

RACIST DISCOURSE IN ANONYMOUS ONLINE READER COMMENTS

Master's thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract Rasismi on erittäin mukautumiskykyinen ideologia, jonka perustana on käsitys ihmisten ihonväriin perustuvasta erilaisuudesta ja hierarkiasta. Rasismin on mahdollista sopeutua erilaisiin toiminta- ja kommunikaatioympäristöihin siten, että sen havainnoiminen ja vastustaminen on ongelmallista. Verkkojulkaisujen kommenttiosiot ovat juuri tämänkaltaisia ympäristöjä, mutta niiden kautta tuotettu ja levitetty rasistinen diskurssi ei todellakaan ole uusi ilmiö, vaan sitä on havaittu jo vuosituhatien alussa. 2000-luvun kasvava maahanmuuttokriittisyys on tarjonnut tutkijoille mahdollisuuden tarkastella ulkoista uhkaa käsitteleviä rasistisia diskursseja, kun taas sisäisen valtakunnallisen uhan diskurssit ovat jääneet taka-alalle. Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on osoittaa, että internetin tarjoamat anonyymit vuorovaikutuskanavat ovat potentiaalisia ympäristöjä rasististen diskurssien tuottamiselle. Tutkimuksen aineisto kerättiin <i>The Washington Postin</i> nettisivuilta, yhden elokuussa 2017 julkaistun, Charlottesvillen mielenosoitusta käsitelleen artikkelin kommenttikentästä. Yhdistämällä analyysissä sekä määrällisiä että laadullisia menetelmiä, tämä tutkimus tarjoaa yhtäaikaaisesti laajan kuvan kohteena olleen kommenttikentän rasistisista kommentteista kuin myös mahdollistaa yksityiskohtaisen tarkastelun diskurssianalyysiin valitusta kommentista. Yhteensä yli 3300 tarkastellusta kommentista 242 kommentissa (7,2%) tuotettiin rasistisia diskursseja. Laadulliseen analyysin kohteeksi valikoitui rasistinen uhkadiskurssi, jonka avulla kommentoijat yrittivät muodostaa kuvan rodullistetusta toisesta, joka muodostaa uhan valkoiselle amerikkalaisväestölle. Diskurssianalyysi johti merkittävään havaintoon siitä, että tarkasteltuun uhkadiskurssiin kuului olennaisena osana ulkopuolisen tahon syyllistäminen rodullistetusta uhasta. Tämä johtopäätös tukee aiempaa tutkimusta rasistisen uhkadiskurssin strategioista. Rasistiset kommentoijat myös kertosivat aktiivisesti Charlottesvillen mielenosoituksen tapahtumia syyttäen Yhdysvaltain liberaalimediaa kokonaiskuvan vääristämisestä. Syytösten suuntaaminen muihin kuin mielenosoitukseen osallistuneihin tahoihin mahdollisti rasistisen diskurssin tuottamisen ilman, että kommentoijaa välttämättä syytettiin rasismista. Huolestuneen kansalaisen äänen omaksuminen toimi siis tehokkaana suojana syytöksiä vastaan. Jatkotutkimuksen kannalta olisi tärkeää selvittää, kuinka poliittisesti ja ideologisesti vastakkaisten ryhmien konflikteja muotoillaan diskursiivisesti uudelleen rasistisen diskurssin hyödyksi.	
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1 INTRODUCTION

On 11 August, 2017, a group of white supremacist protesters marched through the campus of University of Virginia in Charlottesville, the U.S., towards Emancipation Park and the statue of Confederate commander Robert E. Lee. This was the prelude to the 'Unite the Right' rally, which escalated the following day as the alt-right group clashed with the counter-protesters. As a result of the rally three people were killed; one person was killed when she was hit by a car that was driven by a far-right protester and two police officers were killed in a helicopter crash on their way to the rally site (Heim et al. 2017; Weiner 2017).

Due to the fact that Robert E. Lee had been the commander of the pro-slavery Confederate army, and the involvement of various alt-right groups, already the starting points of the rally had a particularly racist undertone. However, its aftermath turned into a shower of two-sided racist accusations targeting anyone with even the slightest connection to the rally. The media coverage on the Charlottesville rally and various social media platforms were quickly harnessed as springboards for the production and circulation of racist discourse. Liberal media blamed the alt-right protesters for unnecessary violence and critically questioned President Trump for his unusual silence; on the other hand, these accusations were retaliated by blaming Barack Obama, the counter-protesters and the liberal media. These latter accusations and the discourse within which they were incorporated caught my attention, because they highlighted the racial dichotomy between the opposing sides of the rally.

The objective of the present study is to identify and critically analyze racist discourse in the reader comments written on the website of *The Washington Post*. I aim to discover what kind of racist discourse can actually be detected on a supposedly moderated social media platform. The analysis will focus on eight anonymous comments that I collected from the reader comment section of the newspaper's online version. These comments represent the discursive strategy of outsourcing the blame for the racialized threat, which I found to characterize the racist threat discourse in the present data. Moreover, the blame was targeted at Barack Obama, the Democratic Party, the liberal media and Black Lives Matter, who, in fact, the commenters often perceived synonymous with black people. Consequently, the data and approach that were chosen for the present study involve methodologically problematic aspects, such as taking into consideration the effect of the commenters' anonymity, in addition to further protecting it, and the moderation policies of the discussion platform. I will outline and discuss the relevance and importance of these issues before the analysis.

Racism and its different manifestations have received growing attention among researchers for over 50 years. The relatively short history of research on racism has witnessed the field change and endeavoring to become more uniform, but this process is still evolving. Because of the state of flux in which both racism and its research are, the field has sometimes been considered to be rather extensive and somewhat scattered (Bowser 2017). The 1990s introduced online interaction into the framework and with concepts such as social media and anonymous interaction, racist ideologies have discovered more ways to reproduce than ever before. Thus the field of cyber-racism has received increasingly more attention and significance (Bliuc et al. 2018: 75).

Within the broad field of linguistics, racism has been studied in many contexts. Most recently, a particular focus has been on, for instance, different social environments and institutions, such as universities, schools and workplaces, in addition to topics such as online communities, racist humor and hate speech (e.g. Billig 2001; Ernst et al. 2017; Weaver 2011). The way in which language works as a medium for racism has interested researchers already in the 20th century, covering topics such as mock Ebonics, online racism and institutional racism. However, the shift from the earliest studies to the ones conducted in the last 10 years has seen a transition away from descriptive methods to more in-depth analyses of the social functions of racist discourse.

The present study does not attempt to fill a specific gap in the field of cyber-racism per se, because in the case of such a fluid phenomenon, the gaps are numerous and continuously multiplying as new manifestations of racism are found. Instead, the justification behind the present study stems from the need for a versatile examination of different online racist practices as they emerge. The development and increasing accessibility of various forms of online interaction have made it paramount to examine which of these forms are exploited in the circulation of racist discourse. The present study therefore concentrates on one specific platform of online interaction, the reader comment section of an online newspaper. In previous research, this platform has received little attention as far as racist practices are concerned. This lack of attention is somewhat curious even though reader comment sections are some of the oldest forms of online interaction. Accordingly, the objective of the present study is to demonstrate its status as an influential platform for the dissemination of and debates on racist discourse (Erjavec and Kovačič 2012: 900; Faulkner and Bliuc 2016: 2547; Hughey and Daniels 2013: 333).

After this introductory chapter, I will present and discuss the theoretical framework of the present study. The following section will begin with an outline of its theoretical foundation formed by discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis. After this, in Chapter 3, I will move to the presentation of the key focus of my study by discussing the history of the concept of race as well as the manifestations of racist practices especially in the geographical context of the U.S. This will be followed by a discussion in which all these ideas are pulled together in Chapters 4 and 5 that include a theorization and an account of research on racist discourse. Chapter 6 introduces the set-up of the present study, spelling out the data, aims and research questions of my study. In the set-up section I will also explain the processes behind the data collection and selection which demanded specific attention towards preserving and protecting the commenter's anonymity. Finally, Chapter 8 describes the outcomes my detailed analysis of the racist comments, followed by Chapter 9, in which I will discuss and elaborate on the most important findings.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis is not synonymous with the analysis of text. Text, of course is in a significant role in discourse analysis, but it alone does not constitute what discourse is and what it does. Fairclough (1992: 29) has developed the idea of the multileveled structure of discourse, consisting of the levels of text, discursive practice and social practice, as well as, as a later revision of his model, of the role of discourse in defining and “living” social structures (Fairclough 2003: 3). This complex relationship between language, discourse and social action gives a fruitful starting point for the present study in which I will analyze racist language use and racist discourse as social action and a part of a particularly powerful and relevant meaning-making process. This means that in this study language is not conceptualized as the product of social action, but instead as the vehicle. Consequently, any discourse analysis needs to go beyond describing and explaining language use to also interpreting what actually is the message. This can only be achieved through a rigorous process of observing and interpreting, but the possibility of interpretation also highlights the researcher’s increasing liability for her/his audience to avoid exaggeration (van Dijk 1993: 94). Interpretation not only provides room for the researcher’s subjective and systematic reading of her/his data, but also demands transparency of the analysis process. Accordingly, interpretations have to be justified in writing.

When the object of analysis is discourse, the researcher has to take into consideration not only language but also what is actually done with it. As Blommaert (2005: 2) aptly states, discourse can be defined as “language-in-action” or “language-in-use”. Both of these definitions imply that language needs to be studied as a process, or as a part of the process of making meaning, instead of isolating language from its contextual, cultural or historical dimensions. Already over 10 years ago, Blommaert argued for the need to analyze discourse critically in order to discover its role and influence in the production of inequality (Blommaert 2005: 233). Furthermore, quite recently it has been argued by Fairclough (2017: 14) that by simply analyzing language and discourse separately, we cannot explain the power relations and mechanisms behind social inequality. However, any discourse’s status as only a semiotic tool in manifesting social representations and ideas should not be trivialized. Rather its importance as a component in the relationship between social realities and meaning-making processes should be highlighted. As far as my study is concerned, this means that in order for

me to productively analyze the racist discourse produced in the comment section, I have to take into consideration the significance of the deeply embedded power structures affecting the U.S. society. I have dedicated Chapter 3 especially for the purpose of explaining and providing the relevant social background for my study.

2.2 Critical discourse analysis of racism

From its beginnings, the field of critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been centered around the issue of power relations and the role of discourse in creating those power relations (Flowerdew 2008: 195). For instance, the production and circulation of power inequalities has been particularly underlined in recent studies (Fairclough 2017). Moreover, language is a powerful tool for producing, reproducing and circulating discourses of inequality. In addition to treating discourse as the medium that channels and distributes power, ideological motivations have been at the center of the early theorization of CDA. Within few years Fairclough (1992) developed his theory of CDA further by focusing, for example, on the operationalization and recontextualization of discourse for the purposes of neoliberal capitalism. In short, at this stage CDA scholars were interested in topics such as media discourse and language use in different social institutions, but general emphasis was given to power relations and social hierarchy which had been previously given only little attention by sociolinguists (Blommaert 2005: 22-24; Wodak 2001: 5).

Within the field of CDA, racism has received attention from very early on (Blommaert 2005: 26). The research on racist practices has included interdisciplinary contexts and themes such as politics, white supremacy and education (e.g. Daniels 2009; Orozco 2012; Werbner and Modood 2015). More recently, immigration and particularly the attitudinal developments concerning immigrated people have gained more visibility (Bloch 2016; Orrù 2014). Racism within the context of discrimination has been a central area of interest for the Discourse-Historical Approach in Europe (Reisigl 2017: 44). The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) first saw the light of day in the late 1980s as a result of an interdisciplinary research project analyzing the Austrian presidential candidate Kurt Waldheim's anti-Semitic background and discursive output in their historical context (Wodak 1990; Wodak and Reisigl 1999). Since then, multiple research projects have been conducted where various scholars of for instance linguistics and history have collaborated in order to widen the contextual level of their analysis (e.g. Waterton and Wilson 2009).

For instance, Waterton and Wilson (2009) examined in their study the effect of the slave trade on the abolition discourse in Britain. Their study had considerable interdisciplinary potential in combining critical discourse analysis with the historical context of the slave trade. As a result, they were able to link the long history of slavery to the contemporary discussions on multiculturalism in Britain. In a similar vein, for the purposes of the present study, the DHA is utilized as a means for contextualizing the Charlottesville rally by taking into consideration two historically important developments: the black struggles in the U.S. since the era of slavery, and, the neo-Nazi movement.

In critical research, it is crucial to acknowledge the context of discourse. Since the focus in CDA is on political and social issues, it would be futile to analyze language in any form or on any level in isolation from its cultural and historical context (Khosravini and Unger 2016: 208; van Dijk 2015). However, “context” as a term is not one-dimensional, nor as simple as it initially might seem. This quality is highlighted by Reisigl (2017: 53) who presents notes that there are, in fact, four different dimensions of context, which should all be taken into consideration in the analysis of discourse. The first dimension is the co-text and co-discourse of the produced language. The analysis of this dimension should focus on for example presuppositions and implications. The second contextual dimension examines how different discursive levels, from an utterance to discourse, are textually and discursively interlinked. The third dimension takes a step away from looking at discourse from a linguistic perspective towards the analysis of the role of broader context-specific factors and frames and their relationship with discourse. This move shifts factors such as the producers of discourse - with all their intersecting personal qualities and identities - and the overall discursive setting into the spotlight. In the fourth and final dimension, the sociopolitical and historical contexts are added to the analysis. Consequently, the fourth dimension with the historical alignment is of special interest for the DHA.

As a sub-field of the larger field of Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), the DHA also means that I, the researcher, need to bring forward my political standpoint and commit myself to conducting critical research while evaluating, and, if necessary, challenging the boundaries set by established practices. Moreover, context-dependency, interdiscursivity as well as intertextuality are key theoretical factors of the DHA, but what makes it distinctive from other CDS approaches and therefore valuable for the present study is its interest in and emphasis on the historical context of the discourse phenomena it focuses on. This perspective is extremely relevant for the present study, since its context is inextricably linked to the historical and

sociopolitical developments in the U.S., such as the abolition of slavery, Jim Crow legislation, the Civil War and the civil rights movement. Racism has evolved side by side with all of these phases and continues to affect the U.S. society today and tomorrow. This temporal and historical connection mandates that contemporary racist practices are studied as a part of a continuum rather than as isolated events (Stewart and Dixon 2010: 143). The specific contextual and historical aspects relevant for the present study will be discussed in more detail below.

Following its historical development, it seems unlikely that racism is ever going to disappear. Nevertheless, it can be – and has been - challenged. I argue that exactly this task should be one of the motivations behind research on racism. Moreover, it is important to ensure that not only researchers but also the general public are sensitized to the different manifestations of racism. Echoing Fairclough (2003: 15), I do not believe that absolutely objective research can ever be conducted and thus I acknowledge that my analysis is by necessity partial and affected by subjectivity. Every researcher has a unique set of values and morale, which unavoidably influence different choices made in the research process. Already the decision about the theme for research is guided by the researcher's interest and motivation. However, I argue that my subjectivity does not invalidate the present study by any means, but rather emphasizes my motivation for participating in the revealing of the reproduction of social inequality.

I conduct the present study from an antiracist standpoint, but I find it necessary to note that I do not have a particularly advantageous epistemological position, since I am a privileged white European and have only witnessed racism, but have not personally experienced it (at least not that I have been aware of it). Thus I do not have an insider perspective, which has been argued to be advantageous for the analysis of discriminative practices (Chavez 2008; Hill 2008: 181). However, I was raised to treat everyone equally as well as to seek to understand why someone's skin color may have a negative effect on their lives. Later, as a part of my education I have studied the structural complexity of racism and racial discrimination. Consequently, I wish to advocate that also an outsider's perspective can function as a complementary source of insight into the complex power relations that both produce racism and, in turn, are maintained by racist practices. This entire process is at heart social and therefore everyone experiences it differently, depending on their standpoint. Taking both insiders' and outsiders' observations into account has the most potential to expose the multifaceted nature of racism.

For the present study, CDA as a perspective is very suitable because of its interdisciplinary potential. More specifically, this means that I will incorporate the analysis of online communication and racist discourse with a raciolinguistic approach. Together these three principles provide me with a set of important analytical tools that will both guide and enable the critical discourse analysis of racist online comments. In the following sections, I am going to present these three fields of study, the analysis of online communication, the analysis of racist discourse and raciolinguistics, and explain their relevance for the upcoming analysis. I will begin this mission with a discussion about the key concepts which define and modify racist language use; first, I will outline the development of the concepts of race and racism.

3 RACE AND RACISM

In the contemporary world there is only one human race. The concept of the multiple races is, in contrast, the product of centuries of racialization. Accordingly, there continues to exist two main ways of defining and understanding race, biological and social (Crump 2014: 210-211; Hill 2008: 6). Even though it has been scientifically proven that all humans belong to the same categorical racial group, the custom of viewing different people as belonging to different races is far from disappearing (Hall 2008: 42; Wodak and Reisigl 1999: 176). One reason for this might be that categorizing people with different skin color into different races is an age-old practice. Centuries of skin color-based categorization – racialization – has led to the establishment of a relatively unchallenged view that there are multiple races. This way of dividing people into different, biologically based races was used in the U.S. in the 17th and 18th centuries to the advantage of the legitimization of the enslavement of millions of people who were forcibly shipped from Africa (James 2008: 33). As another outcome, different skin colors became to be associated with other, often negative meanings, which, in time, begun to stereotypically characterize “races” other than the prestigious ones.

The second main conceptualization of race, race as a social construct, does not stand for the total abandonment of the biological theorization of race. Instead, the concepts of biological and social racism are inherently intertwined (James 2008: 34). As Crump (2014: 210-211) explains, it is now understood that the persistent influence of biological racism has resulted in the multileveled entrenchment of racist practices all over the American society. Thus it is important not to overlook the influence of race in studies of human relationships and social life. This observation stems from the oversimplified notion that since different human races do not exist, it does not make sense to spend resources on researching the effect of race. In contrast, Guillem (2017: 361) points out that the Western academic and non-academic efforts to replace race with other terms such as diversity and multiculturalism have actually had the opposite effect of emphasizing the division based on different skin colors. Furthermore, race should always be critically analyzed in relation to other social conceptualizations of people, instead of excluding it or erasing its effect for the sake of political correctness.

Both of these two understandings of race are inextricably linked to racism and, consequently, different ways of dealing with racism. Research has established that there are different forms and manifestations of racism, instead of only one static and unchangeable form. Racism has been theorized differently in different eras, which underlines its changing nature and the

constant need for more research. Before moving on to a more in-depth discussion of racism, an important point should be made. This is that I want to underline the fact that racism is not only an American problem, even though my study focusses on the U.S. Racist practices have been recorded and studied in connection to various other geographical contexts such as in Europe, Asia, Australia and Africa and from both local and global perspectives (e.g. Conradie and Brokensha 2016; Faulkner and Bliuc 2016; Flowerdew et al. 2002; Wodak 1990). However, the reason for focusing on online racist discourse in the context of the U.S. in this study is two-fold. First, the current political climate in the U.S. and notably the rhetorical delivery of President Trump have caught the attention of various scholars and emphasized the need for more thorough examination of racist practices in the U.S. on every societal level. Second, the fact that people are still getting killed in racially motivated situations highlights the need for a critical examination of the so-called post-racial America (Dukes and Gaither 2017).

3.1 The sensitization to the concept of racism

Racism is a powerful ideology and a set of practices that are produced, reproduced and circulated in order to create and maintain a hierarchy among people with different skin color (Wodak and Reisigl 1999). In the specific context of the U.S., the mainstream media has framed racism not only as a problem affecting the relationships between the white majority population and minorities, but also the relationships among different minorities (Hill 2008: 7-8, 23). Accordingly, in the U.S., even though racism has often been associated in a rather straight-forward manner with the horrible and indefensible enslavement of African people, outrageous Jim Crow laws and the atrocious Ku Klux Klan, it has not been eradicated alongside its inglorious history. In addition, it has been fortunately understood that not only black people, but also other minorities in the U.S. such as Native Americans, Asian-Americans and Hispanic people encounter severe racist practices (Hill 2008).

At the core of racism is the urge to create a group of others; this group is characterized by easily modifiable and manipulable physical and social borders, which allow the involuntary admission and exit of different people, as stipulated by the dominant group of “us” (van Dijk 2004: 105). The membership requirements of this group have been changed when seen necessary by those with power (i.e. high-ranking white people). Nevertheless, skin color has remained a lasting factor. In the 21st century, racist practices have been so deeply branded into

people's everyday life that the effect of skin color can be easily superseded with other social aspects, such as nationality, education and gender (Hill 2008: 3-4).

Outside of scholarly discourse, the discussion of racism was first introduced in the public domain in the decade preceding the Second World War. It continued during the war, as a part of the propaganda against the anti-Semitic racial politics of the Nazis in Germany (Bowser 2017: 573). In the 1930s, the Nazis began their campaign which initially targeted the Jewish population in Germany on the basis of their alleged racial inferiority. In comparison to the pure Aryan racial group, which the Nazis valued above any other race, Jews were considered to be the lowest of the low in society (Boaz 2011). The force behind the division of these two racial groups, and consequently many other groups of people such as the Romany people, gay people and people with disabilities, was the "Nationalist Socialist racial hygiene", i.e. the racial eugenics that placed the Aryans on top of the racial hierarchy. The outcome of this ideology was heinous and over 6,000,000 Jews were murdered. However, even though the war ended and the Nazi regime was finally overthrown, the Nazi movement and the dissemination of the racist ideology never vanished completely (e.g. Angouri and Wodak 2014).

