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Introduction

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Decolonising Social Work in Finland: Racialisation and Practices of Care coalesces a transnational community of social workers, educators, advocates and scholars to identify the long-term impact of coloniality extant in Finnish social work practices and to envision how diverse practices might move us towards deeply needed decolonised futures. Studies of coloniality are often located in the lands and systems of former empires or colonised territories, but what about small nations that have histories enmeshed in complex social relations that shape-shifted as both coloniser and colonised? How can we theorise the ongoing legacy of coloniality in the Nordic social welfare systems, often seen as the most progressive in the world? This book centres the case of Finland, a country on the periphery of Northern Europe, to explore how social welfare structures and social care practices reinforce coloniality at the intersection of racialisation and belonging. The contributions in this edited book bring nuance and complexity to understanding how coloniality and racialisation are intrinsically linked in the contemporary welfare society, and it points to some possible avenues of decolonial transformation.

Decolonising social work reflects a diversity of theories, policies and practices that aim to interrogate, challenge and fundamentally upend knowledge systems and institutions mired in coloniality (for example, [Rowe, Baldry and Earles, 2015](#); [Gray, Coates, Yellow Bird and Hetherington, 2016](#); [Pyles, 2017](#); [Fortier and Hon-Sing Wong, 2019](#); [Clarke and Yellow Bird, 2021](#); [Madew, Boryczko and Lusk, 2023](#); [Niigaaniin, MacNeil and Ramos-Cortes, 2023](#)). Decolonial theories and practices are heterogeneous, expansive and extensive. They have lineages in every continent and stretch back decades, and while they have similarities across borders, decolonial theorisations are deeply implanted in place and local histories of coloniality (for example, [Quijano, 2007](#); [Mignolo, 2009](#); [Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012](#); [Hino, 2020](#); [Velez and Turana, 2020](#); [Ciofalo et al, 2022](#); [Funez-Flores et al, 2022](#)).

As [Sylvia Tamale \(2020: 13\)](#) points out, decolonisation implies a rupture or undoing and therefore starts by fundamentally recognising how entrenched colonial structures pervade every aspect of our ‘common sense’ and how we see the world. In terms of social work, decolonisation challenges us to question our systems of knowledge and expertise, as well as how we practice. To go beyond what [Linda Tuhiwai Smith \(2021\)](#) called ‘colonising knowledge’ also requires centring diverse knowledge systems, not simply

as alternatives but as key ontologies and epistemologies that can inform social work. Further, decolonising means assuming the responsibility of challenging how interlocking systems of oppression lay at the heart of how we conceptualise social work as a profession and practice. In this book, authors utilise diverse research theories, place-based knowledge, critical auto-ethnography and qualitative research studies to shed light on how the comfort of familiar threads of consciousness simultaneously ensure and deny the existence of colonial modes of social organising and control.

Starting points

The genesis of the book came from a memory that Kris has carried from a doctoral seminar at the University of Tampere, Finland, back in the 1990s. She was among a small group of international and Finnish students who had just started postgraduate studies in social work with great excitement. One day a guest lecturer opened his talk by declaring that “we in Finland have nothing to learn from African social work”. The statement was jarring on many levels, not least that university should be a place where curiosity reigns. Around the same time, fellow doctoral student Satu attended a meeting of social work scholars, practitioners and students who shared an interest in global social work, where someone was proudly introduced as *the* person who brought child protection to Africa – as if before his visit no practices existed to ensure child welfare on the continent. Besides indifference to global structural inequalities that stem from the era of colonialism and imperialism and the deployment of racialisation as a tool of social control, these vignettes illustrate how colonial social work knowledge, expertise and professional ancestry continue to inform social work perspectives (Clarke, 2021).

In Finland, a certain attitude of disinterest is often directed towards people other than White-passing Finns (beyond questioning who they are, why they are here and what they think of Finland). This habit precludes learning from their knowledges and insights, especially when they are from non-Western and Indigenous contexts, even in cases of when social workers are explicitly tasked to support a person on their own path to wellness. On the surface level of Finnish culture, however, Finns are seen as liberal and open-minded and they are accustomed to receiving a positive response globally. Who would not want to learn about Finnish achievements in primary education, gender equality, information technology or universal welfare services? Rather than taking these kinds of attitudes as mere gusts of patriotism, our standpoint is that they reflect and enforce the broader hegemonic cultural undercurrent of Finnish society, which casts Finnishness as synonymous with the West as in the classic binary between ‘the West’ and ‘the rest’, or ‘us’ and ‘others’. And, indeed, the parliamentary elections of 2023 produced a coalition between the conservative party and the extreme ethno-nationalist right. The fact

that horrifically racist comments in public blog posts from earlier years were made by several members of the new Finnish government reflects perhaps a new stage where openly racist and pro-Nazi sympathies have come out of the shadows and into the mainstream. While it is significant that many politicians and business leaders have taken an anti-racist stance, it is equally worth noting that many of them have emphasised their concern about the harm caused to Finland's national brand more than the everyday experience of racialised people in Finland.

Colonialism and imperialism were justified with precisely similar ideas, as history reflects, that seizing the land, wealth and labour of *othered* people called for a reasoned vindication that reinforced the need for such appropriation. European overseas colonialism, which started in the late 15th century, and reached its zenith between the latter half of 19th century and World War I, was rationalised by spreading the 'good word' of Christianity and civilising 'the uncivilised' (on colonialism's civilising mission, see [Kiernan \[1995\]](#), or [Mann \[2004\]](#)). Even the enslavement of peoples forced into colonial subjecthood, seen in the transatlantic slave trade and genocidal campaigns against Indigenous peoples, was condoned by colonisers through laws and church precepts like the Doctrine of Discovery, government policies that fomented the inevitability of Manifest Destiny, and philosophies such as the White Man's Burden that were popularised, for example, in the poetry of Rudyard Kipling and recited in myriad children's lessons and stories.

The late Edward Said ([Said, 1979](#)) identified and described the mental and philosophical framework that undergirded notions of the innate superiority of Europe and (White) Europeans in relation to non-Europeans as Orientalism (1979). Said argued that Western knowledge about the 'Orient' (the Middle East, North Africa and Asia) was not neutral but immersed in asymmetrical power dynamics related to colonialism. It was based on growing a sense of White superiority, where the difference between colonisers and the colonised could be systematically maintained at the most intimate level – as members of a common humanity. From an Orientalist perspective, those deemed colonial subjects fell towards the bottom of the racial hierarchy, with similarities to, yet vastly different from those cast at the top of the hierarchy.

Already in the late 18th century, naturalist and zoologist Johanness Blumenbach organised a human hierarchy relegating all peoples on the planet into five categories, with Caucasians at the top. In it, he reified the notion that all persons are subject to their own biological determinism, occupying a rung on the ladder ranging from savage to civilised. Human difference, over centuries, thus became equivalent to subjugation. For had the colonised and colonisers become equals, colonialism would have lost its *raison d'être* ([Mann, 2004](#)). Unequal social relationships were further produced and naturalised through the power structures of Whiteness and racism, in essence utilising certain physical and cultural attributes to reinforce

power relations and subjectivities beyond categorisations such as class and gender and in ways that classified whole peoples in geographic regions as lesser than the colonisers (Fanon, 1967; Wallerstein, 2004a; Seikkula and Hortelano, 2021).

