

Studies in Critical Social Sciences

*Irene Molina, Diana Mulinari
and Anders Neergaard (Eds.)*

Racial Capitalism

In the Shadow of the Swedish Model

BRILL

Racial Capitalism

Studies in Critical Social Sciences

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Edited by

Irene Molina
Diana Mulinari
Anders Neergaard



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Contents

Notes on Contributors vii

- 1 Introduction: Why Reproductive Racial Capitalism? Why Now? 1
 Irene Molina, Diana Mulinari and Anders Neergaard

PART 1

Racism(s)

- 2 Exclusionary and Exploitative Racism: Two Facets of Contemporary
 Racial Ideologies 31
 Martin Wolgast and Sima Nurali Wolgast
- 3 White Ignorance Maintains Racial Capitalism: Shock towards Labor
 Exploitation in the Finnish Food Systems 49
 Dionysia Jia Ying Kang
- 4 Racial Capitalism, Swedish Trade Unions, and the Wages
 of Whiteness 84
 Paula Mulinari and Anders Neergaard
- 5 Capitalist Racism as “Occupational Hazard” and Personal Responsibility:
 Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Finland 114
 Anuhya Bobba
- 6 Theories on Resistance, Visions of Hope 145
 Diana Mulinari

PART 2

Bordering

- 7 The Logistics of Settlement in Racial Capitalism: Migrant Dispersal,
 Algorithms and the Struggle for Relationality 173
 Karin Krifors

- 8 Refugee Settlement Policy within a Racial Capitalist Housing Market 196
Nicolina Ewards Öberg and Irene Molina
- 9 Ghosts of the Afterlife of Violence: the Traces of Racial Capitalism in the Carceral Practices of Remote Detention and Punishment of Refugees 224
Claudia Tazreiter

PART 3

Transformations and Resistances

- 10 Easter Riots and the Politics of Autocratization in Reconquista Sweden 257
Edda Manga and Mattias Gardell
- 11 The Trade Union Confederation, Neoliberalism and the Emergence of an Ethno-racist Sweden: Is Trade Union Anti-Racism Possible? 290
Anders Neergaard
- 12 Neo-apartheid Metropolis: Racial Capitalism and Subaltern Struggles in Urban Sweden 321
Carl-Ulrik Schierup, Aleksandra Ålund and Ilhan Kellecioglu
- Index 353

Notes on Contributors

Aleksandra Ålund

Professor Emerita at REMESO, The Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society, Linköping University, has published on migration, gender, and social movements, including the co-edited volume *Reimagineering the Nation. Essays on Twenty-First Century Sweden* (Peter Lang, 2017).

Anuhya Bobba

is a Ph.D. candidate in economic sociology, University of Turku, Finland. She studies entrepreneurship as a neoliberal ideology amidst the competitive restructuring of the Finnish welfare state. Her analysis of Finnish entrepreneurship strategy is recently published in *Scandinavian Political Studies* (2025, 48:3).

Nicolina Ewards Öberg

is a Ph.D. candidate at REMESO, Linköping University. Her research examines how changes in migration policy intersect with urban inequality and welfare retrenchment. She recently published *Local Migration Policy. International review of public policy* (2024, 6:3).

Mattias Gardell

Professor in Comparative Religion at the Centre for the Multidisciplinary Studies of Racism, Uppsala University. He explores problems related to religion, politics, racism and violence. His publications include *Lone Wolf Race Warriors and White Genocide* (2021).

Dionysia Jia Ying Kang

sociolegal scholar, Institute for Human Rights, Åbo Akademi University, adopting decolonial feminist praxis, studying intersections of race, border and work in food systems. She co-authored “Reclaiming Agency over Food Preparation under Immigration Detention” (2024), *FILLER zine*.

Ilhan Kellecioglu

MA in Political Science, Institute for Housing and Urban Research, Uppsala University, has published on urban planning, and privatization of public housing including the co-authored “Flowing Capital-Disrupted Homes: Financialization and Maintenance of Rental Housing in Sweden” (*Antipode* 2023).

Karin Krifors

is a researcher at REMESO, Linköping University. Karin has explored circulation of labour as logistics (*Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*), the spatial and gendered aspects of convivial migrant struggles and algorithms and interoperability in border control.

Edda Manga

is Research Director at the Multicultural Centre, Stockholm, affiliated researcher at Södertörn University. Her work explores intellectual histories of global inequality. She currently leads a major mapping of Sweden's social space following *Att mäta rasism* (2022).

Irene Molina

Professor in Human Geography at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research, Uppsala University. Her main areas of interest are the dynamics of racialization and urban segregation. Among her publications: *Capturing Displacement. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 49 (4). 852–875.

Diana Mulinari

Professor Emerita of Gender Studies, University of Lund, Sweden. Her work is inspired by anticolonial feminist traditions. A recent publication (co-author) is "The impossibility of social inclusion: The ethno-racist welfare discourse in Sweden" (2025) Routledge.

Paula Mulinari

Senior Lecturer Social Work, Malmö University, Sweden. Her research areas include racial temporality, social reproduction, social movements and trade union struggles. She recently published *Temporal Racism and the Invisibilization of Work* in *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* (2025, 15:1).

Anders Neergaard

Professor at REMESO, The Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society, Linköping university with research focusing on power, inequality, resistance and social movements. Recent publications are *The Power of Silence: Variations in the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism Among White Male-dominated Trade Unions in Sweden* (Routledge).

Sima Nurali Wolgast

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Lund University. Her research examines discrimination, minority stress, and organizational inequality. She has published widely on discrimination in working life, including Psychological Flexibility and Compassion Training for Equality in Organizations (*Mindfulness* 2024; 15: 2875–2887).

Carl-Ulrik Schierup

Professor Emeritus, REMESO, The Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society, Linköping University. Has published on migration, de-coloniality, nationalism, and social movements, including the co-edited volume *Handbook on Migration and Development. A Counterhegemonic Perspective* (Edward Elgar, 2024).

Claudia Tazreiter

is Professor at the Institute for REMESO, Linköping University. Her research engages in the fields of race, ethnicity, forced migration and memory studies. Among her many publications is *An End to Refugee Protection? In The politics of seeking asylum*, Emerald (2024).

Martin Wolgast

Associate Professor, Department of Psychology, Lund University. His work addresses psychological perspectives on social inequalities. He is co-author of several publications including *White Fragility and the Preservation of White Privileges in Organizations* (Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy, 2024).

Introduction: Why Reproductive Racial Capitalism? Why Now?

Irene Molina, Diana Mulinari and Anders Neergaard

1 Introduction

This volume is the result of work by the Nordic Research Collective for Critical Racism Studies, in which a group of scholars started to think, discuss and write with, around and about racial capitalism. The Nordic Research Collective is one of several networks we have established in recent decades to introduce race-critical traditions into Swedish academic disciplines (de los Reyes et al., 2002; SOU, 2005:41). While the knowledge produced through efforts to explore and understand the mechanisms and practices of Swedish racial capitalism has been impressive, there has also been a monolithic resistance within academic environments to engaging in productive dialogue with these efforts (Gutierrez et al., 2010; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017; Wekker, 2017). Contrary to right-wing and even mainstream academic discourses that portray gender and race critical researchers as powerful voices (Martinsson, 2020), Swedish academia remains firmly framed within an insular tradition. Narratives of the welfare state, regulated through methodological nationalism, the division between ‘us and them’, and the construction of migrants as an object of study (Anderson, 2017; De Genova, 2013) lie at the core of how racism is acted upon within research disciplines.

A concept increasingly used in analysing the intersection between class, race, and gender is racial capitalism. While rooted in Marxist debates in and about South Africa’s apartheid regime (Levenson & Paret, 2023), it is Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983) that, through critical dialogue with several social justice movements, has become the general reference point today.

We bring racial capitalism to bear on the archetype of welfare capitalism – the Swedish model, referred to as the ‘Nordic Model’. We do this with the aim of qualifying and challenging some institutionalised understandings of welfare capitalism represented by Sweden and, to a lesser extent, Finland – two welfare states with small populations in the northern peripheries of the Global North.

This edited volume explores the relevance of the concept of racial capitalism in analysing ‘Nordic exceptionalism’ (Keskinen et al., 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012) in general and, more specifically, for an analysis of the Swedish model (Ålund et al., 2017; Ålund & Schierup, 1991). In the last decade, there has been an upsurge in research, spurred by the republication of Robinson’s (1983) book in 2000 and 2020. Much of this work, however, has had a strong Anglo-US inflection. Few studies have focused on continental Europe or the Nordic region. In this edited volume, the focus is on theoretically inspired and empirically grounded analyses of Sweden in the Nordic context, exploring the Swedish capitalist welfare model from a perspective that places processes of racialisation and racial regimes at centre stage.

The two central questions guiding the volume are as follows. The first question asks whether broad theoretical perspectives of racial capitalism can be tweaked and used on “social democratic” welfare capitalist states often seen as remote from colonialism and from the domination, exploitation, and violence that are implicitly or explicitly central to analyses of racial capitalism (Jenkins & Leroy, 2021). The second question focuses on what may be revealed by applying racial capitalism perspectives to welfare capitalist states, especially by situating analyses at the intersection of class, gender, and race.

We read the Black radical tradition as creating and developing a multidimensional way of conceptualising social relations. In this edited volume, racial capitalism is a central sounding board – a heuristic concept for exploring the social from new angles. This concept has been applied in different disciplines and diverse theoretical traditions, although a positivistic reading would identify this plurality as one of the concept’s weaknesses. Our first point of departure is that the openness of the concept, framed in the Black radical tradition, creates the space to think together, with and through tradition. Thus, racial capitalism is neither the only possible concept nor the ‘best’ theory with big T; it is not a totalising explanatory model but a possible way of creating and producing counterhegemonic forms of knowledge(s). We also read the concept of racial capitalism, central to Robinson’s project – forged in diverse struggles for social justice – as a call for action. Perhaps Robinson’s ability to construct theory through praxis, transgressing the binary opposition between scientific and other forms of knowledge, is one of the most truly radical aspects of *Black Marxism*.

Paraphrasing Stuart Hall’s (1983) article ‘For a Marxism without guarantees’, we argue that this collection could be read as ‘Racial capitalism without guarantees’ (for an interesting comparison of these approaches, see Paret & Levenson, 2024). This phrase emphasises our curiosity in being inspired by a

broad field of texts in which racial capitalism is invoked in discussion, development, and analysis.

This introductory chapter begins by temporally situating the writing of the volume. This is followed by a section on why Sweden and the Nordic countries are interesting from a racial capitalism perspective, briefly outlining a historical background that focuses on the intersection of class, gender, and race in welfare capitalism. The third section argues that the racial capitalism perspective should be seen as part of a broader family of critical structural and cultural theories analysing inequalities, power, and resistance. The fourth section considers the use of racial capitalism as taking sides, reflecting on its placement within militant epistemologies. The chapter concludes with short introductions of the subsequent chapters, which together contribute to a volume structured into three parts.

2 Temporal and Spatial Situation When Writing the Volume

This volume has evolved at a particular time, characterised by what we see as four central contexts. At the same time, we caution against generalising the monolithic discourses generated in the Global North, as the social justice visions and practices in the Global South – with differing sociopolitical contexts – demonstrate.

The first context involves a crisis in the global neoliberal project, marked by the growing amalgamation of neoliberal and neofascist governing and instability through various attempts to merge these projects (Bruff, 2014; Palley, 2024). The second concerns inter-imperialist struggles, not only in armed conflicts – such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the more general scramble for Ukraine between Russia, Europe, and the United States – but also, and more often (now including China), through economic projects of foreign direct investment, trade relations, and military cooperation (Kotz, 2023). The third is the genocidal project against Palestinians and Palestine carried out by Israel with the active support of the United States, Europe, and its allies (Abdo, 2024; Ayyash, 2024; Embrick & Williams, 2023). The fourth – partly linked to the previous three (neoliberal production, consumption, and destruction; inter-imperialist war and armament race; and Israel as the Global North spearhead in the region of oil and gas fossil production) – is the planetary crisis of environmental and climatic destruction in which we are living (Gonzalez, 2021; 2024).

However – and this is fundamental – there are some beacons of light, exemplified by South Africa's *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip* (*South Africa v. Israel*),¹ supported by a number of governments, especially from Latin America and the Global South more broadly, and by only a few European states. In addition, a global civil society movement of solidarity with Palestine and Palestinians has emerged, mobilising millions of people around the world.

A central contribution of the concept of racial capitalism, which highlights the ways in which sexism and racism are integral to capitalist accumulation, is its relevance not only for understanding the role of class, race and gender globally.

Thus, while we consider the gravity of the ongoing transformations of racial capitalism, particularly its inter-imperialist war (the Russian invasion of Ukraine), US imperialist attacks (as Iran and Venezuela) and genocide and resistance (Palestine), we argue for the need for a serious reflection on positionality. Indigenous scholars have challenged notions of *crisis*, arguing that what is often understood as crisis is a continuation of a long history of colonialism, extractivism, exploitation, and the disruption of Indigenous ways of life (Hokowhitu et al., 2021).

Thus, when racial capitalism is foregrounded in this volume, it links to these contexts, in which racism is one of the driving structural features. With the volume's focus on Sweden and some linked outlooks, we will now argue that Sweden is interesting for a number of reasons.

3 Why Swedish/Nordic Reproductive Racial Capitalism?

Sweden has long been held as a successful example of a social democratic project reconciling capitalism with welfare and a relatively low degree of income inequality. It has also been seen as a forerunner in state-led gender equality and as a social democratic example of both solidarity with the Global South and an inclusive (but subordinating) version of multiculturalism. Sweden has been and continues to be one of the Global North countries whose demographic profile has changed most through migration – where more than 20% of the population are foreign born and 27% have migrant backgrounds, but with a very diverse migration trajectory (SCB.se).

In recent decades – we would argue 35 years – these descriptions of the Swedish model have become increasingly obsolete. Sweden rapidly embarked

¹ <https://www.icj-cij.org/case/192>.

on a neoliberal transition that has increasingly merged with an ethno-racist project (Ålund et al., 2017), epitomised by the Tidö Agreement in 2022 – a government platform between traditional right-wing parties and the ethnoracist Sweden Democrats, the largest party in parliament behind the agreement (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2025).

The Swedish government's hitherto unstable project of combining neoliberalism and ethno-racism is dramatically restructuring Swedish social formation, making racial capitalism very visible. This point of departure permeates the chapters of this volume and is further developed in the introduction. However, in framing the volume through racial capitalism, a historical excavation clarifies that the concept – still in the process of theoretical clarification – can be used not only to understand Sweden today but also to analyse similarities and changes over time and to situate the Swedish social formation in a global context.

In times when planetary survival is on the agenda, it may seem wrong to research a small country on the European northern periphery with a population less than Mexico City. It could also be argued that a focus on a specific country reinforces problematic methodological nationalism. In this context, a volume focusing on racial capitalism from a Swedish vantage point might be seen as ironic. As editors of this anthology, we raised these and similar issues several times. A small country in the northern periphery of the Global North. A country that is often looked upon as a successful example of inclusive welfare capitalism, gender equality and multicultural integration.

There are, however, several reasons why an understanding of Swedish racial capitalism may contribute to knowledge production for possible and liveable futures. Sweden is a country whose Nordic model has inspired activists for social justice worldwide. However, this model, even at its heyday, we argue, was partially based on the overexploitation of labour from the Global South and from Europe's southeastern peripheries through migration and international trade, as well as through colonial and post-colonial extractivism of land and nature from within and beyond Swedish borders.

While we discuss Swedish imperialist and internal colonialist relations below, we begin with a brief discussion of the role of migration in making Sweden a rich welfare capitalist society.

4 The Swedish Racial Regime: 'Innocence' and Complicity

Despite ups and downs, Sweden established itself as a small yet strong imperialist actor towards the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the

20th century. While laissez-faire liberalism was challenged by the economic depression, Keynesian economics, and World War II, the trend continued with more internal focus. During the war, Sweden, while maintaining neutrality, actively exported to both sides. After the war, while much of the Global North's industrial base was in ruins or still geared towards war, Sweden's industrial capacity for exports and foreign direct investment remained unscathed (Prado & Molinder, 2022).

The Keynesian-inspired economic policies of the Social Democratic governments from 1932 to 1990 (except for 1976–1982) and a solidaristic wage model grounded in the economic principles of the LO blue-collar trade union confederation were two central pillars for achieving full employment, decreasing income inequalities, and raising wage levels. A central aspect here was exports brought about by low-productivity, labour-intensive industrial production. Combined with an active labour market policy – stimulating and pressuring workers to move to places where their employers were located – this secured full employment and an economy supported by welfare, both through income-based social insurance and expanding welfare services. These policies successfully reduced income differences (measured as Gini) but, with the exception of the short-lived and largely distorted implementation of LO economist Meidner's blueprint for wage earners' funds, never aimed at socialising production (Neergaard, 2017; Schierup & Scarpa, 2017).

Gender equality, while providing fundamental rights for women, was framed as a shift from private to public patriarchy, with women positioned within the public care sector. It was also regulated through notions of *integrating* women into production, which seldom challenged capitalist logics, and while stimulating women's employment often in relatively low-wage sectors, it weakened matrilineal family relations (Giritli Nygren et al., 2018).

A large body of research, particularly from the last three decades, highlights the discrimination of migrants and their children targeted by processes of racialisation, as well as racialised segmentation in the labour and housing markets. This includes analyses of how different generations of racialised migrant workers have often been incorporated into the sectors of the labour market in which wages are lower and working conditions harder (Ahmed, 2015; Kim, 2025). During the social democratic regime, this was done through a project of subordinated inclusion in which migrants – especially labour migrants – were included in the welfare state and given the right to citizenship but at the same time employed in the lower segments of the labour market (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2005, 2023) – those most prone to transformation as wage levels grew and production was exported to low-wage countries, some in Europe but others increasingly in the global South. These workers experienced

discrimination and often paid for their harsh working conditions with their health – a case in point being migrant women, who bore the burden of patriarchal racial capitalism and faced a high rate of health-related early retirement (Mulinari & Lundquist, 2017). Towards the end of the 1980s, at a time when the social democratic regime was moving towards one that was neoliberal, later generations of migrants came to experience subordinated exclusion. This entailed a process of informalisation with high level of unemployment, informal employment, and the dirty, dangerous and demanding (3Ds) jobs of a neoliberal labour market (flexible, part-time, unsecure) (Slavnic, 2010; Neergaard, 2017). In this context, labour market polarisation was growing, and ethnoracist social movements were establishing themselves. However, it should be noted that this period – while difficult for a large number of racialised residents and their children – was a time when some succeeded in converting high educational attainment into a place in the upper-middle strata and professional jobs. In both these regimes, racialised policies and institutions have been present, although to varying degrees.

Besides the discrimination and segregation in the labour market, housing segmentation and residential segregation have been constant markers of the racialised and gendered exploitation of the migrant labour force and their descendants, evidencing that the whole structure of the Swedish society is organised along the lines of racism grounded in racial capitalism. Racialised migrants and their children are often overrepresented in the suburbs mass-produced in the gilded years of social democracy and universal welfare. Paradoxically, it was in these years that both racial and gender segregation were cemented in the Swedish urban landscape (Molina, 2018). These neighbourhoods have become successively racialised and are nowadays especially punished by racial stigmatisation and the cuts to welfare, contributing to a racial differentiation in the provision of care and health services.

Today, in what seems to be a new regime – one that is ethno-racist – neoliberal and racist social and political forces are driving a combination of explicitly racist and anti-migrant policies, producing an even more (super)exploitable workforce of racialised residents and their children.

While the Swedish (and Nordic) model of welfare capitalism during the social democratic regime – demarcating certain policies that produced important contributions of welfare and gender equality for a large part of the Swedish population, together with relatively low-income inequality from a comparative international perspective – it was also flawed.

This is because it developed into a discursive myth in which idea of ‘true’ Swedes excluded racialised workers, Sami and Sápmi (Lawrence, 2014; Ojala & Nordin, 2015) and racial imperialism (Lauesen, 2024; Mulinari & Neergaard,

2024) from successful wealth creation. We argue that there is now a basic common-sense agreement – though with important nuances in how it is expressed – both academically and politically, in the myth that the ‘Swedes’ produced the Swedish model themselves, which has become the dominant discourse. From this follows the legitimization of intensified internal colonialism, the framing of migrants as a cost, and the implementation of policies to reduce migration and racial imperialism hidden by parity and equality in international trade.

Departing from Hall et al.’s (1978) classic quote that ‘race is the modality in which class is lived’ (394), we should add that, in the Swedish context, migrant background is a central modality through which race is lived. While the structure of Sweden’s racial capitalism is fluid and complex, the migrant *other* often becomes shorthand for racialisation, since only certain migrants are considered ‘migrants’, while their children are reproduced as racialised others through oxymorons such as ‘second-generation migrants’ or, in official statistics, people ‘with migrant background’.

Using racial capitalism to understand global neoliberalism provides an understanding not only of the process by which the global North benefits but also of the tensions that neofascist racism produces among privileged groups, the petty bourgeoisie, and the working class in the countries in the Global North. Resentment and entitlement – or, as Du Bois (1935) called it, the psychological wage of whiteness – play a central role here.

Does the transnational capitalist class, through the international division of labor, often provide more benefits for the core working and middle classes than it captures for itself? In the case of the iPad, most of the expropriated dark value is realized, not as corporate profit, but as consumer surplus in the form of cheaper goods. Consequently, the core citizen becomes an unwitting beneficiary of this exploitative system when (s)he uses one waged hour to purchase a product that embodies many more lower-waged and unpaid hours and many under-valued material and ecological inputs. In this manner, core citizens become a global consumerist aristocracy. (Clelland, 2014, p. 105)

As income polarisation has grown in the Global North due to racial neoliberalism, it has been particularly detrimental not only to racialised others who are not citizens but also to those who are citizens, as well as to the female working class racialised as white. In particular, the White male middle strata, petty bourgeoisie, and working class have protested against this polarisation

through a neofascist project of racist resentment, grounded in the relative deprivation of entitlement, both material and symbolic.

Although the subject of racism has been shifting from the Other outside the national borders as well as the Nordic indigenous populations to post-WWII migrants, the ideological foundations of Nordic racism and economic and cultural imperialism – through a successful combination of entrepreneurship and White supremacy – have developed on a continuous path until today. We seek an explanation for this historical continuity in the rationale of racial capitalism that will make it possible to outline some of the contours of Sweden's history of racism and imperialism in relation to capitalism today. In longing more for yesterday than for tomorrow, the 'good old days' of Swedish exceptionalism risk becoming an image of a paradise lost. However, it never was.

New discourses and practices of securitisation and militarisation have been increasingly directed towards a war against racialised residents and refugees alike, often through the criminalisation of immigration – or 'crimmigration' (Stumpf, 2006), and towards Sweden's incorporation into the NATO military alliance, taking an active role in radically increasing military expenditures. Scholars have highlighted the centrality of the institutional trust of citizens for the Swedish model; in governmental documents, for instance, *state* and *society* are often used synonymously. The Swedish model focused on welfare and labour market institutions during the social democratic regime but has increasingly shifted towards an ethnoracist regime. This has been fundamental in the radical transformation of the Swedish state (and society) towards the construction of an enemy within (migrants) and the narrative of a society threatened (by Russia and by Muslim states, not least Iran) and in need of defence.

However, the neoliberal parliamentary project could not reproduce a popular base for long, as the core electorate was too small and increasingly sought the support of the ethno-racist Sweden Democrats, as the Tidö agreement following the 2022 parliamentary elections illustrates, in a coalition that has put Sweden on the road towards a protofascist governmental regime.

Russophobia, a long-lasting element of Swedish hegemonic discourse (Harrisson, 2024), facilitated the use of Russia's imperialist invasion of Ukraine to create space for a discourse of fear and external threats, which colluded with earlier discourses on the threat of terrorism centred on Muslims in Sweden and beyond. The long tradition of Swedish foreign policy being based on international law, diplomacy, and development support – although combined with international trade and foreign direct investments – was broken in the 1990s by a new focus on EU integration, securitisation, and militarisation.

Using racial capitalism as a point of departure for analysis makes it possible to challenge how Marxism, broadly defined, has been used by the nationalist left and social democrats in fantasies of ‘a strong Swedish welfare state’ as a universal and exportable project of social justice, when it is, in fact, partially based on the overexploitation of others and the extraction of their land.

The following central questions are posed: How and where does the category of race act upon notions of nationhood and belonging, and how and where does boundary making in terms of national belonging act upon labour and reproduction? How are changes in Swedish capitalism and the racial regime structured in Sweden? Concepts travel across time and space and are more or less successfully translated into new contexts. This volume departs from the question of whether racial capitalism can be translated into a Swedish context and what analytical benefits such a translation would offer.

4.1 *Sweden: A Small But Hungry Imperialist Country*

Racial capitalism facilitates the analysis of Sweden and the Swedish model by centring the importance of race as oppression, exploitation, and extraction through internal colonialism, migration, and imperialism, with the latter in focus here.

Although social democratic welfare capitalism produced results for large parts of the Swedish population, it also became a distinct mode of Swedish imperialism. Solidarity-based wage policy and coordinated wage negotiations, instead of wages based on the viability of individual companies and industries, meant that low-productivity, labour-intensive industrial production was relocated to the European peripheries and the Global South, with products later imported as relatively cheap consumer goods together with industrial inputs, often controlled through FDI and global supply and subcontracting chains.

Nordic countries have come to self-identify as exceptionally humanitarian and non-racist societies (Keskinen et al., 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). As Jensen put it,

Thus, there is almost an aura of immaculateness attached to the Nordic societies (readily nation-branded by the Nordic countries themselves), whose most notable postcolonial dimension is the irreconcilability of perfection with the sordid reality of colonialism. Hence, there is and has been constructed a narrative that Nordic countries had no stake in colonialism. Which of course they did. Denmark(-Norway) had an overseas empire in the North Atlantic, the Caribbean, West Africa and on the east coast of India, Sweden sent settlers to North America at a very early stage,

had a European empire and was like Denmark(-Norway) involved in the slave trade. The Nordic countries had citizens working for King Leopold's genocidal regime in the Congo and they sent settlers to North America in vast numbers in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus participating in the displacement of North America's Indigenous populations. The current perceived immaculateness of the Nordic countries is a narrative premised on the successful creation of a post-1945 welfare society built on exclusively domestic achievement. This excludes the consideration of wealth inherited from colonialism and ignores the neocolonial exploitative system replacing colonialism – a system the Nordic countries benefited from alongside the rest of the Global North (2020, p. 72).

In 1922, the Swedish Institute of Race Biology at Uppsala University became the first state-supported institute of its kind worldwide, established with broad political and academic support. Parliament's decision to found the institute carried symbolic weight and contributed to suffering and deaths on racist grounds beyond Sweden's borders. The effects of the racist doctrines led by Herman Lundborg persist today in discourses claiming Swedish cultural superiority. Lundborg's primary aim was to delineate Swedishness as a blend of racial and cultural factors that combined biological and cultural racism. Thus, racial biology was associated with both racial and class differences, with class mixing – as with racial mixing – threatening the national race type. The development of capitalism was explicitly put in relation to the imagined racial lines. In Lundborg's biological racism, nationhood signified a nuanced interplay of race, class, gender, and place, with settler (or internal) colonialism towards the Sami largely unrecognised (Lawrence, 2014; Lundmark, 2010).

Racism towards the Sami facilitated the internal colonisation of Sápmi. Mining and forestry, which were important in Sweden's rapid industrialisation – and later hydroelectric power stations – were partially accessed through dispossession and extractivism. This process, in line with theories of internal colonialism, is still ongoing (Knoblock, 2022; Lundmark, 2010). In the Swedish case, it could be argued that climate and environmental challenges and crises have, over recent decades, been used to justify the search for 'green energy', with the further expansion of hydroelectric power, wind power plants and battery production once again framed as positive developments through the intensified use of resources in Sápmi (Lawrence, 2014; Ojala & Nordin, 2015). While some state subsidies for the Sami population, such as for reindeer herding, are often invoked as compensation for internal colonialism, we would argue that there is an analogy with Swedish foreign aid, as both make the case for transfer

from the colonial imperial power through subsidies and aid, when in reality these are token contributions compared to the large sums derived from previous colonialism and ongoing imperialist and settler colonial practices.

The stability of the Global North during the Keynesian era of class compromise was aided by the ways in which the surplus exploitation of the working class could be partially compensated for by the power of working-class consumption in the Global North, based on the racialised super-exploitation of the Global South.

Sweden came relatively late to industrialisation, a century after Great Britain, but in the last half of the 19th century, a first wave of industrialisation began, with growth emerging in the export of industrial products. However, it was at the beginning of the 20th century – at the same time that scientific racism was established and instituted with the State Institute for Racial Biology – when Swedish enterprises became actors in the international economy in earnest through exports, imports and foreign direct investment. This was driven by enterprises within the wood, paper, metals, and machine industries.

In Lauesen's analyses of Scandinavia, and especially Sweden (2024), besides using statistics to demonstrate how Swedish multinationals were employed more in the Global South than in Sweden, he exemplified the dynamics by focusing on some Swedish transnational corporations. He did this by demonstrating how some Swedish multinationals operate, such as the clothing firm H&M, the furniture company IKEA, and the producer of trucks, buses, and construction machines, Volvo, as well as through nearby imperialist relations in the Baltic.

However, while recognising that labour is paid below its value, the importance of racialisation has not been highlighted. In an interesting article on supply chain capitalism, Tsing (2009) defined super-exploitation as 'exploitation that depends on so-called noneconomic factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, age and citizenship status' (p. 158). In a similar vein, when discussing class racism, Balibar (2010) used the term 'overexploitation' (p. 575).

Using racial capitalism to understand global neoliberalism therefore provides an understanding not only of how the global North benefits but also of the tensions that neofascist racism produces among privileged groups, the petty bourgeoisie, and the working classes within the countries of the global North. Resentment (Fassin, 2020) and entitlement (Myers, 2019) – or, as Du Bois (1935) named it, 'psychological wages of whiteness' – play a central role here.

We have attempted to situate Sweden as an imperialist hegemon, as a great colonial power, and in the Nordic context. Central to this contextualisation is the false notion that Swedish wealth has always been produced by 'Swedes' in

Sweden; however, as we have discussed here, Swedish wealth has in fact been produced by reproductive racial imperialism. Eurocentric narratives that conceptualise Sweden as ‘innocent’ in the face of colonialism and imperialism and that provide a fantasy of the success of a welfare state due to its (peaceful) social movements are empirically wrong.

5 Thinking through and Together with Racial Capitalism

The Marxist and neo-Marxist traditions focus on resistance and on challenging capitalism through the historic role of workers’ class struggle. Recognising the empirical deviation from theory, in which a ‘natural’ worker is a male White worker, racism and sexism have often been explained with references to the continued remnants of pre-capitalist social relations. However, if we depart from racial capitalism – and social reproduction theory concerning gender – then the racism and sexism within the labour movement is not a reflection of precapitalist social relations but instead of capitalism – that is, reproductive racial capitalism. This, therefore, challenges the naturalisation of the labour movement as a historical subject, as expressed by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto*:

The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Workers of the world, unite! (1998)

However, the stark difference in the living and working conditions of proletarians across the world makes the call for workers to unite challenging. As soon as analyses depart from methodological nationalism – in which the movement of goods, services, and people across borders is seen as neutral – then the shared interests of wage workers risk dissolving.

Assuming a globalized value of labor, and given the difference in the price of labor (wage) between the Global North and South, then being a wage laborer does not necessarily imply that you are exploited. It is a matter of calculation. A worker in the industry in Southeast Asia, and a worker in the industry in Scandinavia are both wage laborers. Both create value and both are a source of surplus value and hence profit for capital. However, given the high wage level in the Global North, the worker can appropriate more value through the consumption of goods produced by low-wage labor, than the value extracted through the labor process. (Lauesen, 2024, p. 53)

If we add to this the idea that reproductive and racial capitalism create grounds for claiming that the living and working conditions of the 'natural' worker are, in part, privileged through sharing in the super-exploitation and appropriation of land and water, then the statement that the 'proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains' also becomes problematic.

Thus, without dismissing the important role of class, situating workers globally within an intersectional approach, we contend that racial capitalism provides an analytical frame for exploring not only its dynamics but also the cracks, sites, and historical subjects that may challenge it to varying degrees. We draw on the work of Stuart Hall on race and class and the importance of understanding their changing articulations – indeed, the need to look at multiple articulations, not only of race, racialisation, gender, and class but also of diverse state formations, state power, with forms of production, racialised ideologies, and systems of reproduction.

As the central concept for this volume concerns capitalism, the question is why is it not enough to recognise that racism is part of and, as most traditional Marxists would argue, subordinated to capitalism? As Robinson (2020) wrote, the point of applying a racial capitalism frame is to recognise that capitalism emerged in societies characterised by 'racialism' and, consequently, that Europe was and still is central to understanding racism. At the same time, capitalism was brought by European colonial powers to colonised territories before European industrialisation. Moreover, Robinson pointed out that the idea that capitalism tends to erase all differences other than class fails to encompass the extent to which racialism is ingrained in its functioning, not only concretely but also abstractly.

The concepts of imperialism (Luxemburg, 1913; Lauesen, 2021), dependency theory (Amin, 2018; Marini, 1973/2009; Rodney, 1972/2018), and the world system approach (Wallerstein, 2000; Silver, 2003) are all means of developing or departing from Marxism, theorising beyond methodological nationalism or state-centred approaches. In many ways, they contribute analytical elements that are of importance, although they underplay the role of race, racialisation, racism (and patriarchy) (Antunes de Oliveira, 2021). What is central here is that these concepts open up the possibility of exploring value transfers between countries – imperial and colonial, core, semi-peripheral and peripheral states – that generally map onto hierarchies of global racial formation. Furthermore, as emphasised by the concept of supply chain capitalism and in line with Robinson, capitalism is not a homogenising force but a differentiating one, in which the mobilisation of labour occurs in different combinations across race, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and citizenship status (Tsing, 2009).

The traditions of thought associated with postcolonialism and decoloniality are rich and diverse. Despite their differences, postcolonial and decolonial traditions have been highly illuminating in their challenge to the historical narratives emanating from Europe, framing the representation of the endogenous European origins of modernity at the core of social theory (Costa et al., 2010; Bhabra, 2014). Scholars have systematically argued for the need to conceptualise modernity (and capitalism) through the histories of colonialism, imperialism, and racism. These epistemic projects are all valuable and have propelled the conversation forward in important ways. However, they have particular foci and limitations that we think can be overcome by turning to reproductive racial capitalism as a source of social thought with ongoing relevance for today.

While the postcolonial tradition is a fundamental contribution to anti-colonial social theory (Go, 2020), illuminating the role of colonialism and imperialism in the making of European modernity, the tradition tends to emphasise the contradiction between the West and the rest. This makes the struggles against racialisation taking place in Europe marginal to the analysis (Virdee, 2019). The frames of modernity, coloniality, and decoloniality provide an alternative to the distorted notion of modernity rooted in the Enlightenment, which, according to decolonial scholars, postcolonial theory is accused of reproducing. At the core of the tensions between postcolonial and decolonial theory is a disagreement over how to conceptualise the relationship between them. When Molina (2020) introduced the term *socialist* in exploring the racist frame of hegemonic Swedish feminism, she was arguing for the visibility of a tradition fundamental for the anti-colonial struggle and for struggles of social justice globally. For a generation that has been struggling for democratic forms of socialism, the tendency of some of these epistemic projects aiming to challenge Eurocentric social theory, to delink is not only a tendency to overemphasise a critique of modernity that risks essentialising through a reductionist anti-Western rhetoric (Naicker, 2023; Zembylas, 2025). There has also been a tendency to delink from the diversity of the experiences of struggle in Latin America, where Western Marxism was merged with liberation theology and dependency theory.

Several concepts have been developed to theorise the centrality of race, which are, in different ways, in proximity to or partially overlap Robinson's agenda. These include racial formation (Omi & Winant, 1986), racial state (Goldberg, 2002), and the 'racialised social system' approach (Bonilla-Silva, 1997), among others. While we have used these approaches and think they are fundamental contributions to consider, they tend to be based on the idea of separation and (relative) autonomy from capitalism. At the dawn of the 20th century, Du Bois (1901) wrote, 'The problem of the Twentieth Century is

the problem of the colour line', linking race and capitalism. This was, to a certain extent, an inspiration for Robinson's work on racial capitalism – a way of hoping for, if not a happy, then at least a productive union. In addition, while both capitalism and racial formation are scalable, they have often, in the final instance, had a methodological nationalist bias; this is less so, we contend, with racial capitalism.

Another concept that has similarities with racial capitalism is colonial capitalism (Bhambra, 2021; Bhambra & Holmwood, 2021), which argues 'that each of the stages of the history of capitalism is determined by colonial processes and practices. There is no underlying logic of capitalism that can be separated from colonialism and no underlying logic through which colonial relations are filtered' (Bhambra & Holmwood, 2023, p. 171). By centring colonial processes, race becomes important as a form of hierarchisation of populations that is attuned to domination. In arguing for colonial capitalism instead, Bhambra and Holmwood (2023) wrote, 'The problem does not lie in the emphasis on race in racial capitalism, but in the concept of capitalism as a process separated from colonialism' (p. 171). The settler colonialism of Palestine and the ongoing genocide is an example that is increasingly being analysed through racial capitalism perspectives (Abdo, 2024; Ayyash, 2024; Embrick & Williams, 2023).

The dehumanisation of labour and nature is a fundamental contribution of Melamed's (2023) reading of the concept, asserting that the failure of Marxism is located in the fantasy of taking over industrial worlds instead of exploring the possibilities of other futures outside growth. Melamed understands the failure of Marxism as the urge to take over industrial civilisation instead of constructing alternatives to it, and for her, Indigenous struggles against dispossession provided a starting point for progressive social action rather than worker-led industrialism (Onay, 2025).

One important reinterpretation of the racial capitalism approach comes from Bhattacharyya (2018), whose contribution took social reproduction theory as its point of departure and explored the interaction between racism and work/non-work, the forms of social reproduction, and their relation to nature. For Bhattacharyya, race is not outside the logic of capitalism but its centre (see also Virdee, 2019; Kundnani, 2020).

All these contributions argue (and depart from the idea) that race and gender are co-constitutive frameworks of operation under racial capitalism. Scholarship on colonialism has identified the fundamental role that the destruction of Indigenous gender regimes played in the establishment of colonial forms of exploitation, expropriation and accumulation. For Marxist feminists, the concept of social reproduction grasps the work of care and sustenance that supply workers to produce value (Arruzza et al., 2019; Bhattacharyya,

2017; Federici, 2021). For Black feminists framed through the tradition of intersectionality, social reproduction needs to be understood through the reproductive labour of both slave racial capitalism and contemporary forms of reproductive racial capitalism (Morgan & Weinbaum, 2024; Ross & Solinger, 2017; Sweeney, 2021).

These epistemic projects are all valuable and have propelled the conversation forward in important ways. However, they have particular foci and limitations that we think can be overcome by turning to anti-colonial theory as a source of social thought with ongoing relevance for today (Al-Hardan & Go, 2025).

6 Racial Capitalism: A Militant Epistemology

The radical transformation of Sweden towards a protofascist government and an ethno-racist hegemony – supporting NATO and with all parliamentary parties from right to left joining a military buildup on a scale unprecedented since World War II – is mirrored in the shift within universities as sites of knowledge production. This is particularly evident in the normalisation of attacks against social justice scholars within a mainstream frame that constructs them as too activist, as politicising science, or as too ideological. Scholars – particularly those who identify with social justice movements' agendas – who explore other ways of knowledge production risk paying a serious price in their academic careers and are today even at risk of unemployment.

Swedish universities have taken several measures in response to Russia's imperial invasion of Ukraine, with the aim that academic institutions should not be complicit in Russia's violations of international law. In juxtaposition, academic leadership has responded with infantilisation and criminalisation of the extended and successful solidarity movement for Palestine in the context of the Israeli genocide. Scholars and students demanding that universities follow their ethical frameworks – calling for a ceasefire and an end to academic collaboration with complicit universities in Israel – were met with paternalistic arguments and repressive practices. University leadership asserted that pro-Palestine solidarity fails to understand the role of universities (to teach and research) and academic freedom (participating in research projects with universities engaged in genocide) and ignores the fact that Swedish universities are governmental institutions and thus must follow Swedish governmental foreign policy.²

² <https://www.su.se/english/news/the-role-of-universities-1.744418>.

The hypocrisy and double standards have been painfully evident, particularly when research and analysis of Israeli settler colonialism and genocide have been presented by academic leadership not as scientific evidence but as opinions.

While politically engaged research has a long history, it presents specific methodological and epistemological challenges. However, debates about 'taking sides' obscure the role that epistemic racism and Eurocentrism play in developing social theory. Rutazibwa (2023) took as her point of departure the Swedish author Sven Lindqvist's impressive analysis of racism and colonialism, *Exterminate All the Brutes* (1997), in which he asserts that we already know enough. The author points to a politics of knowledge framed through sustained structural colonial amnesia.

The dilemma is not about taking sides or even about methodological reflections regarding positionality; it is about efforts and struggles to create forms of knowledge production from the standpoint of social actors – spaces historically excluded from the development of theory.

I have no power, so I have to resort to the tools of education, to writing and speaking (Said, 2003, p. 17).

We understand Said's words as an invitation – and appeal – to bring back our writing and speaking as one of the many ways to resist those who have the power of life and death over the planet. The concept of militant epistemologies has evolved from the work of the social anthropologist David Graeber (2009) and other scholars who have spoken of intellectual activism (Collins, 2012; Favell et al., 2021). Radical knowledge is only true to its purpose when it actively works to resist and dismantle – materially and epistemologically – the hegemonies in which it is situated.

Against nostalgic and pessimistic trends in social and political theory, the Black radical tradition argues for the indispensability of hope in conceptualising futures. Such hope, however, does not need to be beholden to a unitary vision of the future – as with Enlightenment notions of progress – but instead opens up a multiplicity of possible better worlds. The work of José Carlos Mariátegui (1928/2007) – one of Latin America's most original Marxists – is strikingly relevant for confronting the continent's right-wing backlash today. Mariátegui argued fiercely that even among memories of popular defeat, there are always fractures of utopian fragments that identify lines of resistance. He never called for a return to the past but for a recuperation of historical references towards possible futures.

The development of theory is fundamental for oppressed and exploited groups, challenging hegemonic narratives of migrants as a problem, a burden or a threat. Anti-colonial scholars, from Che Guevara (1977) to Aimé Césaire (1955/2000) and Amílcar Cabral (1966), have spoken of the need for revolutionary theory. What is at stake are the who(s) and the where(s) of knowledge production. Anti-colonial social theory identifies a tradition that challenges the notion of the academy as an ivory tower and argues that ideas and visions of theorising move fluently between the academy and other spaces of knowledge production for social justice.

Anti-colonial thought, in its many versions, maps and interprets ideas and actions that have emerged in the political struggle(s) of the colonized peoples against capitalist colonialism's material exploitation, ideologies, and practices. It collates, catalogs, and analyses the subjective experiences of being dominated by colonial and imperial economic, social, political, and cultural institutions, policies, and rules. (Ashcroft et al., 2007, pp. 11–12)

For these traditions, the concept of reproductive racial capitalism is not a rigid term but an analytical tool for understanding and dismantling exploitative structures. In the context of impressive Western imperialistic and militaristic mobilisation, the concept matters (Meghji, 2020).

As editors of this volume, our trajectories towards racial capitalism have been uneven and filled with tension. While both Mulinari and Neergaard wrote their theses on Third World sociology, in which Marxism is in a heated – and at times constructive – debate with dependency world-systems theories, methodological nationalism always seemed to sneak back. For Molina and Mulinari – as female political refugees from Latin America – Eurocentric feminism is a point of departure yet also a central problem in understanding patriarchy and its intersections. For all three, being racialised as non-Swedes in different ways shaped our interests in participating in and developing anti-racist/critical racism theory, with inspiration from our UK and US colleagues in particular. Intersectionality offered a way of dealing with our theoretical trajectory and thinking about class, gender, sexuality, and race together. However, methodological nationalism again sneaked back. In this context, racial capitalism seemed to offer us a way to recognise and continue thinking through these theoretical perspectives while rethinking beyond methodological nationalism. This was a context in which the discussion of methodological nationalism – as well as the politics of nationalism – was central to the agenda, amid neoliberal

globalisation and increasing numbers of refugees worldwide. The focus, however, was mainly on refugees from the Global South trying – and sometimes succeeding – to cross the borders into the Global North, alongside the political growth of authoritarian liberalism and the radical right, not only but especially in the Global North. This was when we started the book project; however, it unfolded and concluded in the context of the Western-supported Israeli genocide of Palestinians and Palestine. Thus, for us, reproductive racial capitalism signifies the possibility of combining our theoretical trajectory with a serious critique of methodological nationalism. Finally, we also found reproductive racial capitalism to be a generative concept in bridging structural analysis with human agency by assessing the struggles against dehumanisation. Thus, it names the cruelty and perversity of social formation as well as the creativity, courage, joy, and solidarity of humans struggling in the present and creating other futures.

7 The Structure and Chapters of the Volume

In *Why racial capitalism, why Now* (Irene Molina, Diana Mulinari, and Anders Neergaard), the editors introduce what has undoubtedly proved to be one of the most original and provocative intellectual projects in recent decades: the elaboration of the concept of racial capitalism framed through the Black radical tradition. The concept of racial capitalism provides a productive framework to explore Sweden's location within colonialism and imperialism more generally and of the "Nordic model's" racial formation more particularly.

This opening chapter sets the scene for the subsequent chapters, organised in three sections that explore the origins, content, and forms of Swedish racial capitalism in several fields.

Part 1 **Racism(s)** explores and establishes fundamental features of the "Nordic model" vis-à-vis migration and racialisation regimes. *Martin Wolgast and Sima Nurali Wolgast* investigate whether exclusionary and exploitative racism can be empirically represented as two separate racial ideologies and explore theoretically grounded assumptions regarding how endorsement of these ideologies is related to socioeconomic status and gender. *Dionysia Jia Ying Kang* explores the denial of racism, analysing how "shock" responses to media coverage on the exploitative labour conditions within the Finnish food system must be framed through an understanding of epistemic neglect and white innocence. *Paula Mulinari and Anders Neergaard* question the role of Swedish trade unions as defending (all) workers, challenging narratives of the nation that render the role of whiteness in shaping politics beyond the white (male)

working class invisible. The last two chapters in this section explore racialisation processes with focus on representation of the category of migrants. *Anuhya Bobba* illustrates the Finnish neoliberal construction of migrants as entrepreneurs, which creates precarious and insecure living conditions for inhabitants racialised as Other. The author problematises the conceptualisation of non-Finnish persons as *naturally* inclined to entrepreneurship, convincingly arguing that, in practice, entrepreneurship is a low-paying and precarious trade. *Diana Mulinari* provides a feminist inspired reading of racial capitalism, identifying the role of women categorised as “migrant” as a problem, a burden, and a threat to the Swedish welfare regime.

Part 2 **Bordering** problematise the borders and the changing nature of borders, identifying the practice of bordering as a fundamental site of investigation in the understanding of Swedish racial capitalism. *Karin Krifors* examines refugee dispersal policies in Sweden and Germany, focusing on these policies as instances where their violence is visible, arguing that dispersal is a mechanism of logistical racial capitalism rather than neutral strategies to improve migrant lives. Similarly, *Nicolina Edwards Öberg* and *Irene Molina* bring together scholarship on racial capitalism, urban migration governance, and housing policy. Their analysis offers an in-depth exploration of the nexus between a dysfunctional, racialised housing market and the reception of a racialised refugee population in urgent need of housing, as was the case with groups of refugees from the Global South arriving in the country in 2015 and in the following years. Finally, *Claudia Tazreiter* explores the relationship of place and race, through the links between the carceral systems of refugee detention and racial capitalism, broadly considering the traces of racial capitalism in the practices of detention and punishment of refugees.

Part 3 Transformations and Resistances

The third and final part of the volume explores the changes in the “Swedish Model”, in which authoritarian liberalism and ethnoracism is increasingly merging, and how old and new social movements deal with these changes. *Edda Manga* and *Mattias Gardell* explore the transformations that have taken place after the 2022 success of a neoliberal and neofascist coalition, analysing how these new regimes define the people, from whom ‘all public power proceeds’, according to the Swedish constitution, and whose ‘welfare and security’ it has promised to achieve. *Diana Mulinari* and *Anders Neergaard* read these transformations from the location of labour unions, exploring the possibility of the doing of antiracism within an ethno-racist political regime. Finally, *Carl-Ulrik Schierup*, *Aleksandra Ålund*, and *Ilhan Kellecioglu* discuss the concept of Swedish exceptionalism in terms of changing power and governance.

