cultures", Lai Zhao dedicates a paragraph titled *Beyond European Borders* to the exploration of 'alternative' cultures. With the term alternative, she means non-western (p38). She states, "alternative cultures provid[e] a greater range of choice when worldbuilding [...] that makes your work stand out from others (p38)" (Zhao). The remaining of the chapter she centers her content around Chinese and Japanese cultures. Michael J. Varola's chapter "World Cultures" uses a similar premise when discussing non-western cultures as fantasy inspiration. "Think twice before doing the same [...] covering ground many other writers have already visited (p31)" (Varhola). He starts mirroring the message of Tina Morgan's statement but his plan of action in the rest of his chapter is noticeable different. He provides profiles of non-western cultures "to hint at the great variety of foreign cultures available to writers (p31)" and "to inspire and guide writers to seek out more information (p31)" (Varhola). He points out that it is important for the writer to "consider what point or points in a culture's development they are going to portray (p31)" because when the writer "know[s] the story [he] want[s] to write, [he] can pick cultures with a history that fits (p32)" (Varhola). That history will then inspire storylines, characters and events. The following paragraphs of his chapter summarizes different cultures from Africa, Asia, Mesoamerica, North-America, Oceania and South-America profiles with short descriptions for the culture's individual aspects on *Arts and Sciences, Government, Military, Economy and Religion*.

When I compare the information provided by the fantasy manuals, I see similarities in how they tackle the issue of inspiration. All chapters agree that non-western or world cultures are 'an alternative' when searching for worldbuilding inspiration for a fantasy setting. As such, you can distinguish your writings from the massive European-centered fantasy stories available. Yet, the mode they act on their advice differs greatly. Tina Morgan's chapter which focuses primarily on world-building (and perhaps because she didn't have enough pages to elaborate further) only mentions the idea of an alternative inspiration source. Lai Zhao gives a specific example of East-Asian culture with a focus on China and Japan while Michael J. Varola dedicates his entire chapter on 'world cultures'. Thus, in three different chapters from three different manuals, writing advice on world-building shows vast differences in content but adhere a similar reason to seek out non-western cultures: an 'alternative' source for inspiration.

2.1.2 'WE' ARE NOT A MONOLITH

On WWC, I focused my search on worldbuilding- and fantasy-tagged blogposts to find out their perspective on using non-western cultures in fantasy settings. Many blogposts I encounter are questions concerning what is 'allowed' when writing about non-western cultures. Since WWC's vision is to share resources and knowledge on ethnic diversity in writing, these asks are well expected.

When diving into the content of the searched blogposts, there is one topic prominently reoccurring, namely *how* to use cultures in (fantasy) stories. These questions imply questions such as 'How do I chose which cultures from the world to make up a new earth?' and 'How do I write about African, Asian or Native American culture?' All these questions relate to the manner in which a writer uses a culture to showcase their world-building. The broadest answer that WWC's moderators give on these writing questions is that cultures (but also countries and people of color) "are not a monolith". With this term, WWC means to make clear that there is no such thing as 'African culture', 'Asian culture' or 'Native American culture'. For the latter example, mod Lesya explains that 'Native American culture or a 'tribe culture' doesn't exist: "Pow Wows are Plains Indian, Confederacies are Great Lakes region tribes, [...] They come from their environments and when you consider just how big and varied North America is, you start to realize just how much there can't be a singular culture" (Lesya "Native American "Tribal Culture" Inspiration"). Michael J. Varola gave a similar indirect message by giving examples of various cultures listed according to the respective continent they belong to. In the paragraph Asia, Varola lists Early Imperial Chinese culture and Mughal culture as two examples of what could be understood as 'Asian Culture'. Thus, WWC states that a first consideration to make is 'which specific culture do I want to use in my story?'

Another related obstacle mentioned in terms of viewing non-western cultures as a monolith is what the blog calls 'blending'. Blending cultures indicates that "you cherry pick things

from cultures and lump them together” but the issue with this approach is that “the things that you have chosen might actually clash with each other in actuality” (Najela "Representing Real Cultures in Fantasy"). Though, blending is not entirely wrong. The blog admits the existence of 'culture-sharing' but the difference depends on the way you handle it. For example: in history, there were many places that intersected through common trading partners or neighboring cultures. In these contexts, the possibility of blending is highly realistic and the writer only needs to figure out “what is likely to be shared” and “how will that change [the dynamics of those cultures]” (Lesya). Mod Najela adds that you need to “tak[e] each culture as its own unique whole and plac[e] them beside each other to see what’s likely to cross over” but that, in truth, “[blending] tends to water down each culture instead of celebrating [their uniqueness]” (Najela "Representing Real Cultures in Fantasy"). A very specific facet on the disadvantageous effect of blending is portrayed by a Vietnamese blogger on the teen tv show *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. The fantasy setting of the show is heavily East-Asian (Chinese and Japanese) inspired though some aspects of the world-building were borrowed from other cultures too. One of these cultures is Vietnamese culture. Yet, those inspirational elements of Vietnamese culture are not recognized by viewers and instead assumed to be part of Chinese or Japanese culture which according to the blogger is hurtful to see (Jess). Therefore, mixing cultures to mod Najela is the same as homogenizing neighboring cultures leading to the creation of a 'monolith' culture in which the different cultures that inspired you tend to be unidentifiable for your readers. As such, you are supporting the perspective that 'Asian culture' exists while that is, in fact, not the case. To avoid relating such misinformation, WWC believes the best manner is to base your fantasy setting within one culture which you research deeply. Hence, you get acquainted with cultural practices of that culture and their meaning within that culture:

"Each fantasy culture needs to be grounded in either one specific real world inspiration or needs to be firmly rooted in the customs and cultures you create on your own." (Najela "Fantasy Cultures: Mass Answer ")

The former example can be done by means of *coding*. Coding is “a way to tip off readers that characters or settings in literature are based off a certain ethnic group/religion/place in real life using notable characteristics or stereotypes (Yasmin and Shira).” It is similar to a code harboring a message. The code is based on cultural symbols like clothing, food, vegetation, customs and beliefs of your characters that eventually will represent your fantasy culture. As such, your reader can recognize a certain non-western culture in your fantasy setting. Mod Lesya makes a relevant remark in this context: “Culture does not need to be shown in its entirety in order to be respectful. In fact, it’s impossible to show it in full even if you’re focusing exclusively on one ethnic group” (Najela and Lesya). As a writer, WWC states, it is your job to figure out what parts of culture to represent by narrowing the scope and pick which cultural element you need to flesh out. In other words,

you will not need every aspect of a culture simply because it is not relevant to your plot. Again, one needs to be respectful and aware of certain pitfalls. For example, using caste-system in a South-Asian inspired setting is a harmful stereotype for South-Asian, Indian or Hindu culture. Mod Nikhil states that these cultures “nee[d] the dismantlement of the notion that there’s anything inherently South-Asian, Indian or Hindu about casteism” and that “coding a fantasy caste system as South-Asian [isn’t] helpful in any of those endeavors” (Nikhil "South Asian-Coded Fantasy Caste System"). As such the rules for coding are blurry and are not the general solution for writing ethnic diverse fantasy stories since WWC states that whether “coding provides positive or negative representation is an entirely different matter.” For example, both mod Shira and mod Yasmine prefer actual presentation over coding since “if something is coded Islamic but has a few differences, then the second we try to claim it as our own[,] people jump on us to point out why these characters are not Muslim” (Yasmin and Shira). Therefore, there is discussion on the role of coding in the search of what good representation entails.