Besides the actions claimed (and by many Europeans genuinely believed) to be beneficent to the colonised, colonialism and imperialism were substantially about making economic profit and creating a huge gap in the power differentials between colonisers and their newly claimed colonised states (for example, McLeod, 2000: 7). Accordingly, what the colonisers articulated as liberation and modernisation often meant exploitation and oppression from the viewpoint of the colonised. However, maybe then, just as now with the contemporary thumb-twiddling over embarking on truly effective climate change mitigation measures, reasoning from the West and Western-aligned countries is again guided by strategic visions that conflate wishful thinking with a lack of critical self-reflection, and a cunning eye for economic and ideological gain.

The system of colonialism, and the resulting socio-economic and political structures, leaves colonial subjects with formidable structural and economic barriers and social ideologies that hold them in place. Layers deep, the colonised world of the past centuries would find themselves hard-pressed to develop their own countries, regions and homelands, as colonisers' claims to vast regions, undiscovered territories and whole continents and peoples, lands and waters were continuously subjected to new statuses and conceptualisations – as property of the colonising authority (Memmi, 1991; Muthu, 2003). When colonial territories eventually took on the appearance of independence, the divide remained between settler colonial subjects and the colonised. In sum, the newly autonomous status of the colonised did not necessarily alter their relationship to the coloniser. Following Walter Rodney (1982), a more accurate view of the process, or project, of colonialism could be understood best with his phrase 'how Europe undeveloped Africa'. Harvey Kaye (1995: 16–18) has further noted that in Europe the 'benefits of imperialism were most unequally distributed by region and class', making visible the ways in which the racism and violence of colonialism and imperialism cast its logics and brutalities in European life as well. The use of racialisation by colonising forces as a means for human subjugation left its imprint on the ways in which human difference would continue to shape European life and nationalist perspectives into the future.

Nowadays colonialism and imperialism as direct political control and economic exploitation are largely overlaid by corporate expansion and political systems that operate well outside of the view of the general public, though their various political, economic, cultural, ideological and epistemic legacies live on even in the systems of welfare and care (for example, Hunter, 2021). Often with sophisticated overwriting that employs oppressive models

of racialisation articulated through state logics, their existence is identifiable in the ways that privilege is extended to some over others. Reconfigured racial tropes that retain what Blumenbach saw as biological determinism, for example, minoritise some people and uphold the ostensible success of mainstream hegemonic cultural bodies through concepts that range from meritocracy to wilful ignorance (for example, [Au et al, 2016](#); [Joseph, 2019](#)).

Conceptually, coloniality (as extended from colonialism) refers to the global structures of power that stem from the colonial era in economy, culture and knowledge production, and that continue shaping the current world ([Quijano, 2000, 2007](#); [Mignolo, 2012](#); [Keskinen, Seikkula and Mkwesha, 2021](#): 49). More than creating processes in which the colonised become independent from colonisers, decoloniality, to situate the process of decolonisation in the contemporary, is about identifying and strategically dismantling the complex legacies of colonialism in the present in order to achieve liberation and create futures for all peoples, emancipated from racist thinking and structures. These efforts must include eradicating internalised colonial mindsets by creating new social systems where liberation is prioritised.

Another, partially overlapping, umbrella term for decolonisation is often thought to be postcolonialism. Discursively, postcolonial studies cover a spectrum of interpretations of colonialism and its consequences, aimed at making theoretical sense of how something is *because of* and *after* the onset of colonialism ([Hutcheon, 2003](#): 18–19, italics original). As a term, however, postcolonialism has raised plenty of criticism, not least for terminologically obscuring the continuing influence of racialised and colonial hierarchies on our perceptions of the world, sustaining Eurocentrism, dissolving into generalities and overly focusing on identities and cultural representations ([Goss, 1996](#); [Keskinen, Seikkula and Mkwesha, 2021](#): 50). In this book, the choice to use the term decolonising is due to its action-oriented aims. In addition to recognising, criticising and deconstructing still-existing colonial structures and practices, decolonising is also about seeking and producing alternatives – the goal being liberation, empowerment and equality.

Why decolonise, why now, why in Finland?

Presuming that these days colonialism and imperialism have already been quite thoroughly discussed, and that Northern Europe is promoted as relatively peripheral to colonial practices, what contemporary sense does it make to address decolonisation in a Nordic country such as Finland? Was not life in the North at times harsher than in the colonies itself? The standpoint of this book is that decolonisation serves, at last, to raise awareness and inspire action for several reasons: (1) Actual Nordic involvement in colonial practices is under-theorised and unacknowledged in scholarly and political discourses;¹ (2) Nordic societies colonised Indigenous societies during their

own efforts of nation-formation; and (3) Nordic societies at-large internalised the tenets of a colonial hegemonic world view of European superiority, and thus the racialised and gendered inequalities and biases intrinsic to it. Therefore, contemporary practices, policies and attitudes exhibit the inherent continuum between colonial racialisation and normative Finnish society, thus creating the marginalisation of people with ‘non-Western’ ethnic identities, even when they are native Finns, and refugees and immigrants. Given that social work is a point of entry for people facing social, economic, political and (in the case of refugees) medical precarity, and that social work is considered a social justice practice especially in democratic nations, all of these points have important ramifications in the fields of social rights and care.

Discussions of decolonising social work first began to appear in the early 2000s (for example, [Sinclair, 2004](#); [Razack, 2009](#); [Waterfall, 2009](#)) as scholars, specifically critical Indigenous scholars, such as [Michael Yellow Bird \(1999\)](#), began to articulate that the very structures intended to ‘help’ were further oppressing many people. The volumes edited by Mel Gray, John Coates and Michael Yellow Bird (2008, 2016) gave breadth and depth to developing the concepts of Indigenous knowledges and active decolonisation in social work. This work spawned a variety of events like the Liberation Healing Conference at California State University, Northridge ([Almeida, Melendez and Paez, 2015](#)), reinventions of social work programmes like the University of Johannesburg in South Africa ([Rasool and Harms-Smith, 2021](#)), discussions on the decolonisation of social work ethics ([Sewpaul and Henrickson, 2019](#)) and new approaches to transdisciplinary practice, such as Boston Liberation Health Group ([Martinez and Fleck-Henderson, 2014](#)). Public health and medicine have also begun to explore the need for decolonisation in medical care ([Marya and Patel, 2021](#)) and health research ([Krusz et al, 2020](#)). In Finland, [Satu Ranta-Tyrkkö \(2010, 2011\)](#) wrote about the need for postcolonial analysis in social work already over a decade ago, though there has been little response in the Finnish social and healthcare field.