The second "wave" of the popularization of and general sensitization to racism took place in the 1960s due to the African-American civil rights movement (Bowser 2017: 573-574). In the U.S., the processes of discrimination and segregation, which targeted almost exclusively the black population, date back to the 17th century when the systematic shipment and consecutive enslavement of African people began. As will be discussed below, the abolishment of slavery did not result in the end of methodical discrimination of African Americans (Bowser 2017: 579; Stein 2013: 2-3). For a long time, these discriminative practices have attracted increasingly more attention both inside and outside academic discussion; for instance, the civil rights movement was formed to challenge the multifaceted inequality between African Americans and the white population in the U.S. (Coates 2007).

The fact that racism has a complex sociopolitical and historical background emphasizes the importance of examining racist practices in their context. Racism does not exist in a vacuum or in isolation from other discriminative ideologies and power structures. However, in order to avoid disregarding the influence of race, the research of racism should not move too far beyond its original key focus, the fundamental effect of a person's skin color (Bonilla-Silva 2015: 1360).

Racism and different racist practices have been researched since the 1960s (Bowser 2017: 574). *Black Power* (1967), by Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) and Charles Hamilton, was the first publication to address and acknowledge the relationship between biologically explained racism and institutional discriminative practices. The 1960s was consequently also the era when first theorizations of racism appeared. Importantly for the modern theory of racism, during that time it was recognized that racism was a multileveled phenomenon, consisting of individual, institutional and cultural components. In 50 years, each of these has been defined as concrete and separate yet interrelated instances of racism (Bowser 2017: 574).

In public discourse, the year 2008 was for some time considered the milestone year when racism in the U.S. would have been finally conquered, due to the election of the first African-American president, Barack Obama. The American press was reveling in the idea of the post-racial United States of America, because surely racism could no longer exist if a black person was elected for the highest administrative position in the country. Due to the political situation now and then, it did not take a long time for this bubble to burst (Sue 2015: 6), but the importance of Obama's election and the relevance of his legacy for the way racism is understood cannot be undermined either. As Stein (2013: 14) argues, Obama's era only highlighted the topicality of racism.

3.2 A short history of racism in the U.S.

The history of racism in the U.S. is long and well-documented. Racism in the U.S. is quite often thought to concern only the black population (Bowser 2017: 584). This way of thinking is the expected result of public discussions on the eras of slavery and Jim Crow legislation, which have dominated the academic and popular topics for a long time (Horton and Horton 2005). Despite being often thought to be synonymous with the discriminative practices targeted at the black population, racism affects various other ethnical and religious groups who have faced sanctions and segregation because of their "difference" in comparison with the white population. In addition to African Americans, Native Americans, Jewish, Hispanic, Latino, Middle Eastern and Asian Americans have been racially discriminated via both formal (e.g. legislation) and informal routes (see e.g. Fox and Stallworth 2005). Regardless of the legislative efforts to dismantle and eradicate these practices, racism continues to influence Americans' lives on both individual and institutional levels (Durrheim et al. 2015: 86).

For the purposes of the present study I will briefly outline the development of racism and racial relations from the specific point of view of African Americans. The reason for this lies in the historical and sociopolitical context of the present study: the Charlottesville rally was organized in response to the decision to remove a statue of the Confederate commander Robert E. Lee. However, the statue was not commissioned and erected directly after the Civil War, but instead later to reinforce the suppression of black Americans during an era when the discriminatory Jim Crow laws were challenged and resisted (Lewis and Lewis 2009: 237-238). The statue of Robert E. Lee is one of many Confederate monuments which were located in public places to serve as a reminder for black people of their history and inferior status in the American society (Upton 2015). The discussion surrounding the rally was therefore dominated by topics such as the Civil War, slavery and racism towards African Americans.

It has been estimated that between the years 1501 and 1867, approximately 12, 5 million African people were shipped against their will to the Americas, including the British North America (Eltis and Richardson 2010: 23). The shipping of slaves to the British North America (excluding Canada), later the United States of America, grew rapidly. In 1700, 11 percent of the population of the British North America were black slaves (27,817 people), whereas in 1750 they made already 20 percent (236,420 people) of the total population. The following decades saw a boom in the general population growth, and, consequently, in 1770, 21 percent (459,822 people) of the total population were black slaves. By 1800, the number of slaves had more than doubled (1,002,037 people) (Eltis and Richardson 2010: 244). Slavery was officially abolished in 1833 in the British America, but since its former colony had already declared its independence in 1776, it had no formal effect there. In the same year the American Anti-slavery Society was founded, which was a concrete indicator of upcoming changes. Unfortunately, such fundamental sociopolitical changes did not come easily for the U.S. and, as a result, the Civil War was fought from 1861 to 1865 (Horton and Horton 2005: 243-245).

In 1865, as a result of the Civil War, slavery was finally abolished in the U.S. by the ratification of the 13th amendment after having been a custom practice for over 200 years (Eltis and Richardson 2010: 244). Approximately 4,400,000 black slaves, 95% of whom lived in the southern states - comprising one third of the population - gained their legislative freedom (Horton and Horton 2005: 245). However, this did not result in a complete freedom for the former slaves or the following generations of black Americans. The following year, in 1866, the Civil Rights Act was enacted, which meant that, in theory, every person in the U.S.

had equal rights and were equally protected by the law. In practice, these post-slavery rights did not apply to African Americans who were forced to succumb to a different form of racial discrimination, which was put into operation in the form of the Black Codes (Bowser 2017: 579). Black codes were a set of laws designed and passed by the Confederate states in order to weaken the status of African Americans, diminish their value as citizens and continue their exploitation as cheap workforce.

Only few decades later, the situation for African Americans in the U.S. became worse. After the Reconstruction period which followed the Civil War, Jim Crow laws were enacted and continued their reign all the way to 1965 (Bowser 2017: 579). At the heart of Jim Crow laws was the total segregation of the African-American population from the white population. This segregation, though conflicting with the 14th amendment, was enabled by the “separate but equal” doctrine, which stated that racial segregation was an admissible practice (Eltis and Richardson 2010: 245). Thus, the systematic discrimination of African Americans continued and the hope brought by the Civil Rights Act was invalidated. African-American people were denied the rights and privileges afforded to the white population in nearly every aspect of life. Services such as schools, public transportation and housing were tightly and unevenly distributed between people according to their skin color. The effects of these segregated resources are still clearly visible in the 21st century. For instance, racial residential segregation is still documented to be strong (Iceland 2014; Ivery and Basset 2011; Tettey-Fio 2010: 31). Regardless of the abolition of Jim Crow laws in 1964, racist practices continued to have considerable power, especially in the South of the U.S. (Bowser 2017: 575). This is clear evidence of the ability of racism to change and adapt to varying situations.

This short description of the development of African Americans’ situation is the tip of the iceberg. In addition to this institutional evolution of racism, black people have faced severe discrimination, hate and even violence from other people. Perhaps the most notorious of the advocates for racial segregation and racism was, and still is, the Ku Klux Klan. Members of the organization harassed, assaulted and murdered black people and often did this without any retribution. They incited racial hatred across the U.S., but their influence was particularly strong in the southern states. Currently, the Ku Klux Klan is still considered a symbol of racism and racial violence and whenever a conflict occurs which has some racial context, the group is mentioned (Gray and Coates 2009).

As Stein (2013: 2) states, slavery is considered the “original sin” of America and the effect of the stigma has not diminished with time. However, Bonilla-Silva (2014: 107) has found that American slave discourse emphasizes the agency of the past generations and thus the negative legacy of slavery. White people can be judged by the crimes of their supposed ancestors purely based on their shared skin color, but these accusations are far from constructive for the understanding of modern racism. Moreover, as time passes after such abominable events, their relevance might seem difficult to associate with the current events (Bonilla-Silva 2014: 106-107). However, as I will demonstrate with my data, racist sentiments are practically impossible to eliminate. It is therefore important to understand where they originate from and how they have – if they indeed have – changed.

3.3 The relationship between race and language

Rather than erasing race, we must work as a collective to produce knowledge that eradicates racism, linguistic or otherwise, at home or abroad (Alim 2016: 25).

Within the broad field of linguistics, racism has been studied in many contexts. For instance, sociolinguists have been interested in the manifestations of race, racialization and racism in language (e.g. Hill 2008). However, in comparison with linguistic research which has attempted to trace the effects caused by language users’ personal qualities, such as age, gender and economical status, research on the effects of race and racialization have not received the same amount of attention (Rosa and Flores 2017: 14). Reversely, within the field of social race studies, the role and impact of language use has been previously disregarded (Alim 2016: 4-5). Language is a powerful tool for racism and therefore the attention it should receive is justified. More recently, researchers have begun to conduct more in depth analyses of the social functions of racism and, consequently, to pay particular attention to the institutional processes of racism and racialization in for instance universities, schools and workplaces (e.g. Bucholtz 2016).

Regardless of the growing attention to racist discourse, it has only been a few years since a fruitful initiative was launched to form a more unitary field of research on the relationship between race, racism and language. The term *raciolinguistics* first appeared in a research article by Nelson Flores and Jonathan Rosa, published in 2015 and titled *Undoing Appropriateness: Raciolinguistic Ideologies and Language Diversity in Education*. The motivation behind coining a specific name for a branch of sociolinguistic research was to unify the fragmented set of subfields under one objective: to uncover and challenge the

relationship between language, race and power. Moreover, the first compilation of raciolinguistic research articles was published as recently as in 2016 (Alim et al. 2016). As a combination of reports from studies on social media, educational settings, immigration and for instance Israeli Reality TV, the book serves as evidence of the previously scattered group of scholars. Consequently, at the moment, the field of raciolinguistic research is broad and constantly expanding.

Rosa and Flores (2017) encourage scholars to see beyond the age-old simplistic juxtaposition of whiteness and non-whiteness and move towards broader and more flexible notions of intersectionality and multi-levelled power formations. As any language use, also racist and racializing language has to be read and interpreted within its context, taking into account the relevant circumstances. As mentioned above, the fast development of technological appliances, internet-based communication and social media platforms causes problems as well as requirements for researchers; the same applies to raciolinguists. When we are faced with the continuous re-evaluation of different ways to analyze racism, we also have to take into account the rapidly changing technology which acts as the medium for the circulation and production of racist discourses (Alim et al. 2016: 6).

The present study is positioned within the field of raciolinguistics, according to the description given by Alim, Rickford and Ball. Despite its focus on the effect of race on language in educational settings, the authors also provide a more open approach for raciolinguistics that can open the door for research conducted in other contexts, advocating linguists “to ask and answer critical questions about the relations between language, race, and power across diverse ethnoracial contexts and societies” (Alim et al. 2016: 27, Note 1).

In my thesis I wish to contribute to this relatively new field of raciolinguistics by identifying, describing and analyzing recent forms of racist discourse on the internet and demonstrate the status of online discussion platforms as effective environments for racist discourse. My study provides the field of raciolinguistics with a slightly different perspective on how race affects one’s language use, because it examines the language use of those who pursue to produce discourses of white supremacy and racism. In my analysis the focus is on how the commenters produce their own hypothetical race of white “us” opposite to the black “other.” However, the anonymity of the discussion platform rules out any definite conclusions of the commenters’ description. In turn, this means that deductions can be made exclusively based on the produced discourse. The discursive production of racialized subjects is therefore

initially controlled by the racist commenters, but since they have chosen an interactive platform for that process, the racist discourse is faced with unrestricted responses by others. Next, I will present and discuss what racist discourse actually is like and what it does in practice.

4 RACIST DISCOURSE IN THEORY

To produce racist discourse is to participate in the continuous discrimination of racialized others. These others are negatively valued and treated by means of racist practices which have infiltrated all the levels of social life. Language is only one dimension and tool for racism. Racist practices, regulations and confirmed habits are products of racist language but they also reciprocally generate and circulate racist language.

At the heart of racist discourse lie stereotypes and prejudices which are the by-products of the evolution and adaptation of racism to each contemporary sociopolitical environment (Wodak and Reisigl 2015: 579). This process of transformation has led racism to become an ideology which, because of its perpetual changing, is an object of study demanding great sensitivity. In this section of my thesis, I will outline recent theorizations and identified strategies of racist discourse and present previous studies which have examined these strategies in practice. In Chapter 5, I will shift my focus to the context of online interaction and discuss what forms of racist discourse have been found to circulate on the internet.

4.1 Targets and subjects: the racialized other's twofold position

Racism is about discursively casting a group of people as others who are positioned outside of the dominant group of safe and familiar "us." The process of discursive casting signifies that racism is a social process: racism is a tool for the dominant group to distribute power, attribute value to different groups of people according their physical appearance and above all, legitimize these actions. What distinguishes racism from other discriminative discourses is that the targeted others either are or are assumed to be ethnically different from the dominant group. This assumption is made on the basis of racial categorization, usually based on people's skin color.

Furthermore, racist discourse can be divided into two distinct yet interrelated subcategories, as defined by van Dijk (2004: 352). First, the group of others can be the *target* of racist discourse. This practice was witnessed by Weaver (2011) who analyzed the use of racism as a means of humor. The impact of racist humor has been debated over decades. At the one end of the spectrum is the argument that racist humor can be empowering for ethnic minorities, but only in a situation where the humor is produced by a member of that particular ethnic minority. This kind of humor which employs racist language can be utilized to produce a positive racialized identity and negotiate a membership of a racial group, in order to counter-

act the harming effect of otherwise othering discourse (Weaver 2011: 120). At the other end of the spectrum are those who view any kind of racist humor, produced by anyone, as harmful and enforcing old stereotypes (e.g. Pérez 2017). In his study Weaver (2011: 78) underlined the importance of taking the intent of the speaker/writer into consideration. For my study, this point is extremely important, even though my data does not include jokes per se. The intent behind the anonymously posted comments is almost impossible to determine, because of the lack of information about the producer of the discourse. In addition, whether or not the commenters copy each other or others online usually remains unknown.

Second, racialized others can be the *subject* of racist discourse (van Dijk 2004: 352). In this case the discourse can be directed towards other members of the dominant group of “us” or some other audience who do not, however, belong to the out-group of others. The racialized other is in this case excluded from the interaction altogether, and racist discourse is distributed among a group of people who supposedly share the producer’s views. Evidently, the distinction between the two types of racist discourse, about the others and to the others, is not as obvious as could be assumed: rather, the two forms are closely connected (van Dijk 2004: 352). One of the major reasons for this close relation is the changing nature of communication and the fast spread of content via the internet; excluding the most private mediums of interaction, such as instant messengers and closed private forums, content on the internet is available for huge crowds of people. Someone’s racist discourse which was initially intended as a personal attack against an individual can therefore become a publicly debated issue and vice versa, discourse about the racialized other that was originally meant as racist can transform into a verbal attack, when members of the out-group are included in the audience.

4.2 Creating the racialized other

Racist discourse can be produced by adopting a number of possible discursive strategies. Next, I want to introduce five different types of discursive moves that Wodak and Reisigl (2015: 585) have proposed to illustrate racist discourse, before moving on to discussing relevant and recent research on racist discourse. These strategies form a crucial part of the theoretical framework of my thesis and will be further elaborated on in the methodology section. The five strategies are:

1. Nomination
2. Predication
3. Argumentation
4. Expression of involvement
5. Intensification and mitigation

The first strategy, nomination, refers to the practices employed by producers of racist discourse to artificially form seemingly homogenous groups such as *us* and *them*. Thus, the objective is to discursively construct divisive boundaries between people and to cast them in different in-groups and out-groups. In practice, these nominations can include the following terms: *us*, *them*, *criminals*, *racists* and *victims*. The second strategy, predication, stands for the use of linguistic elements which have the power of emphasizing both negative and positive qualities of different groups of people. This strategy can be effectively used to create a favorable image for the inside group “us” and unfavorable for the outside group “them.”

Thirdly, argumentation can be any of the strategies that are used to reassert the rightness and purpose of racist discourse, allowing a racist interlocutor to justify her/his opinion. The objective of argumentation in this context is to make the racist’s message believable and justified. Powerful argumentation can be realized by for instance vaguely referring to seemingly credible and reliable sources, such as research findings or expert opinions, without necessarily explicitly naming the source. In addition, blatantly stating something as a fact can give the impression of the racist interlocutor having some relevant knowledge, even though the piece of information may be in fact based on her/his opinion.

Fourthly, writers or speakers with racist intentions can include a personal point of view in their output by for example telling a personal narrative where they frame a member or members of a certain outside group as somehow negatively different, deviant or threatening (van Dijk 2004: 353). The expression of this type of involvement in the discourse allows the speaker/writer to frame racist discourse as having a personal and justifiable motivation. Moreover, by personally associating oneself with racist discourse, the speaker/writer appeals to her/his audience with a possibly beneficial result. The fifth and last strategy is the usage of both mitigating and intensifying strategies to favorably affect racist and other discriminative discourses on the utterance level. This is can be done by modifying the illocutionary force of utterances by for example, hedging (e.g. Hill 2008: 65).

In the present study, I will complement Wodak's and Reisigl's (2015: 585) five discursive strategies by including the methods and instructions outlined and used by Blommaert and Verschueren (2002: 32-36) in their critical discourse analysis of ideology. In their study, Blommaert and Verschueren analyzed discourses constructed within the immigration discussion in Belgium in the late 1990s, focusing specifically on the discursive production of racist ideology. Blommaert and Verschueren list four major aspects for analyzing how implicit meaning can be discursively produced: (1) wording patterns and strategies, (2) local carriers of implicit information, (3) global meaning constructs and (4) interaction patterns. In turn, these four discursive tools can be used to manifest specific verbal racist practices, as also described by Wodak and Reisigl (2015: 578):

1. The artificial construction and polarization of seemingly homogenous groups of people (e.g. blacks vs. whites, Americans vs. "others")
2. The naturalization of stereotypes and cultural differences (e.g. Mock Spanish (Hill 2008))
3. The juxtaposition between "us" and the racialized "other"
4. The legitimization of power differences and exclusive practices, based on negative stereotypes and naturalized racial hierarchy

All of these practices are important for the present study, but, since I am analyzing racist comments published on a discussion platform, interaction patterns are especially relevant. As the comments have been written in a public comment section, it can be assumed that the commenters were aware that their contributions might spark discussion, and some might possibly even have expected and wished for it. Thus, I will attempt to find out what discursive strategies the commenters employ to incite discussion, i.e. initiate a dialogue. Racist discourse is typically produced in a dialogic situation, which necessitates an analysis that goes beyond the investigation of individual racist comments in isolation from the actual environment they occur in. The scope of my study limits the level of attention that I can give to the possible responses that the racist comments received, but the exclusion of their detailed analysis does not exclude their significance altogether. In sum, these sets of verbal practices together form a complex model for the analysis of racist discourse. Next, I will elaborate on this model and first present an exemplary study that has examined the discussed discursive strategies. After this, I will move on to present research on direct accusations of racism.

As an example of a study on online racist discourse, Jane H. Hill (2008) analyzed the use of racist discourse on a U.S. news paper's online message board. She followed the discussion sparked by the name change process of a mountain peak in Arizona (previously Squaw Peak, now Piastewa Peak) in 2003 and 2004. The name change was initiated and motivated by the racist history of the word 'squaw' which is a derogatory term and a slur used of Native American women (the term was used to refer to them as animals). Despite this sound reason behind the change of the mountain peak's name, the initiative was actually strongly opposed by many. The ensuing anonymous online discussions analyzed by Hill included comments which both opposed and defended the name change. As a result, Hill was able to find numerous racist and racially motivated comments.

More specifically, Hill (2008: 86) found that many of the commenters in her data actually endorsed practices associated with white racism, i.e. racism endorsing the superiority of the "white race." In the online comments racist discourse was often implicit, included in the comment as a part of personalist ideology. According to personalist ideology, something is not racist if the writer or speaker does not truly mean and believe it to be so. Those who defended the use of 'squaw' in the peak's name claimed that it did not mean anything insulting *for them*, and therefore they did not understand the need for the name change. This way of thinking is often linked to racist discourse, because racist writers or speakers can attempt to defend their utterances by arguing that they have been misunderstood.

Interestingly, in Hill's data, some people diverted from the core discussion of defending or opposing the name change, and instead focused on framing the larger picture of the current situation of Native Americans. For instance, Hill (2008: 76) reported that one commenter claimed that American Indians were needy, dangerous and always taking from the white population. This is a racially motivated discursive move with which the commenter attempted to naturalize the cultural difference of American Indians in comparison to the white population and thus to legitimize the racist practices targeted at the minority population. The commenter presented only her/his view of the situation, but by presenting it in the form of a categorical assertion, s/he attempted to frame it as the truth.

Sometimes producers of racist discourse do not voluntarily attempt to justify their views when they first express their opinion. The need for that may be prompted by others participating in the same discussion or otherwise using the same platform of communication. Moreover, research on online racism has found that online discussion forums are effective environments

for both the production of racist discourse and expressing criticism and opposition towards it. In the next section, I will examine previous research made on the accusations of racism as well as the racist writers' responses to them.

4.3 Responding to accusations of racism

Racism is a difficult and loaded topic in any kind of communication. Whether someone reacts to racism, accuses someone else of being a racist or a racist topic is in some other way negotiated between the interlocutors, different ways of responding are always available. This was shown by Goodman and Rowe (2014) who found in their analysis of online discussions about Gypsies in the UK that writers of racist comments attempted to evade possible accusations of racism either by direct denial or by acknowledging being prejudiced rather than racist. The commenters who were accused of being racists shunned from being labelled as 'racist' but did not even attempt to negate the hatred they targeted towards Gypsies. Moreover, these racist commenters often resorted to counter-insults and made no effort to justify their point of view (Goodman and Rowe 2014: 38-40). Accusations against them were described as unnecessary and unjust.