Importantly to note is that wrongly handling blending or coding cultures resulting in the ‘clashing-with-each-other’ or ‘watering-down’ problem are only examples of a greater phenomenon. The main problem with writing non-western cultures in fantasy is the dangerous territory of *cultural appropriation* that is being walked.

2.1.3 BEWARE OF CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Cultural appropriation is “the taking – from a culture that is not one’s own – of intellectual property, cultural expression or artifacts, history and ways of knowledge (p1)” In *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, the nuances of the terms used in the definition are being explored to what cultural appropriation really indicates. In any case, it arrays towards three general points: 1) cultural appropriation indicates relationships among people since “appropriation connotes some form of taking (p2)” and revels on “the need to describe a community of insiders and outsiders (p3)”, 2) it can occur through various modes and may or may not be straightforward, and 3) it is widely practiced and therefore can be called “a pervasive phenomenon” (p4). Still, many state the use of it as a rhetorical weapon reflecting “the idea that cultural appropriation is a political issue (p8)” and has ties to power dynamics between minority and dominant communities.

I see this concept being an important argument for WWC when giving writing advice about ethnicities and cultures. On their FAQs page, a paragraph is specifically lent to explain what cultural appropriation entails:

“Cultural appropriation involves a culture and/or sacred aspects of it being worn or used by people outside of the culture with little to no understanding for the significance of the usage at hand.” (Color "Frequently Asked Question")

The same basic aspect is being pointed out as in the ‘official’ definition of the term: “used by people outside of the culture” centered around the issue they do so “with little to no

understanding". This line of thought repeats itself in many ask-based blogposts answered by WWC when giving advice such as "do your research", "culture is not a monolith" and "do not cherry-pick cultural aspects". WWC is concerned about the possible consequences when you apply it to writing:

"Cultural appropriation [happens] when you write about a culture that is not yours and either perpetuate racist stereotypes about it or egregiously misrepresent it[,] taking a culture for your story because you think it's cool or interesting, but [...] don't bother to look into the aspects of how that culture works. [...] [B]ecause writing about these marginalized cultures in such a way leads readers to believe that your work is presenting the truth about them[.]" (Color "Frequently Asked Question")

The problem with cultural appropriation, according to WWC, is that members of ethnic minority communities need to see correct representation and thus, when outsiders write about them, they should do so with respect towards cultural aspects. In addition, when this representation is misrepresentation, because the outsider didn't bother to search about their culture, other outsiders who read the story will be misinformed. This statement again mirrors the emotional load of the blog. That is also the entity about cultural appropriation; it has become a heavily-loaded word in the publishing industry edging towards the discussion about who can write about whom and a consequent censorship.

In a 2017 article on The Bookseller website, authors speak out on the fear of accusations of cultural appropriation. Nicola Solomon, chief executive for the Society of Authors brought the issue up in a discussion forum by writing that diverse voices are important but "[should]n't troll writers for cultural appropriation every time they put a black face in their book if they are not black" since "authors are caught between two stalls.", namely embracing ethnic diversity in their writing and being criticized because of it (Cowdry). Lionel Shiver, an author, also gave a speech about cultural appropriation in which she hoped it was "a passing fad" because "trying to push the boundaries of the author's personal experience is part of fiction writer's job" (Hooton). Her speech received instant backlash and Yassmin Abdel-Magied walked out of her speech and posted a blogpost arguing that Shiver portrayed "a celebration of the unfettered exploitation of the experiences of others, under the guise of fiction" (Abdel-Magied). In another article of The Guardian, numerous novelists give their respective say on Lionel Shiver's speech about cultural appropriation and whether or not there should be boundaries on what a novelist can write about (Kunzri et al.).

Reading these different articles in full, the tension that the term cultural appropriation rises is sensed. What seems to be a recurring assumption within the discussion is that only writers that belong to a certain culture may write about that given culture (even though many novelists speak against this assumption in the The Guardian article). Mod Nikhil argues that "if you belong to a culture, you should get first crack at messing around with

it, whether in fiction or reality” simply because “it can’t be cultural appropriation if it’s your culture to begin with” (Nikhil "A Kingdom Based on Indian Culture") though his opinion doesn’t exclude members outside a culture to write about that culture.

The arguments from this heated discussion seems to echo certain negative messages: the warning for cultural appropriation serves as a censorship on certain writers, or with or without this censorship ethnic minorities must choose between no diversity or misrepresented diversity in literature respectively. WWC clearly doesn’t reflect this initial assumption that cultural appropriation is a form of censorship. Their standpoint is clear: “It isn’t necessarily cultural appropriation if you are white, only if you don’t do your research!” (Satvika) which to me translates as a fullhearted permission to write about other ethnicities as long as you are conscious, respectful and consider the possible racial issues you might trend when you write ethnic diversity in your fantasy story.

For cultural appropriation, what makes the difference between a bad or a good cultural-inspired fantasy story is the writers motivation. If we refer to the concept of blending, cherry-picking aspects from one or many cultures to build your fantasy world without knowing their true cultural meaning is cultural appropriation. For WWC, “[y]ou’re pulling cultures [at random] because those cultures ‘fit’ your goals and they’re ‘amazing’ cultures, instead of reflect[ing] the world” (Lesya "High Fantasy World Building with Real World Inspiration, Fantasy Poc and Fetishization"). This statement shows that a writer needs to think about their motivation when using a culture for their fantasy world. This message clashes with the message given by fantasy manuals. Their opinion is to delve into non-western cultures to give a ‘fresh’ and ‘new’ twist among the hundred European-centered novels on the market.

2.2 CREATING ETHNIC DIVERSE CHARACTERS

Character creation forms an important aspect of writing a story. “You do not want to leave your readers frustrated by not having well-rounded characters they can relate to (p25)”, Lea Docken states in *The Complete Guide™ To Writing Fantasy: Volume One* (Park and Dullemond). Such well-rounded characters need a backstory and dreams among many other things to bring them to life. Through conflict of your story, you define your characters for the readers as a real person. How does race, and especially ethnicity fit in this process of character creation according to the fantasy manuals and WWC?

2.2.1 THE RELATION BETWEEN FANTASY AND RACE

Both chapters I selected – “Race Creation” by Michael McRae in *The Complete Guide™ to Writing Fantasy: Volume One* (2002) and “Fantasy Races” by Andrew P. Miller and Daniel Clark in *The Writer’s Complete Fantasy Reference* (1998) – open by trying to form the definition of ‘race’. Michael McRae defines race as “being any population of individuals who

differ from other races by way of culture, heritage and/or morphology (p66)" (McRae) while Miller and Clark define race as such:

"The term race is fraught with political and cultural implications; in general, it refers to similarities and differences in certain physical characteristics like skin color, facial form or eye shape (p154)" (Miller and Clark).