Even though relatively peripheral in Europe, Nordic societies played an active part in broader regional and global power relations, including colonial and imperial processes ([Keskinen et al, 2009](#); [Vuorela, 2009](#); [Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011](#); [Keskinen, 2021](#): 69). Certain Nordic areas, such as Greenland or the *Sápmi* (the Sámi land) in Northern Fennoscandia, and their people were in various and divergent ways targets of colonisation ([Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012](#); [Lehtola, 2015](#)). In spite of the great effort of Sámi peoples to bring public attention to the impacts of Nordic expansion in their homelands and lives, the internal colonisation and the resulting pressure placed on the Sámi have only recently been acknowledged and considered in academic research (for example, [Lehtola, 2015, 2022](#): 157–88; [Kuokkanen, 2022](#)). It is clear from these newer investigations that the Finnish state-supported settler colonial practices in the Sámi areas are effectively forcing many of

the Indigenous Sámi to become stationary, restricting access to the broader expanses of land and waters they were accustomed to, and forcing them to reside in fixed dwellings (Lehtola, 2015: 25). In more recent times, various infrastructure projects have worked as ‘persuasive colonialism’ by expanding public institutions, such as healthcare services, postal services and police in the Sámi communities, thereby eventually ‘nationalising’ the Sámi homelands (Massa, 1994: 262–3; Lehtola, 2015: 29).

The Roma in Finland were also targets of repressive assimilative legislation, policies and practices (Keskinen, 2021). Though there has been some debate on the origins of the Roma community, there is scholarly consensus that Finnish Roma always saw themselves as a distinct group from the mainstream community (Rekola, 2023). Consequently, Pyykkönen (2015) points out how Finnish administrative techniques towards ethnic minorities shifted in the 19th century as the national romantic movement, a form of cultural activism often described as a ‘national awakening’, gained steam. While the Roma were first subject to the Finnish administrative law on vagrancy, techniques of governance changed to directly controlling the bodies of the Roma through deportation, involuntary labour and forced settlements (Pulma, 2006). Ethnic minorities thus became increasingly negatively ‘culturalised’ as comparisons were drawn between those seen as being ‘on the margins of the nation and its civilisation’ and racialised White Finns (Pyykkönen, 2015).

Overseas, Nordic countries and individuals also are deeply implicated in various colonial enterprises. Denmark and Sweden (the only independent Nordic countries throughout the era of colonialism) had colonies of their own. Some people with a Finnish background migrated and settled in North America, Australia, South Africa and other areas where they participated in perpetuating land theft against Indigenous people, an opportunity rendered possible by the broader settler colonial structures of power and the ideologies that the burgeoning Nordic societies embraced (Keskinen, 2021: 75; Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä, 2021). Denmark, as a seafaring nation, took advantage of and exploited the triangle trade that carried enslaved peoples, sugar and cotton across the North Atlantic. Nordic peoples participated in colonial practices as missionaries, shipmasters, military personnel, engineers and academics. These colonial connections were important to Nordic economies as sources of knowledge, as well as of raw materials, such as cotton, and for developing a system of exporting goods. Sweden, for example, produced the iron chains used in slave ships, and Finland made tar, which was needed to maintain sailing ships (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011: 29–30). Most commonly, Finns’ involvement in colonialism took place ‘at home, in everyday situations. Finns circulated, shared, adopted, adapted and created colonial discourses: texts, scientific studies, objects, imagery and artifacts’ (Merivirta, Koivunen and Särkkä, 2021: 6). In sum, while the

degree of Nordic colonial involvement varied from country to country, many participated and profited from the colonial practices that produced Europe as a global centre (Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012: 1; Keskinen, 2021). Despite the long *durée* of colonial practices, somehow each of these Nordic nations holds a special political positionality as the world's neutral powers. This status further complicates decolonial efforts to call attention to and address the erasure and impacts of their inherent coloniality.

As previously noted, although Nordic societies have been reluctant to take accountability for their role in colonialism, where major imperial powers such as Britain or France assume centre stage (Jensen, 2009: 164), Nordic societies did indeed embrace the hegemonic, inherently racist world view of colonialism, taking it by and large as natural and 'universally' accepted (Vuorela, 2009). As an ideological undercurrent, the colonial world view has informed attitudes towards non-European others, paving the way for patronising, disparaging and, at times, hostile attitudes and representations, rather than equality. Nonetheless, by emphasising their perceived outsider and neutral positions, Nordic societies have been able to envision and portray themselves as liberal bystanders, at worst, to racism and the dehumanising colonial and imperial practices of other nations. In this line of thought, it is assumed that since there has been little contact with colonised people of colour in Nordic societies, then there has been little racist behaviour, and consequently no racism to deal with. If anything, Finns have been appalled to see their own history as a negatively racialised peoples, represented as being among the 'Yellow' race in the European racial theories of late 19th and early 20th century. When racial classifications changed to also include Eastern Europeans as quite White, Finns were gradually Whitened, which shows how racial categorisations are fluid and change over time (Ignatiev, 1995; Keskinen, 2021: 76–7).

Overall, Nordic societies have been uninterested in their colonial legacies and slow to acknowledge racism as a long-standing cultural and structural undercurrent, and not merely individual bad behaviour (for example, Keskinen et al, 2009; Keskinen, 2021: 70). Not long ago, even research proposals on racism were routinely evaluated as irrelevant on the basis that 'there is no racism' in Nordic society for it to be researched (personal communication with a Nordic social work professor whose research plan was in question). Still in the spring of 2022, a local Finnish newspaper reported a story about an anguished grocery store customer in Satu's former municipality of residence, Pirkkala, who called police after seeing Janette Grönfors, a Roma woman, behind the store's cash counter (Ellilä, 2022). The customer simply could not absorb the fact that the Roma woman wearing the store's vest was a shop assistant on duty. Ironically, the same Roma woman had been unable to finish her studies because she never managed to get an internship to complete the practical training period required to

complete her degree. As these kinds of experiences attest, equality in Nordic societies may appear to be a myth, rather than a default value, especially for those excluded from, or contesting, hegemonic Nordic imaginaries and understandings of society.

The previously discussed conceptualisation of Nordics as outsiders rather than directly engaged in colonialism has enabled the notion of ‘Nordic exceptionalism’ to emerge and assert an image of Nordics as peace-loving, rational, conflict resolution-oriented do-gooders in ways that resonate globally (Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012). The ostensible certainty of Nordic exceptionalism serves as a beacon of democratic respectability and reifies early colonial formations that aggregate Whiteness with civility. Backed up with relatively generous development aid funding, the seemingly neutral position has facilitated positive international roles for Nordic countries in the international arena, including political engagement in various anti-imperial and anti-racist activities since the 1970s. Indeed, there have been social justice movements in Finland like *prosenttiliike* (the per cent movement) of the 1980s, which called for Finland to increase its development aid to the level recommended by the United Nations. Many members donated 1 per cent of their salary to development cooperation in solidarity with the Global South. When Kris first started at the University of Tampere, for example, she studied with students from the African National Congress that were funded by the Finnish government. At the same time, hosting students and intellectuals from colonised nations or making donations to development projects may effectively push Nordic involvement in colonialism, accountability and decolonisation-as-necessary even further away from the national consciousness (Puar, 2007; Morgensen, 2011).