The other group of responders to accusations that Goodman and Rowe analyzed denied the association with racism by replacing it with prejudice instead. The commenters did not find it necessary to alter the content of their original message; however, they found it more important to deny any accusations of racism. As an attempt to minimize the role of racism in the overall discussion, one commenter stated: "Not racism. Just simple extreme prejudice" (Goodman and Rowe 2014: 40-42). Consequently, Goodman and Rowe underline how curious it is that prejudice is somehow found more acceptable per se than racism. It is interesting why the extremely negative value attributed to the label of a 'racist' surpasses that of prejudice or hatred in a way that the commenters find them easier to accept. As Goodman and Rowe (2014: 44) point out, this suggests that discourse about different out-groups, and, critique towards their position in the society, has to be carefully analyzed while taking into consideration what appears to be considered an acceptable reason for hatred. This point highlights the need to analyze further the different discursive means by which accusations of racism are swerved and denied. It is therefore important to uncover practices and strategies which are used to discriminate and spread hatred towards minorities and otherwise marginalized groups of people.

Accordingly, one key characteristic of racist discourse is the objective of avoiding accusations of actually being a racist, and, in case of becoming the target of such accusations, how to prove them wrong. Some theories even suggest that being a racist is not necessarily evident to the person expressing racist ideas (Hill 2008). This of course cannot be argued against, since some people probably do not see anything bad in evaluating others based on their skin color and other physical traits. However, the extent of the speaker's or writer's awareness or understanding does not reduce the malignant force of racism. Racism is still sometimes considered as an ideology which can be negotiated in terms of intent and commitment. These negotiations are usually initiated in response to racism or other prior responses. Racist discourse therefore requires a certain level of interpretation from the assumed audience. In other words, framing racist discourse is a two-way process; first, the speaker/writer may need to justify her/his opinion; second, the hearer/reader must infer the purpose behind the racist writing, i.e. how "serious" the message actually is (Hill 2008: 89).

Hill (2008) found in her analysis that defensive actions against accusations of racism can be performed by both the alleged racist and her/his supporters. She presented an interesting case study of this process of negotiating and evaluating accusations in which a senior U.S. Senator Trent Lott received criticism for his speech during Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday celebrations in 2002. The following is an excerpt from the speech that caused the uproar:

I want to say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president, we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead, *we wouldn't have had all these problems over all these year, either* (Hill 2008: 99, emphasis added).

Without any contextual reference this extract would not necessarily make sense, but as Hill explained, while Thurmond was a senator, and even ran for president, he was an advocate of racial segregation. The remark was therefore interpreted as a criticism for the racial policies advocated by Thurmond's opponents. After slowly becoming a topic of nationwide debate, Trent's remark was often called a mistake and an innocent slip that did not mean anything bad. The "true" meaning of Trent's words was discussed and the importance of intentionality was especially emphasized: in order for the remark to be racist, it must be meant as such. For the present study, it is especially important to acknowledge the ways in which Trent's racist remark was both criticized and defended. Interestingly, in Trent's case he was more openly accused of racism and instead his supporters claimed that he was "only" being insensitive or stupid (Hill 2008: 116).

Moving on to the specific context of written racist discourse, there are different strategies which a writer of racist messages can adopt in order to make her/his verbal discourse appear less racist and thus avoid possible accusations. In his study of racist discourse on Facebook, Orrù (2014) found that those wishing to dodge and deny the racist intent in their comments resorted to two discursive strategies: first, by blaming the government for ‘reverse racism’, and, second, by utilizing discursive deracialization. Orrù’s analysis concentrated on Italian Facebook posts collected from four public pages, which, on the surface, would not be assumed to attract explicitly racist comments. However, all of these pages included racist posts which had the objective of discursively framing immigrants as a threat to Italy. Contributors utilized for instance statistics to enhance their reliability, contrasting to present Italians as innocent victims whose welfare should be prioritized above the threatening immigrants, pictures to provide concrete illustrations of the threat and metaphors (“waves of desperate people”, and describing Italy as a house whose doors need to be closed) (Orrù 2014: 121-122).

Similarly to Angouri and Wodak’s (2014) analysis of the anti-immigrant discourse of Greece, which will be discussed below, Orrù’s analysis also found that immigrants were described as a burden to Italy, emphasizing the tension between the in-group, us/Italians, and the out-group, they/immigrants. While appealing to the solidarity of the original population, the writers of racist messages could appeal to their readers’ emotions and frame the concern for the country and social collective as the main discourse instead of the hostility towards the immigrants (Angouri and Wodak 2014: 125). Two forms of denial of racism emerged from Orrù’s analysis: discursive deracialization (Augoustinos and Every 2007: 133-134) and discursive reversal. Discursive deracialization occurred when the writer admits that s/he is prejudiced towards others based on their social characteristics, such as education or criminal background, deliberately excluding any reference to race (see also Goodman and Rowe 2014). Discursive reversal, on the other hand, means responding to accusations of racism by attributing the status of victim to the in-group instead. In the next section, I will elaborate on the notion of finding the blame or a scapegoat for the racial problem or threat, which is the key focus of the present study.

4.4 Finding the blame for the threat

In addition to discussing racist discourse from the point of view of its targeted audience, van Dijk (2004) provides another type of useful categorization, which focuses more on the actual

message and tone of racist discourse. Racist discourse does not only have the ability to imply that a specific racialized group is *different* from the dominant group, but it can also typecast the others as either *deviant* or *threatening* (van Dijk 2004: 353, emphasis added). This three-levelled classification system further emphasizes the context-dependency and transformability of racist discourse. The racialized other can be labelled in varying ways; the level of inferiority is determined by the speaker's or writer's discursive moves and motives. In everyday discussion, it might often be disregarded that racist discourse can actually be something else than blatant words of abuse (van Dijk 1993: 117). In sum, racist discourse can be used as a manipulative tool to validate one's attempt to label a racialized group as belonging in any of the three groups. It cannot be straightforwardly argued which of these three strategies has the most damaging potential to the targeted out-group. However, labelling the racialized other as a threat does involve attributing them with bad agency, framing them as dangerous, criminals or otherwise threatening to the in-group. This discourse, in turn, can easily imply or even directly suggest concrete measures to be taken against the out-group of others (Poynting and Mason 2007).

Angouri and Wodak (2014) found that discussions of the racialized threat included negotiations of the responsible party for the threatening situation. Negotiation is a suitable term for the discursive construction of blame in this case, because in multi-party discussions various groups were attributed with the blame instead of one unanimously chosen target (Angouri and Wodak 2014: 542). Angouri and Wodak (2014) analyzed online reader comments posted on the website of *The Guardian*, concerning two articles which had been written about the connection between the 21st century financial crisis in Greece and the growing visibility of Golden Dawn, a Greek neo-Nazi party.

Golden Dawn is notorious in Greece for its anti-immigrant views and violent attacks against the party's opponents. In their analysis Angouri and Wodak (2014: 551, C.2.) found that the neo-Nazi party's agency was significantly mitigated, and for instance negative views of immigrants were justified by commenters who framed the party's politics as a natural response to the threat posed by "immigrant thugs". The commenters framed the Greek government and politicians as responsible for the threat with various discursive strategies such as nomination, predication and perspectivation, by which the writer of the commenter highlighted her/his personal involvement in the situation (see also Orrù 2014: 129). In the 'blaming game', as incisively called by Angouri and Wodak, the players (i.e. the commenters) attempted to convince the audience to agree with their view of the target of the blame.

However, this “game” can be utilized as an effective strategy to express racist views under cover of participating in seemingly democratic political discourse.

In this chapter, I have presented and described those aspects of racist discourse which together form a useful theorization for the present study. As I outlined above, racist language use can entail diverse discursive strategies which extend beyond slandering. People who participate in the production of racist discourse manipulate and adapt their language use according to their objective, whether it is to present racialized others in a negative light or find a target of blame for the supposed problems which have been caused by the “others”. In the next chapter, I will present how the strategies discussed above have been found to affect in practice in the specific context of online interaction.

5 RESEARCH ON ONLINE DISCRIMINATION AND RACISM

When social media are mentioned in everyday discussion, they are easily simplified and taken for granted. For many, social media equals popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, which is by no means a false definition, but these platforms only form the tip of the iceberg. Features of social media, such as message boards, have been embedded within almost every type of website available on the internet. Social media and the analysis of online social interaction are not new phenomena as such, because the internet has been, since its establishment, a social construction and a medium for interpersonal communication (Khosravini and Unger 2017: 211).

However, what used to characterize the social nature of the internet has transformed drastically from its early stages, where the internet was a place for people to read content that was produced by other people, to put it simply (Khosravini and Unger 2017: 206). People could, for instance, read articles published on news sites or check what the weather would be like the next day. Of course, these actions are performed today, too, but the core nature of the reading process has changed significantly. If the current state of the internet had been explained to internet users in the early 1990s, it would have probably been difficult for them to understand how far we have moved from the initial producer/reader- dichotomy.

Web 2.0 is a term used to describe the evolution of the internet, because it incisively depicts the steady evolution of the web. The basic core of online world is still the same as it initially was, but too many aspects have changed for the simple term ‘Web’ to represent the web at its different stages (Herring 2013). The instruments to produce content used to be available to an exclusive group of people consisting primarily of experts of the field, but today the popularization of online administration has made the know-how accessible for anyone. Combined with the growing interest in creating content, the previously one-way movement of information has been reconstituted (Herring 2013). Consequently, as online communication has developed, research on online interaction has faced the urgent need to adjust and proceed at the same pace (Bliuc et al. 2018: 76).

The contemporary state and numerous manifestations of online interaction have been covered in several studies, but for the purposes of the present study, I will focus on research conducted on online discussion forums and their more recent form, reader comment sections (Hughey and Daniels 2013; Loke 2012). These two ways of communicating on the internet are characterized by dialogicality, since they both enable internet users to interact with each other

and thus create their own content. In this way internet users have been able to break from the boundaries of previously producer-to-consumer-oriented online communication.

In the present study I will analyze data collected from a social media platform, an online newspaper's comment section to be precise. In terms of their dynamics, as a setting of online interaction, newspapers' reader comment sections are quite similar with discussion forums and message boards. These forums are often independent or separate websites created as discussion platforms for people with shared interest in a specific topic, whereas reader comment sections are embedded on the news sites. They are therefore an example of a product of the evolution of Web 2.0, where an already existing Web 1.0 phenomenon has been adopted and adapted to a Web 2.0 environment (Herring 2013: 1). As a result of this adoption of an already existing medium of interaction, and implementing it in a new online setting, I argue that it is important to first outline how interaction on discussion forums has been studied. Next, I will present recent research conducted on different types of platforms which enable the production and distribution of discriminative messages. In addition to these and importantly for the present study, I will also discuss the effect of anonymity, which is a debated aspect of online communication.

5.1 Online hate groups

Racism and other forms of discursive discrimination can be found all over the internet (Blüch et al. 2018). Online platforms provide versatile environments with low thresholds for the production and circulation of different opinions and ideological messages (Coffey and Woolworth 2004). Racist messages can be posted where they are not asked for or expected, but the internet also opens the door for websites, such as discussion forums, which are specifically dedicated to the endorsement of hateful discourse. Both of these environments of racist discourse, discussion forums and more complex websites, have been researched and perhaps surprisingly, despite their structural differences and diversity of users, both have been found to be equally effective tools for spreading hateful discourse. In this section, I will briefly discuss the research of online hate groups and racist discourse on other social media sites, before proceeding to present findings made on the platform in focus in the present study, the reader comment sections of news sites.

The content on hate groups' websites can be extreme and provocative, even encouraging for violence. Despite this type of content seems hateful and appalling for many, the websites'

existence has been made possible by national legislation, which in some countries enables the administration of extreme sites due to freedom of speech. This concept has been stretched to the maximum as the right to express racist and otherwise discriminative views and produce such content is protected by the constitution in the U.S. (Heyman 2008: 2). However, as Heyman (2008: 23) rightly states, this should not be the case. The concept of freedom of speech is so highly valued in the U.S. that it seems unlikely that any radical changes will be made to the legislation. Nevertheless, it is now understood that there is a significant conflict between the almost unrestricted freedom of speech and people's civil rights and safety (Heyman 2008: 4). On the other hand, the ideological value attributed to freedom of speech can still be harnessed for the benefit of defending racist views (White and Crandall 2017: 424-425).

5.2 Racism in discussion forums

Online discussion forums are efficient platforms for people to both produce racist discourse and negotiate its meaning. Discussion forums can provide internet users with a relative and varying level of anonymity which, in turn, provides a space between an individual's frontstage (public) and backstage (private) lives. This is a space where one can express personal opinions more freely than in face-to-face communication, but it can also create the impression that anything can be said without a serious consequence, other than possible removal of published messages or a ban from the forum.

In his doctoral dissertation, Kytölä (2013) discussed several points that also underline the relevance of the present study, too, to the larger field of computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA). First, Kytölä (2013: 72) made the important point that online discussion forums are in some degree "grey areas" of communication. As already mentioned above, online communication cannot be categorized strictly as either spoken or written discourse, but, in addition to this flexibility between the two broad types of text production, online communication as a concept and form is also quite diverse. The variety and diversity of discussion forums is so broad that they cannot be defined simply and, as a result, their analysis can require different approaches.

When discussion forums are used as sources for research data, it is crucial to take into account the level of publicity and openness of the forum. In comparison to spoken and textual discourses, discussion forums tend not to have as well defined assumed audience. Instances of

speech and text can rather easily be defined as either public or private according to their purpose, location and participants. The speaker or writer is usually aware of her/his audience and therefore has the control over who hears or sees what. Discussion forums, in contrast, do not offer this type of authorial control (Witschge 2008). Depending on the moderation policies, the contributors are naturally in charge of the content of the comments they submit, but they do not necessarily have a similar control over who is going to be reading and possibly responding to their comments.

Another interesting study for my purpose is a paper by Kytölä and Androutsopoulos (2012) that analyzes instances of racist discourse in a Finnish football forum. The data investigated in it were collected from two Finnish football forums, with specific focus on the multilingual resources utilized by the participants. One of their examples is the case of Altan, a Turkish participant. His non-standard uses of English on the forum triggered a great deal of explicitly racist comments. As Kytölä and Androutsopoulos (2012: 179-180) showed, the comments Altan received were not exceptional since Kytölä had also discovered various similar cases. The goal of the imposters was to target genuinely foreign members of the forum with spiteful racist discourse. Furthermore, what followed from these earlier provocations combined with Altan's seemingly genuine and appropriate comments and questions was even more racist discourse in the form of mocking, copying and echoing his style of writing. Moreover, these 'mock foreigners' reinforced the already present discriminative practices of racism and othering.

Similarly to Kytölä, Cleland (2014) also found evidence of racist discourse on English football discussion forums. He argues that different social media platforms allow racist discourse to circulate relatively effortlessly, which in turn has made it increasingly difficult for researchers and activists to challenge it (Cleland 2014: 427). In Cleland's study (2014), the football forums he investigated were shown to provide many opportunities for the production of racist discourse. Some posters on the message boards he analyzed reacted very strongly to discussions about foreign players by posting insulting and racist messages without caring about the responses from other members of the forum. However, Cleland (2014: 425) also found that racist discourse was often openly challenged by other writers, which might bespeak of an increasing willingness to resist discriminative practices in general.

The analysis of racist discourse should always be considered a part of its larger context, which also includes any responses the producer of racist discourse might receive. Kytölä's and

Cleland's studies demonstrate that data collected from discussion forums, or alternatively from comment sections, should not be examined as separate comments or instances of language use, but instead as components of an extended discourse. For instance, in the case of Altan, without the acknowledgement of the discussion history on the platform, it would have been impossible to determine the function of the 'mock foreigners' and their link to the Turkish member Altan (Kytölä and Androutsopoulos 2012). Together racist comments and their discursive context form interactive patterns where different perspectives are actively negotiated. It is therefore important to examine what discursive strategies prove to be most effective for both the racist discourse and its counter-discourses. Taking this premise into consideration, it may also be possible to find ways for monitoring racist language use and eradicate already existing racist practices by identifying recurrent linguistic elements used by racist commenters.

5.3 Racism in online reader comment sections

As a setting of online interaction, newspapers' reader comment sections are quite similar in terms of their dynamics as discussion forums and boards, which generally are independent or separate websites created as discussion platforms for people with shared interest in a specific topic. As a result of the implementation a social medium for participation and dialogue on the news sites, readers are now provided with the opportunity to directly comment on online articles. This change has significantly altered the dynamics of newspaper websites (Loke 2012: 240; Nagar 2011: 140). While previously reader participation was restricted to separate discussion forums, at present comment sections are an active and important part of online newspapers. Accordingly, an online newspaper's success is often determined based on its reader comment activity (Hlavach and Freivogel 2011: 29).

The function of reader comment sections is to create an undemanding platform for readers to publicly express their opinions (Nagar 2011: 135). Moreover, reader comments are a form of *public* rather than private discourse, because they are usually available for anyone to read. However, participation in the discussions can be more restricted. Depending on the newspaper, commenters may be required to register to the website as an administrative measure to ensure the good quality of communication (Coffey and Woolworth 2004: 12-13; Santana 2014: 28). This registration is often done via an email address or other social network user identification. The objective of this procedure is to make the posting of messages more time-consuming, which, in turn, reduces the amount of low-grade comments, at least in theory

(Nagar 2011: 136). These low-grade comments that the newspapers want to reduce include abusive and hateful comments. According to Nagar (2011: 136), from the point of view of the online newspaper's editorial team, these types of comments diminish the discussion activity, because other commenters do not want to be targeted by such negativity. Rowe (2015: 124-125) also points out that, because of the uncivility witnessed in online reader comment sections, anonymity is regarded to cause more harm than benefit, especially with political discussions. What began as a promising custom of online communication has transformed into a troublesome burden.

Online reader comments with hateful content such as racism can be found under articles with a wide variety of topics ranging from economy to domestic politics (Erjavec and Kovačič 2012). It has also been found that it is not necessary for the news article to feature a specifically racially related topic for the readers to write racist comments (Harlow 2015). Moreover, discriminative discourse is not always produced with the intent of inciting hatred and violence, even though this does not diminish its harmful power. The motives for hate speech as well as its characteristics vary greatly depending on the commenter. Erjavec and Kovačič (2012) were able to identify four different groups of commenters who produced hate speech online: 'soldiers', who are active members of political parties or other organizations; 'believers', who do not necessarily belong to any group or party, but still defend and spread their ideology; 'players', for whom producing hate speech acts as an excitement and a game; and lastly, 'watchdogs', commenters whose hate speech is supposed to point out social problems. Each of these groups considered participating in the discussion as an acceptable form of social interaction (Erjavec and Kovačič 2012: 916).

Moreover, the actual content of the comments including hate speech revealed four discursive strategies, which were frequently used by the commenters (Erjavec and Kovačič 2012: 907-914):

1. The rearticulation of the news item, which was being commented on
2. The rearticulation of political topics; domestic issues were framed as cultural conflicts between the "left" and the "right"
3. The rearticulation of political topics; domestic issues were personalized to concern individual people, such as politicians
4. Direct attacks against well-known people (for example, celebrities) because their opinions did not match the commenter's opinions

These four strategies indicate that racist and hateful discourse can be much more complex than mere slandering and mocking. Taking strategies 1-3 into consideration, which all include some type of rearticulation, it can be concluded that producers of hateful discourses attempt to disguise their message as some other, more generally acceptable, discourse, such as political comments and debates. These strategies are effective tools for the writers to defend against accusations of racism or discrimination, because they can highlight the seemingly social or political aspects of their comment. It is no wonder that, if in a society where public figures, such as politicians, publicly produce hateful discourse, other people can consider it their well-founded right to express similar views. This was the case in Slovenia which was the geographical context of Erjavec's and Kovačič's study (2012: 916). Consequently, taking President Trump's influence and publicity into account, it seems unlikely that his publicly expressed hateful views would not attract and encourage mimics in the context of the U.S.

5.4 The effect of anonymity

Anonymity in online interaction is not an on/off phenomenon, because sometimes seemingly anonymous social media platforms actually reveal some information about the participants (Hughey and Daniels 2013: 336). Moreover, other interlocutors may not know details about each other, but the administrator of the website may have access to personal information such as the commenter's location or even her/his name. The research on the effect of online anonymity has resulted in rather varying outcomes. On the one hand, it has been argued that the potential anonymity allows a person interacting online the freedom from the discursive restrictions s/he may face in the "real world" (Loke 2012). What might not be tolerated in public communication could be expressed online without any consequences, or so it has been concluded (Santana 2014).

On the other hand, anonymity can also be regarded as a facade – something artificially constructed; a name that does not match the reality. Anonymity does not release an internet user from the shackles of guidelines, common sense and conscience. However, Bolander and Locher (2013) also point out that, even though some background information and variables of the writers of the analyzed data could be retrieved, many online sources cannot provide this information reliably. Thus, the level of anonymity must be carefully considered in the analysis of any data including online interaction.

Even though the scope of the present study does not allow the extensive analysis of the effect of anonymity, I still want to highlight its relevance for contemporary online interaction. The effects of anonymity have not been found to be universally similar and the findings have been in principle twofold. Anonymity has been found to either facilitate and encourage the production and circulation of unorthodox views or have no seeming effect at all. Nonetheless, anonymous commenting for instance on newspapers' discussion forums and reader comment sections has been found to have serious ethical implications directly because of its harmful potential. From the commenters' point of view, anonymity is considered a justified right, and to lose the protection it provides could be equaled to direct censorship (Erjavec and Kovačič 2012: 915).

In their study, Steinfeldt et al. (2010) found that the anonymity provided by online forums further facilitates the articulation of opinions and ideas which would probably face severe criticism if expressed publicly. The data used by Steinfeldt et al. (2010: 364) consisted of comments collected from two online newspapers, thus representing a similar set-up to the present study. They analyzed the discussion revolving around the sports team Fighting Sioux's use of their particular name and logo, which, because of their American Indian background, incited heated debates. Steinfeldt et al. (2010: 365) found four different types of responses to the controversial use of the team name: surprise, power and privilege, trivialization and denigration. Out of these four categories, comments which belonged to the category of denigration were found to include the most direct racist discourse. The language use in these comments, with derogatory terms depicting American Indians such as "drunks" and "savages" can be compared to the comments analyzed in the present study, where black people are described as "crazy" and "dangerous animals". Thus anonymity has the unquestionable potential as a facilitator for racist discourse (see also Santana 2014).

