The English Classroom

– a Place of Struggle

AN ANALYSIS OF THE POTENTIAL OF CONTEMPORARY YOUNG ADULT FICTION AS A TEACHING TOOL FOR THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

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Abstract

The topic of this thesis investigates the potential of contemporary young adult fiction as a teaching tool for the encouragement of intercultural competence. The aim has been to identify cultural specific issues represented in the texts, as well as universal issues. This is because intercultural competence is concerned with both. Furthermore, the aim is to suggest how these representations are beneficial for the teaching of intercultural competence in Norwegian lower secondary schools, and what pedagogical potential the novels possess.

The methodological approach has been a literary analysis inspired by the notion of 'culture as discourse'. Hence, I have suggested some relevant discourses found in the novels. The data material consist of two American novels, one with a male and one with a female protagonist, and two British novels, also represented with one protagonist from each gender. All the novels fall under the genre of contemporary young adult fiction.

Through the analysis, universal and culture specific issues were identified related to three cultural topics: *family*, *gender* and *youth culture*. The findings indicate that the novels can be used as cultural artifacts, although to varying degree. Thus, the novels challenge the reader's knowledge, skills and attitudes – which are the three aspects of interculturality. The conflicts that might occur between the reader's native culture and the novels' representations of cultures will generate a 'place of struggle' between these cultures. By generating these cultural struggles – which also can be understood as cultural difference and contradictions – the novels allow for teaching activities that aim to make the learner comfortable with cultural differences, i.e. becoming interculturally competent.

Sammendrag

Temaet for denne avhandlingen undersøker potensialet samtidslitteratur for ungdom innehar som et pedagogisk verktøy for å fremme interkulturell kompetanse. Målet har vært å identifisere kulturspesifikke problemstillinger som er representert i tekstene, samt universelle problemstillinger. Dette er fordi interkulturell kompetanse er opptatt av begge perspektivene. Videre er målet å foreslå hvordan disse representasjonene er gunstige for undervisning av interkulturell kompetanse i den norske ungdomsskolen, og hvilket pedagogiske potensial romanene besitter.

Den metodiske tilnærmingen har vært en litterær analyse inspirert av konseptet 'kultur som diskurs'. På grunn av dette har jeg foreslått noen relevante diskurser som finnes i romanene. Datamaterialet består av to amerikanske romaner, en med mannlig og en med kvinnelig hovedperson, og to britiske romaner, også representert med en protagonist fra hvert kjønn. Alle romanene faller under sjangeren samtidslitteratur for ungdom.

Gjennom analysen var universelle og kulturspesifikke problemstillinger identifisert i tilknytning til tre kulturelle temaer: *familie*, *kjønn* og *ungdomskultur*. Funnene antyder at romanene kan brukes som kulturelle artefakter, men i varierende grad. Dermed utfordrer romanene leserens kunnskaper, ferdigheter og holdninger – som er de tre aspektene interkulturalitet består av. Konfliktene som kan oppstå mellom leserens 'native culture' og romanenes representasjoner av kulturer vil generere en 'place of struggle' mellom disse kulturene. Ved å generere disse "kulturkampene" – som også kan forstås som kulturforskjeller og –motsetninger – tilrettelegger romanene for undervisningsaktiviteter som tar sikte på å gjøre eleven komfortabel med kulturelle forskjell, det vil si å bli interkulturelt kompetent.

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1 INTRODUCTION

> "[L]anguage teachers are so much teachers of culture that
> culture has often become invisible to them."
>
> Claire Kramsch (1993, p. 48)

Claire Kramsch, an important scholar in the field of applied linguistics, makes this statement in her book *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. If we are to accept Kramsch's statement, what does this entail for our teaching? When I say "our teaching", I am referring to my fellow language teachers and myself, as a soon-to-be English teacher. If culture has become invisible, how can we as language teachers ensure that our students are provided with the required competence? Because, as I will present below, cultural awareness, knowledge and competence is a part of our mandate as language teachers. To me, Kramsch's statement implies a need to make culture visible to language teachers, and with my background in social science studies, the importance and implementation of culture as an integral part of the English classroom is truly interesting.

This thesis sets out to explore whether and how (inter)cultural competence can be approached through fictional literature. Fictional literature was chosen as these types of texts have a natural place in the language classrooms. Furthermore, the focus on culture through fictional literature gave me the opportunity to combine two of my main interest areas. The purpose of my study is to address the potential in the resource of fictional novels, in an attempt to make culture visible.

1.1 Research question

The research question chosen for this thesis is as follows: **What is the potential of contemporary young adult fiction[1] as a teaching tool for the encouragement of intercultural competence in the Norwegian ESL classroom[2] at lower secondary school?** To answer this question I have conducted a literary analysis where intercultural theory, including Kramsch's (2013) notion of 'culture as discourse', have been essential. I have analyzed four novels within the genre of contemporary young adult fiction. These novels consist

[1] Analytical unit. The project only address four novels within this genre, and not "all contemporary young adult fiction". The transfer value of my findings will be addressed in the discussion part of the thesis, when I evaluate the thesis' quality.

[2] ESL – English as a Second Language. English does not have the official status as a second language in Norway. However, in our school system it has the unique position as our second language, as the term 'foreign language' usually does not include English, but rather refers to all the other languages being offered and taught.

of two British novels and two American novels that respectably consist of one with a male and one with a female protagonist.

Through a literary analysis I sought to investigate what cultural issues are addressed. Intercultural competence concerns both a reflection on ourselves and 'others', which I will further elaborate below. These concerns make it desirable for teachers if the novels to portray both universal issues and culture specific issues. In addition to these concerns I wanted to investigate Kramsch's notion of 'culture as discourse'. Thus, I searched for discourses that I thought could be beneficial for the acquisition of intercultural competence

I have sought to answer the main research question through these three sub-questions:

1. Which cultural issues are universal?
2. Which cultural issues are culture specific?
3. Which discourses contribute to an intercultural perspective?

1.2 Limitation and clarification of concepts

Working with a project's research question is strongly tied to working with relevant terms and concepts (Johannessen, Tufte, & Christoffersen, 2010, p. 60). This thesis research question has two important concepts that need to be defined and understood before we can move on. The first is 'contemporary young adult fiction'. The second is 'intercultural competence'. The clarification of these terms will also indicate the limitations of my project.

1.2.1 Contemporary young adult fiction

In the process of formulating this study's research question the restriction on texts was a major focus. My initial interest was with non-pedagogical text, also referred to as authentic texts. However, the concept is extremely vast and unmanageable. Furthermore, 'authentic text(s)' is not a concept used in the Knowledge Promotion (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013)[3]. However, most of the terms used in LK06 that relates to texts – 'literary text' being one of them – are part of the vast universe of authentic texts. Personally, I am an avid

[3] The official translated version of the Norwegian National Curriculum, Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training, as it stands after the 2013 revision. Throughout this thesis I will also refer to the Knowledge Promotion as LK06, as this is the accepted abbreviation used for the Norwegian curriculum.

reader of novels written for young adults, both because I find them entertaining and because they give me inspiration for future teaching activities. Consequently, the texts I have chosen can be categorized under the genre 'contemporary young adult fiction'.

Contemporary young adult fiction is a vide definition that could be said to include any book that is popular for young adult readers, ranging from fantasy to realism. However, in the context of this thesis the concept is used exclusively on novels within contemporary realism. Contemporary realism in young adult fiction is characterized by a construction of reality that is credible, possible to recognize, and deals with central but difficult aspects of young peoples' lives. The *contemporary* aspect is tied to the time period the plot unfolds, and that this time period to a certain extent coincides with the reader's own period (Slettan, 2014, p. 30). The four novels investigated in this thesis fall under this understanding of the genre. The selected novels are:

- *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah (2001)
- *Dustbin Baby* by Jacqueline Wilson (2001)
- *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2007). Illustrations by Ellen Forney.
- *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech (1994)[4]

1.2.2 Intercultural competence

The choice to use the concept 'intercultural competence' was not obvious, especially seeing how the Knowledge Promotion uses the term 'cultural competence' (2013, p. 2) – although it is only used once. Furthermore, the Knowledge Promotion does not offer any definition of the term. Consequently, the content of the term is open to interpretation. While cultural competence is generally viewed by theorists as "transfer of information between cultures" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 205), the English subject curriculum's aims seem to go beyond that. For instance, LK06 uses expressions such as 'discuss', 'elaborate' and 'reflect', which clearly surpasses a passive transfer of information.

The 'decomposition' of intercultural competence does present itself more in line with the descriptions provided in LK06. Although intercultural competence is difficult to define because of its many uses, there seems to be an agreement among linguists and language education

[4] The dates presented here refer to the year the novels were first published.

researchers that being interculturally competent is an activity – as opposed to the relative passiveness of cultural competence (Byram, 2008; Byram, Gribkova, & Starkey, 2002; Kramsch, 1993; Lund, 2006). Intercultural competence "includes a reflection both on the target and on the native culture" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 205). Additionally, the concept of intercultural competence is tied to the ability of taking into account a person's individual identity, as opposed to some preconceived idea of national identity. National culture and identity is prominent in cultural competence.

Michael Byram, who is one of the leading theorists within language and culture education, is a strong advocate of the activity aspect of intercultural competence. Thus, I will present some relevant concepts of his in next chapter's theoretical framing. However, simply put, intercultural competence is a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes (Byram, 2008). This is a view that the English subject curriculum seems to cater for. One of the competence aims after year 10 states that the students should be able to "*discuss and elaborate* on the way *people* live and how they socialise in Great Britain, USA and other English-speaking countries *and Norway*" (p. 9, my italics). Furthermore, the curriculum states that "to develop *knowledge* about, *understanding* of and *respect* for the lives and cultures of *other people*" is of importance (p. 4, my italics). These examples indicate that the aim is in fact intercultural competence: the acquisition of both appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes by demanding active students with a consciousness of their own culture and a focus on the individuals we communicate with, not the nationalities.

Byram's work has been greatly influential in Europe and has been implemented in the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEF) (Lund, 2008, p. 2). The CEF has in turn influenced national curriculum reforms. Therefore, it is rather ironic that the concept of 'intercultural competence' is never used in the English subject curriculum. However, as we have seen, the intent of the Knowledge Promotion appears in fact to be the promotion of students' 'intercultural competence'. Ragnhild Elisabeth Lund (2008, p. 5) draws the same conclusion in her article "Intercultural Competence – an aim for the teaching of English in Norway"[5]. Thus, after conferring with relevant theory and the English subject curriculum, it became evident that my interest, as well as the interest of the English subject curriculum, is, rather confusingly, intercultural competence. Therefore, my thesis will concern the encouragement of intercultural competence through contemporary young adult fiction, based

[5] Lund's article is based on the English subject curriculum as it stood before the 2013 revision. However, seeing how it was a revision and not a reform, her findings are still valid.

on the understanding that intercultural competence is the intended aim of the English subject curriculum.

1.3 Previous research and my thesis' relevance

I started this thesis with a quote from Claire Kramsch. In the quote, Kramsch states that culture sometimes become invisible to language teachers. In the same book that this quote was retrieved from, Kramsch explores the pedagogy of literary texts in a foreign language classroom on a theoretical level. She starts off by reporting what she, at the time, understood as current practices in the communicative teaching of literary texts. She then proceeds by suggesting ways in which these practices "can be reoriented toward a pedagogy of dialogue that elicits and values diversity and difference" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 131). However, Kramsch's research is over a decade old and was conducted on a German class in the US. Nevertheless, it is evident that her contribution will be influential to this thesis as her area of expertise is foreign language acquisition and argues that literature and culture are inseparable.

In a Norwegian context there has, to my knowledge, not been conducted any research related to literary texts and the promotion of intercultural competence. What has been explored is the use of culture in our English textbooks. In 2006 Lund published her PhD dissertation, *Questions of Context and Culture in English language textbooks - a study of textbooks for the teaching of English in Norway* (2006), which offers insight into the position of intercultural competence in ESL classrooms. Lund's focus on textbooks as a learning resource is understandable in light of the crucial role textbooks play in teachers' day-to-day planning of classes (Lund, 2006, p. 45).

Lund's study discusses one fundamental problem with many of the textbook texts. The textbooks "refer to seemingly 'culture-neutral' context" (Lund, 2007, p. 240). Lund elaborates by specifying that "[d]espite the use of English personal names and place names, the primary concern of many of the texts is, clearly, to describe situations that Norwegian students will recognize as their own" (Lund, 2007, p. 240). This is a major challenge that should not be ignored. Such culture-neutral texts will not challenge or provide the students with knowledge, skills and attitudes beyond those they already possess. Lund's dissertation was published before the current curriculum reform from 2006 – the Knowledge Promotion. However, even after the new reform Lund (2008) states that

> [t]extbook authors and teachers may [because of the curriculum's ambiguity] interpret LK-06 as falling into the traditional way of dealing with foreign languages, and continue

> to focus on the development of language skills without considering intercultural issues (p. 6).

I find it easy to agree with this statement. Nevertheless, as suggested above regarding the inferred aims of the English subject curriculum, there is room for a different interpretation, i.e. an interpretation favorable to the classroom implementation of interculturality.

Additionally, and highly significant to this thesis, the culture-neutral textbook texts emphasize the need for supplementary resources when the English subject's aim is to develop interculturally competent students and citizens:

> Development of communicative language skills and cultural insight can promote greater interaction, understanding and respect between persons with different cultural backgrounds. Thus, language and cultural competence promote the general education perspective and strengthen democratic involvement and co-citizenship (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2013, p. 2).

Nevertheless, the reader of this thesis might wonder why I have not chosen to focus my attention on shorter texts, e.g. short stories. The choice to investigate the book format went beyond my own personal interest. Over the last few decades there has been an increased realization among educators and scholars that there is a need for activities directed at youths that facilitate reading experiences that demand concentration and commitment over time (Slettan, 2014, p. 24). The focus on more extensive texts might make it easier for these resources to be utilized in the classroom.

Another study that was highly motivational to me was conducted by Ewa Burwitz-Melzer (2001). Her study investigates how Byram's intercultural communicative competence can be taught through literature, which basically is a variation of my own research question. She lists multiple reasons for why fictional texts are suitable for just this purpose. For one they "invite the readers to view subjectively a nation or an ethnic group by portraying specific values, prejudice and stereotypes" (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001, p. 29). In addition, they

> offer their audience the chance to exchange their culturally restricted points of view together with the hero or heroine of the narrative, or with the narrator of the story. Fictional texts guide their readers through the reading process focusing their attention not only on actions and characters (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001, p. 29).

This study suggests that there is great potential to be tapped into related to literature and intercultural competence. Still, there seems to be a gap in terms of investigating the use of specific literary works as a resource for interculturality in the ESL classroom – at least in a

Norwegian context and in regards to the genre ‘contemporary young adult fiction’. This is where I hope my project might be a viable contributor.

1.4 Chapter summary and outline of the thesis

As this chapter indicates, Kramsch and Byram are two of the main contributors to this thesis theoretical framework, which is coming up in the next chapter. Thus, in the theoretical framing I will present different perspectives on culture and determine which intercultural perspectives are relevant in my thesis. Furthermore, I will address familiar traits related to young adult fiction, in addition to Rosenblatt’s (1994) literary receptionist theory. Chapter 3 accounts for the methods used on my data material, which is a literary analysis inspired by discourse analysis. Moreover, the choice of contemporary young adult fiction will be accounted for, and plot summaries are provided. In chapter 4, I present what I found in my analysis, and chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to the theory. Lastly, I will offer some concluding remarks.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMING

This chapter will present the overall theoretical framing for this project, which will provide the foundation for the analysis of the four contemporary young adult novels and the discussion of my findings. Since this study aims to obtain an understanding of how contemporary young adult fiction can be used in an educational setting to encourage intercultural competence, my epistemological standpoint is social constructivism. Social constructivism is a perspective within social sciences concerning theories about culture and society. Discourse analysis is one of the most applied approaches within this perspective (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 4). However, the notion of discourse in this thesis is inspired by Gee, mainly because he sees Discourses, with a capital D, as social and products of social histories (Gee, 2008, p. 3). The premise of discourse analysis is that theory and method is intertwined. This is why it is awarded space in my theoretical framing, although my method of analysis is not exclusively contingent on the notion of discourse analysis.

Still, discourse analysis does not generally consist of strict analytical rules. Discourse analysis is open for personal adjustments as long as the theory and analytical perspectives that is combined are flexible (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Thus, it would be unappropriate to use theory that rely on absolute truths related to culture, literary works and learning. I will present Kramsch's idea of a pedagogical 'place of struggle' in the language classroom and Byram's concept of 'intercultural communicative competence' and the ability to 'decenter'. Furthermore, this project has been inspired by theory related to the bildungsroman and Rosenblatt's literary receptionist theory[6].

2.1 Social constructivism

Social constructivism is, as stated, the epistemological basis for this thesis, i.e. the theoretical backdrop. In simple terms, the perspective entails that reality and knowledge is constructed through language and context. Social constructionist approaches are diverse, making it difficult to provide one adequate description. However, Winther Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, pp. 5-6) site Burr, stating that there are four premises shared by them all, all of which apply to this thesis

[6] I have highlighted (put in bold) the most important notions and concepts related to intercultural competence. These notions and concepts will be used throughout the presentation and/or discussion (chapters 4 and 5).

to varying degrees. The first premise is that reality is only accessible to us through the categories with which we express ourselves. A simplistic way of looking at it is that language generate knowledge, e.g. knowledge related to concepts and cultures. This premise implies that a text, e.g. including novels, can be seen as a **cultural artifact** representing aspects of the culture in which it is produced.

The second premise is that the social, cultural and historical setting people live in has significance for people's perception and understanding. Consequently, individuals within the same context will more or less share a **common understanding** of the world around them. It is within this premise that I have based my understanding of "the reader(s)", as I am partially part of the same context as the reader I am addressing in this thesis. I will return to the implication of this in the method chapter. However, it is based on this notion that I feel somewhat confident about suggesting how the learner might interpret the information provided by the novels.

Thirdly, reality is, by most accounts, a linguistic construction created by people in social relations. Within social processes and interactions, knowledge is created as "we construct common truths and compete about what is true and false" (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 5). Thus it is fair to assume that the authors of the novels in my study rely on certain shared understandings when they compose their narratives. This makes it interesting to investigate if it is possible to determine whether the authors operate within these understandings or challenge them. Such insights might offer an understanding of which cultural conflict that can arise for the learner during the reading process.

Finally, the fourth premise states that knowledge and common truths lead to different **social actions**. Thus, our comprehension of reality is characterized by the culture we live in. This premise highlights the importance of awareness related to which depictions of reality we promote in the classroom. It seems obvious that most of the time we are not aware of how we depict the world around us. However, analyses of cultural discourses and cultural artifacts such as fiction might contribute to raise awareness of social representations. I will elaborate further on the theory of discourse below.

The four premises of social constructivism are linked to this study as it investigates how authors' portray their fictional realities and its influence on the reader, thus highlighting the potential of the novels for intercultural acquisition. It is not my aim to find the truth concerning any particular cultural group. As with social constructivism, this study will not search for an absolute truth, but rather look critically at what the novels seem to **take for granted**, i.e. what

shared/common understanding they base themselves on, and as such what the readers are expected to be **familiar** with.

2.2 Cultural education in the ESL classroom

2.2.1 What is culture?

I have already established that both this thesis and the Norwegian curriculum aim to encourage intercultural competence, but how do we understand the concept of culture in this context? As this thesis is concerned with interculturality, Byram's (2008) definition provides the necessary understanding of the intricacy of culture:

> [Culture] is the 'shared beliefs, values and behaviours' of a social group, where 'social group' can refer to any collectivity of people, from those in a social institution such as university, a golf club, a family, to those organised in large-scale groups such as a nation, or even a 'civilisation' such as 'European' (p. 60).

Byram's definition might come across as vague and unmanageable. However, when dealing with the issue of culture, it quickly becomes evident that exclusively addressing national cultures is too limited. The essential in this definition is the phrase 'culture is the shared beliefs, values and behaviors of a social group' as it indicates which areas to focus on when studying culture. Moreover, it is important to note that beliefs and values are generally expressed through actions and interactions (behavior), as well as through language.

The way we view culture and the teaching of culture has greatly changed over the last decades; from elitism to a focus on everyday life; from the transfer of information to **deeper understandings**; from national cultures to a **multitude of social groups**. Previously, due to the "building" of national states, the so called 'big C' Cultures were what was being taught in the language classroom. Kramsch (2006) discusses that this focus gave meaning and value to the national community and its identity. Additionally, Kramsch highlights the fact that is was believed that as long as one learned the language one would be able to understand each other. 'Big C' Culture was the dominant concept of culture prior to the 1970's, and the focus was on canonical print literacy. An increased emphasis on communication and interaction in social contexts, made 'little c' culture the most relevant concept of culture since the 1980's. 'Little c' culture reflects everyday life, and includes ways of behaving, eating, talking, beliefs and values.

However, even in this view "culture was seen as pretty monolithic" and stereotypical, and kept with the national boarders (Kramsch, 2006, p. 14).

Both the humanistic concept of 'big C' Culture and the sociolinguistic concept of 'little c' culture are modernist perspectives on language teaching. In the 1980's the term 'intercultural' emerged as a component of humanistic education. In Europe in recent years, the concept of **intercultural learning** has arisen together with the concept of communicative competence in foreign language teaching. Intercultural learning "is based on the subjective experience of the language learner engaged in the process of becoming bi- or multilingual and struggling with another language, culture and identity" (Kramsch, 2006, p. 15). The links to social constructivism are strong through the emphasis on "subjective experience" and the connection between language and culture. In the intercultural and communicative perspectives culture becomes a much more variable concept than it was previously. Thus, it is within these perspectives that we find the connection, or natural progression, to the post-modernist perspective of culture as Discourse, identity and power (Kramsch, 2006).

2.2.2 Culture as Discourse

Culture as discourse is most prominently related to the teaching of English as a foreign or second language. This is due to the position the English language possesses in our global community compared to other languages, which makes the notion of national boundaries obsolete. Kramsch refers to James Gee's definition of Discourse (with a capital 'D'), and notes that it encompasses all the aspects of what we would usually call 'culture':

> A Discourse is composed of ways of talking, listening, reading, writing, acting, interacting, believing, valuing, and using tools and objects, in particular settings and at specific times, so as to display or to recognize a particular social identity (Gee, Hull and Lankshear, 1996, pp. 10, in: Kramsch, 2013, pp. 63-64).