In the end, there is no denying the fact that there are many taken-for-granted practices and patterns of thought that carry discriminatory elements in the Nordic societies. Sometimes it takes a child to point these out. Satu, for instance, was happy to eventually find a Finnish children’s book, *Metkat menopelit* (*Funny Set of Wheels*, WSOY, 2010) with diverse (not only White) human characters. While the book is joyful and fun to read, one illustration leaves the reader troubled. On a double-page spread presenting a train and its passengers, the one and only seated Black passenger has non-cushioned sides in his seat, whereas the seats of the other, White travellers are nicely soft, and can be stroked by a small reader. Confused, Satu’s child asked why that one person did not have a soft seat like the others. Indeed, why not? Maybe the technical explanation for the inferior seat of the Black passenger is that the picture happens to be situated close to the spine of the book, its softness thus difficult to make out. The fact that this seat has a racialised passenger may be a mere accident, though hard to imagine given the rigorous inspection that publishing editors and illustrators painstakingly give to materials before they go to press. The trouble is that too often those who do not fit into

the norm of Whiteness are presented in inferior positions, which implicitly and explicitly inform readers where they belong (for a historical analysis on normalising imperialist world order and colonialism in children's literature, see [Merivirta, 2021](#)). Likewise, people who are aware of colonial legacies and who take a decolonial mind to the art and practice of literature would notice such marginalising acts like placing the only person of colour in a position where their representation also situates them as differential beings tied to distinct aesthetics.

Hegemonic Whiteness in the Finnish context

As we have previously discussed, normative Whiteness has been central to mainstream notions of Finnishness and national identity. Those not fitting into the (narrow) norm of Whiteness have been and are still today easily interpreted as foreigners, or dubious and different in some nefarious way (such as the Sámi, the Roma, refugees, immigrants and other categories of not fitting in). Even if this kind of stance is suggested to originate from a world view consisting of clear-cut and stable national units associated with a natural land area untethered to other peoples and cultures ([Assmuth et al, 2021: 17](#)), the presupposition is at odds with historical realities. Nordic histories, among others, show that national borders keep changing, people can be scattered across several states or be stateless and people mix and migrate. In the past, many people emigrated from Nordic countries to areas of colonial conquest in search of better lives, and tens of thousands of Finns, sometimes annually, moved to Sweden as late as the 1960s and 1970s seeking a better quality of life or economic opportunities. Hence, the concepts of migration and desire do not reside outside of the hegemonic national consciousness.

In contemporary discussions on migration in Finland, however, the term migrant has often been used to convey the implicit notion that immigrating refugees, asylum seekers and racialised migrants lack the drive and means to achieve the threshold of living among Finnish peoples. They are dehumanised and deemed, before and after arrival, as financial and educational burdens who need external support to find and achieve even a modicum of dignity and a place in Finnish society. At the same time, for the prosperous, those recognised as key experts in their fields and holders of the 'right' passport, crossing borders in the European Union and the Nordic countries is rarely a problem. No matter how robust the efforts of members of racially marginalised groups to overcome barriers and fully participate in Nordic societies, studies indicate that systemic unconscious bias reinforces structures of discrimination, not only against ethnic minorities, but also against people with gendered or non-normative identity factors ([Huuki and Juutalainen, 2016](#); [Liebkind, Larja and Brylka, 2016](#); [Ahmad, 2020](#)). Noting the simultaneous acute labour shortage in many fields, and layers

of need throughout the ageing Finnish society, a dividing line is drawn between those assumed to be resourceful and/or culturally unchallenging for Finns and those assumed to be somehow too different or opportunistic. The most restrictive, and sometimes even insurmountable, immigration and asylum policies seem to be reserved for truly distressed migrants only (for example, [Assmuth et al, 2021](#): 8, referencing [Hiitola and Pellander, 2019](#)). It is from the latter 'kind' of migrants that the European Union (including the exceptional Nordics) protects itself with walls, radars and armed patrols, while preaching about human rights to the world in other arenas.

Notwithstanding the previously mentioned histories of emigration, contemporary discussions on migration in Finland have largely focused on the potential problems of current immigration, particularly when imagining non-White newcomers. Immigration is often viewed, first and foremost, as a problem of national security and economic stability. These assumptions emerge from a prominent national narrative that is rooted in hierarchical colonial structures of power that reproduce racist attitudes regarding racialised immigrants in every arena from politics to media to literature. Consequently, this problem-oriented mode of speech, which easily extends to other racialised and othered groups in Finland, has eroded the sense of security of some members of Finnish society ([Assmuth et al, 2021](#): 12–13). Moreover, it probably also reflects nebulous White fears of change combined with a longing for what felt like less complex times. Nostalgia, a key part of national exceptionalism, ventures to imagine society's past as simple and agreeable; it is a conceptualisation that is well aligned with the conception of Nordic benevolence and a time when, in reality, minoritised peoples lacked visibility in the mainstream culture and conscience and 'knew their place'. Fears and prejudices have political currency, which partly explains the emergence and success of political parties such as the Finns Party (*Perussuomalaiset*) in Finland or Swedish Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*) in Sweden. Whatever one's side in these discussions, paying attention only to the present may hide the fact that the rhetoric is neither tied to nor a consequence of migration alone but, rather, is rooted in racist and racialised notions about ostensible outsiders, alongside the naturalised merit of White Nordic citizenry, and has a long history in Finnish and other Nordic societies ([Seikkula and Keskinen, 2021](#): 13).

In the Nordic countries, many of the White-majority population still find the notion that White is a skin colour or related with privilege to be novel ideas. As [Keskinen, Mkwesha and Seikkula \(2021\)](#) argue, many people racialised as White are often not accustomed to dealing with racialised hierarchies, or to acknowledge their own position within them. Likewise, many find doing so to be uncomfortable, and may react with uneasiness, self-pity, annoyance and, even, accusations. In addition to excusing racism with White innocence, White tears and White ignorance, this kind of White

fragility can delay or prevent tackling racism and critical analyses of power (Keskinen, Mkwesha and Seikkula, 2021: 62). Part of the pain may be that acknowledging racism leads to seeing the many positional advantages that come along with Whiteness in a critical light (for example, Seikkula and Hortelano, 2021: 149).