In the current chapter I have presented a number of interesting aspects which all are relevant for the present study. As the result of decades of research, social media platforms have been found to be efficient environments for the production and circulation of discriminatory discourses. Specifically racist discourse has been found and monitored on various online platforms, both public and private ones. The range and level of user accessibility within the category of online discussion forums is quite broad, whereas newspapers' online reader comment sections are all somewhat similar as far as registration policies are concerned. What appears to be a major difference between different online reader comment sections is the level of anonymity the administrators provide with the commenters. The possibility of anonymity

has been found beneficial for those who want to express racist and otherwise hateful views online. While taking these issues and the entire theoretical framework of the present study presented in Chapters 2-5 into consideration, in the following chapter I will proceed to the description of the aims, research questions and methods of analysis of the present study.

6 PRESENT STUDY

In this section, I will move on from the explication of my theoretical framework for the study of online racist discourse to describing the aims, data and methods of the present study. First, I will introduce the closer historical context of my thesis. I have already described the historical development of racism in the U.S. above, but here I will move a step closer and discuss what happened during the rally in Charlottesville and describe the aftermath on both local and nationwide levels. I have already stressed several times the importance of analyzing racist discourse in context, and here the current context of discussion in the online comment sections is presented. Second, I will explain in detail the aim of my study and present the research questions that guide and help me to achieve that aim. Thirdly, I will explain the process of data collection and the subsequent process of narrowing down the amount of data. The fourth step of building the set-up of my study will deal with the ethical considerations of doing research with social media data. Processing data which has been collected from a social media platform requires certain measures to be taken in order to protect the commenters' anonymity, especially in the context of such a sensitive and ideological topic as racism. Lastly, I will focus on describing the analytic methods that I will employ in the analysis of my data.

6.1 The Charlottesville rally

The Charlottesville rally took place in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 11-12, 2017, when two opposing groups, 'Unite the Right', who consisted of different far-right nationalist groups, and their counter-protestors, confronted each other and violence broke out between them. In total three people were killed during the conflict; one person was killed when one of the far-right protestors drove his car into a crowd of counter-protestors, while the two other casualties were police officers who were killed in a helicopter accident as they were flying to the scene of the rally (Weiner 2017).

The demonstration of the 'Unite the Right' was related to the official decision of the Charlottesville City Council to remove the statue of a confederate military officer Robert E. Lee from one of the city's parks. This decision was a part of a more extensive nationwide campaign in the U.S. to remove all monuments and other traces of the Confederation from public property (Upton 2017). The city council had begun to prepare for the removal of the statue already in the previous spring (Fortey 2017). The general decision to remove

monuments of Confederate soldiers was a result of the discussion about the still tangible legacy of the Jim Crow era and how its imprint is still visible all over the U.S. The discussion escalated drastically after the Charleston church massacre in 2015, when a white supremacist murdered nine African American people by shooting them in their church (BBC 2015). The decision in Charlottesville resulted in a strong opposition from those advocating the statue's historical value, while some referred to the state law and claimed that the city council did not have a legal permission to remove the statue (Fortey 2017).

During and after the conflict in Charlottesville, *The Washington Post* actively reported on the events, and for each published article, the comment sections were made open for public discussion for 14 days. Numerous articles on *The Washington Post*'s website and many other media reports focused on discussing President Trump's response to the rally. He was heavily criticized especially by the left-leaning media for his unusual silence on social media; Trump has been known for his frequent tweets (Twitter posts), even for a famous politician. Later, over six months after the rally took place, the U.S. media, politicians and celebrities still frequently referred to the conflict in discussions about racism, police force and freedom of speech.

6.2 The Washington Post

The Washington Post's website was chosen as the source of data for a few reasons. First, it is one of the largest and longest running news sites in the U.S. ("The Washington Post" 2018). In August 2017, around the time of the Charlottesville rally, *The Washington Post*'s website gathered almost 92.4 million visitors and 1.1 billion page views (WashPostPR 2017b). Second, the online reader comment sections are open for anyone to read, but in order to participate in the discussions one has to register either via Facebook, Amazon account or email. This in effect can help to minimize the amount of trolling or spamming, because such instances can be easily reported to the administrators, and, as a consequence, the commenter can be blocked. This of course works only to a degree, because creating multiple Facebook accounts or email addresses is not difficult. However, the registration may at least have some effect.

The third reason for choosing *The Washington Post* as a source of the present data relates to its discussion guidelines and political stance. The newspaper directly states in its discussion guidelines that it does not approve any kind of discriminatory or hateful language use in the

comment sections (Amenabar 2018). Based on their moderation policies, one might expect that racist discourse would thus be eliminated from the comment sections, but this is understandably difficult to achieve in practice, due to the sometimes massive amount of comments per article.

The Washington Post is a left-leaning newspaper, which can be expected to have an effect on reader commenting in two ways. On the one hand, the more right-leaning readers, specifically from the far-right stances, do not presumably actively read the newspaper. On the other hand, they may contribute to the comment sections with the purpose of criticism and provocation. Taking the context of the present study into consideration, it is probable that the amount of criticism targeted at President Trump attracted his supporters to join the discussion on *The Washington Post*'s comment section. In contrast, it would seem unlikely that he were targeted with similar reproach from his supporters on right-leaning media sites, due to his open support towards them.

6.3 Aims and research questions

The preliminary aim of this study was to identify what types of racist discourse were produced in the reader comment section of an online newspaper. However, as the data collection process progressed, it became obvious that the variety of racist discourses surpassed the scope of a Master's thesis. Thus, for research economical purposes as well as for the purpose of following my own interest, I crystallized and specified the aim somewhat further. The aim of this thesis therefore is to find out how the racialized other is discursively produced as a threat in the online reader comment sections of *The Washington Post*. Next, I will explain and justify the decision behind committing to this objective.

The reason for focusing on the practices framing the racialized other as dangerous or a threat stems from a three-fold conceptualization of racism which I utilized in the preliminary quantitative analysis (van Dijk 2004: 352-353). According to van Dijk (2004), racist discourse can be utilized to categorize the racialized other as three types; as different from the dominant in-group "us," deviant, or a threat to "us." All three of these categorizations were, in fact, present in the data of the present study. The reason and motivation behind choosing to focus on how the category of threat (or dangerous) was exploited stemmed from the fact that this discursive group represents the most hostile opinions towards minorities and other marginalized groups of people.

I will try to reach this general aim of my study by seeking answers to the following, more specific research questions:

1. How is the racialized other discursively framed as dangerous or a threat by the commenters?
2. Who the commenters consider responsible or blamed for the racialized threat?

I hypothesize that my analysis will provide valuable information by revealing how discursive and linguistic tools are utilized to present the threatening racialized other and the target of responsibility and, consequently, how these means are exploited to substantiate racial hierarchy.

6.4 Data collection and selection

The data which I am going to analyze in the next section consists of eight comments posted on the reader comment section of *The Washington Post's* website on August 2017. The selected comments were collected and saved from a single article that was published on the website during the aftermath of the violent rally which occurred in Charlottesville in August 2017. The decision to collect the data associated to an article which was published very shortly after the rally was based on my interest to focus on the commenters' initial opinions on the incident. Since the rally occurred between August 11 and 12, most of the media coverage on the aftermath was published on August 12 and 13. On August 13, the article with most reader participation activity on *The Washington Post's* website received over 14,000 comments. Despite my wish to collect the data from as active a source as possible, I chose to collect comments from one of the other most commented articles of following days, which, in turn, had amassed over 3,000 comments.

The analysis of the discourse collected has to extend beyond separate sentences or extracts and this is the reason why I wanted to collect all the reader comments from the same article. In this way, I expect that I will be able to detect recurrent themes and topics, as well as keep a rough track on commenter activity. The overall online commenter activity surrounding the Charlottesville rally was extensive, far beyond the scope of a Master's thesis. However, I will include my observations on the wider discussion and general political climate in the analysis whenever it is deemed necessary and relevant. Next, I will explain the process behind narrowing the data down to eight racist comments.

The data collection and selection process of my thesis consisted of multiple phases. The first stage involved the decision from where and with the help of which tools I would collect the data and what the data would actually consist of. As I already discussed in section 5.4, anonymous online reader comments can work as powerful vehicles for the production and circulation of harmful discourses. Racist discourse consists of a web of social practices on different levels of society and online social media platforms have been found to provide fruitful environments for it. Moreover, the relative, yet not absolute, anonymity of many news websites' comment sections lowers the threshold for expressing radical ideas (see e.g. Coffey and Woolworth 2004). Thus, in the present study I wanted to examine online reader comments which were published anonymously, because, as indicated in previous research they would most likely feature more ideologically peripheral contributions in contrast to more public platforms (Cleland 2014; Harlow 2015; Steinfeldt et al. 2010).

The selection of the specific source of data, i.e. an article or articles with comment sections, proved to be more complicated. Even though it has been proven that the article attracting racist comments may include no reference to racial matters, I decided to choose an article which actually would cover such issues, because the number of racist comments would most likely be larger, and there would be more variety in terms of discursive strategies used by the commenters. In order to collect sufficiently extensive data, as far as it would be research economically feasible for a Master's thesis, I scanned the most popular topics and articles published on *The Washington Post's* website in August 2017. During that time, as detailed above, a violent clash between far-right protesters and their counter-protesters had occurred in Charlottesville, Virginia, regarding the decision to remove a statue of a Confederate commander from one of the city's parks. This event was very minimally covered in Finland, which is why I decided to familiarize myself with the issue.

As an outsider approaching the context consisting of the Civil War, Civil Rights Movement, Jim Crow legislation, racism and the contemporary tensions between movements such as Black Lives Matter and Unite the Right, I found myself as a researcher with a dilemma. I wondered how I could justify choosing this topic as the starting point for my thesis, even though I live thousands of kilometers from the actual site and have only little personal experience of racism. Fortunately, within that question I had already validated the need for the present study; in order for people to become more sensitive towards racist discourse, it has to be examined from an outsider's point of view, too. Those with personal experience of racism are no doubt more competent to point out racist practices, however, an outsider has the

advantage of finding out something which has been taken for granted and accepted as a part of the territory, but which should instead be challenged. Nevertheless, some racist practices are considered to be only marginal phenomena and their power and effect are accordingly understated and disregarded (Hill 2008: 6). One example of this is the silent acceptance of racist discourse by referring to freedom of speech. Racist discourse should not be considered as such because it is derogatory, harmful and has the concrete potential of inciting violence.

The reporting on the Charlottesville rally amassed tens of thousands of reader comments on *The Washington Post*'s website. The data for the present study was collected from one of the most commented articles with over 3,000 comments. I mentioned above that I wanted to collect as many comments as possible, but for research economical purposes it would have been impossible to include the most commented articles (with almost 20,000 comments each) in the current data. Moreover, I wish to make an observation for future research: the reader comment sections of *The Washington Post* are quite impractical when the amount of comments is as large as in the present study. The comment section downloads only a small amount of comments by turns, which forces the reader to continuously load more comments in short intervals. In addition, the examination of approximately 3,000 comments could not be done at one sitting. Thus, every time I continued to review the comments, I had to scroll and reload the comment section for more material multiple times in order to reach the point where I had stopped the last time. Since the comment section required this impractical process of scrolling and loading, it was not possible to collect the data by simply saving the entire web page.

As a result of the data selection, I collected in total 190 discussion threads for further analysis. However, it has to be acknowledged that it is possible and probable that some instances of racist discourse were not collected. When a human does the work instead of a machine, errors are bound to occur. The chosen comments were first saved as screenshots and then transcribed. The transcriptions were pseudonymized as thoroughly as possible by including nothing but the original text of the comments: all usernames and profile pictures, dates and specific times of uploading the comments and references to other commenters by their usernames were deleted. During the transcription process the data was securely stored in my personal U-drive in the University of Jyväskylä's network and after completing it, the screenshots were deleted.

6.4.1 Narrowing down the data

After the data collection, I began the process of narrowing down the perspective of my analysis. At this point the research questions were still on quite a general level, allowing both the collection of a variety of comments and the further restriction of focus. I thematically categorized the comments in different ways, according to their discussion activity, topics and discursive strategies. Observing the comments for similarities, I found that many of them included discussion about the participators of the rally and especially which one of them could be identified as guilty party.

When a comment focusses on framing the racialized threat in the context of a conflict (such as the Charlottesville rally), it is natural that someone is also attributed with the blame for the threat (Angouri and Wodak 2014: 542). Following this finding, I chose to narrow the data to the comments negotiating the target of blame and these comments were further divided into five categories according to who was to blame. The identified targets of blame were the media, Barack Obama, the Democratic Party and Black Lives Matter or the counter-protesters more generally. For the analysis presented in the following chapter, I chose two comments from each category, which best represent the discursive strategies used by the commenters to frame the racialized other as a threat.

The moderation policies of *The Washington Post's* website supposedly leave the reader with comments that do not appear racist on the surface. The exact process of moderation is of course never detailed; the commenters know only that a moderation team exists. This moderation team is complemented by artificial intelligence (WashPostPR 2017a), which probably is coded to register and report unorthodox language use with the help of keywords and phrases. From this perspective the moderation system appears to work. During the data collection process, I did not notice any use of for example stereotypically racist slurs (which do not need to be repeated here). However, racist discourse is more complicated than the writing of verbal insults.

Since I was not able to use any specific keywords or a specific set of rules to detect racist discourse, I was left with both the liberty and responsibility of forming a new detection system. This system can be divided into two categories: first, I utilized three lists of discursive structures, practices and moves which are typical to racist discourse (Blommaert and Verschueren 2002: 32-36; Wodak and Reisigl 2015: 578, 585). I will discuss these lists below in more detail regarding the analytic methods where these principles were of utmost

importance. Second, I worked hard to develop my Racist Internet Literacy, which is also discussed below, in order to become more sensitive to verbal racist practices which could not be straightforwardly categorized with the given lists (Hughey and Daniels 2013). Racist Internet Literacy became an important aspect of both the data collection and analysis, because it gave me a direction from which to look at comments that were not overtly racist and did not feature any apparent racist discursive moves, but still implicitly came across as racist.

6.4.2 Ethical considerations

The ethicality of conducting research on discourse concerns several aspects from the researcher's subjectivity to protecting the anonymity of anyone participating in the research process. In order to conduct ethically acceptable research, I have to commit to executing and representing the entire research process truthfully, because any attempt to manipulate or distort for example the findings can be seen as an attempt to deceive the audience. It is the researcher's responsibility to design and conduct her/his project while taking ethicality into consideration during each phase of the research project (Bolander and Locher 2013: 16-18; Markham and Buchanan 2012).

Social media research is interested in people's social interaction online and a discourse analyst is specifically interested in the discursive processes behind and resulting from interaction. When people – anonymous or identified internet users– and their language use are under observation, it is the researcher's responsibility to follow specific ethical guidelines of analysis and ensure that the research subjects' rights are protected. At present, the internet is full of seemingly publicly available data, but this does not mean that a researcher can choose, analyze and then publish anything s/he wants (Bolander and Locher 2013: 17).

Easily available data, such as open blogs or discussion forums, may not have been intended for everyone to read by the writers. However, by uploading something in a way that it becomes physically available for anyone, the producer of content has to acknowledge the relative end of privacy. Moreover, the researcher has to pay special attention to the nature of her/his data and, if necessary, certain measures can and have to be taken in order to respect the privacy of the study objects (Bolander and Locher 2013). The collection process of the data for the present study therefore entailed investigating and following the privacy policy of *The Washington Post* (The Washington Post 2018). The submission and discussion guidelines state that the commenters have total responsibility for the messages they post on the comment

sections. Moreover, it is also emphasized that the newspaper does not assume any liability for the content of the comments. The reader comment sections of *The Washington Post*'s website can be regarded as relatively public discussion forums, because the content can be read by anyone without registration and this openness is well notified on the website. However, the goal of the present study is to provide valuable information for the research on racist discourse, not to cause harm to anyone by identifying them as racists. Consequently, I will take concrete measures to protect the anonymity of the commenters.

6.4.3 The pseudonymization of the data

As a researcher, I will do my best to protect the anonymity of the people who have published the comments which I have collected as my data. As the comments have originally been written relatively anonymously, if the commenters wanted to do so, I will continue to protect that right. Since racist discourse is often met, depending on the context of course, with opposition and sometimes anger, being able to interact anonymously online is one of the few ways to openly express one's views. For this reason, I decided to collect the data for my Master's thesis from the comment sections on the website of *The Washington Post* newspaper. As mentioned above, *The Washington Post*'s website requires the commenters to register before being able to post content, but they are still given the freedom to choose the username which will be visible to everyone else. The usernames on the website vary from realistic usernames (combinations of first name and last name) to some commenters having adopted completely invented names. In order to make any attempts to trace the comments back as difficult as possible, I removed all details about the commenters from the transcriptions, as I already explained in the previous section.

Previous research on social media has dealt varyingly with the pseudonymization of data with some removing all specific information, including the source of data, whereas some have left the data almost untouched. For the present study, protecting the commenters' anonymity is linked with the content of the comments. The topic under observation, racism, is not part of any mainstream discourse as such and it is generally not witnessed or heard in formal, public contexts. Thus the contributors who had written the comments that included racist discourse may not want or they may not be able to express these ideas in public. It is impossible to deduce what kind of an effect blaming someone of producing extremist discourse, such as racist discourse, might have. Racism is an extremely sensitive topic and the psychological impact for the reader and writer has to be taken into consideration. In addition, racism is not

accepted in every community (e.g. workplaces) and revealing the username of a writer of racist messages could lead into their identification and subsequent disciplinary actions.

6.5 Methods of analysis

In the analysis of racist discourse in *The Washington Post*'s online reader comment sections, I will combine mainly qualitative analytical methods which have been previously used in other studies with a similar set-up. Since the scale of a Master's thesis sets research economical limitations for the analysis, I argue that for the present study it is more fruitful and worthwhile to conduct an in-depth analysis of a relatively small amount of data, rather than make more superficial observations from a larger set of data. Following this principle, I also made the decision to focus on a specific type of racist discourse, which describes the marked group of racialized others as a threat or dangerous. In short, the purpose of my study is to contribute to the timely research of racist discourse in social media. The decision to focus on a single platform of social media (newspaper's online reader comment sections) and a single theme of discussion (the Charlottesville rally), will allow me to provide valuable analysis for the existing body of research.

My analysis is divided into two sections; in the first section I will examine the data from a quantitative perspective and in the second, more in-depth section I will conduct qualitative discourse analysis. The quantitative perspective allows me to present a clear picture of the collected data as a larger whole, illustrating the different characteristics of racist discourse which were produced in the comment section. Furthermore, the quantitative analysis supports the entire analysis by providing a comprehensive picture of the data, while allowing the qualitative analysis to focus on a relatively small amount of data.

Each section of the discourse analysis is structured in the same way. First, individual comments will be analyzed following the analytic principles of CDA, paying specific attention to the discursive moves and strategies of racist discourse outlined and discussed in the analytical framework (Reisigl and Wodak 2015; van Dijk 2004). The goal is to detect specific discursive moves that the commenters use to convey their racist message with as much effect as possible. Each section of the qualitative analysis will feature a summary of the similarities of the comments and discussion threads, which will be further elaborated on in the following discussion chapter.

Following these steps I will strive to find answers to my research questions and thus reach the aims of my thesis, which are to discover how and why the racialized other is discursively presented as a threat in the anonymous online reader comments, what is the discursive function of the ‘blaming game’ and, finally, find evidence to support the argument that racist discourse should not be considered free speech and thus be protected by the constitution.

6.6 Methodological considerations

Analyzing online discourse has both problems and advantages. For the present study, one methodological problem is caused by the moderation policies of *The Washington Post*’s website; it cannot be known for certain which comments have been moderated or if some of them have been deleted. As Hughey and Daniels (2013) argue, the analysis of racist discourse operating in online newspapers’ reader comment sections is indeed not straightforward. The body of available comments does not include every comment ever posted because the mainstream, popular news sites have issued strict moderation guidelines for the commenters. In short, this means that posting comments that display extremist opinions has been made quite difficult. Thus, the effect of moderation has to be acknowledged in the following analysis (Witschge 2008: 79).

Commenters are expected to follow the issued rules and guidelines, or otherwise their comments will not be published in the first place, or, as a result of another commenter’s report, they might be deleted by the moderators. *The Washington Post* has listed on its website guidelines for commenters, and articles can also be found, where updates on the moderation policies are being informed (*The Washington Post* 2018). Thus, it can be assumed that the commenters are relatively aware of the monitoring of the comment sections. Interestingly, in June 2017, *The Washington Post* posted an article notifying about the deployment of ‘ModBot’, artificial intelligence software which would be utilized in comment moderation, alongside human moderators (WashPostPR 2017a). The software is described as having the ability to detect derogatory messages by scanning the comments for key words. These key words are of course listed nowhere on the website, most likely in order to prevent commenters from having the advantage of avoiding these triggers.

For the analysis of racist discourse, these moderation policies pose a problem. It is a positive thing that blatantly racist or otherwise pejorative comments cannot be published on these public commenting platforms, at least in theory, but it results in a relative uncertainty

regarding, on the one hand, the original content of the comments and, on the other hand, the actual amount of comments. However, as in the present study, this issue can be harnessed for the benefit of the analyst. When for instance *The Washington Post's* website moderates the readers' comments, one is supposedly left with the ones that do not appear offensive on the surface. Thus, in the present study I want to identify those racist discourses that do not necessarily seem racist at the first glance.