They offer an approach to subaltern struggles that centres on a local case, in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods, focusing on movements contending the financialisation of housing and the precarisation of labour.

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PART 1

Racism(s)



Exclusionary and Exploitative Racism: Two Facets of Contemporary Racial Ideologies

Martin Wolgast and Sima Nurali Wolgast

Exclusion and exploitation have been enduring cornerstones of the global racial order, deeply shaping the dynamics of racial capitalism both historically and in the present day. These processes are not only central to the economic and political functioning of capitalist societies, but also underpin the ideological frameworks that justify and normalize racial hierarchies. From colonial conquests to contemporary forms of labor exploitation, exclusion and exploitation have worked in tandem to facilitate the accumulation of wealth by racializing and dehumanizing entire populations. This interplay is fundamental to understanding how racial capitalism operates in both material and ideological terms, reinforcing economic and social inequalities through racialized logics of domination and subjugation.

Racial capitalism, as articulated by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism* (1983), emphasizes that capitalism has always been intertwined with racial differentiation. According to Robinson, capitalism developed within an already racialized global context, wherein racial oppression and economic exploitation were mutually reinforcing processes. Robinson's work challenges the traditional Marxist framework that views capitalism as a race-neutral system of class exploitation, instead arguing that race is central to its development and functioning. In contrast, as Robinson (1983) asserts, the historical and ongoing structures of capitalism are inextricably linked to racial oppression, making race a primary organizing principle of capitalist accumulation. By framing exclusionary and exploitative racism as expressions of racial capitalism, this chapter examines how these two facets of contemporary racial capitalism enable both the expropriation of resources and the super-exploitation of racialized labor in various contexts.

Social theorists have long sought to categorize and conceptualize these dual forms of racism. French sociologist Pierre-André Taguieff introduced two distinctive varieties of racism: *le racisme d'exploitation*, which is tied to dominance, exploitation, and subjugation, and *le racisme d'extermination*, which is concerned with exclusion and erasure of the racialized "other" (Taguieff,

1987). This theoretical distinction helps frame the analysis of racial ideologies as reflecting broader capitalist logics. Similarly, in his analysis of the racial dynamics in the 19th-century United States, psychologist Joel Kovel distinguished between the “dominative” racial ideologies of the South, where racialized groups were overtly subjugated and exploited, and the “aversive” racial ideologies of the North, where exclusion and segregation were more prominent (Kovel, 1984). More recently, Mulinari and Neergaard (2017) developed a similar framework in their analysis of the Swedish racial regime, identifying exploitative and exclusionary forms of contemporary racial ideologies. In this chapter, we build on these insights to analyze the distinction between exploitative and exclusionary racism while presenting the results of a recent empirical study that investigates whether these forms of racism can be represented as distinct ideological constructs and examines their relationship to socioeconomic status and modern racial ideologies.

1 Racial Ideologies and Racialized Social Systems

A crucial aspect of understanding exclusionary and exploitative racism lies in recognizing that racial ideologies are embedded within what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (1997) terms “racialized social systems.” This concept aligns with the broader theory of racial capitalism developed by Cedric Robinson (1983) in *Black Marxism*, which argues that capitalism has always been shaped by racial differentiation. In such racialized social systems, individuals are categorized into racial hierarchies that are deeply intertwined with the distribution of wealth, status, and power. These hierarchical racial categories are not merely social constructions or abstract classifications; rather, they serve as material forces that sustain the economic and political structures of racial capitalism. As Bonilla-Silva (1997) and Robinson (1983) both emphasize, racial ideologies provide the necessary justifications for the inequalities that emerge from the intersection of racism and capitalism, legitimizing the expropriation and exploitation that underpin these systems.

Bonilla-Silva’s (1997) framework of racialized social systems provides a powerful theoretical foundation for analysing how exclusionary and exploitative racism function as mutually reinforcing processes, whereas Robinson’s (1983) theory of racial capitalism situates these processes within the broader historical context of capitalist development. According to Robinson, capitalism emerged within an already racialized world, and its economic systems were built on racial distinctions that enabled the expropriation of resources and the exploitation of labor from racialized groups. Bonilla-Silva’s framework

complements this by illustrating how racial ideologies crystallize around these processes, legitimizing the ongoing dispossession and exploitation of racialized populations. These ideologies are not merely reflective of societal prejudices but are active agents in maintaining the structures of capitalism through the normalization of racial inequality (Bobo, 1988; Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Exclusionary racism, as historically manifested through colonialism, settler expansion, and imperialism, has played a central role in the acquisition of land, raw materials, and other resources. These acts of dispossession were not incidental to capitalism but essential to its growth, as Robinson (1983) argues in his analysis of European imperialism and its racialized foundations. The processes of expropriation that occurred during the colonization of Africa, the Americas, and Asia were justified through racial ideologies that dehumanized non-white populations, framing them as inferior and unworthy of participation in modernity (Bonds & Inwood, 2016). Bonilla-Silva's racialized social systems framework reinforces this by showing how these ideologies systematically rationalized the exclusion of non-white populations from the benefits of social and economic progress (Edwards & Kelton, 2020; Jones, 2010). This exclusion was not only ideological but material, facilitating the violent dispossession and erasure of entire populations, a central feature of racial capitalism's expansion.

At the same time, exploitation has been equally central to the racialized world order, particularly in how racialized groups have been used as cheap, coerced, or enslaved labour for the accumulation of wealth. From the transatlantic slave trade to modern-day forms of migrant labour exploitation, the super-exploitation of racialized workers has been a driving force behind capitalist accumulation (Butt, 2013; Fraser, 2016; Bhabra, 2021). Robinson's concept of racial capitalism emphasizes that racial oppression was not peripheral but intrinsic to the development of capitalism. This exploitation is deeply racialized, with non-white workers being subjected to intensified forms of dehumanization that position them as naturally subordinate and undeserving of the rights and protections extended to white workers. Ideologies of racial superiority and inferiority, deeply embedded in both the capitalist and colonial projects, justified the exploitation of these workers while securing their economic and social marginalization (Boskin, 1986; Goings, 1994; Jewell, 1993). Bonilla-Silva extends this analysis by explaining how these exploitative ideologies are institutionalized within the fabric of racialized social systems, further embedding racial hierarchies into everyday social and economic practices.

Furthermore, as both Robinson (1983) and Bonilla-Silva (1997) argue, the historical processes of exclusion and exploitation are not relics of the past but continue to shape contemporary economic and power relations. Race remains a fundamental axis along which modern capitalist societies are structured,

and racial ideologies persist as essential mechanisms for maintaining these structures (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Bhambra, 2021; Miles, 1982). The ongoing racialization of labour markets, housing, and access to education and health-care reflects how these ideologies sustain the economic inequalities that form the backbone of racial capitalism. To fully grasp the role of exclusionary and exploitative racism in contemporary societies however, it is essential to explore how race and class intersect under the logic of racial capitalism. As Bonilla-Silva emphasizes, race is not an epiphenomenon of class but is structurally embedded within capitalist relations of production. Robinson's theory of racial capitalism similarly stresses that capitalism developed through racial differentiation, making the intersectionality of race and class a critical aspect of understanding modern social systems.

2 The Intersection of Race and Class in Contemporary Racial Capitalism

One of the central insights of racial capitalism theory is the understanding that race and class are not separate or distinct categories but are instead mutually constitutive. In her work on expropriation and exploitation, Nancy Fraser (2016) argues that capitalism depends not only on the exploitation of labour but also on the expropriation of racialized populations and resources. This expropriation is not incidental to capitalism; it is a necessary condition for the continued accumulation of wealth. As Fraser explains, racialized expropriation is a central mechanism through which capitalism secures cheap or free labour, land, and resources.

Similarly, Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992) emphasize that racialization takes place within class structures, while class formation occurs in a racialized context. This insight is crucial for understanding how exploitative and exclusionary racism function in modern capitalist economies. In contemporary neoliberal capitalism, the labour market is increasingly segmented along racial lines, with racialized workers concentrated in low-status, low-paying sectors of the economy. This racialization of labour is a direct outcome of the historical processes of exclusion and exploitation that have shaped capitalism. As such, exclusionary and exploitative racism are not separate phenomena but are instead deeply intertwined aspects of the same racialized capitalist system. In this context, the racialization of class relations allows for the simultaneous exclusion of racialized groups from the benefits of the labour market while also facilitating their exploitation as a cheap and disposable labour force. This dynamic is evident in the Swedish labour market, where non-white workers

are disproportionately concentrated in sectors characterized by low wages, insecure employment, and poor working conditions (Akay & Ahmadi, 2022). This racialized segmentation of the labor market benefits employers by providing them with a flexible, low-cost labour force that can be easily exploited.

3 Addressing Tensions within Racial Capitalism Theory

In his critical work, Julian Go (2021) highlights several theoretical tensions within the concept of racial capitalism, especially regarding the role of race as a primary versus secondary mode of differentiation within capitalist systems. This debate over the centrality of race to capitalism's historical and present-day structures offers valuable insights for understanding the dual processes of exclusion and exploitation. Go (2021) argues that while race has been integral to the development of capitalism, its role as a mechanism of differentiation can vary depending on the specific socio-economic and geographic context. In some contexts, racial exclusion may be the dominant feature, as seen historically in settler colonialism where racialized populations were expelled from lands and excluded from the benefits of modernity. In other contexts, racial exploitation takes precedence, particularly in labor markets where racialized workers are systematically devalued and used as cheap or coerced labor, often without the rights and protections afforded to their white counterparts. This variation demonstrates the flexible and adaptable nature of racial capitalism, where different modes of racial oppression – whether exclusion or exploitation – are employed depending on what is most beneficial to capital accumulation at a given moment or in a specific location. Recognizing these tensions allows for a more nuanced understanding of how racial capitalism operates across different historical and geographic contexts. It demonstrates that the dynamics of racial capitalism are not fixed but are contingent on broader economic and political developments. For example, during periods of rapid industrialization and the expansion of global markets, such as the transatlantic slave trade or the rise of migrant labor in neoliberal economies, racial exploitation has been the dominant mechanism by which capitalism functions. In these instances, racialized labor is exploited to produce surplus value, with workers being systematically dehumanized and reduced to mere instruments of production. On the other hand, during colonial expansions, exclusionary racism was often used to justify the dispossession and marginalization of indigenous populations, removing them from their land and stripping them of resources, which were then reallocated to white settlers or colonizers for capitalist development. By addressing these tensions within racial capitalism

theory, it becomes clear that exclusionary and exploitative racism are not isolated phenomena but are mutually reinforcing processes that sustain racial capitalism. Both forms of racism are necessary for the functioning of a system that depends on the unequal distribution of wealth, status, and power along racial lines. The flexibility of racial capitalism, which allows it to adapt to different socio-economic and geographic contexts, ensures that the dual processes of exclusion and exploitation remain central to its operation.

In conclusion, Julian Go's (2021) exploration of the tensions within racial capitalism theory helps to illuminate the ways in which exclusionary and exploitative racism work together to sustain capitalist systems. Whether racial exclusion or exploitation is emphasized depends on the specific historical and geographic context, but both are essential to maintaining the racialized structures of capitalism.

4 Neoliberalism and the Commodification of Race

The global dimensions of racial capitalism discussed above are particularly evident in the ways in which neoliberal policies have exacerbated racial inequalities in the labour market. Neoliberalism, characterized by austerity measures, deregulation, and labour market flexibility, has created conditions in which racialized workers are increasingly exploited as cheap and disposable labour (Fraser, 2016). These workers are not only excluded from the full benefits of the global economy but are also exploited for their labor, creating a vicious cycle of exclusion and exploitation that reinforces global racial hierarchies. Nancy Leong's (2013) analyses of racial capitalism provides further insight into how racialized bodies are commodified in predominantly white institutions. Leong argues that racial capitalism involves deriving social and economic value from the racial identity of another person. This process is particularly evident in how immigrant labor is commodified within the Swedish labor market, where non-white workers are valued differently based on market demands. This commodification of race allows for the continued exploitation of racialized workers, while also reinforcing the racial hierarchies that underpin the global capitalist system. Leong's notion of race as a form of social capital adds a new dimension to the analysis of exploitative racism, illustrating how racialized bodies are commodified and assigned differential value based on their perceived utility to the capitalist economy. This commodification of race is not limited to the labour market but extends to other areas of society, including education, housing, and healthcare. By viewing race as a form of capital, we

can better understand how racial ideologies continue to shape the distribution of resources and opportunities within capitalist societies.

Based on the perspectives discussed above, we argue that both facets of racism – exclusion and exploitation – are highly relevant in order to understand racial social systems. On this assumption we recently conducted a study seeking to empirically validate a model aimed at increasing our understanding of these two facets of contemporary racial ideologies using data retrieved from a large survey conducted in Sweden (Wolgast & Nurali Wolgast, 2024). We will discuss the results of this study in the context of the theories presented in this chapter. First, however, we turn to a more in-depth discussion of contemporary forms of exclusionary and exploitative racial ideologies and their functions in contemporary Western societies.

5 Exclusionary Racial Ideologies

In connection with the sharp increase in popular support and the political mobilisation of right-wing parties and political forces in Europe and North America during the last decades, exclusionary racial ideologies have come to the foreground of the political debate (Nagan & Manausa, 2018; Sandrin, 2021; Vieten & Poynting, 2016). By exclusionary racial ideologies in this context, we refer to ideologies that construct the racialised non-white ‘other’ as a threat or a burden, and whose presence makes the situation worse for the ‘white’ majority. In Sweden, where the present study was conducted, the far-right Sweden Democrats have steadily increased their share of the votes, reaching over 20% in the 2022 elections. In addition, many of the other parties in Sweden have adopted more restrictive immigration policies, and a political discourse where groups that are racialised as ‘non-white’ – especially from the MENA region – are tied to a range of social problems has dominated much of the political debate (Brune, 2004; Mattsson, 2005; Strömbäck, Andersson & Nedlund, 2017).

Several explanations have been suggested for this rise in organised and politically articulated form of exclusionary racism, and the explanatory factors are likely to vary across different countries and different subgroups of the populations (see Rodrik, 2021 for a recent overview). A complete review of all the suggested explanations goes beyond the scope of this chapter, but a recurring factor in many explanations is the economic development during the last decades, where globalisation has contributed to the loss of jobs in manufacturing industries due to the reallocation to countries with cheaper labour costs. During the same period, neoliberal economic policies of austerity,

privatisation and financial deregulation, coupled with the weakening of labour unions, have led to the concentration of capital, a rise in housing costs, cuts to welfare provisions, stagnation of wages, precarious jobs and unemployment, all contributing to a growth in inequality and disempowerment (Rodrik, 2021). These trends have produced greater economic anxiety and put the livelihood of large segments of the population under increased pressure (Vacas & Fernández-Macías, 2017), creating dissatisfaction and insecurity that can then be politically mobilised by right-wing populist parties (Rodrik, 2021). In relation to this, research on attitudes towards immigration in Sweden consistently indicates that those with tertiary education and above have more positive attitudes towards immigration compared to those with lower levels of education. When it comes to employment, professional employees have the most positive attitudes, whereas unemployed, persons on long-term sick leave, and those on disability pensions are the least positive (Strömbäck & Theorin, 2018). From the perspective of racial capitalism, this pattern of differential attitudes can be understood as reflecting a process where those with weaker position on the labour market are more likely to perceive themselves to be under more competition from immigrant groups that – through racialized class structuration – is assigned to a similar or subordinate socioeconomic position and which – by having higher levels of unemployment – can be used to create a downward pressure on wages and work conditions (Longhi, Nijkamp & Poot, 2005). Those in more privileged positions on the labour market, however, are less likely to perceive the same level of competition for limited resources and might therefore tend to have less exclusionary racist attitudes towards immigrants.

Another relevant perspective to take into account when discussing explanations for the rise in exclusionary racism and the form that it takes are the different effects of globalisation on individual and collective identities discussed by Hall (1997). From this perspective, cultural flows among nations and global consumerism can lead to cultural homogenization, erasing national identities and creating global forms of identification. In addition, migratory trends can produce new hybrid identities, where the possibilities of identity are widened by diasporic communities who share and belong to different cultures and histories at the same time. Lastly – and perhaps most relevant to the understanding of exclusionary racism – migration can also lead to the strengthening of identities, where dominant ethnic groups, feeling threatened by the presence of ‘others’ in ‘their’ territory, react defensively. In addition, minority groups, in response to experiences of racism and exclusion, might also strengthen their identities. Hence, instead of creating hybrid identities, globalisation can lead to polarisation among groups who appeal to the ‘essence’ of identities under threat by the presence of a different ‘other’ (Hall, 1997).

Finally, in a context of increased economic insecurity, the significance of social and cultural privileges tied to whiteness – what Roediger (2007) conceptualizes as the ‘wages of whiteness’ – becomes even more pronounced. This concept refers to the psychological and material advantages that white workers derive from their racial identity, even when their economic conditions are far from favorable. In times of economic downturn or structural inequality, where working-class populations are increasingly marginalized, these racial privileges can serve as a crucial means of compensation for the alienation and exploitation experienced within capitalist labor markets. According to this perspective, for many white workers, whiteness provides a sense of superiority and belonging, which is often framed as a form of intangible capital that distinguishes them from racialized groups who are positioned at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy.

Roediger's analysis points to how these privileges, though not directly related to economic wealth, offer psychological and social benefits that help sustain white workers' loyalty to the broader capitalist system, even as they endure its inequities. This is especially relevant in neoliberal contexts, where workers are subject to precarious employment, wage stagnation, and reduced social protections. The alienation caused by these conditions can lead white workers to cling more tightly to their racial identity, using it as a source of value and status in an otherwise increasingly exploitative class structure. The ‘wages of whiteness’ provide a non-material compensation, offering a sense of superiority that makes the inequality and insecurity of the labor market more bearable. In this way, whiteness operates as both a buffer and a mechanism of social control. It allows white workers to feel a sense of collective belonging that is grounded in their racial identity, positioning them as superior to racialized workers who are perceived as competitors for scarce resources, such as jobs, housing, and welfare benefits. This dynamic often leads to increased support for exclusionary racial ideologies, as white workers seek to protect the status and privilege conferred by their racial identity in the face of economic hardship. Rather than aligning themselves with other marginalized groups in a broader class struggle, white workers may instead reinforce racial divisions, viewing immigrants and racialized minorities as threats to their economic security. This phenomenon becomes particularly evident during periods of economic crisis, when the threat to white workers' socioeconomic status is more acute. As economic insecurities rise, so too does the importance of preserving racial hierarchies that keep racialized groups at a disadvantage. The structural privileges of whiteness can thus be mobilized to justify exclusionary policies and ideologies that frame non-white immigrants and minorities as the

cause of economic decline, rather than the result of broader systemic issues related to capitalism and neoliberal austerity.

Furthermore, the ‘wages of whiteness’ not only function at the individual level but are reinforced through institutional practices that perpetuate racial inequalities. For example, labor market policies, housing regulations, and welfare programs often reflect racial biases that privilege white populations over racialized groups, ensuring that the benefits of whiteness are continually reproduced within the structure of society. This institutional reinforcement of racial privilege further deepens the appeal of exclusionary racial ideologies among white workers, as it allows them to maintain their perceived status within a racial hierarchy, even as they are subjected to the same neoliberal policies that create economic precarity. In sum, Roediger’s concept of the ‘wages of whiteness’ helps explain why, in times of economic insecurity, racial identity becomes a key source of social capital for white workers. The status and privileges associated with whiteness provide a means of compensating for the alienation inherent in capitalist labor markets, leading to greater support for exclusionary ideologies. This dynamic not only entrenches racial divisions but also diverts attention away from the systemic causes of economic inequality, thereby reinforcing the existing structures of racial capitalism.

6 Exploitative Racial Ideologies

As stated earlier, increasing the opportunities for exploitation is another core feature of the racialised world order (see, e.g. Bhambra, 2021). In contemporary Western economies, racialised exploitation is seen in the intersectionality of race and class discussed above, where non-white workers are increasingly over-represented in sectors of the labour market characterised by low-paid jobs with high levels of insecurity. This development is clearly visible in the Swedish context. Here, the hierarchical structure of the Swedish labour market is becoming increasingly racialized, where those racialised as non-white are overrepresented in segments of the economy where wages are low and working conditions are worse (Akay & Ahmadi, 2022; Neergaard, 2021; SCB, 2022). In their article discussing the racial regime in Sweden, Mulinari and Neergaard (2017) suggest that exploitative racism operates by producing an exploitable racialised labour force through both discursive and institutional practises. The discursive practises involve constructing an image of the ‘immigrant’ as either as especially well-suited for certain service jobs (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017) or as less competent, welfare dependent, and requiring incentives in the form of lowered welfare benefits and a low-wage deregulated service sector in order

to establish themselves in the labour market (Mattsson, 2005; Strömbäck, Andersson & Nedlund, 2017). The institutional factors refer, for example, both to special regulations on the labour market directed towards immigrants as well as more broader deregulations and weakening of the legislated rights of labour, often officially motivated by the need to provide job opportunities for people of immigrant background (SOU, 2020:30). Through more insecure work conditions and lower wages, this racialisation of the working class renders workers more vulnerable to exploitation and provides benefits to employers given the weakened labour market positions of workers (Neergaard, 2021). On this background, we understand 'exploitative racism' as an ideological position characterised by the view that immigration is positive, since people of immigrant origin can be used as cheap labour, thereby increasing profit and making certain services cheaper, and since they can perform work and services that others do not want to perform. Given this understanding of exploitative racism, those in a privileged social position might benefit from the presence of a low-wage segment of the workforce with higher levels of unemployment, who can perform 'low status' jobs and – by having lower wages – can increase profit and render certain services cheaper. This leads to the prediction that these groups may have attitudes more in line with exploitative racism, in that they might be positive to forms of immigration that can be used to make certain services cheaper, more available and increase the possibilities for profit.

7 Empirical Analyses of Exclusionary and Exploitative Racial Ideology in Contemporary Swedish Society

Building on the theoretical framework outlined above, the authors of this chapter recently conducted a study designed to empirically test the distinction between exclusionary and exploitative racial ideologies (Wolgast & Nurali Wolgast, 2023). The study aimed to address a key gap in the existing literature by providing empirical support for the notion that exclusionary and exploitative racism are not only conceptually distinct but also manifest differently in contemporary societies. Additionally, the authors sought to explore the relationships between these ideologies and socioeconomic status, with the goal of better understanding how socioeconomic factors are associated with racial ideologies.

The first objective of the study was to assess the empirical adequacy of a model that separates exclusionary and exploitative aspects of racial ideology. While these two forms of racism have been extensively discussed in theoretical terms, empirical validation was needed to determine whether they can

be represented as distinct constructs in measures of attitude or opinion. As described above, exclusionary racism, typically associated with negative attitudes toward immigrants and racial minorities, positions non-white populations as threats to societal cohesion and economic security. Exploitative racism, by contrast, views these same groups as economically advantageous, especially in their role as a source of cheap labor. The authors aimed to examine whether these two types of racism could be measured independently and whether they were correlated or largely separate in their manifestations.

The second objective was to examine the relationship between exclusionary and exploitative racism and individuals' socioeconomic status. Based on existing research on the rise of right-wing populism in Europe and North America (Rodrik, 2021; Vacas & Fernández-Macías, 2017) as well as the theory and research previously discussed, we hypothesized that exclusionary racism would be more prevalent among individuals with lower socioeconomic status. On the other hand, the authors hypothesized that exploitative racism would be more common among individuals with higher socioeconomic status. People in more economically secure positions might not view immigrants or racialized others as competitors but rather as economically beneficial, given their role in providing inexpensive labour and rendering services more accessible. The authors sought to test this hypothesis by examining whether those with higher income and education levels were more likely to endorse exploitative racist ideologies.

7.1 *Methodology*

The methodology employed in the study involved a large-scale survey conducted in Sweden, which aimed to capture a broad spectrum of attitudes toward racialized groups and immigration. The survey was designed to gather responses from a sample of the Swedish population of working age, covering a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, including variations in income, education, and employment status. The study surveyed 1922 participants likely to be racialized as White, resulting in a sample that quite well aligned with national demographic statistics.

The survey was structured to distinguish between exclusionary and exploitative racism. Questions measuring exclusionary racism focused on participants' negative attitudes toward the immigration of non-white groups, perceptions of ethnic diversity as problematic, and beliefs that racialized others compete for resources such as jobs and social benefits, thereby disadvantaging the majority white population. These questions were designed to assess whether participants viewed immigrants as a threat to the socio-economic security of

native-born citizens. In contrast, the questions designed to measure exploitative racism assessed participants' views on the economic advantages that non-white immigrants might bring. These questions focused on whether participants believed that immigrants help reduce labour costs, make services cheaper, and increase overall economic efficiency. Hence, rather than framing immigrants as a threat, these questions probed whether participants saw racialized groups as a valuable labour force that could be utilized to enhance economic outcomes for the privileged segments of society. The survey also collected detailed information on participants' socioeconomic status, including data on their income, educational attainment, and employment status. This allowed the authors to conduct analyses that explored the relationships between socioeconomic variables and the endorsement of exclusionary or exploitative racial ideologies. By including a broad range of demographic and socioeconomic indicators, we could test our hypotheses regarding the differential prevalence of exclusionary and exploitative racism among various segments of the population.

7.2 *Results*

The study's findings provided clear empirical support for the distinction between exclusionary and exploitative racism as separate constructs. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) demonstrated strong model fit for this distinction, with indices such as $CFI = 0.97$ and $RMSEA = 0.061$ supporting the validity of treating these ideologies as distinct facets of racial attitudes. The weak correlation between exclusionary and exploitative racism ($r = 0.06$; $p < 0.01$) further emphasized their independence, reinforcing the notion that these two forms of racism function differently and are shaped by distinct socioeconomic dynamics.

Exclusionary racism, as conceptualized in the study, reflects negative attitudes toward the immigration of non-white populations and opposition to racial and ethnic diversity. Participants' responses yielded an average score of 6.0 ($SD = 3.8$) on the exclusionary racism scale, indicating moderate prevalence of these attitudes across the sample. In addition, Structural equation modelling (SEM) revealed a significant negative relationship between exclusionary racism and socioeconomic status ($\beta = -0.84$, $p < 0.001$). This result confirmed the hypothesis that exclusionary racism is more prevalent among individuals with lower income and education levels.

Participants endorsing exclusionary racism perceived non-white immigrants as threats to their own economic security, viewing them as competitors for scarce resources such as jobs, housing, and social benefits. These findings

align with prior research on the link between economic precarity and heightened exclusionary attitudes, suggesting that feelings of vulnerability amplify resentment toward perceived out-group competitors.

Exploitative racism, on the other hand, was characterized as an ideology that frames racialized others as economically beneficial, particularly through their role as cheap labor. Participants scored an average of 7.1 ($SD = 3.2$) on the exploitative racism scale, indicating higher endorsement of this ideology compared to exclusionary racism. SEM revealed a positive relationship between exploitative racism and socioeconomic status ($\beta = 0.55, p < 0.001$), supporting the hypothesis that individuals with higher education and income levels are more likely to endorse exploitative racist ideologies.

Unlike exclusionary racism, exploitative racism was not characterized by overt hostility toward non-white immigrants. Instead, it constructed these populations as an economic resource, useful for performing labour-intensive and low-wage jobs that others were unwilling to undertake. Participants who endorsed exploitative racism often viewed immigration as a means of increasing profitability and reducing the costs of services, such as cleaning, construction, and caregiving. Although less overtly hostile than exclusionary racism, exploitative racism nonetheless dehumanizes non-white populations by reducing them to commodities for economic gain.

In sum, the study provided robust empirical support for distinguishing between exclusionary and exploitative racial ideologies. Exclusionary racism, characterized by negative attitudes toward non-white immigrants and concerns about competition for resources, was more prevalent among individuals with lower socioeconomic status, particularly those facing economic insecurity. In contrast, exploitative racism, which views racialized others as economically beneficial due to their role as cheap labour, was more commonly endorsed by individuals with higher income and education levels. These findings underscore the structural dynamics that underpin these ideologies and their respective relationships to economic privilege and insecurity.

As with all research, there are important aspects to consider when interpreting the results. The study's methodological approach has notable strengths, including its large sample size and alignment with national demographic statistics, ensuring robust and arguably representative findings. At the same time, the reliance on convenience sampling may introduce selection bias, as individuals with strong opinions on racial issues might have been more likely to participate. The use of self-reported data also poses a risk of social desirability bias, potentially leading to underreporting of prejudiced attitudes. Lastly, the cross-sectional design limits causal inferences, restricting the ability to determine the directionality of relationships between racial ideologies and socioeconomic factors.

8 Concluding Remarks

The findings and theoretical discussions in this chapter have elucidated the dual mechanisms of exclusionary and exploitative racism and their roles within the broader framework of racial capitalism. These processes, while analytically distinct, are deeply interwoven and mutually reinforcing within the structure of modern capitalist economies. The empirical results of this study, which validate the separation of exclusionary and exploitative racism as two distinct facets of racial ideology, further our understanding of how racism operates within the context of socioeconomic stratification. However, these phenomena cannot be fully understood without considering the broader, global dynamics of racial capitalism, which Cedric Robinson (1983) posited as a central framework for comprehending how race and class are fundamentally interconnected within capitalist societies.

As our study has demonstrated, exclusionary racism is more prevalent among economically vulnerable groups, driven by fears of competition for scarce resources such as jobs and social services. This aligns with the historical role of racialized exclusion in facilitating the extraction and accumulation of wealth for dominant racial groups, as seen in both historical and contemporary contexts. As Issar (2021) emphasizes, neoliberalism has exacerbated these trends, intensifying the economic precarity of marginalized populations while deepening racial divides that are exploited by populist political forces to justify exclusionary policies. This is evident in the rising political power of far-right parties across Europe, as they capitalize on economic insecurity to foster xenophobic sentiments that target racialized 'others.' Exploitative racism, on the other hand, operates through a more insidious logic of commodification, where racialized bodies are not excluded but rather incorporated into the capitalist system as exploitable labour. As Jodi Melamed (2015) and Jordanna Matlon (2024) highlight, the commodification of racialized labour is central to the functioning of modern capitalism, where racial difference is leveraged to extract greater value from non-white workers. Our empirical findings, showing a positive correlation between exploitative racism and higher socioeconomic status, reflect this dynamic. Those in privileged economic positions often benefit from the presence of a racialized segment of the working class, whose labour is devalued and exploited to maintain profitability and access to low-cost services. This resonates with Melamed's argument that capitalism requires loss, disposability, and the unequal differentiation of human value to sustain itself (Melamed, 2015). Exploitative racism, then, is not merely an abstract ideological construct but a material force that perpetuates inequality by rationalizing the subordination of racialized groups and the commodification of racialized labour, as discussed by Ralph and Singhal (2019), is central

to the logic of racial capitalism, where racial difference is instrumentalized to maximize profit at the expense of marginalized populations.

Moreover, the concept of racial capitalism advanced by Cedric Robinson and expanded by other scholars provides a powerful lens through which to analyse the ongoing dynamics of racial exploitation and exclusion in the neo-liberal era. As Issar (2021) points out, the Black Lives Matter movement has brought renewed attention to the ways in which racial capitalism continues to shape the lived experiences of Black and other racialized communities. The movement's critique of neoliberalism highlights the continuities between historical forms of racialized oppression, such as slavery and colonialism, and contemporary mechanisms of exploitation in the global economy. This critique underscores the importance of understanding how race and class intersect to perpetuate economic inequality and social injustice.

Finally, the insights from the perspectives discussed in this chapter offer a framework not only for understanding how exclusionary and exploitative racial ideologies function within capitalist societies, but also for how they can be challenged in the pursuit of a more just and equal world. By recognizing that racism is not a byproduct of capitalism but a central feature of its functioning, social movements can develop strategies that address the root causes of inequality rather than its symptoms. These efforts must be grounded in solidarity across racial and class lines, recognizing that the struggle for racial justice is inseparable from the fight for economic justice and vice versa. Only by dismantling the structures of racial capitalism can we move toward a society in which all individuals are valued equally and afforded the full range of social, economic, and political rights.

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White Ignorance Maintains Racial Capitalism: Shock towards Labor Exploitation in the Finnish Food Systems

Dionysia Jia Ying Kang

1 Introduction

Labor exploitation and unsafe work conditions in Finland's food system have garnered mainstream media attention. Food system is

the entire range of actors and their interlinked value-adding activities involved in the production, aggregation, processing, distribution, consumption, and disposal (loss or waste) of food products that originate from agriculture (incl. livestock), forestry, fisheries, and food industries, and the broader economic, societal, and natural environments in which they are embedded. (von Braun et al., 2021; p. 30)

Food system is widely known for its difficulties in recruiting local citizen population as workers; hence, relying on migrant workers, often from the global periphery. The global food system is an overlooked site of “(global) apartheid” at the “international nexus of capital, colonialism, and white supremacy” sustained by racially subordinated, migrant, underclass labor force (Harris, 2021; p. xii; Harrison, 2002; Besteman, 2020). Food system work constitutes what Gargi Bhattacharyya (2024; pp. 69-70) terms, “shitty work”; characterized as precarious, dangerous, underprotected, and functions to demarcate between the racially subordinated from the racially privileged.

In Finland, labor in food systems is overwhelmingly performed by migrants. For instance, Southeast Asians and Eastern Europeans overrepresent seasonal berry-pickers like in Sweden (Hämäläinen, 2020; Krivonos, 2020; Mešić & Wikstrom, 2021; Yle News, 2020), while African, West and South Asian men overrepresent food delivery platform workers¹ in Finland. Most foreign workers in agriculture are from outside the European Union (EU), with more than

¹ Based on general observation as no data is available.

half of full-time workers in greenhouse enterprises being foreign (Latvala, Väre and Niemi, 2022). According to Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE) (2022), one-third of permanent employees and half of the seasonal workers on farms were migrant workers in 2020. Precarious migration statuses make migrant workers susceptible to dangerous work conditions, underprotection and some instances meet the legal threshold of human trafficking (Ministry of Employment and Economy, 2014; Elver & Sharpiro, 2021; Yle News, 2013). This phenomenon is also observed in the Swedish agrifood, restaurants and platform industries (Axelsson et al., 2017; Iossa & Selberg, 2020; 2022; Sjödin, 2021; Webster & Zhang, 2025; Vogiazides & Hedberg, 2017).

News coverage of exploitative labor practices in various sectors of the food systems in Finland mushroomed in the last years. Generally, exploitations in café and fast-food chains, greenhouses, wild berry-picking, berry farms, and restaurants across Finland were reported (e.g. Jansson, 2021; Onali, 2021; Suobanki, 2022; Teittinen, 2019). Some of the reported cases are not new, but have repeated over the years such as the extortion of greenhouse workers in Närpes (Yle News, 2015; 2022a).

The reports tend to feature as investigative ‘exposés’. Public responses, seen in comments on online news websites and social media, tend to carry the emotion of shock/surprise/disbelief and outrage. Such emotive responses render cases of exploitation ‘new’, ‘isolated’ and committed by individual bad apples; therefore, framing each incident as uncharacteristic and non-systematic to Finland. Afterall, *shock* implies not knowing before. As there have already been reports after reports, I am curious about the persistent repetitive shock reaction towards such reports. Why the surprise/shock/disbelief? Who is surprised, and over what?

Using ‘shock’ as the departure point, this chapter illustrates how such reaction towards exploitative labor conditions is constitutive of white ignorance (Mills, 2007) vis-à-vis white innocence (Wekker, 2016), employed to sustain racial capitalism in Finland. Confronting the ‘shock’ can uncover normative assumptions and practices that have been obscured by epistemic neglect. It makes obvious the material consequences on marginalized groups. The assumptions can illuminate the socio-political and economic structures of Finland embedded within the exploitative labor conditions found in its food system. Jadwiga Błahut-Prusik (2021, p. 438) saw the social consequences of challenging epistemic ignorance,

Proffering the postulate of restoring the epistemic meaning to the subjects of knowledge which was erased and marginalized, social epistemology

not only explains the reality, but also becomes a tool in the fight for social justice.

I analyse four mainstream news articles, and their corresponding public comments to interrogate how white ignorance work as oil to the racial capitalist machinery in three parts. First, I identify what are the underlying normative assumptions underneath the shock. Second, I decode the ways in which the 'shock' acts a way to externalize exploitation as a problem uncharacteristic to Finnish society, and its material consequences. Third, I uncover what the technology of white ignorance obscure; and in effect, sustain. Digging into this seemingly innocuous emotion uncovers the peculiarities of the racial capitalist structures underlying food systems in Finland, which I hope is useful for rejecting status quo.

This chapter illustrates how shock is a manifestation of white ignorance within The Racial Contract, understood as a political, epistemological, and methodological technology that maintains a racial hierarchization of labour (Mills, 1997; Robinson, 1983; 2021). Facilitated by technologies of the migration infrastructure, the racial hierarchization of labour renders racially subordinated, often migrant, workers' rights conditional; therefore, rendering them *unfree* (El-Enany, 2020; Maldonado, 2009; Nishitani et al., 2023; Spiliopoulos & Timmons, 2022; Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). This *unfree*² labor force is necessary to the capitalist machine of Finland underpinned by racial hierarchization, in other words, a racial capitalist economy (Robinson, 1983).

2 Definition of Exploitation

Despite overlapping at times, 'exploitation' is conceptualized differently in international law and through Marxist lens. In International Law,³ the Palermo Protocol, criminalizing human trafficking, widened the scope of 'exploitation' from defining it as sexual exploitation, particularly women and girls, to broadly covering labour relations that are not *entered freely* and *consented equally* between the 'worker' and 'employer' (Marks, 2008). Employment contract operates on individual level, governs worker-employer bilateral relationship and disregards structural elements like discrimination and/or welfare access colonialism that contributes to unfreedom of racially subordinated workers

2 I will expand on the concept 'unfree' in the subsequent paragraphs.

3 E.g. the Palermo protocol article 2(a) 3(a), ILO Forced Labor Convention.

(Ashiagbor, 2021). Although workers' socio-economic background often made them 'accept' harsh conditions even without coercion, it is still insufficient to assess and attribute legal responsibility for exploitation as it falls outside of employer and employee relationship (Barrientos et al., 2013). The discourse of labour exploitation as 'criminal'; instead of, being inherent to relations of production is critiqued as a mere stop-gap measure that individualizes systemic extractivism (Dines, 2023). In extreme cases of exploitation, the European Court of Human Rights recognized psychological coercion by employer linked to workers' vulnerable personal characteristics, such as age, undocumented status, social and economic resources, as 'forced labour' (Bogg et al., 2024).

While international law is concern with coercion and voluntariness of labour relationship entered between employer and employee, Marxists are concern with the distribution of profit from the goods produced by the worker. Marxists defines 'exploitation' as workers not earning the full value of the good they produced as employers profit from their work (Roemer, 1985). Described by Marxists as 'unfree', employees have to 'accept' employers' term of not getting paid an income equivalent to the full value of the good produced, and are not in control of their own labour to freely sell it on the market in the first place (Wolff, 1999). Unfree labor is distinct from forced labour; what is unfree is not necessarily illegal. According to Anders Neergaard (2015; p. 142), unfree labour refers to the precarious working conditions of "workers whose wage and working conditions are generally agreed as being below 'legal' minimum", vulnerable to wages and working condition below standards set in collective agreement and labour market legislation. Facilitated by law, the state of unfreedom entails workers exchanging certain rights/freedom, e.g. freedom to mobility, right to life, or civil and political right, for political rights to advocate for improved working conditions (Gordon, 2019).

In this chapter, I define 'exploitation' as *unfree labour performing "shitty work"* (Bhattacharyya, 2024; pp. 69–73). Seeing unfreedom as solely stemming from employee-employer class oppression delinks 'exploitation' from other interlocking oppressive structures like patriarchy and racism (Federici, 2004; Marks, 2009; Paret & Levenson, 2024). Using 'shitty work' in my definition of 'exploitation' highlights the harshness of food systems work as particular to racial capitalism. Necessary for racially hierarchizing workers, the exposure to harshness demarcates the racially subordinated and privileged (Bhattacharyya, 2024). The racially subordinated endure the harshness as their default association to and performance of shitty work which the racially privileged consider to be beneath them and rather not perform.

Beyond Marxist definition of 'exploitation', *shitty work is superexploitation*. Anna Tsing (2009; p. 158) defines 'superexploitation' as

exploitation that depends on so-called noneconomic factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, age, and citizenship status (...) where workers establish their economic performance through performances of the very factors that establish their superexploitation: gender, race, ethnicity and so forth.

Neo-Marxist dependency theorists argues that superexploitation of labour occurs when foreign capital and local ruling class benefit from an intensified making of surplus labour, thereby pushing wages and working conditions to extreme lows and precarity not seen in colonial centers (Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, 2023). Surplus populations are produced by pauperization of rural-agricultural communities, prison industrial complex (Gilmore; cited in Card, 2020), dangerous global migration infrastructure (Gordon, 2019; Sunam, 2023), conflicts and wars (Melamed, 2015); land grabs and environmental degradation (Soletto Valencia, 2017), underemployment and exclusion from upward social mobility (Rajaram, 2018). In food systems worldwide, work conditions are depressed as surplus population become cheap (devalued), seasonal and subjected to market demand (disposable) (Cervantes, 2012; Kavak, 2016).

3 The Racial Contract within Racial Capitalism

Broadly understood as a racial division of the labour force in the interest of the (ruling/dominant) white capitalist, conceptualization of racial capitalism emerged from the South African Tradition of Racial Capitalism during anti-apartheid struggle (Kundnani, 2020; Legassick and Hemson, 1976; Paret & Levenson, 2024). Cedric Robinson (1983) showed the labour force composition in feudal Europe as based on racial hierarchies; therefore, racial hierarchization of labour precedes and is inherent to capitalism. There is no one singular theorization of Racial Capitalism (Bhattacharyya, 2018; Paret & Levenson, 2024). The main convergence in the conceptualization of racial capitalism is that it is both a *racial process* and *political relation* of coercion and violence, extractivism and accumulation (Ralph & Singhal, 2019).

To locate shock as an epistemological technology that maintains the structural dependence on *unfree labour performing shitty work*, I position Mill's (1997) The Racial Contract (TRC) as maintaining racial capitalism. Mills (1997) theorized TRC as the functioning framework of white supremacy in the United States, while Robinson (2021; p. 28) described racialism as an enduring

principle of European and Western civilization. Race, within racial capitalism, serves a political function. Racial capitalism, as a concept, “allows a structural and historical account of the ways in which race and class are linked in the economy, and the oppressive structure it shapes” (Gonzalez and Mutua, 2022; p. 128). The racialization of people and spaces directly determines how much racially subordinated workers exercise their agency, civil and political right (Ferreira, 2022; p. 236).

Without naming it ‘racial capitalism’, theorization from colonial peripheries (e.g. Alatas, 1977; Jenkins & Leroy, 2021; Marini, 2022; Rodney, 1972) had long demonstrated the centrality of the social reproduction of race in global (colonial) extractivism, albeit containing time-space specificities (Paret & Levenson, 2024). Rather an outcome, racial differentiation and devaluation transforms people into surplus populations, necessary for superexploitation (Bhattacharyya, 2024; Robinson, 1983; Melamed, 2015; Rajaram, 2018; Virdee, 2019).

Superexploitation is legitimized by “state-sanctioned and/or extra-legal production and exploitation of group differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death” (Gilmore, 2002, p. 261). Under TRC, the racially privileged are ‘full humans’ entitled to full rights, whereas the other racially subordinated are ‘subpersons’, classified as inferior and less deserving of rights and liberties (Mills, 1997; Lentin, 2021). “It is possible to get away with doing things to subpersons that one could not do to persons, because they do not have the same rights as persons” (Mills, 2022; p. 56). Unequal access to protection within the Racial Contract lies at the “foreground that is aimed at economic exploitation” (Mills, 2022; p. 32).

The restrictive migration regime, possessing social reproductive value that legitimizes superexploitation, “(creates) a new juridical space for non-Europeans as separate category of being” (Gore & LeBaron, 2019; Mills, 2022; p. 26). Migration status legitimize limited or no protection for migrant workers (Rasnača, 2022). According to Judy Fudge & Kendra Stauss (2014; p. 163), unfree migrant labor “describes when a worker is unable to enter the labour market (of the receiving country) through a process of ‘free’ contract, but his or her labour power is nevertheless commodified.” Systemic injustice arises when state authorities enact legal rules that excludes certain disadvantaged workers from important protection; therefore, increasing their vulnerability to systematic exploitations (Mantouvalou, 2023). Irregularized migrants are most susceptible to unfree labour conditions as they are excluded from almost all juridical spaces. Even in the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families,

regular(ized) migrants still have more rights than those who are irregular(ized) (Pécoud, 2017).

4 Locating White Ignorance and Innocence in Finland

I draw on Sara Salem's (2018) application of Gloria Wekker's (2016) conceptualization of *white innocence*, grounded on Mills's (2007) theorization of *white ignorance*, to interrogate the 'shock' reaction. White ignorance is an epistemic form of racialized ignorance that maintains white supremacy (Mills, 1997, 2007; Bain, 2022). It is a pattern of cognitive tendency of active non-knowing that privileges dominant white and Western voices, while blocking views and knowledge that threatens white supremacy (Mills, 2007). By not knowing, the racially privileged 'do not know' of the problem affecting the racially subordinated, rendering the problem 'non-existent'. Active white ignorance undermines the lived reality of racial subordination; therefore, allowing inaction to maintain status quo. Shock elucidates a different reality existing *outside* and *despite of* the normative expectations and reality. It exposes which reality is assumed to be normative, and the other-ed marginalized reality.

Finland is imagined as exceptional and an *innocent outsider* of overseas colonialism as it never formally established its own colonies while under Swedish and Russian rule before its independence in 1917 (Keskinen, 2019; Palmberg, 2009; Rastas, 2012). Nevertheless, Finland and Finns were complicit in colonialism, and continue active roles in settler colonial projects and resource extractivism from Sápmi to Uruguay (Alavuotunki, 1999; cited in, Itkonen, 2021; Andersson & Lahti, 2022; Groglopo, 2012; Leinonen, 2022; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012; Merivirta et al., 2021; van der Mark, 2019; Vuorela, 2009). Herman Spöring Jr. – a botanist born in Finland during Swedish rule and employed by Carl Linnaeus's prodigy, Daniel Solander, was recruited in the James Cook-commanded HMS Endeavour, that resulted in the settler-colonization of Australia – continues to be honoured⁴ (Singh, 2021).

Besides fostering Finland's exceptionalism with colonial 'innocence', the state also fashions itself as 'equal' and 'women-friendly' (Elomäki et al., 2021; Masoud, 2024; Tuori, 2007). According to Anne-Mari Souto & Sirpa Lappalainen (2024; p. 5),

4 See Koivukangas (2007), Turun Sanomat (2007), and Walrond (2005).

The failure to recognize and deal with racialized relations has been argued to be part of the Finnish exceptionalism that dismisses the history and presence of racism in Finland and can also be interpreted as a Finnish version of white innocence and ignorance.

Guised as *colorblindness*, Finland constructs itself as a homogenous white nation where a non-white population does not exist even though Romas and diasporic Africans were respectively in Finland since the end of the 1500s and 1800s, and indigenous Sámi people continues to struggle for self-determination (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Katz, 2020; Kuokkanen, 2024; Rastas & Poelman, 2021; Salvioli, 2024; Seikkula, 2020; Vuorela & Borin, 1998). A nation's claim to innocence is central to its self-representation as a (white) nation; thus, reproducing racial hierarchy within (Wekker, 2016). When racial hierarchization is the foundation of social ordering, Finland's nation-building narrative becomes a myth of homogeneity (Karimi, 2024; Keskinen, 2019; McEachrane, 2014). Structural racism continues to penetrate all spheres of everyday lives (e.g. Ahmad, 2020; Anti-Racist Forum, 2023; Bobba, 2021; EUFRA, 2023; Hagelin, 2023; Helakorpi et al., 2023; Kelekay, 2022; Öblom & Antfolk, 2017; Mikander, 2023; Sudenkaarne & Blell, 2022; THL, 2021; Zacheus et al., 2019).

5 Methodology and Method

Following Wekker (2006), I adopt Jack Halberstam's (2004; p. 943) scavenger methodology, a queer methodology, which "uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behavior". Scavenger methodology deems what is excluded as useful for interrogation. Considering Finland's colour-blindness, mainstream materials that directly address racial exclusion and discrimination may not be meaningful because of strategic silence or misrepresentation. As the Finnish food systems, alike the global food systems, depends on unfree labour of migrants and racially subordinated to produce for the capital accumulation and consumption of those privileged by class and race, teasing out what is silenced could uncover racial capitalism contextually. The migrant and racially subordinated are often spoken over, for and about, and pathologized as research subjects (Smith, 1999; Edmondson, 2018).