The similarities to Byram's definition of 'culture' is evident as it includes both beliefs, values and behaviors. In Gee's definition of Discourse there is a strong link between language, thoughts and culture. Furthermore, the language and categories we use is understood as part of our social identity and power position (Kramsch, 2006). "Without language and other symbolic systems, the habits, beliefs, institutions, and monuments that we call culture would be just observable realities, not cultural phenomena" (Kramsch, 2013). It is our language, i.e. our

discourses, that creates the meaning that constitutes culture. These meanings relate to our identity, our position in society, our beliefs, values and behaviors.

Today the modernist perspectives of 'big C' and 'little c' cultures coexists with the post-modernist perspective of culture as Discourse, identity and power (Kramsch, 2013), and it becomes evident that 'culture' is not easily defined. The post-modernist perspective on culture as Discourse lends itself to this study and the analysis conducted as it provides an understanding of culture as ways of talking, acting, interacting, believing and valuing that displays a particular social identity. It is my understanding that these aspect can be portrayed in the novels' ways of describing, i.e. the expressions used, to convey cultural notions, issues, stereotypes, challenges and conventional thinking. This is how I will use the concept of **discourse** throughout this thesis. The question is whether such representations of culture can be identified and how they lend themselves to the acquisition of intercultural competence.

As this study is aimed at the ESL classroom, I will in the following address two prominent ideas related to the teaching of language. The first is Kramsch's 'place of struggle'. The second, Byram's concept of the ability to 'decenter'.

2.2.3 'Place of struggle'

Kramsch sees culture both as facts and as meaning, but more importantly she views culture as a **'place of struggle'** between "the learners' meanings and those of native speakers" (1993, p. 24). The idea is that in a meeting between two individuals from different cultures, there will always be a conflict between one individuals' perception of the other persons culture, as well as a conflict between the two different cultures they represent. For instance, in a meeting between a Norwegian students and a Native American teenager, the student's understanding of Native American culture would inevitably stand in contrast to the culture of that particular Native American. Furthermore, there would be a conflict between the Norwegian culture and the Native American culture. These methaphorical "areas" of conflict are what Kramsch refers to as a 'place of struggle', or *places* of struggle. This struggle is not exclusively uncomfortable. It may also refer to an encounter that is perceived as fruitful, although it does require a level of uneasiness. This project will discuss in a literary context how text may function as a place of struggle; how there might be a conflict between the learner's understanding of concepts and

different cultures, and the representations of these in the contemporary young adult novels. Thus, discussing how these conflict may create a favorable place of struggle.

Another concept that is meant to describe this place of struggle is third culture. Kramsch reviews the notion of thirdness in the chapter "Third Culture and Language Education" (Kramsch, 2009). Third culture has been approached somewhat differently as it has spread from semiotics to literacy and cultural studies to foreign language study. Thus, the notion of thirdness has been given different names: third place, third space, thirding (see Kramsch, 2009). What they all have in common is that the notion of **thirdness** is proposed to avoid the dichotomies that are prominent features of language education. As language teachers we tend to talk in relative black and whites: first language (L1) and second language (L2), first culture/the learner's native culture (C1) and target culture (C2), 'us' versus 'them', 'self' versus 'other' (Kramsch, 2009, p. 238). Within literary education, researchers stress that the intention of foreign language education should not be to ingrain or to assimilate the learners into a target culture. The aim should rather be to make learners comfortable with the differences, contradictions and ambivalence – the place of struggle and thirdness – that exists between cultures (between the dichotomies). This will become an important perspective in the analysis as what the novels describe might be both familiar and foreign, and the reader might identify or struggle with the characters and their values.

Literary educationalists have linked the focus on contradictions and ambivalence to the development of intercultural competence. Furthermore, third culture has been connected to Vygotsky's learning theory of the zone of proximal development, thus identifying the notion of thirdness as a developmental zone (Kramsch, 2009, p. 240). These connections stress the usefulness of the notion of thirdness in a teaching environment. The understanding of intercultural encounters as a developmental zone will indicate when the learning potential is most advantageous. Hence, this project will investigate the different representations within the novels that might generate an advantageous struggle between the reader's C1 and the protrayed C2.

If learners of a foreign language are to become comfortable with a notion of thirdness, "learners have to be aware of their own cultural myths and realities that ease or impede their understanding of the foreign imagination" (Kramsch, 1993, p. 216). In order for the learners to achieve a deeper understanding of the boundaries that exists between cultures, systematic training of learners in insiders' and outsiders' views on cultural phenomena is required. The narrative voice of a novel might allow for such training. Explicit awareness of learners' native

culture is essential for the acquisition of intercultural competence. This is because the learner's awareness of her[7] C1 will determine how the novels' description of concepts and cultural issues is perceived.

This study attempts to demonstrate how contemporary young adult novels can facilitate readers' encounters with difference – a place of struggle. This is done firstly by identifying culture specific issues, i.e. C2 features, that differs from the reader's C1. Secondly, through identifying universal issues that can offer the reader a better understanding of their C1.

2.2.4 'Decenter'

As presented in the introduction to the concept of intercultural competence, Byram views this competence as an activity. In order to illustrate the activity aspect he has coined two terms. The first is the verb **'decenter'**. Decenter means to be able to see how your own values, beliefs and behaviors might look from a different perspective (Byram et al., 2002, p. 14). The second is the noun **'mediator'**. A mediator is someone with the ability to see how different cultures relate to each other and can therefore mediate between them (Byram et al., 2002, p. 68). It is my understanding that these terms coincide with Kramsch's concepts of 'place of struggle' and thirdness; to decenter and mediate are the actual activities that happen in the place of struggle when an individual is "comfortable" with cultural differences, contradictions and ambivalence.

With these concepts Byram argues that one of the aims of language teaching is to enable the students to see how people from different cultures relate to each other "and to act as a mediator between them, or more precisely between people socialised into them" (Byram, 2008, p. 68). Again, the similarities to Kramsch is evident. The communicative aspect is prominent in Byram's understanding of being intercultural, and mediation presupposes some linguistic competence. Since Byram views being intercultural as an activity with strong links to communication he has established the concept of 'intercultural *communicative* competence', where he tries to describe the behaviors involved in acting interculturally (Byram, 1997). He identified five capacities, or *saviors*, that make out intercultural communicative competence. The five saviors involve both affective, cognitive and behavioral aspects. I will list the three

[7] I will only use one pronoun in regards to gender whenever I am dealing with an unknown individual such as teachers and readers. This is done for the sake of brevity and in order to ease the reading experience. Thus, I will use the pronouns she/her/herself and not 'he and she' etc.

relevant to my project. The last two are additional savoirs involving 'skills', however they go beyond the scope of my thesis:

The first savoir, **attitudes**, is closely linked to the concept of decentering. It is described as "curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (Byram, 2008, p. 69). In this thesis, it is of interest to examine if and how the novels' representations of culture allow for the reader to "suspend disbelief", i.e. to decenter. The second savoir is **knowledge** "of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" (Byram, 2008, p. 69). For my strudy it is important to investigate if the novels provide the learners with knowledge about different social groups. The third capacity Byram defines as '**skills** of interpreting and relating', which is the "ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own" (Byram, 2008, p. 69). What is of interest in my project is to examine and discuss whether or not the novels can function as cultural artifacts. In extension, providing the students with the opportunity to develop their interpretational and relational skills.

The concept of intercultural communicative competence highlights all three aspects of language learning; linguistics, culture and communication. As a scholar of language learning and education, Byram established the five 'savoirs' in an attempt to provide teachers with the means to assess students' language learning. And as said earlier, he participated in the development of the CEF, which has impacted the current curriculum alongside the other contributors within language and culture learning theories (Dypedahl, 2007). Nevertheless, even with the five 'savoirs' intercultural competence is still a rather vague term. Magne Dypedahl, a Norwegian university lecturer within the field of intercultural competence, has consequently focused on identifying reflection tools in order to systematize intercultural events and to ease teaching.

Dypedahl suggests the following eight reflection tools based on main topics in intercultural communication: 1) ethnocentrism, 2) culture and cultural background, 3) verbal differences, 4) non-verbal differences, 5) value differences, 6) stereotypes and prejudice, 7) contextual awareness, and, finally, 8) to lose face (Dypedahl, 2007, p. 8, my translation). These perspectives were essential in my initial meeting with my data material. The reflection tools provided an entranceway to the novels while contributing to a relative objective analysis. During the analysis these perspectives merged into three topics of interest.

The reflection tool of 'value differences' consists of multiple subcategories. One of them is individualism versus collectivism. In individualistic cultures the connections between individuals are not as close and there is a stronger focus on the nuclear family than in collectivistic cultures, where people are integrated in larger groups. The notion of **individualism** could prove interesting as it is quite characteristic of western countries. However, the most interesting tool related to 'value differences' is **masculinity versus femininity**. The construction of gender in novels meant for children and teens is highly debated. Thus, gender was an area of interest, and ultimately it ended up as one of the three cultural topics of my analysis. Dypedahl states that in society, masculine cultures tend to have a more evident focus on competition and toughness, while feminine cultures tend to focus on moderation and gentleness. Furthermore, gender roles are often more equal the more feminine a culture is (Dypedahl, 2007, p. 12). Thus, based on the terminology presented by Dypedahl, Norway is often viewed as a very feminine culture.

The relevant theories related to culture that I have presented above, all have in common an understanding of culture as diversity and difference, i.e. a postmodern perspective. They can all be said to more or less strive for students to obtain a cultural relativistic attitude. Cultural relativism is the opposite of ethnocentrism, which was another one of Dypedahl's reflection tools. To have a cultural relativistic attitude means possessing a willingness to understand and interpret other cultures based on their own premises (Schiefloe, 2003, p. 169). This resonates in my understanding of Kramsch's 'place of struggle' and thirdness and Byram's concept of decentering.

2.3 Literature in the ESL classroom

2.3.1 The gender perspective

Books, as cultural artifacts, transmit society's constructions of reality. Today's youth literature has a tradition that dates back to the old boy books and girl books that first appeared at the end of the 19th century. These book where written based on the template provided by contemporary *adult* fiction – the bildungsroman (Slettan, 2014, p. 15). Bildungsroman is also known as the novel of education and experience (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 169). These novels generally revolve around a young protagonist that faces a problem that causes personal growth and a more resolved identity. This resolved identity is often tied to a western standard of

individualism. Hence, commonly addressed topics include family, school, sexuality and gender. A challenge in terms of the modern ESL classroom is that these stories generally has, or had, a polarized depiction of the gender characteristics (Slettan, 2014, p. 15). Thus, it is important to recognize which reading role the novels allow for, and whether the novels identify with a male or a female readership (Slettan, 2014, p. 40). But what is gender?

Researchers have in resent years distinguished between 'sex' and 'gender' in research. While the former is biologically determined, the latter is culturally constructed. Although they differ, the terms are inevitably two sides of the same coin. "Sex is a biological construct that encapsulates the anatomical, physiological, genetic, and hormonal variation that exists in species" (Johnson & Repta, 2012, p. 19). While sex is determined by birth, gender is defined as

> […] a multidimensional construct that refers to different roles, responsibilities, limitations, and experiences provided to individuals based on their presenting sex/gender. Gender builds on biological sex to give meaning to sex differences, categorizing individuals with labels such as *woman, man, transsexual* […] These categories are socially constructed, as humans both create and assign individuals to them (Johnson & Repta, 2012, pp. 20-21).

Hence, gender is understood as "the internal perception of self as a male, female, both or neither" (Torbjørnsen, 2014, p. 3). As the cultural perspectives that this thesis build on emphasize the diversity within cultures and thus within cultural/gender roles, it would not be beneficial for the students' acquisition of intercultural competence if the gender characteristics in the novels were to be stereotypical. The manner in which gender is portrayed influences how the reader understands and perceives the expectations and norms of how gender operates and behaves:

> Gender stereotypical roles are constraining to both genders. Just as girls are trapped in passive and whiney roles, boys and men are rarely described as people demonstrating emotions of sadness and fear, having hobbies/occupations that are not stereotypically male and in roles where they aren't competing or meeting high expectations (Singh, 1998, p. 3).

Svein Slettan (2014, p. 15) further describes how gender stereotypically has been portrayed in youth literature. He states that boy books generally were told through stories concerning exciting journeys and challenges. Furthermore, they portrayed boys who kept their cool and gained "the respect of the adults". Girl books were stereotypically concerned with the girls'

emotional life, "about internal clarifications and maturation", which in turn is related to a preparation for family life. This thesis will consider whether the representation of gender in the novels confirm or challenge stereotypical gender norms. In terms of intercultural competence this is important because gender is an intrinsic part of how we understand ourselves and those we meet. Moreover, gender norms and expectations can greatly differ from one culture to another.

2.3.2 'Efferent' or 'aesthetic' reading of fictional texts

Louise M. Rosenblatt (1994) compares reading of literary texts with the performance of a piece of music. It is the performance or the reading of the symbols on the page that creates the art, not the symbols themselves. Hence, Rosenblatt places a lot on emphasis on the reader and their experiences with the text. This emphasis is cognitive and thus stands in contrast to the notion of culture and discourse presented above, where the perspectives are social. Nevertheless, this thesis has been inspired by Rosenblatt's differentiation between 'aesthetic' and 'efferent' reading. These concepts are extremes on a linear continuum and address what the reader *do* when reading different types of texts (Rosenblatt, 1994, pp. 22-47).

Rosenblatt states that aesthetic reading is the nature of reading "literary works of art", which is the concern of this project as it addresses contemporary young adult fiction. The differences between aesthetic and non-aesthetic reading relates to where the reader's attention is directed. In non-aesthetic reading the focus is on the knowledge that will remain *after* the reading. Hence, Rosenblatt chose the term 'efferent' as it derives from Latin, meaning "to carry away" (1994, p. 24). **Efferent reading** is the most dominant process of reading history books, recipes, newspaper articles etc. In **aesthetic reading**, on the other hand, the reader's main concern is what happens *during* the reading event. The reader

> […] pays attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him. […] In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with the particular text (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 25).

In this definition of 'aesthetic reading' the phrase "associations, feelings, attitudes and ideas" give clear associations to the previous presented ideas related to intercultural competence – knowledge, attitudes, decentering, thirdness. However, when teachers select books for the

classroom, there is always an explicit motivation behind those selections. There is inevitably something we as teachers wish that the learner should "carry away" from the reading, and there is almost always learning activities *after* the reading. Hence, in an educational setting the term 'efferent' is equally relevant, arguably no matter the text.

I have argued that both ends of Rosenblatt's reading continuum is of interest in this thesis. The question is where on this continuum the use of contemporary young adult novels for the encouragement of intercultural competence places itself. Because if the reading experience is entirely aesthetic and cognitive then the potential of utilizing these novels will be difficult for the teacher to assess and evaluate. Although assessment and evaluation of learners' development is not a part of this thesis, it would be unnatural for a pedagogic project not to consider such aspect in the choice of material, method and theory.

2.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have highlighted the importance of understanding interculturality as a competence with two sides. Firstly, it entails critical awareness of one's own culture. Secondly, it entails a level of *knowledge, skills* and *attitudes* regarding other cultures, or rather, the people of other cultures. Hence, in order for the books to encourage intercultural competence they have to portray a difference between the reader's C1 and the C2 portrayed in the novels. In other words, in the analysis I will identify both universal and culture specific issues that are addressed in the contemporary young adult fiction. However, it is important to remember that the notion of interculturality is not concerned with national cultures, but rather a multitude of social groups.

Important concepts are the notion of *struggle* and the ability to *decenter*, i.e. to become comfortable with a "thirdness". Furthermore, I have accounted for how I will use the notion of *discourse*. In short, these perspectives should demonstrate which knowledge, skills and attitudes, i.e. Byram's savoirs, the novels offer the reader, and how these can be used in the ESL classroom.

3 METHOD AND MATERIALS

The purpose of methodology is to establish systematic, thorough and transparent procedures of collecting, analyzing and interpreting the chosen material (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 29). In this chapter I will present how I sought to achieve this. The choice of method is governed by the choice of research question. The compatibility between research question and research design greatly influences the study's quality. Hence, I have chosen to start this chapter by explaining the importance of a pilot project I conducted prior to this study, as it greatly influenced the choice of research question and method.

After presenting the methodological choices made, I will provide the necessary insight into the four contemporary young adult novels that I have analyzed. The intention is to clarify why these texts where chosen, their relevance and to provide a backdrop for next chapter's analysis.

3.1 The pilot project

I conducted a short pilot study a year prior to embarking on my thesis. The method utilized in the pilot was a semi-structured interview, where I interviewed three English teachers from different lower secondary schools. The pilot investigated "the use of authentic texts in the ESL classroom", and as I accounted for in the introduction, contemporary young adult fiction is part of that extensive concept. The aim of the pilot was to actively explore the possibilities within the topic of authentic texts. Thus, the pilot's research question was kept broad and open. In short, I found that time and structure were ruling in terms of the resources utilized in the classroom, which meant that the textbook was the favored tool in the informants' teaching practices. The use of authentic texts was seen as a means of variation. Interestingly, the teachers also viewed authentic texts as motivational – both for themselves and for the students. However, the challenges seemed to be considered greater than the reward, resulting in a predominant focus on textbook-lessons. As my interest was authentic texts, I found the results somewhat disappointing because they gave me few varied answers as to *how* authentic texts were used as a resource.

Looking back I realize that the outcome of the pilot project might have been caused by operating with a broad and indecisive research question. Nevertheless, when it was time to choose a focus for the MA thesis, I was aware that interviews might not give me the insight I was interested

in. Simultaneously, I had begun exploring another topic of interest; the focus on intercultural education in language teaching. The pilot paid little attention to the intercultural elements provided by texts, although the semi-structured interview allowed the informants to address intercultural factors. The fact that such factors were not an important or explicit concern for the interviewed teachers could be an indication that intercultural competence is not a conscious focus when utilizing authentic texts. Consequently, the reward of using authentic texts as a tool in the ESL classroom might not be fully exploited.

The pilot project's indications made me question how an MA thesis could generate more interest in using authentic texts as a teaching resource. For instance, how can awareness related to the intercultural content in authentic texts be increased, thereby increasing the reward of working with literature? This led to the question of investigating contemporary young adult fiction's potential for interculturality. Thus, the pilot project helped clarify both the research question and the research method for my thesis. The research question changed character from one interested in teachers' practices, to one focused on the potential of the resource, which resulted in a natural shift in method, from interview to literary analysis. Moreover, the pilot project helped me narrow down the concept of 'authentic text' to 'contemporary young adult fiction'.

3.2 The qualitative research method

My project is based on a qualitative approach. The aim of qualitative research methods is to study the quality or specific characteristics of a phenomena that we wish to understand more thoroughly (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 32). In this study I am investigating the *potential* of contemporary young adult fiction for the teaching of intercultural competence. Thus, I have examined specific characteristics and the quality of the novels with the intercultural perspectives presented in chapter 2. In other words, I wish to reveal details and nuances related to the chosen topic, to gain in-depth knowledge, and place emphasis on meaning (Thagaard, 2009, p. 17). These desires reflect my understanding of culture as difference (nuances) and representations of meaning.

3.2.1 The researcher

Seeing how qualitative research emphasizes meaning, its approaches has an interpretive nature. The researcher is the instrument of the research and possesses a great deal of influence and authority over the results of the study. Thus, the researcher as an 'instrument' has to be described (Postholm, 2010, p. 127), which means that I have to inform my readers of the structure and theory I have utilized in order to create a level of distance between myself and the material. Clarifying my predisposition is important in order for you – the reader – to evaluate my study's credibility. Although any researcher seeks objectivity, we cannot meet the material with an empty head or, in other words, completely objectively or without any predispositions. All I as a researcher can do is study the material with an open mind (Postholm, 2010, p. 128). However, my study and material is very different from a study that involves for instance teachers and students. With a literary analysis a critical eye is to some degree needed, because I cannot take everything at face-value.

I will address how my research choices and my position influenced the reliability and validity of my thesis later when discussing the project's quality in chapter 5. For now, I want to state that the theoretical framing, as well as the research method chosen is part of my position and predisposition. My predisposition will also be colored by my personal experiences, values, knowledge, research philosophy and attitudes related to the topic studied (Nilssen, 2012, p. 68). In the introduction, chapter 1, and section 3.1, I accounted for my interest and previous experience related to the topic, which is part of my predisposition. Furthermore, I directed the research question towards lower secondary schools because of my teacher training background from a university college – meaning that this is the level I am most familiar with.

3.2.2 Text analysis: a combination of literary and discourse analysis

I chose to conduct a text analysis that is inspired by the notions of both literary and discourse analysis. This combination was chosen in order to gain the most advantageous understanding of the material in relation to the acquisition of intercultural competence. I mainly utilized literary analysis as a template by asking and answering the questions that are fundamental to a literary analysis – but always with the intercultural perspective as reference. Thus, I have only commented on literary devices – the artistic elements of fiction – when they directly help underline a cultural point. Related to discourse I explored how cultural aspects are represented

through language and other symbolic systems – or as "culture as discourse". When looking at how cultural aspects are represented I was not only interested in *what* is being said, but *ways* of talking, believing, valuing, acting and interacting (Kramsch, 2013, p. 63).

Bjarne Markussen (2014) discusses the principles of literary text analysis and outlines seven main questions that are fundamental to any literary analysis. He states that all literary analyses are variations and elaborations related to those questions. The questions are:

1. Who is the author?
2. When was the text written?
3. Where was the text written?
4. What medium and genre are we dealing with?
5. What does the text say?
6. How does it say it?
7. Why does it say it?

(Markussen, 2014, p. 208, my translation)

The questions are mainly divided between two purposes. Questions 1-3 are related to the context in which the text is written, while questions 4-7 are questions that has to be answered through the text isself. Question 1, 2 and 3, and partially question 5, will be dealt with later in this chapter (3.2 The research material). Question 4 was addressed in the introduction (1.3.2 Contemporary young adult fiction). The three last questions – what, how and why – are investigated in the analysis, chapter 4. The questions of *what* the text says and *how* it says it, gives associations to social constructivism and discourse analysis. For the purpose of this thesis the question of *why* the text say something is looked at in two respects. Firstly, *why* is what the text says and how it says it culturally beneficial? Secondly, in extension of that, *why* is it didactically beneficial?