The analysis of online settings also has its advantages. One of these is the possibility to avoid the 'observer's paradox' (Bolander and Locher 2013: 18; Herring 1996: 5; Labov 1972: 209). The observer's paradox is a phenomenon often encountered in research of offline language use. Even the knowledge of someone, i.e. the observer/researcher, monitoring one's language use, in real-time or retrospectively can affect the subject's language use. It can be argued that this paradox can be avoided, at least to some extent, in online research.

In general, it cannot be proven whether or not the object of study (e.g. a blogger) is aware of her/his potential observer, but similar rules apply to online interaction as to offline contexts: if the producer of text (in any form) knows that the text has any audience, it will have an effect on how s/he designs her/his message. Moreover, the hypothetical blogger is fully aware that someone will be reading her/his texts, if they have been made public, but who that reader might be and what are her/his motivations, cannot be known. In the data collection and analysis of the present study, the observer's paradox had to be taken into account. Since the present data were collected from a public source, during the moment of publishing their comments, the writers have been aware that other people will be able to read and comment on them. However, it cannot be argued that this would necessarily distort the credibility of the data, because the reader comment sections are used precisely to *participate*, not to write a personal diary that no one is supposed to read. The commenters probably were not aware that their comments would be used for research purposes, which implies that they may have not deliberately modified their comments to appear for instance more politically correct.

6.7 Racist Internet Literacy

In order for the researcher to detect and analyze racist online discourse, s/he has to develop what Hughey and Daniels (2013: 337) have named as Racist Internet Literacy. This concept is very important for the present study, because the most explicitly racist comments have supposedly been deleted from the articles' reader comment sections following the moderation

guidelines. As a result, one can assume that only those racially motivated comments have been published which do not appear overtly racist. As the researcher, I have therefore had to develop my Racist Internet Literacy, the familiarity and knowledge of the subtle and obscure linguistic strategies used to convey racist messages in virtual settings. As a non-native English-speaker, I have had to take this issue into specific consideration, because, at least in the beginning of this research project, I was not as sensitive towards racist language as I am now.

In order to develop my sensitivity to racist language and be better able to detect hidden messages which have been embedded into other discourses, I have familiarized myself with a myriad of previous and relatively new research in the field, which I have presented in the previous section (e.g. Erjavec and Kovačič 2012: 900; Hill 2008; Orrù 2014). In addition, directed by the information on the historical and cultural context of the events in Charlottesville, I have independently studied relevant aspects of the history of the U.S. as well the development of current political and societal affairs. Relevant historical and socio-political themes which are also present in the comment sections included the abolition of slavery and the Civil War, Jim Crow era, Ku Klux Klan, the civil rights movement, the polarization between the two major political parties and the juxtaposition of the far-right and far-left movements.

In addition to becoming more acquainted with the current racial climate in the U.S. and especially surrounding the Charlottesville rally, I will also utilize the actual comments under the chosen articles as indicators towards racist behavior. This will be achieved by monitoring possible accusations of racism from the comments, analyze the targeted, potentially racist comments, and find out what might have triggered the original blaming. Racist discourse is produced, circulated, heard, read and responded to; in short, it is context-dependent as it shapes its interactive environment and is shaped by it. Most importantly, racist discourse affects especially those who it targets, often in a negative and harming way. In conclusion, racist comments are written with a motive, whether it is to provoke, insult or participate in a discussion, and therefore the replies can provide valuable information if their role is also acknowledged in the analysis.

Now, after having explained my aims, the process of data selection and collection as well as the most important methodological aspects for the present study, I will move on to the analysis of my data.

7 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF READER COMMENTS

In this section of my thesis, I will analyze racist comments which I collected from the online reader comment section of *The Washington Post*. As mentioned above, the aim of this analysis is to examine what type of racist discourse is present in the online comment section of one specific article and what the commenters actually try to accomplish with it.

The racist discourse under observation in this analysis is in each example characterized by specific discursive goals. These goals are framing the racialized other as a threat, assigning a person or a group with the blame or responsibility for the racialized threat, and explaining the situation at that moment as one in which the white population is under a threat. With different discursive moves the commenters strive to provide justifications for their views. Moreover, the commenters utilize the relatively anonymous comment section as an effective platform for spreading discriminative discourse. The current and the following chapter are dedicated to exposing and dismantling the racist discourse which was produced and circulated in the target online comment section.

The analysis has been divided into two sections. In the first section, I present and analyze the collected set of data from a quantitative point of view. The purpose of this short numerical analysis is to both provide the reader with a comprehensive view of the analyzed comment section and justify the subsequent selection of certain comments for the qualitative analysis. In this section, I will focus on the themes, topics and reply activity in the comment section because together they demonstrate the intersecting and multilayered nature of the reader discussions.

7.1 The number of racist comments in the comment section

The primary focus of my analysis is on discourse, i.e. how the English language is used to convey racist ideology. However, had I adopted an exclusively qualitative approach to the collected data purely for the sake of practicality, I believe that I could have distorted the overall picture. For this reason, I feel it is necessary and justified to discuss the collected data in the form of numbers and percentages before moving on to a more in-depth discursive analysis.

Table 1. The number of racist comments in the comment section from August 13 to 27, 2017

Total amount of comments	The amount of racist comments
3,357 ¹	242 (7,2% of all comments)

Table 1 presents the overall amount of racist comments in the comment section of the target article. These comments were counted on the grounds of the discursive content of the comments rather than only focusing on individual lexical choices such as using derogatory terms. Each of the 3,357 comments was read and examined paying specific attention to the discursive strategies that have been found to characterize racist discourse (Wodak and Reisigl 2015). In total, 242 racist comments were identified from the comment section and these comments were distributed between 190 discussion threads, indicating that many of the discussion threads including racist content included more than one racist comment. Most of the discussion threads included only one racist comment, which, for the majority of cases, was the initiator of the thread. The ensuing comments were usually criticizing the first comment. However, in those discussion threads which included more than one racist comment, the other racist comments (2-5 racist messages in total) were in most cases written by the first commenter in her/his own defense, but other commenters did also sometimes resort to racist discourse in attempting to defend the first commenter.

The fact that in one article alone the amount of racist comments is as substantial as in the article under observation is noteworthy because *The Washington Post* has declared a zero-tolerance policy for discriminative language use. Granted, not all the comments, which included racist discourse, were using overtly derogatory language or expressing direct threats towards a marked group of people; the more subtle and covert the racist discourse, the easier it is to excuse oneself by referring to freedom of speech.

7.2 Who is to blame for the racialized threat?

In order to narrow down the data for the qualitative discourse analysis, I conducted a preliminary content analysis on each of the 190 discussion threads after having formed an overall picture of the amount of racist content in the comment section. The goal of this

¹ This is the amount of comments recorded on the website. It is unknown whether this number includes comments which were posted, but have since been deleted by the moderation team or the commenter her/himself.

process was to hopefully find linguistic features and characteristics, which would provide a center of focus for my study.

In the preparatory analysis, I utilized as my guideline the focus on the way the racialized other is presented and discussed in the comments. This means that in the process of reading the comments, I paid specific attention to those commenters who focused on discussing the negative involvement of the counter-protesters, or some other group of people, in contrast to the ‘Unite the Right’ protesters. I paid specific attention to van Dijk’s (2004: 352-353) tripartite categorization of the racialized other as either different, deviant or a threat, and, as a result, found that 45 discussion threads (23,7%) featured racist discourse which defined the racialized other as a threat. Even though the threat discourse was not the most popular among racist commenters, its appearance and prevalence imply that the hostility towards racial groups has acquired extreme characteristics. Consequently, I decided to continue the analysis with these 45 discussion threads, because I wanted to find out why, how and for what purposes these people were utilizing an anonymous comment section to spread their hateful messages.

Unsurprisingly, with more than 3,357 comments, the variety of discussion topics and themes in the comment section was extensive. Merely listing all the discussion topics would not reveal the true complexity of the comment section, because in many discussion threads the commenters included new topics and perspectives into the discussion, which could pass completely ignored by others or, on the other hand, could divert the discussion into a new direction from the original comment. The topic of the original article did by no means restrict the topics of the reader comments to only the Charlottesville rally, President Trump or Black Lives Matter; instead, a myriad of more or less contemporary sociopolitical themes of the U.S. were covered. Table 2 lists the most popular discussion topics of the 45 discussion threads which included racist threat discourse. As can be observed from the table, topics in the analyzed discussion threads were often intersected with each other:

Table 2. The most popular discussion topics within the racist threat discourse

Topic	Number of discussion threads featuring the topic	Percentage of the total number of discussion threads ²
Black rage	28	62,2%
Black people vs. white people	18	40%
Police murders	13	28,9%
Barack Obama	13	28,9%
Media coverage of the rally	11	24,4%
The statue of Robert E. Lee	9	20%
Total	45	100%

The discussion topics presented in Table 2 were rarely featured separately and it was more common that as the discussions progressed, the topics also changed and intersected with one another within the threads. However, what connects all of these topics together is their focus on the specifically black racial aspect of the rally. The threads that included debates on the media coverage of the rally featured comments which focused on arguing how media attempted to distort the image of the rally in favor of Black Lives Matter. In addition, the significance of the statue of Robert E. Lee was downplayed by the commenters by referring to its historical value rather than its pro-slavery background and function in relation to the Jim Crow law. Only few commenters mentioned the fact that the neo-Nazi protesters were shouting threats targeted at Jewish people (Green 2017).

The most frequent discussion topic was black rage; the threads featuring this topic were the most direct in their threat discourse as they described black people, and Black Lives Matter as their representative, as dangerous, violent and completely out of control. The second most popular topic, the comparison between black and white people, was also expected as it is a core feature of racist discourse to create a dichotomous us versus them relationship between racially marked groups of people. The topic of police murders was often introduced as evidence of black people's threatening nature, and, one example which was brought up was

² 45 discussion threads

the shooting of Dallas police officers in 2016, which was conducted by a black person. One of the motives for the shooting was racial hatred towards white people (BBC 2016).

Lastly, only 9 discussion threads included messages about the statue of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. These comments all focused on defending the alt-right marchers by criticizing the Charlottesville City Council's decision to remove the statue. The commenters argued that the statue was an important part of the history of the Civil War and its removal would be disrespectful towards those who fought and died during the war. However, these commenters were effectively silenced by respondents who pointed out that the statue was erected as a reminder for black people of slavery and the Jim Crow era rather than as a tribute to the soldiers.

Importantly for the rest of the analysis, the way in which Barack Obama and the mainstream U.S. media were discussed in relation to the Charlottesville rally indicated towards fundamental discursive strategies used by the commenters. Obama and the mainstream media were not only topics of discussion, but rather they were assigned with particular roles in the timeline both preceding and following the rally. What I found was that both of them were ascribed with the responsibility and blame for the rally. Consequently, out of the 45 discussion threads 32 included an accusation or assignment of blame and responsibility. Table 3 presents the four targets of blame and their prevalence in the discussion threads:

Table 3. The targets of blame

The target	The number of discussion threads featuring the target	Percentage from the discussion threads ³
Barack Obama	13	40,6%
The media	11	34,4%
The Democratic Party or the left	10	31,3%
Black Lives Matter or the counter-protesters	7	21,9%
Total	32	100%

³ From the 32 discussion threads including an assignment of blame or responsibility

As Table 3 shows, there were intersections of topics also within the assignments of blame. I will not describe these categories in detail now, because the following section will present data examples from each one. Out of these four categories, the media, the Democratic Party and Black Lives Matter can be relatively easily connected with the immediate context of the Charlottesville rally. However, in order to understand why Barack Obama, who was the most popular target of blame, was mentioned so often, it is crucial to stress that these commenters often placed the Charlottesville rally on a timeline instead of considering it a separate incident. This timeline had its beginning in different time for different people, but for many, the rally was framed as a direct consequence of Barack Obama's time as the president of the United States. Moreover, the rally was considered a result of Obama's favoring of black people and ignorance towards their violent actions, which was embodied in the allegedly violent form of Black Lives Matter.

In summary, most of the racist comments which framed the racialized other as a threat also assigned a person or a group of people with the responsibility for the threat. Eight discussion threads also proposed a solution for this thread, or, in turn, an inauspicious prediction for the future of the U.S. For research economical purposes, the following qualitative analysis will only feature comments discussing the racialized threat and the blame; the solutions and predictions will be featured in the following chapter.

8 QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF RACIST COMMENTS

In this chapter I will present and discuss the eight comments which were chosen as examples from the collected data. Each comment is an example of racist discourse. Guided by the research questions I will endeavor to find out what ideas of the racialized other these commenters present, who they hold as responsible for the racialized threat and how they actually attempt to persuade their audience.

The analysis will be structured according to the different targets of blame for the racialized threat which were presented in Table 3: Barack Obama, the media, the Democratic Party or the left and finally Black Lives Matter or the counter-protesters.

8.1 Blaming Barack Obama

- (1) When Obama first won the presidency I cried tears of joy over the hope that racism would become a thing of the past and that people would be judged on character, values and talents rather than the color of their skin. My God, if America can elect a black president it shows we are nearly there. My hopes were absolutely dashed a few years ago when I realized that Al Sharpton had gained influence at the White House and suddenly our lives were overwhelmed with BLM, violence, cop massacres and black racial resentment. Sure enough America is now more divided than before. This is the antithesis of what I expected to happen when I voted twice for Obama. This right wing trash is disgusting and pathetic but I believe this was all largely set in motion during Obama's second term in office.

Example (1) differs from the following examples as it is a first-person narrative; the commenter actively uses the pronoun "I" to describe her/his opinions and actions. The comment begins with a scene-setting, "When Obama first won the presidency..." which functions as a starting point for the chronologically evolving narrative. Even though the commenter seemingly focuses on expressing her/his disappointment towards Barack Obama's administration, the text actually conveys, quite explicitly, racist discourse targeted at the black population living in the U.S. At the surface level, the commenter's main objective seems to be to brand Obama as the scapegoat for various societal and especially racial issues (from the commenter's viewpoint) – "BLM, violence, cop massacres and black racial resentment" – but under cover of the blame towards Obama, the commenter expresses her/his racist attitude towards black people. However, the content of the comment has been strongly centered around Obama's actions, which gives the initial impression that the commenter is only criticizing the former president. In other words, the commenter utilizes political discourse as a hedge for racist discourse.

The commenter produces racist discourse which characterizes black American people as a violent threat for a vaguely defined, victimized “us.” This division of people is actually explicitly stated and the writer twice addresses her/his audience in collectivistic terms:

... and suddenly *our lives* were overwhelmed with BLM, violence, cop massacres and black racial resentment.

...it shows *we* are nearly there.

These two manifestations of a collectivistic perspective are not haphazard, because they significantly alter the comment’s otherwise individualistic tone. Even though it cannot be argued for certain, this premeditated use of first-person plural noun phrases and pronouns emphasizes and extends the commenter’s concern from her/himself to others also feeling threatened and thus establishes the commenter as a person caring for the common good. However, when this common good excludes Black Lives Matter and black people, the commenter’s seemingly virtuous motives cannot be morally justified. Racism is as powerful as are the people supporting and spreading it and this comment demonstrates how strong an effect can be produced with racist discourse within a personal narrative.

Despite the open expressions of racism, the writer of this comment does utilize discursive moves in order to mitigate and dismiss possible accusations of racism. This strategy is important especially in a public forum such as the comment section, because it minimizes the risk of the comment being deleted. For instance, the last sentence of the comment, “... but I believe this was all largely set in motion...” includes an epistemic hedge “but I believe”, which highlights the sentence’s personal tone, and an adverbial hedge “largely”, which creates room for defending against accusations of excessive assertiveness. However, the location of this hedging, in terms of the entire comment, is interesting. It appears that the commenter wanted to include these expressions towards the end of the comment, because in this way it would diminish the effect of the rest of the comment as little as possible. The majority of example (3) has been written assertively, in an attempt to validate the commenter’s knowledge and persuasiveness. This may explain why the hedges were utilized in the last sentence, as in that way it might be possible to maintain the convincing effect, but still attempt to dodge accusations of racism.

As opposed to the examples of a speaker saving her/his face from accusations of being a racist by claiming to have been only joking (Hill 2008: 95), in this comment personalism functions the other way round. Instead of insisting on *not* being serious, in this comment the writer

actually works hard to explicitly prove s/he is serious. For research on racism, this is an interesting observation, because it points towards an idea of racism being somehow acceptable if one only provides enough evidence to support the adopted point of view.

Moreover, example (1) is an example of racist discourse which is produced with the help of perspectivation and personalism in order to persuade as many readers as possible. This is achieved with a first-person narrative and sentimental expressions such as “I cried tears of joy”, “My God” and “My hopes were absolutely dashed.” The commenter carefully attempts to disguise her/his racist ideology behind the mask of a worried citizen, but this emotionality does not erase the fact that this type of racist discourse is indefensible. The commenter directly describes the threat – “BLM, violence, cop massacres and black racial resentment” – without any concrete real-life examples of these threatening phenomena and people. S/he only attempts to substantiate her/his position with the assertive hyperbole “Sure enough America is now more divided than before.” Moreover, for the commenter it seems logical to trace the source of the threat back to President Obama, who, by being a black person in a highly powerful position, had a major contributing role in the creation of the whole situation. All these factors are at the core of the racist discourse analyzed in this study. This type of racist discourse does not content itself with attacking the racialized other; instead, it builds a more complex web of contributing factors and actors.

- (2) I thought the country was on track to healing racial tensions under Obama. I’m not sure however having Obama invite BLM to the WH numerous times as their members are simultaneously openly shouting encouragement of violence towards cops and BLM members are involved in murdering cops was the right message. But hey...I know it’s worse that Trump hasn’t spelled out his disdain in the exact wording the left wants...and of course there’s that whole....he has an “R” behind this name travesty. Without hypocrisy the left would not exist.

(WH= White House)

In example (2), the commenter continues to blame President Obama for the racialized threat posed by Black Lives Matter. In a similar vein with the previous commenter, this contributor also traces the roots of the current, unstable situation back to the time when Barack Obama was in office. Moreover, Obama’s political activity is again directly linked with racial tensions, which were discussed a great deal during his time in office as the first black president. This commenter, like many others in the present data, seems to be assuming that a black president would only prioritize racial issues in his politics. S/he directly asserts her/his disapproval of Obama inviting representatives of Black Lives Matter to the White House and

argues that it did not send “the right message”. With this ‘right message’ the commenter refers to violence which allegedly happened in parallel with the meetings. Accordingly, the commenter attributes Obama with some of the responsibility for that violence, because he was at the same time hosting members of the violent group. Thus the racialized threat, posed by Black Lives Matter, is directly linked with an implicit approval from the president at that time.

Black Lives Matter is framed as the source and instigator of violence, and therefore it is characterized as a threat. The commenter does not explicitly state the scale of this threat, but by describing Black Lives Matter and its members as “openly shouting encouragement of violence towards cops” and having been “involved in murdering cops”, s/he implies that a threat towards the protectors of the citizens is also a threat towards everyone. These categorical assertions which the commenter does not mitigate and presents them as undeniable facts, frame Black Lives Matter as a racialized threat. Moreover, the aspect of a specifically *racial* threat can be witnessed in the first sentence of the comment:

I thought the country was on track to healing *racial tensions* under Obama.

Thus, the commenter directly connects Black Lives Matter to racial tensions, because this phrase is followed by a description of the group’s alleged violence against the law enforcement. Furthermore, I argue that since the commenter centers her/his concern around racial tensions, the victimized, yet racially unmarked, policemen are implied to be white. Consequently, as the policemen are representing the opposing side to the racialized threat, the commenter also implies that the threatened group of people includes all the white people in the United States.

The commenter also criticizes *The Washington Post’s* article and expresses her/his disapproval of its judgmental attitude towards President Trump. S/he utilizes the beginning of her/his comment as a counter-example of Obama’s allegedly failed conduct during his time in office and sarcastically disapproves with the writer of the article. The way in which the commenter juxtaposes the two presidents’ actions, Obama’s contribution to racial violence and Trump’s inability to spell “out his disdain in the exact wording the left wants”, contrasts two very different matters as far as their consequences are considered. The commenter’s racist discourse of Obama and Black Lives Matter is only effectively emphasized by this imbalance of agency between the black president and the white one. The characterization of President Trump as only a bystander is in stark contrast with the agency given to Obama.

In comparison with the previous commenter, the commenter in example (2) employs a different temporal approach. Whereas the commenter in example (1) wrote her/his narrative quite chronologically, creating a story-like effect, the commenter in this example utilizes parallelism when s/he is describing both Obama's responsibility and Black Lives Matter's violence. This discursive effect was created with the use of adverbials "numerous (times)" "simultaneously" which highlight the multiplicity and concurrency of the two events; while Obama was hosting Black Lives Matter in the White House, violence was occurring elsewhere. This also creates a hierarchy between Obama and Black Lives Matter and represents Obama in an authoritative position in relation to the activist group. The commenter therefore discursively creates an image of a threatening group who should be under control of an authority figure.

Similarly to example (1), in this example Obama's actions are also contrasted with the political actions of the right wing, specifically with President Trump in this case. Obama is assigned with a great deal of agency and responsibility; according to the commenter, it was "under Obama" when racial tensions got worse and "having Obama invite BLM to the WH" was not a favorable choice of action. As a political discourse, this comment could pass as a critique towards the former president while defending the current one. However, the context of the article, which is the target of the comments, and the commenter's production of discourse itself point towards implicit racism embedded with the seemingly political message. A black president is directly and exclusively linked to a group which raises awareness of racial struggles, especially those of black people. The commenter therefore racializes both the threat and the blame and discursively creates an image of America that is plagued by a black social movement, who in turn is protected by a black president. The objective of racist discourse in this example is to create a seemingly natural link between Barack Obama and Black Lives Matter and, consequently, frame them both as enemies of the U.S. citizens. Parallelism is effectively utilized to excuse the actions of the neo-Nazi marchers by comparing them with Black Lives Matter and thus attempting to turn the spotlight from the former and frame the latter group as violent and uncontrollable. However, the racist ideology behind the alt-right movement cannot be concealed.

