

Hannaleena Hauru:

Collaborative Dramaturgies in Filmmaking

- Creating a Concept for the Feature Film “Parvet”

Abstract

In this thesis, I make a personal reflection on how the dramaturgical concept of the feature film “Parvet” was created. The aim of the project is to build dramaturgical tools that would benefit voices that are currently marginalized in Finnish film and television. The “Parvet” film focuses on experiences as a racialized or indigenous person, and as a non-binary trans person in Finland in 2023 and deals also with the representation of people with learning disabilities, while most crew members in the production, including me, are white, non-disabled and cis-gendered. The central questions in the thesis are:

- How did using feminist decolonial theories and my previous experiences in collaborative filmmaking inspire the methodological framework for the concept of "Parvet"?
- How can autobiographical minority experiences be adapted to fiction film by providing agency to the performers by rearranging artistic decision-making power between the auteur-director, the performers, and the designers in the crew?
- How does "Parvet" navigate the complex interplay of collaborative filmmaking within a project centered on minority topics while operating in an environment and industry dominated by structural whiteness?

Creating “Parvet” took place in 2022–2023. The film is directed by Hannaleena Hauru and Katja Gauriloff and produced by Emilia Haukka. The production is a collaboration between Aamu Film Company and Uniarts Helsinki's Theatre Academy. “Parvet” will premiere in 2024. The thesis was written in the Summer–Autumn of 2023, while “Parvet” has still been in post-production.

Keywords:

collaborative filmmaking, collaboration, screenwriting, dramaturgy, marginalized voices, minority narratives, coloniality, decolonial, settler colonial, power hierarchies, artistic hierarchies, character representation, representation, auteurship, auteur-director, safer working environments, tokenism, racialized, anti-racist, indigenous, nonbinary, trans, cis-gender, non-disabled, disability, actors with learning disabilities, people of colour, POC, whiteness, structural whiteness, privilege, identity, autobiography, fiction films

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Project Introduction

In February 2022 I launched an open call to select the entire filmmaking crew to create a collaborative feature film from scratch. The selection was based on motivation letters of the applicants on the theme “Finnish national identity as part of coloniality”. The selected crew of 72 people consisted of performers, artistic and technical crew members, production staff, a few researchers, and a mini-audience of 30 members who would be the primary audience of the forthcoming film. The project started with this whole group coming together for 5 days in August 2022 to discuss and decide, what kind of a film we want to create together and what kind of methodologies should be applied to execute the “Parvet” project.

In this thesis, I make a personal reflection on how the dramaturgical concept of the feature film “Parvet” was created. The aim of the project is to build dramaturgical tools that would benefit voices that are currently marginalized in Finnish film and television. The “Parvet” film focuses on experiences as a racialized or indigenous person, and as a non-binary trans person in Finland in 2023, and deals also with the representation of people with learning disabilities. The paradox in “Parvet” is, that while aiming to strengthen the marginalized groups, the film crew was operating in an environment and industry based on the auteur-director tradition and dominated by structural whiteness. Most of the group members in “Parvet”, including me as the director, are white, cis-gendered and non-disabled.

This thesis is divided into three parts. In the first part, I’ll present my former experiences in building collaborative dramaturgies and working with autobiographical material in fiction films. The first part also presents the decolonial influences that inspired the general outline of the “Parvet” project.

In the second part, I will chronologically walk through developing the “Parvet” concept starting with initiating the open call, followed by how the concept for screenwriting was developed collectively and how the dramaturgy was built through ongoing negotiation with the productional aspects during the shooting period. The performers were given

agency to decide on the representation of their characters throughout the production - from the first brainstorming sessions to the final cut of the film. During pre-production, for Saami representation in the film, the group decided to invite filmmaker Katja Gauriloff to be in charge of the narrative regarding Saami in the film, thus changing the original plan of Hannaleena Hauru directing the whole film. This decision is discussed further in chapter 2.3.3.

In the second part, I will briefly go through productional issues affecting the concept, although this thesis is focusing on creating the artistic concept. Means to benefit marginalized voices in the “Parvet” project were taken into account by examining all areas of filmmaking from audience work to budgeting and aiming to build safer working environments. I will briefly present these productional methods, as creating the artistic concept in “Parvet” was inseparable from designing the productional working methods. There was a lot of positive feedback throughout the process from the minority participants on how the project concept was fostering diversity, whereas problems occurred regarding the working conditions. Despite trying to follow safer space guidelines and build a safer environment, minority group members encountered racism in the form of microaggressions, exoticising or being misgendered during the production. The project was also burdening for many of the marginalized group members due to minority stress and the responsibility these group members took to carry regarding minority representation and their treatment in the production. Some of these experiences ended up being adapted as material for the fiction film (chapter 2.5.3).

In the last part, I discuss the conclusions and further points of development. I end by reflecting on tokenism and structural whiteness in the project. While operating in an environment, where most decision-makers and crew members in the project are privileged and don't represent the marginalized, and the industry leans heavily on structural whiteness, can tokenism ever be fully avoided?

“Parvet” is directed by Hannaleena Hauru and Katja Gauriloff and produced by Emilia Haukka / Aamu Film Company. The project was financially supported by Kone Foundation, Finnish Film Foundation, Yle - Finnish National Broadcast Company and Uniarts Theatre Academy Helsinki. Creating “Parvet” took place in 2022–2023, the production was a collaboration between Aamu Film Company and Uniarts Helsinki's

Theatre Academy. As a fiction film, “Parvet” interweaves multiple storylines and characters, dealing with experiences as a brown or black person, as Saami, and as a non-binary trans person in Finland in 2023 and also represents people with learning disabilities. The script was made by the selected working group and based on their personal experiences. In the first stage of production, the crew prepared a performative event combining live performance and audiovisual material for two nights in Kinopalatsi, Helsinki, in February 2023. After this, the live materials were adapted to the film script, and the film shootings continued, resulting in a feature film to be premiered in 2024.

The thesis was written in Summer–Autumn 2023, while “Parvet” has still been in post-production and is my personal reflection. Reflecting and evaluating the overall outcomes of the production and the finished film are not discussed in this paper. Further research on whether the developed concept has been advantageous for marginalized groups should happen once the film is finished and has been exposed to the audience.

1. Setting up the Collaborative Structure

1.1 Prior Experiences in Engaging Performers in the Screenwriting Process

I've been collaborating with Aamu Film Company since 2009, latest in "Fucking with Nobody" (2020) with Emilia Haukka as the producer. All my collaborations as a screenwriter-director with Aamu Film Company have involved designing the film project in close dialogue with producers Emilia Haukka and/or Jussi Rantamäki from early first drafts. The projects have been built by having a very flexible approach to the production style, enabling the possibility to adapt any productional aspects depending on the content of the film. And vice versa, as a screenwriter I'm used to being very flexible to take into account the productional circumstances and adapt the artistic content of the script accordingly. For me, "Parvet" was a natural continuum in my collaboration with Aamu Film Company. I share the same values with the company in prioritizing fair and safe working conditions and transparency in productional communication, yet still striving for high artistic quality. Producer Emilia Haukka was involved in "Parvet" since first early drafts for the project, and all further crew members for the project were selected by us two in charge.

Why I originally started pushing to develop collaborative methods in screenwriting, started from how I felt I was personally failing at fostering diversity in Finnish film and TV. In 2016 at Aamu Film Company we were casting the leading roles for my first feature film "Thick Lashes of Lauri Mäntyvaara". I wanted to do my best to diversify Finnish film and TV, and at the time for me, this was done by looking for performers from various backgrounds and inviting them for casting. There were no locked features for the appearance or background of the lead actors based on the script I had written - or that's what I thought. My idea was, that the leading roles for "Thick Lashes..." would be cast six months before the script was entirely finished, so as a writer, I could adjust the story based on the selected actors, and what they want to bring to the story and the characters. I thought that this way I could take representation into account by letting

actors affect the content. I didn't realize that most things regarding the characters were already locked through narrative decisions, as I'd been writing the film already for four years before the casting. And, I had been writing the script based on my personal past experiences as a white, non-disabled cis-woman. It was embarrassing to realize, that although I claimed otherwise, there was no real space being created for new diversity as the film was leaning on my autobiographical experiences. The collaboration with performers on the script should've started way earlier if I wanted to create space for diverse representation in the narrative structures. In the end, the selected lead actors in "Thick Lashes of Lauri Mäntyvaara" affected the final script mostly in the way I was adding humour to the script due to the comical abilities of the selected performers.

In my second feature film "Fucking with Nobody" (2020) all the central cast were involved in developing their characters from early on, and for example, almost all the dialogue was created by each performer. With the team, we were also reflecting on the shot raw material together. For example, the non-binary character, Ara, was negotiated throughout the film with actor Pietu Wikström. The gender of Ara wasn't a crucial narrative element in the film, but personally for Wikström as a non-binary actor, it was important that the character could be non-binary (Talvensaari, 2021). But again, although in "Fucking with Nobody" I had established a collaborative process with the performers, the original layout of the character ensemble and plot structure was created by me and co-screenwriter Lasse Poser. The actors' power to decide was based on the narrative structure created by the screenwriters. I knew that for my next project, in order to genuinely open up space for the input of the performers, some bigger structural changes needed to be made.