To '*demigrantize*' migration research, where migrants are the subject of research, I turn the gaze away from the migrant, and stare at the normative dominant white and Finnish public who are invisible, unspoken *for* or *about* as subjects (Dahinden, 2016). This methodology elucidates the *otherwise*, understood

as silenced knowledge and periphery realities. To be clear, flipping the gaze is *neither* petty vindication *nor* governing one's emotions. Interrogating what is silenced underneath the shock reveals the epistemic violence of white innocence and ignorance (Pérez, 2019). As I highlight the implication and structures that play integral role in Finland's societal functioning hidden under everyday discourses, this chapter is *not* about criticizing individuals. Drawing from the Black Radical Tradition, it is to confront, challenge and destabilize structures of dominant epistemic logic and social understandings behind which lives are worthy to *let live*, *shortened*, or *cease* (Quan, 2013; Mbembé, 2003). Underneath the shock is normative discourses that embrace/tolerate the current socio-political-economic structure because the privileged *unshortened* lives rely on it. By surfacing what underlies the shock, I destabilize the normative logic behind mainstream narratives that maintains unfree, shitty work conditions that shortens – and in unknown cases, ceases – lives of racially subordinated and migrant persons in Finnish food systems.

I analyze four textual materials⁵ published in mainstream national news outlets in Finland; i.e. Yle, Helsingin Sanomat and Hufvudstadsbladet. They are opinion pieces, investigative news articles, and comments left by its readers in response to the articles. These articles covered poor work conditions in the restaurant and fast-food industry, greenhouses in rural Finland, and platform food delivery. Three of the articles are originally written in Finnish, one in Swedish; and I analysed the rough English translations of these materials. All quotations used in this chapter are rough translation from either Finnish or Swedish to English.

I selected these articles because they garnered public attention, implying public and political interest on the topic. I selected non-academic materials to highlight the accessibility of information on labour exploitation in food industries in Finland and as representative of everyday discourse. For practical reasons of not analysing replicated reports, I omitted articles that are secondary reports based on the original investigative pieces from my analysis. The articles selected are published, in 2022 and 2023, to provide temporal relevance at the time of writing this chapter.

My analysis uses discourse analysis by connecting what each article says to contemporary and historical economic and political structures in Finland. The written articles and their comments are *spontaneous discourse*, produced within everyday lives (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009). I interpret the written materials in conjunction with existing structures of race and racism, migration and labor

5 Ginman, 2022; Palkoaho et al., 2023; Suobanki, 2022; Takala, 2023.

demand of Finland. The materials' silence on racial structures reveals the normative assumptions that the racially privileged public have towards the labor realities of racially subordinated migrant workers.

6 Assumption behind Shock

Bewilderment and puzzlement show that one is taking for granted the morality of the literal social contract as a norm; once one begins from the Racial Contract, the mystery evaporates. The Racial Contract that makes White moral psychology transparent; one is not continually 'surprised' when one examines the historical record, because this is the psychology the contract prescribes. (Mills, 2022; p. 102)

Suobanki (2022) reported that the representative of the Food Safety Unit in the City of Helsinki expressed ignorance and shock towards dangerous working conditions and poor hygiene in Espresso House, a multinational café chain:

"This was completely new information for us, that such things happen there at night or outside of office hours", says Mia Degerlund, team manager of the Food Safety Unit (Elintarviketurvallisuusyksikkö⁶). For example, checking the adequacy of the premises has been practically impossible when the inspection has taken place during the day when the kitchen is empty. It also comes as a surprise to the official that the small kitchen prepares food for fourteen cafeterias. "I am shocked", Degerlund says.

Similarly, the public responded towards news of exploitations with appal. Shock and disapproval are expressed towards public authorities' failure to protect not only consumers and hygiene standards, but also in preventing poor labor conditions. The following quotes are readers' comments towards Suobanki's (2022) report on work condition in Espresso house. The following comments received 'thumbs-up' from other readers, signalling agreement:

It is surprising that the authorities think it's enough when the inspection is conducted when there is no work being done in the kitchen. ... Finland is thought to have been lost to money-hungry operators. Let's take it back, and never ever, step foot into places like this, where profit-making comes

6 Part of the City of Helsinki, Urban Environment Division.

first and the workers are worthless scum. We don't want this for anyone, do we? I wish that the Finnish working life would be more moral than this, and that it would not be allowed to deteriorate to this level. (+144 thumbs up) (Silmänräpäys)

A nasty chain of cafes. I expected much better action from the authorities than what was reported in the story. In addition to employees, customers are also at risk. I don't want food poisoning, so I don't go to those cafes. (+167 thumbs up) (vuosia mittarissa)

The public shock revealed a normative assumption that workers' protection is adequate in Finland. The assumption stems from Finland's self-image as an exceptional classless Nordic society embellished by the so-called Nordic welfare model and high rates of union membership (e.g. Rastas, 2012; Phillips, 2023). The high public trust towards state and formal institutions epitomizes the perception of state exceptionalism. Trust towards the Finnish government and public administration is steadily high, notably, with more than 90% of the population reporting confidence towards the police in 2020 (OECD, 2021). This public trust is internalized as Finland being universally safe and protected. Given the high level of public trust and confidence, the shock towards the lack of state and institutional protection is understandable.

Contrastingly, trust and access to protection by state administration and unions do not appear as optimistic among migrants and those who are racially subordinated. People who had experienced racial discrimination tend to have lower trust in the police than those who did not in Finland (EUFRA, 2023). Ethnic profiling, especially Roma and Black people, is a prevalent problem, decreasing trust towards police (Keskinen et al., 2018; e.g. Yle News, 2022d). According to EUFRA (2023), 18% of African descent respondents ($n = 502$) perceived to have been stopped by the police due to racial profiling 12 months prior to the survey, and majority of the respondents who have been stopped were stopped while in a private car. Unions in Finland are less representative of the most informal sectors that migrant workers tend to work in (Danaj et al., 2018). Political participation among immigrants is consistently lower than citizens in Finland (Ndukwe, 2022). Additionally, the investigation procedures of police and prosecutor lacked competency in identifying human-trafficking (Deputy Chancellor of Justice, 2021), and shortcomings were found in identifying and processing hate-motivated incidents in criminal procedure (Juutinen, 2021). These everyday structural circumstances lay foundation for superexploitation.

Considering the disparity in public trust and access to state protection between differently racialized group, shock, in Mills's (2022; p. 56) words

depicts, “a regrettable deviation from the ideal”. It reflects Mill’s (2022; p. 16) description of “moral egalitarianism” whereby equality and freedom are allocated by default only to white (citizen) men of class privilege. Protected by default, they can opt out of unfree shitty work. To them, the alternative reality, which equality and freedom are conditional or inaccessible, appears outrageous. The seemingly individual response of emotive shock forms a collective demarcating force between racially privileged citizens with class privilege and those subordinated. Their shock signals that they are not unfree workers performing shitty work; therefore, how would they have known?

7 The Problem from Outside Entering Finland

7.1 *Problem of Foreign Business*

Accompanying the shock is a tendency to rationalize the non-normative reality of exploitative labor. As exploitation and underprotection of workers is normatively assumed to be uncharacteristic of Finland, it gets externalized as problems *entering from outside*. The public narrative attributes the cause of exploitation to *foreign* national and ethnic markers of both businesses and workers. Foreignness implies cultural norms seen as distant from norms of an exceptional Finland. Narrative characterized the *foreignness* of businesses and their operators as evil capitalist conglomerates, exchanging workers’ rights for greater profits, deviates from the assumed Finnish business norms. Supporting ‘small local businesses’ is mentioned as a solution, reflecting a romanticized and nostalgic sentiment towards Finnish-owned business as small, quaint, local and ethical. The following are readers’ comments to Suobanki’s (2022) report on the dangerous and unhygienic work conditions found in Espresso House:

Now there should be a boycott of these chain locations in the food industry. First Hesburger and now Espresso House. (...) Hopefully, people would start favoring small domestic entrepreneurs, so maybe at some point we would get rid of these transnational wastes, who don’t seem to care about their employees, even if it is in everyone’s interest. I also encourage those who work in such places to find another job. I don’t think the situation is this bad in all small private cafes or restaurants. +67 (thumbs up) (Hulaboy)

Apparently originally a Swedish company that operates in Scandinavia and Finland. The current owner seems to be a Luxembourg holding company. Sometimes also belonged to a Norwegian investment company.

Italian seems to be just an image and an espresso. Or is that too? The employees seem to be largely non-Finns, which may also tell something about the salary level and working conditions. How much do you pay in taxes to Finland? +119 (thumbs up) (Tätimies)

7.2 *Externalizing Problem to Migrant Workers*

Shifting responsibility of preventing exploitation to workers themselves is another common reaction. The main narratives are 1. migrant workers put themselves at risk of exploitation by working ‘illegally’,⁷ and 2. integration as the solution for exploitation. The criminalizing languages used on irregularized platform food couriers, and ‘integration as solution’ discourse ignore and individualize the structural cause behind unfree shitty work. Reducing it to individual *choices* of not working ‘illegally’ or integration efforts brings greater precarity to the workers.

Criminalising workers. The discourse of illegality and offense is reproduced in Milla Palkoaho’s, Pauliina Siniauer’s & Paavo Teittinen’s (2023) “*Dark Transport*”,⁸ an investigative article on migrants without residence permit and/or work permit working in platform delivery industry, whose work are described as ‘illegal’. They work under the identity of the person whom they rent courier account from which is commonly described as ‘misuse/abuse’ of accounts. The renter takes a fee or cut from earnings, and some withhold earnings of the worker.

Companies that use platform delivery services responded to Palkoaho et al. (2023) exposé using illegalizing language fused with disapproval, dissociation and ignorance. For example, reported by Sami Takala’s (2023):

Olli Johansson, CEO of McDonald’s in Finland, says that he does not accept illegal activities against drivers.

We have our own responsibility principles and ethical codes. Actions that point to such abuses are blatantly at odds with them. (Antti Rajala, Kesko’s director responsible for food online shopping)

7 In various instances, I repeated the term ‘illegal’ to show the language public and political discourse used to describe work performed by irregularized migrants.

8 Rough translation from Finnish, originally “Pimeitä kulljetuksia”. Although ‘pimeitä’ is directly translated as ‘dark’ in English, I suggest interpreting it as ‘shadow’, as in ‘shadow economy’. I urge for a critical usage of the term ‘dark/shadow transport’ as it reproduces the illegalization of migrant workers; see Franko (2020).

It goes without saying that we do not accept any kind of criminal or unethical activity. (Aku Vikström, CEO of Noho Partners)

We are now hearing about it for the first time. We have not received findings of such activity from our restaurants and it is completely clear to us that we do not accept any illegal activity from our partners. (Jari Vuoto, Vice-president of Hesburger)

The language of illegality and offense is a hostile way to externalize the problem to unfree workers. Similarly used against cleaners and taxi-drivers elsewhere; it lies at the crux of the migration control, gendered and sexualized racism, and class subordination (Farris, 2017; Gebrial, 2022; Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018; Lata et al., 2023; van Doorn et al., 2022). Maintaining imperial exploitation, migration governance facilitates racial governance by hierarchizing bodies and territories (Achiume, 2022; Goldberg, 2002).

Palkoaho's et al. (2023) reported deportation of irregularized platform delivery workers following identification inspection during work. The article reported that the most common workers identified by the police as 'working illegally' are Nigerians who entered Europe through Southern Europe. I situate this phenomenon within a racialized social ordering, notably anti-Blackness and islamophobia, in Finland and Sweden where and racism within policing forms part of translocal power relations (EUFRA, 2023; Karimi, 2024; Schclarek Mulinari & Keskinen, 2022). Blackness is not an essentialized identity, but the ultimate sociopolitical condition of labor subordination and subjection to capital (De Genova, 2023). This means that Blackness is the ultimate lived experience of superexploitation under a racial order.

Migration law determining freedom *to move* and *to work*, as legal violation for some but granted as rights for others, functions to govern the racially subordinated migrants (Kmak, 2023). Juridical categories used in border enforcement differentiates labor mobility; therefore, functioning as critical sites of labor subordination (De Genova, 2023). Active usage of criminalizing language and words, like 'abused' or 'misused', reproduced migrant workers without right to work as 'illegal'. Palkoaho et al.'s article (2023, p. B2) reported the police identified a "foreign man" with a Wolt bag had no rights to work when he ran the red light on his electric scooter, resulting in his deportation. Known as 'crimmigration', it is criminal law as fused with migration control (Aliverti, 2012; Brouwer et al., 2017; Franko, 2020; Koulis & Woude, 2020; Stumpf, 2006). Local law enforcement criminalizing racially subordinated migrants into 'criminal aliens' is linked to racial outcomes of immigration enforcement (Armenta, 2017).

Applying the language of illegality on work performed predominantly by Black and Brown migrant men reinforces the demarcation between mainstream reader-consumer from the unfree workers performing shitty work. Characterizing racially subordinated migrant workers performing unfree shitty work as 'illegal' disproportionately portray them as threats to the 'safe' and 'legal' white Finnish society. This brings material consequences to the racially subordinated workers by legitimizing racial surveillance and crimmigration infrastructure within platform tech industry.

According to Pankakoski, Wolt is developing various technical solutions that would make it possible to find out whether the right person was acting as a substitute for the courier or under what circumstances the courier was operating. These include facial recognition technology, for example, or starting to look at statistics on how many shipments a particular person has or how many applications use a particular account. (...) Foodora also reports that the introduction of facial recognition is being considered. (Palkoaho et al., 2023; p. B5)

Palkoaho et al. (2023) reported increased police surveillance on platform delivery workers. This suggests that Black and Brown men face higher likelihood of police surveillance at work than the general population. Besides identification checks by police on patrol, Wolt performed 500 spot checks on its account users following the news publication (Pankakoski, 2023). In France, similar surveillance led to irregularized migrants getting dismissed; therefore, making them even more vulnerable and degraded as they "become beggars", feeling helpless, lost and depressed (Oberti, 2022).

Instead of better protecting workers, surveillance intensifies the unfreedom of workers, further endangering those who are most threatened by crimmigration. Restrictive immigration control fosters conditions that foster (super)exploitation of migrant workers (Fudge & Strauss, 2014). Under the threat of the crimmigration infrastructure, surveillance works to mark the il/legality of workers to maintain workers' unfreedom. The proclaimed *means* (surveillance) does not meet the proclaimed *end* (labor rights). Tackling migrant workers' exploitation requires moving away from the doctrine of illegality and towards regularization, better recognizing workers' freedom of association, and including them in basic social welfare provision (Bogg & Novitz, 2014; Fox-Ruhs & Ruhs, 2022), thereby, eliminating their unfreedom.

Integration as solution. In an opinion piece following the uncovering of widespread extortion of Vietnamese workers in the Närpes greenhouse industry, Susanna Ginman (2022; p. 34) wrote:

An obvious problem in Närpes is that among the influential Vietnamese, there are groups that are completely isolated from the rest of society. They do not know Swedish or Finnish and they have no contact with Finns. Their knowledge of Finnish society and their own rights is non-existent or grossly deficient.

Ginman's (2022) opinion piece reflects a wider normative assumption that integration is a solution to labor exploitation. In Finnish public discourse, 'integration' constitutes a process which migrants gain knowledge of accessing labor rights *de jure*, 'Finnish' social networks, and most prominently, adequate Finnish or Swedish language skills. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration defines integration as having adequate Finnish or Swedish language proficiency and employment. The Orpo coalition government (2023-) proposal emphasizes on migrants' responsibility to integrate, a shift from integration as a right, making their right to remain conditional to integration.

The government will ensure that there are opportunities for integration by increasing immigrants' own responsibility for integration and by introducing obligations into the system. (...) shift the focus of the system from an emphasis on the rights of immigrants to an emphasis on their own obligations and responsibilities. (Finnish Government, 2023; p. 229)

'Integration as solution' obscures the mundane brutality of unfree, shitty labor conditions which migrant workers (and readers/consumers) are embedded in by turning each exposé of exploitation into *singular* and *unrelated spectacles*. In effect, emancipation from unfree shitty work is reduced into a matter of individual choice. Hassan, a platform delivery worker, was trapped by recruitment debt and was not in position to choose or determine the work conditions he *entered*:

Hassan had paid his friend, a recruiter, a large initial cost ('*kynnysraha*') of more than 10 000 euros to get into Finland. The recruiter had promised to find a job as a newspaper distributor in Finland. It soon became clear that the job was difficult and would not pay enough.

"I told my friend that this job is very difficult. The area was difficult, I was moving alone at night and I had just arrived in the country," Hassan tells HS.

The recruiter suggested Hassan another option: a job as a food delivery courier. Hassan ran the recruiter's Foodora account as well as opening

a Wolt account himself, with a linked bank account belonging to the recruiter.

(...) All the income went first to the recruiter, who took out the 'insurance premium, phone bill and petrol costs'. When Hassan deducted rent, food and the repayment of the debt from the initial cost ('*kynnyusraha*'), he was left with between €500 and €1,000 a month. (Palkoaho et al., 2023; p. B3)

Superexploitation cannot be opted out. Linh Tran waited to quit her job two weeks after an accident from making deliveries in a faulty van. Financial uncertainty that exacerbated unfreedom trapped Tran in her shitty work, risking her of premature death:

I don't want to be in a financially uncertain situation. I have always looked for a new job before quitting. This time I decided to quit because I just couldn't take it anymore. (Tran) (Suobanki, 2020)

Those demarcated into performing unfree shitty work face repercussion if they attempt to seek or bargain for better work conditions, such as losing subsistence, right to stay or facing expulsion.

Pia Marttila, specialist coordinating the work to help victims of human trafficking, says that those who are particularly vulnerable are the undocumented and those who do not have the right to work in Finland. "There is no way for them to earn a living legally and they do not receive any social benefits. In such a situation, you take any deal you can get." (Palkoaho et al., 2023; p. B4)

The normative assumption of migrants 'knowing their rights' to prevent or stop their exploitation do not match the reality of unfree shitty work. After all, migrant workers' de facto access to labor justice is hindered, exacerbating their unfreedom in the first place (Rasnača, 2022). Actual effects of imposing employers' sanctions tend to affect workers without permission to work worse than offending employers, such as risking deportation, loss of income, facing debt versus fine or incarceration for employers (Berg, 2015). Public authorities also lack competency in ensuring victims' access to justice. Although trafficking victims who are *able to establish* exploitation by their employer have temporary rights to remain in Finland since 2021, it was hampered by narrow interpretation of human trafficking threshold, and public authorities' difficulty

in detecting and identifying human trafficking victims (Deputy Chancellor of Justice, 2021; Weatherburn, 2023).

The Finnish government (2023) framing conditional right to remain depending on integration as an ‘opportunity provided’ to integrate into the Finnish society (labor force) is a mask of benevolence. There is nothing benevolent when employment is an integral feature of integration, in other words third-country nationals’ right to remain is determined by their (taxable) labor value. It is a “civilizing/civilizational quest such that enabling entry into wage work is presented as a moral endeavor” (Bhattacharyya, 2018; p. 52). The codification of moral values to govern, exclude and extract from the racially subordinated *other-ed* is an age-old colonial trick. Like the benevolent mask of ‘integration’, European colonial powers co-opted abolition, anti-slavery and reconciliation under the guise of humanitarianism and high morality to legitimize their continued oppression of indigenous and racially subordinated people to further their economic, colonial, and imperialist agenda (Hammoudi, 2022; Bergman Rosamond et al., 2023). The paternalistic and pathologizing tone towards migrants, is reminiscent of the paternalistic ILO 1957 Indigenous and Tribal Populations Recommendation which viewed the exploitation of indigenous workers “on account of their unfamiliarity with the industrial environment”, not the fact that the workers have no means of subsistence other than exploitative wage-labor (Marks, 2009; p. 297).

Discourses of integration and ‘illegal work’ reduce migrant workers into *caricature of ignorance* who are ‘not integrated’ (uncivilized), and *caricature of threats* to Finnish society. The moralistic characterization of different migrants “(sear) their racialized designations onto their bodies and identities that creates a ‘surplus population’” (De Genova, 2023). Magdalena Kmak (2015) uses “technology of morality” to describe the EU differentiation of migrants as subject/non-subjects of legal and moral norms by ascribing and codifying moral values on different migration pathways. Migrants’ subjecthood under moral and legal norms depends on how much they follow and reinforce a set of codified moral values set by the dominant state. Underlying the codified moral values set by the state is TRC – a racial “moral/political” social contract required for the stable functioning of an economic agenda (Mills, 2022; p. 31). When ‘integration’ is reproduced in public discourse as an individual responsibility and as a solution for superexploitation, it pathologizes the unfree migrant worker as morally deficient in need of intervention. The ‘morally deficient’ worker (subhuman) is seen as a ‘undeserving’ subject of legal/moral norms; hence, placed outside of rights that is reserved for racially privileged worker – the full human. Therefore, integration as a solution ultimately regulates unfree labor without confronting the structural factors fostering superexploitation.

Instead of emancipating unfree workers from shitty work, integration maintains their unfreedom to ensure stable functioning of racial capitalism.

8 What Shock Obscures and Maintains?

Reducing unfree labor conditions into matters of individual choices diverts the gaze from structures of superexploitation. The workings of international law, tends to obscure who benefits from superexploitation; “the exhaustion of the worker corresponds to the enrichment of the capitalist (...) privilege is linked to deprivation” (Marks, 2009; pp. 301–302). Therefore, I suggest flipping our gaze towards the Finnish state and the businesses. Finland relies on the superexploitation of unfree migrant workers; in other words, the global surplus population doing shitty work. Forgetting Finland’s historical and contemporary extractivism forges an idea that it has attained its exceptional merits independently; thereby, establishing a moral hierarchy to legitimize itself privileging from global economy of superexploitation (Ashiagbor, 2021; Hammoudi, 2022; Mills, 2022).

Finnish agricultural industry is an example of Finland directly benefiting from unfree populations made ‘surplus’ by displacement and war. Following the labor shortages of male Ukrainian workers available to pick strawberries in the summer of 2022, seasonal berry farm businesses hired Ukrainian women who fled Russia’s war against Ukraine, Thailand and Southern European workers to fill the labor gap (Uusi-Kraapo, 2022). Farming communities hosted ex-Ukrainian seasonal workers and their families fleeing the war in February 2022 were more likely to secure seasonal labor needed (Mattila, 2022; Sarsila, 2022; Yle News, 2022c). The migration regime that creates an unfree labor force out of displaced persons is called “*refugeeization* of workforce (Dines & Rigo, 2016). The refugeeization of agricultural workforce in Finland is not recent as ex-Yugoslavs, particularly Bosnians, and Vietnamese refugees filled blue collar workforce from 1980s onwards (Yle News, 2015; Hadžibulić, 2017; Valtonen, 2019). There was already an influx of Ukrainian seasonal workers after Russia’s aggression since 2014 (Yle News, 2014). Those displaced by war, dispossession and pauperization form an unfree labor force to perform shitty work in Finland. Those circumstances necessitate them to give up certain labor rights in exchange for subsistence and their right to stay, rendering them unfree.

Palkoaho et al. (2023) exposé focused on irregularized migrant labor in the platform delivery industry, and their vulnerability to exploitation by account owners. The article; however, did not critically address the structural relations

of superexploitation. Compared to the so-called ‘illegal workers’, tech businesses accumulating capital from unfree labor did not face equivalent scrutiny, criminalization and condemnation.

Platform companies utilized fuzzy classification of employment status to avoid obligation of ensuring workers’ rights and benefits around the world (Gebrial, 2022; Perkiö et al., n.d.). Sarah Philipson Issac (2024) demonstrates how migration bureaucracy fosters racial capitalism in Sweden by pushing migrant workers with precarious legal status into informal work, giving way for businesses to avoid tax and employment obligations. Similarly, in Finland, the higher Helsinki Administrative Court’s decided that couriers were self-employed, overturning the Regional State Administrative Agency (AVI) of Southern Finland’s⁹ decision which established an employment relationship between Wolt and its delivery couriers (AVI, 2021; Yle News, 2024).¹⁰ The Insurance Court (*A v. XOy*, 2024 *a & b*) also overturned its own and the Finnish Centre for Pensions decision, and decided that platform food couriers are not in an employment relationship with Foodora (owned by Delivery Hero) under the Employment Contracts Act (STT, 2024; Tiainen, 2024). Irregularizing and informalizing migrant workers is law utilized to “formally codify racially subordinate statuses” of protection, in other word, a legal mode of racial demarcation (Bhattacharyya, 2024; Mills, 2022; p. 26). Rather than strengthening workers’ protection, law is being used to legitimize tech companies’ capital accumulating activities and market domination. In 2022, Wolt generated over 3 billion euros of sales globally, and dominated (73%) Finnish platform delivery market share of alongside Foodora (65%) (Statista, 2024; Wolt Blog, 2023).

Furthermore, the legitimization of unfree labor in the platform industry reinforces the Finnish neoliberal nation-building and internationalization agenda. According to Marks (2009; p. 289), “Workplace rights have come under particular strain in countries where governments have vied to attract foreign investment by reducing social protections”. US-based DoorDash’s acquired Wolt, a Finnish tech start-up, at 8.09 billion USD in 2022, becoming the second largest acquisition in Finnish business history then; Wolt raised 822.5 million USD as of February 2023 (Yle News, 2022b). In 2022, Wolt’s founder, Mikko Kuusi was the highest income-earner and income taxpayer in Finland (Yle News, 2023). According to Henri Koskinen (2022), entrepreneurship features strongly in the Finnish government political discourse and policies since 1979. Since the 2000s, the welfare state services, and its financial foundations rest

9 AVI plays an enforcement and implementation role to Finnish legislation (see: <https://avi.fi/en/about-us>).

10 There have been further legal developments in determining delivery couriers’ employment status after this chapter was written.

firmly on entrepreneurship. Grounded on identity construction linked to masculinity and entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship becomes fundamental in the making of the ‘good Finnish citizen’ (Katila et al., 2019; Möttönen, 2020). Since Nokia’s decline, a company important to Finland’s economy and international reputation in information and communications technology, a tech start-up like Wolt – that is not only high value but also internationalized – reaffirms Finland’s entrepreneurial policies (Megerle, 2019). It stands out as majority of entrepreneurial endeavour in Finland are small single entrepreneurship in the traditional economy.¹¹ For migrants who do not embody ‘Finnishness’ defined by whiteness, masculinity and social class, entrepreneurship becomes an integral way to ‘attain Finnishness’. It is visible through government-funded entrepreneurial programs such as Business Finland, and non-governmental organizations like Boost Turku and Start Up Refugee that links integration to entrepreneurship. Unveiling Finland’s interest in entrepreneurial success reveals its neoliberal foundations, far from the innocent imaginary of an equal and morally exceptional welfare state; therefore, questioning the normative assumption of an equal Finland.

9 Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated how white ignorance is a technology to racially demarcate the labor force in the Finnish food system, maintaining some labor conditions unfree and shitty. I departed from public ‘shock’ to uncover the normative assumptions of Finland as innocent and exceptional where public authorities are assumed to protect all workers from exploitation. I show how public discourse rationalize the ‘surprising’ otherwise reality by externalizing the problem of exploitation to the *foreignness* of businesses and migrant workers. The externalization of problem to workers operated through 1. language of illegality and 2. proposing integration as a solution. Ignoring structural factors that intensifies unfreedom, both discourses use the “technology of morality” to reproduce racism and migration control. It reduces exploitation into a matter of individual choice. In effect, workers become more precarious, solidifying their unfreedom.

The public’s claim to ignorance obscures Finland’s neoliberal nation-building and its businesses’ capital accumulation as dependent on unfree shitty work. Active unknowing enables active passivity – to not act upon and continue status quo. Unfreedom is intensified by the racial migration regime; those who

11 According to Suomen Yrittäjät (2023), 95,5% of companies in Finland have less than 10 employees, 70% of business owners are single-person business.

perform unfree shitty work are more likely to face premature death¹² (Gilmore, 2002). They are 'let die' when denied protections to ensures them health, safety and dignity (Mbembe, 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). "Letting die was not an oversight. It was a calculated decision, rationalized in terms of the greater good." (Li, 2010; p. 80). Recognizing the racial superexploitation as fused with the migration regime helps us reject this 'oversight'.

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12 While this chapter had not feature actual death, the structural nature of racial capitalism means that there is no singular attributable culprit, and condition of unfree labour is not a one-off spectacular. Rather, it is an ongoing devaluation of life into premature death through constant exposure to danger, precarity and stress, such as Tran's experience.

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Racial Capitalism, Swedish Trade Unions, and the Wages of Whiteness

Paula Mulinari and Anders Neergaard

1 Introduction

This chapter has two central aims. First, we argue for the relevance of racial capitalism in the studies of the Swedish model in general and trade unions (TUs) specifically. Second, in doing so, we argue that racial capitalism could be captured in three different but connected dimensions: within the national state, human mobility and the border of the national state, and North–South trade of commodities and foreign direct investment. We explore these three dimensions through exemplifications from Swedish TU movement discourses, capturing both blue- and white-collar TUs and TU confederations (TUCs). One way of expanding the analyses of racism in the Swedish context, is by exploring how labour intersect with Sweden without the confinements of methodological nationalism (Anderson, 2019; Sager, 2016). In this chapter, we approach one aspect of this: the discourses of TUs and TUCs through the lens of racial capitalism. While this perspective is attracting considerable interest these days (Ali & Whitham, 2021; Bhattacharyya, 2018; Gilmore, 2021; Robinson, 2000; Taiwo et al., 2021; Vickers, 2021), it is almost invisible both in the analyses of TU discourse and, more specifically, of Swedish labour market relations. To some extent, this latter absence is linked to the idea of Swedish exceptionalism (McEachrane, 2014; Palmberg, 2009; Schierup et al., 2022), which, among other points, argues that Sweden has been outside both colonialism and imperialism and that race and racism are external to labour market relations. The Swedish model of industrial relations has been highly influenced by the ideas of Swedish exceptionalism and has generally been analysed as autonomous and isolated from global relations of power (Johansson, 2008; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2022; Sjölander, 2005; see also chapters 1 and 11 in this volume).

In analysing Swedish TUs through three different but connected dimensions of racial capitalism, we exemplify them using material concerning three contested topics. Within the national state, we analyse statements concerning the

debate around a new employment protection regulation that shifted the balance from workers in Sweden (especially the working class) to employers (especially capitalists) but within a discourse from which racially structured labour market and racialised workers were absent. The second dimension centres on the labour force as human mobility and the border of the national state. While the dimension encompasses all human mobility across states, emphasising the racial (and gendered) valuing of mobility as intrinsically linked to global capitalism, our exemplifications focus on the regulation of labour migration. Finally, concerning the national state within the racial North–South division of extraction, production, and trade, our focus is on free trade. This approach, while limited in the analysis here, highlights three different tensions in the (idealistic) idea of working-class international solidarity. The first is competition for employment across states and the Global North–South divide, the second is how superwages accrue from the class struggle in the Global North through free trade in the context of racial imperialism, and the third is how super-exploitation reduces the secondary exploitation of workers in Sweden (Cope, 2019; Lauesen, 2021; Tsing, 2009).

The growing research on racial capitalism is still in a process of theorisation; thus, we use racial capitalism as a heuristic concept to highlight three points: (i) There are fundamental links between racism or racial inequality and capitalism; (ii) to understand the nature of capitalism in Sweden and specifically the Swedish model, it is important to consider global relations and thereby transcend methodological nationalism; and (iii) if racism and capitalism are logically linked, as we will argue, then anti-capitalist struggles should address issues of racism, and vice versa (Go, 2022; Kundnani, 2023).

The chapter proceeds as follows. After a short theoretical discussion of racial capitalism and an overview of why it is relevant to an understanding of the Swedish social formation and TU struggles, we explore TU and TUC discourses in relation to the three dimensions, focusing on how they directly or indirectly affect processes in which wages of whiteness are accrued. We argue that the reproduction and expansion of racial capitalism is not an exclusive task of capitalists but also an effect of different TU and TUC strategies. Using the concepts of superwages and super-exploitation we open up for an analysis that challenges methodological nationalism in analysing capital – labour relations. We end the chapter linking the Swedish model of industrial relations with global racial capitalism, discussing how in diverse ways TUs of different class fractions of workers both challenge and reproduce racial capitalism.

2 Racial Capitalism as a Lens

In *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), Robinson developed a theoretical framework conceptualising global capitalism as racial – that is, as racial capitalism. Inspired by, among others, Du Bois (1935) and Oliver C. Cox (1948), Robinson stressed that race and racism are fundamental to the development of capitalism and that the global history of enslavement, genocide, and dispossession are embedded in contemporary racial hierarchies among states as well as in the hierarchies of racialised populations within states. He further argued that racial and colonial capitalism was an inherently violent system based on exploitation, dispossession, and the control of the colonies, resulting in wars between colonial powers. Capitalism has been global since its inception, and “free” wage labour has been a marginal form of labour in historical and present-day capitalism.

The focus on slavery and labour within racial capitalism may be developed by the contribution of Du Bois. His analysis of wages of whiteness has been recognised but sparsely used in the empirical analysis of TUS in the Nordic context. The wages of whiteness have often been solely captured as the sociopsychological wages of status and privilege of whiteness. However, while important and explored in this chapter, the wages of whiteness are also the material remuneration of racial capitalism not only as wages but also as purchasing power. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois famously declared that “the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line” (1991:281–89). He extended this beyond the national state, arguing for it as an imperial meridian along which Western imperialism divided the world into blocs of light and dark races for the purposes of capitalist exploitation. Using this concept together with the global colour line, we argue that it contributes aspects to the analysis of racial capitalism that takes us beyond the national framework, recognising a global racial formation (Bonacich, 2008).

According to Itzigsohn (2022), one of Du Bois's central arguments was that the colour line is a global one; therefore, studies of race cannot be separated from the global history of colonialism. Itzigsohn stressed that racial capitalism has local variations, and that racial and class inequalities are place and time specific. However, this diversity should be understood as a local manifestation of a global process of racial and colonial capitalism (Itzigsohn, 2022). According to Robinson, each period of capitalism finds distinctive ways to reify regional and cultural differences into races to structure social divisions between different forms of labour. Racism is thus not reducible to a legacy of the past but is continuously regenerated, with globally dispersed divisions of labour and the struggles against them playing an important role.

Following Robinson's argument, Kundnani argued that capitalism constantly recreates itself through the differentiation of waged and unwaged labour. Race, according to the author, provides the means of coding and managing the material boundaries between different forms of labour; hence, "[r]ace is a material feature of the division of labour that neoliberalism produces" (Kundnani, 2021:16). Bhattacharyya continued in this vein, questioning the role of racialisation in the differentiation of the population under capitalism. She answered that racial capitalism can be seen "as a process by which capitalist formations create by default the edge-populations that serve as the other and limit of the working class" (2018:5). According to Bhattacharyya, the concept of racial capitalism can be used as a way to understand how the workforce becomes divided:

Racial capitalism is a way of understanding the role of racism in enabling key moments of capitalist development [...]. [It] helps us to understand how people become divided from each other in the name of economic survival or in the name of economic well-being. One aspect of its techniques encompass[es] the processes that appear to grant differential privileges to workers and almost workers and non-workers and the social relations that flow from these differentiations. (2018:3)

One of the key strengths of using racial capitalism as a framework is the decentring of methodological nationalism that dominates research not only on capitalism and the racialised labour market but also on TUs, as done by Du Bois in his analyses, discussed in the next section.

3 (Wages) of Whiteness, Workers, and Trade Unions

In Du Bois's critical rewriting of US history, white (and male) TUs played a central role in producing and reproducing racial labour and social inequality. Du Bois argued that by not identifying Black people as workers or Black movements (e.g., the abolition movement) as labour movements and by not confronting racism – but in fact reinforcing it through violence or racist strikes (e.g., white people refusing to work with Black workers or have Black managers) or other subtle ways – white male-dominated unions were a central force in the formation of a racial capitalist US. The story that Du Bois told is, in many ways, the story of a white labour movement that prioritised its own mobility and prosperity but not that of the whole working class:

The upward moving of white labor was betrayed into wars for profit based on color caste. Democracy died save in the hearts of black folk. Indeed, the plight of the white working class throughout the world today is directly traceable to Negro slavery in America, on which modern commerce and industry was founded, and which persisted to threaten free labor until it was partially overthrown in 1863. The resulting color caste founded and retained by capitalism was adopted, forwarded and approved by white labor, and resulted in subordination of colored labor to white profits the world over. Thus the majority of the world's laborers, by the insistence of white labor, became the basis of a system of industry which ruined democracy and showed its perfect fruit in World War and Depression. And this book seeks to tell that story. (1935:30)

According to Du Bois, white TUs and the workers they represented could receive “a low wage” and were “compensated in part by a public and psychological wage [of whiteness]” (1935, pp. 663–664). This wage gave white workers privileges in societal spheres but, at the same time, kept them exploited. Roediger (1998), in developing Du Bois's work, referred to this as the *wages of whiteness* and argued that this has shaped class and TU politics in the US. Du Bois's work could, in some ways, be seen as ushering in the concept of racial capitalism that is not only limited to the dynamics in the US but is also a global process (Narayan, 2017), and the wages of whiteness could be seen as a heuristic approach that encompasses at least three different aspects. The first and least directly material is the symbolic wage of whiteness: feeling and living as having more “worth” than the racialised other. The second aspect is directly linked to primary exploitation, the fact that white workers have higher salaries based on a combination of being, to a higher extent, able to sell their labour as free labour and avoiding effects of discrimination and labour market segmentation (here a similar point could be argued concerning gender). The third aspect of the wages of whiteness is what some Marxists would call superwages (Cope, 2019) – that is, the corollary of what Tsing conceptualised as super-exploitation (2009). Through the wages of whiteness, superwages signify the indirect use of racialised surplus labour realised not only by capitalists but also by white workers through higher wages or through the consumption of commodities or services produced by the labour of the racialised other in the Global North or by workers in the Global South. There is nothing automatic in the conversion of super-exploitation to superwages, as it reflects the outcome of the class struggle between capitalists and workers in the Global North. Although the first aspect happens within the national state, this third aspect is an effect of the bordering process and especially through the Global North–South divide.

As argued by Du Bois, understanding white (and male) labour and TUs is central to analysing racial capitalism. Internationally today, there is a growing field of research exploring the intersection between whiteness, class, and TUs. Researchers have, among other issues, explored how TUs tackle race and ethnicity by studying issues such as: exclusion, subordination, and representation in TUs (Marino et al., 2017); the role of whiteness in the self-representation of TUs (Ouali & Jefferys, 2015); and the ways in which race and ethnicity shape the worldview of TUs and their political positions (Virdee, 2014). Although diverse, this research shows that imaginaries around race and nations within labour unions have, as Virdee wrote, not only been “constitutive in the making, unmaking, and remaking of the working class” but also shaped the nation itself (2014:8). One of the central contributions of this line of research is that it shows that race is integral to understanding why unions act as they do. Race is not a marginal phenomenon but one that lies at the core, together with class and gender, of how TUs formulate strategies and visions of what they are, how they act, and what they want to become.

In the Swedish context, analyses of the relationship between whiteness and how unions mobilise are few and have predominantly, if not exclusively, been conducted in relation to migrants and the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (the LO; Johansson, 2008; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2004; Yalcin, 2010), reflecting a general international scholarly trend of locating racism within the white working class (for a critique, see Bhambra, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2019).

This research has often focused on exploring why a large segment of the white, especially male, working class and its unions have, in a neoliberal, racially stratified, and ethnonationalist conjuncture, increasingly embarked on exclusionary strategies, defending the wages of whiteness instead of advancing working-class unity and struggles. This has made a fundamental contribution to understanding how racism shapes TU struggles (or the lack thereof). However, as argued by Bonilla-Silva (2019), one of the limitations of the blue-collar narrative focus with its exclusive emphasis on the white male working class is that it tends to hide the role of whiteness and racism in other class fractions and thus focuses on whiteness as an expression of working-class loss and resentment. The struggle for the wages of whiteness, as will be illustrated below, has many different articulations and positions.

4 Swedish Industrial Relations and the Racialised Other

At the institutional level, the Swedish model of industrial relations has been based on both strong TUs and employers' associations (Kjellberg, 2011). In contrast to many other countries, Sweden has no legal minimum wage. Instead,

wages, together with other working conditions, are set through collective agreements that employers' associations and TUs have to actively negotiate. In addition, the Ghent model of unemployment insurance, whereby insurance funds are organised and administered by TUs, is also important for high union density (Kjellberg, 2009; Scruggs, 2002). A neoliberal shift began to occur in the late 1980s, initially under a social democratic government, in which price stability replaced full employment as the overarching aim. Together with several complementary (re)regulations, this radically changed the conditions of the Swedish model of industrial relations, weakening the relative power of the working class vis-à-vis the employers and white-collar TUs. When viewed in the context of the strong organisational presence of employers' associations, today, the balance between the labour market actors has tended towards white-collar unions and employers' associations. Thus, LO has become increasingly marginalised in terms of the shaping of institutional forms and negotiations within the Swedish model of industrial relations, as exemplified by the case of changing employment protection regulations. The declining unionisation among the working class has been more severe among foreign-born workers (Kjellberg, 2023).

Research on the Swedish model has generally focused on class relations, especially between organised labour and capital, sidelining the gendered and, more importantly for this chapter, racialised character of the labour market. Inspired by Roediger's argument that we should "draw lines connecting race and class" (2017 p. 15), we note some features of the Swedish regime of racial capitalism. Departing from the classic quote that "race is the modality in which class is lived" (Hall et al., 1978:394), we *add* that, in the Swedish context, migrant background is a central modality in which race is lived. Although the structure of Sweden's racial capitalism is fluid and complex, the migrant "other" often becomes shorthand for racialisation in popular and academic vernacular, as only certain migrants are considered migrants, while the children of these migrants are reproduced as racialised "others" through oxymorons such as "second-generation migrants." Thus, our understanding of race is linked to concrete processes of racialisation, whereby different elements are invoked for constructing the racialised other and for racialising oneself (whiteness). These are social constructions located in time and place with varying degrees of temporal and spatial stickiness.

Turning now to official statistics and a TU confederation's class definition, more than two-thirds of employees with a migrant background belong to the working class, compared to slightly less than half of employees with a Swedish background (Neergaard, 2021). Furthermore, within different class locations, workers racialised as the other are overrepresented in occupations with the

lowest salaries and the worst working conditions, and within the same occupations, they are overrepresented in performing the most precarious working tasks. The situation of racialised workers in Sweden is characterised by a substantially lower employment rate, significantly higher unemployment, a higher degree of both precarious temporary employment and over-education in employment, less access to internal training as employees, and substantially lower wages (Boréus et al., 2021; Mulinari & Sager, 2022; Neergaard, 2021). The racialised segmentation of the Swedish labour market may be exemplified by the statistical overrepresentation of foreign-born workers from Africa, Asia, and South America, comprising approximately 11% of Sweden's employees in low-income, often precarious employment. These occupations, in which racialised workers constitute around 30% of the workforce, include nursing assistants; cleaners; domestic workers and others; fast-food, kitchen, and restaurant workers; alternative medicine therapists; car, motorcycle, and bicycle drivers; machine operators; textile, laundry, and leather workers; and window cleaning and other cleaning workers. Another central aspect of the Swedish labour market is the increased integration between the migration complex and the labour market complex, where over time, Sweden's asylum politics has been increasingly determined by migrants' positions in relation to the labour market (Philipsson Isac 2024; Mulinari, 2021). Together with shifts in economic and labour market policies and rapidly increase in migration restrictions, there is increasing pressure towards accepting unfree labour by racialised others (Neergaard, 2015) and temporary employment contracts and a move towards general precarisation. Thus, the issues of employment security are more pressing for racialised workers. It is, therefore, surprising (or not) that racial labour market inequalities are completely absent from union debates around a new employment protection regulation.

The changing regulations discussed in this chapter unfold in a context in which economic policies are no longer Keynesian but monetarist and the Swedish welfare state has transitioned from a social democratic welfare state to a neoliberal one (Ålund et al., 2017; Therborn, 2020) that is increasingly infused with racism (Neergaard & Mulinari, 2022). In this evolving context, social insurance is less encompassing, covering fewer inhabitants (Herz, 2022); active labour market policy is more restrictive (Dahlstedt & Neergaard, 2023); and, at the same time, there is a substantial increase in labour market precarisation (Carlén & de los Reyes, 2021). We depart from the Keynesian welfare regime of the late 1980s and early 1990s – when racial capitalism in the labour market was relatively hidden under a project of subordinated inclusion – towards a neoliberal welfare regime, characterised by exclusionary subordination with a more explicit racialised discourse, which today has become an ethnoracial

welfare regime that attempts to combine neoliberalism with welfare policies that are tweaked to target the white population, including the white working class (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2025).

The strength of the Swedish model is normally linked to the strong organisation of workers and, later on, professionals (today surpassing workers in regard to the degree of unionisation), and the organised strength of capital as well as public employers, who, through collective agreements, manage industrial relations. However, we also argue that the strength is also partially explained through the extractivism and super-exploitation in the Global South (Amin, 1997; Higginbottom, 2014) and the internal colonisation of Sapmi (de Leeuw, 2024). Furthermore, border and visa regimes serve to reinforce racialised distinctions between Global North and South countries and their citizens, and they play a crucial role in the maintenance of racial capitalism. Even when and where these have changed over time – as in Sweden from WWII until today – spanning periods of open borders and restricted entry for some categories of migrants (on the grounds of asylum, refuge, family reunification, labour, and other forms of migration categories), the overall pattern of keeping white people and people of colour in their places largely remains the same.

5 Methodology and Material

Methodologically, this chapter is based on critical text analysis. Inspired by Wright's distinction of class locations (1980), we have analysed three TUS: the Swedish Construction Workers' Union (CWU, working class), the Managers' Union (MU, contradictory class location based on managing and controlling workers), and the Swedish Engineers' Union (SEU, contradictory class location based on controlling expert knowledge as employees). The three unions represent workers differently located in both the stratified and spatial dimensions of racial capitalism. Although the national state setting is central for all three, the border and labour mobility is mainly an issue for CWU and SEU, as labour migration for managers is limited. In the debate regarding labour migration and salaries, we analyse the three TUCs: the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), the Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees (TCO), and the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO). The international trade dimension is important for all unions in representing stratified consumption based on secondary exploitation. It is especially important for the SEU and partially for the MU but much less so for the CWU, as it is strongly tied to Sweden as a site of production. In the following section, we use our empirical material for exemplification of the three TUS and their TUCs in

relation to the three dimensions (see also Mulinari & Neergaard, 2023, 2025). We have analysed the texts from the organisations' websites, magazines, and sometimes statements in newspapers, focusing on searching for the Swedish model, EPR, labour migration, free trade, and connected terms. In the analysis below, we use, for reasons of space, few quotes to represent a substantial amount of material.

6 The Wages of Whiteness – the National Context

According to Du Bois, it is understandable that privileged workers define themselves by their whiteness, as it can give them short-term advantages for instance by having higher salaries, or that their work is defined as more skilled. However, he stressed that the wages of whiteness can often be a low wage but that this is often compensated by a “public and psychological wage” (1935:700). Du Bois argued that white supremacy under the reconstruction undermined the vision of the white working class, which came to focus more on the question of job satisfaction than on the struggle against the roots of exploitation. Roediger (1999) wrote that whiteness was a way for the white workers (and those workers who through processes of re-racialisation become white, such as the Irish, see Ignatiev, 1995; Virdee, 2004) to respond to the fear of dependency on wage labour and the necessities of capitalist work discipline. To separate themselves from the Black workers, terms such as “boss” were used instead of “master” to indicate the difference that white workers were in fact different from (and freer than) Black workers. One of Roediger's contributions to the analyses of class and race is that he attributed agency to the white working class, which has often otherwise been seen as shaped by a false consciousness that benefits capitalism. By doing so, Roediger, inspired by the work of Du Bois, showed how the white working class and TUs are important actors if one wants to understand the formation of racial capitalism historically as well as today. As argued earlier, Swedish TU research, with very few exceptions (Knocke, 1996, 2006; Mulinari & Neergaard 2010), does not explore issues of race as embedded in the strategies and visions of the TUs. Nonetheless when exploring the position of white male-dominated TUs, it becomes clear, as Roediger and Du Bois argued, that the wages of whiteness play a role in the positions that the unions take. Our first analysis departs from the national debate on a new EPR.