I found that the focus on what, how and why allowed for the dynamics of interculturality and literature to become more prominent. It allowed me to identify the cultural topics that I felt best lend themselves to illustrate and discuss the intercultural perspectives presented in the previous chapter. Thus, I tried to identify 1) the cultural topics I found to be most prominent, i.e. *what*, 2) *how* these topics were problematized, and 3) *why* these would be beneficial for the teaching and acquisition of intercultural competence. Note that these analytical questions where not asked chronologically. They where all seen in relation to each other as it is the relationship between the three that I felt best demonstrates the potential of contemporary young adult fiction as a teaching tool for working with intercultural competence.

The more formal analysis started off with a large amount of notes and reflections related to Dypedahl's reflection tool for teaching intercultural communicative competence (Dypedahl, 2007). These notes provided me with an overview of the most prominent cultural issues. In addition, Dypedahl's reflection tools made it easier to identify what was universal and culture specific about these issues. Thus, the approach was quite deductive, i.e. going from theory to the empirical data.

I was pleased to find that the novels, although they have quite different characters, were all ripe with cultural issues. This was not surprising, but nevertheless satisfying. However, when it was time to systemize the elements I had found it became evident that Dypedahl's reflection tools were too extensive as a basis for a thorough analysis. From there it was the case of working hermeneutically. Literary analysis is the case of working within the hermeneutical circle, where parts of the text is understood and interpreted in light of the entirety of the novel, and the entirety in light of its separate parts (Slettan, 2014, p. 207). This was done through a back-and-forth process of conferring with my methodology, theory and material, and is how I identified the three cultural topics of *family, gender* and *youth culture*. I decided on focusing on these three topics as they combine universal and culture specific issues. The way these texts portray the universal and the culture specific generates some conflicts and challenges that seemed beneficial for the encouragement of intercultural competence.

The topic of *gender* was influenced by Dypedahl's reflection tool of 'masculinity versus femininity', in addition to general debates and previous research related to gender in young adult fiction. The topic of *family* and *youth culture* is a combination of reflections related to four of Dypedahl's reflection tools: 'culture and background', 'verbal differences', 'value differences' and 'stereotypes and prejudice'. The reflection tools were invaluable contributors to the final systematization, however they do not function as sub-categories in an explicit sense.

3.2.3 The reader – the learner

It is relevant to clarify my understanding of 'the reader'. For the purpose of this thesis the reader is understood as the English language learner in Norwegian lower secondary schools. This is because my study relates to the Norwegian ESL classroom and the literary analysis is conducted on the basis of the novels' potential in an educational setting. This simplification is done for the sake of brevity and will ease the reading of my thesis.

The composition of students in a Norwegian classroom will vary in diversity. How homogeneous or multicultural a class is will greatly depend on the location of the school, e.g. if it is a rural or an urban school district. However, whenever I suggest how the reader might understand the novels it is based on *my* knowledge of the student body, which in turn is based on my own experiences. Social constructivism indicates that people within the same context will more or less share common understandings of the world around them (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 5). It is on this basis that I allow myself to assume which understandings of the world the reader might possess. Nevertheless, it is never beneficial to address cultural issues dichotomous, thus I have endeavored to avoid this simplifications of 'the reader' whenever natural and necessary.

3.3 The research material

This subchapter will elaborate on the chosen novels. Firstly, I will reflect on the process behind and reasoning for choosing the contemporary young adult novels that make up the data material for my thesis. Secondly, novel summaries are provided. These summaries allow for some transparency before the next chapter's analysis.

3.3.1 Choosing the research material

The material for this thesis consists of four novels under the category of contemporary young adult fiction. They are: *Refugee Boy* by Benjamin Zephaniah (2001), *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie (2008)[8] (*Part-Time Indian* for short), *Dustbin Baby* by Jacqueline Wilson (2013)[9] and *Walk Two Moons* by Sharon Creech (2012)[10]. The objective has been to identify how culture is used in these particular novels – if any generalities can be identified across the four individual novels – and from that indicate the potential for pedagogical use of contemporary young adult fiction with intercultural competence as an aim. In order to develop this argument the novels selected comprise of both similar and contrasting elements.

I was familiar with *Refugee Boy* from previous literature classes, and knew it was a suitable candidate. As the novel is set in London and has a male adolescent protagonist, I started looking

[8] *Part-Time Indian* was first published in 2007. The version referred to in this thesis is from 2008.
[9] *Dustbin Baby* was first published in 2001. The version referred to in this project is from 2013.
[10] *Walk Two Moons* was first published in 1994. The version referred to in this project is from 2012.

for an American counterpart. I chose to focus on novels from Great Britain and USA. The reason being that these are the two English-speaking nationalities emphasized in the English subject curriculum, as well as the two English-speaking countries I am most familiar with. Through recommendations from teachers, I found *Part-Time Indian,* which also had a male adolescent protagonist.

As I felt confident with these choices, it became evident that the thesis would benefit from an additional set of books. As a contrast to the two male narratives, I wanted books with female adolescent protagonists. Again, I started with a novel I was familiar with – *Dustbin Baby* by Jacqueline Wilson. *Dustbin Baby* has an outsider's perspective, just like the two previous novels, which means the protagonist is an outsider to the dominant culture he or she lives in. However, instead of addressing clashes between different ethnicities, Wilson focuses on the conflicts within family structures. With the guidance of my thesis supervisor, I settled on *Walk Two Moons* as the US counterpart. It too has a female protagonist and focuses on family structures.

All four books are set in a realistic, contemporary environment and place emphasis on outsider perspectives. It is important to get across that although these are the chosen novels, other contemporary young adult fictions could have been just as suitable for my project. The significance is that these four novels contain topics and aspects that I initially found to be of interest. Furthermore, it is important to stress that the comparison conducted in the following is not done in an effort to demonstrate the novels suitability for a multi-text classroom (Birketveit & Williams, 2013, p. 165), which is a common pedagogical tool when teaching literature. The comparison is exclusively executed for the purpose of this thesis. This is because it is my professional opinion that in a Norwegian ESL classroom these novels are extensive enough on their own. A multi-text classroom with these novels would easily generate unmanageable activities and discussions both for the teacher and certainly for the students. Nevertheless, whenever working with one of these text (or similar texts), it would be advantageous for the gifted students to have access to the other texts for possible further reading.

In addition to the consideration made above, it was important to me that the content and language of the novels were judged to be appropriate and at a level fitted for the intended learner – which is lower secondary school students. As a result of these considerations multiple young adult fictions were rejected during the selection process. Ultimately, I found *Refugee Boy*, *Part-Time Indian, Dustbin Baby* and *Walk Two Moons* to be suitable to address and discuss the topic of my thesis.

3.3.2 Novel summaries and general comments

3.3.2.1 Refugee Boy

In *Refugee Boy* we meet Alem from Ethiopia/Eritrea who arrives in London, England, with his father, Mr. Kelo, on vacation. The next morning Alem wakes up alone to find a letter from his father. In the letter Alem learns that he has been left behind in England until the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea has ended, or it is otherwise safe for him to return. Alem gets help from a refugee council and is placed into a children's home, and later into foster care. He goes to school, works hard on improving his English, understanding the culture, and keeping out of trouble. After some time Alem receives another letter from his father, telling him that his mother has been killed and that Mr. Kelo will be joining Alem in London. However, Mr. Kelo and Alem's applications for asylum is denied. Alem's friends try to help by organizing a campaign. Unfortunately, Mr. Kelo is murdered before their appeal. Alem – now an orphan – is granted asylum and goes on living with his foster family, the Fitzgeralds.

The novel is divided into 27 chapter over 284 pages (p. 9-293), where each chapter has its own title. An omniscient narrator tells the story using past tense.

3.3.2.2 The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

In *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* we follow Junior who lives with his parents and older sister in the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington, USA. The reservation, as his family, struggles with poverty, unemployment, violence, death and alcoholism. Furthermore, Junior is born with a physical disability. He cares for school, and when a teacher notices he recommends that Junior transfer to the school outside of the reservation. The all-white school in Reardan is seen as his only chance of an education beyond high school. By transferring, his best friend Rowdy and the Spokane tribe turn their backs on Junior – considering him to be a traitor. The new school does not treat Junior much better than his last, and he is the victim of prejudice and racism. However, over time Junior does make some new friends and is picked to join the basketball team. Soon Junior is forced to question his own stereotypes and prejudice – slowly change for the better, along with new and old friends.

Part-Time Indian consists of 230 pages divided into 29 chapter, which, again, each has its own title. Junior is an avid drawer, and drawings and cartoons is part of the story. I have examined some of these illustrations in the analysis. Junior is the narrator of the story, i.e. the novel has a first person narrator, and it is told in the past tense.

3.3.2.3 Dustbin Baby

Dustbin Baby starts where it ends, in a restaurant on the evening of April's fourteenth birthday, before going back to the very beginning of that same day. April tells the reader how she hates her birthday, April 1st, how she was left in a dustbin behind a pizza restaurant at birth, and how she was found by a teenage boy who worked there. April's birth mother never came to claim her, and April has been passed between foster carers, adoptive parents, Children's Homes and institutions. On the morning of her birthday, April picks a fight with her foster mom, Marion, over her birthday present. Instead of going to school April goes traveling through London on her own, visiting all her previous homes. However, none of these visits seems to give April the answers she is looking for, therefore she goes back to where it all started; in the alley behind The Pizza Place. On the bin she finds a message: PLEASE CALL, BABY. April calls the number adjacent, nervous that her birth mother will pick up. However, on the other end of the line is Frankie, the boy who found her in the dustbin fourteen years ago. April is relieved. She calls Marion and apologizes for disappearing for the entire day. After hanging up, she waits for Frankie and Marion to meet her, while feeling a sense of closure.

Dustbin Baby consists of 198 pages divided between a preface and 16 chapters. The chapters do not have individual titles. However, all chapters are introduced with a small drawing. The background of all the drawings are the same – a paper chain cut out of a girl figure. Every chapter has a simple addition to this backdrop, e.g. a dustbin, a tombstone, moisture stains or a face (often attached to a single name). These simple additions imply who or what we are going to meet in the following chapter, as such they function as a tentative guide for the reader. April narrates the story, and it is written in present tense. However, a lot of the narrative consists of April remembering her past. These stories are naturally told in past tense.

3.3.2.4 Walk Two Moons

In *Walk Two Moons* Salamanca (Sal) sets out on a road trip with her grandparents from Euclid, Ohio, to Lewiston, Idaho, where her mother is. Along the way, Sal tells her grandparents, Gram and Gramps, the story of her best friend, Phoebe Winterbottom. Sal met Phoebe when she and her father moved from their farm in Bybanks, Kentucky, to Euclid to be closer to Margaret Cadaver, whom Sal's father befriended after his wife went away. Phoebe's mother, just like Sal's, decides to leave unexpectedly. Phoebe's imagination takes off when mystical notes appear on the family's doorstep, a stranger, quickly nicknamed "the lunatic", is seen walking around the neighborhood, and with a next-door neighbor named Mrs. Cadaver. Phoebe is certain

that these incidences are all connected. Sal is quickly pulled into Phoebe's melodrama and recognizes many of her own emotions in Phoebe. Through telling Phoebe's story, Sal intertwines the story about her own mother. Sal's mother lost a baby in childbirth and had further complications, leading her to leave Sal and her father. Sal and her grandparents' road trips takes them on the same journey as her mother. Towards the end of the journey, Gram becomes ill as Phoebe's story comes to an end. Sal reveals that Mrs. Winterbottom returned home with the lunatic, who turned out to be Mrs. Winterbottom's son. A son she had given up for adoption when she was younger, and had been too ashamed to tell her family about. Sal wishes her own mother could come home. Gram is rushed to hospital and Sal has to do the last leg of the journey on her own. It is not until these last chapters of the story that the reader is let in on the fact that Sal's mother has actually passed away, killed in a bus crash where Mrs. Cadaver was the sole survivor. Sal visits the crash site and her mother's grave, before she returns to the hospital to find that Gram has passed away. Sal and her father later return to their farm in Bybanks, Kentucky, after making peace with the passing of Sal's mother. Sal is looking forwards to the upcoming visit from her friends from Euclid.

The story consists of 44 chapter over 266 pages, which means the chapters' average around six pages. Every chapter has its own title. Again, it is the protagonist that narrates the story, and it is told in past tense.

3.4 Chapter summary

In this chapter I have explained that the methodical approach for this thesis is a text analysis inspired by literary analysis and discourse analysis. I have presented that the text analysis was highly influenced by chapter 2's theoretical perspectives. The reasoning and process behind the choice of novels were based on recommendations from practicing teachers and lecturers, in addition to intercultural and didactical evaluations.

4 ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Refugee Boy, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (*Part-Time Indian* for short), *Dustbin Baby* and *Walk Two Moons* make up the data material for this project – as we just saw. Analyzing data is a continuous process and it started with my first encounter with the novels. This continuous analysis had an informal character up until all the data was collected and sorted. It was only then that the more formal and final analysis could take place (Nilssen, 2012, pp. 101-102). Thus, this chapter will first elaborate on how the categories are understood in an intercultural context. Secondly, a descriptive, thematic presentation of this thesis' material will be given.

Postholm (2010) distinguishes between descriptive and theoretical analyses. This chapter is an descriptive analysis and chapter 5 is theoretical analysis. Postholm defines descriptive analysis to encompass analytical procedures that structures the data material. This chapter will present how the material was structured and the findings related to this structure. Consequently, most of the discussion and links to theory will be addressed in the next chapter. However, as a literary analysis is a continuous interpretation, it would serve no function to present the data without any context. That is, this chapter includes elements of discussion.

4.1 Categorizing and analyzing

In the next two subchapters, I will present *what* the novels covey related to culture and *how* the way they express it relates to culture. Following this introduction, a more thorough depiction of the findings related to *what* the novels address and *how* they address it is given in section 4.2. As these perspectives are two sides of the same coin, the thematic presentation will address both *what* and *how* simultaneously. My understanding of *why* the novels say the things they say is strongly linked to this thesis' theoretical framing. Therefore, the introduction of the *why*-aspect will be presented at the very end of this chapter, functioning as an introduction to next chapter's discussion.

4.1.1 *What* cultural topics the novels address

The contemporary young adult novels in my thesis all base their stories around the familiar, i.e. common understandings and universal issues. As mentioned in the methodological chapter I will focus on the cultural topics of *family*, *gender* and *youth cultures*. The social context in which the novels are written is somewhat mirrored in the novels' plots. Thus, the novels seem to presuppose that the readers possess a common understanding of the cultural topics they address. These cultural topics are areas that it is reasonable to assume teenagers and young adults are acquainted with and can identify with.

However, the novels do not simply portray the familiar. The authors use the familiar topics as a backdrop for the story they want to tell, i.e. challenging the reader's 'common understandings'. The term 'common understandings' implies conventional manners of thinking and taken-for-granted notions, beliefs and ideals, and builds on my understanding of culture and discourse. Because these understandings are common or 'universal', they are also familiar. This dictates which ideas and concepts are considered normal. In most cases, what is familiar to the reader is what the protagonists struggle with. This is because these common understandings are considered to be normal, and it is a "normal" that the protagonists do not fit into. Thus, the novels provide multiple variations of the concept that might have a taken-for-granted manifestation within the reader, and generates an arena for contemplation. The familiarity of the cultural topics depicted provide readers with the opportunity to confirm or expand their understanding of reality.

Table 4.1 below, demonstrates the relation between the cultural topics that I identified and found useful. All the four books have these cultural topics in common. The table is divided between main topics on the left, and subtopics on the right. All these topics are assumed to be familiar aspects or aspects that the students might have a taken-for-granted understanding of.

Table 4.1: *What* cultural topics are addressed in the novels

Relation between the cultural topics	
Family	Structure and members
	Heritage
Gender	Parenting
	Masculinity/femininity
Youth culture	Journeys/resilience
	Names

Family, *gender* and *youth culture* are all 'social groups' that might share *some* beliefs, values and behaviors . Related to family, issues of family structures and members, plus family heritage are addressed. Moreover, the books problematizes parenting and the construction of the concepts of motherhood and fatherhood. Hence, parenting is both tied to the main topics of family and gender. Related to gender, the issue of masculine versus feminine cultures is depicted. Such differences influence the different youth cultures presented. Furthermore, the main topic of youth culture addresses journeys/psychological resilience (learning) and names.

Table 4.1 illustrates the layout that will be used in section 4.2 Descriptive presentation, where both the findings related to *what* and *how* will be thoroughly explored through excerpts, quotes and illustrations from the books. The overlapping of the subtopics is characteristic of qualitative data representation as the data represent a complex whole (Thagaard, 2009, p. 147), and will also be reflected in the descriptive presentation below.

4.1.2 *How* the cultural topics in the novels are address

After answering what the texts address, the next question becomes: *How* do the novels deal with the cultural topics that are assumed to be familiar to the readers? My findings indicate that the novels portray the cultural topics by introducing elements of the extraordinary, exceptional and exaggerated. This is achieved in three different ways. Firstly, the familiar is sometimes placed adjacent to a contorted familiarity. Secondly, the familiar is viewed from a different perspective. Finally, the familiar is expanded to include elements of unfamiliarity and 'otherness'. These were all perspectives that influenced my focus during the analysis. Related to family, for instance, there is across the novels an element of crisis that the protagonists have to overcome. Related to youth culture the protagonists seem forced to a level of independence beyond their years.

In other words, the familiar is juxtaposed to the unfamiliar – belief against disbelief. This might prove to be beneficial if the novels are to promote intercultural competence. To do so they have to include two perspectives. On the one hand, the novels have to provide the reader with a greater understanding of self, i.e. the familiar aspects that I presented in the previous section. On the other hand, they have to offer the reader culture specific insights, i.e. the unfamiliar aspects. In other words, the novels have to be seen as cultural artifacts that also address universal issues. I will address this throughout the presentation. Without the references to

familiar topics and common understandings, the conflicts and contrasts that are introduced would fall short, as well as the notions of the extraordinary and the exceptional.

In table 4.2 below, I present the novels' content following the template of the topics introduced in table 4.1. The table is a short and structured introduction to *how* the cultural topics are addressed in the contemporary young adult novels.

Table 4.2: *How* the cultural topics are addressed in the novels

NOVELS				
Origin	*UK*	*US*	*UK*	*US*
Protagonist	*Male: Alem*	*Male: Junior*	*Female: April*	*Female: Sal*
TITLE / **CULTURAL TOPICS**	**Refugee Boy**	**Part-Time Indian**	**Dustbin Baby**	**Walk Two Moons**
Families	A family victim of war. An experienced foster family.	A family strained by different challenges. Extended family. The grandmother is the matriarch.	Complete lack of family ties. Replaced by a diversity of temporary solutions.	Strong family bonds. Extended family.
Gender	Not prominent, conventional	Masculine culture	Motherhood	Different emphasis between families
Youth culture, similarities	Rebellion against parents and authorities, school, teasing/bullying, new experiences/learning, nicknaming, social clicks, fitting in, crushes			
Youth culture, differences	Music, smoking, rallying	Sport events, dances, falling in love	Birthday celebrations	Privacy and embarrassment
Literal journeys	From one county and continent to another – Eritrea to London, England.	From a poor Native-American school, to an all-white school off the reservation.	Traveling through London.	Road trip across the US, through seven states, following her mother's journey.
Metaphorical journeys	From one culture to another. Finding one's place.	Realizing his potential and the actual impact of his heritage.	Accepting her past and cherishing the one's around her.	From denial to acceptance related to her mother's death.
Psychological resilience	Alem has many losses and setbacks, but nevertheless moves forwards.	Junior as anti-hero, continues to surpass expectations.	April as anti-heroine, but she is independent and she adapts to the situation presented.	Sal starts off in denial, but gradually comes to terms with her mother's passing.
Names	The significance of personal names as a marker of identity and culture. Nicknames are used for bullying and unwanted attention, but also as a token of endearment and belonging.			
Outsider	Refugee, ethnicity and violent loss of family members.	Poverty, disability, ethnicity and loss of family members	Abandoned at birth. Adoptive mom committed suicide. Being the "bad girl" in foster families and at the Children's Home.	New to the area, her mother has left, and her father is seeing another woman.

4.2 Descriptive presentation

From my introduction above it might seem that the *what* and *how* of the texts are two categories that will be presented separately. However, *what* and *how* will naturally relate to the same topics, hence the descriptive presentation is organized by the cultural topics identified in table 4.1 above. Subchapter 4.2.1 will present my findings concerning the topic of *family*. Subchapter 4.2.2 will present the topic of *gender*. And, finally, the findings related to *youth culture* will be the focus of subchapter 4.2.3. The cultural topics are *what* the novels address, and the presentation will therefore illustrate *how* these topics are dealt with. Thus, investigating *how* the familiar is contorted by the extraordinary and exceptional, and indicating how the novels might be identified as cultural artifacts. These focuses will identify ways of talking, acting, interacting and believing, which we remember as part of the definition of discourse (Kramsch, 2013).

In the following excerpts, quotes and illustrations retrieved from the four novels are used to illustrate the argument I wish to pursue in the discussion. I have chosen to take into account the excerpts' accessibility for readers who have not read the novels. This was done for the sake of transparency. Furthermore, while each book is not equally represented under each topic, each book is given a fair representation throughout the presentation and discussion.

4.2.1 Family

Family is a highly prominent topic in *Dustbin Baby*, *Refugee Boy*, *Part-Time Indian* and *Walk Two Moons.* As evidence of this, three of the four books, all except *Part-Time Indian,* start their plot with the introduction of a family related crisis and ends with the solution of that same crisis. What all the four novels have in common is the focus on family structures and family heritage.

4.2.1.1 Family structures

The novels use of different family structures play on the familiarity and common understanding of the readers. A common understanding that seems to base itself on the ideal that a family is a stable safe haven, consisting of a mother, a father and children – preferably connected through biology. Obviously, this ideal family structure will not be representative of all the families represented in a class. However, 'common understandings' should not be understood as what is normal, but rather what is idealized and taken for granted as a common standard.