Three characteristics are important when defining race according to these authors, namely culture, history and physical characteristics. A relevant comment to make is that both definitions were only formed in reference to the human notion of race - Michael McRae explores human races as examples to define the term 'race' - but eventually applied on the concept of fantasy races. This observation made me to conclude that while the manuals speak of race within the fantasy genre, they are in fact referring to the fantastical aspect of it, rather than in terms of human ethnicities.

In comparison, both chapters differ in their focus on what the fantastical aspect of race implies. Michael McRae asks his readers to not make "the choice between using mythological races over unique creations [...] lightly (p67)". He writes about 'template races' which entails clichéd fantasy races such as elves and dwarfs, and mentions the possibility to "'borrow' from other cultures". Such template races stand against "unique races" since the latter refer to imaginative races created by the writer. Importantly, McRae doesn't believe that one is better than the other but that the writer must think about the advantages and disadvantages when choosing one of the two options. The advantage of 'template races' or 'pre-fabricated races' is the assumptions your reader might make about that fantasy race because of "the stereotype behind the mythological creature (p67)" (McRae). McRae uses 'race' and 'creature' interchangeable. Miller and Clark, on the other hand, try to distinguish between those two terms. In their chapter, the authors state that race is defined by five criteria of which "[reason and culture] seem to be the most crucial in determining whether a fantastic being is a creature or a member of a race (p155)" (Miller and Clark). Their ultimate point is to state that you can shape a being that is assumed to be a fantasy creature into a fantasy race in order to create something unique. Their chapter, as they write, "[offers] some different perspectives on the 'standard' races, [suggests] some techniques for avoiding the cliché (p156)" (Miller and Clark). The remaining of the chapter involves different paragraphs on general fantasy races such as elves, dwarfs and giants among others and dedicates one paragraph to "non-western races" where the authors open that "Europe does not have a monopoly on legendary races. Such races can be found in the folktales, myths and stories of other cultures as well (p167)" (Miller and Clark).

For both investigated chapters, the relation between fantasy and race has a major imaginative characteristic. The writing advice directs the reader to wonder about the kind of fantasy race he would want to create, to be aware of the stereotype it carries and in

what manner he can breathe life into those fantasy-clichéd races. Additionally, there is another quote in 'Race Creation' by Michael McRae worth mentioning:

"By being aware of the stereotype associated with any given race, or mythological creature, you can make a significant statement without a single word (p69)" (McRae).

This quote gives an interesting perspective on writing advice concerning the relation between fantasy and race, whatever the specificity of that relation. Moreover, aligned with WWC's vision on writing ethnic diversity, it offers supplementary substance to consider for the continuity of this chapter.

2.2.2 RECOGNIZE THE TROPE. CHANGE THE STEREOTYPE

The existence of stereotyping has been established in the fantasy manuals. Often, the notion of the stereotype relates to the suggestion that the writer tries something new with his story, whether this involves creating a different kind of fantasy world or a differently handled fantasy race. For WWC, stereotyping goes beyond these two realms. By now, I believe it apparent that the Tumblr-blog focuses on writing advice and the issues that may come up when writing involves culture and ethnicity. Thus, stereotyping on WWC is mainly focused on writing characters of color (i.e. a term similar to people of color). Still, this does not mean that WWC doesn't answered ask-related blogposts about fantasy creatures.

By searching for fantasy-and-race-tagged, and fantasy-and-creature-tagged blogposts, I uncovered many asks involving 'race creation' and 'fantasy races'. Mod Alice realizes that "[European-based creatures such as elves, dwarves and dragons] are most well-known, possibly due to being a trope for a lot of fantasy novels" (Alice ""European" Fantasy Creatures in a Poc-Centric Setting"). In another blogpost, she states that the "problem [she] has with fictional races which have no diversity in skin color within the race is not per se there is no variety in color, but that there is no variety in characteristics within the race, [i]n a sense, you are stereotyping these races" (Alice "Writing Fictional Races Who Are 100% One Skin Color"). The concept of stereotyping a fantasy races is established in the same extent in the online community as it is in the fantasy manuals. Yet, the argument for mod Alice goes deeper, namely referring to the indirect implications of certain stereotypes. For example, in that same blogpost mod Alice compares elves and orcs, races from Tolkien's Middle Earth, to convey her argument. In that fantasy world, all elves are noble and white, while all orcs are violent and black. Indeed, there is no variety in characteristics within these races but, in addition, there is an underlying black and white symbolism, namely white is good and black is evil (Alice "Writing Fictional Races Who Are 100% One Skin Color"). A symbolism that unintentionally translate a racial relation with our real world.

In many blogposts, WWC focuses on the racial tension that may arise when creating fantasy races. The overall message I receive from researching the blog in this context is

to be careful and aware about racial stereotypes when you choose to write a fantasy story, to create a fantasy race and want to diversify it. "Most [f]antasy races are either animalistic, white or offensive stereotypes" according to mod Alice (Alice "Race-Assignment to Non-Human Characters"). In this line of thought, when you want to create a fantasy race and you want to have ethnic diversity, it is important to be aware of the "statement [made] without a single word" (McRae). Portraying people of color as a fantasy race can associate them with being 'the other', 'beastly' and 'exotic' depending on the specific conditions of how your fantasy story is written.

For WWC, stereotypes and tropes (i.e. a recurring theme or device in a work of literature) do not only apply on fantasy races but on human races/ethnicities too. A simple example to make this point clear is when we discuss character death. It is commonly noticed that people of color die before reaching the end of a story as these following blogposts on WWC indicate (Alice and Colette "Handeling Character Deaths with a Diverse Cast"; Colette "Writing First Major Deaths of Poc Characters Respectfully"). Similarly, some stories tend to give white character's death more emotional value than the death of a people of color. This is harmful representation because it implies a "P[eople] O[f] C[olor]-are-disposable trope" (Colette "Writing First Major Deaths of Poc Characters Respectfully").