In October 2022, a new EPR was implemented in Sweden. It included a new collective agreement between the employers' association and TUs and subsequent changes in the Employment Protection Act by the Parliament. This change was the outcome of a long and conflictual rewriting of the EPR, which

is considered a core aspect of the Swedish model of industrial relations and covers rules that are applicable to employment, termination, and dismissal (Kjellberg, 2021). Although the debate regarding the new regulation was heated, an interesting aspect was the silence around the racialised (and gendered) labour market, in the unions' advocacy for various forms of labour market protection. This was remarkable given Sweden's highly racially segmented (and gendered) labour market with varying working conditions (Ahmed, 2015; Neergaard, 2021). Below, we exemplify this by summarising the three TUs' positions in terms of how they, in diverse ways, reproduced, instead of challenged, racial capitalism in Sweden and how this, in turn, promotes an even more racialised unequal labour market. While their positions differ, primarily as the construction workers' unions opposed the change in the regulation, there are similarities in the sense that they defend the wages of whiteness in different ways by positioning the members not as part of a collective of workers but in juxtaposition to other workers.

The managers' position regarding the new regulation stressed the importance of protecting skills and increasing flexibilization. These two factors were formulated as important to the Swedish model. For the MU, their position indicates a successful rearticulation of the Swedish model in which today's and tomorrow's needs are framed by necessity to increase flexibilization (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2023). The new regulation gave the managers greater power in terms of recruitment and dismissal. It also easily enables managers to employ people on short-term contracts that, together with the subordinated and marginalised position of the racialised labour force, will further consolidate the segmented character of Swedish racial capitalism, as discussed in the introduction. The concept of the Swedish model is hence used to, on the one hand, reclaim and defend the past and, on the other hand, pursue responsible and modern development through "necessary" adjustments. The silence about the labour market racial inequalities during the conflict over the new regulation enables the MU to portray its position as being in the interest of both the nation and the Swedish model (Miller, 2020). At the same time, the combined emphasis on skill development and flexibilization gave managers dual power in the labour market, both in terms of employment opportunities through skill development and in managing employees through increased precarisation.

While the managers stressed the importance of organisational flexibility, which would increase their organisational power, the Engineers Union was more concerned with protecting their skills. The rhetoric of competitiveness and skills births a space that not only offers protection to Swedish engineers as skilled expert workers but also safeguards them from competing with

engineers in and from the Global South (Lundberg, 2016). This demonstrates how racial and geographic inequities in the global economy (racial capitalism) are maintained through a rhetoric of national welfare, progress, and protectionism (Go, 2022). In the Swedish labour market, which has a higher proportion of racialised workers in low-skill areas who are in insecure employment and often overeducated, the new regulation enhances the precarisation of these workers. However, in contrast, for Swedish engineers (and other skilled employees), the new agreement affirms and facilitates competence development and employment mobility, which serve to protect them from increased insecurity. In this sense, the Engineers Union, one could argue, not only gained but in fact reproduced the global colour line by securing state protection from global competition at the same time that it would increase the precarisation of other workers.

When the new agreement was presented, the CWU opposed it, arguing that it was not a solution to the question of employment security, central to their members. Whereas the MU and SEU emphasised the importance of being able to educate oneself after dismissal, the CWU stressed that its members needed employment security at work, as physically, they would not have the same productivity throughout a working lifetime. The question of whether managers would have a greater right to dismiss people, for instance, because of lower productivity, became a central issue. The interesting fact that reflects the change in the power structure of the Swedish model is that the government – a social democratic-led one, even though the Builders Union opposed the new proposition – decided to follow the recommendation of the white-collar unions.

In our analysis of the construction workers' participation in the debate on the regulation of employment security, we did not find any explicit reference to whiteness or the racialised labour market. However, this has been an important issue in the internal discussions of the construction workers. On the one hand, there has been a lively discussion on how to manage the members' strong support for the Sweden Democrats, which the union sees as a racist party, as opposed to the union's core values and ideology. On the other hand, the union has struggled to navigate the exclusionary racism of its many members and its inclusionary politics that serve to safeguard its members from the threats of the EPR. The EU Posted Workers Directive, bogus self-employed EU citizens, irregular labour, and unauthorised migrants have often been seen as threats by the members of the Swedish CWU (Neergaard, 2015). Thus, the union strives to strike a balance between being critical of migrants threatening the labour market position of its members and fighting the exclusionary racism of the Sweden

Democrats and their supporters within the union (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2024), although increasingly adapting to restrictive policies as exemplified in not defending members' right to maintain permanent residence permits.

One of the limitations of the Swedish model as an analytical concept is its silencing of race in racial capitalism. As Virdee argued, the idea of the nation, or in this case the Swedish model, operates as a power container, "limiting the political imagination of even most of those who were representative of the exploited and oppressed" (2019:5). Therefore, while the Swedish CWU and its members are in many ways compromised by the EPR changes made by the other white-male-dominated unions, one could also argue that the construction workers, when losing their small class fraction privilege, attempt to partially defend it through the wages of whiteness, arguing that they are the core of the Swedish model. The contradictory class location is also a contradictory race location of whiteness. The new regulation deprived the white workers in the building sector of labour market security, to some extent, losing the wages of whiteness in terms of secure employment.

7 **Bordering: Trade Unions and Labour Migration from "Third Countries"**

Despite formal declarations on international solidarity, the dominant frame of reference of TUS (Sweden being no exception) remains that of the (nation-)state and the national arena (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2013; Marino et al., 2024). To grasp the TUS' positions towards migration in Sweden, various forms of migration may be differentiated. Roughly outlined from a TU perspective, it is possible to discern four administrative forms which potentially, and in different ways, impact TU policy. These are agreements on free movement, residence, and permits across borders; third-country labour migration; refugee and family reunification; and unauthorised migration (Neergaard & Selberg, 2024). As wage labour is the dominant form of livelihood in Sweden, most migrants, despite the administrative form, become a part of the labour force. The focus here is on TU discourse and third-country labour migration.

The 2008 labour migration reform may be seen as the most liberal (employer-driven) labour migration scheme among the OECD members (OECD, 2011). Prior to 2008, Sweden had a quota-based system in which quotas of labour power were based on assessments by the TUS and the employers' organisations, together with a government agency that determined which labour needs could not be fulfilled by the domestic labour force and when it was legitimate to hire migrant labour. From 2008, it was employers who determined the

labour needs. The new regulation implemented by the right-wing government from 2006–2014 was among the most employer-friendly labour migration laws in the OECD, whereby employers and not TUs determined the need for labour power. Central to this new regulation was that it was up to the employers to determine the period of residence for the migrant labour, depending on their needs. In rather sharp contrast to other periods, it is the employers who decide on the temporal residence permits of migrants (Frank, 2017). Although those workers still needed to have salaries in accordance with the collective agreement, the regulation gave employers the flexibility of hiring, for instance, unorganised workers as well as workers who in order to be able to stay needed the acceptance of the employers, giving the latter increasing power over the labour force. The new regulation was highly criticised by the LO, which argued that it gave employers total power over the labour force (LO, 2013). While the legislation prior to the 2008 reform was neo-corporatist, with the government at the centre and an important role given to TUs, the new legislation concentrates on employers' needs. Following the election of 2014, with a government consisting of the Social Democratic and the Green Party, some minor changes to labour migration regulations were made. While the Social Democrats wanted more restrictive changes – the requirement for workers to prove that their salaries could support their families, increased control of employers, and full-time hours as the norm for obtaining labour migration permits – the Centre Party, which was crucial for a parliamentary majority, succeeded in defending the employer-friendly regulation. However, there was an increased demand for employers to actually show that their needs could not be filled by domestic labour.

In 2023, the Tidö agreement parties identified the change in labour migration as one of the areas that they wanted to reform (Sverigedemokraterna et al., 2022; Civil Rights Defenders, 2022). Already in November 2023, a new requirement for a work visa was decided, with the salary requirement being increased to 80% of the Swedish median wage, and in 2025, the government is trying to increase it to 100%. The paradox (or not) is that it was the right-wing government in 2008 that introduced the new law for third-country (non-EU) labour migration and a new ethnoracist right-wing government that made it more restrictive, mirroring what Hollifield (1992) called the Liberal paradox. Concerning labour market actors, the blue-collar LO TUC supported the new Tidö agreement regulation, while both the TCO and the SACO white-collar TUCs, including the Engineers' Union; and the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise opposed it. The MU did not submit a referral.

Presenting the new regulation that demanded that a “migrant worker” earn 80% of the median wage in Sweden, the Minister of Migration, at that time

Maria Malmer Stenergard, stressed that it was part of the wider paradigm shift in Swedish migration politics (Sjögren, 2023). Camilla Mårtensson from the Liberal Party emphasised that the new regulation was made to stop migrant workers in the lowest-paid professions at the same time that it made it possible for companies to recruit highly educated migrants. The LO TUC had been critical of the regulation since 2008 and supported the Tidö agreement's change in relation to salaries but argued that the TUs, not only employers, needed to determine what was defined as a need in the labour market:

The LO TUC supports the government's proposal to raise the income requirement from SEK 13,000 per month to at least 80 per cent of the Swedish median wage ... The increased income requirement must also be monitored and controlled by the Migration Agency. The reason for this is that the risk of exploitation does not disappear with an increased income requirement. (LO, 2023:1)

For the LO TUC, the central problem with the change in the regulation was not the increase in salary but the fact that the new government did not create sufficiently strong forms of control of workplaces that use migrant labour. In the end, although stressing that the problem with the exploitation of migrant workers would not end because of higher demands on salaries, the LO TUC backed the right-wing government by supporting the extreme-right party Sweden Democrats' new suggestion for controlling workers from third countries. When asked by a journalist why the LO TUC supported the government's position, Torbjörn Johansson, collective agreement secretary of the LO, answered,

But we do not have the same position. We want a labour market test. We think that this is a bad proposal but that it is better than having it unregulated. Unregulated labour immigration is completely devastating for workers and low-paid workers in Sweden. It opens the gates of hell. (Wreder, 2023)

When asked, "How does the LO want it then?" he responded,

We think that in professions and sectors where there is a shortage of labour, people should be allowed to work. But where there is no shortage, where there are unemployed people who can take the jobs, you should not let people in. We can't pay taxes and unemployment benefits for people who are then outcompeted by people from other countries. (Wreder, 2023)

As stressed by Virdee (2014), it becomes clear that migrant workers are not in fact defined as workers belonging to the working class but rather as a threat to the national working class. The LO's position seems to be a combination of strengthening bordering concerning labour migrants (but not actively in the case of asylum/refugee policies). At the same time, they advocate increasing the rights of workers while they are in the country, thereby reducing the degree of exploitation of workers (including subordination for racialised and migrant workers). One way of understanding the position of the LO is that the workers whom it organises individually have very limited power in a Wright sense (control over their own and other workers, means of production, and skills as competition). In this sense, the power that they have (or at least the power that they seem to think they have) is to reinforce the borders of the nation, imagining that this will protect the national working class. Their position hence reflects their weak status as a TUC, as they do not have any alternative or progressive demands, only enforcing more control, while most of their members do not have the salaries that are being discussed as a minimum requirement for labour migrants. The paradox is that the TUC is, in this case, in favour of state wage regulation, against the core principle of the Swedish model – that wages are set in collective agreements.

While the government stressed that the new regulation would protect highly skilled companies, both TCO and SACO opposed it. The Swedish Confederation of Professional Employees opposed the new regulation, arguing that

the concept of good livelihood should not be based on median wage because such a solution lacks the necessary link to the Swedish labour market model ... TCO's view is therefore that the concept of a good livelihood should mean employment conditions in line with collective agreements or industry practice ... A wage level that is set too low risks that the conditions for labour migrants will be worse than what otherwise applies in the labour market, and if the wage level is set too high, employers in sectors or occupational groups with wages below the wage level are not able to recruit from third countries when needed. (TCO, 2023:1)

In contrast to the LO, TCO stressed the centrality of the Swedish model and the importance of the government not interfering in collective bargaining. The difference in position, we understand, reflects the weakness of the LO vis-à-vis the employers. In comparison to the LO, which saw regulation lowering “white” wages, TCO even stressed that the wages could become lower for migrant workers, as the government would determine what salaries they should have, reflecting that their members have higher salaries than the ones unionised by

the LO. For TCO, therefore, it also becomes important to protect workers who in fact find themselves with wages above 80% of the median wages. TCO was also concerned that the new regulation would affect the overall salary norm in the labour market:

TCO also sees a risk that the wage levels for work permits will have a normative effect on the labour market and affect the wage formation model. By extension, we see a risk that government interference in wage formation leads to a reduction in employers' incentives to sign collective agreements. (TCO, 2023:3)

While TCO like the LO, stresses the need to stop the (over-)exploitation of migrant workers, they, on the contrary, argued that the best way to secure this would be within the frame of the Swedish model of relations between social partners. They understood the new regulation as a weakening of the Swedish model.

SACO, like TCO, argued against the proposal, writing,

In Sweden, the social partners are responsible for wage formation. This means that it is alien to the Swedish collective agreement model to introduce a minimum wage in law or regulation that would apply to employees working in Sweden ... introducing a definition of what the concept of good income should be by setting a wage level on the Swedish labour market is something fundamentally different. (SACO, 2023:2)

SACO emphasised the paradox that the government opposes minimum wages, while the regulation in fact would create a minimum wage. Both TCO and SACO emphasise the need to protect the Swedish model. Similar to their position on EPR, the need for labour market flexibility is defended in combination with skills formation and social insurances. The labour market power of SACO members is through collective agreements, which are seen as a better arrangement:

Again, it needs to be remembered that wages should not be regulated by law or regulation. Industry-wide agreements on wages and employment conditions are much better suited to flexible and adapted solutions to a changing labour market. (SACO, 2023:2)

All three TUCs argue in general for defending the Swedish model of wage and working condition setting through collective agreements between employers and TUS. However, there is a clear difference when it comes to dealing with

third-country labour migration. The blue-collar LO prefers labour migration legislation linked to occupational or sectoral shortages but accepts it as a second alternative wage setting for labour migration permits. TCO and SACO, in contrast, defend the Swedish model and are very clear against wage setting by legislation, although TCO especially recognises the importance of combating (over)exploiting employers.

We argue that labour market strength is a central factor in these differences. Whereas the LO, co-founder of the Swedish model, together with the employers, does accept legislation to reduce the risk of labour migrants taking jobs below the collective agreements, SACO, in contrast, with a much stronger bargaining position vis-à-vis employers, fully defends wage setting through collective agreements. TCO, closer to SACO in its policy but with a weaker bargaining position, defends the Swedish model but emphasises more the need to control employers than the exploitation of workers. While outside the focus of this chapter, it is interesting to note that the employers (Confederation of Swedish Enterprise) are, together with SACO, the most consistent in defending wage setting through collective agreements, the two organisations with the strongest bargaining power on the Swedish labour market. Returning to the concept of the wages of whiteness, we argue that the LO needs regulation to defend it, whereas SACO has the bargaining power to both defend wages for its members in contradictory class locations and, at the same time, defend the wages of whiteness in collective agreements with employers.

8 Drivers of Globalisation and the Wages of Whiteness

It is much more important, globally speaking, whether you are lucky enough to be born in a rich country than whether the income class to which you belong in a rich country is high, medium or low. (Milanović, 2011:113)

The above quote from World Bank economist Branko Milanović challenges the common understanding of analysing class inequalities through a national approach, which has been central in studying the Swedish model. A central feature of Swedish TU struggles has been the pursuit of a high-wage economy. During social democratic hegemony, struggles for a high-wage economy were combined with a project of structural development signifying both the commodification of labour, and the decommodification through social insurances. In many ways, this was successful, and although it has changed with neoliberal economics, the increase in low-wage employment has mainly been confined

to the growing service sector characterised by labour-intensive work. While digital technology allows for certain service work to be flexibly located, much needs to be located close to customers.

Thus, over time, raw material and agricultural imports have been complemented by the imports of industrial commodities from the Global South, all based on low-wage work and sometimes in different forms of unfree labour. This has been seen as a positive development by both blue- and white-collar TUs. This strategy is in line with Milanović's quote above linking global inequality with location rather than class. While invisibilising race, this "location" aspect introduces the third exemplification of understanding TUs in relation to racial capitalism (racial imperialism), focusing on the outlook on globalisation.

In contrast with the blue-collar TUs in many other countries, the Swedish LO and its member unions have embraced international trade and globalisation, as the following quote from the LO chairman highlights:

WE LIKE CHANGE! We have done so since LO was founded in 1898. As part of a strong trade union labour movement, we have taken responsibility for a competitive economy, high employment for both women and men and an equal distribution of income. Therefore, we are also in favour of new technologies, globalisation and free trade. In many countries, however, workers have been left behind. This is why the world needs a wage increase! (Bender & Carlén, 2016:3)

The above quote argues in defence of the Swedish model as a provider of high (full) employment and economic security for workers and thus facilitates support for competitive, free-trade globalisation. However, in writing that "In many countries, however, workers have been left behind. This is why the world needs a wage increase!", the focus is more on other countries of the Global North. The workers of the Global South are mainly left out of the discussion.

However, there are important interventions for TU solidarity, as exemplified by construction workers. While they do not want to organise unauthorised workers in Sweden, they do international solidarity, especially as active members of Building and Wood Workers' International, supporting TUs and campaigning against super-exploitation (Byggnads, 2021).

For the wage workers in contradictory class locations within Sweden – we mentioned managers and engineers above – the outlook on globalisation has been more positive. Here, positive affirmation dominates, although it is often combined with arguments for enhancing the relative strength of these workers through the facilitation of continuous education and on-the-job training and through decreasing progressive taxation. The following quote from the MU is

interesting because it, on the one hand, affirms globalisation but, on the other, restricts some of the freedom of mobility to the EU:

Ledarna [MU] operates in a globalized world where Sweden is one of the world's most export-dependent countries. Our members work in both Swedish and foreign or multinational organisations, and a large proportion of Ledarna's members work in companies that are entirely dependent on exports. Ledarna is in favour of the free movement of goods and services within the EU ... We will act in a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable manner without protectionist overtones. (Ledarna, 2022:2)

While TCO also sees free trade as positive, despite recognising the challenges of digitalisation, globalisation, and climate change, it focuses on solving it through the Swedish model (and seemingly in Sweden), stating,

If trade unions do not push for security, adaptation and development when the world of work is changing rapidly, there is hardly anyone else who will. We in the trade union movement need to get better at jointly promoting the success story. And we need employers to emphasize the value of a well-functioning partnership model for companies that want to compete on skills and development. (Svanström, 2020)

While the idea for Sweden is high-wage, high-skill work with social security, the visions for the Global South focus more on poverty reduction. Reflecting on the lessons from the pandemic, they highlight “the challenges with the importance of long-term sustainable structural transformation processes towards more inclusive and resilient labour markets ... reducing the widespread informal sector and discrimination” (Gustafsson, 2022).

Finally, SACO also repeats that free trade is good, emphasising climate crisis and the need to meet the global Sustainable Development Goals. It argues,

These goals, which are integrated into SACO's activities, coincide with the core values of trade union work: redressing power imbalances and inequalities, livelihoods and decent work, universal and quality education, and expanded social systems. (SACO, 2022)

However, when further analysing the SACO position, it becomes evident that it revolves around how EU member states together should manage the

challenges of globalisation, emphasising that “strong social partners are essential” (SACO, 2022).

A central point is that free trade is good. While it is sometimes good for Sweden and thus for our members, sometimes for the EU, and sometimes for the world, there is no real structural analysis of unequal globalisation. Basically, Adam Smith’s ideas pervade the TUs concerning free trade national specialisation (as high-skill, high-wage producers) in the international division of labour. The central measurement is to what extent it is good for our members, which is also where we can see differences in nuance based on the variation in relative bargaining power. If workers in the Global South are mentioned, there is generally a focus on the lack of good working conditions and TU rights, mainly as an effect of the states of these countries.

Thus, returning to the concept of racial imperialism, there is a basic consensus among TUCs covering different class locations concerning relations beyond the borders of the EU (that at the same time play a marginal role in their activities and discourse). This is also institutionally reflected in Union to Union, which is a joint LO, TCO, and SACO international cooperation development organisation focusing on creating strong democratic TUs and more decent jobs globally (Union to Union, n.d.).

It should however be noted that the blue-collar LO and some of its member unions (with international solidarity funds) take this marginal task more seriously (LO, 2023; 2024). First, all recognise that Sweden is and should be an open economy with free trade and limited protectionism, emphasising the need to strengthen support in maintaining global competitiveness. Second, their common outlook is that the Swedish model of industrial relations is useful for other countries as well and that their international relations with the TUs of the Global South are helping them in this direction. Here, we see a benevolent paternal solidarity that, on the one hand, argues for international aid and TU solidarity with unions of the Global South, and, on the other hand, supports the basic economic system of free (unequal) trade but in the more humane version expressed through Agenda 2030 and the Global Deal. While recognising many problems on a global scale, the reformism linked to the Swedish model makes the TUs blind and silent on the basic structures of racial capitalism (while gender equality and climate/environment challenges are mentioned, racial formation or racism is not mentioned as part of the global system). An important question for further research is whether this is ignorance or active support for a model that privileges most workers in Sweden (including large parts of the working class) based on the combination of free trade and super-exploitation of the workers of the Global South – that is, racial capitalism.

Returning to Milanović's quote at the beginning of this section, downplaying the significance of class and replacing it with location obscures the centrality of race. This is also echoed and expanded upon in the following quote:

It would be simplistic to perceive the Swedish trade unions' support for free trade as merely safeguarding their own interests, to the detriment of wage earners in other countries. There is undoubtedly a genuine perception among Swedish trade union leaders that free trade benefits all parties. The only question is whether this view holds true today. (Jonsson & Lindberg, 2014:64)

While noting the tensions, Jonsson and Lindberg argue for a genuine perception of solidarity among TU leaders and that free trade, at least previously, has benefited all parties, which is a claim that is unsustainable if one takes racial imperialism seriously. As a number of scholars have argued albeit often focusing within the borders of the state or on migration, class has been and is racialised, and more than anything else, this becomes visible on the global scene of racial capitalism. Furthermore, the organised labour, not only blue-collar, of the Global North actively reproduces and, to their benefit, thrives on global racial capitalism. While international solidarity is present rhetorically and, to a smaller extent, concretely, the imagined solidarity is more national than that of the global working class. While collective agreements forge national solidarities, they, at the same time, forge solidarities with organised capital as employers of workers in Sweden, to the relative and, some would argue, absolute detriment of the workers in the Global South.

9 Conclusion: "The Internationale Unites the Human Race"

The heading, as we are ending this chapter, refers back to the end of the 19th century and the idea of international solidarity and global social transformation. As we have argued here, using exemplifications of Swedish TUs and TUCs, there is a wide gap between what is sung and the real visions and practices. While this chapter is a first and limited contribution, we do think that the traditional analyses of the Swedish model of industrial relations, which often explored the Swedish model as operating outside racial capitalism, need to be questioned for three different reasons. First, TUs always act in a terrain in which capitalism is entwined with racial formations, despite the silence and even negations by TUs and often researchers on this issue. Second, to

understand the nature of capitalism in Sweden, it is important to consider global relations and the global context that is, the formation of the wages (of whiteness) is not only decided by the national industrial relations but is also part of global industrial relations that we argue are constructively explored through a racial capitalism lens. Third, if racism and capitalism are logically linked, as we argue, TU struggles need to address how racism shapes class relations, and anti-racist struggles need to address class oppression.

By focusing on TU and TUC class location discourses concerning the regulation of employment protection, third-country labour migration, and free trade globalisation through a racial capitalist lens, we contribute to research (and, by continuation, social justice struggles) in three different ways.

First, we find that the discourse is characterised by colour-blind rhetoric and arguments despite the racialised stratification of the Swedish labour market, the racialisation of third-country labour migration regulation, and the huge wage disparities between workers in Sweden and in the Global South. Second, we argue that racism and racial understandings need to be explored across class locations – and not by focusing only on the white male working class – through the three dimensions of racial capitalism. By doing so, and despite the colour-blind contestation, we demonstrate that the different positions of the TUs have racial consequences. Third – and this is an area that calls for significantly more investigation – we demonstrate that what is often, through methodological nationalism, perceived as an endogenous process needs to be analysed within a broader context. Swedish exceptionalism and the Swedish model are invoked in these contestations in ways that affect the construction of borders and strengthen racial imperialism.

The use of racial capitalism as a lens addresses two central gaps in TU research. On the one hand the notion that the Swedish labour market and the Swedish model are not embedded in racial or colonial (global) histories and inequalities. To truly understand the position of TUs, it is important to consider that they also act crudely (we acknowledge) within a world that may be captured by a Global North–South divide; hence, as we have explored, whiteness, Swedishness, and white masculinity are key factors that shape the unions' strategies and visions.

On the other hand, applying a racial capitalism perspective illuminates the need to explore how diverse actors reinforce racial capitalism. While research has focused on the often-narrow perspective of the white working class, we argue that research also has to take into consideration (white-collar) workers' class locations in reproducing racial capitalism. To do this, it is important but not sufficient to approach this through a methodological nationalist lens. When state formations of racial capitalism are situated together with

migration, the bordering of racial capitalism, and imperialist racial capitalism, our understanding of the dynamics and complexities of the working of the latter becomes clearer.

Finally, an issue that we have not discussed explicitly in this chapter is how to understand resistance to racial capitalism based on the extended understanding presented here. In the context of combatting racism, it seems worthwhile to revisit Go's idea that if "racism and capitalism are interconnected, as the racial capitalism thesis holds, then the fight against racism is also a fight against capitalism" (2021:40). Furthermore, and if acknowledging the arguments of Cope (2019) and Lauesen (2021) that the relative privilege of workers in Sweden (superwages) is partially an effect on the working of racial capitalism at the border and through the Global North–South divide, the question of international solidarity needs to be rethought. Thus, the racial capitalism perspective has consequences both for understanding resistance, a central point of Robinson's "Black Marxism" with the subtitle "the Making of the Black Radical Tradition," and for formulating strategies against racial capitalism.

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Capitalist Racism as “Occupational Hazard” and Personal Responsibility: Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Finland

Anuhya Bobba

1 Introduction

In recent years, entrepreneurship has received political traction as a solution to the integration of newly arrived asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants in Finland. While acquiring employment was previously seen as the primary method of integration, the latest Entrepreneurship Strategy (2022, p. 30) emblematically claims entrepreneurship as the “natural way to integrate into Finnish society and get a job.” Analysing fifteen semi-structured interviews with non-Finnish businessowners in the cities of Helsinki and Turku, Finland, this chapter problematizes the conceptualization of non-Finnish persons as *naturally* inclined to entrepreneurship, especially on the basis of cultural or ethnic traits. In practice, entrepreneurship is a low-paying and precarious trade, where differential access to employment opportunities often renders self-employment a necessity for newcomers.

This shift in the discourse of integration, from immigrants as employees to immigrants as employees *and* entrepreneurs, was first reflected in the Government Integration Programme of 2016. This shift occurred in the aftermath of the so-termed “refugee crisis” of 2015, when Finland received a record number of asylum applications. This produced renewed attention on racism in the labour market, which had been legally positioned as the primary means to integrate non-Finns, that can be ameliorated by business creation and entrepreneurial pursuit. Entrepreneurship, in this sense, presents an individualistic solution to a structural problem.

This does not, however, diverge from how immigrant integration has been devised more generally. As Kurki et al. (2018, p. 239) demonstrate, integration in Finland is largely presented as “an individualistic project that emphasizes self-discipline and continuous self-development” to produce a non-reliance on welfare mechanisms, where the employed and thus ‘integrated self’ is the desired end product. The ‘integrated self’ is similar to the ‘entrepreneurial self’ (Bröckling, 2015); both are subject to a process of ‘continuous self-development’

in which they are made responsible for employability. These ideas align with broader trends in the neoliberal restructuring of the Finnish welfare state.

The economic crisis of the 1970s, driven by stagflation and a structural shift to post-industrialism, evoked a “crisis of the welfare state” in Finland (Yliaska, 2015, p. 440). Central characteristics of the Finnish welfare state, such as coordinated wage regulation, heavy taxation, universal public services, and wealth redistribution, were considered inefficiently equipped for the “requirements of the era” (Wuokko, 2019, p. 8). The post-wwII Fordist model proved too inflexible to adapt to emergent information technologies and evolving consumer market demands, which triggered significant socioeconomic changes that impacted the structure of work. Consequently, capitalism transitioned to a strategy of flexible accumulation, often termed neoliberalism (Harvey, 1990, p. 147).

Notably, the economic depression of the early 1990s in Finland shepherded neoliberal policies, which deregulated financial markets, restructured the labour market to boost flexibility and supply, shifted the burden of unemployment onto individuals, mandated employment for welfare access, and deemed health and social services as excessive public expenditure in need of privatization. While the crises of 1970s and 1990s resulted in high rates of poverty and unemployment, which would purportedly be offset by the measures listed before, empirical evidence instead demonstrates a consistent rise in inequality (Kokkonen et al., 2018, p. 42). Moreover, the Keynesian objective of full employment has largely been deprioritized, instead unemployment is now considered as an inevitable and even beneficial marker of a competitive economy (Kantola and Kananen, 2013, pp. 813–814). Entrepreneurship has advanced as a policy priority within such a context. It is not only a labor market status that is marked by flexibility and limited state intervention, but also an ideology that is compatible to neoliberal development (Tavares, 2018; Carmo et al., 2021).

In the context of Sweden, Hjerm (2004, p. 752) writes, “[I]mportantly, but not as explicitly discussed, entrepreneurship means that society can take its hands away from the problems of marginalization and segregation.” The dismantlement of the Swedish welfare state was similarly precipitated by economic turmoil in the 1990s and worked to restructure the labor market, now marked by a high rate of unemployment (Neergaard, 2015, p. 143). Entrepreneurship is framed as a means of immigrant integration to remedy grim labor market outcomes, while in the same breath, it places the burden of financial and social security on the individual rather than the state (Hjerm, 2004, pp. 741–742). For example, in a study on the ethnic segmentation in the Swedish taxi industry, Slavic and Urban (2018, p. 455) explore how the challenges faced by immigrant entrepreneurs—such as low wages, financial instability, long hours,

and exposure to threats and violence—raise concerns about integration in light of “an organizational structure that gives no real power to self-employed individuals.”

As this chapter will demonstrate, while this dynamic takes shape in distinct ways across different contexts, its general form is also evident in Finland. Typical welfare measures such as unemployment benefits are rendered individual responsibility under entrepreneurship as a labor market status. Correspondingly, structural issues such as racism also become consigned to “the personal domain,” or a matter of individual tolerance or lack thereof (Carmo et al., 2021, p. 28). While racism had been explained as an “occupational hazard” for business owners subject to processes of differentiation, this must be understood in specific relation to capitalist development in Finland, lest it be reduced to an interpersonal impulse (Ishaq et al., 2010, p. 377).

As Kundnani (2023, pp. 4–5) argues, structural racism is not the mere sum of prejudiced individuals within institutions but is actively mediated by capitalism’s tendency to differentiate workers. While I will consider the concept of racial capitalism, I remain cautious about its theoretical premise as elaborated by Robinson (2000) and will instead focus on the term “capitalist racism” to more precisely describe how capitalism and racism are co-mediated. Particularly, such an approach would lend us a more nuanced analysis of how the promotion of entrepreneurship under neoliberal persuasion does not merely place the burden of (un)employability onto immigrants but also makes them responsible for the very structural racism that produces such abysmal prospects in the first place. Under neoliberalism, the traditional role of the Finnish state as a regulator of business, labour, and welfare is subordinated to the forces of the free market, which it now facilitates and insulates “from democratic pressures” (Slobodian, 2018, p. 4). Thus, instead of alleviatory measures, the state regularly “exercise[s] its right *not* to regulate labour recruitment practices” and instead perpetuates and sustains economic and racial disparities that enable a steady supply of cheap, flexible labour (Martin and Prokkola, 2017, p. 150).

While many Finnish immigrant entrepreneurship studies take a mixed embeddedness approach (Kloosterman et al., 1999), or how ethnic, migrant, or immigrant entrepreneurial activities are dually embedded in the structures and social networks of the community, city, or country in which they conduct business, they do not situate these structures and their development in relation to capitalism nor contend with how capitalist racism mediates this embeddedness (e.g. Yeasmin and Koivurova, 2019). Thus, ethnic, migrant, or immigrant entrepreneurship in Finland is portrayed in individualistic terms, where the success or failure of the business becomes located in the

individual entrepreneur’s incapacity to access capital or in the lack of institutional awareness, rather than in the processes of racial differentiation that affect their abilities to do so. There then appears to be two forces at play: 1) institutional encouragement of entrepreneurship, and 2) institutional blockages to entrepreneurship. Taken at its appearance, this implies that if Finnish institutions were more primed to encounter a foreigner, then the experience of entrepreneurship would be better facilitated. However, an analysis of racism and capitalism together would problematize this further to showcase how entrepreneurship has not produced integration but rather the concentration of certain immigrants in low-margin sectors, or a deeper entrenchment of the racial division of labour.

The state of the Finnish labour market has not changed since 2015. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment reported that in December 2023, the number of unemployed foreign job seekers in Finland surpassed 44,000, the highest figure ever recorded (Laitinen, 2024). Accordingly, entrepreneurship is put forth as a remedy for the shortcomings of a discriminatory and racist labour market, which does not easily permit the integration of immigrants. Analysing fifteen semi-structured interviews through a critical engagement with capitalism and racism studies, this chapter will subject to scrutiny the assumption that entrepreneurship resolves the systemic errors of the labour market. The chapter will be structured as follows. First, a brief overview of the Finnish context is provided. Second, the theoretical framework of capitalist racism, under the broader theme of racial capitalism, will be explored in direct relation to immigrant entrepreneurship in Finland. Third, methodological processes and concerns are offered before a detailed analysis of the empirical material is put forth.

2 From Welfare Provision to Market Facilitation: Finland in Context

The Finnish welfare state developed later than its Nordic counterparts due to the country’s delayed industrialization, which only acquired momentum in the mid-20th century (Jäntti and Vartiainen, 2009). Unlike Sweden, which established robust welfare provisions alongside early industrial expansion, Finland remained largely agrarian until after WWII (Kettunen, 2019, p. 226). Finnish employers, especially manufacturers, resisted collective agreements with trade unions until WWII, while Sweden, Denmark, and Norway had high unionization rates by the 1930s (Kettunen, 2001, p. 230). Finland, by contrast, experienced more economic and political volatility, namely the civil (or class) war in 1918 followed by the Winter War and the Continuation War in 1939 and

1941 respectively. The postwar period saw the consolidation of a Nordic welfare model, but its foundation was always more precarious, as it had to balance late-industrial development with external economic pressures.

The dismantlement of welfare in Finland started with the deregulation of financial markets in the 1980s, precipitated by the economic crises of the 1970s, interpreted as an indictment of Keynesian policies (Outinen, 2017, pp. 398–400). In Sweden, the previously agreed-upon approach to capital-labour relations (spirit of Saltsjöbaden) fell apart in the wake of this seismic shift in “market forces”, which repoliticized the role of labour-market organizations (Kettunen, 2001, p. 246). On the other hand, national consensus in Finland was reaffirmed not only by conservative parties and employer federations but also the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Confederation of Finnish Unions (SAK), in which practical solutions to enhance competition, fiscal discipline, and labour flexibility were considered a “rational” response to capital flight (Outinen, 2017, p. 401). Notably, the economic depression of the early 1990s in Finland lent legitimacy to retrenchment policies.

Furthermore, Finland’s membership in the European Union and the European Monetary Union, of which it is the “most integrationist of the Nordic states,” had made its welfare policies more susceptible to external shocks (Jokela, 2015, p. 27 & p. 30). In comparison to Sweden, which retained its own currency and thus greater monetary flexibility, the adoption of the euro in Finland has limited its ability to devalue or float its currency in response to economic turmoil. Instead, internal devaluation, in the form of wage suppression, surfaces as a key policy tool (Dølvik and Oldervoll, 2019, p. 217). Crucially, Finnish competition policy has worked to reduce the cost of labour since 2015; “excessive labour cost growth” in Finnish industries was located as a partial reason for their “subpar export performance” after the Eurocrisis (Kaitila, 2018, p. 3). Both Sweden and Finland, however, are still constrained by what is now a globalized capitalism: even Sweden, with an older welfare state, has faced pressures within the European Union to adhere to the neoliberal framework of fiscal austerity and market competition albeit with more autonomy (Jensen and Davidsen, 2015, p. 195).

To better understand globalized capitalism, it is important to consider since the 1960s, the rise of information technology has been a key force that has modified the structure of work internationally. As digital technologies advanced, the nature of production and the capital-labour relations co-constituted with the former have fundamentally altered in Finland, which has led to more decentralized and flexible work arrangements (Koskinen, 2022, p. 25). Information technology has facilitated the outsourcing of jobs and the fragmentation of

work across borders, enabling companies to tap into global labour markets for cheaper, more efficient production: “Advances in technology—in transport, communications, information and data processing and organization—rendered geographical distances irrelevant and made possible the movement of plant to labour, while ensuring centralized control of production” (Sivanandan, 1979, p. 113). These shifts have also eroded traditional labour protections, as work becomes more splintered and less regulated.

In Finland, non-standard employment—including agency work, fixed-term contracts, part-time jobs, project-based positions, and self-employment—accounted for 31 percent of all jobs in 2015 and has steadily increased since 2000 (Ojala et al., 2021, p. 97). Moreover, the global interconnectedness fostered by information technology means that national economies are increasingly subsumed into transnational flows of capital and labour, which makes it difficult for any single nation-state to regulate or control these processes (Patnaik, 2020, p. 40). The nation-state, once able to exert capital control with protectionist policies and shield labour with welfare provisions, now finds its regulatory power diminished. Instead, the nation-state assumes a neoliberal direction and works to facilitate the market, which in Finland has not meant a complete dissolution of the Nordic welfare model. Rather, the welfare state has been able to maintain its form, but tripartite negotiation and consensus policy have been repurposed to fulfil market-driven priorities instead (Wuokko, 2019).

A clear example of this development can be discerned in relation to Nokia, whose technological success was buttressed by *public* research and development (R&D) and venture capital, the outcomes of which were *privately* captured (Ornston, 2014, p. 468). The Finnish state made a series of concessions for Nokia, such as the 2010 university reform, and effectively created a scenario where state priorities became synonymous with market needs (Lindén, 2021, pp. 31–32). These capitulations, ultimately, did not prevent Nokia’s later decision to shift operations to China. However, Nokia’s failure to adapt in the face of changing technological trends—such as the rise of smartphones—coupled with bureaucratic inefficiencies inevitably spelled its collapse (Pajarinen & Rouvinen, 2013, p. 6). Nokia’s decline underlines the limitations of a state model that is heavily embedded with corporate interests, in which “the public sector socializes risks, while rewards are privatized” (Mazzucato, 2013). Despite these shortcomings, however, globalized capital leaves little room for alternative approaches and requires state compliance with its imperatives of competition, fiscal discipline, and labour flexibility (Ferguson, 2016, p. 51).

This has also contributed to an ideological shift in which ‘entrepreneurs’ and ‘small businesses’ are now heralded as the impetus of the Finnish economy, despite the reality that they often face precarious conditions and are not the backbone of economic growth empirically. Large companies in Finland have a significantly higher rate of productivity and contribute substantially to the value of total exports and imports (TEM, 2022, pp. 12, 37). Historically, small businesses in Finland have been resistant to state regulation of capital-labour relations: “The benefits that trade unions could acquire for their members often came at a particularly high cost for small companies, which had fewer resources to comply with them” (Jensen-Eriksen, 2024, p. 12). In the conditions specific to industrial capitalism, employer federations in Finland conceded to the January Engagement and thus tripartite negotiation as a means to stabilize labour unrest and revive mass production, which in turn supported the welfare state. However, under global capitalism, where production is increasingly fragmented and capital is highly mobile, the preoccupations of small business have been usurped by corporations and the nation-state as in the interest of a competitive economy. This is best reflected in the Proposal for an Entrepreneurship Strategy under the Sipilä cabinet, where “the legal right to conclude agreements that deviate from the provisions of collective agreements” is first presented as beneficial to the small business, before it is to be applicable to all enterprises for the sake of “linear business growth” (TEM, 2018, pp. 94–96).

The rhetoric of ‘think small first’ does not serve to undermine the parasitic relationship between corporations and small businesses but rather takes aim at state intervention in capital-labour relations (Waterhouse, 2017). What is of particular importance is that the corporation’s shape has transformed as well: “Spinning off their financing, distribution, advertising, human resources, and customer service functions to the lowest bidder, many of the world’s biggest businesses are today little more than coordinators of a massive network of nodes” (ibid.). This dissemination of corporate power facilitates a new dynamic in which capital flows extend beyond national borders, and the threat of capital flight is omnipresent. In this dynamic, the Finnish state increasingly seeks to cheapen the cost of labour to remain attractive in the competition-driven global market. Entrepreneurship aligns seamlessly with the new globalized economic order, in which it conjures the “continual ‘adjustment’ of labour,” a process that disproportionately affects non-white, non-EU/EAA workers who are structurally positioned to bear the brunt of economic precarity (Sotiropoulos, Milios, & Lapatsioras, 2013, p. 192). This new economic landscape, with its emphasis on entrepreneurship and welfare retrenchment, also

intersects with deeper issues of capitalist racism and immigration. This will be covered in the next section.

3 Capitalist Racism, Immigration, and Entrepreneurship

The term ‘racial capitalism’ is best associated with Cedric Robinson (1983) and his seminal work, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, the republication of which in 2000 has been the subject of academic debate and praise. Robinson argues that capitalism did not mark a sharp departure from or a negation of feudalism but instead represents an extension of feudal racial hierarchies and social relations into the economic and political systems of the modern world. He contends that racialism is an endogenous feature of Western civilization, which runs “deep in the bowels of Europe,” and accordingly “the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions” (Robinson, 2000, p. 60 & p. 3).

In this work, Robinson (2000, p. 317) takes critical aim at Western Marxism, which he considers as “insufficiently radical to expose and root out the racialist order that contaminates its analytic and philosophic applications.” Instead, he transposes a Black radical tradition, defined dubiously around “one Black collective identity” (ibid.). What is peculiar is that, while Robinson draws from W. E. B. Du Bois and C. L. R. James as examples of this tradition, he fails to account for their serious commitment to “working-class solidarity across the colour-line for human emancipation” (Satgar, 2019, p. 12). Furthermore, the relationship of capitalism, racism, and slavery has been a serious consideration for not only Marx, for example in his work on the American Civil War, but also for *Black* and Third World figures such as Amílcar Cabral, Henry Haywood, Claudia Jones, and Walter Rodney who found in Marxism a theory of liberation. These figures do not appear in Robinson’s text, whose radical contribution is not accounted for in the Black tradition. While he attributes the term ‘racial capitalism’ to the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, he neither engages with the historical specificities from which that term was developed and leveraged.

In the South African tradition (SAT) of racial capitalism, Levenson and Paret (2023, p. 3407) note, it was “never argued that all capitalism is racial, but rather, that capitalism assumes a racial guise under specific conditions.” The task, instead, becomes “to reveal the conditions under which capitalism becomes racial” (ibid., p. 3406). Importantly, SAT considers racism as firmly rooted in exploitation or economic reasons first, until it matures into “a serious problem

on its own” (ibid., p. 3409). To say that capitalist development in Finland from its inception assumed a racial guise is an overestimation; the relationship of capitalism and racism did not develop similarly in Finland as it did in South Africa or the United States. This historical purview is outside the scope of this study, but I will focus my attention on racism as it relates to Finland in the contemporary moment: globalized capitalism. I will opt to use the term ‘capitalist racism,’ largely to distinguish it from Robinson’s theorization, which instead showcases the inextricability of capitalism and racism in accordance to SAT.

Categories produced by racism are not inherently meaningful, lest we also incorporate the processes by which these categories become productive: “[T]hese categories of difference obscure the processes of differential value making that sort humanity into various designations of value and valuelessness because such categories come into being after the value making and merely describe (and thus reify) the effects of the process” (Melamed, 2011, p. xiv). To shift attention to the process as opposed to the effect, and ultimately to reconnect racism to material conditions, it is pertinent to include an analysis of capitalism. What ‘unifies’ these processes of differential value formation, in this particular historical conjecture, is the capitalist social whole in which these processes become “a source of capital’s power” and in which alternative practices become difficult to imagine (Mau, 2019, p. 26; McNally and Ferguson, 2015). More succinctly, as Kundnani (2023, p. 262) writes, “capitalism generates the structure in structural racism” or capitalist racism. This dynamic is grossly unacknowledged and often fiercely contested in Finland (Puuronen, 2011).

The Finnish state’s embrace of entrepreneurship as a solution to immigrant integration and labour market exclusion must be understood in the broader implications wrought by globalized capitalism and its reconfigurations of labour relations nationally. As the previous section outlined, the Finnish welfare state emerged late compared to its Nordic counterparts and has since been reshaped by global economic pressures following the emergence of information technology. The structural transformations brought about by these forces—the flexibilization of labour, the fragmentation of production, and the state’s reorientation toward market facilitation—have not only eroded traditional labour protections but have also fundamentally altered the conditions under which immigrant workers participate in the Finnish economy. The shifting role of the nation-state thus reinforces a hierarchy of labour underpinned by racism, where non-white, non-EU/EEA workers are disproportionately positioned in precarious forms of self-employment, serving as the buffer or as ‘interchangeable items’ for an economy increasingly structured around global capital flows (Rodríguez, 2018, p. 15). Rather than a means of genuine economic inclusion or even prosperity, entrepreneurship is deployed as a

mechanism to absorb the instability and precarity generated by the disintegration of traditional employment relations (Tavares, 2018).

With the dissolution of corporate power into networks of nodes and the state's shift from regulator to facilitator of market imperatives, immigrant labour becomes a key site for maintaining labour market flexibility and suppressing wage growth (Pal Singh and Grover, 2018). This is simultaneous to concerted attacks on the labour market protections of Finnish workers. But even this orientation appears fruitless, provided “the systemic need to expel living labour from the production process” is at the heart of capital's inner movement and with it “the systematic proliferation of human need itself, unmet and denied”—which led Frederic Jameson to remark “*Capital* is simply a book about unemployment” (Best, 2024, p. 50 & p. 46). This arrangement benefits domestic employers, who gain access to a cheap and disposable workforce from which to compel the so-termed ‘native’ workforce into similar conditions, and also transnational capital, which relies on the continued flexibilization of labor markets to maintain competitiveness (Lillie and Sippola, 2011, p. 150). Ultimately, the sorting of immigrants into precarious self-employment on racial terms exposes how migration is not simply a demographic phenomenon but a structurally embedded process within contemporary capitalism: one that reinforces racial hierarchies and serves the broader imperatives of market-driven governance (Ziadah and Hanieh, 2023).

Accordingly, as a response to the 8,000 asylum applications received, various labour market organizations released a statement in September 2015 that condemned racism of all forms but especially in relation to the workplace, emphasizing that “Finland will need a new labour force in the future, also from abroad” (“Labour market organisations condemn racism,” 2015). This statement, which was published on the Ministry of Finance website, effectively confirmed what had been common knowledge for years before: the Finnish labour market discriminates and sorts candidates through an “ethnic hierarchy” that prioritizes Finnish persons and persons from countries incorporated in the European Union (EU) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Heikkilä, 2005; Ahmad, 2020).

A year later, in 2016, saw the “From Immigrant to Entrepreneur Tour” in different asylum reception centres across the country. While asylum seekers can only seek gainful employment, or a salaried relationship with an employer, and cannot work as entrepreneurs, this does not foreclose that they cannot already be primed for an entrepreneurial career upon acquiring a residence permit. Organized by the Confederation of Finnish Industries, the Employment and Economic Development Office, the Finnish Enterprise Agencies, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the event

suggested entrepreneurship as a “natural path to Finnish working life” (“From Immigrant to Entrepreneur”, 2016). Asylum seekers become refugees, once granted asylum. Accordingly, around the same time, the Finnish Immigration Service and the Ministry of Interior financially sponsored the work of Startup Refugees as well. Established in 2015, also in response to the record number of asylum applications received, Startup Refugees provides employment and entrepreneurship support to asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants in order to facilitate the fastest possible route to integration. Thus, at all stages of mobility, from immigrant to asylum seeker and refugee, Finland now encourages entrepreneurship.