8.2 Blaming the media

- (3) The media's refusal to call out the Black crime and racism and the media's attempts to destroy America by failing to call a spade a spade and hold those criminals accountable for their actions is the entire problem. You have angered those who were law abiding citizens who got tired of hearing that violent racist crowds burning and looting was acceptable behavior. YOU the media is responsible for racism and YOU use it to peddle your phoney Journalism.

In example (3), the commenter portrays black criminals as the racial threat. This threat is not attributed with as much agency as the media are. Instead, the commenter portrays the threat as a problematic phenomenon that should have been controlled by the media. The commenter emphasizes the racial aspect of the threat, i.e. racializes it by directly naming the threat as “Black crime and racism” in the first sentence, and by giving skin color further prominence by writing it in upper case. Since the commenter considers the racialized others – specifically black people – as dangerous, s/he emphatically characterizes them as “violent racist crowds”, where choosing to refer to them as crowds implies their multitude and strength. Attributing violence to the threat highlights the alleged victimized position of the in-group, to which in this case the commenter most likely positions her/himself (van Dijk 2000). Moreover, as the threatened group of people is described as “law abiding citizens”, the tripartite juxtaposition between the inclusive yet implicit we, the threatening racialized them and the responsible you (the media) is clear.

It is interesting and noteworthy how the role and power of the media is emphasized by this commenter. S/he actually describes and polarizes three different groups of people, the media, the black community and the oblique group of the (white) us, as opposed to the typical dichotomous us versus them juxtaposition, which is characteristic to racist discourse (Wodak and Reisigl 2015: 578). It can be inferred that the commenter places her/himself within the in-group of us, more specifically “law abiding citizens”, because s/he addresses the media as “you”, and the racialized others are described as the threatening out-group formed by “those criminals.” The commenter emphasizes the negative impact of the media with the hyperbolic phrase “the media's attempts to destroy America” and by arguing that “the entire problem” is indeed caused by the media's actions. What “the entire problem” actually stands for remains implicit, but it is probable that the commenter is referring to the general racial tensions discussed in the news article. This presumption is supported by the last sentence of the comment, in which the commenter directly blames the media for being responsible for racism. The commenter concludes by asserting that the media uses racism to “peddle your phoney

Journalism”, thus highlighting her/his disapproval and by writing journalism in upper-case, s/he could be attempting to be sarcastic by giving the concept false emphasis despite the negative attribute “phoney.”

The commenter highlights the threat posed by the racialized other by actionalization, a type of discursive categorization, in which people are referred to in terms of action. Framing someone as a threat entails in itself the idea of negative activity towards the supposed in-group. As opposed to racist discourse focusing on the difference of the others, arguing for someone’s threatening nature necessitates the racist discourse to explain what they *do* that is threatening. In this comment the threatening others are labelled as “criminals” and “racists.” The stigmatizing function of these objectifying nouns is further complemented by the actionalization of the counter-protesters by describing them as “burning” and “looting”. Moreover, emphasizing crime as the cause of the racial threat is very typical for racist discourse (Henry and Tator 2002: 164; van Dijk 2004: 353).

The commenter explicitly blames the media for the racialized threat and its consequences in every sentence. Not only does the commenter accuse the media for its refusal to call out the racialized threat, but s/he also directly blames the media for attempting to destroy America. With the plural form “attempts” the commenter implies that this practice has been going on for some time. According to the commenter, the way in which the media has attempted to destroy America has been by “failing to call a spade a spade.” This idiom, which stands for saying things as they are, can also be inferred to function as a racist slur. In the 1920s, spade was used as a derogatory term for black people, as the color of the playing card suit spade is black. The original meaning of the idiom itself dates back to before this pejorative use of the term, but for instance journalists are advised not to use it because of its negative connotation (Tinsely- Jones 2003). I argue that in this context the idiom indeed has a racist tone and thus contributes to the racist discourse produced by the commenter.

In example (3), the commenter aims at framing the media as an active accomplice and enabler to the racialized threat and highlights the media’s liability for the white American people. This perspective becomes apparent when the commenter first presents the media being responsible for “the entire problem” and continues by stating that as a result of these actions, the media has angered “the law abiding citizens.” The media is described as supporting the counter-protesters and, as a logical consequence, failing to protect those under the racialized threat. The commenter does not resort to explicit personalization, but instead the comment is

written without mitigating modalities, such as hedging; the comment is characterized by categorical assertions and a tone of prognostic urgency. What happens next as “law abiding citizens” have been angered is not mentioned.

- (4) The Washington Post and other nauseating control freak media and politicians are the problem. They do not pass judgement on Antifa and other violent left organizations. They do not condemn the execution of Policemen incited by Black Lives Matter. They are not equal opportunity condemnation people. They have a soft spot for the violent left. People are fed up with it, and they won't be shut down by the “established” orthodoxy any more. It has nothing to do with the orange haired baboon in office.

In example (4), the commenter's message is characterized by strong and accusatory categorical assertions, which focus on the blame for the racialized threat, instead of targeting the threatening group of people themselves. The comment begins with the writer asserting that politicians, the media and especially *The Washington Post* are the problem. This “problem” is a reference to the original article, which frames the alt-right protesters as well as President Trump as the problem for the U.S. Consequently, the first sentence functions as a counter-argument against the criticism targeted at President Trump by the journalist of *The Washington Post*. The first sentence also works as an introduction for the commenter's counter-discursive stance. Moreover, the first sentence is supported by the following four sentences which are all structured assertively, either stating what the people in charge of the problem do not do (“do not pass judgement”, “do not condemn”) or are not (“are not equal condemnation people”), finishing with “They have a soft spot for the violent left.” All these assertions rhetorically build the discourse to establish “the problem” and logically convince the reader of the responsibility of “they.” In short, the commenter blames *The Washington Post*, and “other nauseating control freak media and politicians” for their inability and reluctance to condemn the alleged violence of different left organizations.

Speaking on behalf of “people”, standing for the ordinary American people under a racialized threat, the commenter creates an image of the country where the people have been systematically restrained, the adverb “any more” emphasizing the longevity of this situation. In the same vein, with the arguments against *The Washington Post* and other media representatives and politicians, the commenter highlights her/his mistrust of the leftist authority by appointing them as participants in “the established orthodoxy.” The use of scare quotes indicates that the commenter does not mean what s/he is writing and emphasizes her/his dislike of and disagreement with the current policies. Specific media representatives and politicians are framed as the reason why the American people are facing the threat posed

by Antifa, Black Lives Matter and “other violent left organizations” and by disposing of them, people can dispose of “the problem.”

In this comment, the writer again divides the American people into three categories. First, there is the violent left and, within it, Black Lives Matter, posing the threat of violence and civil unrest to the rest of the people. According to the commenter, the threat posed by Black Lives Matter is a serious one, as s/he chooses to illustrate its actions with an example “the execution of Policemen.” This choice of description is meaningful for two reasons. First, the connotation of the noun “execution” is quite different from “murder” or “killing”, which also depict the act of taking someone’s life. The use of “execution” entails not only the idea of the victims’ complete inability to defend for themselves, but also a level of authoritative sanctioning. Thus, the policemen are victimized and objectified whereas Black Lives Matter is given the full responsibility and placed as the only active subject.

However, the threat posed by these left organizations is discursively framed by the commenter as a specifically racialized threat. This can be witnessed from these two sentences:

They do not condemn the execution of Policemen incited by Black Lives Matter. They are not equal opportunity condemnation people.

The danger caused by Black Lives Matter is materialized with a practical example of their threatening behavior “the execution of Policemen”, emphasizing the allegedly brutal character of Black Lives Matter. The commenter wants to highlight the acuteness and gravity of the racial threat by depicting violence against people in an authoritative position. This type of racist discourse can generate an atmosphere of a crisis: if the people who are supposed to be protecting others cannot defend themselves, how can anyone feel safe? In addition, it is peculiar how Black Lives Matter is given the agency in this particular sentence as the commenter otherwise labels the “violent left” as the threat. This indicates that the commenter considers Black Lives Matter a major representative of the “violent left” and as an organization whose actions should be considered as a genuine manifestation of their threatening nature. As a result, the vague “violent left” is given a racialized, black face.

The categorical assertions indicate that the image of a country under a racial threat is the true state of the situation from the commenter’s perspective - or at least this is what s/he wants the reader to think - and that there is no alternative. After the list of assertions, the commenter concludes her/his comment with two discursively different statements, both of which are

crucial for the entire comment and racist discourse it embodies. First, the commenter verbally channels what s/he thinks is the current situation among the third group of people, the in-group of “us,” within which s/he places her/himself without making it explicit.

People are fed up with it, and they won't be shut down by the “established” orthodoxy any more.

“People are fed up with it...” ties together the preceding assertions, highlighting that it is the previously-mentioned racialized “problem” that people are fed up with. However, what follows this phrase is significant for the overall message: “...and they won't be shut down by the “established” orthodoxy any more.” In this phrase the commenter formulates a predictive declaration, suggesting that the time has come for “people” to do something to eradicate “the problem.” This suggests that the commenter no longer considers the media or the politicians capable of taking care of the situation, but instead ordinary (implicitly white) people have to take care of it themselves.

As far as the Left, or “the established orthodoxy”, is considered, the accusations of this commenter convey such racist discourse which considers the democratic, leftist politics the root cause for the discussed violence. Thus the second category of people, the media and sympathizing politicians, are referred to in the first sentence, placing them in a central and authoritative position in relation to the racialized threat. The commenter refers twice to the left with the strong negative adjective attribute ‘violent’, but s/he also seems to be criticizing the social politics of the left in the U.S. by calling them as not being “equal opportunity condemnation people.” This ironic description is a reference to the equal opportunity policy, which is supported by the Democratic Party and which attempts to eradicate race, among many other personal qualities, as a contributing factor in for instance employment (The Human Rights Campaign 2018).

To sum up, example (4) is a representative of racist discourse which considers the racialized other as a threat that cannot be controlled by the relevant authorities. Thus it is the group of “us” which needs and is encouraged to take the reins. This type of racist discourse is serious and dangerous for the racialized other, because it actually implies that concrete measures should be taken against them. The way in which the commenter verbalizes this demand, signals that the process has already begun. However, the fact that this comment was published in the first place is disconcerting, because the commenter insinuates serious actions against black people.

8.3 Blaming Black Lives Matter

The following examples, in contrast to examples 1-4, do not attempt to frame an authority figure or group as holding the responsibility for the violence that occurred during or before the Charlottesville rally. Instead, the commenters in examples (5) and (6) hold the counter-protesters, who are named varyingly as Black Lives Matter, the Antifa and the left, liable for the chain of events.

- (5) There was no violence until the Antifa, Black Lives Matter and other social justice warriors showed up to counter-protest. The Unite The White group had a legal permit to assemble and march, but the counter-protesters did not. The Unite The White group dispersed when the police intervened... the counter-protesters did not. The people hit by the car were in the streets without a permit and were blocking traffic. Not defending the driver here...just pointing out the facts. If the counter-protesters had dispersed as ordered, or were peacefully walking on the sidewalks, none of them would have been hit. Also...don't try and blame the helicopter crash and the deaths of two policemen on the Unite The White group; that one is on the Virginia State Police. Again...there would have been no need for a heavy police presence and air surveillance had the Antifa and leftist counter-protesters stayed home.

In example (5), the commenter does not name a separate target of blame for the threat, but instead s/he attributes the group of counter-protesters as much agency and responsibility as possible. This example of racist discourse is characterized by categorical assertions, formulated as a list of counter-arguments opposing the original article and the mainstream media coverage of the Charlottesville rally. The comment is structured as a counter-point of view of the rally; in the second and third sentence, events are described with the Unite the White group in the head subject position. Moreover, throughout the comment, the writer portrays the "Unite The White" group vis-à-vis with another subject in order to present the former in a more positive light than the mainstream media have done. In the beginning of the comment, the focus is on what the Unite the White did and Black Lives Matter did not do during the rally. According to the commenter, the "Unite The White" group had a permit to assemble and march and they did as the police ordered and dispersed when they were told to do so; these actions Black Lives Matter did not perform.

This type of counter-narrative and juxtaposing is an effective discursive tool for racist discourse. First, having been written assertively, the comment presents the readers with an alternative truth and guides them to a questioning about the original article. Second, it allows the commenter to present her/his view of the events, what s/he believes actually happened and thus present and highlight the events and people that support the counter-narrative and, on the other hand, omit those factors that would work against it. For instance, the way in which the

commenter describes the moment when one of the protesters drove his car into the crowd of counter-protesters effectively summarizes her/his viewpoint of the incident and the entire rally:

The people hit by the car were in the streets without a permit and were blocking traffic.

Here the commenter utilizes transitivity in order to frame the incident favorably for her/his narrative; s/he places “the people hit by the car” in the subject position, completely erases the driver from the narrative and utilizes only “the car” to minimize the agency and responsibility of the driver. Finally, s/he attributes the victims with the entire blame, because they did not have a permit and, more astonishingly, dared to block the traffic. Later, the commenter also emphasizes the victims’ fault by stating that “none of them would have been hit”, again removing the driver from the subject position and further dissipating the agent as well. These sentences embody the commenter’s attitude towards the counter-protesters and her/his lack of sympathy and objectivity. However, even this commenter does not forget to cover her/his back in some way and the accusatory sentence was followed by an attempt to mitigate its force:

Not defending the driver here... just pointing out the facts.

It seems illogical that, despite the content of the preceding sentence, the commenter claims that s/he was not actually defending the driver. Was s/he not doing exactly that by blaming the victims and downplaying the intentionality of the crash? Moreover, the commenter concludes this part of the comment by discursively justifying her/his output; s/he was “just pointing out the facts.” The use of the discourse marker and hedge ‘just’ implies that the commenter considers her/his assertions to be self-evident and that s/he had no trouble writing them. Moreover, this hedge also implies that the commenter does not feel the need to provide any explanation for her/his view, as “the facts” should be well known. In addition to shifting the responsibility for the violence to the counter-protesters, this comment is actually one of the few in my data that addressed the death of the two police-men who died in a helicopter accident on their way to the rally site.

This comment does not express racist attitudes as explicitly as some of the commenters in the previous examples, but her/his way of thinking and the motivation behind the racist discourse can be observed from both the context of the comment as well as the discourse itself. In order to manifest her/his racist ideology, the commenter relies on discursively framing the

protesters as the “good” side, and thus more implicitly contributing to the negative image of the counter-protesters, who s/he considers to be violent and threatening. They are also given the racial mark by the excessive underlining of the whiteness of the protesters. In fact, most of the media coverage called the protesters “Unite the Right” group rather than “Unite the White.” It cannot be argued for certain whether the commenter’s alternative naming was a mistake or deliberate discursive strategy, but it nevertheless emphasizes, in addition to the cause of the rally, the racial markedness of the opposing groups.

As mentioned above, the comment mostly consists of categorical assertions, formulated in the style of “the Unite the White did X, the counter-protesters did not”, and only a few mitigating devices. The commenter relies on the persuasive effect of her/his text and therefore does not present any concrete evidence to support the counter-narrative. However, racist discourse can be detected behind this seemingly objective assertiveness, which could appear to be only defending the wrongly judged group of protesters. When s/he nominates the counter-protesters as “Antifa, Black Lives Matter and other social justice warriors”, the commenter attributes these people with racial markedness with the context-dependent Black Lives Matter, which in the comment section was used rather synonymously to refer to black people by those who defended the Unite the Right rally. The use of the actionalized noun warrior also refers to primitive violence, which links with the described lack of control among the counter-protesters.

The aim of example (5) is to discredit and invalidate the news coverage submitted from Charlottesville. The commenter’s view of the violence that occurred as the result of the rally is completely opposite to the information given by for instance *The Washington Post*. According to the commenter, no violence would have occurred if the counter-protesters had stayed home, because they, unlike the neo-Nazi protesters, did not have “a legal permit to assemble and march.” The racist discourse in this comment focuses on denigrating the counter-protesters, who are framed as black with the synonymously utilized Black Lives Matter, in contrast with Unite the White, and providing evidence of their violent and uncontrollable behavior. The racialized others – others than Unite the *White* – are characterized as indifferent towards laws and authorities and disrespectful of the protesters right to march. Thus they are threatening to anyone who disagrees with them, because even the presence of law enforcements does not bother them.

- (6) Trump may be an idiot, however, the seeds for yesterday's demonstration were planted when BLM was allowed to riot and loot with total impunity. Yesterday was the backlash we knew was coming. It is time for prudent Americans to come together and combat the evil on both sides. BLM does not hold the moral high ground of MLK.

Example (6) is an example of racist discourse creating an image of a dichotomous American society which is divided into two sides, the white "us" and the racialized, black "them." The commenter's objective is to strengthen the division between these two groups by framing one of them as threatening to the other. In order to achieve this goal of juxtaposing Black Lives Matter and "prudent Americans", the commenter describes Black Lives Matter as having been able to do anything without punishment, whereas "prudent Americans" are only now encouraged to express resistance against the threat. According to the commenter, the threat is not a new phenomenon as s/he states that "Yesterday was the backlash we knew was coming", which sets the discourse as one depicting the outcome of an unsuccessful co-existence of two racial groups of people. The racist discourse of this comment conveys a stark gulf between the two racial groups, a gulf specifically based on civility and morals. The commenter appears to be expressing both her/his idea of a good American citizen and disdain towards Black Lives Matter. These good citizens, "prudent Americans", are not only characterized as victims, but also as having the ability – and requirement – to fight the threat. The commenter attempts to generalize this threat by calling it "the evil on both sides", but in the comment the threat is exclusively contextualized as Black Lives Matter.

In contrast with the previous example (5), this commenter does not focus on describing the actual events of the rally or even the opposing sides. Instead, s/he refers to the rally only as "yesterday's demonstration" and simply "yesterday". This is a powerful discursive move, because it allows the reader to decide what the commenter means by "yesterday" and what her/his perspective to the incident is. The rally is only considered a stage in what seems to be a far longer period of time, because the commenter refers to the time both before and after the rally. Thus the commenter constructs a timeline, which is supposed to function as a justification for her/his negative attitude towards Black Lives Matter. Moreover, the commenter expresses her/his viewpoint with categorical assertions such as "the seeds for yesterday's demonstration were planted when BLM was allowed to riot and loot with total impunity", "yesterday was the backlash we knew was coming" and "BLM does not hold the moral high ground of MLK" which emphasize her/his certainty and knowledge in addition to attempting to justify her/his racist views.

According to the commenter, the situation had begun to worsen long before the rally in Charlottesville. In racist discourse, this type of argument highlights the longevity and force of the racialized threat, and, on the other hand attributes authorities with more blame for not reacting early enough. Black Lives Matter is again positioned in a central role as the source of danger and lack of morality, but the commenter fails to state directly, who s/he actually holds responsible for the organization's actions:

...the seeds for yesterday's demonstration were planted when BLM was allowed to riot and loot with total impunity.

Martin Luther King Jr, to whom the commenter refers as MLK, holds a strong position in the 'American dream' discourse as well as in the discourse of black social movements. He is often considered the figurehead of the Civil Rights Movement and the sociopolitical struggles of the black people in the U.S. When the commenter concludes her/his contribution by arguing that "BLM does not hold the moral high ground of MLK," s/he discursively creates an affective juxtaposition between the two intertwined eras of black struggles. Arguing that Black Lives Matter lacks the "moral high ground" of Martin Luther King Jr, the commenter presents them as significantly inferior in comparison and thus expresses her/his disapproval of the group. The commenter thus attempts to excuse her/his racist discourse by expressing her/his view and disapproval of Black Lives Matter's members' lack of civility and morality – aspects attributed with Martin Luther King Jr.

As in the other examples above, the racist discourse in this comment focuses on expressing a rational and seemingly understandable explanation for the dislike of black people. The commenter also attempts to shift the criticism and blame targeted at President Trump in the original news article. In this case, s/he does not actually accuse the writer of the article of being wrong, but instead dismisses the level of responsibility attributed to Trump at the very beginning of the comment by stating "Trump may be an idiot, however..." This statement functions as a mitigation device for the racist discourse by providing a bridge for the harsh racist comment. Moreover, when the commenter calls President Trump an idiot, s/he utilizes somatization in order to soften the criticism targeted at Trump by arguing for his general stupidity. This type of somatization is a form of subject categorization which is utilized to represent people in terms of their physical appearance and in this case mental deficiency (Reisigl and Wodak 2001: 48, 53) Calling someone an idiot or stupid can mitigate the power of a person's intellectual capability; however, it does not erase responsibility.

8.4 Blaming the Democratic Party

- (7) If BLM can storm the streets, make speeches, protests, etc, surely Whites can do the same? Liberal hypocrisy knows no bounds. That's one of the cornerstones of why Liberalism and the Democrat party have been failing miserably for years. They expect everyone to feel the same way they do, and if they don't, it's hate! Meanwhile BLM can trash cities, start fires, loot and pillage and it's called "protesting" by the liberal media.

This comment is an example of direct racist discourse attacking black people, framing them as a dangerous group of people who are unfairly protected by the liberal media. The geographical context of the comment remains the same as in the original article, but here again the commenter attempts to contradict the journalist's accusations targeting President Trump by shifting the blame to Black Lives Matter. The aim of this comment is to present the commenter's view of different the roles of the different actors during the rally: Black Lives Matter, and black people more generally, as the antagonists, the liberal media as their protector, white people as the victims and the Democratic Party as the root cause of black people's violence.

The racist discourse of this commenter is characterized by its strong expression of racial hierarchy. Already in the first sentence the commenter discursively creates the racial dichotomy between black and white people by contrasting BLM (Black Lives Matter) and "Whites":

If *BLM* can storm the streets, make speeches, protests, etc. surely *Whites* can do the same?