1.2 Definitions: Dramaturgy, Collaborations and Auteur Filmmaking

I agree with Katalin Trencsényi's definition of dramaturgy as "action through which meaning is created by the recognition and arrangement of patterns" (Trencsényi, 2015, 21). In this thesis, I refer to "doing dramaturgy" by following Trencsényi's definition. The team of "Parvet" was in continuous dialogue with each other on designing the content of the film. "Doing dramaturgy" in the project was, that this dialogue was led by a hermeneutical and facilitating role throughout the process (ibid.). The collaborative dramaturgy was concluded not only by deciding upon the artistic content of the project but making necessary changes to productional circumstances. I want to highlight, that for me, doing dramaturgy is not just about arranging the creative and artistic elements in the project, but is in continuous resonance with the productional methods being used. And as the project aimed to develop dramaturgical tools, this required constant dialogue between the artistic and productional methods used in the project.

My background is in theatre. Developing film scripts from early on together with the performers arises from participating in several theatre productions, where in the rehearsal process the script is modified through the input of the performers, or productions that are based on devising methods where the whole piece is created through the collaboration of the team (Scott and Hoggert, 2009). In Finnish filmmaking, in my experience, it's still exceptional to have fiction film projects, where the script and methodology have been developed together by consulting the whole crew. In contemporary European theatre, this kind of collaborative working is a well-acknowledged and established option, especially in the fringe scene and among freelance theatre groups. (Trencsényi, 2015, 82; Lehmann, 2006, 82).

In this thesis, I'm using the term "auteur-director". With this, I'm referring to the common setup in European Arthouse filmmaking, that considers the director as the primary artist in the film. This auteur tradition was born during the 1950s–1960s European New Wave Cinema, which emphasized acknowledgement of the director's leading role as the creative author and influencer of a film's artistic vision (Sarris, 1962).

It was reshaping the understanding of authorship in cinema, redirecting attention from producers and star actors to the director (ibid.). Having been part of the Finnish Film Industry since 2009, it's been my observation that the legacy of the New Wave continues to significantly influence artistic hierarchies. Although, in my experience, higher film education for example at Aalto University emphasizes artistic collaborativeness and recognition of input of all central crew members, one director is expected to lead the artistic decision-making process. Also, whereas artistic recognition and collaborativeness are being fostered in professional productions, in my experience the director is considered the primary artist and the visionary when discussing with funding institutions and in the media. It's greatly up to the director to share artistic power and credits to their crew members. To give an example, me and Tanja Heinänen co-created the film "Säälistäjät" (2015), and despite the continuous emphasis placed on both of us being the authors of the film in press releases and interviews, up to this day Heinänen's name is mostly excluded when the film is being referred to. I was the director and other screenwriter of the film. Heinänen was the other screenwriter and lead actress in the film. While the Arthouse film industry has made significant progress since the European New Wave in many regards, positioning the director as the dominating artistic auteur is still foundationally affecting the aesthetic, industrial, discursive, and ideological aspects of Arthouse filmmaking worldwide (Murray, 2020).

1.3 Decolonial Influences

All the decolonial theories I'll be discussing in this thesis have been used as inspiration for an artistic project. My intention is to create concrete dramaturgical tools to benefit marginalized groups in Finland, and I am doing this based on my previous collaborative filmmaking methods and freely adapting ideas from decolonial readings to develop artistic tools.

I belong to a Finnish generation born in the 1980s, who were taught at school that coloniality is linked mainly to European sea voyages somewhere in the 15th century, and therefore Finland had no actual connections with colonialism. Fortunately, discussions on Finland as part of coloniality have been activated during the last few

years. Discussions have been fueled by shifts in academic knowledge construction as well as replacing the Eurocentric worldview with multiple histories produced from diverse viewpoints (Lahti and Kullaa, 2020). The Black Lives Matter -movement in 2020 activated the discussion on cultural appropriation in Finland, and public discussions have also started to look into the involvement of Finnish companies or individuals in the slave trade and land ownership abroad, as well as Finland's past and ongoing exploitation of Saami people and land (ibid.). As a screenwriter-director, I see it natural that I take part in the process by critically examining what kind of colonial structures and patterns I'm upholding in my own professional domain. While this thesis focuses on the examination of a single case study involving a dramaturgical concept, my bigger quest is to plug into those deep structures in my filmmaking, that trace back to racist and unequal systems born through colonialism.

In my theory readings I started to gravitate quite early to texts dealing with decolonization from an indigenous context, as for me there was the most direct resonance with the Finnish Society and coloniality. Settler colonialism was a practical approach for me as a theory novice. In Finland, 90 percent of Saami land is still defined as property of the state, managed by the state enterprise "Metsähallitus" (Aukio and Turunen, 2022). It must be reminded, that although the term "decolonization" has been largely built upon indigenous thinking, it doesn't solely concern indigenous peoples, but affects in various ways all those who live under the influence of colonialism's effects. Decolonization includes all who directly or indirectly uphold colonial systems or benefit from them. (ibid.) I will now go through the decolonial theoretical influences I based the outline of the "Parvet" concept.

After an open call to participants, the "Parvet" project started with a one-week workshop where the whole group consisting of performers, artistic and technical crew members, production staff, and 30 members set to be the primary audience of the film, got together to discuss, what kind of film they want to make and see, and what kind of working methods should be applied. The idea to start with the whole group from scratch was adapted from postcolonial anthropology. I started reading postcolonial texts after landing on Laura U. Marks' "haptic visuality" (see chapter 2.3.2). As I read examples of how postcolonial theories had been adapted to practical means in the field of

anthropological research, I was highly inspired to develop a similar approach to collaborative filmmaking. In "Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples", Linda Tuhiwai Smith critically examines the history of research involving Indigenous communities. She explores the implications of colonial practices in anthropology and emphasizes the need for researchers to engage in meaningful dialogue and collaboration with Indigenous communities. One of these means is to start research by negotiating the methods and aims together with the community that is being researched, to ensure that the research will benefit the Indigenous group in concrete ways (Smith, 1999). Scholars Shawn Wilson and Margaret Kovach have a similar approach in their work (Shawn, 2008; Kovach, 2009). A decolonizing approach to research challenges the historically exploitative practices and centers Indigenous knowledge, voices, and self-determination. Decolonial anthropology pointed me toward a more collaborative approach for my work, which was exactly what I had been looking for, as I felt my previous experiments in giving agency to the performers hadn't been successful (chapter 1.1.).

As an enthusiastic beginner in theoretical studies, quite early in my postcolonial readings, I got deeply absorbed in abstract thinking. The field was new to me, and I was highly inspired by several theoretical texts, to the point of losing touch with practical, concrete reality. I was saved from this intellectual detachment by Eve Tuck's and K. Wayne Yang's essay "Decolonization is not a metaphor" (2002), which became personally the most important text for me in the "Parvet" project. The essay, focusing on settler colonialism, criticizes how the term "decolonization" is in the United States frequently used to describe processes of social justice, self-improvement, or personal growth, and is often detached from its original context in colonial and indigenous struggles for liberation. The text was important, as I caught myself "riding the decoloniality wave". In the initial stages of drafting the "Parvet" project, I was getting high on theory, and how decoloniality could inspire the project, without linking the project to the existing struggles caused by coloniality.

Tuck and Yang argue that the metaphorical use of "decolonization" can lead to appropriation, where the concept of decolonization is adopted by dominant groups to serve their own interests without actually engaging with the structural issues of

colonization. They emphasize the importance of centering indigenous knowledge in discussions and actions related to decolonization and highlight the significance of land and territory in decolonization efforts, as these aspects are central to the histories and futures of indigenous peoples. (Tuck and Yang, 2002).

One of the key outcomes from the essay was to start examining how I and the other privileged group members in the upcoming film project could give up power, instead of leaning on ostensible means to benefit the marginalized. From a settler-colonial perspective, Tuck and Yang describe these ostensible means as “settler moves to innocence”. In settler colonialism, these moves are strategies used by settlers, non-Indigenous individuals living in colonized territories, to free themselves of guilt or responsibility for the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, without giving up power, privilege, or control over Indigenous land. Examples of these “moves to innocence” might be for example charitable acts, where settlers engage in acts of charity or donation to Indigenous causes, hoping to alleviate guilt or present themselves as allies. While these charitable actions may be well-intentioned, they can often sidestep the need for systemic change. (ibid.). This thought is close to so-called “performative allyship”, that refers to the superficial or insincere support shown by individuals or groups, to appear as allies to marginalized communities.

Tuck and Yang’s essay was personally important, as it made me reflect, on how much the structures of coloniality are ingrained in my thinking, particularly in using fantasies as a mechanism to avoid confronting my own privileges and unconscious biases. As one example, Tuck and Yang take the film “Dances with Wolves,” which portrays white settlers as becoming “authentic knowers” through interactions with Indigenous communities while the Indigenous characters remain objects for transformation. If I’m entirely honest with myself, I need to admit having had fantasies of becoming an “authentic knower”.

Tuck and Yang’s examples also go through, how settler individuals may distance themselves from historical colonization by claiming that they or their ancestors were not involved in colonial violence or leaning to the story of long-lost Indigenous ancestry

and use this to wash their hands and gain innocence. (ibid.) I have had these kinds of fantasies as well.