According to Finnish policy, entrepreneurship will attract skilled labour, create employment and prosperity, increase investment and productivity, and integrate refugees and immigrants. Of the 277,000 self-employed persons in Finland, 191,000 are self-employed without employees (Statistics Finland, 2021). Out of the 443,731 companies in Finland, 95 percent employ less than 10 persons (“Entrepreneurship in Finland,” 2024). Forty-four percent of entrepreneurs report earnings of less than 2,000 euros, whereas the average salary in Finland is approximately 3,500 euros per month (“Many entrepreneurs earning under 2K,” 2022).

In a survey conducted specifically on immigrant entrepreneurs by the Federation of Finnish Enterprises, there is a corresponding overrepresentation of micro enterprises (92 percent) and single person businesses (48 percent) (Keisala-Kaseja et al., 2018). More than half of the respondents reported an annual turnover of 30,000 euros or less, and 29 percent reported earnings of less than 10,000 euros. Fornaro (2018) demonstrates an inverse relationship between labour market conditions and the foreign resident share of new entrepreneurs. As in, immigrant entrepreneurship is seemingly a necessity measure to prevent unemployment, as opposed to a freely chosen pursuit for innovation or a “natural” path.

Moreover, immigrants tend to initiate business operations in low-margin sectors, often due to limited access to financial capital. In general, immigrant entrepreneurs demonstrate lesser earnings than Finnish entrepreneurs; this is a direct result of their overconcentration in the service sector (Fornaro, 2018, p. 11). While the Entrepreneurship Strategy praises the capacity of entrepreneurship to attract skilled labour and increase productivity, it reaches an impasse in relation to immigrant entrepreneurship, where low-waged, low-productivity job creation is praised and even naturalized. The strategy writes, “Companies with an immigrant background have created a relatively large number of low productivity and low wage jobs” (Yrittäjyysstrategia, 2022, p. 30). It even argues

that “[i]mmigrants in business are happy to employ other immigrants” to said “low-productivity and low wage jobs” (ibid).

The term “immigrant” cannot properly elaborate neither the class differences nor the processes of racism that produce “differential exposure to precarious working and living conditions,” while it remains attached to some groups over others (Martin & Prokkola, 2017, p. 145): “‘Racial’ meanings can be implicitly conveyed as the unspoken subtext in terms such as ‘ethnicity,’ ‘immigrant,’ or ‘refugee.’ The association of these categories with ‘non-white’ and ‘non-Western origins’ has been identified by many scholars” (Leinonen & Toivanen, 2014, p. 153). For example, Heikkilä and Yeasmin (2021, pp. 192–193) compared the labour market situation of German and Somali workers. German workers were concentrated in managerial and professional jobs, whereas Somali workers were located in service and sales positions. Thus, in this strategy, “immigrant” appears as a stand-in for non-white persons from the Global South as opposed to intra-EU persons, who are in better labour market positions.

In fact, Forsander (2003, p. 68) showcases how nationality is a critical factor in immigrant labour market integration in Finland, where “labour market status of refugees and of those who immigrated from developing countries was shown to be weakest.” Additionally, Finnish employers were shown to undervalue educational credentials acquired abroad. Indeed, fixed-term and part-time employment are more common among immigrant workers (Statistics Finland, 2015). Furthermore, Könönen (2017, p. 62) writes how immigration law strongly determines labour market composition and structure in Finland, where “restrictions target low-paid work” and “a faster and less burdensome bureaucratic process” is in place for managerial positions and skilled work. Wide (2023, p. 917) connects this to the flexibilization of the labour market as a result of neoliberal reform in Finland, where conditional and temporary work residency permits often confine the applicant to a specific sector: “[S]omeone who obtains a work permit for private domestic work can only apply for other jobs as a domestic worker under that permit.” Effectively, Finnish immigration law buttresses the national and ultimately racial division of labour, where non-white, Global South persons have come to constitute a cheap labour force. Accordingly, as Jones et al. (2014, p. 515) argue, “[T]he over-exposure of immigrants to problematic forms of self-employment needs to be traced back to previous labour market discrimination against them as employees.”

As noted in the previous section, non-standard employment has steadily increased since 2000. Light entrepreneurship, in which workers invoice clients through intermediary platforms, represents a particularly precarious form of employment that lacks legal protections. One in four light entrepreneurs are

of foreign origin (Sten-Gahmberg and Riekhoff, 2024, p. 7). Reports from the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation have documented multiple cases in which foreign workers were misclassified as light entrepreneurs without their knowledge, allowing employers to evade labour protections while reducing wage costs (“Police suspect human trafficking”, 2023). While the subcontracting firms that facilitated their employment were held legally liable, the companies under which the victims worked were not. What is of concern here is that the exploitation of cheap, non-Finnish labour is not met with punitive enforcement. Rather, punitive enforcement is politicized, where crime control “may jeopardize the effective functioning of capitalism since both employers and consumers benefit from cheap labour” – an entirely “[un]feasible option in a neoliberal ideology of de-regulation and privatization” (Ollus, 2016, p. 75).

4 Methodology

Initially, this study aimed to explore how racism shaped the process of entrepreneurship for non-white, non-Finnish persons. Helsinki and Turku were chosen as sites of the study, because each city hosts a sizeable population of foreign language speakers, Finland’s official category for non-Finnish persons. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews acted as the primary method of data collection. Fifteen interviews, consisting of Afghan, Indian, Japanese, Malaysian, Mexican, Nigerian, Pakistani, Senegalese, Somali, and Vietnamese business owners, were conducted from November 2021 to February 2022. Interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half, and based on the preferences and availability of the participants, took place either in person or virtually. To recruit participants, I utilized my personal networks, contacted community-based organizations such as the Finland-Somalia Association and the Finnish-Thai Association, and employed snowball sampling.

Participants were made aware of the study’s purpose, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any point. Interviews were conducted in English, then transcribed verbatim. All identifiable information was removed, and pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality and privacy. Data was then entered into NVivo for analysis after pseudonymization. Because the study focuses on processes of race and racism, I collected special categories of personal data related to ethnic identity and religious beliefs. As a result, I underwent mandatory ethical review by the Ethics Committee for Human Sciences at the University of Turku and received institutional approval of the study. Special categories of personal data can only be processed with the

explicit consent of the participant, which I expressly stated in initial outreach and in the interview. All 15 participants provided explicit consent. An ethical concern that arises with ethnicity related data collection is the potential reification of ethnicity or race as biological constructs. To avoid this reification, the research does not put forth ethnic or racial categories as “taken-for-granted, natural, or neutral” but considers them in direct relation to social processes and structures that engender such categorizations in the first place (Salway et al., 2009, p. 2).

To analyse the interview data, I employed thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves six phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 594) later developed reflexive thematic analysis, which provided a flexible yet rigorous framework for identifying patterns of meaning within the participants’ accounts as well as researcher subjectivity: “Themes do not passively emerge from either data or coding; they are not ‘in’ the data, waiting to be identified and retrieved by the researcher. Themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher’s theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves.” My initial coding was informed by literature on racial discrimination, which largely frames racism as an interpersonal phenomenon that manifests as explicit bias, microaggressions, or exclusionary practices (Kundnani, 2023, p. 174). Where structure or system is concerned, it is not rigorously considered in relation to capitalism, but rather as an abstract force. Accordingly, my first set of codes reflected this perspective, capturing instances where participants described racist encounters with customers or employees in different institutions that they encountered. However, as the coding process progressed, it became evident that participants often downplayed these interpersonal forms of racism, instead highlighting systemic barriers as more consequential.

Yet, even within participants discussions of systemic racism, the focus remained on the cumulative effects of individual actions rather than the structural imperatives that produce and reproduce racial inequality. Many recognized that something larger was at play—an unfair system that perpetuated their exclusion—but could not articulate more specifically its characteristics. I, too, as a researcher, initially found myself grappling with the same limitation. It was only through deeper engagement with literature on the history of the Finnish welfare state and its retrenchment, the fragmentation of work and the promotion of entrepreneurship, the nation-state in the wake of globalization, and the relationship of capitalism and racism that I could begin to name what

was otherwise felt but not fully grasped: that capitalism does not randomly or sporadically intersect with racial inequality, but actively structures and sustains it. This framing is not incidental and reflects how capitalism presents itself, through the appearance of individual agency and market neutrality, while concealing the ways in which racial differentiation is embedded in its very logic of accumulation.

I iteratively moved between the data and my theoretical framework, allowing insights from participants' narratives to reshape my analytical categories. As coding progressed, I grouped related codes into broader themes, such as "entrepreneurship as necessity," "interpersonal vs. systemic racism," and "capitalist racism as personal responsibility." Reflexivity was central to this process; I continuously examined how my theoretical assumptions influenced the identification and interpretation of themes, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' lived realities. This approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how capitalism and racism co-mediated the experience of immigrant entrepreneurship, moving beyond surface-level descriptions to interrogate the deeper structures at play. This was especially the case in the final theme, "the case of Hamza," which exclusively concerns one participant's experience as a refugee-turned-entrepreneur. His story laid bare how state policies that claim to promote integration instead operate as mechanisms of economic coercion, which made an analysis of capitalism not just relevant but necessary. Without it, the structural conditions that shape immigrant entrepreneurship would remain obscured, appearing as mere individual hardship rather than as part of a broader system of labour discipline and exploitation on racial terms.

While the study relies on the narratives provided by interviewees, it does not treat them as transparent windows into reality. Following Bourdieu (1999) and Ågotnes et al. (2019, p. 210), I recognize that interview accounts are not simply "true" or objective representations of reality but are shaped by ideological framings, power relations, and social positions, and thus an overreliance on taking respondents' narratives at face value is dissuaded. Rather, accounts must always be situated within broader structures that shape what can be said, how it is said, and what remains unsaid (Ågotnes et al., 2019, pp. 209–210). This necessitates a methodological approach that oscillates between individual experience and structural analysis, including researcher subjectivity, which neatly fit into reflexive thematic analysis. Thus, while participants often framed their entrepreneurial struggles through narratives that emphasized personal resilience and hard work, I considered how these narratives were themselves shaped by neoliberal capitalist discourses that prioritize individual solutions over structural change. This back-and-forth movement between subjective

accounts and structural conditions ensured that the analysis did not reproduce an individualized understanding of entrepreneurship but instead located these experiences within the material and ideological constraints imposed by capitalism and systemic racism.

As I analysed the data, I was mindful of the concepts described by Whittle and Reissner (2024) in their conceptualization of the ‘epistemological leap.’ They define this as the inferential process through which researchers transition from the analysed data to claims about phenomena beyond the interview situation. In this study, the epistemological leap falls under the ‘power effect’ mode, where participants’ responses are understood as illuminative of prevailing ideologies and social structures, especially those rooted in capitalism and racism. However, this power effect is not unidirectional or deterministic. Participants are not passive recipients of these ideologies or structures; rather, they negotiate and respond to these structures in diverse ways that sometimes exceed or subvert them, and other times comply with their limitations. This dynamic allowed me to see the ways in which immigrant entrepreneurs navigate the structures of capitalism and racism, finding agency within or against the constraints imposed on them.

5 Analysis

5.1 *Entrepreneurship as Choice or Necessity*

A majority of interviewees presented a linear trajectory from service work to self-employment. Halima, a Somali healthcare contractor, worked as a nurse; Dike, a Nigerian restaurant owner, worked as a cleaner; and Mamadou, a Senegalese restaurant owner, worked as a cook. There are more examples, but entrepreneurship for many was a choice made in pursuit of autonomy and class mobility. Former experiences in the service industry, where they felt devalued or not cared for, led to self-employment. For others, job insecurity in skilled work such as the university, led to the same decision. Usman, who is developing a food delivery service, came to Finland as a student from Pakistan. He is now a doctoral researcher but is stressed by a difficult and intense labour market, and continues to work as a food delivery driver on the weekends to fund his company that will purportedly act as an ethical alternative to Foodora and Wolt:

The drivers, their interest is money. My interest is that drivers would have like a secure job. Because Wolt and Foodora have already exploited the situation among the drivers because they are giving them money rather

than giving them benefits, because they [the drivers] keep their mind on the money. We are building a company where we would offer like more secure employment.

Similarly, Bilal, a Pakistani cleaning service owner, is also a doctoral researcher but unfunded. He opened his business after gigs as a newspaper delivery person, where he worked shifts from 2AM to 6AM, and as a cleaner:

I felt that it was better to have your own business at least, then you can have that sort of freedom that whenever or whatever you want to do. So that was the main motivation to start my own company. Because in cleaning companies, they also try to try to manipulate I would say the workers.

While many “chose” entrepreneurship, it does not appear to be an entirely independent decision but one shaped by structural factors, either a direct consequence of a lack of employment opportunities in the labour market or exploitative and stressful conditions in the employment that was secured. Lan, a Vietnamese grocery store owner, also arrived in Finland as a student:

I don't think there are many opportunity or possibility to do what we really want to do. I used to be a student here, but I know so many students who will come to Finland for study. After their study, there are so narrow opportunities. They don't have a lot of opportunity or they don't have any choice. I think a career, it's very difficult for a foreigner to find a decent job, like an office job to do something related to what you study. Very difficult. Most of the time, people have to go on kind of like cleaning, like do all kind of blue-collar work. *Or if you don't want to do that kind of job, you have to open your own company.*

Tómas, a Mexican, self-employed graphic designer, was extensively trained in his line of work back in Mexico but experienced two years of unemployment. His education and work experience did not translate as recognized qualifications in the Finnish labour market:

So I think one thing that I believe but I cannot prove it, but I'm pretty sure that when they see that your degree is from a Latin country or like other countries that are not in the European Union or USA, Canada and Japan, something like that. Then they really like don't pay attention to your cv or your profile.

Tomás' experience with the TE office was also less than favourable, when he could not secure employment in graphic design. The TE employee repeatedly suggested work in the food industry as an option to him, based on temporary gigs he had undertaken at different restaurants to make money.

But it's not my expertise. I don't want to become a restaurant owner. It's not my job. I want to be a designer. And she was like, 'Why? You should just get a job there.' I was like shocked. They are supposed to help you with your career, but they just want to get rid of you. She didn't move or blink. She was like, 'The restaurant work, isn't it easy?' And I was like, 'No, it's horrible!'

Even the work of entrepreneurship appears to be bifurcated along class lines, which is especially evident in the two residence permits possible for entrepreneurial work: entrepreneurship resident permit or startup residence permit. Umar, an Indonesian technology marketing company owner, lives in Finland under the latter permit and described the difference as such:

A startup residence permit needs this validation from Business Finland. They'll give you this letter saying, 'This business is a good business. It's scalable, and the founders are good. They can execute this.' So this letter really helped us in many of the processes, including this, like making a bank account. So the difference between a startup and a normal traditional business is usually it's like software based, something scalable. So if I'm a hairdresser or I open a restaurant, I cannot be a startup residence permit person. I have to go in the traditional entrepreneur one.

5.2 *Experiences of Racism: Interpersonal to Structural*

At the interpersonal level, interviewees recounted various experiences of 'underestimation,' a form of everyday racism identified by Essed (1991, p. 20) in which non-white people are seen as "less intelligent and less competent." Dike recounted how a customer demanded to speak to the 'Finnish owner':

A lady came. She came and said, 'Hey, can I speak to your manager?' She says, 'I want to speak to the owner now.' And I said, 'You are talking to the owner now.' Then she looked from head to toe, 'I mean the Finnish owner.' I looked at her and switched to Finnish: 'There is no Finnish owner.' You mean an African person is not good enough to own a restaurant? So it has to be owned by a Finnish person!

Similarly, Halima described instances in which she was met with surprise for her business acumen and intelligence:

When they see you, for example me as a smart woman, they say, 'Yeah, I didn't know that Somalis were like, well educated.' They have a different imagination, you know? I just say, 'Well, we have, we have so many educated and successful ones.'

Additionally, interviewees whose businesses have a social media presence recounted racist comments left by anonymous persons. Lan, for example, received an Instagram comment from an anonymous user: "Who wants to eat that ching-chang food?" Zeinab, a Somali, self-employed DEI consultant, describes how the contact form on her business website is regularly used to leave comments that she sees as 'hate speech':

[T]here had been some hate speech unfortunately that people will make the effort to send me. I will get some emails that are not so nice, but that is part of my work. Dealing with a hard topic like diversity, inclusion, race stuff, some people can get really mad and they see this as a threat, so they make this type of comments.

Interviewees that have been integrated into the start-up ecosystem in both cities, such as Maria O1 in Helsinki and Business Turku, approached the question of racism differently. Madhavan, an Indian telecommunications company owner, considered differentiation as an intrinsic quality of human nature:

I don't think Indians are treated differently in Finland. See, feeling racism or feeling racist is a personal perception. See, you say something. The way I take it is different, the way a Finn takes it is different. A Somali might take it as different. The Iranian or Kurdish will take it as different. It comes from our background. I have been exposed to such kind of inequality, discrimination, casteism, or you call it what you want. I have been exposed to every kind of grouping. So I think it's part of life. It's human nature. Human cannot see everything as one, they'll find a reason to group things together.

Umar remarks that racism is too easily used to categorize bad experiences in the business creation process:

I think sometimes people are also quick to label any bad experiences with that racism label, even though it may not be related to that. So, an

example would be, I'm a business, I'm trying to get Finnish clients, but why do no Finnish people want to buy my service? If you take the racism angle, you will instantly jump to 'It's because I'm a foreigner.' But when you take a step back, and really analyse the business situation, maybe your solution might not be the best fit. One really difficult question that I got asked is, someone asked me in an event, 'Why would I trust my Finnish brand with two non-Finnish people who doesn't speak Finnish?' It's a fair question, and it's a question which you need to have the answer for, because if they were to ask me to make content in Finnish, like me as a person, I wouldn't be able to do it.

While different interpretations of interpersonal accounts of racism and discrimination were offered, there was a broader consensus among interviewees that structural racism was of greater consequence for their material reality. Usman describes how discrimination from 'the upper level' determines whether he can attain secure or insecure employment:

The discrimination is not on the lower level. Discrimination is always on the upper level. You cannot apply for a permanent job, you apply for lower level contracts because that is what you'll get. When you are applying for the permanent positions, you can feel that there is discrimination. The situation is like that.

Likewise, Tomás considers the detrimental effects of bureaucratic racism on a person's ability to work effectively:

I don't think the racism and discrimination, it's from people to people. It's more like the bureaucratic processes. And that's a problem already, because if you don't have time or money to pay the rent or you don't have the basic needs covered, then it's going to be really hard that you are even like mentally stable to do a good job. Racism and discrimination, I think it's more structural than the individual to individual.

This is shared by Halima, for whom interpersonal racism fades in comparison to racist systems that threaten career and thus livelihood:

You know, that's the worst thing because the hate speech is something that stupid people just say you know out there, but you can see, the people who are like behind the doors, you know, tries to block other people's, you know, careers and everything. And that's I think that's the worst thing.

Ultimately, while interpersonal racism has caused frustration in interviewees, the institutions, structures, and systems through which different interviewees mediated business ownership were considered materially decisive and thus significant. Dike describes Finland, rather than one person, as “corrupt” and as a country that forces foreigners into precarious cycles of debt and stress:

So you can just imagine if somebody ... maybe the whole family is working depending on the business ... and you're told to go on social support ... you know people are used to getting their hard earned money. You still kept them in debt, cause they still have to pay the things they owe. So it's not easy at all ... it's really hard to have a business in this country.

5.3 *Capitalist Racism as Personal Responsibility*

Numerous interviewees recounted what they termed as differential treatment from various institutions that interfered either in the official registration of the business or within day-to-day operations, which would directly impede in profit creation. Furthermore, the existing infrastructure was criticized for its lack of accommodation of the English language, such as in customs.

Lan regularly imports products from different Asian countries to sell in her store. For each import, she is required to pay a tax online, but this has proven difficult since the relevant website is offered only in Finnish or Swedish.

Before you buy imported products, you have to go the government website and make the custom clearance. You have to pay tax on the website. And that website doesn't have English. It only has Finnish or Swedish. And it's so difficult, it's very difficult for me at the beginning trying to look in and try to pay everything by myself. I even called the officer and she said, 'Yeah, I don't think you can do this because we don't have English.' Yeah. Like everything, simply designed not for foreigner. Just for the people who are born and raised here.

For Abdul, a Pakistani grocery store owner, customs complications have resulted in the confiscation and disposal of imported products. He explains that customs officers approach products from countries like India with more suspicion, and the process is non-negotiable and costly.

They ask too much questions if you order from another country. India for example. They make it difficult. If a little bit, something is missing, they object and they send it back or throw it away. We say check it again, they say no. We stopped buying it from India, even though it is cheaper. Yeah,

you never know when they reject it, what's going on. We have lost a lot of money. Buying from Holland is easier.

On the other hand, for Dike, it was food safety inspectors that caused a delayed opening and loss of income. Dike claims that food safety inspectors in Finland expect uncleanness from foreign restaurants and recounts an experience where his restaurant was shut down for two days after a bad inspection score that he believes occurred on problematic rationale.

Inspectors ... like when they go to a foreign restaurant before even getting in there and they see the reality that ... wow, this is not what they are expecting ... the place is clean, it is neat and everything. They try to find all kinds of excuses to give us a hard time. Anyways, this one time, two came and they gave us a bad score. They wanted our spices to be in IKEA bags and not the bags they come in. So it took us two days, they came again, we passed. Well if you don't do this, in Finland, we can shut down ... you know, they threaten people. And you know, each time they come, you have to pay. So that's a way of getting money from you as well and it's not cheap.

Apart from untransparent assessments or processes in customs and food safety, banks posed the most significant problem for nearly half of the interviewees. Every business requires a business ID to process income and transactions, which are applied for at a bank of one's choice. However, if a bank rejects your application for a business ID or a loan, the institution is not legally required to tell you why. This is illustrated in Halima's case:

Nordea called me. Probably the customer service. She said we found something. And sorry, we cannot take you as a client. I was like "I'm interested to know. What did you find?" They didn't tell me what they did find.

Abdul, Bilal, Dike, Tomás, Lan, Mamadou, and Usman all experienced difficulties acquiring a business ID. However, the process was better facilitated if they had a Finnish contact or a Finnish partner that could act as a mediator between the institution and the business owner. For Halima, it would not be until her advisor, a Finnish man, intervened and called Nordea on her behalf that the bank became interested in Halima as a client. Lan, Tomás, and Mamadou were married to Finnish partners that resulted in a permanent residency status or even citizenship, which then made easier the process to acquire a business ID.

Kiyomi, a Japanese restaurant owner, describes how she leverages her Finnish partner “as a fortune cookie” in the face of a bureaucracy that makes her anxious:

The registration like anything related to bureaucracy, I always ask my partner to do. Everything goes so faster, although everybody speaks English in this country. Also like, I'm going to get more respect if I show up with my white husband and just I am trusted more. People will treat me better in the hospital or like official institutions. So it's like so sad. But I bring my husband as a fortune cookie or what you call it.

Usman also uses a similar strategy to avoid discrimination but with his Finnish business partner, who serves as the outward face of the business:

One of my business partner is a Finnish guy here in Finland, and he's someone who is responsible for contacting restaurants. Because if I was to go, I know that from stuff already, people in restaurants will not appreciate me doing business with them. For the front face, we have the Finnish guy who is for the contracts and stuff like that.

Some interviewees faced little difficulty and even received institutional support. Parth, an Indian environmental consultancy owner, had a contact with a Nordea employee that facilitated the process of his business ID. Umar was able to secure a letter of guarantee from Business Finland that his business was “good” and “scalable.” Others like Bilal, who have all of “two Finnish friends,” official processes are made more difficult:

I would say that opening a business can be easy in Finland, but to run or to keep it running might be a problem or some issue. If I am from Pakistan or some other non-European country, and if I would like to have some Finnish partner, it's very difficult unless you have some Finnish friend or some Finnish acquaintance.

Bilal has had to rely on light entrepreneurship for his cleaning service, because the business ID application proved too complicated and strenuous. These services take a commission for each payment processed, and many report millions of euros in revenue. For example, OP Bank offers such a service via its subsidiary Pivo Wallet Oy, and the OP-Suomi Small Cap Fund is a shareholder of Eezy PLC, which also provides the same service. As in, banks that render inaccessible the process of a business ID for non-Finnish persons profit from the services fledgling business owners turn to as a solution. Official processes

required to open or continue a business can be difficult to manoeuvre, either instructions are in Finnish or the assessment process is not transparent. Instead of structural support, most interviewees have had to rely on individual networks to circumvent these processes. In the absence of a Finnish colleague, contact, or partner, a secure residency status, or a capable network, the experience of entrepreneurship is entirely untenable. This is especially illustrative in Hamza's case.

5.4 *A Death-Dealing "Occupational Hazard": the Case of Hamza*

Hamza arrived in Finland as an unaccompanied minor and asylum seeker from Iran. Once he received his refugee travel document, he began studies and took temporary work as a food delivery driver to make ends meet. He currently works as a sales associate in a department store and opened his current business for extra money, a clothes' alteration service that he operates in his apartment. His aspirations are related to his work but not entirely. He wishes to be a model in the future, but feels limited because of his position as a refugee and the type of work people expect a refugee to take:

Before coming to Finland, before, I like modelling very much. So I like modelling, but Finnish people, they say it's not for me. And I think it's refugee people here, they work in restaurants. Cleaners, taxi drivers. And working in service jobs. And I don't like some people saying to me, 'Do that, don't do that. You can get that, you cannot get that.' For me, it's difficult.

Similar to other interviewees, Hamza explained that he faced difficulty with his business ID and ultimately could not open a business account. Hamza shared that his personal bank account activity is monitored to see how he uses his funds, and that he too uses light entrepreneurship services for his business transactions. He sees this a consequence of his lack of Finnish citizenship, which he cautiously wishes to acquire:

I'm paying all my bills. Sometimes I pay the bill twice, just in case. And they call and say so, but I tell them to keep it for next month. In Finland, when you try to apply for a passport, you can't have unpaid bills, taxes. No police station visits. Metro fees. Nothing.

Most of Hamza's income from both his contracted work and self-employment are sent as remittances to his family in Iran or to his relative that recently arrived in Finland as an asylum seeker, which often leaves him with no money:

I need money. Because my father, my sister, and my mother, they need money, I send money into Iran. And my relative's come. He didn't even have clothes. They are thinking in Finland, the money, there is a lot. Only me, I know. Here, it is very, very hard. Why, why me? For me, now it's difficult, before it's difficult.

Hamza is now responsible for the relative that has arrived, also as an unaccompanied minor from Iran. Hamza regularly checks in on him at the reception centre to which he was sent, but this was received with contempt from the staff, who would not answer Hamza's questions on his relative's wellbeing. One personnel even said: "If you want your relative to have a good home, go to another country. Why does he have to be here?"

Hamza wished to expand his business, and in return his income so as to support his family, but struggled to find regular clientele. His friend, who was also a refugee, used to help him with his business' social media until his passing:

I don't know how to get customers through Instagram or Facebook. But I had a friend who was helping me. My friend. Yeah, he's killed himself. It was too hard for him. He was also from Iran. He didn't have a Finnish permit and all the time, six years, refugee, refugee, refugee. Cannot speak Finnish, cannot take work, cannot go to school. Sometimes before, I wanted to finish my life too. This life here, I don't like it.

Hamza's case is not elaborated for shock value, and many of the details have been significantly altered to avoid identification. Rather, his case seriously places under scrutiny the productive capacity of entrepreneurship. Policy continues to represent self-employment as a positive, even empowering, experience. For many non-white persons who undertake business creation, they are confined to the service industry and regularly encounter an unyielding bureaucracy that impedes more than it supports.

6 Conclusion

The chapter explored how entrepreneurship has emerged as a key component in the integration of immigrants in Finland, particularly following the refugee "crisis" of 2015. While entrepreneurship is framed as a path to integration, this is often a response to the limitations of the Finnish labour market,

which remains discriminatory and segregated along racial and ethnic lines. Already from 2006 to 2014, there was a 92 percent rise in the number of non-Finnish self-employed persons (Fornaro, 2018, p. 7). The rise of immigrant entrepreneurship is therefore not a natural inclination of non-Finnish individuals but a structural necessity due to limited employment opportunities, as showcased by the interviewees. The ideology of entrepreneurship, intertwined with neoliberal policies, individualizes systemic issues like racism and labour market discrimination.

Finland's neoliberal reforms, especially after the economic crises of the 1970s and 1990s, reshaped the labour market by promoting flexible accumulation and reducing labour costs. Entrepreneurship, particularly among immigrants, has grown within this context as a form of precarious employment. Immigrant entrepreneurs often face significant challenges, such as limited access to capital and discriminatory institutional practices. These conditions perpetuate a racialized division of labour, where immigrants, especially non-white persons from the Global South, are overrepresented in low-wage, low-productivity jobs, only reinforced by Finnish policies on competition and immigration. Immigration laws often confine immigrants to specific sectors, and light entrepreneurship—a form of self-employment facilitated by invoice service platforms—further marginalizes immigrant workers. These structural conditions are exacerbated by Finland's broader capitalist development, where the integration of immigrants through entrepreneurship ultimately benefits capitalist interests by providing cheap labour.

The chapter calls for a critical analysis that connects capitalism and racism, arguing that the current focus on individual entrepreneurial success overlooks the systemic forces that create and sustain racial and economic inequalities. By situating immigrant entrepreneurship within the broader context of Finland's capitalist and neoliberal policies, the chapter challenges the notion that entrepreneurship can serve as a solution to the problems of labour market discrimination and structural racism.

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Theories on Resistance, Visions of Hope

Diana Mulinari

1 Introduction

Racial capitalism is a concept crafted by South African militants in their struggle against apartheid (Al-Bulushi, 2022). Against an orthodox Marxist understanding of capitalism as a revolutionary force that could ultimately destroy apartheid, these committed intellectuals argued for the centrality of race at the core of capitalism (Alexander, 1979). In South Africa, they asserted, a precondition of capitalism was the preservation of non-capitalist economies, not their destruction; and – they continued – the state played a fundamental role in the racialisation of labour (Levenson & Paret, 2023). The South African-inspired concept of racial capitalism entered, in the following years, a productive dialogue with the knowledge production of anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles globally.

The concept of racial capitalism is at the core of Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* published in 1983/2021, in conversation with the members of the *Race and Class* journal, particularly the work of Sivanandan (1982). The impact of Robinson's book when it was first published was narrow (Issar, 2021; Kundnani, 2020). It is the globality of the Black Lives Matters (BLM) struggle that created the intellectual political space for the re-introduction and popularity of the concept today.

This chapter aims to explore the relevance of the concept for the analyses of Swedish society. What follows is one of the many possible interpretations of the concept and tradition, mostly an exercise in exploration and clarification. It considers the concept and particularly what it reveals when it is used to examine Swedish reproductive racial capitalism. Methodologically, the essay is inspired by the Black/Chicano feminist tradition of intellectual activism (Collins, 2013) and Latin American militant research (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2013).

The chapter is organised as follows. First, an analytical consideration of the strengths and the possible weaknesses of the concept, followed by an assessment of the tension and dialogues between the notion of racial capitalism and Black feminist scholarship, will be introduced. The following four sections explore the race-migration nexus. The empirical material presented evolves from several studies that I (sometimes together with other scholars)

have conducted in the last decades. The focus is theoretically driven, aiming to illustrate a possible understanding of an intersectional analysis of Swedish reproductive racial capitalism.

2 The Black Radical Tradition and the Concept of Racial Capitalism

The eurocentrism of social theory has been continuously challenged from diverse locations and geopolitical contexts. Connected sociologies (Bhambra, 2014), postcolonial (Spivak, 1999), decolonial (Dussel, 1995; Mignolo, 2005) and indigenous thought (Coburn, 2020), represent powerful epistemologies that provide a different conceptual frame to analyse the social.

Sociologist Raewyn Connell (2007) uses the notion of Southern Theory to underline the relations of authority, exclusion, inclusion, and hegemony between intellectuals and institutions in the centre and those in the periphery. The originality of Third World revolutionaries in transforming Marxist theory through the visions and practices of anti-imperialist and anticolonial struggles (Cabral, 1973; Fanon, 1952/2008; Mariátegui, 1995) provides several powerful conceptual frames relevant to the reading of racial capitalism.

Anti-colonial thought (Go, 2020) argues for the need to provincialise Europe (Chakrabarty, 2000) and points out that there is much to work on in developing conceptual frames that decolonise academic knowledge production:

While imperial sociology embeds the experiences, interests and concerns of metropolitan elites in the Anglo-European centre, anticolonial sociologies embed the standpoint of subjugated peoples whose voices and minds have been marginalised as lesser, inferior, as not offering valuable social knowledge at all. My conclusion, therefore, is that recovering anticolonial thought *is* to recover an alternative to imperial sociology and its imperial standpoint. If we want an alternative to imperial sociology, surely one place to start is anti-imperial, anticolonial thought, which has for too long been repressed but which might just be the key to unlocking a more expanded sociological imagination that is analytically alive to the elusive relations of power and structures of domination plaguing us today. (Go, 2023, p. 291)

Robinson's *Black Marxism* is congruent with anticolonial social thought. In its many versions, it analyses the knowledge production evolving from the political struggles against colonialism and imperialism (Amin, 1989; Said, 1994). The concept (and the tradition) may also be conceptualised as travelling theory

(Said, 1983) transformed by different journeys. Clarno and Vally (2023) identified three of these dialectic movements: back and forth between the periphery and the centre, back and forth between activist and academic discourses, and finally back and forth between the concept itself and the specific contextual meanings created through these travels.

The concept of racial capitalism is relevant to achieve an understanding of the Swedish racial formation for the following reasons: First, the concept challenges Eurocentric narratives in social theory, identifying the fundamental role played by the category of race and the transnational slave trade in the development of capitalism. Thus, capitalism is not a break from feudal regimes, but capitalism *extended* (not abolished or deconstructed) these exclusionary racialised practices. The continuity of the category of race is the means through which different modes of production are coded, managed and legitimated.

Feminist scholar Silvia Federici's (2018) analysis of capitalism and patriarchy contains several similarities with Robinson's conceptual frame. However, for Federici, gender is the primary mode of differentiation in the development of capitalism. How fundamental is identifying race as (up to a certain point) primordial to capitalism? Why not gender, as Federici argues, or other forms of hierarchical categorisation? Is capitalism *always* necessarily racialised or gendered? Federici's contribution is relevant because it challenges the risk of essentialism in conceptualising racism as a transhistorical primordial ontology that constantly reworks itself in new circumstances. Capitalism and racism may *sometimes* overlap, as capitalism and patriarchy do *sometimes*. However, it could be argued that the overlap is an empirical question, not necessarily inherent to capitalist social formations.

Second, the concept of racial capitalism connects ideologies of racism with social relationships aiming at the exploitation of specific categories of people, the appropriation of land and resources and the extermination of specific communities. It is the extraction of value from specific groups and the transference of this value to others. Thus, it is the relational frame of the concept – its interconnectedness – that puts race at the core in the extraction of value, conceptualising relations in terms of appropriation of others' bodies, labour, and territories. Racial capitalism identifies and analyses the production of social separateness and the fracturing of the relationships between humans and between humans and nature needed for the capitalist expropriation of the value generated by workers' labour.

Third, the concept is rooted in a tradition that challenges and transcends the boundaries between the material and the symbolic, between the economic and the cultural, and between class and race. Racism is not, as orthodox Marxists argue, an ideological intervention aimed at creating divisions

among waged workers, but labour is, from its beginning constituted, through racialized (and gendered) social relations. The location of racialised workers in social relations is not only within a 'more exploitative' frame but is *radically* different from that of white workers (Kundani, 2020). Therefore, race, as Stuart Hall (1978) wrote, is the 'modality through which class is lived'.

Fourth, the concept challenges methodological nationalism through a critique of the nation-state as a repository of social processes that predetermines and defines the object of study of social science and the humanities. This point of departure is vital for the fields of migration and ethnic studies that risk being encapsulated within and through the lens of the nation-state, reinforcing the fantasy of stable (national) communities on the one side and people on the move on the other. A shift from the study of migrants and migration to the study of mobilities (Anderson, 2013; Gutierrez, 2018) provides a more productive arena in the analysis of racial capitalism. The concept confronts the disciplining power at the core of the establishment of the field of migration and ethnicity studies as an academic discipline and the highly problematic link between state governability and knowledge production in a specific object of study – migrants.

Fifth, the concept of racial capitalism is theory in the flesh, as Chicano feminist Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) argued. The concept of racial capitalism in South Africa, where it first developed and currently among scholars who identify with the Black radical tradition, is highly political – it transcends the binary opposition between academic and other forms of knowledge, which is fundamental to thinking about liveable futures. The Black radical tradition is decolonial in its epistemology, not only due to its development within diverse margins but also due to its efforts to bridge the production of pluralistic knowledge systems.

Finally, the concept speaks of hope (Freire, 1992). Cultural practices are conceptualised as fundamental to social justice struggles. According to Robinson (1983/2021) Black cultures of (survival) and resistance are established outside the Western order, or what Okoth (2022) defines as forms of 'resistance from elsewhere'. In their analysis of racial formations, Omi and Winant (1986) shared with Robinson an acknowledgement of the fundamental role that social movements' struggles to resist and even transform racial categories play in societal transformations towards social justice. To strengthen the concept of racial capitalism as an activist hermeneutic, Melamed (2015) emphasised the contribution of the Black radical tradition in labelling resistances as forms of re(constituting) collectives.

Defying racial capitalist modes of differentiation that would undermine conditions for peoplehood, the Black radical tradition is antiracist,

anticapitalist and collective making because it is a name for struggles that arrange social forces for Black survival over and against capital accumulation. (Melamed, 2015, p. 80)

The centrality of the construction of collectivities and that of culture and spirituality for resistance are not marginal arguments within the Black radical tradition but an analysis of the social and its forms of human agency that defy Eurocentric secularism. The concept and the tradition 'help us to fight fascism with greater clarity and with ever more questions' (Kelley, 2021, p. x). The concept of offers a collective space for those who continue to believe in our responsibility as scholars in confronting the knowledge production that shapes necropolitics globally.

Although Sweden follows European trends in the increasing hegemony of ethnonationalist agendas, it is relevant to explore, through the concept of racial capitalism, the tension between an institutionalised state feminism that regulates gender equality policies (Martinsson & Giritli-Nygren, 2016) and the location of the category of migrant women.

3 Racial Capitalism and Intersectional Analysis

Hartmann's influential anthology with the captivating title, *The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism Towards a More Progressive Union*, published in the late 1970s, is a solid contribution that bridges the Marxist tradition with Marxist feminist frameworks. Its aims of examining human reproduction, gender, and labour (Hartmann, 1981, p. 1), challenging the subordination of Marxist feminism to Marxism, and arguing for 'a healthier marriage or a divorce' (Hartmann, 1981, p. 2) continue to be highly relevant today.

The further development of the tradition of Marxist feminists, operationalised through social reproduction theory (SRT), contests orthodox Marxism and argues that the economy comprises not only wage labour but also the 'complex network of social processes and human relations that produces the conditions of existence' (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 2). Capitalism depends on domestic labour and on all institutions set up for producing people, such as housing, schools, and hospitals. The 'social-reproductive contradiction of capitalism' (Fraser, 2016, p. 22) creates a powerful analytical space because it takes life itself as the starting point. Social reproduction is the work of care and sustenance that makes it possible to extract the surplus value of production while ensuring a steady supply of workers to produce value (Arruzza, 2016; Ferguson, 2020).

Scholars in SRT assert that the concept of intersectionality (Collins, 1990) so central to the Black feminist tradition lacks, an ontology (capitalism), providing an inadequate theorisation of social totality. It is an integrative theory of the social (capitalism) in that social reproduction theorists/Marxist feminists argue what the tradition of intersectionality lacks (McNally, 2017). However, in the last decade, SRT has developed a dialogue with the concept of racial capitalism (Bhattacharya, 2018) and the concept of intersectionality (Ferguson, 2016) towards what scholars consider a more complete SRT framework.

The pioneer works of Davis (1981) and Glenn (1992) on Black women's reproductive paid labour illustrate the need to understand social reproduction through the axis of racial capitalism, identifying the historical continuities in the racial division of paid reproductive labour. These authors challenge the reading of social reproduction that marginalises racism and the understanding of reproductive labour, treating race and gender as interlocking rather than additive systems. Racial capitalism and intersectionality show how the materiality of oppression and privilege acts upon the extraction of subaltern people's labour for the benefit of privileged groups and the value transferred from diverse forms of labour between categories of people.

Intersectional analysis explores multiple inequalities or the establishment of categories that create and shape these inequalities. As a sensitising concept, intersectionality poses questions regarding the role of different axes of oppression and domination in the doing of the social and in the fluidity and mutability of social and political identities.

The Black feminist tradition of intersectionality does not search for or provide a theory, as a totalising explanatory intervention. According to Carastathis (2016, p. 109), it is precisely this strength that is conveyed by the notion of a provisional concept – the tentative bridging of the 'heuristic gap between present and future' and between dominant ideology and social transformation.

Intersectionality, as a concept, is epistemologically framed through standpoint theory, which learns from the skills and knowledge embodied by those at the margins and explores their standpoint (Collins, 1990) on the social. In feminist theory, the concept of intersectionality within the Black radical tradition (Collins & Bilge, 2016, pp. 25–29), provides a vision of knowledge production within the frames of anticolonial social thought discussed in the first section.

What intersectionality offers is a sensitising concept that productively works in the analysis of social inequalities. In the words of Tomlinson,

Intersectionality is proposed not as an overreaching grand theory but as a politically grounded mid-level theory in the terms that Stuart Hall used in describing the value of Gramsci's theory, a mid-level theory that

complexifies existing theories and problems by connecting large concepts to specific situations, addressing heterogeneous objects of study across many sites and temporality. (Tomlinson, 2018, p. 23)

The concept of intersectionality has been resisted and diluted by mainstream academia (and mainstream gender studies). Several studies have identified diverse strategies through which the concept has been misread, vulgarly questioned, and marginalised (Bilge, 2014; de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2020; Lewis, 2013; Tomlinson, 2018). However, from the transatlantic slavetrade, through the people transformed into migrant workers crossing borders, to the necro-politics of classification between humans and non-humans, many of us have learned to identify, think and act politically through and together with the concept of intersectionality.

The field of intersectionality has been considered the most important contribution of gender studies to social theory. It is often argued that intersectionality gives voice to historically excluded groups. It is true that, up to a certain extent, voice is understood as epistemological resistance against erasure. Intersectionality in the Black radical tradition of conceptualising racial capitalism challenges the tendency of social theory to show the world the privileged position of those historically in control of language and power, thus giving voice and agency to groups and categories of people historically excluded. However, because of the focus on relationality in both concepts, the analysis is not about specific social categories but about the transfer of material and symbolic resources between categories. The materiality of oppression and privilege acts upon the extraction of subaltern people's labour for the benefit of privileged groups. Relationality points to the value transferred of the diverse forms of labour between categories of people.

4 Exploring the Swedish Racial Formation

The analysis that follows consists of four sections. The first section inscribes Sweden into racial capitalism by analysing Volvo, a transnational corporation located in Sweden (Mulinari et al., 2011). The second section explores the role of the Swedish state in racialisation processes through the creation of the category of migrant women in official government reports, which are privileged sites of knowledge production, as they are closely connected with policymaking and academic practices. The third and fourth sections examine Swedish racial capitalism by rethinking gendered labour through the race migration nexus.

4.1 *Racial Capitalism and Swedish Transnational Corporations*

I wake up at 04:30, put on the heating on and make breakfast and the children's lunch. I call the kids while I'm on the bus so that they get up to go to school. ... My day comes to an end at 23:30. I go to bed at 00:30. I sleep between 3.5 and 4.5 hours each night. (Olga, Mexico)

I must wake up very early. There is no problem with the elder, as she can manage alone. But for the little one, I must prepare for myself and dress him while I prepare the children's lunch packages. Then, the little one must come into my room because I must lock my room. That's the thing – he must wait more than an hour dressed like for school. We must be at work before seven, obviously before seven. One gets tired. I get tired after tea, after two. For example, next week we will go overtime at work, and we're talking about this. It will be difficult to work from seven to seven, but we will try. (Lesedi, South Africa)

Olga and Lesedi are two of the many female workers at Volvo, employed by a transnational corporation known in the Global South through its “Swedishness” and thus its gender equality profile. In our study, the ‘opportunity’ given to women (or to migrant workers in other transnational corporations) is based on policies aiming at the introduction of new forms of casual and flexible labour regimes through the incorporation of new categories of (more vulnerable) workers. The “opportunities” must be understood in the context of the impossibility of an increasing number of (male) workers to provide for their families, a sign of the expansion of the capitalist economy than of a feminist vision of women's equality.

The importance of transnational corporations in terms of controlling production, trade and investments in the Global South has increased dramatically over the past decades. In our study (Rätzhel et al., 2014), we explored the diverse and shared experiences of Volvo workers in four different plants in India, Mexico, South Africa, and Sweden. Central to our project was the study of the normality of capitalism, focusing on a ‘Swedish’ corporation that profiles itself as caring for nature and working for gender equality. Sweden is the national home base of Volvo, the ‘core’ in terms of all other production units. It is where the Volvo headquarters is located and where around 28% of the workforce is employed. In 1998, a large Mexican national bus manufacturer, M.A.S.A., was taken over by Volvo through a 100% acquisition at a time when the plant employed 1,600 workers. The self-image of Sweden is usually associated with democracy, social welfare, and gender equality. A main result of

our study is the degree of over-exploitation that workers suffered in the plants located in the Global South, as mirrored by Ascencio's explanation on how difficult it is to manage until Friday:

No, it's because it's Friday, and there's nothing left. We've used all the money ... everything, and this is despite my wife budgeting our money. It's that I have to leave as soon as possible; they are waiting back home ... they're hungry ... sometimes there's nothing to eat on a Friday afternoon. (Ascencio, Mexico)

The over-exploitation of workers by providing salaries below the poverty level is woven into a culture of insecurity and fear of losing their jobs. Unable to live on the salaries Volvo paid them, the workers in all the companies we visited told us that they needed to work extra hours and that everyone in their families contributed to the household through diverse forms of self-employment in the informal sector to make ends meet. Many workers we met were grateful for their grandparents or other family members living in rural areas who provided them with food. Others argued that without the support (in terms of food provisions) of their extended families living in rural areas, their children would go hungry. Thus, Volvo's profit increases by the appropriation of the production of subsistence economies in rural areas. In other words, the exploitation of rural communities through the transfer of their (few) resources to their relatives in urban areas is a decisive part of Volvo's labour regime.

We also identified both in Mexico and South Africa a workplace culture of (violent) insecurity (fear of losing the job), the opposite of discourses that identify Swedish institutions and companies as embodying perceived Swedish values, such as gender equality and democracy.

The way in which workers are exploited at the Volvo plants in the Global South is at the core of Swedish reproductive racial capitalism.

4.2 *Racial Capitalism and the Swedish State*

A fundamental contribution of racial capitalism is the exploration of the role of the state in creating and reproducing racialised categories and hierarchies. In *Resisting Racial Capitalism*, Danewid (2023) interprets Cedric Robinson's work as an invitation to think (and act) beyond the state and the market. Danewid argues that capitalism relies upon state power to render populations available for capitalist dispossession, exploitation, and abandonment. According to the author, Robinson examined the possibility of organising a society in which the refusal of the state does not develop in a war of all against all but rather the establishment of original and sustainable ways of organising the social.

The central role of the capitalist state in racialisation was a hallmark of Marxist thinking in South Africa under apartheid. Goldberg (2002, p. 7) described the ‘the racial state’ as a modern nation-state in which rules and constructions of race are deeply intertwined (Goldberg 2011). According to Hall (2019), the capitalist state and racist policies are conjunctural and historically specific, and racism is not present in the same form and degree in all capitalist formations. This emphasises the need to analyse the conditions under which nation-states *become* racial and shift from a racial to a racist regime (Lentin, 2007). How should this construction of differences and the development of classification systems be understood?

Swedish feminist postcolonial scholars have convincingly argued that the concept of a ‘women-friendly welfare state’, which is central to hegemonic gender studies and framed through the category of women, obscures the experiences and the social location of migrant women (and men) and leaves untheorised the relationship between the Swedish welfare and racism and imperialism, illuminating a close connection between assertions of migrants’ “cultural differences” and racism.

Like the discourses on migrant women in the United Kingdom analysed by Umut Erel (2013), hegemonic discourses on migrant women in Sweden represent migrants’ culture as patriarchal and oppressive, provide an understanding of migrant women placed (or imprisoned) between modernity and tradition, and consider migrant women as recipients of benefits rather than contributors. Hegemonic discourses on migrant women are also framed by Eurocentric arrogance (Razack, 2004) shaped by the conviction that Sweden, with its gender equality ideology, opened through the provision of paid labour a path towards the empowerment of migrant women.