Deconstructing colonial and racist structures of power requires understanding how they have evolved and been maintained. Against the historical continuities of oppression, exploitation and discrimination that colonialism, imperialism and racism have both directly and indirectly enforced, working to deconstruct them in the present should be vital to any society striving to be just and democratic. Therefore, decolonising is everyone's task, and not something to be left solely to those racialised and othered, though their insights are astute and needed. As Seikkula and Hortelano (2021: 150) argue, while anyone can practise racism in everyday life, anyone can also learn to recognise and resist racism. Colour-blindness, a popular but misconceived notion that associates racism with phenotypic difference, in other words the surface of the skin (that is, colour), became a point of action which invited peoples, businesses and societies to adopt the practice of overlooking or being indifferent to human physical differences. Ideally, ignoring how we look would achieve anti-racism and enable individuals and institutions to overcome inequality. However, the profound implications of race ideologies and racial formations, in reality, create complex mental frameworks upheld by long-standing beliefs in racial difference, which only serve to maintain these interlocking systems of oppression (Omi and Winant, 1994; Seikkula and Hortelano, 2021).

If one of the enemies of combating racism and other colonial legacies in contemporary societies is White people's fear of losing the positional advantages that they are accustomed to, then the challenge is not only individual and societal, but also deeply embedded in the structures of the globalised economy and hegemonic positions of power. In Northern societies, a similar demand to adjust to the rules and power structures that protect the interests of dominant groups are imposed on those considered 'other', such as migrants or refugees. The trouble with demands such as 'when in Finland, do as Finns do' is that newcomers often face barriers to their becoming, in this sense, Finnish in multiple nuanced ways. As Tobias Pötzsch's research (2020) in Finland and Canada shows, (White) fears of real integration are embedded in the various structural and institutional arrangements of migrant integration programmes to the extent that they often impede the critical citizenship of migrants in complex and subtle ways. The newcomers are managed in ways that de facto protect the interests of dominant groups, whereas truly enabling the equal involvement and self-management of the othered groups requires giving them voice and learning from their views and experiences.

Today, the Global North is an increasingly political rather than geopolitical location (Santos, 2015: 10). In the global division of resources, the Global North (and the Nordics as part of it) continues to utilise cheap resources such as raw materials, labour and food from societies facing the ongoing structures of coloniality to its own benefit and at environmental and social costs to the Global South. In today's Global North, maintaining an upper hand and taking care of one's own competitiveness intersects with the coloniality of thought, knowledge and being, leaving the descendants of colonised nations the subjects of those in power in today's Global North (Lugones, 2007; Quijano, 2000). Illustrative of the latter is, for example, the use of seasonal migrant labour, such as berry and vegetable pickers, as well as more permanent workers in sectors where labour shortages prevail, such as in transport and care. Their contracts and conditions commonly force workers to come without their families and be ready to go back once they are no longer needed or productive.

As Bob Pease (2017) writes, global forces shape professions like social work; thus the problems that social workers and other social professionals address are often not solvable within national borders alone. While the nation-state context, its status quos and service infrastructures have long served as the taken-for-granted institutional frameworks to comprehend and deal with the issues at stake in social and care work, it is high time to take a critical distance from the kind of (methodological) nationalism that this has entailed. The same applies to social work research. In a globally interconnected world, social work must remain adaptive and attuned to the structural inequalities that spread within and across countries, in order to avoid reinforcing the already existing inequalities and vulnerabilities mapped onto world systems through colonial ideology (Wallerstein, 2004b).

Moreover, tackling these inequalities is not possible by focusing on social work's traditional, often marginalised, or low-income clients or service-user groups alone. In the case of the currently spiralling climate and ecological crises, for example, an urgent and major task is to confront and limit the internalised prerogative of the affluent sectors of humanity, political powers and corporations, the majority of which are situated comfortably in the Global North, to consume more than their share of the planetary resources. Under these conditions, anti-immigrant and racialised rhetorics spread, with little differentiation, over both those who seek asylum and those seeking work. As such, racialising asylum seekers and immigrants looking for gainful employment through the deployment of political rhetoric obscures the point and scale of the challenges at stake and ahead despite their political currency and real need for peaceful, constructive solutions. A fundamental tenet of social work, to advocate for the equality of all peoples, contends that we are all together, interconnected, and interdependent on planet Earth and to each other, a fact which even the privileged cannot eternally

escape despite the expansive resources to protect and secure themselves and their descendants.

Pluriversalising knowledge production

Clarke and Yellow Bird (2021: 34) point out, ‘How we exist in the world is interwoven with how we know the world.’ Capitalist extractivism, structural racism and colonial systems provide the context to hierarchical systems of knowledge production. Our academies are grounded in class, race and gender privilege maintained by admissions gatekeepers, through biased standardised exams and legacy enrolment. Further, our educational systems are imbued with what Midgley (1981) called ‘professional imperialism’; namely, the attempt of Western social workers to ‘universalise’ their own social work knowledge to the world, which our personal memories in the beginning of this chapter highlighted. The professional histories instilled in students continue to mirror the dominant structures of power. One example of this is that the global story of the social work profession continues to focus on early White female professionals in the US, such as Jane Addams and Mary Richmond, even in places as disparate as India, China and South Africa. Today, a great deal of feminist research recounts the ways in which racialisation and the belief in White saviourism deeply informed much of the work of White suffragists and feminists (Newman, 1999; Lee-Oliver, 2019). Likewise, though there are increasing efforts in social work research to trouble these universalising histories (for example, Coles, Netting and O’Connor, 2018; Chapman and Withers, 2019), the enduring dependence on these founding figures reflects the persistent racialised misperceptions of, at best, or the refusal to acknowledge, at worst, comparable Global South social work ancestors (Clarke, 2021).

As Suoranta and Ryyänänen (2016: 137) point out, ‘academic research is one of the machineries that maintain and renew the hegemonic position of Western knowledge’. In other words, much academic research has for long been either openly or implicitly Northern, stemming from and being specific to the Global North, even when disseminated globally and claimed to be universally applicable (Connel, 2007). Social work is no exception. A central goal of Western social work, after all, has been ‘to synthesise the various theories and practices that aimed at the improvement of the self and society and the maintenance of order’ (Howe, 1994: 519). It is therefore no wonder that knowledge production that challenges and deconstructs coloniality (Keskinen, Seikkula and Mkwesha, 2021: 51) must take place both inside and outside of academic circles, particularly in social movements, public scholarship and through artistic activities in order to arrive at liberatory praxes. Decoloniality ensures that theory and praxes are community informed and place-based. Social work practice, research and education are not

politically neutral arenas, even when disguised as such (Pease, 2017: 222). For a field claiming to promote global justice, a necessary critical skill is the ability to recognise and acknowledge its own complicities – specific to time and place – with the perpetuation of inequalities, including processes such as colonialism (Haug, 2015, referenced in Pease, 2017: 222).

By resisting coloniality, and the lingering frameworks of colonialism, and acknowledging and claiming space for diversity in the present, it is important to recognise that decolonisation is not a fixed process, but rather a call to be adaptive and develop new, dynamic knowledge projects and collective ways of learning and contributing (Connell, 2014). Rather than aspiring to the universal, a decolonial standpoint is that knowledge must be pluriversal (Escobar, 2018) and involve people from diverse backgrounds in its making (Keskinen, Seikkula and Mkwesha, 2021: 67). As Reiter (2018: 7) argues: ‘This world has space for many ways of explaining it and making sense of it. To think that the Western way of thinking about and understanding the world is the only one is ignorant.’ Pluriversality resists the epistemic violence of colonial exceptionalism that sees only one kind of empirical world and is open to a myriad of scientific traditions and languages (Harding, 1998: 40).