There are many other tropes that are considered harmful misrepresentation according to WWC. On their second navigation page, a page that allows a visitor on the blog to *navigate* through all blogposts based on his topic of interest, links to WWC blogposts are provided that discuss tropes associated with people of color (Color "Stereotypes & Tropes Navigation"). What strikes me important to mention is how certain stereotypes are linked to certain ethnicities. As such, there is the "Smart Asian", the "Submissive Asian", the "Angry Black Woman", the "Sassy Black Woman" and the "Black Best Friend". There is the "Native Naturalist" and the "Noble Savage", the "Jewish Witch", the "Spicy Latina" and the "Arab Oil Sheikh". All these stereotypes are based on assumptions of certain ethnicities. WWC tells his followers that as a writer you should "question yourself when you have assigned certain roles for your characters of color, even if they appear 'neutral'" (Colette "No Title"). The discussion of the referenced blogpost revolves around fanart of the founders of Hogwarts, the wizardry school in J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series. In said fanart, the female founders of Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff are frequently portrayed as respectively, East Asian and Black. Though, there is nothing wrong with diversified founding figures to the history of Hogwarts, the issue lies in that the house of Ravenclaw is characterized by wit and intelligence and the house of Hufflepuff by care and kindness. As such, these fans associate intelligence with East Asian woman and caretakers with Black women. Mod Colette adds that "even when it comes to good intentions and adding diversity, there's still a lot of default role assigning that brushes along the lines of racial tropes and stereotypes" (Colette "No Title"). With this last example, we come at a crucial

realization: we need to understand the existing issues of writing ethnic diversity before we can write inclusive and ethnic diverse stories that can represent ethnic minorities. Why does our brain say that the character who is silent and smart is an East-Asian woman or that the angry, violent character we created should be a Black man? This question trends the theoretical concept of *internalized racism*.

Stereotypes reinforce what we already termed 'the single story' in chapter I. Stereotypes are not 'real' characters. Both the manuals and the online community understand that stereotypes may be true but are not what make a character real. What a writer needs to do is "breat[e] new life into a clichéd race" (p170 – Miller and Clarke), whether a fantasy race (in reference to the manuals), or a human race (in reference to WWC) because "what you need to focus on is making your races not [an] archetype [or] stereotype, since not everyone within one race is the same" (Alice "Fantasy Races and Avoiding Racist Portrayals").

To be able to recognize misrepresentation and to challenge it, the writer needs to understand what proper representation truly entails. Unfortunately, proper, or good representation cannot exist if tokenism is kept alive.

2.2.3 LEAVE TOKENISM BEHIND

WWC describes tokenism as "the practice of doing something only to prevent criticism [...] give the appearance that representation is included" (Color "Frequently Asked Question"). In the context of writing, tokenism refers to "writing about a minority character to give the illusion that the author is being diverse and inclusive while relying on stereotypes as an attempt to make characters seem 'authentic' while giving majority of characterization to the main (often White) character" (Color "Frequently Asked Question"). This definition makes three aspects about tokenism clear: 1) the author *tries* to be inclusive in his writing by included a character of color, 2) uses a *stereotype* to do so but 3) *without* major character development. In other words, tokenism arises when you are writing diversity for the sake of diversity.

"Don't just take our physical appearance and pat yourself on the back for being inclusive. Cause currently, you're not." (Lesya ""Native American Looking" Fantasy Protagonist, No Culture")

As such, you get a character cast that is, for example, completely white except for a "Black Best Friend". "If this character isn't adding anything to the story or contributing in any way, then there is no reason for them to be in the story," mod Najela explains (Najela "Black Women and Tokenism"). In a ask-related blogpost, mod Colette states that "the best way to avoid tokenism is to, of course have more than one character of a particular race" (Colette "Diversifying White Casts and Avoiding Tokenism"). As such, your "Black Best Friend" or any other trope concerning a character of color, can have an encounter with a sibling or another family member, even within a brief mention. It will show your

readers that those characters of color that share their ethnicity do differ from each other. Mod Najela clarifies that "tokenism isn't necessarily about having one character from a specific group [but] relying on stereotypes to tell your story" (Najela "Black Women and Tokenism"). As such, you may have a cast centered around characters of color, each representing a respective stereotype and thus, are essentially all a token in that story.

In these tokenism-related blogposts, WWC believes that the reason tokenism is a thing because writers who want to be inclusive in their writing think they need to "fulfil[I] an unspoken quota" (Elaney) while the issue of tokenism is that it gives a false sense of diversity and inclusion:

"Tokeni[ism] isn't just a result of diversity, it's a result of relying on racial or other demographic differences to tell characters apart instead of personality traits" (Shira).

WWC's messages in their blogposts is to portray characters of color as well-rounded characters and not reduce them to stereotypes of their race and ethnicity. Reading a blog thread started by Nimble's Notebook made me understand the importance of language and indirect statements concerning writing inclusive (Shira and Jess). In what way has a character of color been written with respect? It will depend on the personality that character has and shows during your story. Otherwise, you present the *message* that stereotypes characterize people of color. Hence, tokenism is a definite mark of bad representation and consequently harmful. What does writing ethnic diversity and inclusion require then? It requires the writer to treat their characters of color the same way their white characters are treated:

"A white character is presented as normal, a character we can all relate to, with universal problems, and the mere presence of a character who isn't white immediately implies that their otherness must play a major role in the characterization. With this line of thinking, it inevitably ends up with the character being presented as caricature, where their otherness becomes their defining character trait." (Dhillon).

2.2.4 DEFY WHITE NORMALITY

Tokenism is not mentioned in the fantasy manuals. In any chapter I have researched, I have found no statement that refers directly to people of color as characters. The only mention was to define what race is and how it applies to the fantasy genre. Even though, they speak about race and physical traits that distinguish races from each other, there is never anything explicitly stated in relation to representation and people of color. As such, it is not hard to understand that fantasy races are presumed to be white. This is simply understood by watching the cinematic translation of Tolkien's Middle Earth.

In comparison, WWC's ask-related blogposts frequently mention 'diversifying' your characters. Given the different aspects we have already touched upon, the term *diversifying* is easily defined. It is representing non-western cultures and characters of

color in your story. Yet, we need to ask ourselves an important question. Does that suffice? Unfortunately, the answer on that question will be no. Your story isn't necessarily categorized as representative. If you do not state your character of color has a certain race, your reader "will code them as white" (Jess "Race and Fantasy World"). Nonetheless, if you use a well-searched culture as world-building inspiration, give your characters of color a well-rounded personality and character development, you're more than likely to have an inclusive story since cultural coding hints towards ethnicity. When you have respectfully based your fantasy world in a non-western culture, WWC states that you logically also should have same-coded characters, thus characters of color from that culture. Yet, what if you are writing a fantasy story that isn't based in a non-western culture and you respectfully diversify it with characters of color (whether as part of a human race or a fantasy race)? With a non-western world, it isn't a logical assumption to have characters of color. In that situation, *white normativity* becomes a problematic issue.

White normativity is when "[w]hiteness defines the normal or accepted range of conduct and characteristics and all other racial categories are contrasted with whiteness as deviation from the norm (p952)" (Morris). In other words, "white people are people, and the members of other racial groups are people to the extent they resemble white people (p952). The use of stereotypes and tropes in tokenism represents this idea that people of color can only be seen in comparison to their white counterparts. Haney López also states that the character of whiteness depends "on a demonization of non-Whites" and, in comparison, "Whites are deified." This definition articulates a general observation I made when researching ask-related blogposts of WWC. The moment a writer actively wants to write a character of color, it seems that they don't know how to do it while writing white characters is in relation 'easier'. Moreover, no one can deny the persistent presence of white normativity in society. In cinema, Hollywood has been numerously critiqued for whitewashing ethnic diverse characters. The examples of Tolkien's Middle Earth and Rowling's Harry Potter are only a few fantasy examples in literature that prove the existence of the belief that white is default. Thus, adhering to white normativity in your story will lead to misidentification of your characters of color.