The creation of the category of migrant women at the core of Swedish state migration and integration policies has been explored by a number of scholars. Knocke (1991) identified the creation of the category of migrant women as a ‘problem to be solved’ through state institutional strategies, which Ålund (1991) referred to as the culturalisation of social problems. Mulinari and Lundqvist (2020) investigated these constructions in different historical periods, crudely outlining three projects from Swedish government documents regarding the construction of the category of migrant women: migrant women were identified as a problem during social democratic hegemony, as a burden during the neoliberal shift in the late eighties, and as a threat post-9/11. Economic historian Paulina de los Reyes (2022) revealed the contradictory discourses framing migrant women as workers and mothers in Swedish policies.

Although notions of cultural difference between Swedish and migrants are present in the first period, they are framed within an expanding welfare state

inspired by the social democratic ideology of equality, social justice and solidarity with migrants and their families. In the 1960s and 1970s, the racialisation of migrant labour acted upon a classification system regulated through the modernity/tradition paradigm, framed through an organisational model of exploitative racism and subordinated inclusion that targeted both migrant women and migrant men. Migrant women were inscribed within a specific construction of difference, a social policy problem to be solved by the social democratic welfare state. Despite their participation in paid work, the category of migrant women during this period is represented in Swedish official documents as backwards, traditional, and isolated in their homes, culturally different from 'Swedish women' and therefore difficult to include in the Swedish state's gender equality project.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, neoliberal ideologies, which focused on individuals, employability, and freedom of choice, challenged social-democratically framed multiculturalism and provided a new agenda of diversity management, transforming 'ethnic culture' into a market commodity. Public debates focused largely on fantasies surrounding the perceived burden and the impressive expenditures that migrant women on sick leave created for the Swedish welfare state. The increasing rates of ill health among migrant women were 'understood' by academic scholarship and media as migrants' resistance to the demands of work within a transforming labour market'. It was their 'traditional culture' rather than their hard-working conditions that explained their poor health, the long periods of sick leave, and early retirement. Culture – or rather the culture of the other – is established as an explanatory model through the introduction of terms such as cultural distance and cultural conflict, present in all government documents, mainstream academia, and public discourse.

Although exploitative racism has been the hegemonic form of gendered racism, intersecting with racial capitalist exploitation, the success in the 2022 elections of the ethno-nationalist political party Sweden Democrats, with 20% electoral support, indicates a shift towards the idea of migrant women being a threat to Swedish society and thus a shift from exploitative to exclusionary racism. In Sweden, exclusionary racism is often founded on a classification system based on the category of race, emphasising the threat of the 'other' gender culture (the criminalisation of migrants as dangerous and violent men) and attributing patriarchy to the others' cultures. The shift towards racial neoliberalism and exclusionary racism has been framed by notions of securitisation in Sweden, as elsewhere. It is a constant and systematic manufacturing of differences framed through demands for assimilation. Exclusionary racism has not only become hegemonic but has also installed an emotional regime through

which these differences are acted upon and have turned vulgar, vicious, and aggressive.

Despite shifts in policies, there is a strong continuity: working-class migrant women remain a regular army of labour that can be consistently relied upon for diverse forms of precarious work, particularly service and care work. However, the knowledge and skills that make migrant women employable care workers are denied by Swedish authorities and institutions in their roles as mothers. Perhaps this is the main characteristic of Swedish racial capitalism: migrant women transformed into 'good' care workers while systematically being challenged, questioned, and contested in their ability to care for their own children.

Viewing these processes through the lens of racial capitalism allows for an understanding of the changing role of the state in the creation and establishment of racialised labour. This also provides an analytical frame through which to identify the heterogeneity of racialised social relations from regimes of subordinated inclusion to exclusionary and even necropolitical regimes.

4.3 *Racial Capitalism and Gendered Exploitative Racism*

Central to the understanding of racial capitalism is the notion that racial logic dictates and informs the value of gendered labour. The labour of migrant women is performed on the margins of Swedish society but is at the centre of the reproduction of Swedish racial capitalism.

Complying with colonialism (Keskinen et al., 2012) identifies the specificity of the Swedish colonial experience, which includes Sweden's economic interest in the slave trade and settler colonialism towards the indigenous population of the Sami people. Today, the Swedish racial regime ensures the continuity of these forms of racism with the construction of others through the race-migration nexus (Erel et al., 2015).

Diverse types of racism are entangled with one another and target different populations. We have (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017, 2022), operationalised racism through the concepts of *exclusionary*, *exploitative* and *caring* racism, as three differential organisational modes that coexist in different constellations and hierarchies, forging a specific Swedish race regime. Exploitative racism operates through a process of racialisation that legitimises the capitalist production of profit. Exclusionary racism operates through violent boundary making, and its extreme form is the destruction and annihilation of the 'other'. Caring racism is framed by these diverse forms of racism but acts upon the ideologies of love (for 'our own') and of care for others through the legitimisation of the need for coercion and repression toward those 'others' in need of care.

In our study of working-class women from Greece (Tzimoula & Mulinari, 2020) who had migrated to Sweden in the late 1960s, racism was experienced

in a visceral and embodied manner, and the lack of societal public recognition of their suffering reinforced the levels of pain and bodily discomfort that we could identify in our research subjects.

I started working in a factory where they made typewriters. There, I experienced the first big tragedy of my life. My hand got caught in a machine and pieces of my two fingers were ripped off (showing the injured hand). Then, reality hit me. I left a rather good life to go to a country I knew nothing about and became an invalid. I felt useless, invalid – all sorts of things. One could say that it was the first mark that Sweden left on me. (Daphne)

We also identified the reiteration of some arguments, such as ‘It is their country; we are only guests here’ and ‘It is normal; we are guests here’. The research subjects’ experiences of racialised gendered labour migration, particularly the level of over-exploitation of their labour, are located within the functioning of ‘normal’ capitalism. Racial capitalist accumulation depends parasitically on the extraction of migrant women’s labour – work that is essential to economic production in a capitalist society but rendered non-valuable.

It is from the artwork of many of these women’s daughters that the experiences of migrant women are illuminated today, and the connection between racial capitalism and reproductive racism is explored. The 2022 art exhibition ‘MAMI: AMA: MÖDRAR’ at the Tensta Art Museum is a declaration of love for mothers and the maternal work. An art historian, writer, and participant in the exhibition, Macarena Dusan (2022) presented a participatory installation titled ‘Altar for Our Migrated Mothers’ (‘Altare till våra migrerade mödrar’), in which visitors with mothers who migrated were encouraged to leave a tribute or a testimony about their mothers.

Filmmaker Jonelle Twum’s (2022) poetic short film *A Mother’s Body* is about the mental and physical burdens of migrant women who labour on the margins of Swedish society. It is an intimate portrayal of two hotel cleaners from a daughter’s perspective. While the women perform their daily work as cleaners in a hotel, the daughter reflects on how their job affects their bodies and relationships with time. The women navigate and negotiate the demands of strenuous labour with experience, precision and beauty. These artworks illustrate the experience of being daughters of women migrant workers stigmatised in their two conditions: as workers and as migrant mothers.

Journalist and writer Alexandra Pascalidou (2009) revealed the working conditions of her parents from her perspective as the daughter of working-class migrants from Greece:

Mom and Dad worked long hours. They would be tired when they got home. Mama got a job as a cleaner. Every morning, the alarm clock would ring at six o'clock. Mama would prepare breakfast, sandwiches, and milk before going to work. (2009, p. 12)

My dad has been cleaning windows for twenty years. Most people can't last that long. The shoulders usually wear out after a few years. It's a shame that cleaning windows isn't a sport, as Dad would've won many gold medals. (2009, p. 24)

Pascalidou 'remembered' the time her mother woke up and fed the family before going to work. The reader sees her mother moving from unpaid reproductive work at home to paid reproductive work in the public sphere. She 'remembers' tired parents coming home after long hours of paid work. The topic of the body, or the deterioration and suffering of the body, such as mothers' bodies, that are tired after long hours of paid work, is present in many of these artistic interventions.

These are three of the many illustrations through which migrant daughters act in the field of cultural production and reveal the experiences of their migrant mothers as working mothers. The invisibility of migrant women as workers is reproduced in the lack of collective societal memory, in the politics of amnesia in acknowledging their contribution to the establishment of the welfare state.

The commodification of social reproduction is a branch of the economy that is nonviable for relocation to the Global South. The following quotation is from a Social Democratic Minister for Gender Equality and Integration, which illustrates a general agreement about the skills and the usual position of migrant women in the labour market – in low-paid care and service work.

We need a growing service sector. Not least, I'm thinking of those who come here as refugees and who can make bread, sew, care for children and clean. They should be able to find an outlet for their skills and, in addition, be paid for it. (Jens Orback, *Dagens Nyheter*, 26/10/2004)

In the wake of several welfare reforms by the end of the 2000s, including tax deductions on household services, a different discourse emerged. In 2008, a tax deduction for housework was introduced as a gender equality policy measure, with the following argument:

Tax deductions for housework create more equal conditions for women and men to combine family life with working life. Women decrease their

paid work for unpaid work at home to a larger extent than men do. If women are given better possibilities to reorganise their time by shifting their efforts from unpaid work at home to paid work in the labour market, their possibilities for higher salaries will expand as well as gender equality in working life. (SOU, 2008/2009, p. 39)

The 2008 RUT (i.e. Swedish Tax Deduction for Domestic Services) reform provides an example of a family/gender policy framework through premises radically different from those inspired by the social-democratic welfare gender equality project. This is a policy that allows households to purchase cleaning, maintenance and laundry services at a tax-subsidised rate and that exacerbates class, gendered, and racialised social relations (Kvist & Overud, 2015).

Participating in the labour market under equal conditions must not be achieved (as in earlier decades) through the presence of men in care work but through the introduction of the category of migrant women (and their bodies) as the fundamental node in the creation of 'gender equality' in families in Sweden (Yazdanpanah, 2013). While privileged Swedish families are the core of state policies on gender equality, 'migrant families' are the core of state policies of disruption through racist migrant and refugee policies that separate and split up families.

Historically and currently, Swedish wealth depends on the transference of value from racialised peripheries, while Swedish welfare depends on the transference of value from racialised gendered labour.

4.4 *Racial Capitalism and Reproductive Racism*

In feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins' (1998) 'It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation', she explored how the traditional family ideal functions as a nod through which to explore intersectionality in the United States, identifying specific connections between family as a gendered system of social organisation, racial ideas and practices, and notions of national identity and belonging. Collins argued that returning to 'family values' sets the stage (through racial meanings) for reintroducing a logic of eugenics that could be applied to adolescent pregnancy, women's poverty, street crimes, and other social issues.

The film *Sami Blood* (Kemell, 2016) shows the experiences of indigenous children through the story of two sisters, revealing the suffering of their different paths, one towards racist assimilation, the other towards racist exclusion.

Two little girls, who attend a boarding school (Nomad school) are holding hands but will be separated by Swedish settler colonialism leading to two distinctive journeys. The eldest sister wants to learn to speak Swedish, she wants to be 'Swedish', while the other sister wants to go back to her mother, her

family, and her Sámpi community. In one emotionally conflicting scene, the children at the school are instructed in Swedish and admonished for speaking Sámi. The eldest of the girls changes her Sámpi name of Elle Marja to a Swedish name, Christina, which is the name of her teacher.

In the film, researchers from the Swedish State Institute of Race Biology often visit the school. One of the most powerful scenes is when the researchers visit the school to gather 'anthropological data' through body measurements and force Elle Marja to undress. She uses the Swedish language, which she has mastered, to ask: What are you going to do? Nobody answers her questions, and she is violently commanded to undress. There are thousands of naked photographs of Sámi children.

The film does not offer an easy boundary between the path of assimilation (Elle Marja) and that of resistance, which is the path taken by Elle Marja's little sister. In the words of the film director Amanda Kemell, who has a Sámpi background:

I made the film as a declaration of love to this older generation, to those who stayed and those who left. I think both choices are hard ones to make. You have to be strong to leave, but you have to be strong to stay. (quoted in Heeney, 2017, p. 2)

As with many other indigenous postcolonial-inspired cultural productions that have emerged in Sweden in the last decades, the film recovers and reveals the experiences that were edited out of the Swedish hegemonic narrative of gender equality, nationhood, and belonging. It portrays how Swedish settler colonialism's assimilation policies separate, fracture, and destroy the fundamental relationships between mothers and children and between children and communities (Stine, 2023).

In Sweden, sterilisation was an accepted practice until 1972. Studies on Swedish eugenic policies that target racialised populations, such as the Sami and Roma people are extensive (Broberg & Tyden, 2005). These state practices were framed and interrelated in government investigations with the demand on Swedish women to reproduce the 'Swedish folk tribe' (see, e.g., SOU, 1938:57, p. 99) and in which women's reproductive role was widely debated nationally (Kling, 2010). In Denmark, several thousand Greenlandic women had IUDs inserted into them without their knowledge in the 1960s and 1970s. They were never informed about the procedure or given the opportunity to say no; the youngest girls were only 13 years old (Lindberg, 2022).

In her pioneering book *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction and the Meaning of Liberty*, legal scholar Dorothy Roberts (1997) analyses the

systematic attack against Afro-American women as mothers and, among other things, through stereotypical images of Black 'welfare queens' who supposedly had children just to get access to welfare. In Sweden, reproductive and exclusionary racism is at the core of the creation of migrant families and migrant mothers as harmful for their children; from the notion of migrant mothers 'cheating' the welfare system and migrant mothers being committed to dangerous practices of honour killing and female circumcision.

Following the neoliberal shift in the late 1980s, the establishment of migrant women as problematic mothers whose traditional values hinder the integration of their children into Swedish society was established in Swedish governmental documents. While the idea of 'cultural distance' obscured racism and explained their unemployment as a lack of cultural skills within a complex labour market, the 'cultural conflict' paradigm framed in academic, political, and media discourses represented (and acted upon) migrant families as being characterised by violent forms of sexism, with cruel patriarchal men and passive submissive mothers.

Here in Sweden, the immigrant woman finds that women have a different position and that she does not need to find herself ignored and beaten. (SOU, 1982:18)

In an open society, freedom of choice is found in the individual. As the pressure from one's own becomes smaller and the borders between groups weaken, the influence of the majority culture becomes strong. For individuals born in Sweden of migrant parents (or those who migrated to Sweden as a child), there is no choice other than the Swedish option. However, for the same individual in an ethnically repressive society, there is no choice other than the 'ethnic option'. (SOU, 1984:55)

A more tangible way through which generational conflict evolves is influenced by Swedish values and patterns of living. Living patterns differ from country to country and from generation to generation in Sweden. However, in this case, it is natural that the risk of cultural collisions is greater when the domestic population meets immigrants from countries in which the general cultural pattern largely deviates from Swedish values. ('Immigration and Minority Policy' in SOU, 1984:58)

The word 'value' appeared more frequently in the 1990s as a codeword for ontological difference, often without further explanation. It functions by emphasising differences, equating nation-states with 'national' cultures and

marginalising the diversity of cultural backgrounds in Sweden into a monolithic confrontation with migrant culture, in which Swedish values seem so obvious for those engaged in producing these governmental documents that no explanation of what they may be is deemed necessary. No evidence is needed to argue for the positive qualities of Swedish culture and its values, as well as for the negative qualities of migrant cultures, particularly of migrant mothers. It should be noted that Swedish citizens have 'values', while migrants have 'cultures', a discourse that paves the way for the establishment of caring racism in a number of civil society organisations and state institutions.

Caring racism and rescue narratives were at the core of many governmental reports during the 1980s and 1990s, and the desire to save the other from dangerous patriarchies was established. These (caring) racist policies act upon the need to establish municipality 'integration' projects for the administration, management, and warehousing of these 'problematic' mothers. At the same time, feminist-inspired concerns about gender equality began to be mobilised and appropriated for ethnoracist arguments in the successful establishment of migrant men as a threat to Swedish gender equality in general and to Swedish women in particular (Sager & Mulinari, 2018).

Schultz (2023) introduced the Malthusian matrix to understand how class-selective and racist hierarchies in population narratives are combined with gendered policies of reproductive bodies. Distinguishing between the birth of desirable and undesirable people, an upward redistributive family policy in Germany promoted births within the privileged middle class. The concept of reproductive racism is also central in Siddiqui's (2021) analysis, which asserts that 'native' women's reproductive capacities are incentivised for nationalist ends, whereas these same rights (to have children and family life) for minority migrant women are restricted while their labour is hyper-exploited because it is essential to care for the young, sick, and elderly of the nation under 'advanced' capitalism. In Sweden, women who are the target of racialisation processes as 'non-white' and foreign-born suffer more complications and birth injuries and are also at a higher risk of dying during or after childbirth (Bradby et al., 2023).

The following quote summarises the debate and policies in the city of Gothenburg in 2023.

The recent debate about family planning has been about limiting child-bearing among foreign-born people in vulnerable areas, including Gothenburg, and about not having more children than one can support. (Larsson, 2022)

These policies are supported by both the Social Democrats and the right-wing parties. On one side, clear-cut efforts are made to regulate specific groups of women's reproductive capacities; on the other side, policies are aimed at decreasing the number of migrant women's children. For example, the ethnonationalist party, the Sweden Democrats wants the multi-child allowance to be converted into a 'multi-child deduction' so as not to favour large migrant families, while the Moderates' proposal aims to change the criminal code so that the parents of children who commit crimes suffer the consequences (Mulinari, 2024). In Denmark, an agreement that can be concluded between parents and municipalities is called 'Forældrepålæg'. It enables municipalities to withdraw subsidies from Danish parents with migrant backgrounds if their children commit crimes.

Exclusionary racism and reproductive racism are also mirrored in discourses that argue that 'people should not have more children than they themselves can afford' and in policy proposals that target migrant women's reproductive capacities. These policies function through two axes: (1) too many children = resistance to integrate into the labour market and (2) too many children (who cannot be controlled by these mothers) = too many criminals in the future.

Racist policies are also implemented in two ways: denial of migrant women's right to bear as many children as they want and the establishment of specific and differentiated social rights for migrant (parents). Blood/genetic tests to define family bonds (Helen, 2014) among refugees are also an established practice today.

Sociologist Minoo Alinia (2020) shows that the Swedish government's policy document on the prevention of men's violence against women systematically and consistently excludes the analysis of racism and its effects on migrant women's lives. While race is obscured in official documents, differences between those identified as belonging to the nation and the "Others" are systematically emphasised in establishing that migrant cultures are extremely patriarchal.

The Moderate election manifesto of 2022 does not equate migrant mothers with security but highlights that security – understood through the need for repressive measures – is needed to attain safety. A new racial welfare regime is rapidly growing, based on the success of authoritarian and neofascist political visions.

Honour cultures, organised crime, money laundering, and systematic grant fraud. These are some of the things the criminal clans that have established themselves in Sweden today engage in. There are now around 40 criminal clans in Sweden that have extensive violent capital and

stated ambitions to compete with the Swedish state for control. The clan provides its own system of justice, protection against external enemies and a social safety net for its members. In these families, children are brought up early in an unacceptable growing-up environment with an early marked criminal path and a life in conflict with ordinary society. (Moderaterna, 2022, p. 26)

In the manifesto, a specific chapter is dedicated to crime, which states, 'So we sort out the safety and judiciary' (*'Så får vi ordning på tryggheten och rättssystemet'*). The narratives of women's safety legitimise the need for law and order. This need is created through the location of patriarchy (and violence) outside Sweden – violence 'imported' to Sweden by migrant men.

5 Conclusion

Racial capitalism is a concept that has become central to contemporary radical movements, from Black Lives Matter and the Black feminist prison abolition movement to movements for climate justice. With love, care and analytical stringency, Cedric Robinson offers through the concept a powerful narrative of the Black radical tradition and its ability to repeatedly reconstruct itself as a collective and imagine and create practices of epistemic resistance.

The concept connects with diverse forms of thinking about social justice from the standpoint of categories of people and places historically excluded from the notion of theory.

Robinson's work underlines the subterranean forms of (Black) resistance at the crossroads between spoken silence and storytelling that have framed the survival of Black communities from slaves to racialised exploited labour. The concept invites enquiry and exploration and may function as an analytical tool for decolonising knowledge in Eurocentric academia, providing a working agenda for visions and practices of epistemic resistance.

In writing this chapter, I was impressed with how much knowledge on social justice that challenges mainstream social theory has been produced in Sweden over the last few decades. In these efforts thinking together and through the Black radical tradition has played a fundamental role. This knowledge is emancipatory in character, as it not only questions epistemic injustices but also provides arenas for rethinking the Swedish social formation and its inscription in colonialism, imperialism and racism. The strength of this emancipatory knowledge production is that it is pluralistic in voice and agency. It identifies the centrality of racialised groups as historical subjects in their struggle for

social justice. It moves fluidly from the academe to the arts and back and forth in dialogues with antiracist social movements for social justice.

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PART 2

Bordering



The Logistics of Settlement in Racial Capitalism: Migrant Dispersal, Algorithms and the Struggle for Relationality

Karin Krifors

An increasingly explicit unwillingness among European states to commit to asylum and protection for international migrants is accompanied by technical solutions to problems that states assign to migration. The administrative attempts to translate cultural values into demands on migrants, which has concerned the civic integration debates in state policies for decades, seems to have been partly replaced by a preoccupation of tangibles: housing stock, budget frames, and labour market predictions. It was as though the political construction of multiple European ‘migration crises’¹ opened a window of opportunities for a quantification of ways to deal with migration as flows of people, or what we can call a logistification. Migration is understood to be controlled spatially and its geography to be determined by hubs, routes, and relocations. Much has been said about the increasingly cruel border regimes of Europe, as well as about its weaponisation and increased datafication. The relocation of migrants who are not immediately rejected, however, is not instantly recognised as problematic or violent. For this reason, the racial capitalist framework can potentially shift our gaze away from the mundanity of relocating people for practical reasons, towards the consequences of systems that disregard what is also practical or efficient about peoples’ autonomy in (re-)settling elsewhere.

Policies that aim to spread migrants in the asylum system across regions and municipalities have contradictory outcomes for migrants, such as settlement, deportation and limbos in-between these situations. Attempts to match migrants to labour markets or to housing supply are not new, but the current policy interest in governing migrants by diffusing their presence, by guiding them towards places where they are thought to be given the opportunity to blend in, seamlessly, or where they can easily be intelligible, countable and contained, tell us something about the logistics and spatial focus of state imaginations of governance today. Migrant dispersal policies furthermore vary

1 Solidarity crisis, reception crisis. 2015. The analysis is that this caused a large change in asylum politics all over Europe.

across countries: dispersal materializes in detention camps in remote places, or outside of the imagined borders of state territory, but also aims at avoiding urban “clustering”. The violent effects of dispersal practices have been interrogated: from the ‘systems of suffering’ (Darling, 2023) imposed on migrants as they are dispersed within the UK asylum organisation, to the coloniality of scattering ‘unruly’ migrant populations (Tazzioli, 2020) in European cities. Quota systems of refugee resettlement aim to match refugees with labour markets and other criteria for integration. Yet, the processes and effects are difficult to grasp and vary widely depending on its context. In so far as dispersal has no single policy purpose or outcome, it can best be understood as a *technology* within this logistics.

Dispersal as a technology can be traced to ideologies of race and coloniality as it is enforced to control populations that are othered to the notion of the national ‘us’. The author and journalist Elin Anna Labba has provided a painful historic account of colonial re-settlement in the modern welfare state project as it targeted indigenous families during the 1920s. In her book *The Rocks Will Echo Our Sorrow: The Forced Displacement of the Northern Sámi* (2020) Labba describes how the process of defining Norway and Sweden as modern nation-states required a dislocation, which was represented as a bureaucratic frontier of rational land use: benign, helpful and therefore, as written in dominant colonial history, voluntary. People targeted by these displacements, however, experienced coercion and misinformation, and suffered from decisions that neglected or misunderstood language and ethnic identities, reindeer pasture and conditions for keeping families together. This has resulted in generational longing and grief, as well as in struggles to describe this loss. The relation between coercion and freedom in re-settlement is empirical, but it also depends on our gaze. The tension between the “better off” logic and the racial violence of coercion in dispersal practices must, in the setting of today’s asylum and reception policies, be interrogated in ways that are critical to the status-quo of treating refugees as forever mobile populations.

To disperse is to “cause to break up, to cause to become widely spread, to cause to evaporate or vanish” (Merriam Webster). Dispersal policy seems to entail a spatial imaginary where the dilution of migrants causes all kinds of social problems to evaporate or vanish, but it also conceals dispersal itself as it is imposed on ideas and practices of settlement and re-settlement. As geographer Jonathan Darlings writes: “Unlike the violent and imposing structures of immigration detention centres or the intentionally secretive practices of off-shore processing and chartered deportation flights, dispersal represents a system operating alongside communities up and down the country, yet rarely seen unless it is sought” (Darling, 2022:184). I have previously written about

systems of managed migration in supply chain formations (2017), re-thinking these processes as logistics (2021), and hope, in this text, to elaborate also the relation between this logistics and what is not logistified.

A logistical lens helps to uncover how dispersal of refugees has a materiality. The materiality of asylum consists of the ways that reception centres are organised, the social relations of housing markets and job markets, or the distribution of humanitarian aid. One illustrative example is how Lorenzo Vianelli (2021) has described logistification as having its own economy that makes profit on the de-humanizing 'warehousing' of asylum seekers. Logistics in asylum, Mauricio Rogat (2022) argues in his study on refugee housing in Sweden, thus also leads to a consistent deferral of housing shortage and of other problems that migrants face. Dispersal and re-settlement are forms of biopolitics focusing on the control of peoples' mobility across specific locations. The slow violence of dispersal is racial, because it divides populations in a material and geographical sense through criteria of heritage, and it is carried out within the policy framework of states and their political economies. In this chapter I interrogate refugee dispersal in Sweden and Germany by analysing policy documents and expert interviews with bureaucrats and civil society actors. I particularly focus on controversies of these dispersal policies as instances where its violence is visible, to argue that dispersal is a technology of logistical racial capitalism rather than neutral strategies to improve migrant lives, state finances or places of refugee reception.

1 Dispersal in Sweden and Germany

During more than a decade both the German and the Swedish approach to refugee reception have been characterised by the aspirations of 'efficiency', where dispersal constitutes an important dimension. The systems of refugee reception in these countries have several commonalities. In Germany the Königstein Key determines a distribution of migrants from different countries of origin across the Federal States of Germany, based on current refugee composition, together with tax revenue and population. In Sweden, the 2016 Settlement Act introduced a similar system that was meant to avoid a situation where municipalities could refuse refugee reception. The Settlement Act has been deemed successful and it has led to shorter waiting due to a more equal distribution of migrants (Riksrevisionen, 2021), but it has also met critique following reveals that municipalities accept very different levels of responsibility for access to housing or services. The autonomy of federal states is strong and causes settlement in specific localities to vary greatly in the German system. The federal

(*Land*) government, furthermore, has a strong position visavi the municipal immigration agency (*Ausländerbehörde*) in Germany, whilst the local autonomy of municipalities is a strong principle in Sweden and the region often coordinates rather than dictates in issues of reception and integration. The Swedish Migration Agency, a national governmental agency, coordinates housing across the country for newly arrived migrants who have not been granted residence permits or been assigned to a municipality.

Both countries have also introduced policies that govern the temporality of refugees in differentiated ways. The 'Bleibeperspektive' in Germany, which represents whether protection seekers are deemed likely to receive a residence permit or not, grants or denies access to economic and social welfare. In parallel to these services, financed by the federal state, municipalities can choose to finance integration measures also for those with slimmer chances, often via civil society groups. A growing group of migrants in Germany with a so called 'tolerated' stay (*Duldung*) live in increasingly precarious and bureaucratically complex circumstances in terms of their rights to access housing and work. In Sweden, the 2016 Settlement Act was accompanied by reforms of the governance of residence permits where *temporary* residency was made a norm, in contrast to the previous relatively expanded use of permanent residence permits for those who were granted protection. This affects migrants' access to social rights, for instance in terms of demands on integration associated to work and housing, and has particularly made criteria for the right of family reunification more difficult to reach.

The control of mobility within these dispersal regimes do, however, also differ. For migrants with more precarious prospects of staying in Germany, several federal states enforce restrictions on their mobility. Both the *Wohnsitzauflage*, which has mostly had consequences for migrants who are denied access to the labour market in (big city) regions, and the *Residenzpflicht*, which has forced migrants to remain in remote areas, have been applied to various degrees across different federal states. Sweden, in contrast, applies a possibility of self-settlement (*EBO*) for migrants. Since 2022, however, some municipalities have been offered the possibility to ban specific addresses in 'vulnerable areas' for self-settlement, which is regulated through punishments of withheld benefits.

Migration policy in both Germany and Sweden constitute examples of what migration researchers have called 'the local turn', namely a shift in responsibility for migration from the national towards local level governance. The outcomes for refugees are therefore increasingly differentiated and in terms of your access to welfare it will matter if you are assigned to a restrictive or a liberal federal state in Germany. In terms of your long-term prospects in

Sweden it will matter if you can get a permanent housing contract in a small municipality without housing shortage, but also if you have access to a labour market that allows you to meet integration criteria for prospects of becoming a permanent resident, which will generally be more likely in a big city. The diversity of combinations that different towns and cities represent to migrants is incomprehensible. Dispersal policies evoke questions of freedom in repressive systems, namely what it means to be able to choose where to live, when the conditions for living are altogether inadequate.

2 How Racial Capitalism Operates through Logistics

Starting from when I did ethnographic research on racialization of circular migration, and studied how temporary migrant workers were incorporated into complex supply chain discourses of flow and circulation (Krifors, 2019), I have seen connections between migration management and how a growing literature observes and conceptualises new operations of capital as *logistics*. Logistics can be thought of as a lens or a gaze that critically engages with the ways that supply chains, a capitalist organisation of the economy that divides and fragments both management and labour, re-configures time and space in such a way that *circulation* becomes increasingly important for its reproduction and value (Chua et al., 2018). This circulation can be illustrated by the increased importance of international shipping and the value of platform consumerism, which generates enormous capital. The 'art and science' of logistics strives for seamless and smooth mobility, but it is also vulnerable to disruption (Cowen, 2014). Also migration is logistified by the specific governing of migration via flows, channels and corridors (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012; Mezzadra, 2016). Hotspots and hubs re-direct migrants, rather than block them from mobility, in ways that suit the labour markets of European states (Altenried et al., 2018). The logistics of matching migrants to labour markets include calculations of the costs and value of social reproduction, which is necessary for people to maintain their lives in some form. Logistics, thus, determines legitimacy of these differentiated values, as part of the logic of supply chains that stretch across time and space (Krifors, 2019). Critical logistics offers a perspective on the production of space (Neilson and Rossiter, 2014), and in this text I explore how refugee re-settlement produces the urban and rural areas that receive and reject refugees.

The biopolitical project in today's obsession with logistics of migration and mobility can be compared to the fear of over-population that occupied states and international organisations across decades during the twentieth century,

as the environmental and social deterioration that capitalism shaped was projected onto 'surplus' populations. In an historic account, Matthew Connelly (2010) has deconstructed this fear of over-population and critically examined the violent effects of the varied, and often contradictory, population control movement that involved feminist activists for reproductive rights as well as eugenicists. "Though demographic projections consistently failed to anticipate change", Connelly writes, "new projections were still taken as irrefutable signs of inevitable doom. And when family planning took the form of crash programs to control the fertility of poor people and poor countries, the resistance provoked appeared to prove that more ruthless measures would be necessary." (2010:133). The Malthusian ideology of overpopulation operated through states and was always already attached to realities where racial division and separation structured the notion of who was 'surplus' in the world population. The struggle against overpopulation, translated to family planning, can therefore illustrate racial capitalism of state formations centred around nativity and the production of babies. Far more *just-in-time*, today's logistics, instead, attempts to quantitatively define and predict the places where people are allowed to live and work, leaning on an assumption that there is always an available new move, room for improvement and uprooting. We can understand population control and dispersal to be dominant technologies of racial capitalisms in different state formations and different eras of capitalism. Or perhaps, moving away from the seeming preciseness of a term such as technology, these can be considered as different operations of capital, to borrow the words of Mezzadra and Neilson (2019).

Logistics that redirects migrants with its seemingly soft power, in a system that claims to accept people in some places, but not in others, also traces back to past state practices. Racial capitalism offers a perspective that allows us to understand the contexts of logistic innovation. The concept of racial capitalism has been developed following a re-discovery, and re-readings, of Cedric Robinson's intervention in Marxist assumptions on the emergence of capitalism and modern states, which, Robinson argued, disregarded colonialism, imperialism as well as racial structures internal to state building. Ongoing dialogues on human autonomy and social justice in the context of such violence has conceptualized the state as elemental of racial capitalism. Followingly, we need a language that can help us evaluate the state beyond thinking about it as a necessary protection against the most violent effects of the market, a position that Wendy Brown (1995) has observed among liberals as well as among the left. State practices are, to borrow the words from Gargi Bhattacharyya, part of 'the sedimented histories of racialized dispossession' (2018), which are necessary in order to understand both the racialisation of refugees today, as

well as its institutions. In other words, racial capitalism explains how the possession, of the asylum centres and the employment offices and the houses, is preceded by *dispossession* of migrants' opportunities to make a living.

Dispossession in racial capitalism can be illustrated by policies on migrant labour. States shape migrant labour and labour markets through, for instance, activation policies that *culturalise* employability (Dahlstedt and Vesterberg, 2017). The role of refugees in the welfare states of Europe is, however, not reduced to their function as labour. States also control the temporal dimensions of capitalism as migrants experience a form of time theft and a gendered temporal racism in bureaucratic organisations that deprives people of essential aspects of life (Mulinari and Sager, 2022). Temporal dispossession also informalizes migrant labour by robbing them of possibilities of permanent residence permits (Philipson Isaac, 2025). In this text I am interested in how dispersal policies can help us think about spatial dispossession, beyond the obvious ways in which many migrants have been deprived of land and home before they were migrants. Ruth Wilson Gilmore writes that “[t]he violence of abstraction produces all kinds of fetishes: states, races, normative views of how people fit into and make places in the world. A geographical imperative lies at the heart of every struggle for social justice; if justice is embodied, it is then therefore always spatial, which is to say, part of a process of making a place” (Gilmore, 2002: 17). To understand dispersal within racial capitalism includes interrogating places refugees are dispersed to (and from) as products of conflict (Massey, 2005:153). Yet, refugees, asylum seekers, newly arrived migrants and other related ‘categories’ of people are rarely associated with communities that are in possession of distinct spatialities. The racialization of the refugee is, instead, the construction of homelessness. Katherine McKittrick has stated that “black lives are necessarily geographic, but also struggle with discourses that erase and despatialize their sense of place” (2006, p. xiii). The coloniality of dispersal is, as Martina Tazzioli (2020) points out, also constituted by attempts to prevent place-based struggles of anti-racism.

Beyond the expropriation of labour, land and resources, Jodi Melamed writes, racial capitalism attacks collective life itself (2015: 78). The dispossession of refugees' autonomy and sense of home, as they are denied ownership of where to settle, is followed by policy attempts at making things ‘work’, of again connecting refugees to places via policy. In Melamed's discussion on racial capitalism she leans on Ruth Wilson Gilmore's description of racism as a technology that partitions and causes such separateness, what she calls antirelationality. This distinction, Melamed continues, allows for a construction of interconnections to take place. Writings of logistics of capitalism expand on exactly this important process: the re-construction of *interconnectedness* into

a capitalist version of life. Stephano Harney and Fred Moten (2021) elaborate the links between racial capitalism and logistics as they explore the incompleteness that Cedric Robinson identifies in the complex relation between autonomy and power (republished 2016: 196–97). Harney and Moten write: “Logistics would seem to value means over ends – everything is how to get there, not what it is – but logistics is really the degradation of means, the general devaluation of means through individuation and privatization, which are the same thing” (2021:15). This is a helpful image to understand that dispersal, just like reduced nativity, is not a single craft of policy that becomes increasingly refined. Instead, what is going on through these disparate policies of dispersal, as with those of family planning, is the gradually expanded detachment from understanding the conditions of people’s lives. Connelly’s conclusion of the violence of population control during the last century is that “[t]he great tragedy [...], the fatal misconception, was to think that one could know other people’s interests better than they knew it themselves.” (2010: 378).

In recent scholarship on racial capitalism we find a frustration that critique of the state as inherently racially capitalist has been neglected, and the intellectual project of reinstating autonomy as a political ideal is central to this (see e.g. Danewid, 2023). The conceptual discussion about racial capitalism engages questions of hopeful futures and CLR James, in *The Black Jacobins*, intentionally described how the enslaved Africans of Haiti persisted to be invincibly human, even in face of being reduced to property and articles of trade. Harney and Moten also read Cedric Robinson as a ‘solemn optimist’, consistent in his dedication to ‘being with, and being in service to’ friends (2021: 30). The human ability to collaborate for its own *incomplete* improvement, Harney and Moten continue, can be thought of as logisticality. Logisticality is a capacity to live on this earth, although this logisticality is increasingly governed by logistics (2021: 57). Exploring refugee dispersal as racial capitalism, therefore, commits to discussing what justice could be in the situations that refugees are left with.

3 Notes on Method

This study is situated between dispersal as policy and dispersal as experience (Darling, 2016: 485). The text builds on analyses of dispersal policy in Germany and Sweden and particularly traces the organisation of reception and the restrictions that policy enforce on mobility and settlement for protection seekers in these countries. Analyses of policy documents is complemented by insights from a rich body of research that thoroughly describes and analyses the transformation of reception and settlement policy in Germany

and Sweden, although not with the specific focus on dispersal. I also include descriptions of opposition and resistance to dispersal. In the German case I have interviewed ten migrant rights activists about the topic of dispersal. These interviews were carried out in 2020–2022, but they also touch upon situations and events as early as 2013. In Sweden I have interviewed people who work with integration – as municipal clerks and within NGOs and community groups – and asked them to describe reception and settlement policies after 2016, when the Settlement Act was introduced. All together I include 12 interviews that have been carried out between 2019–2022. The diversity of these voices, and the temporal specificity, are not the focus of the analysis. Instead I attempt to capture how people understand the logics of dispersal. The text does not offer a comprehensive comparison, but, instead, considers how differences in policy between Sweden and Germany offer ways to access and illustrate dispersal beyond specific events.

In the first two parts of the analysis I capture logistics from the perspective of its ‘hubs’, by talking to people with local experience who speak from a specific spatial point of view. The hub can be the city, the municipality, the camp, or the site of a protest. After this, in the last section, I switch focus to analyse how new models and algorithms of logistics are described by its designers. I discuss the introduction of the algorithm that attempts to know migrant populations by prediction, and the models that intervene in logistics by matching. Rather than discussing the outcomes of these algorithms, I argue that they are embedded in logistics as a form of racial capitalism.

The people from civil society that I have interviewed observe and critique different aspects of the asylum system, borders and social citizenship for migrants. They do not, however, necessarily have detailed knowledge about the logistic systems. I therefore put the civil society and activist voices in dialogue with policy shifts and infrastructural advancements in the logistics of migration that are described in policy and in social research. Again, the point in this chapter is not to provide a comparative analysis between Germany and Sweden. Instead, I try to find links between these systems to contemplate what the logistics of migration consists of, or why the circulation of people who seek protection is an aspect of racial capitalism worth considering.

4 Dispossession: Enforcing Temporality and Destitution

The politicians in [small town] called refugees a long-time financial burden. They said that they were hit hard by the refugee crisis, as they call it, and that it gave them people with no education and no future potential.

But that was a choice by the local government there, to choose not to invest in these people.

SARA, local integration coordinator, Sweden

People don't understand what it's like, trying to get by on the tolerated stays, short term and precarious, permits that are stacked [because they cannot deport you]. If I would have come as a refugee today, I would have lived in the same limbo. People are struggling with homelessness, with work. There are jobs in Munich, but no housing. There is housing in rural areas but no future for refugees.

ABU, refugee counsellor, Germany

The quotes that introduce this section serve two points. Sara illustrates the economic discourse that affects dispersal policy, namely the dominant account that if migrants are made to represent a future of local misfortune, as surplus people, or as waste, logistics serves the purpose of creating spatial *fairness* under a very particular state rule. This is a blunt approach to migrant logistics, which is, as we shall see, nuanced by the ways that circulation, de facto, operates. This is also what Abu points out. In our conversations on spatial restraints for migrants in Germany, Abu returned to the question of getting by, or even surviving, under the chains of temporary status (*Kettenduldung*) issued to people who are not immediately deemed eligible for asylum. Abu illustrates how the story of logistics needs to begin with the story of dispossession, which is also the sedimented history of racial capitalism. By comparing the experience of these chains of precarious permits to his own history, arriving in Germany as a refugee almost 20 years ago, Abu brings the layers of policy and austerity measures directed at migrant populations into the conversation. The temporal reforms in both Germany and Sweden are aspects of logistics, because they separate the idea of 'reception' from trajectories of citizenship, although, from the point of view of the person seeking protection, they are not possible to separate. As my colleagues Sofi Keshavarz Jansson and Vanna Nordling and I have argued elsewhere (2024), the shifts towards temporal and conditional residency in Sweden mean that when municipalities actively support access to housing and economic self-sufficiency, in ways that allow people to meet residency criteria, they also back peoples' claims on asylum. In contrast, rejection and evictability from municipalities have effects on peoples' potential deportation. Temporary residence permits are, therefore, forms of dispossession where migrants without secure status are deprived of ways to move forward in their lives.

The main argument for dispersing migrants in the welfare state has been to “share the burden” of refugees more equally across different places (Hammar, 1987, Robinson et al., 2003). Both Germany and Sweden apply systems of calculating the dispersal of migrants across regions and municipalities, which I have described above. Referring to migrants as ‘burdens’ obviously carries a language of violence. However, also in economic terms it represents a specific viewpoint. Peo Hansen’s (2021) work on new Keynesianist perspectives on migration illustrates that, however vague, the price of migration seems to be at the centre of every major political discussion in European states. The focus of economy in public policy is, Hansen continues, almost solely on costs of migration, which is falsely or incomprehensibly calculated and communicated in ways that don’t account for the gains to welfare and labour that migration brings. This is exactly the situation mirrored by Sara’s analysis, above. She opposes the images of a local society and a social infrastructure crumbling under the weight of refugee reception. “It’s like they are bragging about a political failure”, she continues. The investments in language training, housing and local labour market partnerships, which Sara herself has helped develop in the municipality where she lives, lie beyond the logistics of managing circulation and reception. “We need to think about them as our citizens”, Sara says.

Investments, however, seem increasingly difficult. Neoliberal austerity, fiscal discipline and retraction, both locally and nationally, has been a primary motive of changes towards neoliberal regimes of governance. Both Sweden and Germany have seen privatization of state services in the asylum area. The governance of refugee reception in Sweden has been influenced by large consultancy agencies such as MacKinsey (Vianelli, 2022) and the interests of private landlords (Herbert, 2023). The German system of refugee reception is also increasingly privatized. In 2024 the Refugee Council of Sachsen warned that the refugee market risks becoming a monopoly as British corporation Serco, which specialises in privatized state services and has for a long time run border facilities on islands outside of the Australian coast, made a multimillion deal. Jonathan Darling’s thorough conceptualisation from the UK case illustrates how far-reaching privatization of reception and housing leads to new logics of dispersal economies and a new geography of asylum. The introduction of intricate procurement contracts (COMPASS) opened up the market for large private enterprises such as G4S, Serco and Clearel who have come to play a large role in how asylum and the lives of asylum seekers are governed. The system has led to fewer possibilities for civil society and politics to assist, with increased harassment, marginalisation and social isolation of asylum seekers in the UK as a result (Darling, 2016, 2022). Privatization designs state economies as supply

chains where profit through circulation is a central characteristic. However, as we will see, this does not reflect back on how the economy of asylum is experienced by people who are circulated.

In a German town in Bavaria that I visited in 2021, the civil society organisations that I talked to were frustrated about being unable to organize ‘reception’. “It feels like the overcrowding of the reception centre here is becoming permanent. The local politicians seem to have lost all control”, Ursula, an older woman who had been volunteering at the centre for more than five years, told me. Whilst the local government argued logistics problems, namely an uneven flow of migrants assigned to them by the state, Ursula pointed out a *steady* underfunding.

Ursula’s town had seen an escalation of conflicts and scandals concerning, as another informant from civil society described it, ‘inhumane’ living conditions in the reception centre. The long-term placement at reception centres for those who are unlikely to stay is meant to facilitate order, control and easier deportation, what can be considered an imaginary of logistics. The German system of these reception centres is a model of logistics thinking: through the *Bleibeperspektive*, a way of *viewing* migrants from the perspective of how the state will judge their prospects of staying, people are categorised and divided in space. The migrants that the German state is unable to deport, for instance the people on a tolerated stay that Abu, above, described, are proof that these logistical fantasies do not materialise. In 2019, when I started my fieldwork in Bavaria, more than 200 000 people lived on the Duldung in Germany. Abiola, a refugee activist, described to me that working politically with refugee rights in Bavaria is changing: “What we mainly need to do is help with housing and access to work. It is increasingly difficult to understand and appeal the different situations that people are in.” Abiola described a differentiation of migrant status in the German system, which affects how migrants can navigate in their everyday life. In 2009, the German bureaucracy delineated 16 different statuses, which have now expanded to 22 residence statuses for humanitarian migrants (Schütze, 2023). This complexity and inefficiency are also outcomes of logistics.

A similar inefficiency in the logistical logic concerns the systems of funding local investment. During one of my visits to a small Swedish municipality in 2022, the integration coordinator and the economy director discussed their action plan for integration. The municipality had been unable to fund an evolved language programme for newly arrived refugees, which was identified as a potential remedy for both local unemployment and labour market needs. “The state looks at the yearly budget and see that they have means left

and they hand out earmarked money for projects that we have two months to finish if we apply. This is how investment is understood as it is delegated to us. So we can't do what we might want to do when it comes to how we care for new inhabitants", the director said. The design of efficient dispersal logistics as 'checks and balances' across very diverse geographies, which the municipal budget represents, often fails to consider local problem-solving and creativity. Logistics is the art and science that calculates value of people and places, but disregards changes, potentials and disruptions that stem from *outside* of the logistical infrastructures. In the calculation of housing stock and availability in school classrooms, the creative aspects of building new lives and changing local economies in unexpected ways are disregarded. Therefore, logistics does not allow for a multitude of possible local responses to migration and it does not facilitate inventive ways to invest in refugees as long-term citizens. It matters that the price-tags on migrants, as they are dispersed across municipalities, are calculated within a framework of austerity, because the lack of resources becomes a form of dispossession. Coddington et al. illustratively write about this as destitution economies, where law and state practices of exclusion produces value: "Destitution is precisely the state of living without thriving, existing without resources to move on or settle permanently. Migrants' value emerges, then, from remaining on the move and everyday reproductive capacities", they write (2020: 1439). 'Living without thriving' risks becoming naturalised as a characteristic of protection seekers in the logistic rationalities that guide 'reception'. Their dispossession is matched to places that are, also, dispossessed.

5 Expulsion and Integration in Rural and Urban Space

They created these spaces where people feel trapped. We need to find ways to get to where people are and that's why we are working with the bus. If you are in one of these [refugee centers], you don't have access to legal aid, you are not part of anything. But it's also difficult to know what is going on and to report about it. The people that I meet tell me awful things, it's like an overcrowded prison.

KIM, refugee activist, Germany

It was in [neighbourhood] that there were about twenty people who the municipality had had no previous contact with. They had been in a municipality in Stockholm before and they had to choose between being

homeless or moving here. It was very obvious that they didn't intend to come here. It's pretty far, not exactly a commute away. One of the families still live here and we are great friends.

ALICE, civil society volunteer, Sweden

Alice lives on the countryside outside of the small town where she volunteers to create a stronger local community. She has worried about the increased influence of right-wing nationalist groups, “the Nazis”, in her town, and about the segregation that refugees experience. She connects these two phenomena as consequences of a more socially distant society. “I need to get engaged for the young people”, she says, “they can't grow up thinking this is normal”. In the quote above she refers to a practice that has come to be known as “social dumping”, meaning that municipalities commission housing by private landlords for their assigned refugees outside of their municipal borders, i.e. ‘dump’ them. The word ‘social’ reflects one of the main arguments for refugee dispersal, namely that it intends to share the burden of *people*. Social dumping is also a logistic vulnerability, an unintended consequence in the design, and illustrates how free flow and unhindered circulation is a logistic fantasy rather than a real outcome. Social dumping, separate from the logistics design of dispersal but part of the logistics logic, does not only produce spaces as dumping grounds, like the small town where Alice lives, which has undergone economic crises and still struggles with high unemployment. It matches people who are deemed as ‘social problems’ to places that are equally dispossessed.