From Tuck and Yang's point of view, decolonization doesn't have a synonym, their aim in the essay is: "to remind readers what is unsettling about decolonization" (Tuck and Yang, 2002, 3). The concrete decolonial act from a settler colonial point of view is to give back the land to those, from whom it's been taken. I took this as my leading approach for the concept of "Parvet". The project should concretely give artistic power to minority crew members. Personally, this meant that I needed to get uncomfortable and start dismantling my director's power and the fantasies aiming for privileged innocence. When in several later stages of the "Parvet" project, as I director I wanted to go back to my accustomed patterns of making a film, I kept coming back to the thought, that maybe me feeling personally uncomfortable was not necessarily a bad thing, but just a sign that the concept was working, and power was shifting as intended.

1.4 Seasonality of Hierarchies in a Film Production

Inspired by Tuck and Yang's essay, I wanted to build a ground for a film project where privileged group members would give up their artistic power to decide. But how to navigate this, as "Parvet" was not a community art project? The project would lean on director auteurship, where one filmmaker, in this case, me, would be in charge of the artistic content of the film. It was clear to me from early on, that I did not want to build a project, where artistic decision-making would be made through a flat hierarchy or democratic voting ending up in constant artistic compromises, or under- or overdeveloped ideas.

My idea was, that in artistic decision-making, multiple formations of hierarchies could exist inside one film production depending on the stage of the production. This idea originated from my previous experiences in experimenting with how to build collaborative dramaturgies. For example, in my feature film "Fucking with Nobody", the shooting days with a lot of equipment and many crew members were following a

strict chain of command and one director held the artistic power. However, many of the smaller shooting days were based on shifting the hierarchies, and the director wasn't necessarily calling all the shots (Talvensaari, 2021). For example, in a club fantasy scene in "Fucking with Nobody" written by screenwriter-performer Lasse Poser, during the shooting day, each shot was negotiated with Poser, to correspond with his vision. In an earlier collaboration with Poser, in "Vialiset otteet" (2009), the film ends with a 5-minute counterpart, created, and directed independently by him, shifting the artistic hierarchy from me as the primary auteur-director.

Anthropologist David Graeber and archaeologist David Wengrow's book "The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity" was published in Finnish around the same time when the concept for "Parvet" started to take shape. Graeber's and Wengrow's book offers a unique take on human societies, highlighting cooperation, equality, and communal organization in early civilizations. (Graeber and Wengrow, 2022). I was reading the book through a decolonial lens as it challenges many of the rooted Eurocentric narratives. In an interview about the book with Protean Magazine in 2022, David Wengrow talks about our ancient ancestors' social arrangements. Many societies, not limited to hunter-gatherer groups, would undergo significant social changes or rearrangements once or even twice a year in response to seasonal patterns and shifts (Williamson, 2022). According to Wengrow, this seasonality of social arrangement was present for example in circumpolar Inuit societies. During the shorter summer months, large groups would split into smaller hunting, fishing, and foraging bands. Fathers assumed significant authority over their families, and property ownership became more emphasized. However, in the long Arctic winter, when the demographic and social arrangements would change, and people gathered in collective winter houses, the rules around property ownership would disappear. (ibid.)

I started to reflect this seasonality of social arrangement into hierarchies in film crews and found seasonal features in the arrangements of my past film productions regarding artistic decision-making. One example of this is my previously mentioned collaborations with Lasse Poser. The most standardized seasonal feature is, that in both of my previous feature films "Thick Lashes of Lauri Mäntyvaara" and "Fucking with Nobody", the strictness of the artistic hierarchy has been depending on the number of

crew members and the technical difficulty of the shooting days. During smaller shoots with fewer crew members, there's often more room for collaborative input from actors and other crew members. For instance, scenes shot on location with a minimal crew and equipment might lead to more spontaneous creative decisions, shaping the artistic direction of the film. Bigger and technically challenging shooting days demand more strict artistic hierarchies to manage time constraints effectively and to guarantee safety by setting strict rules on who can handle the equipment.

Graeber and Wengrow write from the perspective of social arrangements, including the division of goods and ownership of property, whereas I'm applying the idea to hierarchies in decision-making regarding artistic content. The idea of "seasonality" in hierarchies gave me clarity, that instead of seeking one artistic decision-making pattern, that would apply throughout the whole film project, there could be several patterns inside one project. As the earlier examples reveal, I have been experimenting with this kind of setting before, but I always felt those were exceptional situations. Inspired by theory, I realized that this "seasonality of hierarchies" could be the foundational arrangement regarding artistic decision-making in my films.

In "Parvet", instead of one hierarchy, where one auteur director holds artistic power throughout the production, the idea was to build a project, where the hierarchy of artistic power shifts depending on the stage of the production, and on what is being shot. I'll discuss this further in chapter 2.4.3.

1.5 Collaborating on Autobiographical Material in Fiction Films

In my two most recent films, "Metatitanic" (2018) and "Fucking with Nobody" (2020), I worked as the lead actress, director, screenwriter and editor. In these films, I held very strong artistic power throughout the filmmaking process from the script stage to the final cut. In addition, I participated closely in designing the production methods of these two films. Both "Metatitanic" and "Fucking with Nobody" are fiction films based on

autobiographical material and have the screenwriter as a lead performer in the film. “Parvet” has the same basic setting, except that the film has several narratives and several central characters, whereas “Metatitanic” and “Fucking with Nobody” lean on one leading character.

When working simultaneously as a screenwriter-actress-director-editor, my realization has been, that the writing and editing process of the film benefits greatly, when as the editor I can be in dialogue with the embodied experience and physical performance experienced as an actor. For example, “Fucking with Nobody” deals with loneliness, unrecruited love and the oscillation between platonic and romantic love. I’ve been dealing with the same themes in many of my other films, such as “Viallisset otteet” (2009) and “Älä kuiskaa ystävän suuhun” (2010), but I claim that it was through collaboration with the embodied experience, performing in the film, and being in continuous dialogue with the cinematic material while shooting and editing, that led to capturing the experience to an art form in “Fucking with Nobody” better than any of my previous work dealing with the same topics.

For “Parvet” my question was, would it be possible to apply this approach to a project, where I am collaborating with performers as a director, and not acting myself? How to give a performer more agency and power to decide although they are not directing or editing, or are not trained screenwriters? Could it be possible to create more space for the embodied experience of the performer through other means?

1.6 Framing the Outline for the Concept

The concept for the "Parvet" project was born from a desire to create concrete dramaturgical tools to empower marginalized groups in Finland, as I had recognized the need to critically examine the colonial legacies rooted in the way I was making films as a screenwriter-director. The three key starting points for outlining the project were inspired by a settler colonial framework:

- 1) Starting the project by negotiating the content and working methods together with the crew members.
- 2) Trying to avoid metaphorical approaches on decoloniality, striving for concrete means to benefit the marginalized by giving up power as privileged.
- 3) To take an approach of “seasonality in hierarchies”, where the artistic power may shift from the auteur-director, giving minority performers agency in decision-making.

In addition, based on my previous experiences as an actress, director, and writer I wanted to highlight the benefits of collaborative approaches that incorporate embodied experiences. With these approaches in mind, I started drafting an open call to find people who would be interested in collaborating with me.

2. Developing the Concept

2.1 Open Call for Participants

In February 2022 I launched an open call for the cast and crew members of “Parvet”. The call was spread online through my personal social media channels, Uniarts mailing lists, Aamu Film Company and Kone Foundation social media and email lists. The selection was based on motivation letters of the applicants on the theme “Finnish national identity as part of coloniality”. Selecting coloniality as my main theme was a natural follow-up based on my prior background work (see chapter 1). The reason why I decided to add Finnish national identity to the mix, was not based on my prior theoretical readings, but based on recurring discussions with friends on identity politics in Europe, and the lack of relating to togetherness offered by the nation-state structure and its symbols. Also, in my past work, my style has been to deal with theoretical concepts by reflecting them with a personal approach. For example, the film “Metatitanic” deals with how the romantic love narratives tracing back to patriarchy reflect on the way I behave in romantic relationships (Tervonen, 2018). In the open call, I addressed, that in the upcoming film, I would be using an essayistic approach similar to my previous films “Metatitanic” (2018) and “Fucking with Nobody” (2020).

In addition to looking for the cast and the crew, the call was set to find 30 people, who would be the primary audience of the film. Acknowledging the agency of the audience rose also from decolonial anthropology (chapter 1.3). Just as the decolonial approach involves negotiating research methods with those impacted, shouldn't a film employing decolonial principles engage the primary audience it intends to address? I wanted to concretize the audience in an early stage of the project to make visible the question with whom the filmmakers are in dialogue.

Through the open call, the aim was to find a diverse group including students, professionals, amateurs as well as people outside these groups and outside the cultural circles. Out of the 333 applications received, producer Emilia Haukka from Aamu Film Company and I selected 80 individuals to participate in the project. The selection was

based on the motivation letters and the CVs of the participants. For the performers and audience, the selections were made prioritizing personal motivation. When selecting the technical crew and heads of artistic departments, prior experience in the field of filmmaking was emphasized, as the project would be made as a professional feature film production. The call was asking applicants to send an open motivation letter or a video regarding the theme “Finnish national identity as part of coloniality”. Also a CV was required from the applicants. Through an open call to the entire crew, I aimed not only to gather a team passionate about the theme but also to disrupt the way film crews are assembled in the Finnish Film Industry. Especially for roles in the head of departments: set design, cinematography, costume design etc., there are rarely ever open calls. People are invited or scouted through internal searches. Cronyism lives strong.