Here, WWC offers helpful writing advice. How can a writer write characters of color without readers misidentifying them as white and, eventually, avoid misrepresentation? A relevant point that first must be made is the fact that some writers believe that to avoid this is to not 'write white', meaning that when you write a character of color, their behavior shouldn't reflect whiteness. In that respect, mod Najela answers that "this term makes absolutely no sense" because it "assumes that people [of color] can only act one way". She adds that "there is a wide range of diversity of cultures and individual personalities" (Najela "Racism and Fantasy Novels"). This argument also aligns with avoiding the use of stereotypes or

your internalized racial assumptions when writing ethnic diversity, as discussed in the previous paragraphs.

For WWC, defying white normativity entails stating your characters race by showing physical traits such as skin color, hair texture and eye shape.

"Race is more than just skin color" (Alice "Race-Assignment to Non-Human Characters").

Description of race is the weapon that avoids your readers to assume your character of color to be white. Therefore, they have compiled useful blogposts that help writers describe race in a respectful manner (WWC "Featured Description Posts"). To illustrate this writing advice: describing a character of color having 'dark' skin is considered vague description. "What does 'dark' mean to you?" is that light brown, medium brown, dark brown, near black?" (mod Colette) (Colette "Describing Skin As 'Dark'"). She adds that "many white people consider Halle Berry dark, while to me (and most Black people), she's considered to be light-skinned". In addition, writing skin color description may also befall problematic messages according to the WWC moderators. One example is not to compare your character of color's skin color with food. Mod Colette explains "it's dehumanizing" since description such as "I love me some chocolate men' [or] your skin's like a mocha latte' are connected to some sensual desire" while "[cocoa and coffee] drove the slave trade" and, thus, relate to a painful racist-oriented history (Colette "Description Guide: Words for Skin Tone Part I"). In comparison, BuzzFeed published a post titled "If White Characters Were Described Like People Of Color In Literature" (Nigatu). In any case, the point mod Colette tries to make is that even though there might be some exceptions on the rule, such as olive-skinned and natural nuts and plants comparisons or spices, there are a lot of alternatives to use without bordering the line of fetishization. As such, WWC compiled a blogpost with writing advice that guides writers with skin color description of their characters of color (Colette "Description Guide: Words for Skin Tone Part II"). Herein, I noted a very important tip to defy white normativity in literature, namely describing race and skin color of white characters. "If you don't you risk implying that White is default human being and P[eople] O[f] C[olor] are the 'other'" (mod Colette) (Colette "Description Guide: Words for Skin Tone Part II"). Seemingly, a very simple solution for a complex internalized norm.

3 HOW-TO-WRITE: A CONCLUSION

Within my research on the intersection of writing advice and ethnic diversity, I have learned a lot about the practicality of writing inclusive. To state it in simple words: it is not simple. There are a lot of obstacles a writer needs to overcome before he can call himself an *inclusive* writer. Those obstacles are related to the following three conclusions I have made

based on the comparison of writing advice from fantasy manuals and the Tumblr-blog WWC.

3.1 THE RIGHT TO WRITE ETHNIC DIVERSITY

On several occasions, I encountered the discussion on whether a writer has 'the right' to write about certain ethnic groups. To write about an ethnicity means to write about their culture and about the people that belong to it, and should this only be allowed for people from that ethnicity? Concepts as cultural appropriation are believed to restrict people in their creative endeavors, a so-called censorship. Writers are less eager to write inclusively. For those who do try, the publishing industry is even less eager to invest money in ethnic diverse literature for fear of criticism.

I want to create a counter-thought on this principle that aligns with the theoretical chapter of this dissertation. Multicultural literature is categorized in the world of literature. Ijeoma Umebinyuo, Nigerian author of *Questions for Ada*, illustrates this phenomenon in the following quote:

"He said my writing does not show him Africa. Keep in mind this American man has never visited any country in Africa. He said I was writing about Africans driving and listening to Sade in air-conditioned cars. He just couldn't identify with such. [...] He said, "I am sorry, this is just not believable..." and then as I tried to hold my anger, I understood the 'burden' of writing an African story.

The publishing industry has certain expectations when we speak about multicultural or ethnic diverse literature. Authors of color are presumed to write about their experiences as long as it associated with what the dominant culture thinks are their experiences. In that sense, to call cultural appropriation out as the only form of censorship on ethnic diverse stories is hypocritical. In addition, within the publishing industry, there is a serious hiring problem when looking in the hierarchies that are needed to get a story published (literary agents, editors, beta-readers, etc.). Since, if these hierarchies are filled with people of color, stories that reflect misrepresentation might easily be distinguished from representative ones.

In any case, fantasy manuals and the online community understand that characters, in general, experience things that a writer never has experienced or will experience himself. A female writer can write a male character without needing to be male herself and vice versa, so why should that differ when writing a character that belongs to a different race and ethnicity than yours? It simply shouldn't.

In the blogpost "The Right to Write Diversity", the question was explicitly. Has a writer the right to write diversity when he is not part of said diversity (whether this entails belonging to a certain ethnicity or minority group)? Mod Alice answers that "it is a good thing to write about people and cultures other than you(rs). It creates more understanding and empathy towards others unlike yourself." Mod Colette has the same opinion stating that "[anyone]

should feel free to write [an] interesting, diverse world." Though, WWC does make an exception on that rule. In their blog post, titled 'White Authors and Topics to Avoid/Tread Carefully', entails a list of story plots that most likely fall into racial ground (WWC "White Authors and Topics to Avoid/Tread Carefully"). WWC explains that for these topics, there is a difference between an *outsider* and an *insider* writer:

"Outsiders are far more likely to focus on negative aspects, fetishize certain types of pain, and construct a narrative that is far more informed by their political biases than an insider. Yes, an insider can write politically, but because they are insiders they have a deep, visceral understanding of the issues that comes from a primary source: themselves." (WWC "Why Insiders Can Write Their Experience").

The fact writing advice coming from WWC moderators, who are ethnic diverse, focus more on writing ethnic diversity than the fantasy manuals, in a certain extent (while remembering to forget the difference between the media), is a reflection of that quoted statement. As previously stated, the content of WWC has an emotional value concerning the need for good representation.

Writing character experiences and being aware for cultural appropriation are, thus, important aspects that will determine whether someone has 'the right' to write ethnic diversity. Especially, insider experience and motivation are some critical aspects when people of color determine if a story is inclusive and reflects proper representation. These critical aspects are simply related to the political and historical context surrounding race.