Kim, who speaks in the first quote above, has, together with others in the organisation for refugee rights that he is part of, acquired a bus to regularly access a refugee centre in rural Bavaria. Advocates for refugee rights have for a long time warned about the conditions at the German AnKER centres. The AnKER-Einrichtung, which is short for “Ankunft, Entscheidung und Rückführung”, meaning Arrival, Municipal Distribution, Deportation, can certainly be thought of as logistic in their design. The centres have been accused of being overcrowded health-hazards and for keeping people over long periods of time. “The isolation of some of these centres is one of the worst aspects”, Kim says. “They are not supposed to be prisons exactly, but they feel like it. How could they get anywhere, make any sort of life?”, he says. The experiences of rural containment in German refugee logistics can be situated in a wider political context that stretches back in time. In 2012, protests against the living conditions for refugees culminated on the Oranienplatz in Berlin. It had been preceded by years of opposition against containment and its administration in form of the Residenzpflicht. The Residenzpflicht required refugees to remain within a limited federal territory and imposed other confinements,

such as requirements forcing refugees into an economy of food stamps rather than money. The Oranienplatz became a place that symbolically linked protests and hunger strikes in several cities and villages, and linked the South of Germany to the capital through a 600-kilometre-long protest march. "These protests changed how refugees speak up for themselves. For the first time, we were allowed to voice our own concerns, as black people or as refugees, and Germans listened and supported us. We didn't let white Germans speak for us", says Gloria, who is originally from Cameroon and who I met in Berlin in 2022 to talk about the protests from ten years ago. The protests of 2012 represented a call for increased autonomy, regardless of whether people suffered restrictions specific to rural or urban lives.

When dispersal is the lens, struggles against the *Residenzpflicht* and against the conditions at the refugee centres that Kim and Gloria are part of, can be linked to the struggles for sustainable communities that Alice dreams of. They all bring up the importance of dignity, intentionality and autonomy for people to be able to make a home. Practices of care unsettle systems of dispersal, as Jonathan Darling has also observed (2023: 183), and these local relations forge solidarities in unpredictable ways as slow violence is met with 'modes of slow resistance and refutation' (ibid.). Although refugee logistics operates through a set of standards, for instance the calculation of dispersal or the classification of a likeliness to be granted asylum, it will not produce a homogenous refugee geography. Refugee reception outside urban or metropolitan areas is a debate in its own, where it has been asked whether rural spaces are good for migrant integration. Migrants, generally, choose larger cities as places to start building a new life in a new country. This is not very surprising, considering the presence of diaspora and networks, as well as economic possibilities to make a living in a larger urban economy. Despite this, dispersal policies have often assumed that the diffusion of migrants is good for integration. This has, particularly, been the case in Nordic welfare states where integration is highly regulated and often involves interference in the personal lives of newcomers (Larsen, 2011). Dispersal to small towns carries specific understandings of family and community, which has disconnected migrants from ethnic networks that could function as important translations and securities (ibid.). Carlbaum (2022) has studied how refugees in smaller villages often experience a sense of isolation due to poor communications and Arora-Jonsson (2017) concludes that many rural places lack deliberative democratic structures that allow ethnic communities or individual migrants to participate in local development. Dispersal is sometimes proposed as regional development, or a 'regionalization' of migration policy in order to tackle geographic imbalances of population and economy (Akbari and MacDonald, 2014). Disputing this argument,

Kreichauf instead understands onward migration processes as a direct outcome of dispersal and, thus, argues that “immigration (and dispersal) does not solve structural and demographic problems” (2023: 353). In refugee resettlement, small towns have a dual role “as both dumping grounds for dispersed migrants and jumping-off sites and enablers of further migration trajectories” (ibid.). When dispersal of migrants produces ‘dumping grounds’, it serves to position migrants as ‘waste’ (Cheshire and Zappia, 2016). Yet, as Gloria explained in the quotes above, the struggles against the *Residenzpflicht* linked geographies and claims in unexpected ways. Emerging cultures of conviviality, often led by refugees, has the potential to re-shape peripheral places by actively building community (Krifors, 2022). When forced dispersal is protested, it also has the potential of celebrating diversity in both rural and urban spaces.

Although resettlement and refugee logistics have sparked discussions about the role of the rural or the periphery in new logistics of racial capitalism, urban spaces are equally tangled up in these systems. In both Germany and Sweden ‘refugee reception’ shed light on the escalating housing crises, and on the different ways that logistics attempts to re-direct flows *away* from urban areas that are thought of as overcrowded. The German regulation of the *Wohnsitzauflage*, for instance, has presented a large intervention in the mobility and autonomy of migrants, yet its results are unclear almost a decade after its enforcement (Landsberger, 2022). Although the *Wohnsitzauflage* represents a national policy, different states have had varying degrees of restrictions and force to their dispersal practices (Renner, 2018). Abu, the refugee counsellor I introduced above, is concerned about the complexity of asylum experienced by people who seek protection in Germany. “[The *Wohnsitzauflage*] created a large inequality, because it is natural that you would want to live in a city where you can find a job. The bureaucracy is extremely stressful, just to understand what you are allowed to do and not”, Abu says. In his descriptions, Abu doesn’t separate the effects of different policies and regulations. Regulations, he explains, often come together as different ways to cut refugees off from ways of surviving. Logistics has made some tracks easier for migrants with high likeliness to receive permanent status, but it also produces ‘leftover’ categories of people. Mouna Maaroufi (2022) has analysed how layers of German activation policies target protections seekers differently depending on their likeliness to stay and depending on where they reside. This, Maaroufi’s observes, is a formation of racial capitalist logistics that produces a spectrum of experiences: from coerced labour to labour market exclusion. Not least because people who are ‘tolerated’ are, also in the cities, forced to live in over-crowded camps and circumscribed in their everyday mobility.

Changes in Swedish refugee politics are often rooted in ideological beliefs. Yet, policy inventions often seem to have a logistic design. The racial and biopolitical notion of the overcrowded city and its informal economy, the 'shadow society' as it has become known in Sweden, is dominant in several policy advancements to address migration and crime simultaneously over the last years (Schclarek Mulinari, 2025). Hamza, who came to Sweden from Syria in 2015 and who works with education for immigrants, explained the impact of temporary permits: "More and more often we think about leaving Sweden. It is not easy to live here as a Muslim. We try to do every single thing right, but it seems as though it will never ever be enough." Hamza talks about an underlying fear of expulsion where political unpredictability and anti-Muslim racism threatens the rooted security he built in the city where he lives. However, Hamza also talks about his experiences in the context of very concrete policy suggestions to revoke 'permanence' as a sense of security for most migrant categories. It is in this very particular time of symbolic and real anti-immigrant regulations, that logistics prevents intentional migrant investment. The right to self-settlement in Sweden is an example of a regular antagonist in logistic management of migrants. The possibility of self-settlement in Sweden (EBO) was developed as a strategy by a conservative/neo-liberal government in the 1990s to target welfare state dependency by allowing migrants to move autonomously through 'the market'. Preceding the possibility of self-settlement was a nation-wide policy called 'All of Sweden', which connected notions of development and migration in the idea of populating places with refugees and the EBO-reform was hailed as efficient because it, instead, promoted individual responsibility and active integration. Since 2020, people with temporary protection are prohibited to settle in specific neighborhoods whilst maintaining social aid. As autonomy, this time, gives way for logistics it is however not under the flag of regional development but, instead, as attempts of discipline and control through dispersal.

As logistics standardises rural and urban spaces it is interesting to return to the arguments on demography. Connecting back to past policies of population control, the regional focus of refugee dispersal needs to be understood while considering a looming threat of shrinking populations in both Germany and in Sweden. Public policies on migration, Susanne Schultz argues (2019), are deeply affected by demographic predictions and statistics about the national future. These projections, Schultz continues, have paradoxical functions as forecasts and what-if scenarios on both the racialized nation and neoliberal labour recruitment. Demographic rationalities, therefore, "perpetuate the status quo via an epistemology that depends on the idea that the population (or certain

population groups) are the political variable while social relations, global capitalist resource appropriation and distribution and national/regional policies of space and territory are presumed as static" (Schultz, 2019). Demographic estimations are one aspect of calculating logistic flows. Deportation is another. Logistics in racial capitalism aims to coordinate circulation by both re-directing people towards labour needs and towards a biopolitical border. Today, new technologies and modes of calculation are rapidly gaining ground and changing how governance is designed. The ambivalence of forecasts and what-if-scenarios are central to these new logistic paths.

6 Automation beyond Integration: Predicting and Matching Migrants as the Next Phase of Logistics

In Sweden, during the height of what was thought of as the refugee crisis of 2015, a team at the Swedish Migration Agency had started working with efficient flows in their organisation, which meant that they were automating and sharing information across departments to make processing times for migration cases shorter. They had hired data analysts and were prepared to expand their design. When the number of people seeking protection increased, they could automate predictions of how many people would arrive to the Swedish border by monitoring 'routes' along Europe and collecting vast amounts of data. The data available to them, from European and international sources, but also from sources collected by the Swedish team, allowed for this algorithmic modelling. One of the people in the team, John, explained the process to me. "It was a very different way of working. It was operational, rather than building on statistical estimates and predictions far into the future. But beyond changing the ways that we could work at the agency, there were also many municipalities that were interested, because they wanted to know more about what they could expect in the future and what they should plan for." Prediction is an important aspect of hyped notions of artificial intelligence, which affects anything from police work, to financial markets and genomic (see e.g. Tulchinsky and Mason, 2023). There are several components to these technological advancements: improved computing capacities, new forms of data extraction, and improved algorithmic modelling. Ivan, who was also working with the predicting algorithm at the Swedish Migration Agency gave some context to their inventions: "We did this before the hype of generative AI. We had to look for data and be creative, which was a very collaborative process. I think it's interesting to think about what we could have done with this today, and how perhaps the organisation would have invested more into the project."

Studies in the intersection of economics and computer science illustrate how, in the new data-driven scientific paradigm, data cannot be separated from data practices. Justin Joque (2022) has described this as a shift away from frequentist statistics, towards a Bayesian account on probability that is constantly revised according to what new data demonstrates. These predictions are, therefore, not the same as those of demographics, or, for that matter, about planning for investments or restructurings. Instead, they are about precise operations in specific landscapes. While statistics was the main technique by which the state governed mobility, algorithmic techniques are emerging with their own rationality of governing migration (see e.g. Ruppert and Scheel, 2021).

As I have illustrated above, the resettlement and dispersal of migrants by states in racial capitalism remain complex and ambiguous in their outcomes. Logistics of refugee dispersal, furthermore, operates in a diverse and conflictual landscape: both geographically and politically. There are, designers like John and Ivan above would no doubt argue, room for improvement. They both held for true that *inefficiencies* in the systems of reception and resettlement were causes of harm for migrants. In a similar vein, Laura, who has worked with the resettlement of Ukrainian refugees in Germany, explained the complex relation between, on the one hand, municipal unwillingness to take part of refugee reception, and, on the other hand, the blockages or frictions they experienced when they did not actively engage in the logistic design of resettlement. Drawing on information about labour markets, housing stock and 'soft values', her organization has worked with regions and municipalities to develop a system of matching refugees and localities. "It has been about creating legitimacy for refugee reception and we have used new technology and an algorithm that matches refugees to destinations. I have mainly been engaged in the work of trying to collect peoples' preferences. They get a set of criteria that they can rank. It can be anything from nature, to living in a big city or being close to your social network. What we are working on right now is the feedback on the results, that remains as a problem." The *agency* that Laura's organisation wishes to give back to refugees is particularly interesting. One of their core arguments is that the possibility to state your preferences produces efficiency in integration, as people are more likely to get where they want to be. Still, it is central to note how Laura talks about feedback and evaluation after refugees have been matched to a location, as a concern. The desire to settle, or the material and social needs that drive or draw people to specific places, are understandably complex in their coding, and therefore also in their transparency. Logistics, and the black boxes of advanced algorithms, are not designed to speak back to people, or to explain to a person seeking protection how the outcome was optimized, when the assigned destination was not the village,

city or region where someone could envision starting anew. Standardization of peoples' prospects in platform economies have seen an emergence of a new ordinal society (Fourcade and Healy, 2024), and as migrants are matched they are also ranked, which is true also for places of promising or decaying local labour market prospects that they are matched to. As part of a social history of artificial intelligence, Matteo Pasquinelli (2023) explains that technological advances of algorithms and AI imitate a social division of labour. It is helpful to understand migration algorithms, following Pasquinelli, as the result of automated analytical labour. Prediction algorithms and modelling to create a market design for refugees and labour would have been unimaginable without the genealogy of dispossession, calculative logics of austerity and infrastructures of circulation, which all standardized and reduced the needs, rights and freedoms of refugees to potentials for modelling.

Logistics reshapes racial capitalism. References to culture, which have been dominant in the European racisms (Balibar, 1991) and long-lasting debates about civic integration (Rytter, 2019), are present in Swedish and German societies, yet they are played down in logistics. Logistics leaves little room for racial imaginations of assimilation or change, let alone investments in new social formations. In light of logistics, local attempts to return to integration practices appear almost as counter-logistics when they claim that they want migrants to stay, and to settle. The improvement that logistics promises, namely, carries a commitment to circulation rather than to transmutation.

This is, undoubtedly, not the same as saying that refugees will not attempt to make homes, or that they will only see home-making as a possibility through notions of proper integration. As Melamed writes, "the need of racial capitalism to invalidate terms of relationality – to separate forms of humanity so that they may be connected in terms that feed capital – might reveal its weakness as much as its strength; for the acts of racialized violence that would partition people from other senses and practices of social being (noncapitalist, non-state) are as futile as they are constant" (Melamed, 2015: 79). Logistics promises to re-constitute *interconnectedness* by making migrant economies to be less costly by being more agile and quick to adapt to conjunctures, or more profitable by matching migrants to jobs. The disconnectedness, however, rests on top of sedimented layers of refugee policy. These layers, as I have illustrated with examples of local countering discourses, social struggles and the social context of administrative or technological designs, are alternative starting points for the solutions that logistics offer. In the face of advanced logistic technologies such as forced dispersal, centres and algorithms, the answer, therefore, is not to merely state a critique against these innovations, but to defend increased migrant autonomy in re-settlement.

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Refugee Settlement Policy within a Racial Capitalist Housing Market

Nicolina Ewards Öberg and Irene Molina

1 Introduction

racial capitalism produces “migrants” and “refugees” as relative surplus populations, and regulates movement and (im)mobility; especially in relation to the structures and processes of racialization, racialized fixation, and profit extraction at the urban scale. This is particularly true regarding refugee reception, accommodation, and housing, as they are increasingly governed in the urban realm, and are intertwined with distinctively racial logics of neoliberal urban governance, interacting with the wider and historical patterns of racialized exclusion and dispossession, racialized markets, and growing levels of race-based displacement. (Kreichauf, 2023, p. 472)

The right to a dwelling is considered internationally to be a basic human right,¹ and so it is regarded by Swedish law.² The ultimate responsibility for providing refugees with housing and other settlement requirements is with the municipality where people live (Lag 2000:1383). Nevertheless, the Swedish model for housing provision has been on the decline for decades now (Listerborn, 2018; Grundström & Molina, 2016; Listerborn & Molina, 2022), a development occurring alongside a process of intensifying racialization (Andersson & Molina, 2003; Molina, 2018). In 1991, the right-wing administration in power dismantled the regulated housing regime that had characterized Sweden's housing

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- 1 “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control” (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25).
 - 2 “It shall be the responsibility of the public in particular to secure the right to health, work, housing and education and to work for social care and security” (Swedish Constitution, Chapter 1, para. 2).

policy from the post-WWII period, by transferring both risk and responsibility for housing provision to market actors. As such, the 1990s marked the end of the former model for housing provision in Sweden and the beginning of a new market-oriented era for housing policy (Grander, 2017; Rogat, 2022; Grundström & Molina, 2016; Forskarkollektivet Fundament, 2023).

Since then, marking an important shift in the collective consciousness regarding the notions of home and the right to housing, it has been strongly emphasized that housing should be seen as a commodity, not as a right (Hedin et al., 2012, p. 444; Bengtsson, 2001). Further, coupled with the immensely difficult task of finding adequate, affordable, and stable housing in metropolitan areas due to housing shortages, expensive rents in the newly constructed housing stock, as well as high prices when buying, housing can hardly any longer be considered a general right accessible for all to claim (Listerborn, 2018). Additionally, the housing stock produced during the so-called “record years” (1960–1975) has since about 2010 been subjected to a process of housing renewal that has been shown to result in high rental rises and renoviction (renewal + eviction) (Baeten et al., 2017; Polanska et al., 2024). Further, studies show increasingly challenging threshold effects and obstacles for households with lower incomes to be able to attain housing in the new production stock (Elmgren et al., 2017; Grander et al., 2018; Grander, 2018).

Also of relevance for this chapter is the fact that Sweden has long been an immigration country, which facilitated the construction of the strong and universalist welfare state that characterized the country until the end of the 1980s.

Here, we bring together scholarship on racial capitalism, urban migration governance and housing policy. We offer an in-depth exploration of the nexus between a dysfunctional and racialized housing market and refugee admission, analysed through the lens of the theoretical framework of racial capitalism. For this purpose, we conducted a case study in one municipality in a metropolitan area, focusing on refugee housing policies and strategies in the aftermath of the 2015 increased arrival of refugees to Sweden. Empirically, this study is based on interviews with officials carried out in the fall of 2023 and spring of 2024. Four municipal officials³ who deal specifically with planning and implementing the dispersal program called the Settlement Act, refugee reception and refugee housing were interviewed. The officials are not politicians, but their interpretations of political decisions can greatly influence the

3 For ethical reasons, the municipality of focus for our case study and the officials interviewed have been anonymized and will throughout the chapter be referred to as The Municipality and the municipal officials.

carrying out of policy. Additionally, they influence policy output through their ability to initiate efforts and projects. The analysis also builds upon policy documents, as well as previous literature. The aim is to use expanded literature on racial capitalism (Robinson, 2000 [1983]; Bhattacharyya, 2018; Fields & Raymond, 2021; Clare et al., 2022) to explore the connections between a dysfunctional and racialized housing market and a racialized population in urgent need of housing, as it has been with the groups of refugees from the Global South arriving in the country in 2015 and the following years.

According to Listerborn (2021), a dysfunctional housing market is one in which the existing system of housing provision has lost its capacity to solve the housing question for those in need of shelter, exacerbating the situation of precariousness for low-income and other vulnerable groups. “Dysfunctional housing politics reinforce inequalities and enclose existing neoliberal power relations,” Listerborn (2021, p. 1317) clarifies. As such, this dysfunctionality is characterized by negative, and at times detrimental consequences for low-income groups. Many scholars associate the worsening of access to housing for marginalized groups in Sweden, with the neoliberal turn in society in general and the system of housing provision in particular (Listerborn, 2021, Listerborn & Molina, 2022; Kollektivet Fundament, 2023). Listerborn (2021) characterizes these worsening conditions under the neoliberal housing regime as a process of precarization of housing.

At the same time, the housing market in Sweden is highly functional and beneficial for capital interests which are – and have long been – able to capitalize greatly from Swedish housing market conditions. Christophers (2021) show in a comparative study focusing on Sweden, Germany, Denmark and the US how the investment company Blackstone was able to profit from the open rent gap in tenants housing, and in the case of Sweden and the US – close it. In 2016 Blackstone invested in the property development company Carnegie (later renamed Hembla). The company owned an extensive amount of housing in suburban metropolitan areas mostly built during the million-housing program⁴; neighbourhoods not seldom racialized, densely migrant populated and identified in stigmatizing ways as “vulnerable or socially exposed neighbourhoods”, a categorization originally launched by the Swedish police but now widely used in policy. The categorization relies on a thoroughly racialized construction of “vulnerable areas” as the source of problems related to segregation – as such vulnerable areas are depicted as the source rather than an effect of segregation. Nevertheless, these neighbourhoods are rather characterized by higher degrees of deprivation resulting from a lack of social and financial

4 The Million Housing Program was a political initiative aimed at constructing one million housing units between 1965 and 1974 in response to the growing housing shortage.

investment and the exploitation by private economic interests (see Schierup, Ålund & Kellecioglu, chapter 12 in this volume).

Blackstone e.g. was able to capitalize from the rent gap created by the lack of renovation and updates done in these neighbourhoods and, to these building, during the decades since construction in 1960s–1970s. Blackstone bought significant shares in Carnegie, renovated the housing units, raised rents significantly and then sold their shares. Blackstone is just one among several foreign companies that entered the housing market in Sweden, marking a new era of speculative rental housing ownership and management.

In 2011, after twenty years of neoliberal housing policy, a legal act (Lag 2010:879) crowned the project of marketization of the housing sector. The new legislation encouraged state and municipal housing companies to act profitably according to market logic. The contemporary political choices in housing have further worsened an already difficult housing situation for low-income groups (Westin, 2011; Thörn et al., 2023).

We ground our understanding of the racialized Swedish society on earlier research that has provided robust evidence on the racialization of labor (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2023, 2005; de los Reyes, 2002), the welfare system (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2022) and the racialization of housing and the urban (Molina, 1997; Andersson & Molina, 2003). Later interpretations of the relation between capitalist social relations and the racialization of migration have found good help in the theoretical framework of racial capitalism, which is the case for our study as well. We take our point of departure from the ways in which racial capitalism particularly operates in the case of the Swedish racial state (Goldberg, 2001). The chapter is structured as follows.

The analysis starts with an outline of the Swedish policy and the political discursive responses to what should be rightly defined as The Solidarity Crisis of 2015. As argued by Bhagat (2021), the term “crisis” refers to the receiving country’s management of mostly African and Middle Eastern asylum seekers as they flee conflict and attempt to enter the European Union. “That is to say, the migration ‘crisis’ is only named as such because the bodies seeking entry into Europe are dark-skinned and thus, demonized” (Bhagat, 2021, p. 634). We present the reader with some crucial changes taking place in connection to the year 2015 and move to situate these changes within a wider frame of migrant exclusion based on previous research on racialized inequality in Sweden.

In the two subsequent sections, we discuss the interviews, engaging in a discussion about how the housing market dysfunctions operate in a racially differentiated context in which refugee migration and the need of housing occur at the local level. Here we turn to some core examples with both dramatic and subtle consequences of local policy. In the last section, we offer a conclusion.

2 Racial Capitalism and Contemporary Migration in Europe

Capitalism is prone to create, recreate and use differentiation and divide. It lives on arbitrary and ambiguous dichotomies, such as “black and white,” “foreign and native” or “free and dependent.” Like Gutierrez Rodriguez (2018), we base an important part of our argument on the framework of Anibal Quijano’s (2007) “coloniality of power,” or what the author calls the “coloniality of migration.” The formation of the imaginary racial Other has been, and still is, necessary to justify genocides, enslavement and super exploitation of populations. This is, according to Cedric Robinson (2000 [1983]), the ground for all forms of capitalist accumulation and exploitation of labor since colonial time – capital needs difference. In this colonial logic, the construction of the migrant Other has been central for understanding the “refugee question” in terms of the precarious conditions that migrants from the South experience in contemporary Europe.

We would like to begin by inviting the reader to think with us about what racial capitalism as a concept does for our analysis on contemporary accommodation of refugees, particularly in Sweden. We are aware that racial capitalism, as with many other theoretical attempts to explain power relations in different times and in a variegated set of locations, is not the same everywhere (Bhattacharyya, 2024, p. 124). As Goldberg (2001) explains, every racial state has its own history, and it is also the case in Sweden. Most works on racial capitalism refer to labor; only a few refer to housing, but most of these are based in the United States and the United Kingdom. There is an evident lack of research seeking to understand housing inequality from the perspective of racial capitalism in general, and in Europe and Sweden in particular.

Racial capitalism is for us here not an answer; it is rather the theoretical frame that will allow us to interrogate how capital acts in concordance with racialization to produce a detrimental housing condition for refugees in Swedish society. Racial capitalism acknowledges and puts into view aspects that a focus on the global and formal economy might veil. The concept of racial capitalism can thus help unveil some of the innovations and techniques through which inequality persists and transforms (Bhattacharyya, 2024, p. 2). Bhattacharyya suggests an understanding of racial capitalism “as a set of processes that distribute populations into racialised categorisations and racialised [*sic*] opportunities as part of the process of accumulation” (2024, p. 3).

Consequently, we conceive of migration and racial capitalism as two intertwined phenomena in contemporary Europe. During 2015 and 2016, more than 2.5 million new asylum claims were made to the European Union countries. In Sweden alone, close to 163 000 people applied for refuge just in 2015.

In response, the Swedish migration policy and long-standing ideology were drastically and radically changed, from a relatively generous refugee reception with the highest proportion of permanent residence permits in the EU, to a considerably more restrictive and minimum rights-focused migration regime, including only granting temporary residence permits for asylum seekers (Jutvik, 2020; Hansen, 2022). Besides the changes regarding residence permits, the restrictive turn in migration policy includes changes in labor, income and housing requirements for converting temporary permits into permanent residency; implementing a dispersal system called The Settlement Act (Lag 2016:38); restricting possibilities for family unification; and limiting the rights of migrants in choosing which neighbourhood to reside in. Although Sweden has seen recent radical changes in migration policy, it is important to note that this current political landscape is also a continuation of a dividing system that has been prevalent for decades (Khosravi, 2009), albeit taking different forms and communicated by different discourses.

Although the changes following the events in 2015 were unquestionably radical, the shift in attitude toward migration and migrants' rights did not appear in a vacuum after this great refugee migration of 2015; rather, the move toward a less generous stance on migration has been ongoing from the 1960s, when Sweden implemented harsher legislation on labor migration. Even earlier, research has revealed, dominant political debates from the 1930s and forward highlighted an official reluctance towards migration to solve the Swedish demographic deficit caused by a mass emigration flow in the turn of the century 1800–1900. This reluctance was motivated by a desire not to have “the country be flooded by immigrants from countries with alien races” (Myrdal & Myrdal, 1935, as cited in Molina, 1997, p. 74).

As such, it is crucial to situate the shift in Swedish migration politics within a broader historical frame of pre-existing migrant exclusion and racial inequality. Sweden's relatively recent policy changes reflect not (only) a response to acute challenges but deeper-seated patterns of racialized disparity and systemic exclusion that predate The Solidarity Crisis. Sweden stands out among the OECD countries for its growing social inequality (Schierup et al., 2020, p. 93), and the migrant population is more likely to experience “material deprivation than native born people” (OECD, 2017, p. 66). As such, racism can be defined as the ongoing process of producing inequality and differentiation along racialized lines. However, in Sweden, discussions about race and racism are largely avoided. Instead, the focus shifts to political categories such as “migrants” and “foreign-born individuals,” or the term “race” is replaced with “ethnicity” (Osanami Törngren, 2022). This replacement of terminologies carries significant implications for understanding inequality. By attributing disparities to

factors like time spent in the country, cultural or national background, and the perceived inherent differences, attention is diverted from the structurally created underlying racial inequalities present. Notwithstanding the reluctance to address racism directly, structural disparities are evident in capital and housing ownership, wage disparities, education, and political participation (see Mulinari & Neergaard, 2010, 2022; Jedrzejewska & Spehar, 2019; Behtoui et al., 2019; Wind & Hedman, 2018). And notably, disparities tend to persist over generations across various domains. Schierup and Ålund (2011) have argued that the Swedish development, or rather degradation – from a society of exceptionalism, universalism, tolerance, and multiculturalism that extended rights to all people residing within its borders, to a neoliberal state – has substantially eroded what was previously a relatively egalitarian framework.

The aspects explaining the continuum of racial inequality are many and complexly interwoven. Long-standing discrimination and racism in the labor market, the housing system, the school system, among other societal arenas, are all crucial aspects. As is the tax system that claims equal tax from refugees as it does from citizens, no matter the type of residence permit. As such, refugees are being exploited by means of subordinated subjects within the capitalist core but not allowed to enjoy rights on equal grounds as other fully taxed groups. As stated by Fraser (2022), they end up in a situation of being “lucky enough” to be forced into a position of exploitation. Their labor power is incorporated into the movement of capital for accumulation. But importantly, they are not to be confused with a “free labor force” that sells its labor power, because to remain in the country it is, following the changes in 2015, by no means an option; on the contrary, it is forced, in all senses of the meaning. Without stable earnings from labor, the threat of permanent temporariness or of deportation looms. To convert a temporary residence permit into a permanent one, it is required that the applicant has stable and secure employment. To reunite with family in Sweden, it is required from the applicant to have a stable income high enough to support all family members, as well as a stable housing situation. For the fulfilment of those requirements, the role of the municipality in referral is crucial.

3 The Intersection between Housing Market Dysfunctionalities and Refugee Reception

To ensure participation among all municipalities in the refugee reception work following 2015, when 163 000 asylum seekers arrived in Sweden, a dispersal system called the Settlement Act (Lag 2016:38) was introduced in March 2016.

Under this legislation, municipal reception and housing provision for refugees granted residence permits, whether temporary or permanent, became mandatory rather than negotiable as before. The government determines the allocation of individuals to different municipalities through this dispersal program. The Settlement Act applies to individuals who resided in accommodations provided by the Swedish Migration Agency during the asylum process. Additionally, it includes individuals granted residence permits based on family reunification. The Settlement Act does not take housing availability in municipalities into consideration. Instead, the dispersal of people is calculated based on population size, the local labor market, the total number of adults and unaccompanied children referred through the dispersal system, and the number of asylum seekers already living in the municipality.⁵ In the preparatory work for the legal text, it reads that:

The Government's intention is that the municipalities should offer the new arrivals who are covered, as far as it is possible, permanent housing. However, it cannot be ruled out that municipalities will have to offer temporary housing in order to be able to fulfill their obligation. In order not to limit the flexibility that is necessary for the municipalities to be able to offer accommodation of a more temporary nature, the Government considers that it is not appropriate that the Act regulates the type of accommodation referred to. (Prop. 2015/16:54, p. 18 [original in Swedish, our translation])

As illustrated in the above excerpt from the preparations to the Settlement Act, it states that the government's *intent* is that municipalities should work to provide sustainable and long-term settlement for refugees assigned. However, the law does neither specify any duration or quality standards for the housing that should be provided by municipalities, nor the financial and political tools needed for housing provision according to the proposition's demand. Consequently, there are considerable variations among Swedish municipalities regarding their interpretation of the Settlement Act. Recently, the National Audit Office issued a report evaluating the outcomes of the Act. The report is named *The Settlement Act – did the reform live up to the intentions?* (Riksrevisionen, 2021:29 [original in Swedish, our translation]). In light of how the intentions are formulated in the preparations, the title of the audit report suggests that the stability and permanence offered in housing would

5 Government proposition 2015/16:54 *Ett gemensamt ansvar för mottagande av nyanlända*.

be evaluated. However, the audit report focuses on whether or not the legislation contributed to shorter times for municipal reception, spreading refugees more evenly across the country and increasing labor market participation. Considering these aspects, the report concludes that the Settlement Act was successful and did live up to the intentions. But, as noted, the report lacks focus on individuals and does not analyse to any length how this legislation affected stability and permanence, the right to housing or different outcomes for the refugees depending on the interpretations implemented in the municipality of referral. The Settlement Act only grants automatic state funding for municipalities for the initial two-year period upon reception. Consequently, the rationale of impermanence over permanence simmers through the national down to the local levels, creating differential inclusion of groups in Sweden. The Settlement Act compelled municipalities to devise local solutions. While some of these solutions are somehow effective, they raise questions about equal inclusion given the varying approaches among municipalities (Jansson-Keshavarz & Nordling, 2022). This disparity in reception, coupled with a dysfunctional housing market, impacts who benefits from the system and highlights social and racial inequalities in housing opportunities and support services across different regions. Some municipalities might have more resources and political will and thus offer comprehensive support to the newcomers. Others, particularly those with fewer resources, might struggle to provide even basic housing and support, exacerbating inequalities and marginalization. Further complicating the issue of housing for refugees is the fact that, while many municipalities use the public housing stock (*allmännyttan*) to steer the market along certain social lines and have done so in relation to refugee housing policies, others, like Nacka municipality (Fastighetsvärlden, 2017), have entirely gotten rid of their public housing stock by converting it or selling it to private developers, thus forfeiting the possibility to steer the local housing market. The public housing companies were, together with the municipalities, obliged through political assignments to partake in providing housing through the Settlement Act, and as such they had a social obligation. This obligation is not directed at private housing companies.

The lack of definitions about time and quality for reception in the Settlement Act, together with the state's withdrawal from its housing responsibilities (Sahlin, 2004, 2015; Christophers, 2013; Knutagård, 2018), has conceivably fostered geographies of differential inclusion because it is coupled with the housing deficit crisis, a crisis that hits precarious groups the hardest (Listerborn, 2018, 2020; Listerborn et al., 2020). Addressing these disparities requires renewed state involvement and support to ensure that all municipalities have the resources necessary to provide equitable housing and services,

promoting a more inclusive society (Forskarkollektivet Fundament, 2023). While some municipalities offer permanent housing for migrants settling via the Settlement Act, implying a view on housing as a resource *facilitating* integration, others offer temporary housing for a minimum of two years, implying a *responsibility perspective* where the individual will need to secure the necessary resources to then be granted permanent housing (Holmqvist et al., 2022, p. 5). Refugees referred to municipalities applying a restrictive housing policy and thus granting only temporary housing are often left to fend for themselves on the regular housing market after their temporary housing contract expires (Jansson-Keshavarz & Nordling, 2022). In a recent study on the pathways toward stable housing among refugees in Sweden, Herbert (2023) found that it takes on average six years to find a more permanent housing solution. In 1995 more than 80% of Swedish municipalities experienced a housing surplus, whereas twenty years later, a housing shortage was instead reported by more than 80% of the municipalities.

In Sweden, there are different formal routes toward securing housing, all requiring different resources. One is through the real-estate market, which requires financial capital and secure employment to be granted a loan from the bank. Further, one needs savings or a private loan because 15% of the mortgage needs to be paid up front. Apart from taking time to attain, these resources are totally unrealistic to fulfill for newly arrived refugees, and the formal requisites of the private housing market turn into discrimination practices against migrants. A second path is to instead try to attain a rental contract, for which there are public and private queue systems containing both private and publicly managed housing. Given the current affordable rental housing shortage in metropolitan areas, to secure a rental housing contract on a formal basis is almost impossible in the short term. For many people, this leaves the sole option of living in the informal sublet housing market. This market is unregulated, expensive and, as research has revealed, often discriminatory on an everyday racist basis (Herbert, 2023).

Further, research has shown a great disconnectedness between refugee housing policy and the reality these policies are implemented in. Municipalities have motivated their application of time restricted contracts, not seldom as short as two years, by stating a “hope” that this will have provided refugees with sufficient time in the queue, knowing nonetheless that the average time in the housing queue is sometimes up to five times as long (Wikström & Eriksson, 2023). Consequently, migrants are often put in situations of housing precariousness manifesting itself through chaotic housing pathways (Hochstenbach & Boterman, 2015; Herbert, 2023). These pathways for migrants often entail long, difficult, unstable, stressful, and often expensive routes to gaining one’s

own house or apartment. In other words, the Swedish rental housing market is keeping refugees and other migrants out and functioning as discriminatory toward this group on several bases: structurally, through its dysfunctionality and as a corollary of the neoliberal turn of housing policies; through everyday racism in the informal spheres of housing provision; and through institutional discrimination given the incapacity/lack of interest of state institutions to solve the problem of accommodation.

Thinking with Bhattacharyya, racial capitalism can help us map the “emergence of a landscape or machinery or a grid where the components of differential dispossession and disentitlement are established” (2024, p. 10). In refugee reception and accommodation systems, the differentializing is made, quite arbitrarily, through the right to housing. A recent directive to limit asylum seekers’ rights to settle in the municipalities instead of living in the Swedish Migration Agency accommodations while waiting for their residence permits (SOU 2022:64) illustrates this logic of differential dispossession. Refugees in the asylum determination process are today allowed to choose to either live in accommodation offered by the Swedish Migration Agency with a full housing subsidy or find their own housing (Lag 1994:137) but then without the housing subsidy. The proposal to restrict this option of settlement has been foregrounded by a decade-long debate (see, for example, Riksdagen, 2002, 2006, 2013, 2016), grounded in a hegemonic and racist understanding of urban segregation and social neighbourhood quality connected to the amount of asylum seekers in the neighbourhood. This is what researchers have called the racialization of the city (Molina, 1997; Andersson & Molina, 2003), a process in which the people and the areas they inhabit are stigmatized, demonized and criminalized. As Bhattacharyya (2024, p. 10) argues, in the present time of capital reworkings there is an extension of bordering practices that involve and encompasses states and other actors creating a system of capture, closing of mobilities for some and, importantly, a criminalization machinery. This criminalization machinery has successfully coupled the racialized neighbourhoods and their inhabitants with criminal activity. Criminalization of migration, or “crimmigration” (Bhattacharyya, 2024, p. 93), has been operating for a long while in Sweden (Ericsson et al., 2002; Schclarek Mulinari, 2020) and is a consistent part of the process of racialization of the Swedish cities. The government proposal intensely restricting the right of asylum seekers to settle in a municipality instead of living in the Swedish Migration Agency accommodation is assumed to be implemented in 2026 (Dir. 2024:47). Besides intensified urban racialization and criminalization, the proposal disregards research showing that the option of settlement in a municipality for asylum seekers has contributed greatly to labor market participation outcomes (Bevelander et al.,

2019) and rather focuses on the presumed positive outcomes on segregation and municipal cost reduction.

4 **A Municipal Case Study: Refugee Settlement and the Dysfunctionalities of the Housing Market**

As illustrated thus far in this chapter, housing provision is a municipal responsibility. The task of housing refugees' lands in the hands of the local officers who have to navigate among different alternatives to manage the difficult situation of providing housing within a system of affordable housing scarcity. Our results show that the municipality in focus for this research has applied three main strategies: 1) special efforts for families with children; 2) public–private agreements; and 3) giving housing guidance. We understand these strategies as moving within a hybrid economic political system (Christophers, 2013), in which neoliberal politics coexist with remnants of the abandoned welfare system. We present our findings and analysis according to these logics in the following section.

4.1 ***A Welfare Policy Logic: Special Efforts for Families with Children***

The Settlement Act created a new policy landscape and new issues were foregrounded, and thus new ways of dealing with issues were made possible for officials working with reception and settlement at the local level. Sometimes, the municipalities implement targeted policies that are more proactive. The studied municipality has since 2021 carried out a project targeting families with children, offering them an additional contract, in another apartment, after the initial five-year municipal contract expires. These families have not been able to arrange other housing solutions and are therefore at risk of becoming homeless and being placed in the social services' short-term temporary emergency housing, which is often renewed on a weekly basis. The additional contract offered through the project was, after some time, decided to be possible to transform into a permanent one for these families.

A project was started, not by the politicians but they were informed. Our then director, plus the directors of the municipal housing companies, they all gathered and the directors of the four social administrations made a project about short-term housing for families with children. Those families got another year and a half and then, when that started to come to an end – the average time in the housing queue is eight years and a half to get a three-room apartment, so a further decision was made that

families with children in short-term contracts could be able to take over their contracts under certain conditions. If they have behaved according to the Tenancy Act and live up to a number of requirements set by politics, we can ask the property owners if they can take over their contracts. (Interview with municipal official 3)

This project was prolonged in 2023, however not without contestation. A member of the public appealed the project with the motivation of it breaking with the principle of equality stated in the municipal law (*Kommunallagen 2017:725*) The core argument in the appeal is excerpted below:

The decision pits groups against each other, where the advantage in practice is based on factors such as origin and length of stay in Sweden. It also means that the decision is in conflict with the Discrimination Act's prohibition against discrimination on the basis of ethnicity. All families with children are inevitably affected by the current housing situation. [The Municipality] has a satisfactory safety net to ensure that no family with children becomes acutely homeless and can in most cases solve the housing situation so that the children do not have to change schools or friends. The only reasonable thing is that the families with children who, after a total of six and a half years of special solutions, have not arranged their own housing are covered by the same social safety net as other families with children. [The Municipality] is the municipality of residence of the person assigned and has to treat him or her in the same way as other residents, unless there are objective reasons for otherwise. Distressing circumstances do not in themselves constitute grounds for special treatment. Neither the Settlement Act nor the preparatory work for it support the claim that municipalities have the right to give assigned new arrivals priority to housing, or that assignment would be an objective reason for circumventing the municipal principle of equality, either in the case of families with children or other new arrivals. Giving a contract to a small group of housing applicants is not treating everyone in the same situation equally. The Settlement Act imposes the same requirements on all municipalities. It is therefore legally uncertain that the obligation to offer housing ceases for two years in a municipality while other municipalities use the Settlement Act as an argument for circumventing the principle of equality after four years.⁶

6 Excerpt from juridical process concerning the project targeting families with children. Original in Swedish; our translation.

The court ruled in favour of The Municipality, but the appeal illustrates differentiation in action based on notions of equality and deservingness. Further, this arbitrary differentiation of humans in turn creates hierarchies that organize the distribution of resources. Why the families were not granted the permanent contract to begin with (and people without children never) was explained by an inter-municipal conflict. The local political parties could not agree on a reception system based on permanence and it was believed that permanent contracts for refugees would cause negative reactions of unfairness among the population. As such, the additional contract for families with children was only made possible because it was carried out within a project initiated by officials within The Municipality, not by the political rule. What is illustrated with the example of The Municipality's housing projects for families with children is the increasing trend toward a projectification of inclusion or integration policies. This project, and similar ones (Jedrzejska & Spehar, 2019), cannot be conceived of as a permanent feature of the local refugee policy and concurrently this project was suspended at the end of 2024. Instead, officials are initiating various efforts that are only granted financing for a couple of years. After that they are either shut down or a new application process for funding begins. When asked about why permanence has not been part of the local government strategy for housing the refugees, one official state that:

It's simply that it's too controversial; they [the local politicians] think that the public would react negatively to this group being allowed to be prioritized and cut in line. That it is unfair to others who are also in the housing queue for many, many years but never get a larger apartment and who also have vulnerable situations. So, they don't want to create that discussion about an injustice. (Interview with municipal official 1)

This quote mirrors what Gilroy (2000) calls a racialized structure of emotions. According to the principle of equality in the municipal law (the law that regulates what constitutes municipal affairs), all Swedish municipalities are obliged to treat all residents equally. In times of adequate resources, this principle would serve its universal purpose as people would have equal opportunity to attain the resources they need, on the same premises. However, in a racialized society, when resources are made scarce, equal treatment shifts into notions of deservingness along racial lines:

this with the time-restricted housing contracts is because there is a housing queue, and also the justice aspect [...] [The Municipality] wants to the largest extent to make it possible for new people to move here but

you have a dilemma because you don't want to be unfair towards people already living here. (Interview with municipal official 2)

“Equal treatment” is a flexible concept that, depending on the political and economic context, can either reinforce inclusion or exclusion. Although it may appear neutral or fair, its application can exacerbate inequalities, especially for vulnerable groups like refugees. The logic of equal treatment that promises inclusion for people in need but delivers restrictions rises out of a politics of austerity. As such, the concept of equality can, when operationalized, instead serve the process of racial differentiation, where the way resources are distributed can still favor some groups over others, creating inequality despite claims of equality. The notion of “fairness” is often invoked to justify unequal treatment in resource distribution. For instance, politicians may argue that providing refugees with permanent housing is “unfair” to others, but this logic protects a system of unequal opportunities by limiting what is given to marginalized groups, like refugees, which can prevent broader social resistance or upheaval (Danewid, 2023).

Within a setting of understanding “right to resources” rather as “deserving of resources,” the categorization of people as “refugees” serves an important purpose; it is made to represent the carrier of the crisis – in this case, the housing deficiency crisis. The concept of equal treatment is often framed as inclusive, suggesting that everyone in need (like refugees) will be treated the same. However, in times of limited resources, this logic often results in *restrictions* rather than inclusivity. It may be claimed that everyone is treated equally, but in reality, limits are imposed on access to resources because there isn't enough to go around. Further, a creation of an Other as a threat to the order diffuses the origins of resource scarcity, i.e. that is the result of political choices concerning the supply of welfare goods. The construction of scarcity justifies spending cuts and welfare retrenchments. Instead, it becomes perceived as a struggle among and between people over these scarce resources (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018) and this is most apparent in housing policy, particularly in terms of refugee housing. It is about (re)distribution and political and public conflict (Dahlstedt & Neergaard, 2019, p. 203). In the court appeal excerpted above, the diverse responses to the Settlement Act are used as a means to advocate for a minimum rights approach referring to ideas about equality, as such resource distribution is motivated by the discursive expression of equal treatment, and fairness.

Recently The Municipality, used here as a case study made agreements with surrounding municipalities in the region to distribute assigned refugees to those municipalities instead, thus lowering the number of refugees coming to

The Municipality through the dispersal system significantly. When one official was asked about how this had been motivated, they said that:

It's a political decision, it has nothing to do with us working as officials. On the contrary, we think it is better to take more people. We have built up this capacity that is dependent on The Municipality taking a few hundred people every year. But I think that the local government wants to signal that we should instead focus on working with integration concerning those already here and not admit so many new people. (Interview with municipal official 1)

This official was then asked if this signal had entailed new directives or assignments for working with integration, and if so, how these were formulated. The person then responded that:

No, this is nothing that has come to our department. We share part of the responsibility for the housing provision, part of the reception system with another department that focuses more on the administrative issues making sure people are listed everywhere they need to be. But no, I don't know, I don't think they have gotten any clear new directives or assignments either but, well I don't know, I'm speculating now but it might just be signal politics. (Interview with municipal official 1)

Responding to the same question about how the decision to ask other municipalities to take parts of the refugees assigned to The Municipality had been motivated, another official expressed that:

The politicians formulated this request to other municipalities in the region as allowing them to take a bigger responsibility because they [the politicians] believe that [The Municipality] has historically taken a relatively bigger part of the responsibility than other municipalities have. (Interview with municipal official 3)

The decision to implement the Settlement Act by offering time-restricted, non-permanent housing for refugees seems not to be open for alterations, even though the influx of people has drastically declined. Arguably, this is because the circumstances that served as a defense for the original stance are in fact redundant. No matter the circumstances, the allocation of resources can be differentiated through the notion of deservingness along the neoliberal logics (Kundnani, 2021). This illustrates how the "contemporary debates on the need

to control the entry and settlement of ‘refugees’ are not substantiated by facts” (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018, p. 18).

4.2 *A Neoliberal Logic: Private–Public Agreements*

accommodation for refugees is tied to, structured by, and developed within the logics of racial capitalism. It serves to continuously construct refugees as the racial “other” and to make them relational surplus populations for capital accumulation and profit extraction under racial capitalism. (Kreichauf, 2023, p. 472)

The project of securing refugee housing in the cities often involves public–private partnership and collaborations (Darling, 2016), as was the case in The Municipality, which entered into agreements with the private housing sector to acquire housing units for the assigned refugees. Although similar public–private collaboration agreements existed before the Settlement Act, the earlier ones are about ensuring The Municipality has access to housing units for people granted a social contract through the social services. These contracts are, through remittances, granted to people who, for various reasons such as health issues, cannot attain a housing contract on the regular market. The remittance contracts typically consist of a trial period before the tenant is allowed to take over the contract as the permanent contract holder. Although the agreements created to host the refugees are similar in some senses, they differ in crucial ways, mainly because they do not consist of a trial period to then allow the tenant to take over the contract. Instead, these contracts are temporary secondary contracts held by The Municipality, who in turn sublet the apartment to the assigned refugee, who must waive all rights of occupancy when signing the contract. [The Municipality] agrees to bear all costs and risks should anything happen. The compensation received by the private landlords for these contracts is the spatially fixed profit extraction from municipally owned land through favorable positions in land extraction deals. Put simply, the private companies were given priority in the negotiations on land extractions, making their accumulation spatially fixed; all the while, the refugees were granted temporary housing.