The open call aimed to foster diversity. Yet, it’s important to critically examine how “open” the call actually was. While the call did not set specific applicant requirements, the project’s framing inherently limited the eligible participants. Firstly, the call was coming from me, a privileged, white, non-disabled, highly-educated cis-woman. My position was giving every reason to suspect the collaborative aims of the project and intentions to foster diversity. My personal background laid out the language, and terms used in the call. As me and Emilia Haukka were the ones selecting the participants, applicants needed to make their application in a way that would communicate to us. The main task of the applicants was to write a motivation letter on “Finnish national identity as part of coloniality” - this was indirectly demanding the participants to be educated to a level of understanding of at least the basics of these terms. The indirect requirement for prior education was visible in who answered the call. The majority of the applicants in Parvet held a higher education degree in arts or social sciences or were university students.

Also, the open call did frame the work to happen in Finland for six weeks, meaning it did leave out many people living abroad. The project required intense commitment from participants, leaving out individuals who couldn't manage long working hours e.g., due to health or family reasons. In the call, these productional time frames and general working phase were already set. Also, during the call funding for the project was not set

in place. I know many of my freelancer colleagues in the film industry who did not apply as committing to the project would have been financially too risky.

With the possibility of applying with a video instead of a written motivation, I tried to benefit people who prefer expressing themselves orally. Yet, good reading skills were required in Finnish or English to comprehend the call and what was required from an applicant. Also, the call did require a person to be in some way linked to the culture industry and culture workers in Helsinki, as the call was spread through a limited number of channels, mostly on social media and a few email lists. There were flaws in the call, but of course, comparing the “Parvet” open call to the option that I would’ve assembled the crew through an invitation-only system, the absolute strength of the open call was in the possibility for newcomers to enter the project. Despite the limited distribution of the call, it succeeded in reaching several applicants who were highly motivated by the theme of the film and offered a possibility for many newcomers.

The flaws in the open call made me see in practice, how despite my intentions to promote diversity, I’m also a partaker in the industry that often finds itself entangled in a structure that perpetuates inequality. The previous dissection shows that the open call repeated many of the systemic patterns existing in the Finnish Film Industry, that also interconnect cronyism within the industry to systemic whiteness. As the “Parvet” project went on, this entanglement became even more visible and led to problems, as I’ll discuss in chapter 2.5.3, which tackles unsafety in the project. However, while systemic whiteness is deeply rooted, I believe it’s not insurmountable. From my position, I felt the most important task in the “Parvet” project was to find ways to engage with systemic whiteness, yet not make the project content focused on whiteness.

If I were given the same time frame now, I would surely reconsider many aspects in making the open call, but firstly I would change two things regarding the selection of participants. The first one was the size of the “Parvet” working group. If I were to make the decision now, I would reduce the size of the group to 40–50 participants instead of over 70 to make the group more manageable and create more space for discussion. The other change I would make would’ve been in the balance of industry novices versus film professionals in the group. The project was structurally challenging as it aimed to

create new tools for the Finnish Film Industry and experiment with productional structures. Many team members were newcomers in the film industry, and whereas the production was structurally and mentally very demanding for all, it placed a heavy burden on beginners who lacked fundamental skills in professional filmmaking. On the other hand, this brings me around the loop. How to bring new people to the industry, if only the experienced are always hired? The answer is probably in the balance of newcomers: In “Parvet” there should’ve been a bit more crew members with prior experience in making feature films.

2.2 One Week with 72 People Planning Together

2.2.1 Starting from Scratch - with Exceptions

During 22 –26 August 2022, 72 participants took part in the “Parvet” launch workshop. During these five days the whole crew, cast and selected primary audience worked on the following objectives:

- 1) How do we want to work on this upcoming film project?
- 2) Defining the artistic and professional goals of each participant
- 3) Brainstorming and collecting materials for the script

The August working week was aimed to “start from scratch” with the working group, but of course, to manage time and logistics, a lot of structure needed to be created before the group could have their say on the working methods. The primary elements defining the productional frame of the project were linked to my MA studies and schedules: the production of the film needed to somehow fit my study schedule of two years for the Uniarts resources to be available for the production. In addition, I had already gotten funding for the project through the Kone Foundation. Also, it was clear from the early stages of drafting the call, that the aim is to get the project funded by the Finnish Film Foundation and Yle. Whatever decisions would be made, they would

somehow need to fit the qualifications of the funders, and finally, as the film would be done as a professional film production, Finnish labor laws would apply when designing the project.

2.2.2 Audience Design, Psychosocial Support and Additional Initiatives

This thesis focuses on creating the artistic content of the film. Still, I will briefly describe what kind of means were used to benefit marginalized groups not only through artistic working tools but examining how to develop the production methods, and what other initiatives were born during the project.

Art pedagogue and audience experience designer Maiju Tarpila and job counsellor and psychologist Marke Koskelin came to the “Parvet” project through the open call. The open call had a listing of needed working roles while also extending the opportunity for all other potential crew members to apply. To my knowledge, in the Finnish film industry, there has never been a hired psychologist or job counsellor working on a fiction feature film shooting period before, nor an art pedagogue or a primary audience involved in designing the film from scratch. All the working methods around job counselling, psychosocial support, active audience involvement and art pedagogy were developed with the help of Koskelin’s and Tarpila’s prior experience in the field of theatre, performance art and other instances, and adapted as the project went along. For a later part of the project, producer Emilia Haukka, Tarpila and Koskelin formed a support team for the production, focusing on enhancing the safety and well-being of the working group. This involved for example Koskelin being available for private or group counselling sessions. Later in January, psychologist Aini Aintila joined the team, giving psychosocial support with a focus on the POC crew. For the Saami crew members, Kaarin West from Uvja gave psychosocial support during the shooting period. The psychologists in “Parvet” were available to offer private counselling when for example traumas about being marginalized got activated, but were also available for counselling to other team members. The psychologists were also present during selected shooting

days to give support on set. The support team, challenges in providing safety, and the developed code of conduct for the project are discussed further in chapter 2.5.2..

The “Parvet” project had several initiatives, which are framed outside this thesis. For example, Maiju Tarpila worked with the selected 30 audience members from August 2022 to February 2023 to explore and develop spectatorship. Emilia Haukka worked on possibilities to adopt a more collaborative and transparent approach to budgeting the film together with a working group. Teemu Vaarakallio started to work on a paper on Finnish film and sustainability, and researcher Katja Vuorensyrjä started doing ethnographic research and a making-of documentary on the Parvet project.

2.2.3 Collaboration with Theatre NEO

Theatre NEO is a professional theatre supporting actors with learning disabilities in Tampere, Finland. Riikka Papunen, working and collaborating with NEO contacted me during the open call and asked if it’s possible for NEO to apply to the project.

Theatre NEO's goal is to support actors with learning disabilities working in professional performing arts projects. NEO includes two mentors – one responsible for artistic support and the other for social and care support. Through discussions, it was decided that from NEO, actor Mikael Bashmakov would join the project together with mentors Riikka Papunen, who was responsible for artistic support and Sanna Neuvonen, mentor of social and care support for Mikael Bashmakov. Also, Bashmakov’s family as his caretakers were involved in every step of the project.

Considering the needs of the actor, Bashmakov participated in the project mostly from Tampere, where he lives. Whereas other performers living outside of Helsinki were required to travel for the production rehearsals and shootings, our crew travelled to Tampere for Bashmakov’s scenes. Also, the general length of the shooting days was adjusted based on the needs of Bashmakov. Whereas on many parts of the “Parvet” project, measures for support needed to be developed from scratch, with NEO the support and a lot of the methodology were already in place. Mikael Bashmakov had

prior experience in theatre productions and had been collaborating with the same support personnel that he had in “Parvet”.

2.3 Writing a Concept Paper

2.3.1 Deciding on Key Elements for the Script

The aim of the 5-day August workshop was to brainstorm and collect material for the upcoming film and discuss working methods with the whole group. This was done through individual exercises, mini-group sessions, by making artistic demos - and through a few larger group discussions. Outcomes were collected on Google Drive and on written papers. The working style emphasized documenting every working session and summarizing key points of each group discussion. The next step after August was to organize, curate and start working on a written concept from the collected materials. This concept paper would then work as the foundation for the script process and artistic design.

To develop the concept paper and refine key themes for the upcoming script, a “theory group” was formed during the August workshop. The theory group consisted of those people in the “Parvet” crew who had an interest in working with theoretical concepts in an art project. The theory group consisted of Hannaleena Hauru, Yolanda Correa Brown, Minne Mäki, Heta Nuutinen, Minna Seikkula, and Henrik Seppänen. The concept proposal was commented on by film producer Emilia Haukka. Michelle Francett-Hermes gave consultancy on questions regarding the Saami people and land, especially by helping to find a Saami director who would be interested in collaborating on the project (see chapter 2.3.3.).

To start narrowing down all the brainstormed ideas, I assembled all the August workshop materials and incorporated any additional ideas that were sent to me and producer Emilia Haukka via email after the workshop. I curated the set of ideas in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire had assertions such as: “several nonbinary characters”, and “forest as an element in the film”. The options for an answer were 1 –

strongly agree, 2 – mildly agree, 3 – unsure, 4 – mildly disagree and 5 – strongly agree. The questionnaire I made, emphasized representational focus points in the film, such as “the film is empowering to brown and black Finns”, but had also some ideas for artistic elements. The questionnaire was then sent to the whole group. It was not a vote, but more a poll aiming to validate that the primary ideas, suggestions, and desires discussed during the August workshop were embraced by the group. This approach aimed to ensure that the theory group didn't progress a concept idea lacking general consensus or those ideas that were formed in the spur of the moment during the August workshop.