In the two British novels, *Dustbin Baby* and *Refugee Boy*, the understanding of family structures is challenged through the introduction of foster families. In the two American novels, *Walk Two Moons* and *Part-Time Indian*, the understanding is expanded through the portrayal of extended families where the grandparents are important caregivers in the protagonists' lives. Moreover, the focus on extended families challenges the reader's definition of a grandparent. The family structures in these narratives include both biological and non-biological, stable and unstable, extended family and nuclear family, and consisting of both parents or only one. Furthermore, all the protagonists are dealing with absent parents to some degree. None of the texts remain true to the common understanding of family described above, which is what makes the narratives' realities exceptional and extraordinary. As teachers we always have to be aware that some of our students may have experience with the extraordinary and exceptional elements depicted in the narratives. As specified earlier, we cannot talk in terms of dichotomies – either/or, black and whites – when it comes to cultural issues.

Foster families

In the British novels, the understanding of family as a stable unit is problematized through the introduction of foster families. In both *Dustbin Baby* and *Refugee Boy* there is a lack of consistency in the family units, although it plays out very differently.

April, in *Dustbin Baby*, has never had stability. From the moment she was born, she was dumped in a dustbin, and consequently she has "called lots of women 'Mum'" (p. 43). The instability that is ruling in April's life is juxtaposed to the normalcy that her friends experience: "Hannah's mum who was really comforting" (p. 43). Through the story she keeps searching for that familiarity that is taken for granted when it comes to family:

> I'm going to try and see her. I've got her address from the file. She's probably moved away ages ago but I still want to see the house. It might feel familiar. And if she is still there I might recognise her.
>
> Dustbin Baby (p. 47)

April's experiences with foster families is quite dramatic and stands in great contrast to the common understanding of the ideal family and family stability. The reader is presented with April's continuous change of caregivers. The three most extraordinary realities presented is the story relates to April's adoptive parents (pp. 69-106), a hectic foster family (pp. 107-127) and Sunnybank Children's Home (pp. 128-141) "for hard-to-place kids" (p. 129).

The story of April's adoptive parents is exceptional in the level of challenges that April has to overcome. The main factors are the mother's depression and ultimate suicide, and her adoptive father's abandonment – where the one leads to the other. Thus, the plot questions the stability of any family unit and the roles of a mother and a father (an issue I will further pursue under the topic *gender*). Consequently, the novel also problematizes the notion of family as a safe haven. Through April's depiction of her adoptive father it is evident that the issue of biology is important to April when defining her family. This is demonstrated in the ways she talks about him: "He wasn't my real father" and "there isn't a drop of his blood in my blood" (p. 98).

April's description of how the social workers handle this traumatic part of her past also demonstrates how the institution that substitutes family fails to support April – fails to be a safe haven: "[…] They think I can't remember because I've never talked about it to anyone. […] I overheard one social worker say I must have blanked it out. I don't know how they think I can do that" (p. 82). The quote moreover demonstrate on unwillingness on April's part of talking about her experiences. As with discourse it is not (only) that April is so concerned about family that tells us something about her culture, but the *manner* in which she talks about it that is important. The fact that April does not talk about her difficult experiences with caretakers might indicate that she feels ashamed about her situation, as if she is to blame. Although the avoidance is also a coping mechanism that is innately human.

After losing her adoptive parents, April ends up in a hectic foster family where she has a foster sister who terrorizes her: "Pearl was far, far more scary than any drunk in the cemetery" (p. 113). The 'families' and 'homes' that Jacqueline Wilson describes stands in stark contrast to a common understanding of family and home as a safe haven. When April takes revenge on Pearl, or "turned" as she calls it (p. 118), and pushes her down the stairs, April is sent to Sunnybank: "I got sent there because Big Mo [the foster mother] felt I was a threat to the other kids" (p. 129). Again, those who were meant to take care of April abandons her and the reader's understanding of family as a stable and constant unit is challenged. Simultaneously, the reader's assumptions of foster families as temporary substitutes might be confirmed. However, what April neglects to take into account is that, yet again, she is unwilling to communicate the circumstances that led to her reaction, which implies a level of guilt and shame.

At Sunnybank April joins a gang of girls that spend their nights breaking and entering. When they are caught the reader is provided with further insight to the challenges of being in the foster system, and how April can never settle down and feel certain that those around her are there to stay:

> So I got sent away to a special school. […]
>
> I didn't want to go but no one listened to me. That's the scariest thing of all about being in care. You don't get to choose. You just get shoved here, sent away there.
>
> I felt I was being chucked out of Sunnybank because they'd got sick of me.
>
> Dustbin Baby (pp. 143-144)

Although April's story is extraordinary, it is not culture specific to the British society or to the city of London. The representation of April's family circumstances are rather exaggerations of universal issues, which might cause the reader to gain a greater understanding of herself. Wilson's description of foster families and the Child Protective Services indicates a 'shame discourse'. April's unwillingness to communicate and defend herself might indicate that she feels ashamed about who she is. As she says: "they'd got sick of me". This shame discourse build on April being tossed between family "substitutes", because her own family did not care enough to keep her.

In *Refugee Boy,* Alem's experience with a foster family is by no means as turbulent as in *Dustbin Baby:* "Alem was surprised at how comfortable he felt with the family" (p. 88). The author presents a family unit that is not bound by blood, yet functions as a safe haven. However, although Alem finds support in his foster family and quickly feels at home and safe, the lack of blood connection does construct a bound that is somewhat weaker: "Alem hated the idea of becoming some kind of problem to the Fitzgerald family" (p. 119). Furthermore, the circumstances surrounding the foster situation might be considered more problematic than in April's case as there is a constant tension related to the unanswered questions of his parents' safety:

> Alem was happy to have succeeded in getting out of the children's home, but he couldn't help thinking about the bigger picture. 'How long will I be staying here for?' he asked.
>
> 'No one can say, Alem […] your parents could turn up tomorrow, or the fighting could stop tomorrow […]'
>
> Refugee Boy (p. 90)

The exceptional in *Refugee Boy* that challenges the reader's understanding of family structures and stability, is not influenced by the family members themselves – as it was in *Dustbin Baby*. The exceptional in this narrative is how extreme external factors dictate the structure and stability of a family, i.e. war. Simultaneously, it is a paradox that the war is a major contributor to the building of relationships within the foster family, while destroying the biological family.

Grandparents

The novels also challenge the urban modern idea that a family consists of only two generations: parents and children. In *Part-Time Indian* and *Walk Two Moons,* the two American novels in my study, the grandparents' involvement in the protagonists' lives goes beyond what most readers might be accustomed to from their grandparents.

In *Part-Time Indian,* the grandmother is very much the matriarch of the family. She gives Junior the reassurance he needs to be comfortable with changing schools: "My grandmother was the only one who thought it was a 100 percent good idea" (p. 156). She is the one who gives him sage advice and in this respect Junior's grandmother is more present in the narrative than his own mother:

> "I think it means he respects you," she [his grandmother] said.
> "Respect? No way!"
> "Yes way! You see, you men and boys are like packs of wild dogs. This giant boy is the alpha male at the school, and you're the new dog, so he pushed you around a bit to see how tough you are."
>
> Part-Time Indian (p. 68)

Interestingly, even though the grandmother is portrayed as the family matriarch and is greatly respected in the reservation community, there is a strong focus on the masculine in their ways of talking and acting. Notice the grandmother's description of men as "packs of wild dogs". This manner of speaking might reflect multiple cultural issues. Firstly, it might be a reflection of how white men viewed and treated – possibly even views and treats – Native Americans. On the other hand, it might reflect the opposite, as a nostalgic presentation of how the men of the reservation imagine themselves. Finally, the statement might be an indication that the grandmother is tired of brawling men and a masculine culture. However you interpret the grandmother's depiction of men, it does imply a masculine culture that is more or less specific to the American society, or more precisely, the reservation. Moreover, the statement indicates a power discourse where there is a conflict between white Americans and Native Americans or/and between feminine and masculine cultural ideals. This power discourse also partakes in a broader gender discourse. I will return to these notions in the discussion.

Illustration 1: "My grandmother", Part-Time Indian (p. 69)

In the illustration above, Junior's grandmother is in many ways portrayed as a typical, or stereotypical, grandmother: she comes across as a good cook that prepares traditional meals; she wears comfortable shoes; and she is frugal with her spending, as the use of the old dress might demonstrate. These are familiar characteristics of a grandmother. On the other hand, although they might be comfortable, most grandmothers would probably not wear basketball sneakers. Furthermore, making a living of a "fraud", selling "Highly Sacred Aboriginal Transportation Charms", defies most stereotypes regarding grandmothers and is a contortion of the familiar. Thus, the plot offers the reader an extended understanding of the term grandmother. Furthermore, the illustration might be seen as a representation of cultural artifacts:

the sneakers, the bandanas and the traditional salmon dish. The illustrations offer the reader more than one symbolic system to provide cultural context to the issues portrayed.

In *Walk Two Moons* the grandparents – Gram and Gramps – play an indispensable role in the narrative's plot. They are the ones that bring Sal on a road trip to see her mother: "Gram and Gramps knew that I wanted to see Momma, but that I was afraid to" (p. 5). Moreover, they are the willing audience to which Sal tells her story: "my grandmother Hiddle said, "Salamanca, why don't you entertain us?"" (p. 8). Thus, Sal's grandparents are essential to the plot as facilitators and audience, and are a great support for Sal during a difficult time. One might argue that Gram and Gramps replace the role Sal's father should have taken but is emotionally unable to.

Like Junior's grandmother, Gram and Gramps are both familiar and unfamiliar in their "roles" as grandparents. The excerpt below will demonstrate my point:

> […] Dad did not trust Gram and Gramps to behave themselves along the way unless they had me with them. Dad said that if they tried to go on their own, he would save everyone a lot of time and embarrassment by calling the police and having them arrested before they even left the driveway. It might sound a bit extreme for a man to call the police on his own tottery old parents, but when my grandparents got in a car, trouble just naturally followed them like a filly trailing behind a mare.
>
> […] full up to the tops of their heads with goodness and sweetness, and mixed in with all that goodness and sweetness was a large dash of peculiarity. This combination made them interesting to know, but you could never predict what they would do or say.
>
> Walk Two Moons (pp. 5-6)

Gram and Gramps are, like Junior's grandmother in *Part-Time Indian*, in many ways typical grandparents: supportive, good and sweet – as grandparents "should" be. Grandparents' aptitude for just these qualities are generally tied to their passive and predictable behavior. However, the excerpt describes the opposite. Characteristics such as 'followed by trouble', peculiarity and unpredictability sounds more like a description of teenagers than of grandparents, yet here the teenager is the one sent along with the grandparents as a chaperone. Hence, the reader's understanding of grandparents and family structures are contrasted with the peculiarity of Gram and Gramps and their importance in a life changing journey for April. Additionally, the father's reluctance to send his old parent on their own could be understood as a description of shame. He is afraid of being embarrassed and embarrassment relates to the notion of shame, although the emotion is not as strong as shame.

4.2.1.2 Family heritage

As the findings related to different family structures indicate, there are naturally going to be different emphasis on family heritage in these contemporary young adult novels. In *Dustbin Baby* there is a lack of heritage; in *Refugee Boy* there is a "loss" of heritage; in *Part-Time Indian* the family heritage is problematic; and in *Walk Two Moons* the heritage is romanticized.

Family heritage is generally something understood – or taken for granted – as positive confirmation of who we are and who we can be. In the novels, this understanding of family heritage is contrasted by the constructions of heritage as a concept that is "not exclusively positive". Family heritage is naturally tied to the previous topic of family structures. Thus, characters in a foster family situation do not have the same stability in their heritage as those in more stable family units/structures. My point here is not that teenagers – the readers – have elaborate knowledge and a deep understanding of their family history. However, it is fair to assume that most readers *take for granted* that their parents are there to fill in the gaps, both related to previous generations and their own toddler years. Furthermore, consciously or unconsciously the readers will have an understanding of how family governs their perception of reality and grounds them to a culture. The fact that this is taken for granted and seen as something positive is what the novels seem to problematize through portraying contrasting or conflicting representations. This in turn creates ample opportunities for the notion of thirdness to occur.

Lack and loss of family heritage

In *Dustbin Baby,* Jacqueline Wilson does not only contort the reader's understanding of family heritage, she juxtaposes it with a reality that most probably is *un*familiar to the majority of readers. Wilson describes a reality where the protagonist does not have a family or heritage in any version of the traditional sense. April is well aware of her lack of history and how the lack of family stability has robbed her of her own history. The only clues she has to her own heritage are stored in a "huge great box file packed with all kinds of clippings and letters and reports" (p.45). The entire plot is driven by April's search for her mother and, as such, her heritage: "I wonder what it's like to trace your family way back, to finger the gold lettering and find your great-great-great-great grandmother" (p. 101). Through these quotes, and others like it, you get the feeling the April view herself as not normal. This feeling of being abnormal is part of the novel's representation of shame, i.e. a shame discourse, as previously mentioned.

Again, the exceptional about April's heritage are universal issues. Although exaggerated, the issues are not confined to any one particular culture. Being orphaned, in foster care or in a children's home can just as naturally occur in the reader's, i.e. the ESL-learner's, culture, as in the culture depicted in the novel.

In *Refugee Boy* the topic of family heritage is addressed in an entirely different manner. Unlike April, Alem has lived most of his life happily with his mother and father, thus we can assume that he is well acquainted with his on heritage. However, that stability is drastically broken by the ensuing violence in Ethiopia and Eritrea, causing his parents to make the drastic decision to leave him by himself in England. Alem wakes up in the hotel room only to find a letter from his father:

> *My dearest son,*
>
> *You have seen all the trouble that we have been going through back home. What is happening back there has nothing to do with us but we are stuck in the middle of it. You are the product of two countries, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and we love them both equally but they are pulling themselves and each other apart. We hope that it does not go on like this much longer but until the fighting stops and our persecution is over, your mother and I think it would be best if you stay in England. Here they have organisations that will help you, compassionate people who understand why people have to seek refuge from war. We just cannot afford to risk another attack on you; we value your life more than anything.*
>
> *[…] we may be joining you soon. […]*
>
> Part-Time Indian (p. 32, italicized in the original)

From this point forward Alem goes through a gradual loss of the people and places that links him to his heritage. First, Alem learns that his mother "was killed by some very evil people and left near the border" between Ethiopia and Eritrea (p. 157). Later his father is shot dead on the streets of London (p. 284). The trouble depicted in the letter from his father and the consequences of the war are somewhat culture specific. It offers the reader insight to the Ethiopian-Eritrean war, and as such, these countries' histories. This history is part of the Ethiopian and Eritrean cultural heritage. Other factors that are culture specific in terms of Alem's family heritage is portrayed through his encounters with British society and his comparisons with his native country. Through these reflections, the reader is offered insight into demography, wildlife, city structures and tribal belongings.

Ethnicity is one of the contributing factor to the war and to the murder of his father. Conflicts between ethnicities are often part of a power struggle, i.e. a power discourse. This notion might not be as strong in relation to Alem's family heritage. However, his heritage lays the foundation

for other areas where the power discourse becomes more prominent. I will return to this fact under the topic of *youth culture*.

With the loss of both his parents, Alem loses any chance of returning to his home country in the foreseeable future. The war and the personal losses it causes him are now part of the heritage he carries. Thus, Benjamin Zephaniah's portrayal of family heritage is far from exclusively positive. The taken-for-granted notion that parents will "always" be present to fill in blanks in our knowledge is lost.

Problematic and romanticized family heritage

In contrast to April and Alem, Junior and Sal's families are more or less stable family structures, which means that the protagonists have better access to their family heritage. Although both *Part-Time Indian* and *Walk Two Moons* revolves around Native American families and heritage, their emphasis is completely different. *Part-Time Indian* emphasizes the challenges related to Junior's family heritage. In *Walk Two Moons* however, the emphasis is on Sal's general awareness of their heritage and how that heritage ties her to nature. In other words, the problematic nature of knowing one's heritage is the focus in *Part-Time Indian,* while there is a romanticized notion of heritage in *Walk Two Moons*.

In *Part-Time Indian* Junior's family heritage is tied to poverty and racism: "My parents came from poor people who came from poor people who came from poor people" (p.11) "[a]nd because you are Indian you start believing you're destined to be poor" (p. 13). These quotes depiction of poverty are accurate accounts of the appalling conditions that is the reality for many Native Americans living on reservations[11]. Additionally, the quotes demonstrate how the knowledge of his family heritage influences Junior's expectations for the future, and these expectations are kept very low. Immediately, the reader will sense a power discourse relating to ethnicity in the way Junior talks and believes. The illustration below demonstrates this further:

[11] Figures from 2007 found that of all the American ethnic groups, Native Americans living on reservations «had the highest unemployment, alcoholism, poverty and suicide rates». Issues of mental health and malnutrition are also prominent challenges among 'reservation Indians' (Mauk & Oakland, 2009, p. 93).

Illustration 2: "My parents", Part-Time Indian (p. 12)

In the illustration, Junior expresses an understanding of the reservations poverty cycle as maintained by outsiders' expectation. Thus, he places part of the blame for his family's circumstances on others. When Junior says that this is who his parents could have been if "somebody" paid attention to their dreams, it is reasonable to assume that *that* someone he is referring to is a white American. This is further amplified by the continuous focus on hope not existing on the reservation (p. 43) and the "luxuries" that the white Reardan students take for granted, such as food in the fridge and higher education. This is in turn further demonstrated by Junior's illustration, as it portrays all the things Junior assumes are unreachable for him and his

family: an education, fame and the lifestyle that accompanies these accomplishments. In this regard, the illustration is quite culture specific as it portrays all the possibilities they are missing.

However, Junior's teacher Mr. P's confession paint a different picture. A picture where the Indians are not simply victims of circumstance:

> "You were right to throw that book at me. I deserved to get smashed in the face for what I've done to Indians. Every white person on the rez should get smashed in the face. But, let me tell you this. All the Indians should get smashed in the face, too."
>
> I was shocked. Mr. P was *furious.*
>
> "The only thing you kids are being taught is how to give up. […] All these kids have given up," he said. "All your friends. All the bullies. And their mothers and fathers have given up, too. And their grandparents gave up and their grandparents before them. And me and every other teacher here. We're all defeated." […]
>
> Part-Time Indian (pp. 42-43)

There are a few important elements to consider in Mr. P's statement. Firstly, while Junior understands his family's circumstances as a result of his heritage, Mr. P understands Indians' heritage/circumstances as a result of their behavior. In other words, Junior places the blame for his current situation on external factors, while Mr. P blames internal factors – where he includes himself. Secondly, although their understandings might differ, the result is still the same: "somebody" had to pay attention in order for Junior to break out of his family heritage, and make room for a different future. A future where he does not give up and is given the opportunity to reach his potential. This is an important contribution to the notion of a power struggle. Sherman Alexie portray family in manner that depicts multiple culture specific traits. Thus, the novel might work well as a cultural artifact. Simultaneously, the notions of hope and hopelessness are universal and recognizable to the reader. Junior's circumstances are only more exaggerated than what most teenagers are familiar with.

In *Walk Two Moons* the Native American heritage is not a problematic one. However, that does not mean that Sal's heritage is not problematized:

> Gram and I poked our noses into an old fort, and then sat on the grass watching a group of Native Americans dance and beat drums. My mother had not liked the term *Native Americans*. She thought it sounded primitive and stiff. She said, "My great-grandmother was a Seneca Indian, and I'm proud of it. She wasn't a Seneca Native American. *Indian* sounds much more brave and elegant." In school, our teacher told us we had to say Native American, but I agreed with my mother. *Indian* sounded much better. My mother and I liked this Indian-ness in our background. She said it made us appreciate the gifts of nature; it made us closer to the land.
>
> Walk Two Moons (pp. 52-53)

The first element of importance in this excerpt is that Sal problematizes the term 'Native American'. It is worth noting that Sal and her mother, who are part Native American, have a different opinion concerning the term than that of Sal's teacher, who is not Native American. Nevertheless, it is the teacher's understanding of the term that is the excepted one. This underlines the controversy related to the construction of the term. There seems to be a question of political correctness in the description of this concept. Thus, this novel also addresses a power discourse, through portraying ways of talking and valuing. There is a struggle for the power to define a concept – a concept that expresses an ethnical group's identity.

The second element the reader can note is that the words Sal uses to describe her "Indian-ness" – proud, brave and elegant – are nostalgic and romanticized notions of what it means to have an Indian heritage. Sal's awareness of her heritage is also prominent when she and her grandparents arrive at Mt. Rushmore: "I've got nothing against the presidents, but you'd think the Sioux would be mighty sad to have those white faces carved into their sacred hill. […] I wondered why whoever carved them couldn't have put a couple Indians up there too" (p. 167). Again, the Native American heritage is problematized by implying political and cultural conflicts – a power discourse.

Furthermore, the initial excerpt "introduces" the most prominent feature of how Sal's heritage is constructed, and that is how it ties her to nature[12]. That her "Indian-ness" makes her closer to the land is utilized in multiple ways in the novel. Firstly, Sal is born and raised on a farm. Sharon Creech, the author, ties moving away from the farm to a suburban area to Sal's denial concerning the death of her mother. At the end of the narrative, Creech relates moving back to the farm – back to nature – to Sal's acceptance of her mother's death. Secondly, related to the entirety of the plot, traveling through the country, viewing the natural wonders and areas of significance for the Indians helps the narrative construct Sal's heritage. That is, it provides Sal with the opportunity to contemplate her heritage, thus providing the reader with culture specific references, e.g. the Native Americans dancing and beating their drums (cultural ritual), the Seneca and Sioux tribes and Mt. Rushmore (part of the Black Hills that is sacred to the Sioux), as well as other geographical references.

Sal's closeness to nature is vital to how she thinks, talks, believes and values the world. This is illustrated through the use of allegories such as: "trouble just naturally followed them like a

[12] However, to picture traditional Native American cultures in a manner where the land only had spiritual value is "invariably wrong because it romanticizes and oversimplifies the realities of life in North America before European settlement" (Mauk & Oakland, 2009, p. 40).

filly trailing behind a mare" (p. 5), personifications such as: "*Rush, rush, rush* whispered the wind, the sky, the clouds, the tress. *Rush, rush, rush*" (p. 23) and "The closer we got to the Badlands, the more wicked were the whispers in the air: *Slow down, slow, slow, slow*" (p. 133), and similes such as: "A person isn't a bird. You can't cage a person" (p. 132).