3.2 THE RACIAL ISSUES OF WRITING DIVERSITY

WWC touches a lot of ground when it comes to racial issues that might transpire when writing ethnic diversity. We can consider it as a side effect of our racist society because "[w]ithin a racist society, prejudices are inescapable" (Tatum, 1997). This will not change when a writer agrees on being more inclusive towards other races and ethnicities in his writings. From this standpoint, concepts such as tokenism, cultural appropriation, fetishization, dehumanization and color blindness are automatically used within the writing blogosphere when it comes to ethnic diversity in literature. For instance, many asks for WWC are related to writing a fantasy world in which racism does not exist because the writer wants to write about a fantasy world where racial equality among his various races exist and the only struggles his characters deal with are class structures and sexism. It is a beautiful example of how fantasy can be used for *escapism*. Mod Colette states that "not all P[eople O[f] C[olor] readers want to read another story with subplot attached to racism and micro-aggressions". Therefore, WWC moderators are admired by the intention to have racial inequality in a story but think it odd when you do have other forms of discrimination such as classism and sexism. Mod Colette explains that because of intersectionality, classism, sexism and racism go hand in hand:

"You and I still live in a place where racism and our history exists so [be] mindful of not perpetuating harmful tropes and stereotypes that might not be a trope if such

a racism-free world truly existed" (Alice and Colette "Worldbuilding: A Fantasy World without Racism").

Thus, even when you write fantasy in light of escapism, as a writer you must be aware of the underlying messages you unintentionally send. There is a difference between a world without racism and a colorblind world. Stating that your fantasy world just doesn't know the concept of a race and, thus, there is no variety in skin color, is harmful territory you are entering (Alice "Writing Fictional Races Who Are 100% One Skin Color"). WWC calls it *erasure* where you are denying intersectionality between different kind of oppressive systems as known in our real world and, thus, also degrade the devastating effect racial experiences have on the life of people of color. The same is true for concepts such as fetishization and cultural appropriation. When you use an ethnicity's culture for your story, and you only pick what you think is 'amazing' or 'nice' for your story, you are not being respectful for the cultural value certain cultural traditions have as they do for people from that ethnicity. Even physical attributes of people of color can be fetishized in your writing when you want to write a raceless world. In an ask, a writer asks WWC to describe ethnic features as 'markings' and compares it to the concept of marking in animals. Mod Lesya is clear to say that it is offensive because the writer "basically codified white-as-default and everything else from [ethnic] features to animals feature as 'specially marked'" (Lesya "Referring to People of Color's Features As "Markings"").

When it comes to character creation, the racial implication of stereotypes and tropes, the general mechanism of tokenism and how white normativity plays a role in this should not be taken lightly. Even when you choose to have no human races in your fantasy story but different white- and ethnic-coded fantasy races who discriminate among each other, there might be some pitfalls. A writer questions whether having such a fantasy world is harmful since it fictionalizes racism: the race of werewolves being feared by other races. Mod Najela answers that "even though all werewolves are feared in the story, are white werewolves hated less compared to werewolves from other ethnicities? Are there certain stereotypes [h]eightedened and/or downplayed because of racial differences among them?" (Najela and Alice). Thus, what WWC tries to say is that when you write ethnic diversity you need to be aware of racial tension you unintentionally imply that come off as offensive and harmful. That doesn't mean that you shouldn't write ethnic diversity:

"You can definitely contribute to diversity and should feel free to write this interesting, diverse world. And know that offense will happen, no matter what you write. Do accept constructive criticism and feedback, though" (Colette).

That is an obvious of being a writer: there will always be readers that don't like your fantasy story and there will be readers that adore your writing. What will make you a good writer is what you do with the criticism you receive. It is a common standpoint for both the fantasy manuals and the online blog community. Nonetheless, there is a clear difference between these media in the reason behind this standpoint. For WWC, when you carefully

read between the lines, you read the emotional value of being respected as people of color, and that respect is at the heart of good representation writing by an inclusive writer. Writing with respect comes from writing what you know.

3.3 WRITE WHAT YOU KNOW

When it comes to writing fantasy, there are some things you need to know as the concept of worldbuilding and fantasy races. These are things you don't know by accident but unravel by reading fantasy books, fantasy manuals and follow writing- and fantasy-related blogs. Nevertheless, there are many writers that translate cultural appropriation as negative connotated advice that a writer needs to stick with 'what they know'. This is a form of misconception, similar to the misconception that in medieval times, there were no people of color. ""Just because it's European-inspired doesn't mean that there weren't people of color during this time in real history," mod Najela states (Najela "Avoiding Exoticification of Non-European Lands").

The advice to tell writers they should only 'write what they know' implies a stationary source of knowledge. It implies that certain fantasy writers are constrained to writing a certain type of stories. It implies that writers can't educate themselves on matters they want to write about. How many fantasy novels involve armor traditions and fighting techniques? I don't assume any beginning fantasy writer knowing anything about it (lest he reads a lot of fantasy novels). Knowledge can be expanded. A writer can learn. Therefore, the stances of manuals and blogosphere align on the importance of research. Doing your research strikes close home to the advice of writing what you know because once you learn about something, you can write about it. For that reason, the final chapter of *The Complete Guide™ To Writing Fantasy: Volume One* is titled 'Research: The More You Know, The Safer You Are' (p286).

People can educate themselves on the racial issues of writing ethnic diversity. It is one of WWC's beliefs and mission. Through their blog, a writer learns about what defines, for example, tokenism. He will learn to recognize it and, in the future, try to avoid it in his own writings. Eventually, he will write with respect and learns to avoid other racial issues that he might encounter during his writing endeavors. Furthermore, WWC tells their followers to do their individual research on ethnicities and their respective culture and religion if they choose to use it in their fantasy story. Those stories will be proof of an inclusive attitude towards ethnic diversity in literature. In the end, those stories will exhibit what is defined as good and, more importantly, respectful representation:

"When you write diversely you attempt to include strong, realistic portrayals of [different] kind of people, those who are traditionally excluded, marginalized, silenced or stereotyped by the mainstream media[.] The whole point of attempting to be a diverse writer would be to write about cultures with respect, attempting to show them as fully realized, complex and valid."

III RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE (ASPIRING) WRITERS

“Because Education Is The Most Powerful Weapon Which You Can Use.”

Nelson Mandela, *speech at Madison Park High School in Boston* (1990)

What defines being inclusive is the active pursuit for knowledge to educate oneself on matters related to writing ethnic diversity. Once that knowledge has been obtained, representing ethnic diversity ought to be second nature. Now, where does the (aspiring) writer who believes in inclusion and representation start their pursuit for knowledge?

During the research of this dissertation I have made some observations and assumptions on where that knowledge might be hiding. For those in search for some additional guidance when it comes to writing good representation of ethnic diversity, this short chapter discusses methods and sources to recommend some possible steps in becoming an inclusive writer.

I RESEARCH

Being writer means you research what you want to write. If you want to write a story based on Hindu mythology, you will need to read Hindu texts such as Mahabharata. If you want to write about Nigerian folklore, you will need to learn about from Nigerian culture. Soon, you will find out that Nigerian culture is shaped by various ethnic groups, such as Yoruba and Igbo. Hence, before you start writing ethnic diversity, you need to know find culture-related information, how to use that information respectfully and what are the possible impediments you might encounter along the way.