Moreover, this step began the process of articulating the project's themes and objectives more precisely. Of the 72 group members, 45 answered the questionnaire in September 2022. Essentially, the questionnaire stood as the initial draft of the concept and served as a compilation of the desires expressed by the August workshop participants.

The questionnaire had also a blank space for additional thoughts on key elements in the film. The full results of the questionnaire were shared with the whole group to foster transparency in the production. Based on the questionnaire, the theory group developed the concept further. Following final decisions were made on the concept of “Parvet”.

Key elements for the “Parvet” film concept:

- The film is empowering to brown and black Finns
- Making visible the exploitation and submission Finland has done towards the Saami people and land
- Those who belong to a majority give space to those in the minority in this piece, even though it's uncomfortable and would mean giving up one's own space and status.
- The film also has other than non-disabled performers
- Several non-binary characters
- Different social classes are present
- Multilingualism
- Manners of white agency and its amount in the artistic content will be kept under close inspection

All the mentioned above were assertions in the questionnaire, except for “multilingualism”, that was an addition made based by proposals in the questionnaire’s blank space. In addition “inspecting white agency” was an addition from the theory group, to keep visible the existing structural whiteness in the project.

The genre

- combination of surrealism and realism
- narrative fiction film
- not a parody
- not an educational film
- aims to be entertaining
- genre is drama-comedy
- carnevalistic elements

Likewise, all the abovementioned were assertions made within the questionnaire, based on the discussed wishes of the group during the August workshop.

Articulating the key elements and genre decisions, and locking them by writing them in a written form proved to be very beneficial throughout the process all the way to the editing stage. Regarding the film’s relationship to Finnish national identity, the theory group decided, that the film’s narrative structure should rather show different realities than aim to build unity and conformity. A surrealist and estranging approach to national identity was decided upon regarding national identity. The original open call coming from me was proposing working with Finnish nationalist symbols, but in the August workshop, there was very little resonance and interest in this. The participants were more inspired by the theme of being inside and being outside of a group, the need for a feeling of togetherness and breaking free from identity moulds and stereotypes.

2.3.2 Additional Theoretical Inspirations for Screenwriting

The theory group decided that working with “double consciousness” as a theoretical starting point would be applied to develop the artistic collaboration in the film. Double consciousness has been used to describe how black individuals are compelled to see themselves from the viewpoint of white society while also maintaining their own self-identity (Black, 2007, 393). Similarly, colonized peoples balance with double consciousness and must navigate their own self-identities while being influenced by the perspectives of their colonizers (ibid.). According to Marc Black, double consciousness can be harmful when it’s one-sided and experienced only by those who are oppressed. But when the colonists and whites begin to develop an understanding of how their own identity is perceived from the standpoint of people of colour, or the colonized, a cooperative double consciousness can emerge. This may create critical discussions between different racial groups, enabling meaningful conversations about race, identity, and inequality (ibid.). As “Parvet” consisted of both people of colour and white people, as well as colonized people and colonizers through Finnish and Saami, this idea of multilateral double consciousness was applied in hopes of promoting collaboration.

Another theoretical approach that was added to the “Parvet” concept paper was “haptic visuality”. I have been adapting the use of “haptic visuality” in my previous films and have been greatly inspired by its possibilities (Hauru, 2019). Haptic visuality is a term coined by researcher Laura U. Marks (Simon Fraser University). Marks has researched media art made by artists who represent cultural minorities, often “recent immigrants from Asia, the Caribbean, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, as well as First Nations makers” (Marks, 2000, 1). Marks proposes that haptic visuality is a means to preserve or “smuggle” memories of one’s culture and identity. In colonial history, power has been gained by having control over what stories are told and what imagery is shown. Conquering forces have throughout history destroyed cultural symbols, and literature, and systematically forced changes to cultural narratives. The spoken and the seen are tools for those who hold the power. Concrete objects, visual symbols and narratives can be destroyed easily. But it is more difficult to take away the memories of the body: the sensory aspects, smell and taste. The key audiovisual starting point arising from this theory was to start developing the “Parvet” film’s emotional narratives

through non-visual senses: touch, smell, and taste. I didn't have a systematic plan as a filmmaker on how using haptic visuality could benefit the project, but during the screenwriting process I kept coming back to proposing the performers, could non-visual senses be used to portray the experiences of the characters. Many of the performers were willing to take this approach as part of their characters' narrative.

2.3.3 Inviting a Saami Director

The original call for participants suggested that the film deals with Finnish national identity as part of coloniality. In the August working week, the group addressed, that if the upcoming film actually wants to address coloniality in Finland, more Saami crew members should be invited to the project. The first idea to invite more Saami crew members was to have Saami performers and writers. But, following a decolonial method inspired by Tuck's and Yang's essay (chapter 1.3), I reflected on my own power position as the auteur director and initiated a proposition to the group to give up part of my artistic power and co-direct the film with a Saami director, that would be invited to the project.

Katja Gauriloff joined the project, and through her, Saami artist Ritni Pieski joined. Gauriloff's wish was to collaborate with Pieski performing in the film. Gauriloff was given full artistic freedom on the content and style of creating a fiction narrative around a character acted by Ritni Pieski. It needs to be stated, that Gauriloff and Pieski stepped into the project in Autumn 2023, after many of the productional decisions and the concept had been agreed on. Whereas Gauriloff had artistic freedom, her possibilities in affecting the productional circumstances were small. Optimal would've been, that Gauriloff would've been involved in the project even before the open call. In addition to Gauriloff and Pieski, the Saami perspective was present in the "Parvet" working group through costume designer Helmi Hagelin, who took part in consulting the Saami narrative in the script written by Gauriloff and Pieski. The Saami narrative was consulted by Emmi Nuorgam. Through Gauriloff and Pieski, additional Saami performers were also later invited to act in the scenes.

2.4 Writing Together with the Performers

2.4.1 The Group of 8 Performers

Based on the decisions on the working style and key elements in the film (see chapter 2.3.1), eight performers within the group were selected, who would work intensively developing their fiction character from the beginning of the scriptwriting to the final cut of the film. This sub-group consisted of those performers, who in their application letter had self-identified as black or brown, non-binary, or - due to the collaborative nature of the project with Uniarts - were engaged in their MA studies in acting. The chosen performers, Milla Kuikka, Lasse Viitamäki, Denisa Snyder, Aaron Bojang, Adela Ogunbor, Yolanda Correa Brown, Senna Vodzogbe and Stella Massa could scale how much they wanted to use their power to decide in relation to building a character for the film. In addition to the eight performers, Mikael Bashmakov attended through collaboration with Theatre NEO, and Ritni Pieski attended the process under the direction of Katja Gauriloff. The POC, Saami, non-binary characters, and Bashmakov's character representing people with learning disabilities were set as priorities when developing the narratives. Other developed characters and their narratives were subsidiary to these characters. For example, one of the storylines focuses on a Finnish POC footballer "Valeria" who has a white coach "Jusse". All decisions on the character "Jusse", acted by Milla Kuikka were negotiated with actress Yolanda Correa Brown playing "Valeria".

2.4.2 Screenwriters, Dramaturgs and Script Consultants

The group of 8 performers and the screenwriting process was led by me. I worked as the primary screenwriter in the project, meaning I was the one assembling the produced script material to the large written document, and negotiating with the group between different storylines. I was also the primary film editor of "Parvet". The production dramaturg was Jenni Kaunisto, who also worked as the assistant director in the film. Screenwriters Heta Nuutinen and Krista Yrjölä worked on the process by developing the

storylines in close dialogue with the performers. In addition, director Hauru's assistant Minne Mäki worked in the script department. Hauru, Mäki, Yrjölä, Nuutinen and Kaunisto divided the work regarding different storylines, collaborating with the performers on the writing. Katja Gauriloff was in charge of the screenwriting process regarding the Saami narrative, and Riikka Papunen from Theatre NEO collaborated closely with screenwriter Krista Yrjölä on the script regarding Mikael Bashmakov's character. Some scenes, dialogues and monologues were written by the performers, some by the screenwriter team, and some were made in collaboration with several team members through collective writing, improvisation and group discussions that were then assembled into dialogue by the screenwriters.

In January 2023, additional dramaturgs were hired for the project: Laura Eklund Nhaga to give support to the POC narratives and representation in the film, and August Joensalo to support non-binary trans representation in the film. Additional Saami consultation for the script was given by Emmi Nuorgam, and Helmi Hagelin, who also worked as the costume designer for Parvet.

2.4.3 Shifting Artistic Decision-making Hierarchies in "Parvet"

Two different methods were used to shift the hierarchies in artistic decision-making in "Parvet". The straightforward method was the auteur-director entirely giving up her power to decide. I gave up any artistic authority on the sequences Katja Gauriloff was directing in the film. Screenwriting the Saami narrative to the film was made in close collaboration with the script team and Gauriloff, but Gauriloff had the final say on all artistic content regarding the Saami narrative in the film. The second method was to create space for the minority performers to have control over the narratives and visual style of their characters. For this, the artistic power in decision-making was oscillating between me as the auteur-director and the performers.