As I have already suggested, this racial polarity has been implied by a myriad of commenters, but this particular commenter expresses it quite directly: s/he considers Black Lives Matter to be synonymous with black people. Moreover, the capitalization of "Whites" highlights the commenter's racist ideology, as s/he truly appears to hold the two racial groups as separate and having a distinct hierarchy. Black Lives Matter is only a subgroup of the black racial group, which is considered to have an upper hand against white people. Thus, the first sentence functions as a contextualization device for the rest of the comment, because it reveals the commenter's racist mindset. In addition to the racial dichotomy, the first sentence also implies that the commenter considers Black Lives Matter having a relatively free position to do as they please, at least as far as protesting is considered. Moreover, the emphatic rhetorical question "surely Whites can do the same", expresses the commenter's approval towards the alt-right neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville. S/he criticizes the freedom given to Black Lives Matter to protest as the Unite the White group was in contrast judged by

journalists and the majority of mainstream media. The commenter describes white people as a group threatened by black people and, as a result, justified to take counter-measures against them. The commenter continues to discuss the authorization behind the freedom given to Black Lives Matter later in the comment.

The commenter in example (7) centers her/his racist discourse around the ideology of black people's reckless and dangerous behavior and their limitless freedom – sanctioned by the Democratic party and liberal media – to do as they please. The commenter expresses her/his disapproval towards the liberal authorities for allowing Black Lives Matter's threatening behavior. The violent nature of this behavior is emphasized with specific lexical choices, which focus on describing what Black Lives Matter *does*, instead of only stating what they are like. According to the commenter, Black Lives Matter...

...can storm the streets, make speeches, protests, etc...

...can trash cities, start fires, loot and pillage...

Black Lives Matter/black people are given the role of active subjects, which highlights their capability to threaten. As opposed to presenting the racial others as either different or deviant, portraying them as a threat requires a concrete depiction of *how* they actually are threatening. The use of the auxiliary verb 'can' further emphasizes the commenter's view that there is a responsible authority behind Black Lives Matter who enables the group's reprehensible actions. The auxiliary verb 'can' also highlights the liberty and unrestrictedness of their actions – “can storm the streets” instead of “storm the streets” – and the adverb “etc.” underlines the multitude of these threatening actions. The racialized threat is considered functioning in alliance with the Democratic Party and these two agents together form the opposite side “them” for the threatened “us.”

The blame for the racial threat is directly attributed to the Democratic Party when the commenter argues that the Democratic Party has been hypocritical towards “Whites” by not granting them the same freedom to protest as Black Lives Matter. In addition, the commenter implies that liberal media is simultaneously co-operating with the Democratic Party and emphasizing the hypocrisy by sugar-coating the “protesting” of Black Lives Matter. Together the Democratic Party and liberal media roughly form the opposing side to President Trump's office and his supporters and, consequently, the white American population whose freedom to express their views has been suppressed. This phenomenon is present throughout the data of

the present study; as the racial threat is described as having background support, it offers an alternative discursive route for racist comments. Racial threat is framed as a repercussion of a wider societal, problematic situation, which allows the commenters to focus on that situation and feature the threat as something considered self-evident and a logical implication of a wider problem. In this way racist commenters utilize the blame discourse in attempt to support and justify their ideology.

Example (7) is characterized by juxtapositions, divisions between different groups of people and the distinction between inclusion and exclusion attributed to these groups. The commenter's racist discourse separates black people and white people into two distinct racial groups, and, black people, who are represented in the commenter's discourse by Black Lives Matter, are described as violent and acting like criminals. The commenter is displeased with the way these actions have been dealt with in the mainstream, liberal media, which s/he indicates with the use of scare quotes in the last sentence of the comment:

Meanwhile BLM can trash cities, start fires, loot and pillage and it's called "protesting" by the liberal media.

In this sentence, the scare quotes have two functions. First, they express the commenter's distrust towards the liberal media. According to her/him, the list of actions performed by the racial other, which are akin to those committed by a gang of robbers or pirates, is downplayed by the media. The commenter's critique towards the liberal media reaches beyond the coverage of the Charlottesville rally because s/he uses the adverb 'meanwhile' to signify that this has been going on for some time. This leads us to the second function of the scare quotes, which requires the examination of the sentence preceding the previous excerpt:

They expect everyone to feel the same way they do, and if they don't, it's *hate*! Meanwhile BLM can trash cities, start fires, loot and pillage and it's called "*protesting*" by the liberal media.

With these two sentences, the commenter attempts to further validate the racialized threat-victim dichotomy between white and black people. In the first sentence, s/he writes that white people are wrongly accused of hate, when they do not agree with the way the Democratic Party supports Black Lives Matter. On the other hand, in the second sentence s/he mocks the way the liberal media presents Black Lives Matter's violent actions as "protesting." Consequently, the commenter seems angered by how the liberal media equals white people's mere disagreement with hate, when, in the meanwhile, the violent actions of Black Lives

Matter is sugar-coated as protesting. This juxtaposition between the two racial groups and the way the liberal media allegedly views their actions is a powerful discursive tool; it highlights the commenter's objective of presenting the white people as deliberately misunderstood and threatened victims.

- (8) And while attack after attack took place against Trump supporters (by the violent liberal left) during the 2016 election, some of which involved injuries to women and children Obama sat idly by and issued NOT A SINGLE STATEMENT calling for an end to the attacks. DT was there calling for a stop to the violence almost immediately. I see the primary thrust of the marchers not necessarily as racist, but more of a statement on their (vanishing) right to free speech. It was quite clear that the demonstration was peaceful and organized until the violent left came pouring out of the University and started attacking the marchers. Not the other way round. The left seeks to rewrite history, obliterate anything that runs counter to their lockstep syncopathy, and paint anyone who disagrees with them as racist and bigoted. What's next, book burnings, or are we going to Arlington National Cemetery and exhuming the dead confederates?

As the last example to be analyzed I wanted to include a comment whose writer is probably the most discrete in expressing her/his racist views from the other comments discussed in this section – at least on the surface level. Since the racist discourse of this commenter is very subtle, it is more difficult to disapprove of it as purely racist.

In this fairly lengthy extract, the commenter expresses several ideas concerning the contemporary political situation in the U.S. Similarly to other commenters, s/he begins with a brief retrospect of President Obama's time in office and how he allegedly allowed violence to take place against Trump's supporters. After this introduction into the topic of criticizing presidents for their actions or the lack of them, the commenters directly targets those who criticized President Trump's actions after the Charlottesville rally. These people include the writer of the original article as well as the more general public who are present in the comment section. The commenter utilizes similar discourse in order to reach her/his goal, which is to defend President Trump, present President Obama in a negative light and, as far as the actual rally is concerned, frame the Unite the Right marchers as misunderstood, wrongly accused and downright denigrated. This comment features racist discourse in the form of defending and distorting the role of the Neo-Nazi protesters and their objective as well as presenting the counter-protesters as instigators of violence.

The commenter utilizes many of the discursive tools used by those expressing more overt racist opinions, but s/he modifies each of them in a way that transforms the racist discourse as something that is more difficult to spot. Moreover, the commenter has discursively structured her/his message as a set of juxtapositions. S/he contrasts Trump and Obama, the left and the

right wing of political field and the two sides of the rally. Among the American people, the commenter creates a dichotomous division: U.S. citizens are divided into two groups, not explicitly based on their skin color, but rather their political orientation and actions. Moreover, these two sides are placed within the threat discourse; “the violent liberal left” poses a threat to everyone else in the U.S. The threatening left has rather strict and solid boundaries, as it is always referred to as the left, with various attributes, by the commenter, but the group of people threatened by the left is more vaguely defined. The commenter only describes representatives of the threatened group. In the first sentence they are “Trump supporters”, including women and children, and, later in the comment “marchers.”

When the commenter defends the neo-Nazi group, s/he implicitly defends the movement’s ideological foundation, which is based on racism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia, among other hateful and discriminatory concepts. The commenter’s ignorance and disregard for the Unite the Right- marchers’ agenda can be witnessed in her/his view of their objective:

I see the primary thrust of the marchers not necessarily as racist, but more of a statement on their (vanishing) right to free speech.

This sentence is especially meaning-carrying as the commenter does not attempt to refute the mainstream media’s claim that the protesters were racist. Moreover, this sentence has crucial significance as it actually addresses the accusations of racism targeted at the neo-Nazi marchers. Quite unexpectedly, the commenter does not employ verbal mitigating devices in order to tone down her/his support for the marchers. Instead, they are used to actually moderate the original criticism. The use of negative adverb ‘not necessarily’ actually implies that the commenter recognizes the possibility of a racist motive. The following “...but *more of a statement on their (vanishing) right to free speech*” confirms the supposition. Thus, the commenter attempts to highlight the issue of the marchers’ freedom to express themselves while not completely excluding their racist ideology.

The topic of freedom of speech was frequently brought up in the discussions in the comment section and example (8) is no exception in this matter. Commenters mentioning freedom of speech connected the issue almost without exception with discourse defending the neo-Nazi protesters. Freedom of speech was often considered the driving force behind the rally and indeed it is extremely highly valued in the contemporary U.S. society and protected by intricate legislation. Defending the marchers on the basis of the freedom of speech, however, can and should be questioned. As discussed in the background section, accepting racism

language on the grounds of freedom of speech is highly debated; the U.S. has been publicly questioned for its relatively high tolerance of discriminatory language use by both national and international officials. The commenter participates in this discussion by defending the marchers and criticizes the contemporary movement that endeavors to prohibit racist language with the reference to “their (vanishing) right to free speech.” Moreover, by defending the use of racist language the commenter expresses her/his support for the neo-Nazi marchers.

Example (8) is a valid piece of evidence of how important the understanding and recognition of context is for discourse analysis. Even though each of the comments in this analysis is discussed separately, together they function as a representative of the more extensive discussion and discourse around both the Charlottesville rally and the more general political situation in the U.S. The racist discourse of this comment can only be identified if its context is being taken into consideration in the cognitive process of interpretation. The comment does not include explicitly racist language or even a brief mention of it; for instance, the idea of the separation between black or white people or some other considerably more malignant way to express racist ideologies. However, when we examine this comment together with the other comments and the news article, we begin to understand that this comment is a part of the wider racist discourse produced, reproduced and circulated in the comment section.

9 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, it is time to discuss everything that I have investigated in this study. I will connect the findings I made in Chapter 8 with the ones made in earlier research on racism and racist discourse. I will also review the entire research process, evaluate the current findings and how well they provide answers for the research questions. Since the preceding analysis chapter is rather extensive, in the current section I am going to discuss and juxtapose the key findings of each of the eight data samples and focus on those aspects of the discourse I found most intriguing and relevant.

The aim of my research project was, first of all, to find out if racist discourse was produced and circulated in the comment section of an online newspaper and if it was, what was it like from a linguistic point of view. During the time of planning my research, the aftermath of the Charlottesville rally was only just beginning to receive wider exposure world-wide. The racially loaded history behind the rally, together with the attendance of a large group of racist marchers, initially implied a possibly fruitful topic of research of contemporary cyber racism. This impression guided me to examine the online discussions revolving around the rally and thus I found myself face to face with an enormous amount of comments.

On August 13, 2017, alone, the day after the Charlottesville rally, the most commented article on the chosen newspaper amassed over 18,000 comments. In total, during one day, the articles published in relation to the rally attracted over 48,000 reader comments. Since I wanted to collect as extensive and diverse a data as possible, I chose as my object of study the second most commented article of the day. Granted, the most commented article could have proven to be more fruitful a source of racist discourse, but it would have taken too long to read through all the comments. Another option could have been to analyze several less active comment sections and that is actually a set-up which could be utilized in further study; I will present more suggestions for future research in the conclusion of this thesis. For the purposes of the present study, I found that the advantage of focusing on one relatively active comment section was that I got a better general view of the overall discussion, the relevant topics and themes as well as the most active contributors.

As I discussed in the background section, as a researcher approaching the data collected from an outsider's standpoint, I realized that I had to be very careful and diligent with the analysis process. Initially, I found myself in a fairly disadvantageous position for not being familiar enough with the background of the Charlottesville rally. On the surface level, the rally could

have been classified as any rally taking place in the U.S. Protests and confrontations between different activist groups have been quite frequent in the U.S. since the beginning of the millennium. The accelerating social and political polarization between different left-wing and right-wing groups has been surfacing in the form of demonstrations and rallies, and only a few of them - by far the largest as far as the number of participants is considered - have received media coverage outside the borders of the U.S.

In addition to my initial lack of familiarity with the background of the Charlottesville rally, I found myself doubting whether I was sufficiently informed to embark on a research project with as serious and subjective a premise. However, despite the amount of obligatory background work, I argue that research on racist discourse truly requires and benefits from contributions accomplished with a learner's perspective. What I mean by this is that my initial uncertainty made me question and review every finding I made and interpretation I formed, which, instead of facing the risk over-analyzing has resulted in an honest representation of the research process and diligently justified findings.

Next, after this elaborate account of the starting points for the present study, I am going to discuss the findings of the discourse analysis with the assistance of each research question. The following discussion is divided into three sub-sections. First, I will outline the recurrent discursive features discovered and examine whether they support the findings made in earlier research. Second, I will return to the concept of 'blaming game' suggested by Angouri and Wodak (2014). The third and final part of this discussion is dedicated to some important topics and concepts which, for research economical reasons, could not be examined in detail in the previous section. The last four sections before the summary are therefore dedicated to the brief discussion of the responses to racist comments, freedom of speech, the effect of anonymity and the statue of Robert E. Lee.

9.1 How is the racialized other framed as a threat?

The racist discourse in the analyzed examples was exclusively racist discourse about the racialized other. However, even though the commenters did not target their message directly to the racialized other, they did in fact target the discourse at the subject they considered responsible for the racial threat. This conscious discursive move creates and legitimizes a hierarchy between the commenters and the racialized others, since the commenters attack subjects they think have more authority and thus higher hierarchical status in relation to the

“black threat” (Wodak and Reisigl 2015: 578). This strategy was exploited by the commenters who defined as the subject of blame either the media, Barack Obama or the Democratic Party. Similarly to what Angouri and Wodak (2014) found in their study, the blame was indeed targeted at a number of people. On the other hand, the writers of examples (5) and (6) do not target their blame at specific agents other than the counter-protesters and Black Lives Matter, but their racist discourse did not explicitly target the racialized other either. I argue that it is a conscious move not to produce racist discourse which targets the racialized other, because it could be quite easily be interpreted as a verbal threat.

The analyzed comments were strongly characterized by their assertiveness. The commenters had written their messages in the form of categorical statements, rather than opinions, and this discursive choice was only highlighted by the frequent aggressive tone of the comments. Assertiveness and categorical assertions are important and effective strategic tools for racist discourse, because they allow the producer of the discourse to present her/his views as facts. In other words, assertiveness was utilized to naturalize the commenters’ racist views. This discursive strategy emphasizes the commenter’s assumed knowledge of the situation, but the fact that the commenters attempted to completely rearticulate the original news article’s content can render the message confusing. Readers are left with the decision of who to believe, either the journalist or the commenter. However, when many commenters reproduce and circulate racist discourse in this way, the collective might be able to distort the truth and substitute the journalist’s text. This, on the other hand, highlights the urgency and need for active anti-racist discourse, instead of ignoring the racist comments altogether. Consequently, at least in some contexts, assertive and evidence-based counter-discourse can be more effective than plain dismissal of dissenting views as wrong or stupid.

The racist discourse found in the current data was also characterized by comparisons and juxtapositions. These strategies were used to discursively create an image of a country whose inhabitants are separated according to their skin color. Moreover, this separation was perceived as natural and the racial groups as homogenous (Wodak and Reisigl 2015: 578). For instance, the writer of the comment in example (7) justifies white people’s right to “storm the streets, make speeches, protests, etc,” because those were the actions Black Lives Matter, who were representing black people, were allowed to conduct. The commenters divided people into the groups of black and white in the same way they positioned them on the left and right on the political spectrum. Building the racist discourse on this foundation, the commenters also endorsed the ideology of us versus racial them by portraying President

Trump and the Unite the Right vis-à-vis Barack Obama and Black Lives Matter. Almost every subject who was mentioned by the commenters was discursively positioned on either of these two sides. This further emphasized the people's separation into an in-group of us and an out-group of others. However, the media were given a supporting, yet highly influential role outside the two groups. Examples (1) and (2) did actually create a trichotomy rather than us vs. them dichotomy, because they framed the media as a subject that does not belong to either the victimized us or the threatening them.

The racist threat discourse affects this quintessential us versus them juxtaposition considerably. Naturally, racist discourse based on the difference between races or on the deviance of the racialized other, focusses on explaining what makes it possible to separate people into different races. This form of racist discourse that has the goal of naturalizing the racial differences between people is based on stereotypes, often explained as originating from "cultural differences" (Wodak and Reisigl 2015: 578). On the other hand, racist threat discourse which was the focus of my analysis presupposes these stereotypes and develops them to create an atmosphere of imminent danger. In the analyzed comments, the racialized threat was portrayed as a logical consequence of the long-term "black terror" that had been allowed to strengthen by Obama and the liberal media. Racist discourse based on racial differences can implicitly accept the co-existence of different races, whereas racist threat discourse regards the racial other as something that needs to be eradicated. Thus, the commenters rearticulated the Charlottesville rally as a concrete illustration of the need to fight the racial threat (Erjavec and Kovačič 2012: 907-914).

The commenters whom I analyzed appeared to consider the racialized other a serious threat. Threat was seen as a target and an instigator, and, as was the case in many comments, it also was taken as an enabler and even a supporter. The objective of racist threat discourse was to emphasize the agency of the racialized others, instead of settling for describing them as different. Moreover, the threat was described as being current, close and immediate. As a result, those who aimed at revealing the threat and resisting it also implied the necessity for counter-measures. According to the commenters, the threat was not a new phenomenon, but rather something that should have already been noticed by everyone.

The most prevalent manifestation of the black threat was police killings. 13 out of the 45 target discussion threads included the discursive move of racializing the violence against the police. This is a topical subject in contemporary media discussion and research in the U.S. It

has been shown that black people have been the subject of police violence and that this violence has been influenced by racialization (Dukes and Gaither 2017; Jones 2017). The reversed phenomenon, black people attacking the police, was highlighted by many racist commenters with the intent of producing racist discourse which frames the black people as violently attacking the supposed protectors of the people. This strategy of expressing divergent views has the objective of overriding mainstream views, racializing the threat and diminishing the actual problem.

The commenters emphasized their roles as innocent bystanders and in that role they attempted to assure their audience of the need to do something. This was usually done implicitly, with references to what is happening behind-the-scenes, because direct provocation against black people and/or Black Lives Matter might be quickly deleted by moderators. The following extracts from the analyzed comments include different kinds of predictions and solutions for the future:

You have angered those who were law abiding citizens who got tired of hearing that violent racist crowds burning and looting was acceptable behavior (Example (1)).

People are fed up with it, and they won't be shut down by the "established" orthodoxy any more (Example (2)).

It is time for prudent Americans to come together and combat the evil on both sides. BLM does not hold the moral high ground of MLK (Example (6)).

These comments illustrate the variety of outlooks connected to racist discourse. The commenters think that white Americans can now feel rightly threatened, angered and fed up with the violence they may be facing. In short, these commenters create a sinister image of the future. For them, far worse conflicts than the Charlottesville rally are approaching and they cannot be avoided. Expressing such forebodings is effective for racist discourse because it accentuates the threat and underlines the consequences to the reader audience if they do not share the commenter's view. If such racist and implicitly inciteful content can be found from a moderated discussion platform, one can only imagine the state of more closed, private forums, which are dedicated to such discriminative and hateful content.

Racist discourse in the 21st century is complex and its context-dependency cannot be highlighted enough. The racist discourse present in the data of the present study differs considerably from the racist discourse associated with discussions on the contemporary situation of global migration. In comparison with the racist discourse about and targeted at migrants, all of the examples discussed in the previous section produced discourse of an

internal racial threat. The racist commenters actively reproduced the image of a country that is insurmountably divided into white and black people. External influences were included in passing to the discourse when the commenters discussed Russia's influence on President Trump, but otherwise the geographical context of the discourse was almost exclusively the U.S. Racist discourse founded on the contrasting of white vs. black people has a long history in the sociopolitical U.S. discourse, which is why it is still in the 21st century a central aspect of racism in the U.S. Other contextual directions have co-existed and emerged alongside this age-old juxtaposition and it seems apparent that its relevance has not diminished.

9.2 Who is considered responsible for the racialized threat?

All the reader comments which I chose for closer analysis had as their common objective to identify either an internal or external subject of blame for the racialized threat. The position of the target of blame was defined by its racial characterization, i.e. did the responsible subject belong to the racialized group or not. According to the commenters, for instance Barack Obama belong to the same group of racial others as those considered threatening. However, I found in my data that the commenters did not always strive for such unambiguous discursive segregation between us and the racialized them. In fact, in some examples the commenters produced a very hierarchical notion of the racialized group of people. The people who were presented as "them" were attributed with varying levels of responsibility for their own as well as others' actions. In other words, the racialized others were not visualized as an abstract, isolated mass of people, but rather as a group of people who within themselves have leading figures, who have more power and responsibility than others.

Out of the four categories of responsible subjects, Barack Obama was portrayed exactly like this; as a person with the authority and thus the responsibility for the racialized threat. The discursive strategy of framing wider sociopolitical issues to concern individuals has been frequently witnessed in online hate speech (Erjavec and Kovačič 2012: 907-914). However, according to the commenters in the present study, Obama's responsibility was not contemporary but retrospective, dating back to his time as the president of the U.S. He was accused of having then given his silent approval to Black Lives Matter, which resulted in a situation where the U.S. citizens "lives were overwhelmed with BLM, violence, cop massacres and black racial resentment" (Example (3)). Obama was directly assigned the blame for the racialized threat, similarly to how the mainstream media assigned Trump with a considerable amount of the blame for the Charlottesville rally. Accordingly, the fact that the

commenters discussed Obama's link to Black Lives Matter and black violence expressed their readiness and inclination to associate a black president with a black activist group.