“We must always be respectful of the cultures we want to write about. To not do so is to marginalize an entire country, an entire race. Perhaps some of you might wonder what the real harm is. There is harm. Distorting language, traditions, culture to suit your story misrepresents, marginalizes, stereotypes that culture. It is saying, what do I care about your thousands of years of history, I can pick and choose and do whatever I want with it to make a good story.” Ellen Oh, Korean-American author on the importance of proper research.

1.1 READ RACE-RELATED THEORIES

Since the character of ethnic diversity in literature is heavily connected to racial and ethnic politics, it wouldn't hurt to dive into some race-related theories. For starters, chapter I gives a summary on the teachings of CRT, in which it was made clear that racism is not as overt as it once has been. To understand racial issues, is to understand how our society works in that context. In the end, such theories might evoke you to understand what biases and prejudices you possess, especially if you are a privileged writer. There is nothing wrong with admitting you are privileged because realizing that fact will eventually open your eyes

for certain practices in your writing that lead to the misrepresentation of people of color. Nonetheless, there are still a lot of subject I haven't touched upon in my two previous chapters due to content strains such as micro-aggressions and micro-invalidations. It shows that there are a lot of things to learn when it comes to (internalized) racism, prejudices and discrimination.

1.2 READ WRITING ADVICE FOCUSED ON ETHNIC DIVERSITY

To understand what 'good' representation is, you should start to read writing advice that focuses on ethnic diversity in writing. WWC is a good place to begin with. On the blog, you will find a lot of information on racial-related problems that might occur during writing ethnic diversity whether that entails world-building or character creation, as already revealed in chapter II. The reason why I believe this to be a greatly reliable source of information is because the moderators of WWC all can identify as people of color. Since the racial and ethnic issues in our society marginalize people of color, to learn about the consequent struggle of such a society, aren't people of color the living proof? As such, WWC has a segment in which followers contribute to POC Profiles. These are blogposts that host "people of color and those of diverse backgrounds to share their experiences, grievances and knowledge on subjects pertaining to them that they think will be helpful for writers".

Other possible sources in this respect are online writing blogs who are becoming more aware of giving advice on inclusion and representation. Even organization such as WNDB™ give writing advice recommendations for aspiring writers.

1.3 READ MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

By reading ethnic diverse stories, you will learn what makes a story ethnic diverse. You will observe that it is about the little things that hint someone's cultural practices and customs, or their lack of it. In any case, reading such books across genres where ethnic diverse characters play a role, will make it feel natural that your story has a black princess and an Asian prince. Herein, books written by people of color (#ownvoices) are an important source for your multicultural literature shelf. What is important here, though, is to be critical. Read reviews and see what bloggers and reviewer mention about the representation in specific. Was it harmful or disrespectful? More importantly, why? In contrast, what are celebrated reads based on their inclusion of ethnic diverse characters and why? Such reviews, you can find on Rich in Color, WNDB™ and Diversity in YA. In addition, you can absorb other media such as tv-shows, movies and graphic novels to recognize tropes and stereotypes. You can reevaluate them based on your acquired knowledge or based on others critical comments. An additional useful resource for tropes specifically is TV Tropes, a site that lists reoccurring tropes and where in media they appear.

1.4 ASK FOR FEEDBACK FROM PEOPLE OF COLOR

Therefore, I think it important to listen especially to feedback given by people of color when it comes to ethnic diverse stories for, as an inclusive writer, you are trying to represent these individuals. If they feel misrepresented, I stand to believe that your writing isn't as inclusive as it should be. If they have some critique, your writing isn't inclusive as it should be. You learn from your mistakes and you do even better next time! WWC has a 'Colorful Critique' segment on their blog that allows you to let your writing be read by the moderators to give you some feedback concerning description and culture-coding. In addition, you can try to find beta and sensitivity readers to do a similar read-through. An example of such a site is Diversity Crosscheck.

1.5 ACCEPT THAT WRITING EQUALS CRITICISM

When you share your writing with the world, so to speak, you are opening yourself up for critique. Accept that as a given when it comes to writing. Some criticism might sound unjust but sometimes it is also a path towards seeing your mistakes. In any case, don't let it discourage you. It doesn't mean you have failed as an inclusive writer. Criticism should make you reevaluate your writings on your own terms based on the previous steps. If you think the criticism was indeed unjust than you've done a splendid job! If not, it should be only more motivation to better yourself in your craft.

2 ALLYSHIP

As you are paving your way towards more inclusive stories, as writer who identifies as white, you are also becoming an ally for ethnic minorities. You show people of color that you respect them, support them and recognize their importance in society. As an ally and aspiring writer, you address issue you encounter while reading books or other people's writings. As an ally and aspiring writer, you promote diverse books that are available on the market. You make your environment aware of the importance of inclusion and good representation that comes with it. You are proactive, vocal and public about being an ally. As such, you are using your privilege to promote social justice while reflecting on your personal prejudices and learning about the injustices done towards the minority group. You view your membership in the dominant group as an opportunity to make change. For in the end, it is all about the small steps you take to move towards reflecting ethnic diversity as an inherent part of our multicultural society!

CONCLUSION

While my dissertation aims to grasp the importance of representation of ethnic diverse characters in young adult literature and how 'good representation' can be defined, we must first consider why we need to ask ourselves these questions to begin with. Seemingly, we cannot escape the reality of our world. CRT adheres the belief that racism and its consequences are an inescapable part of our society.

Since the expression of racism adapts itself to socio-cultural changes, critical race theorist advice the utility of 'a unique voice of color'. Such voices deliver counter-stories, which ultimately want the harmful effects of racism to be understood by the dominant societal groups. As such, minority groups expose the invisible workings of racial ideologies.

Sandra Hughes-Hassell (2013) finds herself supporting the fact that multicultural YA literature as a form of counter-storytelling since counter-storytelling gives voice to the silenced and challenges dominant narratives. These two facets serve many positive purposes for ethnic minorities. The coming-of-age aspect of an ethnic diverse YA novel is important in the racial and ethnic identity formation of youth of color because such identity formation is an important aspect in their life. On the other hand, multicultural YA literature challenges the single story, the assumption that individuals of a certain ethnicity have only one identity (i.e. adhering to a stereotype to tell their story). As such, multicultural YA literature serves to educate the dominant culture as a vehicle in the discussion around race and racism.

With ethnic diverse YA novels people of color are granted messages of inclusion and representation. They will feel that as individuals they are participating in society and its culture which, regrettably, is not entirely reflected by the bookshelves on the market nowadays. Fortunately, organizations as WNDB™ are aware of the lack of diversity in the publishing industry and are paving the way for authors of color to bring about counter-stories.

Numerous discussions have started concerning the issues of who can represent ethnic diversity. In those discussions, cultural appropriation is called a form of censorship that has led writers and the publishing industries to refrain from writing and publishing culturally-inspired stories fearing criticism. Apparently, inclusive writing does not automatically equal representation. Writers who try to tell experiences about a culture and/or ethnicity they do not belong to, need to be aware of the possibility of misrepresentation in their stories, especially if they do not fully research that culture.