Working together with the performers started with a simple question in the August workshop. I asked each performer: "What kind of a character you would like to act in the film". From this starting point, after the 8-person group was formed, we started to

look for resonance and dynamics between the cast and seek narratives for the characters. From theatre NEO Mikael Bashmakov worked remotely with the assistance of Riikka Papunen, and Ritni Pieski adopted the same working style under the direction of Katja Gauriloff. A downfall was, that due to schedule and location limitations, Pieski's and Bashmakov's characters were developed more independently, reducing the possibility of organic resonance with other characters born in the group sessions. On the other hand, throughout the process for example Bashmakov kept being very clear on his wish that his character would not interact with anyone in the film.

As the characters started to take shape, it started to become evident when the performers would take authority over artistic decisions. Many of the narratives in "Parvet" are based on autobiographical experiences, although the film is fiction. It was natural, that when portraying material based on lived experiences, artistic agency was given to the performers, if they wanted. I'm quite sure this kind of collaboration is common in any contemporary fiction film, where the characters are based on the performers' own lives, and where the performers are invited to the process from early on. From recent films for example director Chloé Zhao has collaborated in "The Rider" (2018) closely with non-professional actors from the Lakota Sioux community, including Brady Jandreau, who plays a fictionalized version of himself (Siegel, 2017). And in "A Fantastic Woman" (2018) the collaboration between director Sebastián Lelio and lead actress Daniela Vega resulted in a film that sheds light on the challenges faced by transgender individuals. Lead actress Daniela Vega plays a fiction character, but she became a consultant on the production, discussing closely with the director and some of her personal experiences became a part of the film (Lazic, 2018).

In "Parvet", the challenge was, that instead of one protagonist, there are multiple storylines. Because of this, strict articulation of the hierarchy between the characters was needed. Verbalization was needed not to give false expectations to the crew members. Although performers were given agency on their own character, it didn't mean that their character's experience and point of view would be necessarily in focus in every scene of the film where the character was present. Also, to support the minority narratives, some characters' qualities and behavior needed to be adjusted to fit the plot. For example, I kept reminding the group, that the white actors' characters' were

subordinate to the POC and indigenous characters in the film. Sometimes a white actor might have had a brilliant and imaginative idea for their character, and especially at the beginning of the process it felt harsh to reject their creative ideas. It was exactly here, where I spotted a need to change my working habits. In “Parvet”, in my experience, the group was always giving space for any minority member, who wanted to share their ideas, but this was not necessarily always done by reducing the amount of one’s own creative ideas. When facilitating creative groups, I’ve adopted the idea of emphasizing group cohesion and creative ideas. This habit is probably arising from Finnish art education and group working principles where everyone’s ideas must be heard equally. I’ve also adopted values, that supporting self-esteem and strengthening the group spirit are important whenever doing creative group work. But, during “Parvet” I started to question the approach of giving equal weight to everyone’s creative ideas, especially when the goal was to transfer artistic power to members of marginalized groups. I argue, that sometimes flat hierarchy in creativity is actually discouraging for marginalized group members. As an example, during the August workshop, I was following a brainstorming session of one of the mini-groups during the week. I experienced how some of the participants in the group seemed to withdraw during the brainstorming, while others were getting more and more excited. It made me think that maybe sometimes encouraging creative ideas within diverse groups inadvertently leads to the reinforcement of dominant cultural norms. In the case of my example, there was a newly formed group seeking common areas of interest, and although the participants were respectful of each other, a shift occurred during the brainstorming of artistic content. The group started prioritizing creativity over group dynamics when starting to brainstorm artistic content. There were also other small moments during the screenwriting process, that made me realize how easily marginalized voices might be overshadowed in creative group work by the participants representing a cultural norm. The facilitating method I started to develop, was aiming to create space for the minority participants by transparently reducing the creativity of the privileged. Starting to apply these strict artistic hierarchies was a big change for many of the crew members, especially those who had backgrounds mostly only in independent and free cinema and performance art. It was important to discuss transparently with the group members, that although they were at times restricted from giving artistic input to the project, it wasn’t meant to affect their equal status as group members. I experienced that some group

members had a hard time separating their self-worth from the possibility of creatively expressing themselves.

I need to remind, that while writing this, the project is still in post-production and my thesis is based on personal reflection. How this arrangement was experienced by the group needs further evaluation after the film is finished, and the group members can evaluate how their artistic work is portrayed in the piece. My personal wish is to expand this idea further by digging into pedagogic research and how art educational practices can align with decolonial principles. However, for now, and within the scope and subjectivity of this thesis, I showcase this example to emphasize the interconnectedness of an auteur-director's role with the facilitation of group dynamics.

2.4.4 Challenges in Adapting Earlier Methods

There were risks in adapting the artistic methods that had been using in my previous film, as most of them were based on my personal artistic working style. Firstly, although many of the performers in “Parvet” had excellent creative skills and many were also experienced writers, none of the performers in “Parvet” were professionally trained in filmmaking. Throughout the creative process, I held power through my experience, as I was most experienced in using different audiovisual tools that could be applied to the project. Although the artistic power to decide was given to the performers, many decisions for example on the cinematic style were based on my proposals on the details and techniques. This position of authority through expertise in “Parvet” was not possible to be dismantled, and also gave me a direct possibility for manipulation, as many of the group members also trusted my artistic expertise. In co-directing with Katja Gauriloff a big strength was that we were about at the same stage in our filmmaking career and could discuss in a detailed matter because of the same skill set. But in relation to almost all other minority representatives in the group, I was more experienced in filmmaking. Of course, there was an educational side to creating “Parvet”, for example through camera exercises with the performers, getting to know cinematic possibilities, in the editing room breaking down the images to understand the different elements used in the scene and so on. Still, I was always more powerful in

technical experience when for collaborating with the performers on the audio-visual style.

Secondly, my privileged position as a white, cis-gender, non-disabled individual added another layer. The methods I have been developing during the past years to adapt autobiographical experiences to fiction films had not been tested with minority artists before to this extent. I've been dealing with sensitive personal topics in my films and adapting them to fiction under high pressure, also sometimes being very alone in my artistic process, so I could offer peer support and guidance to the performers. But I've always been collaborating with people who more or less represent the same background as me. In "Parvet" many of the crew members had a lot of minority stress, and some also had traumatic experiences related to their marginalized position, that I do not have experience of. Sure, as a female filmmaker, I do have the experience of what it is trying to desperately articulate the emotional goals of a film to a late-middle-aged male-dominated group of decision-makers, or being ignored in industry events by male industry representatives who communicate only with other males, but this is a very bleak attempt to be set as a comparison to the situation of many of the marginalized crew members represented in "Parvet". As a white woman working in the Finnish film industry in the 21st century, I'm no longer an exception, and there already exists a canon of film work representing me, compared to the very few examples existing in Finnish Cinema on people with learning disabilities, brown or black Finns, Saami, or non-binary trans people in fiction films. Also, as a white woman, I have much greater access to peer support or options for finding professional help understanding my mindscape than the minority representatives.

2.5 Shooting and Editing

2.5.1 Performers Collaborating on the Cinematic Style

The most active parts when performers were directly taking part in the cinematography dealt with the point of view (POV) shots, especially for Senna Vodzobge's character Nora, who in the film experiences the exoticizing gaze of her neighbor Akseli. During the shooting of these POV shots, Vodzobge was collaborating with cinematographers Laura Seppälä and Hannu Käki and directing co-actor Lasse Viitamäki on set. In a later part of the film, another POV shot follows and Vodzobge was directing her co-actress Rosa Honkonen. As another example, close collaboration on cinematography was done regarding Stella Massa's character Aurora, and their fantasy scene dealing with non-binary trans identity. The visual style of the fantasy was built in close collaboration with cinematographer Khánh Ngô.

The set design, costume, makeup and hair design were made in collaboration with the performers, with emphasis being given to the POC characters. The lack of POC representation in Finnish Film and TV is shown directly by the limited expertise available for make-up and hair design for POC performers. Makeup and hair designer Juho Lehiö was hired to "Parvet" through recommendations of the POC team members. As an example, the POC actors in "Parvet" had previous experiences of being expected to do their own hair on set, while the hired hairdresser in the production had done the hair for all the white actors. The hairdressers weren't skilled to deal with the hair texture of the POC performers. Also, if the make-up and camera personnel have been only working with light-skinned performers, this leads to a direct imbalance in how the POC actors are portrayed, as lighting and make-up design needs are different for lighter and darker skin pigmentation. What needs to be reminded is, that white skin as the industry norm is deeply intertwined in the history of technology (Benjamin, 2019). The discriminatory nature of visual technologies is engraved for example in the history of colour film. Kodak as a major film manufacturer favoured whiteness from the 1950s to the 1990s with the "Shirley Cards". Kodak was using a photo of a white woman,

“Shirley”, to standardize the film exposure process. When white skin tone was set as the ideal norm, it led to photos of darker-skinned people being always underexposed. (ibid.)

For the central characters’ costume design, Helmi Hagelin was on board from early on, negotiating the appearance of each character. Some actors collected mood boards on costume design ideas for the characters, and Hagelin developed them further. For some characters, who didn’t have specific requirements, Hagelin was suggesting their own ideas more freely. Hagelin is a fashion designer, and some of their original designs are seen in the film.

The set design followed a similar approach as the costume design. As an example of collaboration with the performers, set designer Una Auri and actors Yolanda Correa Brown and Aaron Bojang collaborated to create a home that belongs to a Finnish POC couple. It was important for performer Correa Brown to portray her character Valeria’s home as a safe haven, and as a warm home of a loving POC couple. The actors took part in designing the set and selecting the props appearing in the scenes. The actors also brought some of their personal belongings to be used as props, such as Aaron Bojang’s instruments.