Decolonisation is also about ‘the reconstruction of knowledge’ that was suppressed by colonialism (Connell, 2014). In general, due to the globally adopted hegemonic position of Northern perspectives, even those outside of Northern academia are forced to become fluent in the language and master its theories and concepts as a condition to use their own voices on ‘global’ academic platforms. In the case of this book, some of the publishers we initially approached were hesitant about our wish to also include authors who are not primarily academics, but who work actively on decolonisation and culturally responsive social work practices in their communities, despite their effectiveness. We have argued that it is critical to include voices that also bring pluriversality and experiential knowledge to the foreground and challenge the dominance of Western scholarly discourses and the social work practices that they produce.

Margaret Kovach (2021: 158) underlines that it is important not only to bring racialised and Indigenous bodies into the academy but emphasises that diverse knowledges must also transform ways of knowing through relational work aimed at decolonising ‘the exclusive domain of knowledge creation’. Articulating a critical research agenda centred on racialised and Indigenous voices, according to Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021), reinforces self-determination and resists the further dehumanisation and colonisation of racialised and Indigenous people through academic research. Following Patricia Hill Collins (2008: 8), resistance to the omission, trivialisation and depoliticisation of racialised experiences and perspectives as knowledge production is the first step towards empowerment (Dotson, 2015). Hence, incorporating a pluriversalist standpoint also requires acknowledgement of

and the need for action on reparations: epistemologically, materially and spiritually. Thus, globally, holistic culturally responsive social work praxes should be in the service of the wellness of peoples, which includes their sovereignty, bodies and contexts.

Genuine integration requires adjustments for all parties, not only from the newcomers or those whose othering has been customary (Pöttsch, 2020). In this sense, the body of work produced by Indigenous and decolonial scholars on how to frame inclusive and pluriversal research agendas could be educative and even vital to the development of the social work profession (for example, Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird, 2005; Kovach, 2021; Smith, 2021).

Decolonising social work in context

Histories of social work are intertwined with the historical processes of colonialism and imperialism, as well as the struggles against them (Ioakimidis and Wylie, 2023). Social work emerged as a profession in the late 19th century, the period when European colonialism was at its height and was heavily influenced by both social control and social (also anti-imperial) activism (for example, Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2010: 92–103). On the one hand, social work has deep roots in social activism, specifically challenging unfair labour laws, poor public health, the disempowered position of women and children, as well as promoting education and supporting immigrants. On the other hand, it has also operated within structures of White supremacy and colonialism, collaborating with the removal of Indigenous children to boarding schools, the imposition of heteronormativity, the institutionalisation of people perceived as ‘not normal’, control of reproduction through racial hygiene praxes and efforts to repress and erase diverse cultures among immigrants (Lavalette and Ioakimidis, 2011; Ioakimidis and Trimikliniotis, 2020; Sudenkaarne and Blell, 2021). Indeed, the genesis of the police in much of the Global North coincided with the formation of social work and the two professions have continually intersected throughout history, particularly when managing ‘troublesome’ or unhoused populations (Gasche and Holler, 2021; Dettlaff et al, 2023). The early roots of Western social care were also embedded in a patchwork of rhetoric and logic grounded in laws that stigmatised poor people, workhouses and saviourism that emerged from Church-based activities that were anchored in local contexts.

The social work profession has sought to develop a methodological reproduction of the ‘hard’ sciences through ‘evidence-based practice’ (Soydan, 2014). By striving for recognition and status within this paradigm, social work reveals that its view of professionalism is infused with modernity’s positivist illusion of detachment in working relationships, neutrality, social worker-as-expert, universal laws and empiricism, and the separation of the professional from the personal (Sewpaul, 2010). It is also premised

on holding the ‘right knowledge’, commonly understood as objectively produced academic knowledge in Western/Northern contexts, and the marginalisation or epistemicide of other knowledges. In so doing, it has been firmly embedded in what Aníbal Quijano (2000) terms the ‘colonial matrix’; namely, hegemonic control over four interrelated domains: the economy; authority and social institutions; gender and sexuality; and subjectivity and knowledge. This dominant ‘expert’ model of social work has thus been exported globally through colonialism, missionisation, saviourism, extractivism and the European/North American undertaking to subdue Indigenous peoples in their respective homelands through imposing colonised ways of knowing and acting (Sewpaul and Hölscher, 2004).

Though the colonial record leaves evidence of the mechanisms applied to manage human difference, especially as is found in the Doctrine of Discovery and thereafter, a deeper understanding of decolonisation remains elusive to many who seek to democratise institutions and transnational, and inter-sovereign, relationships. For the purposes of pluriversal social work, it is important to acknowledge that while decolonial projects take up the aim of an epistemological revolution, the argument in fact is not against professionalism per se. Rather, decoloniality is critical of the reification of positivist professionalism and exceptionalism. In affluent Global North societies, such professionalism risks not taking accountability by apolitically maintaining carceral control over racialised and Indigenous communities through the veneer of following agency protocols. These types of practices maintain a distance between social workers and those in the vulnerable populations they serve (Sewpaul and Henrickson, 2019: 1473).

A similar distancing may also arise between the often middle-class, university-educated, social work labour force and the many diverse and complex vulnerable populations they serve. The distance can be reinforced when social work education does not challenge students to develop a critical and reflective stance to the structural inequalities that position service users differently from them. National identity in many Global North nations has been framed by marginalising communities based on processes of othering. In other words, contrasting the ideal corporeal citizen with those excluded from this category has occurred through Orientalist practices, scientific racism, heteronormativity and eugenics (Said, 1979; Butler, 1990; Kelley, 2000; Hagren, 2022). Social work education must challenge these binaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’ that have been projected corporeally onto diverse populations, not only based on perceived race, but also sexual orientation, gender expression, class, religion and ability by pluriversalising its knowledge production and practices.