The three factors; moving from and to the farm, the road trip, and Sal's thoughts and view on the world, romanticizes Sal's Native American heritage. Nevertheless, the use of heritage is not without the references to controversial or problematic realities, which is exemplified through Sal's contemplation regarding the term Native American and the carvings on Mt. Rushmore.

All the four novels construct versions of family heritage that greatly differ. The history and heritage a family provides is something that we take for granted, both when it has positive and negative inclinations. Taking something for granted means it is familiar to us – not something we think about. However, in all the contemporary young adult novels this is not the case. Heritage is not something that the protagonists take for granted. It is very much a present issue of their consciousness. Hence, the authors contort the familiar.

4.2.2 Gender

Related to gender the novels have quite different focuses and emphases. The question of gender norms and roles is addressed explicitly in *Dustbin Baby* and *Walk Two Moons* where the protagonists are female. In these narratives, the protagonists' journey throughout the narrative is related to their search for their mothers. Thus, *Dustbin Baby* and *Walk Two Moons* greatly problematizes the concept of motherhood, and implicitly, the concept of fatherhood.

In *Refugee Boy* and *Part-Time Indian* – the two novels with male protagonists – the emphasis on gender norms and roles does not possess such an explicit focus. In these two books, the protagonists' journeys are rather linked to their personal development and their independence. There is a primary focus is on their actions, not their emotions. To account for the different emphases in the books, the presentation of *gender* is divided into 'parenting' and 'masculinity versus femininity'. In the former the elements addressed mainly relate to the two novels with female protagonists, as these texts explicitly address this topic. In the latter, 'masculinity versus femininity', the findings are mostly related to *Part-Time Indian,* as such a focus is prominent in this narrative. Lastly, features from *Refugee Boy* will be presented. However, the topic of gender seems to be quite insignificant in this narrative.

4.2.2.1 Parenting

The notion 'mother' or 'motherhood' is essential to the storylines in both *Dustbin Baby* and *Walk Two Moons.* How this concept is problematized is strongly related to the reader's understanding of family as a stable structure, which is somewhat problematic as touched upon in section 4.2.1.1 Family structures. A natural continuation of the understanding of family is that a mother is a constant provider for their children, which is an understanding the two female protagonists share and struggle with. This understanding is problematized through questions of biology, characteristics and individuality.

April reflects on "[w]hat kind of mother could dump her own baby in a dustbin?" (p. 18). To her the act of abandonment is not compatible with her understanding of a mother. Simultaneously, she cannot avoid the fact that she *is* her mother: "She's the only blood relative that I know about and yet of course I know nothing at all about her" (p. 35). After searching for her *real* mom the entire day April realizes that her unwillingness to let Marion (her foster mother) close is due to their lack of blood relations. This unwillingness is most likely further heightened by previous negative experiences with other caretakers. Nevertheless, Marion might be more of a mother than her biological mother ever was, thus questioning the reader's common understanding of motherhood being tied through biology and as someone who has been present all your life. April eventually recognizes that Marion inhabits other characteristics that are associated with a mother's role, such as unconditional affection and concern/caring. All of these diverse and conflicting descriptions of motherhood is summed up in April's "conclusion" towards the very end of the novel:

> Marion really cares about me even though we're not related. I was kidding myself before. I don't always *want* her to care but she does. The slightest little thing can send her into a state. […]
>
> She *would* hug me if I let her. She's tried several times. I'm the one who always backs away. It's because I don't want her to get too close. I don't want her to be a real mum. Because she's *not* my mum.
>
> I've hung on so long hoping to find my real mum. I don't think I'm ever going to find her now. *She's* the one who hasn't been the *real* mum.
>
> Dustbin Baby (p. 194-195)

These questions related to motherhood – biology and characteristics – are underlined throughout the novel by a variety of mother figures, and by the manner in which April talks and values these different figures. In the excerpt above the quote "I don't always *want* her to care but she does" underlines the unconditional affection that has to be present in the relationship

between a mother and a daughter. At least, these are the characteristics and qualities that April believes in and values. These believes and values partake in a gender discourse, where the norm seems to be that mothers, i.e. women, are loving caregivers.

Dustbin Baby's considerable focus on the issue of abandonment is also explored in *Walk Two Moons.* Both Sal and Phoebe have trouble understanding why their mothers had to leave – again, abandonment is incompatible with the concept of motherhood. Unlike *Dustbin Baby*, motherhood is not problematized through the question of biology, but rather through a mother's individuality. That is, the novels portray maternal characters as both part of the family unit and separate from it. While Sal and Phoebe understand their mothers through the role they possess in the family unit, they have difficulty acknowledging them as individuals: "She had not been well. She had had some terrible shocks, it is true, but I did not understand why she could not get better with us" (p. 103). In this quote, Sal expresses how motherhood and individuality are problematic and incompatible concepts to her.

Nevertheless, when given the outsider's perspective – when the mother in question is not her own – Sal is able to separate the individual from the family unit: "I wondered why it was so easy for me to see that Phoebe's mother was worried and miserable, but Phoebe couldn't see it – or if she could, she was ignoring it" (p.81). Eventually Sal is able to identify even her own mother as a separate individual beyond her family unit, but this is only after Sal has done the same with Phoebe and her mother: "For the first time, it occurred to me that maybe my mother's leaving had nothing whatsoever to do with me. It was separate and apart. We couldn't own our mothers" (p. 164). The reader can recognize the same notion that is present in *Dustbin Baby,* where April eventually realized that her mother's actions were not a reflection of April herself.

The outsider's perspective Sal possesses in relation to Phoebe's family means she is able to reflect on other functions a mother has within a family unit, which further discusses the norms of gender. Mrs. Winterbottom represents the old fashioned stereotypes of what it entails to be a wife and a mother. She takes care of the household – e.g. baking, cleaning, laundry and grocery shopping – and the children while the husband is at work (pp. 27-28). Although Mrs. Winterbottom fulfils her role of 'Mother', and in extension, her role of stereotypical 'Woman', Sal senses that she, in fact, is unsatisfied with her role within the family. This indicates that the gender norms Mrs. Winterbottom appeases to might not mirror her internal perception of self. Thus, the notion of identity is added to the gender discourse – a notion that correlates with the definition of gender. As a contrast to the portrayal of motherhood that Mrs. Winterbottom represents, the reader is introduced to Mary Lou's mother, Mrs. Finney:

> Mr. Finney was cooking something in the kitchen, with the help of four-year-old Tommy. Phoebe whispered, "I am not too optimistic about the possibilities of this meal."
>
> When Mrs. Finney straggled in the door at six o'clock, Tommy and Dougie and Dennis tugged at various parts of her, all of them talking at once. […] She gave Mr. Finney a sloppy kiss on the lips, and he slipped a piece of cucumber into her mouth.
>
> Walk Two Moons (p. 146-147)

Unlike Mrs. Winterbottom, Mrs. Finney has a job and, in this scene, it is her husband that cooks, not her. Thus, the portrayal of the Finney family household does not give the impression of a family unit where the parents have distinct stereotypical gender roles. Consequently, the reader's understandings of fatherhood is also challenged. Phoebe's reaction to Mr. Finney being the cook is worth noting. It seems that her family's stereotypical expectations of gender is internalized in Phoebe. This argument is further supported by the novels portrayal of Mr. Winterbottom, who is rendered as a stereotypical masculine man and "Father, with a capital F" (p. 28). Even after his wife, Phoebe's mother, mysteriously leaves, Phoebe insists that "My father never cries" (p. 152), which further emphasizes a stereotypical man. The fact that the stereotypical gender norms seem internalized in Phoebe, stresses the importance of problematizing gender expectations.

Sal's description of Mr. and Mrs. Winterbottom describes a couple where clear gender roles seems to create a distance between the mother and the father. As a contrast, the Finneys are depicted more as equals, and they seem to contradict every stereotype regarding gender roles and parenting:

> Mr. Finney was lying in the bathtub, with all his clothes on, reading a book. From Mary Lou's bedroom window, I saw Mrs. Finney lying on top of the garage with a pillow under her head. "What's she doing?" I asked.
>
> Mary Lou peered out the window. "King of kings! She's taking a nap."
>
> Walk Two Moons (pp. 44-45)

One last issues that seems to problematize stereotypical female expectations is the reason for Mrs. Winterbottom's disappearance. She had gone away to become reacquainted with the son she once gave up for adoption. Again, the struggle for the female character is related to family, which is a traditional gender representation. Moreover, there is a notion of shame attatched to how Mrs. Winterbottom feels about her past: "I know you will think I am not – or was not – respectable, but it was before I met you, and I had to give him up for adoption and I could hardly bear to think of it and –" (p. 235). This notion of shame is connected with what she perceives as "respectable" behavior. Like in April's case, Mrs. Winterbottom's shame concerns her past and her biological family.

Sharon Creech's description of the Winterbottoms and the Finneys offer the reader both a more "masculine" family where inequality between the genders is more distinguished and a "feminine" family where equality is more prominent. This might imply a society where there are room for "personal" preferences, although it is difficult to determine whether this is a culture specific trait.

In *Dustbin Baby* fatherhood is not an issue of interest for April. However, her disinterest in learning who her biological father is does portray an understanding of a father's importance. Furthermore, her mistrust of her adoptive father underlines a perspective of fathers as a less important caregiver. The descriptions of fatherhood implies an understanding of the male gender as less caring, less compassionate and less patient than the female gender. In this sense, the novel seem to depict a culture that is further on the masculine end of the continuum than on the feminine. Thus, adding to the notion of a gender discourse.

To summaries, both of the novels with female protagonists portray a variety of mother figures that describe different understandings of 'motherhood'. All these descriptions are more or less conflicting and contrasting to the ideal notion of motherhood. The manner in which the wives are portrayed are supported or contrasted by the depiction of their husbands. Thus, fatherhood is an additional concern. The notion of gender depicts either a masculine culture or a feminine one, comprising of different degrees of unfamiliarity to the reader. Thus, making the reader question her own understanding of gender expectations. The question is whether the different depictions of gender roles allow the reader to gain culture specific knowledge. The answer seems to be no. The reader cannot identify the specific culture based on these portrayals of gender.

4.2.2.2 Masculinity versus femininity

Both *Part-Time Indian* and *Refugee Boy* are more focused on the actions of the boys than the roles of their parents or caretakers. That does not mean that the concepts of motherhood and fatherhood are non-existent problems in these two novels. It is simply not a prioritized focus. Instead (it might seem), *Part-Time Indian* introduces readers to a rather masculine culture where there is a prominent focus on competition and toughness. As the Norwegian culture generally is quite feminine, as discussed in the theoretical framing, the masculine characteristics of the reservation could come across as unfamiliar to the reader. The masculinity of the reservation culture is portrayed mostly through the constant fistfights that Junior is victim of and the description of a man as someone that does not show emotions: "Man, I've always cried too

easily. [...] It's weak. It's the opposite of warrior" (p. 75) and "I guess that's the only time [after losing an important basketball game] that men and boys get to cry and not get punched in the face" (p. 196). These quotes demonstrate how masculine features are valued.

In Reardan, the area where Junior's new school is located, the youth culture is portrayed as somewhat less masculine than the reservation culture he is accustomed to. That is not to say that it is feminine – simply less masculine. One example of the depiction of both the masculinity of Junior's reservation culture and the relative femininity of Reardan high school, is when Junior has had enough of the name-calling. Firstly, the reader is introduced to the "Spokane Indian Rules of Fisticuffs" (pp. 61-62). Basically the rules state that a fight is the only solution to any form of dispute or insult – real or imagined. Further reaffirming the masculinity of the culture and the expectations placed on a man. However, at Reardan Junior has experienced no physical violence, something he blames on the other students' prejudice against Indians: "After all, I was a reservation Indian, and no matter how geeky and weak I appeared to be, I was still a potential killer" (p. 63). The problem culminates when one of the school jocks jokes:

> "Did you know that Indians are living proof that niggers fuck buffalo?"
>
> I felt like Roger had kicked me in the face. That was the most racist thing I'd ever heard in my life.
>
> […] I couldn't let them get away with that shit. I wasn't just defending myself. I was defending Indians, black people, *and* buffalo.
>
> So I punched Roger in the face.
>
> Part-Time Indian (pp. 64-65)

Although the jocks of Reardan are tough and competitive, they are not accustomed to the level of violence that Junior is. Consequently, they just stand and stare at Junior in disbelief: "They were *shocked"* (p. 65). This demonstrates the relative femininity of Reardan and the almost absolute masculinity of Wellpinit. Moreover, the joke contributes to the notion of a power struggle, which I also mentioned under the topic *family*. This power struggle is fueled by ethnic prejudice and stereotypes. The notion of ethnic prejudice is a universal one, as it is often part of an imperial ethnocentrism that exists in western countries. However, racial tensions are prominent features of the USA's history and present climate[13]. Thus, the novel's depiction of these racial problems are somewhat culture specific to the USA.

[13] That American life is challenges by nativism and racism is widely discussed and problematized. In June 2008 50 per cent of the American population "believed that race relations" were bad and 30 per cent acknowledge feelings of racial prejudice themselves (Mauk & Oakland, 2009, p. 6).

The first basketball game between Junior's new school, Reardan, and the reservation school, Wellpinit High School, demonstrates how competitive and tough the reservation culture is and that there is a power struggle between the two cultural groups. The depiction in the excerpt below goes beyond simple competition and portrays a culture that sees itself in competition with another cultural group. Unfortunately for Junior, he is caught in the middle:

> The rez basketball fans were chanting, "Ar-nold sucks! Ar-nold sucks! Ar-nold sucks!"
>
> They weren't calling me by my rez name, Junior. Nope, they were calling me by my Reardan name. […]
>
> My fellow tribal members saw me and they all stopped cheering, talking and moving.
>
> I think they stopped breathing.
>
> And, then, as one, they turned their backs on me.
>
> It was a fricking awesome display of contempt. […]
>
> I was mad.
>
> If these dang Indians had been this organized when I went to school here, maybe I would have had more reason to stay.
>
> Part-Time Indian (pp. 143-144)

Sherman Alexie's depiction of a masculine culture is culture specific in its focus on competition and individuality, as these features resonates with the traditional American slogans of "The American Dream" and "every man for himself" (*Cambridge Dictionary of American Idioms*, 2003). The wording of the last underlines the masculine element of culture[14]. Furthermore, the depiction of Junior's best friend Rowdy, is a strong contributor to the representation of gender. Rowdy is fiercely tough – to the point where is a competition to be *the* toughest.

In *Refugee Boy* gender is not problematized explicitly. Certainly, the foster mother is the one who is the most active in Alem's fostering and helping him through his difficult circumstances. Furthermore, she is the one in the kitchen, while Mr. Fitzgerald works in the garden. These could be identified as stereotypical traits of respective genders. On the other hand, Mrs. Fitzgerald seems to be the most outspoken, and thus more action oriented, while her husband is the quite one, keeping himself in the background. These characteristics go against the stereotypes. Additionally, Mr. and Mrs. Fitzgerald are portrayed as equals, thus indicating a feminine culture (at least within the family unit). However, gender roles, masculinity and femininity does not drive the story, which is the case in the other three novels. The priority gender has on the narrative (or the lack thereof) becomes evident when the novel's chief

[14] "In the frequent attempts to define 'Americanness', elements such as self-reliance, individualism, independence […] are stressed" (Mauk & Oakland, 2009, p. 12).

problem is taken into consideration, which is political and not emotional. The focus is on Alem's actions – how he "solves" the situation he is in. This is typical of novels with male protagonist, and depicts an understanding of the male gender as rational, solution orientated individuals – which are stereotypical gender expectations. In this respect the novel does contribute to the gender discourse, by maintaining a traditional representation where gender is taken-for-granted and not problematized.

4.2.3 Youth culture

Throughout the previous two topics – *family* and *gender* – I have identified two discourses (besides the obvious gender discourse). The first is a power discourse often related to the issue of ethnicity, and the second, a shame discourse related to family structures and heritage. In the third and final topic it seems that some of the issues addressed in these two discourses is resolved. The first category under the topic of *youth culture* is 'journeys' and it is towards the end of these "journeys" that the issue of power and shame comes to a more settled conclusion.

4.2.3.1 Journeys

What I have chosen to define as journeys are closely linked to the idea of identity and learning. It is not surprising that such a focus is dominant in all the four texts, seeing how they are young adult novels. As I tried to illustrate in table 4.2 How the cultural topics are addressed in the novels, the novels both depict literal journeys – from one place to another – and metaphorical journeys – from one understanding to another, i.e. the protagonists learn something related to society and themselves. The familiar aspect of this cultural topic is how teenagers struggle to find their place in society – their identity – and that on the road to figuring this out they learn something about themselves. However, the journeys depicted in these novels are journeys that come across as exaggerations of what most young adult will ever have to endure. This is the *how* of the topic. Again, there is a notion of the extraordinary and the exceptional. As these journeys are quite intense, the protagonists have to demonstrate immense psychological resilience, which they do. Their resilience makes the reader root for them.

In *Part-Time Indian,* Junior's journey is firstly a literal one – from Wellpinit to Reardan. The emotional journey and growth is a consequence of the literal journey. The emotional issue relates to *how* Junior can break free from the negative cycle of his heritage without losing his Indian identity. This is something he struggles with throughout the narrative: "I woke up on the

reservation as an Indian, and somewhere on the road to Reardan, I became less than Indian. And once I arrived at Reardan, I became something less than less than Indian" (p. 83). Although this sentiment builds on the universal issue of "where do I belong?", it gives associations to historical events including, and events leading up to, the Indian Removal Act of 1830[15]. The Indian Removal Act meant moving Indian tribes from one area to an area the European settlers had no interest in. In consequence it was both the case of moving Native Americans away from their geographical homeland and from their culture, i.e. their identity. The same notion rings true in Junior's statement.

The picture below illustrates the same struggle. The two representations are total opposites. In both cases Junior is playing for his new team – the Reardan high school basketball team. In the Wellpinit gym he is considered the devil, because to the inhabitants of the reservation his is a traitor to their tribe. In the Reardan gym he is considered an angel because he helps the team win. However, whether Junior is perceived as a devil or an angel he still feel uncomfortable because he does not know who he is, or how to define himself:

Illustration 3: "Who am I?"[16], Part-Time Indian (p. 182)

No matter how people talk about him, values him and believes in him – all elements important in cultural discourse – Junior is still confused about his identity. I would also like to argue that the illustration above partakes in the representation of shame that I have previously introduced. In Wellpinit Junior is ashamed that he has betrayed the reservation. In Reardan is his praised

[15] (Mauk & Oakland, 2009)
[16] This illustration does not have a title. The one suggested here is given by me to indicate the important aspect of the illustration.

for his skills, simultaneously his peers are not aware of his circumstances at home, which Junior avoids elaborating on because he seems ashamed (p. 120). Nevertheless, through it all Junior demonstrates immense endurance. As Mr. P, Junior's reservation teacher, said it: "You've been fighting since you were born" (p. 43). Ultimately, Junior's journey offers him the realization that he can be more than one thing, more than one label:

> I realized that, sure, I was a Spokane Indian, I belonged to that tribe. But I also belonged to the tribe of American immigrants. And to the tribe of basketball players. And to the tribe of bookworms. [and of cartoonists, chronic masturbators, teenage boys, small-town kids, Pacific Northwesterners, tortilla chips-and-salsa lovers, poverty, funeral-goers, tribe of beloved sons, tribe of boys who really missed their best friends.]
>
> It was a huge realization.
>
> And that's when I knew that I was going to be okay.
>
> Part-Time Indian (p. 217)

Through this realization Junior takes back some of the defining power in terms of how he can be defined. Consequently, the balance of power in the previously suggested power discourse is more equal. Junoir no longer sees himself as a victim.

Refugee Boy follows a similar format to *Part-Time Indian.* The literal journey triggers the emotional one and the protagonist has to endure and overcome multiple setbacks – portraying remarkable psychological resilience. Nevertheless, the author, Benjamin Zephaniah, seems more concerned with the portrayal of the British political climate than the development of Alem as a multifaceted character. Unlike Junior, Alem is a through and through good person, a fact that influences the personal journey that it is possible for Alem to take. He starts as a good guy and is still a good guy at the end of the narrative:

> Look at me, look at all the things that I am capable of, and think of all the things you could call me – a student, a lover of literature, a budding architect, a friend, a symbol of hope even, but what am I called? A refugee.
>
> Refugee Boy (p. 292)

In the excerpt Alem challenges the power balance of the British society by questioning the manner in which he is talked about and valued. As suggest under the topic of 'family heritage' it is his heritage that catapults the narrative's main power struggle, which is a political one. However, it would be unreasonable to assume that this critic is culture specific to British society. Similar discourses can be identified in the Norwegian media, thus essentially the discourse is a universal one.

Alem's journey can be divided into two. The first one relates to coping and accepting the consequences of the war. Through that journey the reader is allowed quite extensive insights into the war in Ethiopia and Eritrea (e.g. p. 230). The war was a border dispute, and tensions are still felt today. The second relates to Alem getting acquainted with the British culture, where the focus on language is prominent. Firstly, there is the cultural codes that are embedded in language: "But Alem knew by now that when most people said 'All right?' they didn't really mean, 'are you all right?' He thought this was a gross misuse of the language, he just couldn't understand how they could say 'All right?' and walk away without waiting for an answer" (p. 74). The phrase "all right?" and other similar phrases[17] are culture specific to English speaking countries. This manner of speech can easily cause a cumbersome start to any interaction between an English-speaking person and a Norwegian, which is what Alem experienced. Furthermore, the statement quite explicitly articulates how our use of language is culturally determined, thus offering the reader a intercultural insight.

Secondly, Alem struggles with the creative side of the language, which causes both humor and confusion: ""I am now looking forward to what should be a very interesting mass debate." The class burst into laughter, even the teacher had a smile on his face" (p. 135). Alem reflections also offers an understanding of the different meanings, or "content", that some concepts imply: "He was quietly amused at the way people celebrated Christmas without celebrating the birth of Christ" (p. 137). In this quote Alem expresses that Christmas and the celebration of Christ are one and the same. However, in western countries this is not necessarily the case. Later on the reader also learns that in Ethiopia and Eritrea Christmas is celebrated on January 7th (p. 152), thus providing the reader with a little piece of culture specific information. In general, the comparison between the British and the Ethiopian/Eritrean cultures offers the reader little pieces of culture specific information, e.g. school system (p. 98), reclusiveness (p. 145) and other examples given throughout the presentation.