Continuous negotiation on the artistic hierarchies took place to ensure that the designers would not just end up executing individual wishes from each performer, but that they could give their own artistic input to the project. Instead of collaborating by ending up in an artistic compromise, I preferred options, where a crew member could dictate the decision as much as possible after deciding, that artistic power is given to them on that matter. While facilitating the communication between the performers and heads of departments, I did not witness or hear any major conflicts arising from the artistic decisions during production. My experience was that there was a good balance on how the crew members respected highlighting the agency of the performers yet creating space for artistic work for the heads of departments. It has to be mentioned that the working group of “Parvet” showed very good skills in artistic group work, and navigated through a very challenging process. Most of the group had no prior experience in making a feature film, coming from a background of theatre and performance art. I claim it was the prior group skills and sensitivity that the “Parvet”

crew had gained through previous collaborative theatre and performance art projects, that enabled the experiment of shifting artistic hierarchies to work so well.

2.5.2 Measures for Providing Support for Minorities During the Shooting

This chapter as well as chapter 2.5.3 have been made based on the written “Parvet - code of conduct”, and a discussion with Emilia Haukka on 14 August 2023 at Aamu Film Company Office, Helsinki, and following data protection of personal information of the “Parvet” group members.

In order to enable safer shooting days, a code of conduct was developed for the “Parvet” production. This thesis focuses on creating the artistic concept, but I will briefly go through the developed code of conduct, as it played a central role in how the overall project aimed to benefit marginalized voices. Many of the performers were not only representing minorities, but many were using their personal experiences as sources for their character’s fiction narrative.

The shooting of “Parvet” started by using Aamu Film Company’s occupational safety and health policy, which had been adjusted by the Parvet support team to fit the project as well as possible. Although the original policy tried to take the special needs of the minority participant into account as well as possible, during the first days of shooting it became obvious that more actions were needed, as minority members of the crew did not feel safe. Minority members gave direct feedback that they had encountered microaggressions and misgendering during the working days. Also, other crew members, who had witnessed these situations or heard of them, were very worried. A protocol that was named “the code of conduct” was designed to create a step-by-step clear and detailed procedure in case of misconduct during production. The design of the protocol was led by producer Emilia Haukka.

The protocol was designed to foster a safer working environment and to provide guidance on appropriate conduct and actions in the event of errors, violations, or

inappropriate behavior during shooting or working days, for example when encountering racism. The code of conduct was in written form, and in addition to providing a procedure on how to handle misconduct on set, it aimed to enable the whole crew to deal with difficult subjects, themes, and scenes in the film, and to ensure that support was available to do so.

The events in the script are not only personal but deal with difficult and sometimes triggering topics such as governmental oppression of the Saami by the Finnish state, racism and misgendering. To help the whole crew deal with the difficult subjects in the film, the workflow of each shooting day was moderated in the following way:

At the beginning of each day, there was a 30-minute briefing about the day's shoot, covering safer space guidelines and introduction of individuals' names and pronouns. The day's scenes' content, themes, and considerations for personal experiences were discussed. Information about the harassment contact person and psychological support person was shared with the group.

During shooting days one of the psychologists, or another support team member of the project was present. The person was selected depending on the needs of the performers of each working day.

At the end of each shooting day, a collective 30-minute debriefing session was held, where experiences and successes of the day were shared. Options for further unpacking thoughts and feelings were provided, along with contact information for support. Post-shooting psychological individual debriefing was available. In addition, the support team was available to the crew members throughout production to communicate concerns related to content, workflow, or personal feelings. The production had minority representatives from various backgrounds, and while a standardized safety template was established, the core approach to providing support revolved around ongoing dialogue to address and meet individual support needs.

2.5.3 Unsafety in the Production

Although, from the beginning of the project, the production wanted to ensure a safe working environment for the marginalized crew members, the production of “Parvet” failed to provide a safe working environment for the minority crew members, especially in the beginning of the shooting process before the code of conduct was developed. Non-binary people in the crew experienced misgendering during the production. The POC and Saami performers experienced microaggressions and exoticization during the production. Misgendering, microaggressions and exoticization were done by fellow crew members and bypassers while shooting the film in public spaces. In addition, the POC members experienced that their feedback on feeling unsafe during the production was not taken as seriously as the feedback of white minority crew members who felt unsafe. Despite all efforts, the project did not escape the general systemic racism in Finland. As the project was specifically focusing on benefiting marginalized people in Finland, this was a big disappointment to the crew members. My personal reflection on this is that the “Parvet” team, me included, was putting too much responsibility on the hired psychologists and the developed support team, an initiative that was the first ever demo in any Finnish Film production. In hindsight, the concept of the support team and offering psychosocial support to the crew members should’ve started as a light demo, and more thorough discussions should’ve been had at the beginning of the project with the whole crew about the role and work amount of the support team. Also, a thorough and realistic evaluation of safety risks should’ve been done at an early stage of the production.

2.5.4 Inspirations from the Demo Event

In the demo event in February, the minority performers brought up the failures of the production in front of the audience. The event was a showcase enabling the audience to see inside the production while in the middle of shooting. Demo scenes of the film were shown, and the minority crew members were talking on stage honestly about their experiences in the production. For example, Yolanda Correa Brown wrote and performed a monologue reflecting on her mixed feelings about getting involved in the

“Parvet” project as POC, and at whose expense the changes in fostering diversity in the film industry are being made (Semeri and Virtanen, 2022). This monologue was adapted in the final film for Correa Brown’s fictional character Valeria, who has mixed feelings about getting selected to be the front figure for a football campaign led by white decision-makers, who are promoting the sport to young people in Helsinki.

There were also examples where events in script were intersecting with reality. Denisa Snyder portrays the character Anna, who is in “Parvet” the leader of a choir. In one scene of the film, the group assumes that the only POC member of the choir, Selma, played by Adela Ogunbor, will do a rap solo. Selma doesn’t even know how to rap. Anna, as the leader of the choir, avoids making visible the racist stereotyping that is happening in the group and tries to find a way out by pleasing everyone. In some of the takes, Snyder was improvising and used lines that the “Parvet” crew recognized similar to what had been used in earlier group discussions during the process. While Snyder was making comedy on avoiding conflict and wanting to maintain harmony, the group members, me including, recognized that this strategy had been present in earlier discussions within the “Parvet” group. Adela Ogunbor addressed the topic of microaggressions during the demo event. Ogunbor was experiencing similar microaggression during the shooting days in the production as her character in the fictional scenes. Some spectators were left puzzled after the demo event, as it didn’t provide detailed information about the mistreatment happening on set, and details of people involved in the situations. Naturally, whereas the audience did get to see quite directly inside the process, and the emotions of the performers, the group and the event respected privacy protection.

My experience of the demo event reception was that some of the spectators had a hard time coping with the fact that errors in the production were shown so transparently in front of an audience. The audience got to directly see the painful parts of an ongoing art project. Compared to any previous event or screening I’ve been a part of, many friends and colleagues left the screening extremely quickly without saying a word. I sensed that many of my friends were very delicate in coming back to discuss the event with me. Regarding my friends, I interpreted their behavior as having witnessed me failing as the project initiator, and either being disappointed or being very careful in not hurting me.

For me, showcasing the production mistakes and amplifying the voices of marginalized group members aligned with my commitment to the project's goals. The reactions of my friends made me wonder, was there a hidden expectation from the audience to witness a victory narrative? Is it yet another example of structural whiteness? When a white leader makes an anti-racist initiative, the expectation is to highlight the positive outcomes and be able to celebrate the white leader. It is natural that anti-racist initiatives are built around a positive message giving inspiration and motivation, but it would've been in contradiction to the selected approach in "Parvet", if the experiences of the minority participants had been silenced to highlight the constructive outcomes of the project.

I recognize the same pressure of a victory narrative when writing this thesis. There is a part of me that would like to deliver only successful examples that would encourage other art projects aiming to benefit the marginalized. However, building a victory narrative would ignore the experiences of the minority artists in the project, and most likely lead to tokenism and dismissal, downplaying the experiences of the marginalized in the "Parvet" group.

The demo event and the reaction of the audience I experienced were very valuable for the upcoming wider distribution of the "Parvet" film, and how to take the expectations of the audience into account. Whereas the finished "Parvet" film will deliver one message as an art piece, the exceptional production style and concept will surely raise interest in the film industry. Most likely the project will be presented as a case study in industry events and at schools. How to display the positive outcomes of the project but not fall into a victory narrative? Or have I actually engraved the victory narrative when laying out the primary aim at the beginning of the project? One could interpret that when putting out the open call, I was announcing my personal quest to "benefit the marginalized". For this quest, the possible outcomes were set as I laid my research questions. I would either succeed or fail. Following this train of thought, does this example show anything more than structural whiteness and individual-centered thinking existing in how I position myself in artistic research? Is my foundational personal motivation to do this project rooted in a white savior fantasy? Well, most likely yes. At

present, the best I can do is to engage with it, like in all other areas of the project where structural whiteness can't be overcome.

2.5.5 Performers in the Editing Room

The editing phase of the final film took place during April-September 2023. Jussi Sandhu worked as the editor of the film and edited all the materials for the demo event in February. From April onwards, I continued Sandhu's work as the editor. All eight performers who had been developing their characters since 2022 took part in the editing process as well as performers Mikael Bashmakov and Ritni Pieski. In the first stage, I prepared a raw edit, and individual meetings with each 8 performers were held. In the first meeting, with each performer, we watched the raw materials of the performers' own scenes, as well as material from the other storylines in the film. The tone, further development of the scenes, writing voiceovers, sound design possibilities, selecting takes and the content were discussed in the meeting.