By the 20th century, in Finland, eugenics (also known as race hygiene) was quite influential in systems of care. It emerged at a time when democracy (in the sense of ‘one person, one vote’) took root in Finland, which had gained

independence from Russia. In the context of emerging independence and sovereignty, there were growing anxieties about the burgeoning population growth of ‘others’ in the nation. Eugenics thus was constructed as a health intervention and used to sterilise and isolate individuals represented systematically as ‘subnormal’ in institutions (Hemminiki, Rasimus and Forssas, 1997: 1876). Finnish sterilisation laws were in force between 1935 and 1970. Coercive sterilisation was initially aimed at those deemed ‘mentally incompetent’ and was supported through political and institutional rhetoric that perpetuated fears of the ‘degeneration’ of Finns. This dissociative practice enabled racism to be obscured through protective orders to distance the Finnish citizenry from those inferior peoples ostensibly affected by ‘feeble-mindedness’, alcohol abuse, poor hygiene, laziness and a lack of proper Christian beliefs (Seeman, 2007). It should come as no surprise, then, that Roma women were disproportionately subjected to sterilisation orders, particularly in the period between 1960 and 1970 (Mattila, 2018). The concerns that drove eugenics in Finland easily morphed into fears about ‘unproductive’ people that threatened to drain the welfare state (Spektorowski and Ireni-Saban, 2013). Sudenkaarne and Bell (2021) characterise the Finnish welfare state as ‘haunted’ by the legacy of eugenics. Nowadays, this haunting reality emerges in structural racism and fears about a diminishing White Finnish population, also known in radicalised nationalist groups as ‘the great replacement’. Both the state rhetoric and social fears that centre the need to prevent the loss of Finnishness concentrate on hegemonic Whiteness and are couched in everyday subtle and obvious ways of excluding diverse service users. Just as social work in the US, for example, has been critiqued for its uneasy historical and ongoing alliance with the police, and aligned as a carceral rather than justice-oriented practice, Nordic social work likewise has had its own long-standing engagement with eugenic (or race hygiene) medicine.

Given the recent globalised and multi-variant illuminations of resistance against systematic violence and state tactics of oppression, the resurgence of interest in social work history and contemporary practices also reflects a timely need to drill down into the colonial matrices of White supremacy that have shaped the profession from its inception. Wright, Carr and Akin (2021) argue that the ways that social work history has been taught to students reinforces colonial ideas that Whites have been the doers while BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) populations have been the dependent recipients of their efforts to reform and bring about social change. It reflects a saviour mentality that justice for marginalised peoples happens because modern, liberal citizens make the effort to democratise their institutions. Unless the professionals within social work, and the policy makers who shape it, begin a deep examination of the roots of the profession, and take into account that colonial systems are most clearly defined by White supremacy,

it will continue to replicate systems of human difference and differential treatment in its practices, in its knowledge production and its reinvention of social structures. Unravelling metanarratives of social work through a close examination of colonial history and coloniality, therefore, lends a future orientation towards a transformative social work profession.

Why futures matter

Along with the reasons that we have already highlighted, we have elaborated colonialism and its impacts, as well as decolonisation in and beyond social work, because we strongly believe this to be crucial for imagining and building just futures in social work and care. At a time when there is no dearth of dystopic scenarios, including ever increasing polarisation, catastrophic ecological crises and a growing scarcity of resources, our political systems are simultaneously creating a greater need for social work and care and removing the resources to provide such care. In spite of obvious power differentials, our collective futures are ‘incredibly contested’ and ‘saturated with conflicting social interests’ (Urry, 2014: 3). We contend that if social work wants to remain faithful to the moral and ethical value base it claims, then the preferable, and really the only, futures worth striving for are the ones that are inclusive and worth living – for all. To generate new outcomes requires learning from various pasts, including the colonised and marginalised ones, and on that basis not only ‘developing ways of understanding how past, present and future are mutually intertwined’ (Urry, 2014: 7), but also striving towards a more inclusive and equal world that embraces and builds upon situated knowledge systems and coalitional engagement. At the 1952 Bandung Conference, when world powers came together to imagine futures not under the oppressive force of First World nations, a commitment was made to acknowledge coalitional engagement and mutual respect as cornerstones to building prosperity without human subjugation as a mechanism. Similarly, we find our global communities at yet another turning point, surrounded by the silencing threats of White supremacist domination, seeking to move towards thriving liberation and diversity.

While futures tend to end up being different from what was imagined or planned, the capacity to imagine and own futures matters, to the extent that a central element of power is the power to determine, out of a myriad of ways, how the future is imagined, materialised and distributed (Urry, 2014: 17). From a social work perspective, the question is whether and how social work can promote inclusive futures with credible and positive roles, and a promise of care, for a diverse array of people. However, there is no denying the existing path dependencies: ‘different social futures are fateful for people’s lives in the present’ (Urry, 2014: 7). As our lives are still today influenced by colonial legacies, in other words the presence of coloniality,

this book argues for the necessity to decolonise both to recognise and rework our embeddedness in the colonality of systems, knowledge and being, as well as for the sake of the futures of social work and care.

Until now, efforts to incorporate pieces of diverse knowledge or ideas into social work praxes have been limited or they have been appropriative. [Curtis and Morley \(2019\)](#) argue that greater critical reflection is needed in social work to safeguard against integrating alternative practices without reinscribing colonial, individualised interventions under different guises. Thus, the question is not what decolonisation can add to what we already know, but rather what can decolonisation do to transform social work practices into the tools that we need to create real change? What can social work do to level out the existing polarisations in the society? And how could social work, on its part, promote dismantling the entanglement of the affluent in exploitative and destructive relationships with nature and the Global South? These and related questions are pertinent to the chapters that fill these pages. Examining the implications of social work and care as systematically and practically entwined with colonality make comprehensible and give impetus to complex decolonial praxes, especially as it seems that future dividing lines will deepen between those who hold egalitarian participatory agendas, and those lining up with right-wing, anti-globalisation, anti-liberal and anti-environmentalist standpoints (for example, [Blühdorn and Deflorian, 2021](#)). Each author in this book demonstrates a commitment and praxis that unpacks as it reimagines the future of social work through the lens of justice. Our future visions have powerful social consequences, and the time to work with them, as well as finding the desired ways to achieve them, is now.

[Kara Keeling \(2019: 15\)](#) has asserted that we need a ‘reinvigorated concept of knowledge production—as an imaginative, scholarly enterprise (that) ... engages with existing academic work and other knowledges and that involve the body as well’. When tensions build through growing contradictions between the current historical moment and the webs of meaning attached to institutions and systems, then radical imaginaries emerge that create new ways of knowing, organising and transforming. While the radical imaginary can easily be dismissed as utopian or pie-in-the-sky, such visions are critical to seeing beyond the colonised mind of the present to contemplating a different tomorrow.

Emerging movements such as Afrofuturism, Indigenous and Asian futurism together with complex constellations of global queer, multiracial and trans identities use speculative fiction, comics, art and technology to create new visions and aesthetics of a future where BIPOC people are not exoticised as others, and where they are firmly centred in narratives. Radical change, in other words, requires a radical imaginary that can not only creatively re-envision different structures of social existence, but also understand the past in new ways to enact transformation. The current explosion of texts

and discussions on decolonisation around the globe perhaps represents such a transformational historical moment.

The structure of the book

In this volume, we examine our current realities and practices before considering some ways to transform future practices of social work. In many of these contributions, an important part of the process of approaching the topic is a critical unpacking of colonial and White supremacist views of care that bear the phenomenological markers of coloniality. The work herein observes and questions the intellectual hegemony of the metropole, and its broad institutional underpinnings, including universities but extending far beyond them into professions, governments, corporations and communities of practice. In this book, the authors represent practitioners, scholars and experts whose unique contributions and voices, in and of themselves and as a whole, provide not only insights and critiques, but also practised epistemological social work methods that envision and create justice-oriented outcomes.