April's literal journey through London demonstrates her independence. This journey is triggered by her emotional state and her desire to find her heritage and her mother. On April's journey, she learns to accept her past and cherish those in her life. Thus, she lets go of some of the embarrassment and shame that has tormented her throughout her journey. The narrative – her journey – starts with April pretending to be someone she think others want her to be and keeping everyone at a safe distance emotionally: "They think I'm nice and normal too […] I'm

[17] Based on my own experiences people from the USA and Australia tend to use the phrase "How are you?" more than "All right?". To me "all right?" is primarily a British politeness phrase.

going to do my best to keep it that way" (p. 4) and "I don't always *want* her to care" (p. 194). Towards the end she able to let people closer, as she seemingly lets go of the shame she feels concerning her past:

> I go into The Pizza Place. The waiter smiles at me, shows me to a table, and asks me if I'm on my own.
> I hesitate.
> 'I've got… family coming later,' I say.
>
> Dustbin Baby (p. 198)

Sal's journey, in *Walk Two Moons,* is similar to April's. Through her journey, Sal learns to view motherhood in a different manner (as presented above). Furthermore, she has to confront death and its natural place in life: "Ben said, "Maybe dying could be normal *and* terrible"" (p. 171). This is an understanding Sal eventually reaches. Through these life lessons, Sal has to find her own place in the world, and ultimately she comes to term with a realization she uttered early on in the narrative: "Salamanca Tree Hiddle, you can be happy without her" (p. 35). This is a healthy sense of independence that all teenager and young adults will have to become accustom to in their own right, which makes it a universal issue. "Healthy" in the sense that she is not dependent on her mother in order to be happy. Furthermore, the acceptance that Sal eventually experiences also includes a release of the shame she felt regarding her mother's choice to leave.

Through their journeys, all the four protagonists demonstrate immense psychological resilience, which is portrayed through the manner in which they surpass expectations and overcome their challenges – how they learn and grow through their journey. This growth contributes to the power discourse and to the shame discourse.

4.2.3.2 Names

An element that is a substantial factor in all of the four novels is the use of both wanted and unwanted nicknames. In other words, nicknames are used both as tokens of endearment and as means of teasing and bullying. Nicknames are a creative way of manipulating the language and a way of identifying and labeling those around us. Being able to use and understand the intention behind different nicknames is both a linguistic and a cultural task. The importance of nicknames could be exemplified by the titles of two of the novels: *Refugee Boy* and *Dustbin Baby.* These titles are also the nicknames of the novels' protagonists. Furthermore, the phrase "Part-Time Indian" is also a nickname construction, although it is not one actively used in the story, it does "identify" Junior.

For April most her nicknames relate to her birthdate and place: Dustbin Baby, April Fools (p. 18) and April Showers (p. 18, 27, 43 and 81). However, she is also exposed to other labels such as: Foster kid, Posh-Nob and Swanky-Pants (p. 111), a hard-to-place kid (p. 129), sad girl, bad girl, mad girl, vulnerable girl (p. 160) and:

> It [the bus] had a big sun painted on both sides and the words SUNNYBANK CHILDREN'S HOME but someone had spraypainted the S into an F and added FOR TOTAL NUTTERS. I felt as if I'd been spraypainted with the same scarlet paint.
>
> Dustbin Baby (p. 136)

The nicknames above seem to belong to two different discriptions. Dustbin Baby, April Fools, Foster kid, Posh-Nob, a hard-to-place-kid and Funnybank are all targeted towards April's heritage. The manner in which April reacts to these derogatory labels indicates that she feels a level of shame in regards to her heritage – as previously addressed. As such, these nicknames add to a shame discourse. The remaining nicknames – April Showers, sad girl, bad girl, mad girl, vulnerable girl – all address emotional characteristics, thus adding to a gender discourse. Finally, all derogatory nicknames is a manner of exercising power, therefore this nicknames also contribute to a power discourse.

Contrasting these nicknames are the "seriously embarrassing baby nicknames" (p. 44) that April's friend is being called by her mother: Cuddlepie and Cubbychops. "I shake my head sympathetically but I have to blink hard to stop tears spilling down my cheeks" (p. 44). These constructions of nicknames function as marks of endearment. April has never been the recipient of such verbal declarations of affection. Therefore, she has a very emotional reaction – tears – combined with a feeling of jealousy. Her reaction further stresses the notion of shame that is attached to her own nicknames. In *Walk Two Moons*, Sal is in equal measure exposed to nicknames that are meant as endearment and teasing. Chickabiddy (p. 4) being the former, and Salamander (p. 46) the latter. However, the issue of name-calling is by no means a prominent feature of this novel.

The nicknames in *Dustbin Baby* are unwanted because they remind and identify April with difficult events from her life, and thus aspects of her life that she is ashamed of. The nicknames Junior and Alem are the recipients of relate to their heritage and appearance: ethnicity and disability. Hence, these nicknames are part of a power struggle. At his new school, the nicknames are mostly directed towards his ethnicity:

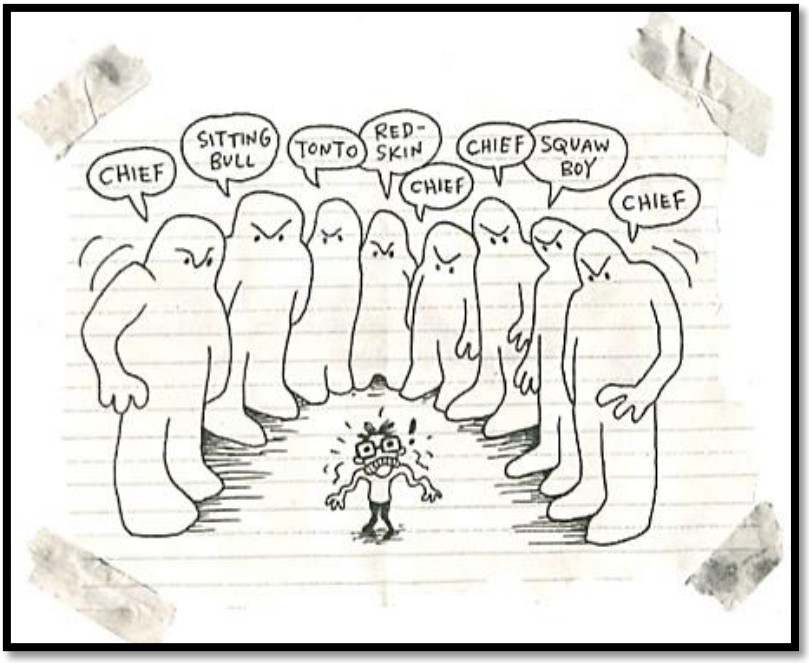

Illustration 4: "They called me names"[18], Part-Time Indian (p. 63)

This illustration is yet another example of how language is not the only symbolic system that can communicate cultural issues. In the drawing the Reardan teens are portrayed as massive, white, featureless beings, while Junior is tiny and crippled. The illustration captures how truly insignificant the derogatory names make him feel. Essentially, Junior reaffirms his own statement: "I draw because words are too limited" (p. 5). The massiveness of the bullies might indicate how ruling and important Junior feels they are. The fact that Junior has portrayed the characters white and featureless gives associations to white imperialist superiority, and is undoubtedly part of a power discourse.

The power discourse based on ethnicity is a rather obvious one. However, even on the reservation Junior is victim of what might be understood as a power discourse. At the reservation it is Junior's disability that attracts the unwanted attention, and he is accustomed to nicknames such as Orbit, Globe and retard (pp. 3-4). The use of these names is a way for others to feel better about themselves, thus climbing the ladder within a social hierarchy.

In *Refugee Boy* the media, as a reflection of British society, is the channel that constructs most of the unwanted name-calling:

[18] This illustration does not have a title. The title is given by me in order to indicate the important aspect of the illustration.

> The headlines jumped out at him one after the other: 'Government to clamp down on *asylum seekers*', '*Gypsies, tramps* and *theives*', '*Refugee beggars* flood London streets', 'Government plan to build new detention centre for *"bogus" refugees*' […]
>
> Refugee Boy (p. 129, my italics)

All the italicized words are labels and stereotypes that Alem are surrounded by. These labels are naturally part of multiple cultural representations; class, ignorance, prejudice and ethnicity. However, to me the most prominent representation is that of power. These labels revolves around a power for control. The struggle for power is also the reason way Alem ended up in London to begin with. In both Ethiopia and Eritrea soldier where threatening the Kelo family through physical violence, but also through language and the use of labels: "Ethiopian" in Eritrea, "Eritrean" in Ethiopia and "traitor" in both (pp. 9-12).

Regarding names the novels have an additionally focus that relates to the importance of personal names and how they are tied to an individual's sense of identity. April does not like her name because of the nicknames they enable and as such highlights how she feels about her background: "April is a windy month. I wish I'd been born at another time of the year. What a birthday – April Fool's Day. Talk about a sick joke" (p. 16). Again, there is this notion of embarrassment and feeling like a stranger that lends itself to the notion of shame.

Junior's name is a strong social identifier, as it is a highly common name on the reservation. Since it is not his full name, Junior unfortunately ends up going by different names at home and at school:

> "My name is Junior," I said. "And my name is Arnold. It's Junior and Arnold. I'm both."
>
> I felt like two different people inside of one body.
>
> No, I felt like a magician slicing myself in half, with Junior living on the north side of the Spokane River and Arnold living on the south.
>
> Part-Time Indian (pp. 59-61)

This duality greatly reflects how split he feels, which was also a part of the presentation above regarding his journey. When his new classmates laugh at his name, at his reservation name, it underscores how much of a stranger Junior actually is to Reardan society. This in turn portrays the ethnic divide between the reservation and the white community on the outside, and offers an additional perspective to the notion of power.

Unlike Junior, Alem refuses to be called anything other than the name he is accustomed to and identifies with. Thus, he seems to reclaim some of the power that others arguably take from him by using derogatory labels. This power relates to how he identifies himself:

> ‘Al-em – I’m sorry, can I call you Alan or Al maybe?’
> ‘No,’ Alem replied firmly, ‘my name is not Alan, it’s Alem.’
> ‘Yes, of course, excuse me,’ he said tactfully […]
>
> Refugee Boy (p. 286)

His name identifies him as an outsider. However, the other nicknames and label mentioned above does also identify Alem as an outsider. The important difference is that to Alem his name is a positive identifier, whereas the other labels clearly are not. Much like Alem, Sal’s name is a happy remainder of her heritage, and another example of how her heritage is maintained and romanticized:

> I should explain right off that my real name is Salamanca Tree Hiddle. Salamanca, my parents thought, was the name of the Indian tribe to which my great-great-grandmother belonged. […]
>
> My middle name, Tree, comes from your basic tree, a thing of such beauty to my mother that she made it part of my name. She wanted to be more specific and use Sugar Maple Tree, her favorite, but Salamanca Sugar Maple Tree Hiddle was a bit much even for her.
>
> Walk Two Moons (p. 7)

Name-calling is a common component of youth culture, as teasing and bullying is a known challenge in school environments. The novels in this thesis demonstrate how the assignment and constructions of names are deeply impactful on the protagonists, thus providing the reader with an insider’s perspective to the impact of unwanted, spiteful nicknames. Moreover, how much culture is embedded in our personal names. These descriptions will, on some level, generate struggles between the reader and the narrative. Although, mostly on a universal level. I have also suggested that on all levels of use name-calling is a characteristic of a power discourse.

4.3 *Why* does the novels address these topics

> “Don’t you think it’s odd that Mrs. Partridge, who is blind, could see something about me – but I, who can see, was blind about her?”
>
> Walk Two Moons (p. 20)

The conflicts and contrasts between the familiar and the unfamiliar provide the reader with an outsider’s perspective to familiar topic. As I have sought to present, this is achieved through the use of the exceptional, the extraordinary, culture specific and universal issues. The elements of the exceptional and extraordinary are understood as uncommon experiences within the

learner group, thus making them outsiders to the events portrayed in the narratives. Furthermore, it seems that what is unfamiliar to the reader is further regarded as unfamiliar to the society in which the protagonists operate, making the protagonists the outsiders in the fictional realities depicted. This is where the *why* comes in. The manner in which the cultural topics are addressed makes the protagonists the outsider.

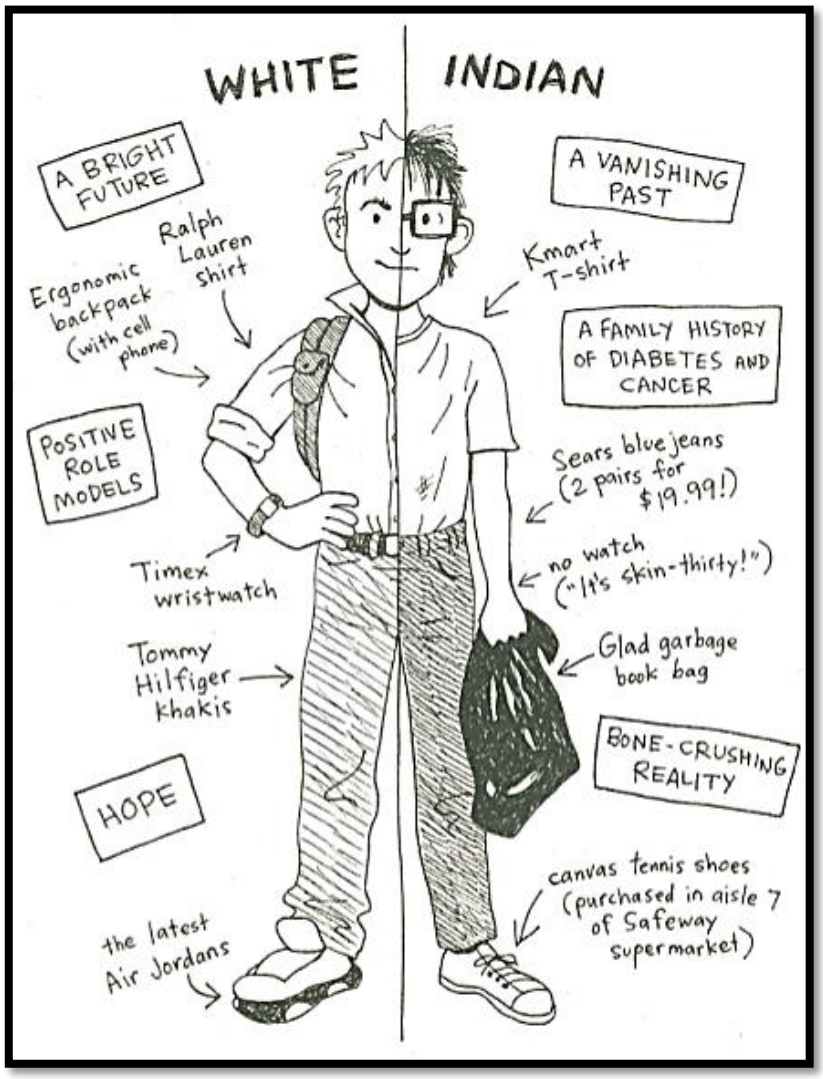

Illustration 5: "White/Indian", Part-Time Indian (p. 57)

The illustration above will demonstrate this point further. Junior's drawing depicts the white boy from an outsider's perspective, and the Indian boy from an insider's perspective. Thus, the novel contains constructions both of insider and outsider perspectives. These constructions provide the reader with the same opportunity – taking insider and outsider perspectives. However, and this is important, the reader's insider and outsider perspectives are most likely opposite of those of the protagonists. For example: If the reader where to construct the drawing

above, she would be drawing the white boy from an insider's perspective and the Indian boy from an outsider's perspective. For Junior it is the opposite. To him the white boy is drawn from an outsider's perspective and the Indian boy is himself, thus drawn from an insider's perspective. Hence, the novels' portrayals of the familiar juxtaposed to the unfamiliar provides the reader with an insider's perspective to the outsider's reality and understandings.

So *why* does the contemporary young adult fiction address familiar topics through the extraordinary and exceptional? Because it makes the protagonist the outsider of his or her society. Why is this important seen with intercultural glasses? Because it provides the reader with an insider's perspective to an outsider's culture. These findings brings the analysis over on the theoretical discussion, as it will demonstrate the potential that lies in the use of contemporary young adult fiction as a teaching tool to encourage intercultural competence.

5 DISCUSSION

The use of any teaching tool is always based on the teacher's professional pedagogical perception and their evaluation of the potential learning benefits the tool can provide. The findings presented in the previous chapter illustrates the cultural topics addressed in the contemporary young adult fiction and how these topics are portrayed. The question becomes how the cultural topics and cultural descriptions can encourage intercultural competence. Thus, answering the question of contemporary young adult fiction's potential as an intercultural teaching tool. While the findings where systemized by the three cultural topics *family, gender* and *youth culture*, the discussion does not keep to this system throughout as it seeks to incorporate all the main points from the previous chapters in order to demonstrate and debate their relations.

The topics discussed in this chapter is closely linked to the main research question and sub-questions of this thesis. Quotes from the novels will be used when needed to stress the arguments made, and to ease the reading of the discussion. I will begin the discussion with a short repetition of the overall outcome my project. Thereafter, in section 5.2, I will discuss how the novels might cater to a cultural place a struggle between familiarity and unfamiliarity, or between belief and disbelief as Byram (2008) might have said. The question of universal issues versus culture specific content is part of this discussion. Section 5.3 will deliberate on the three discourse that I have identified, i.e. power, shame and gender. Rosenblatt's reading receptionist theory is addressed in section 5.4. Section 5.5 will embrace the novels' challenges as a teaching tool for intercultural competence. I will discuss my understanding of the novels' potential pitfalls and shortcomings in terms of how they describe culture and social groups. The last part of this chapter, section 5.6, is dedicated to the evaluation of the projects quality. Here reflections regarding the projects reliability, validity and transfer value will be given.

5.1 Overall outcome of the project

This study did not set out to generate result that could be generalized and transferred to all texts within the genre of contemporary young adult novels. The objective was rather to achieve naturalistic generalizations (Postholm, 2010), where the aim is to allow the reader of my thesis the opportunity to identify with the descriptions made in the previous chapter. Through such identifications the reader might be able to relate what they read to their own experiences with

similar books. In the following the overall outcome of my project is summarized. The order in which they are listed does not imply an order of importance:

- The topic of family is prominent, problematizing aspects of family structures, members and heritage.
- The topic of gender is linked to parenting and cultural traits of masculinity and femininity.
- Youth culture is addressed as journeys ripe with obstacles that generate personal growth, where unwanted nicknames are common challenges.
- The data material seem to allow the reader to meet common concepts in a manner that expands their understanding of them.
- The novels provide the reader with knowledge about different social groups: foster children, refugees, Native Americans.
- The novels offer the reader an insider's perspective to outsider cultures (to 'them', 'other' and otherness).
- The novels all comprise of universal issues. However, only to a varying degree do they address culture specific issues.
- The two novels with male protagonists are primarily driven by the boys' actions.
- The two novels with female protagonists are primarily driven by the girls' emotions.
- I focused on three notions of discourses: 1) a power discourse that relates to ethnicity, 2) a shame discourse that relates to family, and 3) a gender discourse.

These findings will be commented on in the discussion below and in chapter 6's conclusion.

5.2 A literary place of struggle

The title of my thesis suggests that the notion of a 'place of struggle' outlined by Kramsch (2013) is understood as advantageous for the ESL classroom. The place of struggle, or the notion of a third culture, is achieved in a meeting between two individuals representing different cultures. In this meeting the interlocutors will have to utilize all their knowledge, skills and ability to suspend disbelief/decenter (Byram, 2008), which also include looking at one's own culture critically. The question is if the novels offers the reader a meeting (or multiple meetings) with a different culture and to which degree.

5.2.1 Family as struggle

My presentation based itself on the understanding that there exists a universal ideal related to what constitutes a family, and that this ideal influences the reader's common understanding of the world around them. In the presentation we saw that the novels portray a variety of family representations that both include universal issues and issues specific to the culture represented, all of which challenges and expands the reader's common understandings.

Dustbin Baby seems to all the way through describe universal issues. The main issue is April's search for the familiarity of family: "I might recognize her" (p. 47). There is a longing for "emotional safety" and roots. These notions build on basic human needs and does not compete with what the reader defines as *her* culture, i.e. the reader's C1. April's longings reflect our need to ground us to one place or to one social group, which is important because we tend to understand ourselves by defining what makes *us* different from *them* (Kramsch, 1993). The novel creates room for a classroom discussion concerning what it takes to be a family. What would do as a family? These questions would push the students' understandings, and as such expand their understanding of 'self'. Although the culture specific factors in Wilson's story are hard to grasp, the novel allows for an expansion of the reader's cultural competence, if not its intercultural competence. That is, it allows for a better understanding of personal beliefs, values and attitudes, but since the culture specific factors are difficult to determine the notion of *inter*cultural acquisition is missing (Byram, 2008). There is, however, a strong sense of allowing the learner to become *intra*culturally aware.

The unease that April seemingly feels because she does not know her biological family is explicitly expressed by Alem: "Alem hated the idea of becoming some kind of problem to the Fitzgerald family" (p. 119). This notion of being a burden is easily brought into the ESL classroom. In the novel it seems that blood is the determining factor regarding whether or not a child feels like a burden. However, could not a biological son be just as afraid to be a burden? What is it that makes someone feel like a burden? Is there a one-to-one correlation between biology and the feeling of being a burden? This is a universal issue that when addressed in the classroom can challenge the learner's perception and attitudes towards biology and the relationship between parents and children.