Obama was therefore considered the obvious target of blame for some of the commenters, not only because of his high status as the head of state from 2008 to 2016, but also because his skin color matched the supposed skin color of the members and advocates of Black Lives Matter. Moreover, Obama was not overtly represented as the threat, but he was still discursively cast as one of 'them.' However, the commenters may have found it quite easy to target their blame at Obama, because it is not unprecedented to criticize the current or former presidents, politicians or anyone at a higher position, both online and offline.

Thus, the commenters in the current data were participating in the 'blaming game', as coined by Angouri and Wodak (2014) in their study on the online discussion of the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn. The way in which Barack Obama was framed as the responsible person for the Charlottesville rally was a strategic move by the commenters to frame him as the scapegoat and present the situation from a racialized angle. In a similar vein, blaming the media shifted the discussion more towards the discourse of the media's societal influence and liability towards the U.S. citizens whereas blaming the Democratic Party adapted the discourse to fit in the frame of political discourse. It is impossible to know for certain what the commenters' mindsets were when they wrote their contributions, but I argue that the choice of blame for each was a conscious discursive move. These moves therefore provide important information of the commenters' racist ideology; all of them considered black threat as a social problem, either controlled by a person or an institution in an authoritative position. On the other hand, the commenters in examples (5) and (6) who did not attribute direct blame to an external source, alternatively portrayed the counter-protesters either as not doing as they were ordered to do, or in a passive form as a group who was "allowed to riot and loot." Thus, the threatening racialized other was always either directly or indirectly represented as a group under someone's orders.

9.3 Responses to racist comments

Unfortunately, the scale of a master's thesis limited the amount of comments which I could include in the qualitative analysis; consequently, the variety of the responses and discussions they prompted could not be discussed in much length. In general, only few of the analyzed commenters returned to defend their views and those who did, did not employ such a wide

variety of discursive strategies as found by Goodman and Rowe (2014). Instead, many of them chose to slander those who dared to criticize and challenge their views. It seems probable that the commenters did not bother to engage in a dialogue with their respondents and, since many of the comments were quite lengthy, they may have felt that they have said everything they wanted.

Only the commenters in examples (1) and (3) were directly accused of being racists. Even though all the comments, excluding example (2), received negative replies from other participators in the comment section, it is astonishing why only these two were directly called as what they were. The other accusations included being called a liar, a troll or even a Russian, but the respondent's hesitance towards labelling others as racists is worth questioning. The stamp of a racist can be difficult to attribute to anyone who is not expressing blatantly overt racism. It has such a negative value that the respondents may avoid it in the fear of following verbal attacks from the commenter. The unwillingness to name the racist commenters also raises the question of how sensitive the respondents are to racism and whether the lack of nominations is only due to their unconsciousness of the racist comments' central idea. It is also possible that they also pretend that they do not register it (Sue 2015: 6).

Regardless of the intent that motivated the respondents' criticism towards the commenters, their participation in producing effective counter-discourse is valuable. As I pointed out earlier, it is crucial to challenge racist comments because it allows the respondents to share their interpretation with others who may not have the same level of understanding and sensitivity towards racism. The objective of producing counter-discourse is indeed to produce a counter point of view which could invalidate the racist commenter's aim to persuade her/his audience.

9.4 The effect of anonymity and moderation policies

The scale of the present study did not allow me to focus on the effect of anonymity in relation to the production of racist discourse. In order to analyze anonymity and its concrete effects for the interaction, significant modifications should have been executed to the set-up of the study. Nevertheless, the examination of such an extensive data set, allowed me to reflect on and make some tentative observations concerning the anonymous nature of interaction.

On the surface level, the comment section's anonymous nature of interaction does encourage the expression of harmful and unorthodox opinions. For the commenters, an anonymous and

very active comment section provides a platform for autonomous expression of opinion, large audience and minimum risk of serious consequences. A comment section such as the one analyzed in the present study provides the commenters with the freedom to express views which they could not express in their public life. However, the comment section in question left the commenters with the freedom to moderate the level of anonymity concerning their appearance. The commenters could choose their user names (some used real names) and profile pictures, if they wanted to do so.

The large amount of comments might suggest that such comments which express for instance racist views could end up outnumbered and thus hidden among all the other comments, but that theory was completely refuted in this study. The data in the present study was collected from a single source, which renders the reasoning behind the argument extremely restricted. However, in this case universalization is not the objective, but rather providing a valid example of the unfortunate effect of anonymity. Previous research has already shown the potency of anonymous interaction, which is why we need more comparative results from more open interaction (see e.g. Hlavach and Freivogel 2011; Santana 2014; Steinfeldt et al. 2010). On the other hand, this entails a problematic process regarding the data collection and the protection of the research subjects.

9.5 Freedom of speech

Freedom of speech was a prevalent theme of discussion for the racist commenters. In the analysis, only the commenter in example (8) referred to this principle, but I want to stress that the topic was actually very popular among the commenters; it was referred to with different motives and from all three of the wider categories of racist discourse, i.e. framing the racialized other as different, deviant or a threat. Unfortunately, the limitations of the present study prevented me from discussing and analyzing this topic any further, but, without any doubt, it has to be acknowledged. Most of the racist commenters I discovered from the comment section did not refer to this principle with the objective of defending their own opinions per se, but instead they defended the neo-Nazi marchers' right to march and express their objection towards the statue's removal. Some commenters justified their arguments by utilizing the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as a value-bound political buffer for the expression of racism (White and Crandall 2017).

As I already discussed in the background section, the value attributed to the concept of free speech is problematic in these cases of extreme language use. Over the decades, the system of freedom of expression has been adapted to surpass the borders of verbal expression. In turn, this has changed the way in which the effect of language use is considered; in comparison to physical expressions of hate, such as burning crosses and flags, speech and writing may appear less damaging on the surface level. Echoing Heyman (2008), racist language should not be held under the protection of freedom of speech. The present study did not examine the effect of the racist comments, but it has been universally attested that racism has an immediate and harmful impact on the racialized other on an individual level. In addition, racism has the potential to inflect equality and power distribution on institutional and cultural levels. The comments analyzed in the present study have the potential of fortifying collective hate towards black people and inciting individual extremists to physical attacks.

9.6 The statue of Robert E. Lee

The comments examined in the analysis did not mention the centerpiece of the Charlottesville rally, the statue of Robert E. Lee, often, but it was an essential contextual device in other comments in the comment section. I want to shortly discuss the function of the statue for the wider context, because its strategic effect for racist discourse cannot be undermined. Similarly to the concept of freedom of speech, the statue and its historical value were utilized as buffers to defend the neo-Nazis and their cause. In addition, the statue connects the rally and its aftermath directly to the history of racism in the U.S., because - as I already explained in Chapter 3.2 - it is a concrete reminder of the eras of slavery and Jim Crow. The Charlottesville rally is situated on the timeline of racial discrimination in the U.S. that links it with the long history of anti-black racism and proves that the U.S. is still quite far from the ideal of all people being equal. The African people and their descendants who were forced into slavery from the 16th century onwards were excluded from other people and treated more like animals than people. The same way of considering black people to be outsiders of the U.S. population was echoed in the analyzed comments. Even though this way of thinking is not shared by all people, it proves that the same racist ideology governing the era of slavery has not disappeared entirely.

First and foremost, those commenters who opposed the statue's removal and at the same time defended the neo-Nazi marchers employed two general arguments. They claimed that the statue was an important part of the history of the U.S. and therefore it should not be removed.

These attempts to whitewash the background of the statue and its symbolic value as a reminder of the Jim Crow era were fortunately met with defiance by the other commenters, many of whom were aware of the statue's fundamentally racist history. Those commenters who founded their racist discourse around the statue utilized similar strategies to those analyzed by Hill (2008) in relation to the name change of the Piestewa Peak. The discourse revolving around the care and concern for the homeland and its history was actively utilized to frame the racialized counter-protesters as threatening.

9.7 Summary

In the current data, the variety of the commenters' discursive strategies and moves was extensive. In the set-up section of this thesis, I outlined three different guiding lists of discursive features found to characterize racist discourse (Blommaert and Verschueren 2002; Wodak and Reisigl 2015). These lists directed my attention towards typical occurrences, if there are such forms, of racist discourse, especially in its implicit, covert forms. Most of the comments which I analyzed did include these characteristics; quite surprisingly, however, I was also able to find instances of outrageously direct and unmitigated racism. This was rather unexpected when one takes into consideration that the comment section is promoted as a space of communication in which discriminatory – including racist – language use is strongly discouraged and prohibited.

Thus, I found myself surprised by the fact that these types of comments were actually freely posted despite the newspaper's avid informing of their moderation policies, team and even the usage of artificial intelligence to minimize unwanted and unorthodox content. Commenters themselves also had the possibility to report each other in cases of for instance racist language use, but the reader audience could not see what comment might have been reported. As a future experiment, it would be interesting to test out how the reporting system actually works; for example, had I reported example (1) for its racist content⁴, justified the need for the comment's removal, I wonder if the comment would have been removed.

However, the reasons behind permitting the publication of racist comments can be many and profitable for the newspaper. As I have discussed above, freedom of speech is highly valued in the U.S. and the variety of discourses it protects is extensive. Consequently, the comments

⁴ Extract from example (1): "The media's refusal to call out the Black crime and racism and the media's attempts to destroy America by failing to call a spade a spade and hold those criminals accountable for their actions is the entire problem.-- "

that I analyzed in the present study could have been allowed in the comment section, especially because they did not express blatantly overt racism or direct threats. It is also possible that the comment section's administrators allow racist comments because they can incite replies and other comments and so enhance the overall discussion activity. In this way the newspapers can endorse themselves as open spaces for discussion and debate.

I argue that people can find it to be relatively easy to publish racist and otherwise discriminatory and derogatory content online. For instance, in order to post anything on the comment section which I analyzed the commenters had to register. This registration was done via the user's email address, Amazon account or Facebook account. Here alone the readers have three choices of what information to provide of themselves. Moreover, as many of us may have more than one email account, and now that it is also extremely easy to create fake addresses or fake accounts on social media, the registration to this comment section has very low threshold. Excluding direct threats made against specific people or death threats, the negative consequences of producing racist discourse are minimal.

Even though the small size of my data prevents from making any generalizing arguments of the nature and scope of contemporary racism, the comments I analyzed prove, first of all, that racism has definitely not disappeared. As I presented in the quantitative analysis, the amount of racist content posted in relation to one single article was quite substantial. Despite arguments supporting the disappearance of biological racism and its gradual displacement with social racism, the current data showed that biological racism still holds a strong position in the ideological construction of racist discourse. This conclusion supports the argument by Hill (2008: 179) 10 years ago that biological racism still has and continues to have a significant role in contemporary racist discourse.

The context of the present study included and merged numerous themes which have been the focus points of research on racism: white supremacy, black social movements, political polarization and the historical legacy of the era of slavery. The statue of Robert E. Lee already in itself had a loaded history having a connection by both representing the Confederacy and the resistance to the abolishment of slavery, but also the Jim Crow era and Black codes, because the statue was erected in the 1920s. Accordingly, as van Dijk (2015) has argued, it would have been impossible to analyze and interpret the comments without taking into account the multi-layered cultural and historical context of the Charlottesville rally. The comments were produced as the result of the confrontation and the confrontation occurred

because of the Unite the Right marched into Charlottesville. The incentive behind their march was the city council's decision to remove an old statue of a confederate soldier. As we can see, the multilayered intersections behind the rally are numerous.

10 CONCLUSION

The preliminary aim of the present study was to examine the variety and extent of racist discourse in the anonymous online reader comment sections of *The Washington Post*. The findings made following this aim showed, first and foremost, that the number of racist messages that were published on the reader comment section is vast. The most overtly racist comments seem to be missing from the comment section, which indicates that more subtle and implicit discursive strategies are being employed by the commenters. These comments are the most difficult to detect, and having infiltrated the mass of thousands of other comments, even a human army would not have the time and means to delete them all. However, as I discussed in the previous section, the inclusion of the more subtle racist comments may have been a deliberate move from the newspaper to emphasize their appreciation for freedom of speech and boost discussion activity.

The data of the present study were collected from the comment section of a single article. As I explained in the set-up section, the large number of racist comments gave me the freedom to choose from a myriad of possible analytic approaches, but it also proved quite difficult to justify why one type of racist discourse should be afforded with more attention than another. Any kind of racism is a violation against basic human rights and value which should equally be afforded to everyone. In particular, I argue that the racist threat discourse, which was the key focus of this study, has a huge potential to incite concrete measures, such as violence, to be taken against racialized individuals or groups of people.

Racist threat discourse analyzed in the present study was characterized by assertiveness, rearticulation of the Charlottesville rally and the attribution of the blame for the racialized threat to a separate subject who either participated in the rally or had a more detached position. The most frequently targeted sources of blame were Barack Obama, the liberal media, the Democratic Party and Black Lives Matter. The racist commenters had various discursive goals they wished to achieve. First of all, they attempted to present the neo-Nazi protesters as insignificant as possible in comparison to their counter-protesters. The number of protesters was misrepresented as far fewer than they actually were, their right to protest was defended on the basis of freedom of speech and the blame for the violence which occurred between the two opposing groups was entirely put on the counter-protesters. The racist commenters even dismissed the fact that one of the neo-Nazi supporters deliberately drove into the crowd of counter-protesters and killed one of them, because "[i]f the counter-

protesters had dispersed as ordered, or were peacefully walking on the sidewalks, none of them would have been hit” (example (5)).

The most important finding of the present study is that the producers of racist threat discourse actively participate in the 'blaming game' in order to avoid direct accusations of racism. The concept of 'blaming game' proved to be of vital importance for the analysis, because the each of the commenters directed their accusations of blame to a subject which was not as such present during the Charlottesville rally. This discursive move allowed the commenters to express harsh criticism and racist opinions, since they tactically incorporated those views within seemingly political discourse. The most clearly defined targets of blame were Barack Obama and Black Lives Matter whose connection to the group of counter-protesters was explicitly racial. Moreover, for many commenters Black Lives Matter was synonymous with black people.

Overall, I am very satisfied with the present study and the way in which each stage of the research project has been depicted in this thesis. The topicality and global importance of racism justified the decision to embark on the project and I argue the results and findings presented in this thesis function as further indicator of the continuing need for more research. Analyzing racist discourse is always done retrospectively and even the moves of racist threat discourse I found in the present study can be quickly modified in order to make their identification more difficult.

10.1 Implications

The present study contributes to the continuous need for tracking racist discourse and its development and adaptation in relation to contemporary sociopolitical environment and events. My findings are intrinsically connected to racism in the U.S. both because of the background of Charlottesville rally and the platform of social media from which the data was collected. Regardless of this rather narrow context, the set-up my study can be perfectly well adapted to any other setting geographically and historically.

The present study shows that it can be fruitful to analyze racist discourse in the context of a racialized conflict, such as the Charlottesville rally was. In the context of a crisis, people can become extremely emotionally involved with the situation, which, in turn, can result in extreme forms of expression. The Charlottesville rally provided the racist commenters with the opportunity to discuss the possibility of a “race war,” defend the neo-Nazis on the basis of

their freedom of speech and blame an external source for the threat posed by the racial group of blacks or Black Lives Matter. Conflicts can establish an atmosphere of fear and worry, which can be utilized as an excuse to express hate towards the subject that is considered threatening. Moreover, the media coverage of similar events provides people with opportunities to reframe the conflicts as they please and even incite further actions to be taken against the threat. Thus, I argue for the need to examine more how these conflicts between politically and ideologically opposing groups can be discursively reframed by racist commenters for their advantage.

The findings of the present study are also of importance for people who do not belong to my assumed academic audience. It is paramount that website administrators understand that in addition to the positive potential of social media, it is also an effective medium to produce and circulate discriminative content. Social media connects people from all over to world and it is therefore an easy route for people supporting racist ideologies to connect, spread their hateful views and possibly even plan collective actions against the racialized out-groups. These people with their indefensible opinions have of course particular private forums, but as previous research and the present study have demonstrated, they do not settle for the dialogue among others who think alike.

In practice, administrators and the members of moderation teams should familiarize themselves with the more subtle manifestations of racist language. In addition, they should critically evaluate their standpoint on freedom of speech and whether they consider racism to have its protection. As I have argued throughout my thesis, racist language should not be tolerated under any circumstances, but I understand that people working *for* others may not have the power and freedom to act according to their own values. The employment of stricter policies against hateful language use can, at the worst, lead to the loss of customers, which, in turn, can lead to serious financial losses. Especially in the U.S., where freedom of speech is extremely highly valued, the permission and demand to eradicate racist language should come from the governing body in order for it to have an effect. For now, administrators and moderators of large companies, such as *The Washington Post*, can only react to the most overt forms of racist language. On the other hand, private and smaller forums which do not necessarily pursue financial profit can enforce stricter policies.

However, even the smaller forums face the difficulty of actually being able to moderate everything published on their website. Even the moderation of a relatively small discussion

forum can be a time consuming and continuous project and the choice of operations model can be problematic. On the one hand, if the comments on a discussion forum have to be approved by the moderator before their publication, it can have a negative effect on the dynamics of the online interaction and thus chase off the participators. On the other hand, if the comments are moderated only based on other commenters' reports, the efficiency of moderation can deteriorate, because not everyone may consider it necessary to report racist language. Moreover, the time between a racist comment's publication, its reporting and subsequent moderation can be quite long, depending on the activity and the number of moderators. Even though racist comments were actively reported, they can still have extensive visibility before they are deleted.

For everyone else, I wish that my analysis proves that racism is a contemporary issue which we can witness both online and offline. Even though the data that I analyzed represents the rather stereotypical ideological separation between white and black people in the U.S., by no means downplaying its relevance, racist practices have as many varieties as there interlocutors. It is also important to underline that racism does not only equal racist language, but instead it affects practices in politics, social life and education. The pervasiveness of racism is the quality what people need to become aware of. In relation to the present study, I hope that the comments that I analyzed help people to become more sensitive to subtle and indirect racism and find ways and courage to challenge similar comments when faced with them.

10.2 Suggestions for future research

Unfortunately, many interesting and relevant aspects of racist discourse had to be disregarded in the making of the present study, because of the large number of racist comments and the research economical limitations of a Master's thesis. Had I added more comments to the analysis, I believe that the quality and depth of the findings would have been negatively affected. All in all, I am extremely pleased with the decision to focus on the racist threat discourse, but in this section, I can now outline possible directions for further research on online racist discourse on the grounds of my own observations as well as previous research on the field.

First, even though I underline the importance of *discourse* analysis for research on racism, the importance of quantitative approach should not be undermined. In the present study, I did not

have the possibility to afford the quantitative analysis with much space, but even the superficial quantitative overview to the data presented more comprehensive view of the target comment section than the eight comments would have done alone. Thus, echoing Bliuc et al. (2018: 85), I argue for the importance and potential of combining quantitative and qualitative methods in order to avoid the risk of either disregarding the discursive level of racism or the actual quantity of racist language.

The data of the present study was collected from the website of *The Washington Post* which can be located in terms of its political stance slightly left from center (Boston University Libraries 2015). For future research, it would be interesting to conduct a comparative study with data collected from a slightly right-leaning source. The findings from the comparative study might indicate whether the amount and form of racist discourse have been affected by the administrator's stance. Racism is closely connected to far-right ideologies such as white supremacy and nationalism, which is why racist discourse could be assumed to be more present on the right-leaning platforms. This, however, cannot be universally proven without a substantial amount of data.

Another suggestion I want to make for future research is the need for the analysis of more private forums as well. The motivation behind this is the need to examine the effect of anonymity on the production of racist discourse. Even though it is impossible to make any universal conclusions based on the findings of the present study, it can be relatively safely argued that anonymity facilitates writing racist messages, because it minimizes the risk of being identified and further sanctioned. At present, the diversity of online interaction allows people to choose rather freely what forum they want to use and thus they have the power to determine how much information they share of themselves. This highlights the fact that the effect of anonymity should be always considered in relation to the level of openness of the target forum. Anonymous interaction on a platform such as the reader comment section in the present study can differ significantly from anonymous interaction on a closed discussion forum. Consequently, future research could attempt to discover which has more effect on the production of racist discourse, the level of anonymity or the level of privacy of the communication platform. Both set-ups require extremely careful handling of data, because the anonymity of even the supposedly anonymous participants has to be respected.

Even though racist discourse, following the definition by Blommaert (2005: 2), is language in action, research on how it is perceived by its targets has been scarce (Bliuc et al. 2018: 85). It

should not be forgotten that after the publication, racist content does not only exist, but it also continues the discursive process by being circulated and consumed by other readers. People read and react to racist discourse in different ways, which is why the effect of racist discourse should be researched more, from the perspective of both those who can be characterized as belonging to the discursively created racialized out-group as well as those who are part of the in-group. It is important to collect more information on the reactions of the racialized other's responses to racism, focusing on their reactions to it on a personal level. Racism has the serious potential of negatively affecting the discriminated people's identities.

Equally to racist discourse, also anti-racism that is produced as a counter-discourse should be afforded with more attention. As I pointed out in the analysis, the importance of counter-discourse is significant, because silence and ignoring do not necessarily function best for challenging racist discourse. Racist discourse produces an alternative truth, which, if unquestioned, can manipulate people who do not evaluate the message critically. Racist discourse is the result and vehicle of active production, which means that challenging it should also be active instead of passive. This mission has parallel importance with the above-mentioned difficulty with the moderation racist comments. Racists have to be challenged before they have the chance to express their hate and after they have succeeded. At the moment, it seems that the eradication of racism is impossible. However, it is more important to remember that since we are currently forced to coexist with racism, we should not do it without resistance.

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