This book is constructed in three parts. The first part, 'Exploring coloniality in the Finnish social work field', outlines the structures, policies and practices that constitute coloniality in Finnish social work. The second part, 'Naming and confronting epistemic and structural injustice', presents racialised voices that often go unheard about the barriers they face in Finnish society as students and practitioners. Finally, the third part, 'Reimagining caring and social work futurities', opens up diverse approaches to co-creating and envisioning decolonising social work education, practices and ways of thinking.

Part I: 'Exploring coloniality in the Finnish social work field'

The book opens with 'Between a rock and hard place: discussing Sámi issues in contemporary Finland – a conversation with Ánneristen Juuso'. In an interview with the editors, Juuso, a Sámi woman, reindeer herder, actor, lawyer and doctoral researcher in law discusses the possibilities and problematics of decolonisation, and Indigenous erasure within the construct of a benevolent Finland.

Camilla Nordberg, Joa Hiitola, Hanna Kara and Maija Jäppinen then explore the complexity of the family reunification process for forced migrants resident in Finland. Their case studies illustrate how the layers of street-level welfare bureaucracy reinforce the welfare state nationalism of Finnish immigration policies. They illustrate the enormous emotional and financial pressures of navigating administrative barriers by forced migrants, which not only reduces their ability to integrate into Finnish society but

also profoundly affects their fundamental wellbeing. Forced migrants trapped in a state of constant longing and rejection present significant challenges to frontline social workers, who reflect the ambivalence of fulfilling their ethical responsibilities and utilising their professional expertise while carrying out Finnish migration policies.

Eveliina Heino, Hanna Kara and Annika Lillrank examine universal services for disabled children in the Finnish context where cultural homogeneity is often constructed as synonymous with equality. Analysing the accounts of two migrant parents who have a disabled child reveals systemic limitations in Finnish social and healthcare services. They show how responsibility for ensuring universal access to services falls heavily on frontline workers, producing arbitrary practices rather than structures of inclusion.

Inka Söderström investigates homonationalist and colonial meaning-making processes through the stories of queer people with a refugee background and their social workers. In closely examining these stories, Söderström shows how social workers use the homophobia and oppression in refugees' countries of origin to construct Finland as a superior, discrimination-free queer haven. Queer people with a refugee background, nonetheless, talk back to these totalising discourses by narrating alternative stories of their countries of origin and current circumstances. Söderström calls for breaking the tyranny of the single story through listening as a decolonial praxis.

Kati Turtiainen and Merja Anis utilise Iris Marion Young's concepts of the social connection model for building justice-oriented social work that centres the role of responsibility. Through an analysis of social workers' discussions and texts on child welfare and child protection issues, Turtiainen and Anis demonstrate how power dynamics operate on the client-professional level, especially when clients are othered as linguistic or cultural minorities. Most importantly, they indicate how social workers could intervene to take responsibility for structural injustice and shift inequitable outcomes.

Enni Mikkonen presents a rich case study of an arts-based intervention with racialised and othered young people with an asylum-seeking background aimed at building on the youth's agency while addressing structural racism and bias. Mikkonen shows how arts-based methods can provide decolonised entry points for deconstructing cultural and racialised otherisation and empowering youth.

Part II: 'Naming and confronting epistemic and structural injustice'

Koko Hubara offers a personal essay on her journey through Finnish social work as a Brown native Finn former client, student of social work and practitioner. Drawing on her experience, she presents a deep reflection on the role of race in contemporary Finnish social work education and practice,

and offers solutions so that the social work field could free itself from the shackles of colonialism.

Fadumo Dayib reflects on her experience working in the mental health system, while Kris Clarke collaborates in outlining colonial genealogies of ethnopsychiatry and transcultural mental health care. They argue that these conceptualisations perpetuate colonialism by othering, incarcerating, controlling and medicalising the racialised bodies that come into contact with it. The confluence of structural and epistemic injustice in the Whiteness of Finnish mental health services underserves racialised people resident in Finland.

Wambui Njuguna explores her journey through wellness advocacy and care in southern Finland as a practitioner of colour. She discusses the challenges of creating healing spaces for BIPOC people in a wellness landscape filled with cognitive dissonance and colour-blindness. Njuguna talks frankly about how difficult it is to initiate decolonising wellness events within communities with complex identities.

Smarika KC, Priscilla Osei and Kris Clarke discuss epistemic injustice in the Finnish discipline of social work through the critical self-reflection method of *testimonio*. Clarke, the supervisor of doctoral students Smarika and Priscilla, opens the chapter by outlining the concepts of epistemic injustice and intersectionality. The students then present their own *testimonios* about their own experiences as students of colour resident in Finland, and they discuss why they see their research is significant to Finnish social work and the Finnish academy.

Part III: 'Reimagining caring and social work futurities'

Lena Sawyer, Kris Clarke and Nana Osei-Kofi explore the value of city walking as a method of counter-archiving in social work education. They argue that centring people and our bodies in encounters with physical and public space creates decolonial pedagogical forms for grappling with the context of place and how the legacy of colonialism continues, through signs that signify coloniality of power. They closely examine case studies in Sweden and California to show how city walking was used with groups to explore how colonialism lives in our present day.

Saana Raittila-Salo outlines lay people's social work through a case study of community health workers in Mozambique. Arguing that Indigenous community health workers have deep experiential knowledge of the social environment, Raittila-Salo sees the concept of lay people's social work as one way to reframe Indigenous, popular and culturally relevant community practices as social work, thus challenging the dominance of colonial Eurocentric definitions of the profession and confronting professional imperialism.

Michael Yellow Bird and Holly Hatton-Bowers offer the final chapter in the book by exploring how decolonising the mind can build resilience, as well as support social work values and healing practices. Yellow Bird and Hatton-Bowers argue that decolonising mindfulness by intentionally including ethical principles and spirituality in praxis is necessary for sustained systemic changes within the social work field. They underline the key importance of practices acknowledging the historical violence and harm social work has contributed to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC), which is challenging, often painful work, but central to healing and change.

We then offer a Conclusion as a challenge to take up the promise of decolonisation, to reimagine and re-envision how social work could function in Finland.

Note

¹ It should be noted that there are more discussions on colonial legacies in the Finnish public sphere. The Finnish Broadcasting company (YLE) have developed some podcast series, such as ‘At Caribbean slave markets or mines in Congo – stories of Finnish colonialism [Karibian orjamarkkinoilla ja Kongon kaivoksilla – suomalaisen kolonialismin tarinat], <https://arena.yle.fi/podcastit/1-65173734>, and ‘Chapters of the history of racism [Lukuja rasismien historiasta], <https://arena.yle.fi/podcastit/1-50821999>. YLE has increasingly provided content that addresses these issues.

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