Moreover, *Refugee Boy* offers the reader insights into the Ethiopian-Eritrean war that ensued between 1998 and 2000. The novel offers the reader an understanding of the consequences of war and builds on our human need for ourselves and those we love to be safe. What is culture

specific, and as such makes the novel function as a cultural artifact, is the specifics of *this* war: a border dispute with long historical roots. In addition, Alem's reflections related to wildlife, city structures and questions of tribal belonging allows the reader an understanding of a culture that is quite different from that of her own. These examples depict explicit differences between the reader's C1 and the novel. The novel representing a C2. Hence, there are some rather obvious possibilities for a cultural 'place of struggle' to occur (Kramsch, 1993). It is also fair to assume the representation of Alem's cultural background both reaffirms and contradicts the reader's perception and understanding of "Africa", as we tend to address "Africa" in terms of misery (Varanes, 2014)[19]. These conflicts between the reader's previous understandings and any new knowledge the novel offers may make the learner become more comfortable with the notion of thirdness. And that is, simply put, the aim of intercultural education. Hence, the potential of the novel seems to be substantial. In order to grasp Alem's reality the reader has to suspend disbelief (Byram, 2008). Suspending disbelief is a question of both acquiring new knowledge – using it to expand your understanding of a concept, event or feature – and allowing that knowledge to shape your attitudes towards a more inquisitive and respectful disposition.

Part-Time Indian's description of the grandmother provides the reader with culture specific information in terms of clothing and attitudes. More noticeable is the cultural specific references through the portrayal of Junior's family heritage: racial conflict, poverty and lack of educated. In a Norwegian context these characteristics would most likely generate a significant cultural struggle within the reader. The struggle could arise on both a social and a political level. In terms of racial demographics (social groupings), racial conflicts is primarily an issue for Norway's larger cities[20]. However, considering the low number of big cities, as well as the fairly homogenous composition of the Norwegian population, racial conflicts are minor in comparison to the USA. Hence, the reader will have to struggle with understanding how the racial issues depicted arose, plus the emotional and practical issues they cause. Furthermore, with Norway's comprehensive welfare system, issues such as poverty and access to education are generally not significant concerns. The reader of *Part-Time Indian* would have to comprehend how the political system is ideologically different from that of our own and how that effects these issues. All this in order to understand Junior as a character and the culture he

[19] Mari Teigen Varanes identified three relevant discourse used in Norwegian lower secondary schools related to how we construct "Africa": a misery-discourse, a responsibility discourse and a diversity discourse.
[20] Although the racial conflicts in Norway are minor compared to the USA I do not mean to marginalize the issues that *do* exist in Norway, in urban as well as rural areas. I simply wish to point out that it is a much more common problem in the USA.

lives in – all of which is tied to his heritage. Ultimately, the culture specific issues of racial conflicts, poverty and lack of education could facilitate activities to both increase the students' knowledge, skills and challenge their attitudes (Byram, 2008).

The universal issues of *Part-Time Indian* relates to the conflict that takes place within Junior when he realizes that to some extent he has to break free from his family. In part, this notion is typical to western society where independence is valued. Additionally, wanting to blame others for your circumstances, which Junior initially does, is a coping mechanism that I would argue is almost a reflex in our unconsciousness. By problematizing and providing the reader with an outsider's perspective to such "mechanisms", the novel offers the reader a greater understanding of how such behaviors are not entirely beneficial. Thus, challenging the student's attitudes related to responsibilities.

In *Walk Two Moons* the culture specific elements are linked to Sal's family heritage, and not as much to her family structure. Sal's family structure is in a period of change, so although the grandparents are important to Sal it is difficult to establish whether their role is culturally determined or simply a result of a present need. Nevertheless, the depiction of Sal's grandparents does offer some cultural insights. Primarily, it demonstrates how age does not determine someone's behavior. As I said in the presentation, Sal functions as the chaperone and the grandparents are given characteristics more typical of teenagers. Thus, the peculiarity of Gram and Gramps might challenge stereotypical expectations towards grandparents, and offer a better acceptance between generations, because of the somewhat reversed age depictions.

The portrayal of family history is achieved through the literal journey and in consequence, the emotional journey that Sal sets out on. The reader is offered multiple references to geographical sights, historical events and cultural realities, which makes Sharon Creech's story suited for the encouragement of intercultural competence as it can be used as a cultural artifact. As a cultural artifact is allows the reader factual knowledge. Moreover, Sal's reflections concerning the term 'Native American' and the monument Mt. Rushmore challenges the reader's understanding of what is means to have Indian heritage. These challenges, or struggle, could affect the reader's attitudes.

5.2.2 Gender as struggle

In relation to gender I found that contemporary young adult fiction utilizes this cultural issue in multiple ways: explicit and implicit, traditional roles and modern roles, actions and emotions. I will address most of the perspectives offered when discussing the notion of a gender discourse (section 5.3.1). The manner in which gender is problematized correlates to the stereotypical gender norms introduced in the theoretical framing, chapter 2. What is noticeable across the novels is the emphasis on high expectations placed on Junior and Alem, and on the internal clarifications and maturation of April and Sal. These depictions mirror the findings of other scholars (Singh, 1998; Slettan, 2014), thus supporting my presentation.

In line with Kramsch (2009) and the concept of a place of struggle, it is not as problematic that the novels portray somewhat stereotypical gender roles. On the contrary, if these gender roles do not coincide with the learner's own understanding of gender expectation it is beneficial for the student to encounter this thirdness and gain insight into other views on gender. Nevertheless, the challenge is that constructions of concepts lead to different social actions (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Hence, the concern is that a stereotypical representation of gender might generate negative reinforcements of unwanted or outdated social constructs, and in consequence, social actions.

The stereotypical gender expectations portrayed are universal and play on traditional ideals of how gender operates. Hence, it is difficult to determine whether the differences in presentation are culture specific or whether they are individual peculiarities relating to the person(s) in question. Nevertheless, I did imply that the masculine culture of the reservation might be somewhat culture specific to the American culture, thus offering an intercultural exchange. In the other three text the potential is connected to the expansion of the students own understandings and the critical awareness of their own culture, i.e. intracultural awareness.

5.2.3 Youth culture as struggle

Youth culture mainly revolves around the protagonist journey, which is tied to their learning arch and development of identity. Again, this is based on universal issues. From a teaching perspective the protagonists' literal journeys can help provide the learners with a visual to the cultural struggles that occur within the story and between the plot and the reader. Seeing physically where on the map the narrative takes place could help the students systemize the

knowledge they possess into already existing knowledge. If we understand Kramsch's 'place of struggle' as a developmental zone in lines with Vygotsky's learning ideas (Kramsch, 2009), it is imperative that what the students are expected to learn is within their reach. A visual could help with achieving a more optimal developmental zone. This because it would function both as a point of reference and it would cater to the more visual students.

Under 'journeys' I presented Alem's learning curve related to the English language. Alem's observations related to British people's use of their language allows the reader to gain an understanding of both the culture he originates from and the British culture, i.e. Alem's C1 and C2. The manner in which the phrase "all right?" (p. 74) is used in everyday-speech, underscores the connection between language and culture. Students might have (or will) experienced the struggle of how to approach this question in communication with an Englishman. For instance, it would seem odd or even intrusive to a Norwegian student if the staff in a store wanted to know how she is doing. To the English-speaker it would be unusual to receive a detailed answer. Furthermore, it would seem somewhat rude if the interlocutor did not return the question.

Nicknames are another language phenomenon that is rather characteristic for native speakers of English[21]. The use of nicknames is an excellent point of departure for a classroom discussion: What are nicknames to you? Have you got any nicknames? Who gave it to you? What does it mean to you? Which emotions or associations do they trigger? Combining reflections on these questions with the challenges and emotions the nicknames in the novels trigger, the teacher could be able to generate a place of struggle. The conflict that might arise might produce an understanding of the cultural values, i.e. within families, schools and nations, that are inherent in nicknames. Hence, creating the context needed to point out cultural differences and allowing the learners struggle with them.

Unlike the derogatory nicknames in *Dustbin Baby,* none of the derogatory nicknames directed at Junior or Alem relate to their emotional state. Implicitly this adds to the novels' representations of gender and makes the reader question her believes and values related to gender. The challenge is that these nuances are so subtle that it is only when juxtaposed to other texts that they become apparent. Nevertheless, it is important that teachers try to generate a place of struggle related to which nicknames boys and girls are assigned. It is important because of gender's intrinsic significance in culture and our identity. The subtleness of these differences

[21] Based on my own experiences from traveling in English speaking countries (England, the US, Australia and New Zealand), the use of nicknames is very common; for instance the cashier calling you 'love' or 'sweetheart'.

indicate that the teacher will have to explicitly juxtapose one "set" of nicknames to another. In order to exemplify the struggle one might ask the students the question: Why do we use the label 'guttejente' ('boy-girl', i.e. tomboy) and not the label 'jentegutt' ('girl-boy')? And why does the "attachment" of 'gutt' have positive implications? Is it not satisfactory enough to "just" be a girl?

5.2.4 The potential of the literary place of struggle

I ended the presentation of my findings by briefly suggesting *why* the novels seem to use the extraordinary and exceptional to create their narratives and why such a focus is beneficial for the acquisition of intercultural competence. With the help of Junior's drawing I demonstrated that how the cultural topics are addressed makes the protagonists outsiders of his or her fictional reality. The authors' ability to contort the familiar creates challenges and struggles that the protagonists have to overcome. In a sense, there is a literary place of struggle between the protagonist's native culture/C1 and an external C2, where the C2 represents an ideal or a notion of "normalcy". The reader can struggle both with the protagonist's C1 and the C2 of the story. However, the protagonist's C1 is probably the most dominant contributor to the notion of thirdness between the reader and the text. Thus, the literary place of struggle provides the context needed for the cultural 'place of struggle' outlined by Kramsch (1993). In the ESL classroom the initial struggle and experience of thirdness would occur between the reader and the narrative, ultimately this struggle would allow cultural exchanges between learners and between learners and teachers. Consequently, these contemporary young adult novels will allow for pedagogical activities where the learners' ability to decenter and mediate can be trained.

The universal issues of family, gender and youth culture offers the reader an understanding and awareness of her own values, beliefs and behavior, i.e. her own culture (Byram, 2008). The difference – the otherness – that is offered through the novels also portray how the specific cultures view these topics and how the characters' challenges relate to these topics. The cultures represented are predominantly American, British, Native American, Ethiopian and Eritrean, European, African, Western, family cultures and youth cultures. Thus, the novels can function as cultural artifacts and provide a meeting between *different* cultures, but only to a varying degree. To me it is clear that the elements that make these novels cultural artifacts also generate a notion of struggle and thirdness. I would argue that it is the perspectives of familiarity,

difference, struggle and of the novels as cultural artifacts that demonstrates the potential of these resources.

5.3 Cultural discourses in contemporary young adult fiction

In the theoretical framing I presented the definition of discourse as understood by Gee (Kramsch, 2013), and saw that it encompasses all the aspects associated with culture. Through the presentation I tried to identify ways of talking, valuing, acting, interacting and believing and which notions of discourse these portrayals seem to belong under. I have chosen to focus on three discourses: gender discourse, power discourse and shame discourse. In table 5.1 I have sought to define what these discourse, or representations, entail.

Table 5.1: Discourses related to the data material

Discourse	Description
Gender discourse	Gender is a cultural issue that still has stereotypical connotations.
Power discourse	Power is not only a struggle between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. It is present in all social contexts. Power often has an explicit expression through actions and words.
Shame discourse	Shame relates to the notion of embarrassment. Shame is primarily represented through the implicit and through the characters' inactions or avoidance of specific issues.

5.3.1 Gender discourse

Throughout my description of the data material I suggested that the books contribute to a gender discourse. If I add the manner motherhood is problematized in *Walk Two Moons* and *Dustbin Baby* is seems to generate the question: Is a woman's entire worth in society tied to her family or to motherhood? The gender discourse in both *Walk Two Moons* and *Dustbin Baby* struggles with this question. In the beginning of the novels the gender discourse focuses on preparing the girls for future family obligations, which is clearly a traditional portrayal of gender (Slettan, 2014). Thus, the novels offers themselves to a female readership. However, the gender

discourse is not simply the case of providing instructions for future motherhood. The notion of gender thoroughly problematizes stereotypical gender roles when it expresses that *biologically* a woman's worth might be strongly attached to motherhood, but possibly not on a personal level. Hence, the discourse seems to recognize that stereotypical gender expectations are still relevant in today's society, all the while aiming to challenge these perceptions by making the reader question this discourse. The problem is whether by constructing a novel around the question of family obligations helps demolish or reaffirm the old stereotypes.

In *Walk Two Moons* the gender discourse is multilayered. The story supplements the motherhood discourse by adding a discourse related to fatherhood. Implicitly, the line of questioning that leads to problematizing 'motherhood', does the same to 'fatherhood'. Thus the question becomes: is the man's worth in society tied to his role in the family? The diversity of family portraits in *Walk Two Moon* offers multiple input to the gender discourse in this regard. *Dustbin Baby* on the other side seems to answer the question with a 'no', as April's disinterest contributes to the gender discourse by not granting the father much attention. Any consideration on April's part is generally unfavorable towards father figures.

The notion of women being "the weaker sex", as the saying goes, is generally tied to an understanding of the sensitivity and emotionality associated with women as something negative. Naturally, the saying is also a characterization of the physical differences between men and women. The gender discourse has thus traditionally seen emotions as weakness and physical strength as a positive characteristic. Interestingly, in *Part-Time Indian* physical strength is not necessarily portrayed as a positive. On the contrary, the depiction of the extremely masculine culture of the reservation seems to serve as a general critic of this characteristic and the factors that have caused this environment. Rowdy, Junior's best friend, is portrayed as extremely strong physically. However, this does not make him strong socially and mentally. He is still very much an outsider and instead of displaying how he feels emotionally he does so through violence. Thus, the manner in which gender is represented portrays an extreme version of a stereotypical man. This stereotypical man is equally vulnerable as the stereotypical woman. It simply materializes differently.

The noticeable silence in *Refugee Boy* is an equally strong contribution to the gender discourse. To take for granted conventional gender norms implies an acceptance of status quo. I could naturally argue that the lack of focus on gender is just the case of Benjamin Zephaniah's priorities. The problem is that this conclusion can only lead to one follow-up question: *Why* was gender not a priority? Is it because Zephaniah himself is a man? This is a relevant question

to ask as the author's gender indicates the gender discourse that he or she partakes in. For instance, in my data material the female authors portray female protagonists, and the male authors portray male protagonists. Historically and politically the gender discourse has been one where the *woman's* rights where either fought for or fought against (Schiefloe, 2003). Thus, gender expectations have always been women's struggle[22]. By failing to problematize gender *Refugee Boy* could contribute to the gender discourse with an understanding that the gender struggle is not gender neutral, but rather that it "belongs" to women. Nevertheless, I do not wish to exaggerate this point as it is important to keep in mind that this novel serves as one voice in a complex discourse.

Interestingly the gender discourse seems to divide itself between a notion of power and a notion of shame. The power discourse is most prominent in the male protagonists' books and the shame discourse is most prominent in the female protagonists' book. That in itself provides the gender discourse with multiple perspectives. What the novels seem to construct is a notion where men are associated with power and women are associated with shame. In extension of this, it is my understanding that the notion of power is furthermore associated with physical responses/actions and shame is associated with emotional responses. The gender discourse thus generates what generally is understood as old outdated constructions of what it means to be a man and a woman. These constructions are not only problematic for the female gender, as they are equally restrictive for male gender (Singh, 1998). However, the fact that Zephaniah does not problematize gender *is* problematic for the reasons argued above.

Nevertheless, the gender discourse presented in these novels is not one-sided. For instance, it is not only the boys that partake in exciting journeys. April demonstrates bravery and independence by traveling on her own through London. Towards the end of *Walk Two Moons*, Sal makes the bold move of completing the last leg of the trip on her own – borrowing her grandfather's car. Furthermore, the boys are not depicted without display of emotions. Hence, although Junior and Alem come across as tough, thick-skinned boy, they are not without emotional depth. Thus, the gender discourse is not entirely divided between a macho male and a passive female stereotype.

[22] This issue can be recognized from the news with recent focus on the manner in which rape prevention is discussed where the responsibility is given to women and not men or both (Thue, 2015).

5.3.2 Power discourse

In the theoretical framing I stated that language and categories, i.e. the discourses we partake in, are part of our social identity and power position (Kramsch, 2006). Power is exercised for instance through the words we use to describe groups in society. Furthermore, the words we use denote the value and believes that are attached to specific social groups. It is easy to think of a struggle for power to simply address struggles between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. However, Junior's experiences in *Part-Time Indian* demonstrate that this is not the case. Here the connections between a power discourse is made on multiple social layers. In western society there is arguably an ongoing struggle to "be more" or better than someone else. This notion is innately individualistic, and you might remember individualism as one of Dypedahl's (2007) reflection tools in terms of value differences. The power struggle is naturally both political and social, and these cultural institutions are mutual influential on each other. In all social layers the easiest way to climb the social ladder is to keep someone else down, which can be achieved through words and actions. The portrayal of the reservation offers an understanding of the Native Americans as a social group low on the social ladder. However, that does not stop them from keeping one of their own down. Junior constantly receives derogatory nicknames from his own: Globe, retard, etc. (p. 3). Furthermore, he is the victim of physical abuse from his peers. The notion of "sticking to getter makes us stronger", seems neglected in favor of the individual's ability to display power over someone weaker. Even if that weaker person is one of your own. Thus, the way these characters talk and act implies that power, and the struggle for it, is quite fundamental no matter the context.

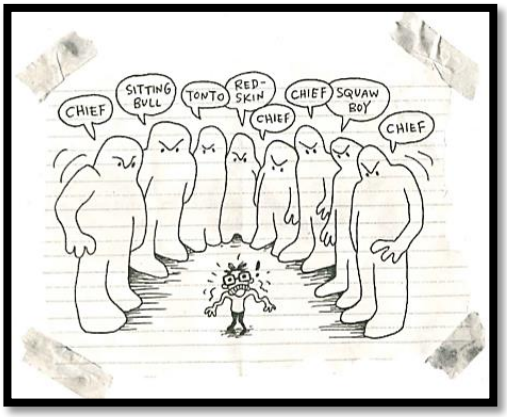

Figure 5.1: Repeat of illustration 4

Ellen Forney's illustration is an example of other symbolic systems besides linguistic ones that demonstrates a social identity and power position. Thus, the illustrations could be equally valuable in terms of understanding culture (Kramsch, 2013). However, if the teacher does not bring this to the reader's attention, then it is easily lost on the reader. Take the illustration "They called me names" (the illustration can be seen in full-size on page 61). The reader might comprehend the size difference between Junior and his Reardan peers. The question is whether they are able to translate the physical size-difference into the notion of a power struggle, i.e. a power discourse.

In *Walk Two Moons* the struggle for the power to define is also problematized. In the case of the term Native Americans versus Indians the power struggle is a question of political correctness. However, political correctness is in turn the question of definition power. The term 'Native American' is maintained by the elite, not the people it defines. The same notion is prominent in *Refugee Boy*, where the problematic term is stated in the title: refugee. What is questionable is the lack of influence possessed by the people the word defines. This is because the concepts it used from above, i.e. from a power position.

5.3.3 Shame discourse

The notion of shame is closely linked to the characters perception of 'self'. In three of the four novels, all except *Refugee Boy*, the notion is represented through the topics the characters wish to avoid. For April it relates to her entire history; for Sal, the disappearance of her mother; and for Junior, his family circumstances.

In *Dustbin Baby* the notion of shame makes April jump to conclusions. For instance, when assumes she got sent away from the children's home because "they got sick of me" (p. 144). This implies that she thinks there is something wrong with her, and there is a shame attached to not being like the others. And what makes her not like the others is the lack of family and family heritage. The connotations of her statement of "they got sick of me" firstly suggest that this rejection is a common occurrence. Secondly, it almost proposes that she has done something to deserve this rejection. These discourse is underscored by April's refusal to talk about dramatic events in her life: 1) she does not tell her new friends about her background, 2) she does not tell anyone about her adoptive mother's suicide, and 3) she does not tell anyone why she pushed Pearl down the stairs. Hence, the shame discourse is liked to April's internal emotional life and the avoidance of accidents she finds difficult and shameful.

The same in *Walk Two Moons* there are three representations of shame. First, there is the more insignificant reflections provided by Sal's father concerning his parents – that they might embarrass him. Secondly, there is the girls' avoidance of the topic of the disappearance of their mothers. Sal refuses to talk to his father about any change in the family dynamics, and she can not understand why her mother left. Sal even implies that maybe she left because of her. To Phoebe the entire notion of shame is avoided by refusing to blame her own mother for leaving. Instead she tries to find a criminal explanation for why Mrs. Winterbottom disappeared. Finally,

it turns out that Mrs. Winterbottom reason for leaving in fact was related to shame. She left because she was embarrassed about a previous life decision – giving a son up for adoption (p. 235). Again, there is an avoidance of the issue that unpleasant and shameful in the eyes of the particular character. Furthermore, the shame discourse is constantly connected to family, i.e. to the once closes to us, or that ideally should be closes to us. *Part-Time Indian* represents the same notion of shame, where Junior is both ashamed that he has betrayed his tribe or of his family's poverty.

5.3.4 The potential of these discourses

These discourses represent fundamental issues in all cultures regardless of the culture's characteristic. As I argued related to the gender discourse, even the avoidance of the discourse contributes to it. This is because discourse, as understood in my thesis, is constructed through ways of talking, acting, interacting, valuing and believing (Kramsch, 2013, pp. 64-65). The three discourses above are notions and representations that are rudimentary to our understanding of 'self' and 'others'. This is because the gender, power and shame discourse contribute to the construction of opposite concepts of 'self' and 'others'. The notion of 'self' and 'others' (or difference) is in turn fundamental to the concept of intercultural competence as it includes both an critical awareness of one's native culture and proficient knowledge, skills and attitudes related to other social groups.

Discourses are often implicit is nature because they are such an integral part of everyday life and behavior. Thus, it seems to me that the awareness of relevant discourses is greatly important if interculturality is the aim. Considering that discourse, in my understanding, is so integral to all cultural expressions, they are essentially important in order to encourage respectful and inquisitive attitudes. The ability to decenter and become comfortable with thirdness presupposes these attitudes. Gender, power and shame discourse are inherently complex and philosophical. However, the benefit and *potential* of these novels is that they address these discourses through the eyes of young adult, hence the connections to the students' own lives should not be such a leap.