There is a general acceptance in the writing world when it comes to writing experiences that are not your own, a writer already does so all the time. Yet, a writer needs to thread extra carefully when writing ethnically inspired stories, even when we set are story boundaries in a fantastical realm.

Researching writing advice in the fantasy genre has lead me to believe that racial issues are an inherent character when it comes to inclusive writing. Fantasy manuals are not straightforward in translating that message. WWC, an online community, is a Tumblr-blog, run by people of color, that focuses on giving writing advice on ethnic diversity in writing. Based on their content, representing ethnic diverse stories and characters can possibly entwine with racial issues such as tokenism, colorblind ideologies, dehumanization and white normativity. Their message to writers is to be aware of the dangers when you write about other ethnicities since the pervasiveness of racism affects every individual in our society and writing what you know will help you overcome it. The ultimate advice is to do research and educate yourself on the racial matters that come with writing ethnic diversity. Especially, the fact that writing about people of color invites learning about the experiences of people of color reflects the theoretical framework of 'a unique voice of color' since the unique voice of color holds knowledge and truth about the society we live in.

As I remarked at the opening of this dissertation, I cannot provide a solid blueprint on how to write ethnic diverse characters. My research has shown me that there are many steps to be taken before writing can reflect respectful inclusion of people of color. Writing advice advises research and communication with people of color to reach such goal.

'How-To-Write With Color' shows that the importance of good representation lies in the fight against under- and misrepresentation, to educate dominant societal groups and challenge prejudice-based narratives. In the end, good representation is reflected in authentic and varied characters of color that mirror a truthful version of the diversity in our world.

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SWOT-ANALYSIS

In the following section, I will provide a short analysis of my dissertation based on a SWOT analysis to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in content and research process and reflect on possible opportunities and threats. To summarize the topic, my dissertation focuses on the question why good representation of ethnic diverse characters in YA fantasy literature is important.

STRENGTHS

I directed my research by first comprehending the issues involved with the research question itself. Asking why good representation of ethnic diverse characters is necessary indirectly implies to search why ethnic diverse characters are not represented correctly. When I considered the numbers of children's books involving ethnic diversity, the numbers were lacking. Therefore, my research first had to answer a question that perhaps shouldn't be asked in the first place, namely, why do we need ethnic diverse characters in literature. This question has brought me to the research done by Sandra Hughes-Hassell who sees multicultural literature as a form of counter-storytelling, a term defined within the theoretical framework of critical race theory. As such, I had found a theoretical framework in which I could answer the question why we need ethnic diverse characters. The short answer is that people of color are a part of our society and should be included in its culture, which in this case is literature. This example of how I conducted research for chapter I of my dissertation shows that the strength of it lies in its objective search for arguments to answer the different facets of the overall research question.

In a similar way, I searched arguments to answer the question what defines 'good' representation. With the theoretical framework in mind, and the concept of 'a unique voice of color', it was a logic choice to use *Writing With Color* as a source of writing advice concerning ethnic diversity. As such, my dissertation shows the practicality of its theory. In general, the topic of my research is very contemporary. It is a hot-topic in nowadays debates and discussion in the publishing industry, reflected in the issue of cultural appropriation as a censorship and the foundation of organizations such as *We Need Diverse Books*[™].

WEAKNESSES

A first weakness that can be pointed out is the comparison of writing advice between the fantasy manuals and the blog community. The fantasy manuals are not recently published in contrast to the blog. In addition, one might argue that the blog in comparison to the manuals is not a reliable source of writing advice in general, though I do admit I don't agree on that fact. Moreover, the subjectivity of the blog can be questioned. The moderators of the blog are people of color who write about the racial issues of writing

ethnic diversity. The content they provide have an emotional load in relation to their own lives and experiences. Therefore, their content may be read with negative connotations. Yet, we must comprehend that in line with the theory represented in the dissertation, this is the practical form of the concept of 'a unique voice of color'. Is it not justified that people of color judge a book's content if that content is supposed to reflect their ethnicity? Especially when that content might be misrepresenting their ethnicity?

When it comes to chapter II, I have tried to give examples and arguments to reflect the discussions surrounding writing ethnic diversity and the definition of 'good representation'. Of course, the length of this dissertation doesn't allow for a full-scope on this contemporary topic and merely, shows a tip of the iceberg. What I tried to focus on is what information do we need to formulate the definition of good representation and how do racial issues play a role in that. Furthermore, since I have set this aspect of my research in the fantasy genre, I have narrowed the possible insights I could make concerning the topic. If I had researched contemporary novels the approach and the subsequent results might have looked entirely different.

Even though, I pointed out the relevance of my topic as content for contemporary discussions, the entirety of my work focuses on American numbers, theories and trends that do not reflect Belgium and the Netherlands. Yet, the topic is source for reflection on our own publishing industry and their respective representation of ethnic diversity. Nevertheless, there is a gradual change in societal discussions surrounding racism and discrimination that rely on insights borrowed from critical race theory in our own academic world and publishing industry.

OPPORTUNITIES

With previous in mind, I believe the opportunity my dissertation offers is to make the reader think. It pushes the reader to reflect on the lack of ethnic diverse characters in literature. Why is 'being white' default? Why are there discussions surrounding cultural appropriation and why does that feel as a form of censorship? Even though, I do not fully answer these questions, they are matters to be considered. Many people of color, including me, will admit they have internalized racism they are still dealing with. Therefore, it is not hard to understand that their dominant counterparts have a longer journey ahead to overcome their own internalized racism. The topic in this dissertation is a manner to reflect on principles, values and thoughts related to racism and discrimination by writers, academics and publishing industry alike. More importantly, I hope reading this dissertation will encourage the readers to research themselves, to educate themselves on the topic to witness the iceberg that is concealed under the surface. In the end, I think someone's individual perspective on societal issues are the first step into solving the attitude of our society. As an idealist, I think that this dissertation and the subsequent research that might come from it will lead to a change in the world, no matter how small.

THREATS

A threat may be that the content I have provided is too limited for some readers, especially people of color. Why do we need to ask ourselves the importance of representation of ethnic diversity? In the end, our world is a diverse place and, logically, we should see that reflected in the bookshelves. My problem with the stance of this argument is that it is too simple. There are more facets to consider. In line with my dissertation, isn't that a color-blind approach? To say that we live in a diverse society and for that reason representation is important is only one aspect of the entire reason. Though, I have answered my research question based on this premise, I believe I have tried to touch other aspects, such as white normativity and the invisible working of racism to create a balanced conclusion.

My ultimate fear is that some readers might find the answer on my research question incomplete, and that is a fair conclusion to make. I am aware that the content of my dissertation isn't complete. Yet, it shows the answer on a research question that in its essence needs a starting point to be answered correctly. That starting point is where I started my research and that is where every individual who believes in inclusion and representation should start too.