In a second meeting, the performers were invited to a screening of the first raw cut version of the whole film. Also, the script team, the music team and the sound designer were invited to this event. Due to scheduling issues, Katja Gauriloff, performer Ritni Pieski, Theatre Neo's Riikka Papunen and performer Mikael Bashmakov were met separately. In the second meeting, the focus was on starting to look into the overall cinematic style of the piece, and how the different storylines actually resonate with each other. When writing this thesis, this screening has just happened, and further steps in the editing are yet to come.

My motivation to invite the performers to take part in the editing phase rose from my experiences working as an editor in films where I'd been working simultaneously as a screenwriter, actress, and editor, such as "Metatitanic" (2018) and "Fucking with Nobody" (2020). In these films, my realization as an editor was, that being able to directly negotiate with the embodied experience as an actress significantly helped the editing process. I believe the intentions in camera acting can be greatly amplified if the editor and the performer collaborate closely. My most important question for the

performers in the editing room was, does the audiovisual portrayal support the original intention of the performer?

I've encountered a common assumption, that performers are not good collaborators in the editing stage as they focus only on themselves and watch the material subjectively. After "Parvet" I disagree with this assumption. My own experience is that during the first round of seeing any film work where I am acting, the focus is on observing my own work, and only in the second round I can more easily focus on the whole piece. This is also what I've been often discussing with other crew members - the cinematographer first watches their work, the set designer theirs - and so on. But it is possible to switch from this viewing approach to another. I think it's downgrading the performers by claiming that they could not change their point of view on how they observe the raw material. Switching between observing one's personal input and understanding its role within the whole, is a vital and expected tool for any crew member in a collaborative art project. During "Parvet" I started to think, about how excluding the performers in the creative processes in filmmaking might originate from the way film education in Finland is arranged. Whereas in the Theatre Academy, the actors and the designers study together, in Aalto University's ELO Film School the collaborativeness excludes performers as artistic collaborators, because actors do not study together with the film students. The general production style arising from film school is considering actors external to the artistic team.

3. Conclusions and Following Steps

This thesis was my personal reflection on the development of the dramaturgical concept for the feature film “Parvet”, and was written while the film was still in post-production. Evaluation of whether the developed artistic working methods have been advantageous for marginalized groups will require consideration once the production is over and the film has been exposed to the audience. Whereas I’ve been focusing on the artistic content, I hope this thesis can shed light on how entangled the artistic work and the productional structures are in making dramaturgy. Many of the artistic working methods used in Parvet arose from my former experiences in filmmaking and were developed further with inspiration from decolonial theories. A continuous dialogue with the minority members and several additional experts in the working group and their input to the project enabled the formation of the concept.

The key outcomes in creating the concept for “Parvet” were:

- 1) When building diversity to an art project led by a privileged, white, cis-gender, non-disabled auteur-director, the approach should involve more than just forming a diverse and inclusive team around an already determined production structure and script outline. Instead, marginalized crew members should be actively engaged from the inception of the project, being able to influence both its content and the working methodology from scratch.
- 2) The “Parvet” project was shifting hierarchies in artistic decision-making from the auteur-director to the performers, to create an agency for minority representatives throughout pre-production, on set, and in post-production. The epiphany was, that instead of pursuing flat hierarchies, a more effective approach was to create room for minorities by setting up a well-defined hierarchy that deliberately reduced the creative influence of the privileged. For the director facilitating the artistic process, it was important to keep verbalizing, who was in charge of each artistic

decision, whose narrative was in focus, and if needed, prevent artistic input of the privileged.

- 3) The project facilitation encouraged continuous feedback from the minority representatives and committed input from them was key to enable the project in the first place. In addition, several crew members were assisting the creation by providing their expertise and support regarding the marginalized in the project. Discussions on the artistic content and representation were held throughout the process. Yet, even though the production was hiring external support personnel to avoid putting too much responsibility on the marginalized crew members, many of them ended up doing unpaid and invisible work by taking responsibility for developing safer working conditions, providing care for fellow crew members, and pointing out potential pitfalls in the project. Although the project tried to put emphasis in planning the productional circumstances, even more thorough pre-planning and risk-analysis would've been needed.

- 4) Starting from framing the open call, "Parvet" was not able to overcome structural whiteness in the Finnish film industry, but tried to find ways to engage with it throughout the process. What was personally important to me, was to challenge my comfort zone in my power position, and face mistakes in my own behavior and thinking. When later distributing the film and sharing the results of the project with the public, the challenge will be in how to contribute to ongoing and continuous anti-racist work in Finland constructively, share inspiration, but not fall into victory narratives. Whereas the fiction film will deliver one message, most likely bigger impact on the industry will be on how the process and working methods will be shared and discussed with the industry and on media.

One of the key productional outcomes in "Parvet" which I hope will continue to be developed further in the film industry, is using psychosocial support when dealing with difficult topics in fiction film projects. In the film industry, a stunt coordinator

guarantees the physical safety of the performers and crew members during action scenes, and the newly established working role of intimacy coordinators is set to assure the safety of the performers while shooting intimate content, such as sex scenes. Following the development to take physical and mental safety into account on set, I find it a natural continuum that in the future mental support will be available to the crew when dealing with heavy topics. It was only after the #MeToo movement in 2017 that the role of an intimacy coordinator began to take shape, highlighting that the film industry is still in its infancy regarding safety protocols on set. Also, the concept of safety during action scenes has come a long way since the early days of cinema. For example, real bullets were occasionally used in the 1920s–1930’s to create authenticity in films with gun shots, leading to several injuries on film sets (Gunning, 1986).

During “Parvet” I was reflecting on the past films where I’ve used heavy personal material as the base for my fiction films. I realized the products would’ve surely been less burdening, if I could’ve reflected some of the heavy shooting days with a professional like it was now tested in Parvet. For me, debriefing of the mental burden of the shooting day happens generally outside working hours with my closest co-workers or close friends. I assume that this is the case for most of my colleagues. In addition, mental support lies most likely heavily in the hands of spouses of the filmmakers, who are doing this work for free and recognized usually only during award speeches.

When evaluating minimizing tokenism in the “Parvet” project, there is still a lot that needs to be taken into consideration in the post-production, distribution, and marketing of the film, as tokenizing the marginalized can manifest in various ways throughout a film project. The “Parvet” project aimed to minimize tokenism by collaborating closely with the selected minority performers from scratch, aiming to build well-developed storylines and meaningful interactions based on the performers' wishes. In addition to this, artistic decision-making power was shifted to the performers in for example costume, makeup, and hair design, set design, cinematography, and directing. Additionally, the performers were involved in the post-production all the way to the final cut. It might be that artistically, the minority participants in the project won’t personally feel tokenized on how their experiences were adapted to fiction narratives in the film as the film is finished. However, most of the performers in the film are still

very early phase of their filmmaking careers. The power imbalance exists through my experience, and there is a chance, that for example in the editing stage, I will use techniques and symbolism, that the performers are not able to see, but will paint representations and meanings that are readable to experiences cinephiles, but stay invisible to the performers themselves. Although the process has been very communicative, there is no way every nuance in the film edit could be verbalized and explained. In addition, tokenism can happen through the upcoming marketing and distribution of the film. For example, the minority aspects of the film's content can be utilized solely for promotional purposes, exoticizing the characters, without engaging in efforts to foster inclusivity. The distribution of the film may also easily be downplaying or ignoring the contributions of individuals from marginalized backgrounds, failing to credit and acknowledge their contributions, expertise, or perspectives. How to ensure that the distribution process of the film won't turn into virtue signalling by putting me as the initiator and an auteur-director in the limelight? The European Arthouse film industry is very much built around marketing and discussing the film through the auteur-director's vision. What can be done to acknowledge the collaborative nature of the project and the artistic work done by the collective and gear away from the individual-focused culture? At the moment I believe this can be achieved only through direct dialogue with any distributing collaborator in the project: the press, editors writing on the film, cinemas and Yle representatives distributing the film on TV. My current suggestion is, that like in all other stages of the project, questions on marketing and distribution should be negotiated together with the crew members and if needed, additional minority representatives and experts. I claim there is not a single area in the Finnish Film Industry, that is not currently influenced by structural whiteness.

And finally, despite all actions, eventually, the crew will have no control over how the audience will perceive and experience the film. Regardless of what actions would be applied to the distribution process, our group can't control the reception of the "Parvet" film and the project outcomes.

I hope that the initiatives in this thesis will aid future projects aiming to benefit marginalized voices in Finnish cinema and TV and contribute to developing a more inclusive and respectful film industry. I will personally continue developing the

collaborative methodology I have presented in this thesis and stay very thankful to the committed crew members in the “Parvet” project, as well Nora Rinne, Otso Huopaniemi, Katalin Trencsényi and Hanna Järvinen from Uniarts, and Christy Poinsettia Ma, Vera Boitcova and Tellervo Kalleinen, and everyone who helped and supported me with writing this thesis. The paradox will remain regarding my white, cis-gendered, non-disabled agency as I will continue to engage with these topics. But I stick to my point of view, that especially those in positions of power and privilege should actively take part in changing the rooted patterns of systemic inequalities.

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