5.4 The reading experience

The concepts of efferent and aesthetic reading are cognitive perspectives (Rosenblatt, 1994). However, culture as discourse and social constructs are social perspectives (Kramsch, 2013; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The cognitive and social perspectives are usually colliding learning ideas. However, the question that interested me was whether fiction could be read efferently. In other words, I was interested in what could be carried away from the reading activity – the potential. This is because as teachers we are attentive to what the learners take away from an activity and which activities a teaching tool allows for.

Moreover, although intercultural education is a social perspective, Byram's savoirs do point out that being intercultural has a cognitive side (Byram, 1997). Hence, I included the perspective of literary receptionist theory in order to demonstrate the cognitive processes that need to be present when reading for the sake of becoming interculturally competent. The notions of efferent and aesthetic reading where not necessarily visible throughout the analysis. However, the concepts are interesting perspectives that can enable teachers to understand the connection between reading and the acquisition of intercultural competence.

By Rosenblatt's definition, efferent reading focuses on what can be taken away from the reading, e.g. knowledge and skills. Knowledge and skills are two of the three main notions from Byram's savoirs (Byram, 2008). Attitudes, which is the third, is one of the cognitive responses Rosenblatt attributes to aesthetic reading. Thus, the natural conclusion is that utilizing contemporary young adult fiction in the ESL classroom for the encouragement of intercultural competence places itself somewhere in the middle of the continuum between 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' reading. Table 5.1 below is meant to illustrate this.

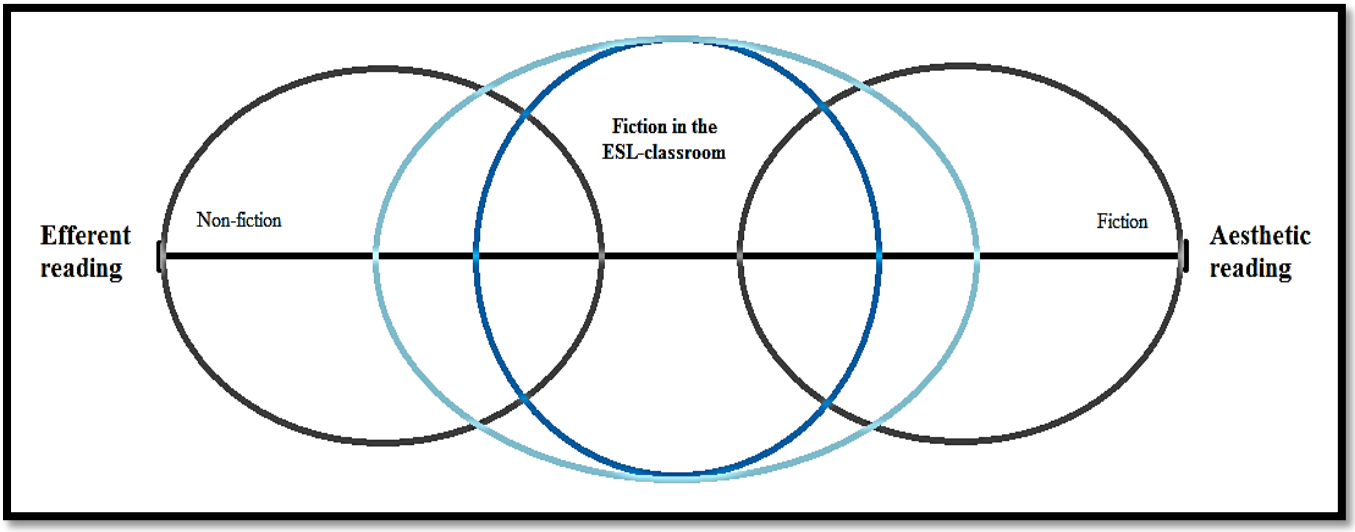

Figure 5.2: The reading of contemporary young adult fiction in the ESL classroom

The idea illustrated in table 5.1 is that for the purpose of encouraging intercultural competence in an educational setting the reading experiences is most beneficial if it consists of both efferent and aesthetic reading. The reader's attention to associations, feelings, attitudes and ideas are attributed to aesthetic reading. These responses are necessary in order to exercise the ability to decenter (Byram, 2008). They are also essential if the reader is to become comfortable with the differences, contradictions and ambivalence that occurs in the meeting, or in the thirdness, between two individuals from different cultures (Kramsch, 2009). The cognitive responses of associations, feelings, attitudes and ideas are equally linked to our understanding and awareness of our own culture, as it is to the understanding and awareness of other cultures. The awareness of both is fundamental to intercultural competence. How far left or right the reading of fiction in an educational setting places itself on the continuum is dependent on the degree of culture specific content and how the story resonates with the reader (hence the light blue circle).

Nevertheless, the use of fiction in the classroom will always be a combination of the both efferent and aesthetic reading. This is because an educational setting is also an assessment situation. In order for the teacher to be able to assess, the students have to be able to communicate their experiences with the text, i.e. they have to be able to communicate what they took away from the reading, which is part of the efferent reading process. In a social learning perspective the notion of carrying something away is not only important for the individual herself, it also offers the learners and the teacher a common topic for communication. As intercultural education is concerned with how people communicate and interact it is essential that the reading process is brought up from the page, into the collectiveness of the classroom

and discussed by the members of the class. These exchanges has to include both the focuses of efferent reading – knowledge and skills – and of aesthetic reading – associations, feelings, attitudes and ideas. It is in this exchange of experiences that the true potential of the novels for the purpose of intercultural competence can be reached.

My understanding of the usefulness of efferent reading of fictional text is supported by Burtwitz-Melzer (2001). In chapter 1, I accounted for how her research had motivated my project. Burtwitz-Melzer states that 'efferent reading' of fictional texts does not only work on a cognitive level but also on an affective level. This because it "enables and strengthens the readers' interaction with the text, their predicting abilities, their emotional responses, as well as their forming and re-forming of hypotheses during the reading process, all of which are necessary to fill the text with meaning" (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001, p. 29) – meaning which builds on contextual and cultural understanding.

5.5 Some general considerations

Culture is highly personal and when culture is problematized it will naturally influence the way we feel and think. Consequently, problematizing culture will challenge the manner in which we understand others and ourselves by triggering emotional, intellectual and psychological responses. These responses challenges the reader's ability to decenter and to suspend disbelief (Byram, 2008). Exploring society's darker sides – which the novels do quite often – while remaining in the familiar can trigger sadness, anger and empathy. Abandonment, racial prejudice and death are examples of events that might trigger these emotions. Simultaneously, the feelings of relief and joy are prominent when conflicts or issues resolves or when the protagonists raises above expectations and surprises the reader. For instance when Junior is picked for the basketball team, when Alem finds a safe home, and when the girls accept their mothers' choices. Finally, culture clashes between characters can trigger humor, recognition and curiosity. Reflecting on these intellectual responses would be greatly linked to Byram's first savoir, attitudes, as well as the other two components of intercultural competence: knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, there are some challenges that teachers have to take into consideration and be acutely aware of – both in preparation and during teaching activities.

5.5.1 How do we address social groups?

The different views on Native Americans provided by *Part-Time Indian* and *Walk Two Moons,* underlines the fact that it is close to impossible to teach a specific culture or social group. These two novels serves as a great reminder that any one construction of a concept or social group does not represent an objective truth. Culture and language is in fact a social construct dependent on the context in which it is used.

What outsiders might define as *one* culture does in fact consist of multiple social groups, and their experiences will differ greatly. Thus, the reader of *Part-Time Indian* might experience a higher degree of struggle with this particular story than with the portrayal of Native Americans in *Walk Two Moons.* Or, it could just as easily be the other way around – depending on previous encounters with cultural artifacts and individuals representing this culture. My point is that intercultural competence and the notions of a 'place of struggle' and decentering do not necessarily pay attention to "who's" culture the learner is struggling with just that the learner is struggling. The focus is on what they can learn from this struggle. Consequently, it is important for teachers to be aware of how they approach culture and different social groups. For instance, when addressing *Part-Time Indian* it would be beneficial to refer to different challenges depicted in the novel as "Junior's challenges", and not "Native Americans' challenges". In other words, it is beneficial to avoid generalizations that easily can led to misrepresentations and misunderstandings, and keep in mind that communication will always occur between people and not cultures. The same argument is valid in relation to 'foster children' and 'refugees' as social groups. On account of communication being one of – if not *the* – main aim(s) of teaching and learning a language, awareness of which words/phrases are used to identify people, social groups and cultures is crucial.

From a social constructivist's perspective the manner in which we, the teacher in this case, articulate ourselves will generate different knowledge and attitudes. In this example, the teacher's utterances can either lead to the knowledge that 1) Native Americans *do* struggle with "these" issues, or 2) people with a Native American background *might* struggle "these" issues. I would categorize the former as "fixed knowledge" and the latter as "adaptable knowledge". The latter being essential for learners to become comfortable with the thirdness that occurs when struggling with another culture and in order to decenter. Moreover, the knowledge a person possesses affects the individual's social actions. Seeing how the goal with intercultural

education is to generate respectful and inquisitive students, "adaptable" knowledge would engage the learners in these favorable social actions.

5.5.2 How accessible is the cultural content?

This question is both a question of explicit versus implicit cultural content and of the learner's comprehension level.

In terms of accessibility, both *Refugee Boy* and *Part-Time Indian* consist of a higher degree of explicit cultural content than that of *Walk Two Moons* and *Dustbin Baby* (especially the latter novel). This is due to the different focuses on actions versus emotions, as suggested and accounted for earlier. However, I would like to add one perspective that concerns Benjamin Zephaniah's *Refugee Boy.* The novel does consist of a high level of explicit cultural content, both in terms of universal issues and culture specific issues. From this perspective one might be inclined to think it highly useful in an ESL classroom. However, the novel paints a rather one-sighted picture, where British society is greatly under attack, and where Alem (the outsider) is depicted as a through and through "good boy". These narrative choices might prove to make the novel challenging to use in the classroom. I am not suggesting that the author is wrong in his depiction – that is not up for me to decide. Still, this dichotomous portrayal of culture, where the culture most similar/closes to the learners' is the one placed in a bad light, might cause the students to distrust the narrative. Simultaneously, if the teacher where to play devil's advocate on behalf of the British political system one would risk the chance of causing more harm than good – providing those with ethnocentric "tendencies" to keep their standpoint instead of decentering and understanding Alem's situation. As a contrast, the other three novels depicts characters that are more multifaceted. Junior, in *Part-Time Indian,* is the clearest anti-hero, and Sherman Alexie portrays no one culture as all good or all bad.

Whenever teachers plan a lesson they always aim to account for the students' comprehensive level. The understanding of the 'place of struggle' as a developmental zone, as presented in the theoretical framing, means that the gap between the familiar and the unfamiliar cannot be too great. This is achieved by using the familiar as a point departure. In this argument I wish to highlight a very positive aspect of *Refugee Boy.* In *Refugee Boy,* war is addressed as a cultural, or political, issue. However, Norwegian students' understanding of war will in most cases be greatly limited. For most Norwegians war is something they hear about on the news, not an

actual problem they are confronted with personally. By moving the plot from the war to London and by placing the emphasis on family and youth culture, Benjamin Zephaniah manages to describe a setting that it is more reasonable to assume that the students will be able to understand and relate to. The novel still addresses the unfamiliarity of war, but from the relative familiarity of a western country (that is somewhat similar to our own). Thus, the students will still have to suspend disbelief and will struggle with the thirdness of their understanding of war versus that Alem's. Simultaneously, the gap between the reader and the protagonist has been decreased through the change of setting.

5.5.3 Are we dealing with boy books and girl books?

My focus in the previous chapter's presentation and in this chapter's discussion demonstrates that gender is an important contributor to how the protagonists are portrayed and how the stories unfold. Hence, the question of whether we are dealing with "boy books" and "girl books" is a relevant one, and it might seem that we are. In the discussion related to Kramsch's notion of a 'place of struggle' I stated that stereotypical gender depictions might not be entirely problematic. I argued that gender stereotypes might contradict the gender norms that the reader is accustomed to, thus forcing her to decenter and suspend disbelief. The challenge arises if the gender depictions facilitate and reinforce outdated stereotypes that are unwanted in a modern western society, where equality between genders is highly regarded.

Furthermore, there is a question of whether or not the dichotomy between boy and girl books is avoidable as previous research on novels for a young adult readership also stress that a stereotypical representation of gender is common. For contemporary young adult fiction to be beneficial as a teaching tool for intercultural competence the teachers' awareness of the issue is rudimentary. However, unlike the other two challenges discussed above, this challenge is not as easily diminished by conscious pedagogical choices. This is because the gender discourse is fairly implicit and difficult to identify.

Nevertheless, the gender discourse can be revealed by first asking *if* gender is problematized. Secondly, by questioning *how* it is problematized. Furthermore, I believe that teachers have to trust the students' ability to discuss the taken-for-granted, i.e. the universal issues that are invisible to them, if not for you. This is true with all the topics addressed in these novels, but possibly especially concerning gender norms, as they are difficult to identify. Making room for

the taken-for-granted in an ESL classroom mirrors Kramsch's statement of making culture visible.

5.6 Evaluation of the project's quality

There does not exist *one* correct interpretation of a text. This is true regarding this project as well. The perspectives that I found and chose to focus on represent *my* understanding of what is relevant and interesting related to this project's research question. Thus, as this thesis is coming to a close, it is time to reflect on the project's quality. Obviously, the methodical design presenter early in this thesis is there to create a framework that allows the reader to understand how the novels were approached. Likewise, the theoretical framing presented in chapter 2 provides insight into the "glasses" that were used to interpret the material. In the following I will reflect on the study's reliability, validity and transfer value.

5.6.1 Reliability

Reliability is concerned with "the accuracy of the study's data, which data is being utilized, the manner in which they are collected, and how they are processed" (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 40, my translation). However, to conduct reliable qualitative research differs from reliable quantitative research. The main distinctions are the material at hand and the role of the researcher. While quantitative researchers have instruments to conduct their research with, the qualitative researcher *is* the instrument (Johannessen et al., 2010, p. 229). From a social constructivist perspective this is especially central to the understanding of the thesis reliability. With a research question that asks for the *potential* provided by the data material, I have to keep in mind that my interpretation and presentation of the potential is based on my constructions of the reader's common understanding, which ideals these understandings build on and which representations are universal.

Since I, the research, is part of the social context I am investigating, I cannot render objective data. However, subjectivity is not something that should be avoided, as it can strengthen the study (Nilssen, 2012, p. 139). My "professional subjectivity" gives the material depth. It is my experiences and my understandings that allows me to investigate, describe and discuss my findings thoroughly. Naturally, this means that whatever weaknesses my study may suffer may

also be the cause of that same subjectivity. This is because my subjectivity might have prevented me from identifying other interesting perspectives. However, a text can always be viewed from different angles. It is up to the researcher to communicate the importance of the once she has chosen, not to identify every possible perspective. Hence, this thesis will inevitably be colored by the fact that it is I that have conducted the study. This also means that another researcher might not be able to make the same conclusions as myself.

Although, there does not exist one "true" interpretation of a text, that does not mean that my findings are not reliable. I have throughout supported my presentation and discussion with theory. Furthermore, similarly to my study, Burtwitz-Melzer research found that efferent reading of fictional text would work affectively as well as cognitively (2001). I have also identified culture specific content, thus proving that the novels do not simply refer to 'culture-neutral' contexts, which was what Lund found in her research (Lund, 2007).

In relation to the researcher's choices, reliability is also about the scope of my data material. In this regard I would like to convey some considerations. It is my opinion that the choice to look at four novels has been both a strength and a restraint. The restraints are in relation to the scope of this thesis. With four novels to analyze I have had approximately 1200 pages of material to go through. Naturally this meant that I have had to priorities what to include and what to exclude. Another researcher would possibly have focused on other aspects of the stories, and might disagree with my priorities. Furthermore, it is highly likely that even I would have prioritized differently had I started over. Some aspects became clearer as I wrote myself into the study, and some did not fit into the system that I had already chosen. Obviously the systemization of the material was conducted on the premise that I assessed it to be advantageous. However, it inevitably led to the exclusion of other interesting perspectives.

Nevertheless, having a data material consisting of four novels made it possible for me to identify some tendencies, and it is these tendencies that are truly interesting to me. In order to suggest any tendencies I was dependent on a certain amount of material. Ultimately, it is the tendencies that offer myself and the reader of this thesis an understanding of the possible transfer value of the presentation and discussion that I have conducted.

5.6.2 Validity

The importance of validity in a qualitative research project cannot be overestimated. Validity is concerned with the question: do we measure what we think we are measuring? Since qualitative designs does not provide any standardized answers or findings, like those of for instance a questionnaire, the challenge lies in generating an overall understanding across the material. This task is further challenged by the possibility of significant variations in the interaction between the researcher and different contexts and sources/informants. When exploring the contemporary young adult fiction, my enjoyment of the different novels may have influenced my ability to appreciate their intercultural potential. I have strived to overcome such variations through the use of established theories and theorists. While references to the theoretical framework is not as explicit in the analysis and presentation of findings, I have actively utilized it in the discussion. Thus, attempting to heighten the concept validity, as well as the external validity, of my study (Johannessen et al., 2010, pp. 230-231). Both the research design and the theoretical framework has helped me as a researcher stay objective to the data material, as it created guidelines for me to follow and it gave me "glasses" to look through. These glasses, both the pedagogical, literary and cultural glasses, did to some extent prevent my interpretation and understanding of the novels being colored by my personal enjoyment of them – keeping me objective in regards to the research question I was seeking to answer.

5.6.3 Transfer value

Keeping in mind the complexity and intricacy of intercultural competence it would be pretentious to conclude that the findings in this projects can say something definitive regarding the potential of these novels (or any novel) for the teaching of interculturality. The knowledge and insights provided throughout my thesis is based on *my* choices and interpretations, as well as my relationship with the books. The transfer value to other books should therefore not be exaggerated – especially seeing how other language teachers will bring different experiences to the reading process and to the teaching of the texts.

Nevertheless, the findings correlated to previous research and theory. The focus on family, gender and youth culture in the four contemporary young adult novels are common topical characteristics of this genre of texts (Slettan, 2014). Thus, it is fair to assume that the perspectives I found holds some transfer value to other novels within the same genre.

Furthermore, the cultural topics, the familiarity and the otherness – even the teaching challenges – that the novels generate creates that advantageous 'place of struggle' and the opportunity to decenter that prominent theorists on the topic of cultural education advocate.

Instead of generalizing the findings to all contemporary young adult fiction, the project's aim should rather be to increase language teachers' awareness of how social groups and concepts are represented. And, moreover, that these representations can generate a conflict within the reader that is beneficial for interculturality. Culture and symbolic representation of reality is generally something that we taken for granted in everyday communication. Consequently, it is beneficial to contemplate why we act, react and say the things we do, and why the books we are reading, and possibly considering to use in class, generate the responses they do. In order to do so the teacher needs to make culture visible to herself – echoing Kramsch. My hope is that this thesis has demonstrated how contemporary young adult novels can be approached in order to do just that.

Lastly, this project is a representation of culture. Through my understanding of the reader's common understandings and my understanding of the ideals operating in the context in which these novels were written, I create an 'us' and a 'them'. I dictate what is familiar and what is unfamiliar through the chosen presentation and deliberation. I cannot separate myself from the social context and discourse that I am part of. Thus, my thesis is a representation of my skills, knowledge and attitudes, i.e. of my intercultural competence.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

6.1 Revisiting the research question

My research question was: **What is the potential of contemporary young adult fiction as a teaching tool for the encouragement of intercultural competence in the Norwegian ESL classroom at lower secondary school?** To answer this question I formulated three sub-questions, which I will now revisit.

Which cultural issues are universal? The simplest answer is provided by the three topics that I have used to systemize my findings: family, gender and youth culture.

Which cultural issues are culture specific? Through the presentation and the discussion, I have argued that the novels can function as cultural artifacts, which means that they include culture specific information. The culture specific traits relate to the countries of the US, Great Britain, Ethiopia and Eritrea. Secondly, they relate to cultural monuments and events, geographical sights and language features. However, due to the varying degree of implicit and explicit cultural reference the potential of these factors will be contingent on the teacher's ability to utilize these in the ESL classroom. Naturally, the potential will also depend on what knowledge the learner carries with her into the reading process.

Which discourses contribute to an intercultural perspective? I have suggested that the novels examine a gender, power and shame discourse and argued that these could greatly benefit the learner's ability to decenter. This is because these discourses are an integral part of how different cultures operate, thus an awareness of the notion of gender, power and shame are important tools when navigating within and between cultures – meeting different interlocutors.

Ultimately, the potential of contemporary young adult fiction for the encouragement of intercultural competence lies in identifying the cultural issues that challenges the learner's understanding of the world around her. That is, to identify universal and culture specific issues that can generate a place of struggle and increase the learner's ability to decenter. Furthermore, the ESL classroom has to be open to discuss cultural issues that might be controversial, i.e. gender, power and shame. The novels are ripe with these issues. It is my argument that only through these measures can the learner be granted sufficient knowledge and favorable skills and attitudes in order to increase their interculturality.

The advantage and *potential* of using fiction as a teaching tool for intercultural competence is that the characters' struggles function as models for the struggles that the reader might find themselves in. Furthermore, the novels model or make the learner contemplate how to, or how not to, interact and communicate with others. The narratives prepare the reader of future encounters, in addition to challenging their attitudes. Contemporary young adult fiction offers the reader insights, both in terms of knowledge and attitudes, related to different, contradicting and ambivalent situations that will make them more equipped to understand the world around them.

6.2 The road from here

My study has identified the potential of contemporary young adult fiction as a teaching tool for the encouragement of intercultural competence. Ultimately, my thesis relevance is by generating knowledge about the general characteristics and challenges with the use of contemporary young adult fiction as a resource for intercultural content. The next step, from a teacher's perspective, could be to conduct a case study. Such a study could entail generating my findings into concrete pedagogical activities and to try them out on lower secondary school students.

Another interesting approach could be to investigate which understanding Norwegian students possess in relation to "our" culture. After all, intercultural competence is about understanding ourselves as much as 'them'. It is my belief that if a student does not understand which stereotypes are associated with her own culture, and how these might differ from reality – or her understanding of reality – it is difficult to decenter in the meeting with someone else. Consequently, the learner will not become comfortable with the struggle that occurs when meeting someone else. Insights into Norwegian students' understandings of their own culture would make it easier for teachers to predict which struggles that will arise when using a specific teaching tool.

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