Since we own the land and can decide who is allowed to build on a certain plot of land and who is allowed to submit bids and who is given priority to submit bids on a certain plot, it is a very small thing for them [the property owners] to tell us [The Municipality] that you can dispose of, for example, ten apartments in our portfolio. But for us [The Municipality]

it's a big deal, but for them it's a condition in a deal that is worth a lot of money because the land in [The Municipality] is very attractive. And the city owns a lot of land, about half of all land. There's a lot of construction going on and everyone wants to be involved. So shaking out these apartments doesn't seem to have been a major problem. And with new arrivals, you've also known that you'll get the apartments back after four or five years, so it's not such a big sacrifice. But put simply they are given priority to buy, or build on, or dispose of land in the city. (Interview with municipal official 2)

As illustrated in the quote above, in exchange for provisory and time-restricted hosting of assigned refugees, the agreement gives the private company the possibility to buy land for future urban developments. The companies should produce housing on this land where a certain percentage must be disposable for The Municipality to use for social contracts and the like. These private developers got advantages in land extraction deals over primarily other developers for lending out apartments in their existing stock to refugees for a maximum of five years. Out of these households, only a few of the many families housed there over the years were, after the five years, offered the permanent contract, based on the entirely voluntary choice of the landlord to grant them a permanent contract or not.

They needed only to lend out apartments already vacant in their stock. The cost therefore was zero, but the financial gain is potentially enormous. They got tenants that pay rent during these designated years and after that they would get the apartments back. Contrary to this rather good deal for the housing company, the refugees were given temporary contracts, and after these expired, they were (if not included in the project offering housing for families with children) left to fend for themselves on the highly competitive and expensive housing market, in which the most expensive alternative, but almost the only one left for refugees, is subletting from a private individual.⁷ This creates surplus tenants, surplus participants on the capital market of housing (Bhattacharayya, 2024, p. 10). As Fraser writes:

Advantageous even in 'normal times', expropriation becomes especially appealing in periods of crisis, when it serves as a critical, if temporary fix for restoring declining profitability. (Fraser, 2022, p. 34)

⁷ This individual can be the owner or have a permanent lease and in turn rents it out. Often for an additional cost and for a time restricted period. The sublet tenant does not have the typical tenants' rights guaranteed to the permanent contract holder.

In the Swedish metropolitan housing market, refugee housing is a financial opportunity (Kreichauf, 2023) – when there is money to be made, there is accommodation and housing for refugees, but when there is no prospect of revenue, housing for refugees appears more difficult to secure. This technique of differential inclusion through capital logic creates expropriable subjects (Fraser, 2022) in the realm of a capitalist-governed social system of housing provision.

The interview material and the municipal–private housing company agreements point to a complex development over time where, as a direct or indirect consequence of the state withdrawing from its social responsibilities, the private sector has gained leverage in land negotiations and development by in return allowing the public sector access to the private stock. When asked if the private sector increased their share in providing social and Settlement Act contracts, and thus their opportunities for acquiring land, one official responded that:

Yes, you can probably say that it did because the proportion of the apartment that the private sector left for municipal contracts, i.e. for the old classic social and medical priority track, was in percentage terms lower than it was during the years when we had the most housing for new arrivals in operation. So, the private sector increased its share quite sharply during those years. And that was partly through land allocation agreements. Then [The Municipality] went out with a proposal to the large private property owners, they contacted some of the big private ones, [...] they promised the large private companies that they would get certain land agreements in the long term if they delivered a certain amount of apartments in their existing stock, because at that time we could not wait for housing to be built, like you would with the earlier agreements. So, they were given a completely transparent and open promise that they would, in the long run, be paid back. But in the beginning that was a special solution to quickly get apartments from the existing stock from the private property owners. and they increased their share of contracts with [The Municipality], the private share was up to 25% if you account for their share in all the different municipal contracts that we had. And before the Settlement Act, that proportion was never above 10% so it increased quite a lot. (Interview with municipal official 3)

From our interviews, we see that the distribution of housing provision responsibility shared between the private and the public through various agreements has a couple of fundamental implications. One is the potential for the private

sector to acquire public land. A second is the possibility of the private actors to evaluate tenants over a period of several years and then decide if they want to, although totally optional, offer the tenants a permanent contract. Thirdly, compared to regular tenants, the refugee tenants have little power over their housing situation, and simultaneously The Municipality has transferred responsibility to private actors. This system is heavily influenced by the public–private agreements, allowing the private to increasingly dictate the right to housing and the right to the city, creating further racial inequality lines. This illustrates the power of the private actors in the housing market in Sweden and how these companies are part of and have power in the local settlement practices. This is more or less forceful in different municipal settings, depending on how much power the public has granted private actors.

In the context of housing commodification and the historical development of housing as a commodity that can be profited from, which has generally benefited the home-owning population, it is conceivable that the consequences of the fact that the municipalities have interpreted the Settlement Act restrictively, and thus do not offer a permanent entry into the housing market with reference to equal treatment and fairness, have skewed wealth trend further. Life has become a prop for the remaking and maintaining of resources rather than the other way around (Fraser, 2022). Rather than the need of people guiding the allocation of resources, we end up with a system that, albeit taking on different shapes and routes, is guided by the need of the distribution itself and the remaking of resources.

As shown by Kreichauf, “refugee accommodation forms an arena of racial capitalism – sites of profit-making and sites where value is extracted from refugees, their continued racialization, and the spaces they occupy, serving urban state ambitions for creating and sustaining the conditions for accumulation” (2023, p. 478). The fact that refugee migrants are not offered permanence on equal grounds may conceivably continue to feed the racial wealth inequalities that already exist in Swedish society, where people born in Sweden tend to own their housing, to a greater extent, and thus be able to make money off it. People born outside Sweden live to a greater extent in rented dwellings, a form of housing that has not been commodified to the same extent.

4.3 *State Withdrawal Wrapped Up in “Housing Guidance”*

Part of the neoliberal policy development in Sweden is the notion of “empowerment.” As a concept, “empowerment” has undergone a significant transformation, aligning with the prevailing neoliberal economic paradigm. Although “empowerment” is rooted in civil rights activism and feminist thinking (Rushing, 2016), the term has been co-opted by neoliberal discourse on human

capacity. In this discourse, empowerment has been made to signify people's ability to compete within neoliberal frameworks and is thus used to justify state withdrawal from the provision of social welfare. The ideas of strengthening the individual to participate in the market and stress individual responsibility is visible in the local strategy of offering housing guidance, a common strategy in many Swedish municipalities post-2015.

We offer housing guidance about how to apply for housing and what the different requirements mean. And we stress that it is every individual's own responsibility to secure housing, so we push and encourage people in their quest for housing. (Interview with municipal official 1)

Consequently, when governments fail to translate empowerment rhetoric into tangible measures that equip individuals with the essentials they are entitled to, it becomes a mere façade that conceals the inherent struggles for equality and justice. It risks becoming "just another disempowering practice dressed in a liberation jumpsuit" (Buono, 2015, p. 139). Empowerment, as a guiding principle for municipal housing efforts, despite its presumably well-intended nature at the local governmental level, exacerbates the unequal framework migrants encounter in the Swedish housing market through a neoliberal logic that critically shifts responsibility from the meso to the micro level, from the state level to the individual. It becomes perceived as the duty of individuals rather than a mandated responsibility of national and local governments to see to all people's rights to housing. This responsibility relocation inadvertently obscures the reality of reduced resources for social efforts, such as refugee housing, masking systemic inadequacies through the dedication of the municipal officials.

The ultimate goal for many parties on the political spectra is for the housing market to become, to the largest extent, private and thus promote private property in its variegated forms instead of rental housing. This ideology is evidenced through policy discourse as well, when officials are expressing owning one's house as a measurement for migrant success. When asked if The Municipality evaluates their efforts and finds out what happens with the assigned refugees after their municipal contracts expire, one official said that:

When it comes to families with children, roughly 50% of the households are able to find housing on their own while around 50% move on to live in housing provided within the project supplying housing for families with children. [...] but around 50% have found housing on their own and among those it differs what kind of housing solution they have found. Sometimes it's a sublet contract and sometimes they actually become

homeowners. Some have actually come that far in their five years in [The Municipality], they are established on the labor and housing market. (Interview with municipal official 1)

As such, home ownership is interpreted as a successful integration trajectory for the migrants. Consequently, the ultimate goal, the ultimate measurement for successful integration is major debt (Fraser, 2022, p. 40). Contrary to the social ideal of the Swedish public housing and the universalist idea, we have, since the 1990s, seen politics and policy of deregulation and periods of mass conversion of the public housing sector in favor of privatization (Magnusson Turner & Andersson, 2008, pp. 3ff), resulting in fewer housing opportunities for those at the bottom of the housing market (Baeten et al., 2017, p. 638). Through, among other things, urban renewal projects taking place in several metropolitan areas, people become at risk of evictions and displacement and the outcomes of such projects enforce the struggles and obstacles for people not able to get into the housing market to begin with. This is one of the detrimental consequences of market power in housing policy.

5 Conclusions

This chapter has attempted to contribute to the literature on racial capitalism and systems of housing provision in the context of the Swedish public sector's task of housing the refugees after the arrival of asylum seekers in 2015. We have argued that local outcomes, regarding interpretations and implementations of national policies, have contributed further to increasing racial inequalities in an already racialized housing market. By utilizing the lens of racial capitalism, and combining the migration and housing policy regimes in Sweden, both experiencing dramatic transformations as a result of decades of neoliberal policies, our research is able to point to some of the trends in the municipal management of housing accommodation for refugees. We identified three strategies for coping with housing the refugees in The Municipality. Those are: 1) prioritizing families with children, which can be seen to remain from a welfare system of social security; 2) signing agreements on temporary rental housing contracts with private housing companies, which appears to in the long term benefit private actors' financial interests; and 3) transferring the responsibility for solving the housing question to the refugees themselves, arguing reasons of empowerment. In sum, two ideological lines were identified in the analysis of the narratives of the municipal officers: one is what we call racialized deservingness, and the other is the shift from rental housing as a

traditional proxy for the welfare state's housing regime to that of homeownership as the optimal integration model. Nevertheless, the racialized and marketized system of housing provision acts with special cruelty against the refugees and their families, leaving most of them in a precarious housing condition in a country where stability is a norm rather than the exception. We conclude by arguing that even though, following 2015, Sweden took a restrictive turn in national and local policies for refugee inclusion, this shift is part and parcel of a historical process and project of migrant exclusion based on the overarching racial order. Through the analysis of what the state administrative levels are doing for housing the refugees, we come to the insight that the Swedish system of housing provision is excluding refugees systematically.

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Ghosts of the Afterlife of Violence: the Traces of Racial Capitalism in the Carceral Practices of Remote Detention and Punishment of Refugees

Claudia Tazreiter

1 Introduction

The international system of human rights law built after the horrors of World War II to protect refugees and other persons in situations of persecution and violence is crumbling under the pressure of many states closing borders to refugees, forcibly moving refugees to impoverished third states and the increasing use of forced returns to unsafe countries of origin. At the same time, the historical context of colonialism together with racial capitalism is, in my view, a critical aspect of evaluating the present. That is, the present geopolitics of multiple crises including the crisis of migration, crisis of borders, crisis of democracy and other fundamental crises of what it is to be human, require careful unpicking by historicizing the fear, hatred and antipathy to the figure of the refugee/outsider/irregular migrant through the lens of racialization experienced as discrimination, impoverishment and marginalization. These experiences have their roots in the longer histories of the rise of capitalism and the highly differentiated attribution of value inherent in this economic form. The systematized value extraction at the heart of capitalist relations morphs over time into ever new forms of expropriation, exploitation and annihilation. It does so through the violence of neo-colonialism in the practices of states that are also part of the systems of racial capitalism.

The current global context is one where, on the one hand, the numbers of people who experience forced displacement is rising sharply, while on the other hand, opportunities for safety and a genuine extension of basic rights, or liveability, are just as sharply shrinking. My aim in this paper is to delve into the detail of one case of a settler-colonial state, Australia, that has implemented a perhaps unique architecture of surveillance, punishment and designed harm targeting refugees arriving by boat through the design of a *carceral archipelago* whereby refugees are sent to remote locations. In detailing this case, I draw on the concepts of racial capitalism, necro-power and haunting. Together, they provide the theoretical architecture to make sense of the empirical detail of

refugee experience in remote sites of incarceration, in this case, Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. The paper includes a comparative component to make sense of the contemporary circumstances of harsher policies toward refugees and other irregular migrants as global patterns. In this regard, developments in Sweden are explored to show the relevance of the carceral archipelago in the Asia-Pacific for the Nordic region and indeed for the EU. Sweden is an important case to highlight given its historically generous and open position toward refugees and the more recent punitive turn toward not only refugees but to migrants more generally.

The paper describes and analyses the ways in which the designed violence of the *carceral archipelago* reverberates across time and space, leaving remainders among the living in the form of ghosts. Later in the paper the idea of haunting is developed as the constitutive impact of the carceral violence targeting refugees. Haunting is considered as sonic and affective reverberations that also mitigate against the erasure of those killed and disappeared. Ultimately, I seek to show how the Australian case is an important lesson for other states and for the international system of refugee protection. Sweden is a salient point of comparison, both as a European country that has historically been part of the cooperative system of harmonised approaches and policies toward refugees, and also as an important example of new Nordic exceptionalism.

2 Safe Haven No More. The New Swedish Exceptionalism in Relation to Migrants

Sweden maintains a national self-understanding as a human rights leader in the world, a state with a strong welfare system to protect members of the political community. Many scholars have shown the decline in this normative and policy frame, documenting the decline of the Swedish welfare state over time, relying among other strategies, on the racialization of migrant groups as undeserving, as well as draining of welfare provisions (Keskinen et al., 2010). Housing and housing segregation is one particular strategy of the Swedish state and its local municipalities related to the ghettoisation of certain areas of Sweden and Swedish cities as a form of spatial segregation (Thapar-Björkert et al., 2019). Spatial segregation results, among other things, in growing fear of certain immigrant groups as moral panics ensue related to the criminalization of immigrant youth (Schierup et al., 2022), but also in relation to gender-based violence and discrimination faced disproportionately by immigrant women (Alinia, 2020). Such developments are an aspect of social change, shaping societal attitudes and arguably legitimizing policies more restrictive to immigrants.

This politics escalated during the 2000s with the rise of anti-immigrant, racist discourse including of the Sweden Democrats party (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2017a, 2017b). Since the election of the neo-conservative coalition government including the Sweden Democrats, migration politics has hardened considerably in Sweden. The independent organisation, Civil Rights Defenders have assessed the so-called Tidö agreement presented by the Moderate Party, the Christian Democrats, the Liberals and the Sweden Democrats in October 2022 (Civil Rights Defenders, 2022). The overall focus of the Tidö agreement is on extending securitization and criminalizing measures directed at non-Swedish residents and immigrants through biometric and internal bordering controls.

Of particular importance for the terms of this paper is the Swedish approach to refugee arrivals. Sweden has a particular history in Europe but also globally of the acceptance and resettlement of refugee populations. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has long called on states to agree to resettle refugees rather than only receive spontaneous arrivals (asylum seekers). Sweden has been one of the few states of Europe to participate in the yearly UNHCR resettlement program. In the period 2003–2018 Sweden was the fourth largest resettlement country following the USA, Canada and Australia. However, resettlement numbers have remained low in comparison with the global number of refugees and displaced persons, with around one percent of the global refugee population having access to resettlement according to the UNHCR. States' willingness to participate in refugee resettlement needs to be considered in light of a states' approach to asylum seeker arrivals.

The 2015 'long summer of migration', otherwise labelled the migrant crisis of 2015, saw Sweden retreat further from its obligations to refugees and to the international norms of human rights. In June 2016, the Temporary Asylum Act was adopted and extended in 2019, diminishing the fundamental rights of asylum seekers (Lindberg, 2023) and arguably in contravention of the European Convention on Human Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Equally, Sweden's restrictive approach to asylum seeker arrivals through the use of detention as a form of punishment and dispossession (Philipson Isaac, 2024) maps onto a global infrastructure of camps as carceral sites of removal.

Another key consideration given the focus of this article on the links between the carceral systems of refugee detention and racial capitalism, is to consider Swedish racialization. As critical migration scholars note in relation to the Nordic region, a growing politics of cultural homogeneity in the last three decades, together with neo-assimilationist policies and new securitisation measures are key aspects of political change marking growing numbers of minoritized

populations as the 'undeserving Other' (Keskinen, Skapatadottir and Toivanen, 2019). In Sweden, racial and ethnic categorisation has a long history including the negative categorisation of the Indigenous Sami population and the application of racial biology principles and techniques (Sehlin MacNeil, 2015). The colonisation of Sápmi lands is telling and arguable continues today in forms of Green colonisation (Nachet, Beckett & Sehlin MacNeil, 2022), but also in social attitudes. The Sámi artist, Katarina Pirak Sikku has, for many years, explored eugenic/race biology through the archives of these practices in Sweden. Such archives exist in many parts of the world, notably also in Sweden. Pirak Sikku creates a range of works in different visual mediums to explore the physical and emotional experiences of interacting with places and material that connect with the histories of racial biology, notably also drawing on the archive of the Race Biology Institute of Sweden at Uppsala University (<https://goteborgskonsthall.se/konstnar/katarina-pirak-sikku/>).

And here there is a link to what is explored later in the paper in the Australian case. That is, the history of marginalization through racialized policies and attitudes to the Indigenous population maps onto contemporary practices toward refugees in the carceral logic of physical and psychological separation to the camp. Having sketched the context of Swedish approaches to migrants and refugees and its move to exceptionalism over several decades, I turn to explore the Australian case in more detail and in conclusion link the two cases through the practices of racial capitalism.

3 Background and Context of Australia a Settler-Colonial State and Society

Australia as a settler-colonial state began with the appropriation and theft of land and resources from the Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples based on the British and European colonial story (myth) that local peoples were inferior and required civilising by the coloniser. This violent paternalism justified violence and extraction of all forms of human and non-human value. It arguably remains embedded in contemporary social attitudes in Australia as in other societies marked by colonialism.¹ This history also allows me to situate the overall argument I make on the recurrence of colonial violence even in purportedly postcolonial contexts through the imposition

¹ Such ongoing colonial social attitudes are exemplified by the Australian electorate rejecting the proposal to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution and provide an Indigenous voice to parliament in a referendum held in 2023.

of concepts such as racial capitalism and necro-power. Since the First Fleet of British colonisers arrived in 1788, Australia has grown the population primarily through immigration programs as a settler-colonial state. The first, and subsequent fleets from England, brought convicts, their guards and administrators. Later, voluntary settlers arrived with the promise of large expanses of land often granted by the Crown to 'squatters', with no payment. This theft of land, systematic killing and encampment of the Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was central to the approach of the colonisers (Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Lake & Reynolds, 2008).

The modern governance of migration in Australia through state practices can be traced to 1901, with the beginning of the federal system, with the six states and two territories governed from a Federal parliament. The first legislation passed in the new federation was the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, more commonly known as the 'White Australia Policy'. From this period, the racialization of immigrants was institutionalized in policies and normalized through the social practices and attitudes that created racial hierarchies of immigrants and First Nations peoples, hence legitimating and embedding such divisions and exclusions over time. Settler-colonial Australia was founded and built on carceral systems that continue into the present, most notably in refugee detention and in the high rates of incarceration of the Indigenous population, including children.²

Australia was late in repealing the White Australia Policy and implementing a non-discriminatory legislative framework to manage the immigration system, accompanied by multicultural, rather than assimilationist values. A parliamentary review in 1966 began the process of repealing the legislation, however substantial change did not come until 1973 with the Whitlam Labor government introducing legislative change premised on non-discrimination alongside policies and practices of multiculturalism. Notably, Indigenous people were also considered as part of the non-White other, though as they were present prior to colonisation, could not be physically excluded in the way that Asian migrants for example were. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were from the beginning of colonisation the target of violent subjugation, cultural genocide, theft of land and resources and forced removal to camps and settlements.

In Australia, people designated as refugees have made up a part of Australia's immigration intake. As a 'classic country of immigration' (like Canada and the USA), Australia determines on a yearly basis the number and composition

2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders make up 25% of Australia's prison population though they are 3% of the general population.

of its immigration intake, including a humanitarian intake of refugees. The spontaneous arrival of asylum seekers has in recent years been tied to the pre-determined humanitarian resettlement numbers, though the 1951 Refugee Convention that Australia is a signatory to, requires states to receive asylum seekers and provide adequate welfare while a claim for protection is assessed over and above any commitment to taking 'resettlement refugees' through a pro-active resettlement intake. Many migration scholars show the diminution of the international refugee system with actions such as those of the Australian government (McAdam, 2017; Mountz, 2020; Juss, 2017; Tazreiter, 2017).

Today, in Australia, as across much of the world, international migration is the target of more restrictive and punitive forms of securitization. Such securitization targets in particular refugee populations and irregular migrants. In Australia and globally, the terrorist events of 9/11, 2001, in the USA, marks a key milestone in legislatively supported securitisation of people categorised as irregular migrants, including refugees and asylum seekers alongside rising Islamophobia. Since 2001 the processes of securitization have escalated in all parts of the world (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss & Cassidy, 2019; Pickering et al., 2013; Tazreiter, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c, 2017, 2019; Weber, Pickering & Tazreiter, 2014; Collins, 2019).

3.1 *A visit to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea*

In mid-2019 I travelled to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea (PNG) to speak with the refugees held on the Island. Part of the Admiralty Islands in the Bismarck Sea, Manus Island is 817 kilometres northeast of the PNG capital, Port Moresby. This makes Manus Island extremely remote even from the rest of PNG, and certainly from the Australian mainland. Manus Island was a German protectorate from 1880 to 1920 when it became mandated territory under Australian control after the First World War. In 1942 the Admiralty Islands were occupied by the Japanese army and became a battleground between the Japanese, American and Australian forces. Originally a colony of the Dutch, Australia became the colonising power until 1970 when PNG gained independence. The Australian Government used the PNG Naval Base at Lombrom to detain over 1,000 refugees between 2013 and 2017. All of the refugees sent to Manus Island were men and boys. From 2017 the refugees were then housed in 'open detention' on the island after the PNG Court of Justice decision in *Belden Norman Naman, MP Leader of the Opposition and Ors v the Independent State of Papua New Guinea*, found the detention of refugees unconstitutional (Giannacopoulos and Loughnan, 2020).

My visit to Manus Island was precipitated by discussions with the journalist, writer and refugee, Behrouz Boochani and Omid Tofighian, a collaborator and

translator of Boochani's writing. Boochani was detained on Manus Island from mid 2013. Geographically remote, Manus Island is a tropical island with a small, impoverished population of around 40,000. During my visit to Manus Island, I relied on participant observation techniques including the writing of detailed fieldnotes that I also drawn on here. A key conversation with Boochani was recorded and later transcribed into a publication (Boochani & Tazreiter, 2019). Other conversations and observations led to further collaboration over the years as well as small education-focused initiatives to find a pathway of access for some of the refugees that expressed a desire to be in a classroom environment. On return to my research and teaching role in Sydney I organised virtual access to a human rights course I was teaching at the time. During my time on Manus Island, Boochani and a young Tamil refugee from Sri Lanka, Shaminda Kanipathi, organised a local Manusian to drive me to key sites on the island, including the former detention centre at Lombrom and the one hospital on the island, a very basic infrastructure that could deal with only the simplest of medical conditions.

My methodological approach engages with decolonial thought where the utility of traditional social science methodologies are questioned and understood as tools and techniques that when used unreflexively can amplify and legitimate the power of the coloniser (Mignolo, 2011, 2018; Walsh, 2023). Other methodological critiques are also recruited to renew the possibilities of research to challenge dominant systems and power structures. Important in this regard is the discourse of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002). While not a new critique of methodologies in migration studies, arguably methodological nationalism remains an entrenched approach of some migration scholars and research, where the nation-state is the object of study in a way that naturalises those persons (bodies) who are present in a particular national jurisdiction, without accounting for the transnational and global practices of people, but also of economic systems such as racial capitalism that exploit infrastructure and labour within the nation-state boundary while simultaneously locating its operations in virtual and transnational locations.

Indeed, much migration research reinforces the imagined norm of national, stable communities that are disrupted by migrants, often working to highlight the difference between migrant and citizen as fundamental to the creation and the governing of nation states and territorial borders (Anderson, 2019, 3). I align with those scholars that eschew human migrations (both internal and international) as requiring a special form of governance and attention (problematisation). Alongside this methodological orientation, the paper adopts

standard documentation analysis of 'events' in collating scholarly research, news and the results of coronial inquests related to deaths of refugees on Manus Island. This evidence is used alongside the speculative theorisation of haunting in the context of practices, such as the remote detention of refugees, occurring in the frame of racial capitalism. Ultimately, I also sketch the hopeful relations of sociability, conviviality and solidarity between refugees and the local people of Manus Island, indicating signs of renewal and transformation that represent the potential of a 'more-than-human' approach to valuing life that is developed throughout. This methodological approach aligns with decolonial, feminist and Indigenous researchers (Berlant, 2011; 2022; Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 1989; Mignolo, 2011, 2018; Povinelli, 2011; Puar, 2017).

3.2 *The 'Pacific Solution' of Extra-territorial Detention in the Australia Case*

As outlined above, the US 'War on Terror' that began after the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, saw new legislation passed in many parts of the world, officially targeting potential terrorist attacks. These developments also saw a related global rise in Islamophobia and an intensification of the racialisation of migrants and refugees, including the introduction of laws of exceptionalism that affected not only irregular migrants but also domestic rights architecture. In the Asia-Pacific region, the Australian state carved out a punitive and exclusionary set of policies aimed at the arrival of asylum seekers. These policies gained widespread public support in the context of political justifications drawing on the 9/11 terror attacks. The Australian governance of refugee arrivals after August 2001 is important at regional and global levels of refugee protection because the refugee protection system relies on states upholding their obligations to key norms in international law, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1948 Declaration on Human Rights (McAdam, 2017; Tazreiter, 2017).

The contemporary perpetuation of crisis narratives in Australia about asylum seekers arriving by boat is the *Tampa* incident that occurred in late August 2001. The *MV Tampa*, a Norwegian cargo freighter, rescued 433 Afghani asylum seeker women, men and children from their small sinking vessel on August 24th in international waters close to the coast of Christmas Island which was at the time part of Australian territory. The Australian government refused the repeated requests of the Tampa's captain to land the asylum seekers on Australian territory as is customary under the law of the sea. Over several tense days, negotiations failed to reach a solution. Eventually, the Australian navy was called in to transfer the asylum seekers from the *MV Tampa* to naval vessels

on the high seas and in the weeks following, the first iteration of the so called ‘Pacific Solution’ of offshore processing and detention of asylum seekers began with the *MV Tampa* asylum seekers transferred to the island state of Nauru. From this first incident, the appearance of a war footing in response to asylum seekers arriving by boat began, with heavily armed Special Service soldiers transferring asylum seekers from the *MV Tampa* onto naval ships. Following the *Tampa* incident, the Australian Government passed a number of laws that created the legal framework that confirmed the offshore detention of asylum seekers in both Nauru and Manus Island, Papua New Guinea. In geopolitical terms, timing is crucial and this is certainly the case here. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, that followed only a few weeks after the *Tampa* incident, saw many political leaders, including the Australian government make links between terrorists and the supposed risks asylum seekers pose to society (Tazreiter, 2017).

The following two decades of Australia’s externalisation policies can be traced to the events of 2001 (Gleeson, 2016; Grewcock, 2017; Juss, 2017; Tazreiter et al., 2023; Williams, 2016). Offshore ‘processing’ (a euphemism for the imprisonment of refugees) had its first incarnation in 2001 (under a conservative government), and its second incarnation under the Labor (social democrat) government of Julia Gillard in 2012. As part of this policy, the Australian Government negotiated multi-billion dollar contracts with the private company Transfield Services (later renamed Broadspectrum) to manage the operations of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection on Nauru and Manus Island. The contract was renewed again in August 2015, for AU\$2.2 billion. Later I will return to the links between the privatisation of carceral practices and the power of racial capitalism in the alignment of state power and capital.

3.3 *Refugee Deaths under and over the Border*

Deaths at the border are the focus of researcher and activist attention across the globe over recent decades (Last, 2020; Perera, 2015; Perera & Pugliese, 2022) as increasingly states turn away from their responsibility for deaths and harms of asylum seekers and other irregular migrants seeking safety.

Here, I refer to border deaths in focusing on the death of twenty-four year old Reza Barati in February 2014, following a severe beating he received from a number of Australian and PNG guards in the detention centre on Manus Island. I refer also to the death of Hamid Khazaei on September 5, 2014 from medical neglect. Khazaei died from septic shock in Brisbane hospital, Australia, two weeks after an untreated leg infection from stepping on a nail and failures in

the medical evacuation system. Drawing on the concepts that undergird the paper, I argue that Barati, Khazaei and many other refugees that died by suicide, neglect or violence on Manus Island, constitute a haunting for the Australian state as well as for Australian citizens. The individual stories and memories of the refugees under the care and responsibility of the Australian state are sutured to Australia and Australians despite efforts to 'disappear' them and forget them through the externalisation of the state borders to Manus Island and other places of off-shore detention. The refugee detention camp, or prison, used first on the Australian mainland from 1992 and from 2001 externalised to off-shore sites, is but one expression, of the necropolitical design implicit in racial capitalism and carried out through state processes (Mbembe, 2017, 2019; Pugliese, 2020; Tofighian, 2020).

Reza Barati died in the Australian run Manus Island detention centre on the night of February 17, 2014. A protest by detainees that had taken place about the conditions of their detention was broken up by Australian and PNG guards with a violent response. Barati was a focus of prison guard violence. Witness statements indicate he was beaten and kicked by ten detention guards and had a large rock dropped on his head (Allen and Hoenig, 2018). A witness to the killing of Reza Barati and has dreams of being killed himself; "Last night I had a dream that they put us inside the place. When the plane is above the sky they open the door and then they throw out each person by force to the sea" (Cousens, 2016). In December 2014, an Australian parliamentary inquiry into the death of Reza Barati reports comments from the Australian Greens political party:

The inquiry into the events of 16 to 18 February 2014 on Manus Island, in which 70 asylum seekers were seriously injured and Mr Reza Barati was killed, has revealed that the Australian Government failed in its duty of care to protect asylum seekers from harm and that the future operation of the centre is untenable. (Australian Senate, 2014)

And further:

There is no doubt that the event that took place at the Manus Island Centre was foreseeable and avoidable. The committee heard that there were a number of significant factors that contributed to the event, in particular the dramatic increase in the population at the centre, the harsh and inhuman conditions endured by asylum seekers whilst detained, and the complete absence of refugee status determination and resettlement

arrangements. These combined elements fuelled a toxic and hopeless culture in the centre. (https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Legal_and_Constitutional_Affairs/Manus_Island/Report/d02)

Behrouz Boochani recounts the death of Reza Barati in numerous articles and other creative practices (2018) against the backdrop of the carefully designed policies of dehumanisation and violence intended to force asylum seekers to return to their home countries and abandon their claims for protection. A collaborative video work made on Manus Island in 2018 with the photographer Hoda Afshar depicts the ongoing mistreatment of refugees, including the remembrance invoked by the refugees of their murdered friend, Reza Barati. A haunting presence of the interwoven stories echoes through the work. One man recites poetry, another man sings in the seemingly idyllic tropical setting of the lush tropical rainforest setting of Manus Island. Afshar and Boochani discuss their artistic practice and collaboration, the aesthetic and political dimensions of their work in this way:

There is already the disjunction between your surroundings, which seem to us like a tropical paradise but which you obviously see and narrate differently in the video because of the horror that you have experienced there. But we do not confront that horror directly or see the situation neatly laid out in linear fashion. Instead, what we get through your testimony is this brief glimpse into your world and its brute circularity – the cycle of death, trauma, boredom, anticipation – but in a way that resists our understanding. (Afshar and Boochani, 2019)

Hamid Khazaei, an otherwise healthy twenty-four-year-old Iranian asylum seeker, contracted a treatable infection in his leg after stepping on a nail. The untreated infection deteriorated to a sepsis resulting some weeks after the original injury in cardiac arrest and multiple organ failure due to a lack of basic medical treatment. Khazaei died on September 5, 2014. An Australian coronial inquest found that he could have survived had he been given minimal adequate treatment for the original injury and infection. An anaesthetist, Dr Richard Glied, gave testimony at the inquest into his death, saying that a series of “little disasters” led to the “major disaster” of Khazaei having a cardiac arrest. Glied said it was not one error, but a cascading litany of mistakes that led to his cardiac arrests and subsequent multi-organ failure – including Khazaei being misdiagnosed as suffering a pulmonary oedema; his ventilator not working; his

being fitted with child- instead of adult-sized intravenous cannulae; and his being left unattended even as the machines keeping him alive were “alarming” (Doherty, 2017). Glied further explains:

My problem is when you have a strong man, a young man who did not have any past relevant medical history, who did not have a cardiac problem, no disability, who was, just a few days before, a healthy strong man, then it needs a lot of little disasters, following one after the other, none of them caught up and resolved, for it to finally to end up in a major disaster. (Doherty, 2017)

The coroner in the inquest into Khazaei's death found that a series of clinical errors and delays, including a lack of antibiotics on Manus Island to treat tropical infections and a failure of the responsible Australian immigration officials to grant the treating doctor's request for Khazaei to be transferred to Australia with sufficient urgency contributed to his death. The coroner called for a systematic overhaul of the healthcare responses in offshore detention. This included a new policy to allow treating doctors on the ground at Manus, rather than officials in Canberra, Australia's capital city, to approve medical transfers. The president of the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Bastian Seidel said:

Bureaucrats should never ever be allowed to override a clinical decision made by a medical doctor. There comes a point when [Home Affairs] Minister Peter Dutton needs to be asked to take responsibility for the actions of his department. (Robertson, 2018)

My personal communication with a refugee,³ formerly detained on Manus Island who witnessed both deaths, tells a more personal story of two young, healthy men with all the creativity and potential of life before them. He tells of the personal agony as a witness to these two violent deaths at the hands of the state they had turned to for protection. And moreover, violent deaths of these two young men and others that are a consequence of a purposeful design described to me as programmatic cruelty, dehumanisation and ultimately what this refugee calls torture through the systematic pain inflicted through everyday small deprivations as well as larger-scale cruelty. This man recounts seeing his friend Khazaei shortly before he was medically evacuated to Australia. At

3 I purposefully withhold the name of this individual in view of their personal security.

that point he had had both legs amputated in a bleated attempt to stave off the infection.

These details are also captured in the book *No Friend But the Mountains* written by Boochani over a number of years while detained on Manus Island (2018). He details the everyday humiliations, repeated endlessly over the many years that most of the men and boys were imprisoned, of queueing for hours in the tropical heat for what was often poor quality food in small quantities, only to find that once the top of the queue was reached the staff say there is no more food, that it has run out for the day. Such are the micro details of everyday humiliations and dehumanisation.

The cases of Barati and Kehazaei warrant attention through the lens of racial capitalism. The deaths of these two young men occurred in very different circumstances, both were avoidable, not accidental, yet without redress or justice. Their stories are unique and important. Yet from the dominant discourse of the sovereign state, count as but two deaths among countless other deaths at the border. The impact of a haunting presence in this context that I suggest in this paper, is much more than a theoretical nuance, it mitigates against erasure. And erasure, whitewashing and denial, are strategies of the sovereign, a key aspect of annihilating certain populations that racial capitalism facilitates and utilises.

After the PNG Court of Justice decision that ordered the Manus Island detention centre to be closed, the Australian government not only decommissioned the site of the facility, moving refugees to temporary containers in 2017, but had the site bulldozed, with all signs of the detention centre erased and the site returned to a jungle landscape. A coalition of researchers, refugees detained on Manus Island, and artists collaborated in a digital recreation of the Manus Island Detention Centre to facilitate ongoing witness to life in the facility through a virtual and interactive recreation. This work mitigates against erasure not only of the physical site but of the memories of what occurred there, and the details of the lives of those who perished there (<https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/school-of-social-and-political-sciences/our-research/research-projects/against-erasure>).

3.4 *Racial Capitalism, Necro-power and Haunting as Modes of Analysis*

The deeply racialized histories of colony and empire that are intimately connected to modernity, liberalism, and capitalism, demand attention in unpicking contemporary bordering practices and the state logics of border control and securitization that manifests as punitive borders in the carceral archipelago (Tazreiter et al., 2023; Tazreiter, 2017; Grewcock, 2017; Juss, 2017). Systematic state racialization of minoritised populations is evident through

the history of modernity in institutions of care such as hospitals, schools, and religious institutions, that are normalized over time as legitimate practices in governing populations (Braidotti, 2013; Haraway, 1989; Mbembe, 2017). In the Australian context, colonial settlers' systems and practices of governance directed against First Nations populations since the violent colonisation in 1788, demonstrate systematic violence and annihilation of minoritised populations premised on racial hierarchies assigned to human life (Lake & Reynolds, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2015; Puar, 2017; Weheliye, 2014). State institutions of care have historically been the sites of systematic practices of violence carried out on First Nations Australians.⁴

The practices of racialization in human and nonhuman life are elaborated most clearly through the concept of *necro-power* as the extraction of profit from the flesh of living entities (Mbembe, 2019). In this politics, death is not just an unintended by-product of the values that drive economic production and consumption, but a deliberative nihilism in creating suffering and death. In similar ways, the concept of racial capitalism commodifies life itself, with the legacies of colonialism deferring debt for stolen life and labour or, indeed masking responsibility for crimes such as slavery, land theft, cultural genocide, while perpetuating gross violations of the fundamental rights of humans and other living entities – as 'human flesh' and other life forms are treated merely as resources (Mbembe, 2017, 2019; Weheliye, 2014). From Achille Mbembe's theory of *necropolitics/necro-power*, we see that the multi-generational, and indeed, multi-species impacts of colonial practices of theft of living entities and resources through cycles of colonial expansion over the past centuries that are still felt and lived today in the form of contemporary inequalities, poverty, and violence globally.

Racial capitalism then, is a concept with differing explanations, emphasis and evidence used to explicate the role of race at key moments in capitalist development (Robinson, 1983; Danewid, 2023; Beller, 2023; Bhattacharyya, 2018, 2024). Over time, the systematised ways in which some living beings are treated as an expendable 'thing' or as waste, become imprinted in systems of power and dominance, as well as in social attitudes and mentalities. Racialization describes the myriad discriminations that create hierarchies of values that do real harm to the living entities devalued in these neo-colonial processes. The transformation of humans into flesh is perhaps most clearly seen in slavery. As one of the earliest writers to systematically develop the

4 In the current Truth Commission in Sweden, assigned by the Swedish government in 2021 (<https://www.sametinget.se/truth-commission>) the practices and abuses of the Sami population by the government are under investigation with a final report due in 2025.

concept of racial capitalism. In *Black Marxism. The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983), Robinson lays out an historically rich argument of the systematised deployment in capitalist economic systems of extraction of labour from humans in globally hierarchised and deeply unequal ways. It is his elaboration of the making of the Black Radical tradition that illuminated the heart of the beast of racial capitalism with the extractive practices of indentured servitude, plantation slavery, indigenous dispossession and militarised trading. Among many stories that Robinson develops is that of the Martinique thinker, Aimé Césaire who is his seminal critique of Western civilization, *In Return to My Native Land* says ‘that Negritude was a statement for some concepts of civilization which the Black people had and which would be important in any development of civilization away from capitalist society, he was able to make this ferocious attack upon Western civilization because he know it inside out’ (1983, 183). While this is but one of many stories Robinson tells in the development of the Black Radical Tradition, the key point reverberates throughout.

An extract of the autobiographical poem of *Return to My Native Land* (1956) takes us into the heart of the experience of racialization:

At the end of the small hours, the rising wind of the past, of broken faith,
of an undefined duty slipping away ... and those other small hours, the
early morning of Europe ...

To leave.
As there are hyena-men and panther-men,
So I shall be a Jew man
a Kaffir man
a Hindu-from-Calcutta man
a man-from-Harlem-who-hasn't-got-the-vote

Famine man, curse man, torture man, you may seize him at any moment,
beat him, kill him – yes, perfectly fine to kill him – accounting to no one,
having to offer an excuse to no one

a Jew man
a pogrom man
a whelp
a beggar

but can you kill Remorse with its beautiful face like that of an English
lady stupefied at finding a Hotentot's skull in her soup tureen? (pp. 14–15)

The range of global scholars and thinkers represented in the Black Radical Tradition were united in their recognition that no existing economic system as well as organised labour in worker movements sufficiently addressed the concerns and interests of Blacks. What Robinson characterises as a systematic creation of inequality through capitalist rapaciousness, even where inequalities did not previously exist, Stoler (2016) adds to with an important distinction in describing how the global economy relies on a landscape of *duress* alongside occlusion – the views, histories and presences (life in all its forms) that are neglected, overlooked or forgotten as part of the geopolitical formations of empire. For me, this analysis links deeply to the workings of racial capitalism and gives a language to the forced disappearance of the carceral archipelago built by the Australian state. I will return later to connect the theorization of racial capitalism to the practices of the carceral archipelago, but also to where hope for different futures lie.

Bhattacharyya (2018, 2024) focuses on social reproduction as the key domain through which unequal extractive power leaves growing proportions of the world's population in abject circumstances. For Bhattacharyya, in contrast to Robinson, the link between the processes of racialization and capitalist practices are not deliberative, but the result of opportunities taken at specific moments in time. This distinction in causality is no mere theoretical nuance. It matters a great deal in how racial capitalism is able to be countered, not merely observed and accounted for. In short, it is the approach of the Black Radical Tradition where hope lies in a complete eschewing of the status quo in recognition of radical change in a new economic form, grounded in the social.

Building on the work of Robinson, Danewid (2023) focuses on the role of the state throughout modernity as the site of racial capitalism. The state not only facilitates racial capitalism in the provision of infrastructure and the administrative support often paid for by the impoverished members of a political community rather than 'flight capitalists', the injury and wounding to local peoples, particularly to Indigenous populations, is amplified in state violence on behalf of racial capitalism.

3.5 *Haunting as Constellations on Re-remembering Past Misdeeds and Suppressed Guilt*

Ghosts of past injustice are now considered in the context of migration bordering practices. These practices are discussed through the concept of 'more-than-human' borders, asking how the geopolitics of borders can be rethought through this new conceptual articulation. This core purpose of exploring haunting as an effect of injustice of the violent practices of carceral exclusion of refugees, extends to the aim of exploring the historical traces of

bordering practices to trauma and memory. Racialisation and racial capitalism are important concepts in this regard where a critique of the human and social consequences of the extractive and exclusionary practices of capitalism are considered through decolonial and critical border studies. Additionally, the 'more-than-human' border approach is a key concept that provides significant nuance in foregrounding the intense reliance and coexistence of human societies with other living entities (Pugliese, 2020). What I seek to describe and analyse are the threads that draw geopolitics, bordering practices and the socio-cultural micro practices of everyday life together to assist in rethinking the implications of border harms through the remote detention of refugees. And here is the link I seek to draw to haunting. The past is inscribed in the present, carried in bodies, memories, traumas (Margalit, 2002; Hirsch, 2012; Huyssen, 2003; Mountz, 2017; Levy and Sznajder, 2006), and embedded in systems and institutions of the state (Povinelli, 2011; Mbembe, 2019; Haraway, 1989). Trauma and memory in relation to haunting, are key ideas to conceive traces of the past remaining among the living, part of elaborating future action and possibility.

Surveying the various articulations and understandings of bordering as spatial, as well as psycho-social practices, together with considering posthuman and 'more-than-human' borders, constitutes the methodology adopted. This approach provides a scaffold for considering haunting as an *afterlife* of the removal and containment of refugees to remote sites of detention. This idea of an *afterlife* is developed in relation to the continuing reverberations, echoes and memories of those absent those who died, or suffered forms of border violence. That is, those absent always remain as a haunting. They are remembered and mourned by those who knew them. They haunt those that design and uphold suffering and death in nightmares and memories and trauma.

Pugliese explains the categories of 'more-than-human' and 'other-than-human' (2020). Importantly, this distinction is to stress opposition to anthropocentrism that is assumed with all uses of the descriptor 'human'. Pugliese stresses his refusal in this regard, challenging human exceptionalism exemplified for example in the legislative measures implemented in states across the world after September 11, 2001. The 'more-than-human' border approach conceptualises the imprint of human society, economy and technology on all of life, human and non-human. Further, the coextensive life force of all other living things continues, despite the impacts of the human-created systems, idiomatic of the dominant figure, *homo economicus*, of capitalist extraction and production. 'More-than-human' borders explains how the annihilation of living entities, human and non-human is carried out through an "infrastructural metaphysics of zoopolitics" (Pugliese, 2020; 73). The use of animals as

'livestock' by both the Israeli and US military in experimentation of weapons are examples of zoopolitics where the distinction between human and non-human collapse, "... the human and nonhuman animals trapped in the Gazan cage are instrumentalized into livestock that will serve the Israeli state's political and economic ends" (Pugliese, 2020; 74). Israeli soldiers describe the haunting nightmares they experience after witnessing the screams of pigs as their bodies are torn apart by bullets and bombs as weapons testing experiments. Little separates the zoopolitics described in this instrumentalization of animal life from the dehumanisation resulting from the design of immigration detention such as on Manus Island and many other sites of detention. Indeed, it can be argued that the violence and deprivations of immigration detention are possible only through processes of dehumanisation.

Here the modality of haunting connects to the dehumanised and superfluous populations as an echo, a reverberation from the past. Haunting is a sign of transgressions, a reminder from the human and non-human entities that suffer injustice, silencing or removal to separate spheres of existence. In some examples, haunting relates to conflict and erasure; others draw on haunting in considering the affective relations connecting generations (Maddrell, 2013; Edensor, 2008); yet others convey trauma as a legacy of violent practices accompanied by spectrality (Mountz, 2017; Coddington, 2011).

Avery F. Gordon employs the language of haunting in conveying an experiential modality, thereby uncovering organised force, abusive systems, and their impacts on everyday life. The impact of hauntings continue to wider society and to the bystander (1997). Gordon explains haunting as an experiential modality, assisting the understanding of the reverberations organised force, abusive systems, and their impacts on everyday life; impacts not only on the oppressed but wider society and the bystander. These impacts link with the earlier elaboration of the layers of injustice reverberating in seen and unseen, felt and sonic presences of the long dead. Ghosts as the 'unhallowed dead', are an integral aspect of modernity, a kind of map of the violence that created them. To be haunted is not as direct as applying a scientific focus to the object of study in the mode of a methodology or a consciousness. Rather, it is an attenuation that changes those who study or look for the ghosts; "Following the ghosts is about making a contact that changes you and refashions the social relations in which you are located. It is about putting life back in where only a vague memory or a bare trace was visible to those who bothered to look" (Gordon, 1997; 22).

For Mbembe, the ghosts of the past remain even if transmuted from the original presence into another form. As we saw earlier, Mbembe describes the exceptional (yet imperfect) rule of the liberal (democratic) state, as already

integrating the annihilation of the “rag-human” that the autocrat then seeks to extinguish through the technologies of the state (2019; 135). Despite the meticulous design of regulation, of law and administration, this system of necropolitics never fully annihilates this “rag-human”. A fragment (rag) stays behind. It is this conceptualising of a fragment always left behind, even a trace, that connects to haunting. Indeed, and perhaps viewed through a geopolitical sensibility, the materiality of the violence wreaked over generations of colonisation, take shape through geographic, cartographic, archaeological means, as the missing bones of the dead are unearthed piece by piece, often at unexpected moments (ibid.; 80). For Kwon, reflecting on the aftermath of the Vietnam-American War and the violence, sorrows and tragedies that follow conflict reverberate in the land with ghosts emerging in story telling forms. Kwon argues that “ghosts in Vietnam [are] a vital source of historical evidence (and a cultural witness) of war-caused violent death and displacement of human lives” (2008; 5). Migration scholars’ elaboration of ‘deaths at the border’ belong to such counter narratives (De Leon, 2015; Last, 2020; Boochani, 2018; Tofighian, 2020; Tazreiter, 2020b).

Haunting is an active, ‘animated’ state, where repressed or unresolved violence surfaces, directly, or in a more subtle manner. To be haunted is to raise things that are unresolved, from however far in the past. What is distinctive about haunting is “that it is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” (Gordon, 1997; xvi). Moreover, haunting means that the past and its traumas, are not resolved or forgotten. Rather, they remain and resonate where violations and harms that are supposed to be invisible or hidden, appear and reverberate, shockingly, unexpectedly through objects, images, memories, geographies. Gordon uses the language of haunting to convey an experiential modality to assist in understanding organised force, abusive systems and their impacts on everyday life; impacts not only on the oppressed but also on wider society, including the bystander:

haunting was precisely the domain of turmoil and trouble, that moment (of however long duration) when things are not in their assigned places, when the cracks and rigging are exposed, when the people who are meant to be invisible show up without any sign of leaving, when disturbed feelings cannot be put away, when something else, something different from before, seems like it must be done. It is this sociopolitical-psychological state to which haunting referred. (Gordon, 1997; xvi)

Refugees held on Manus Island substantiate by the state practices meted out to them the spectral aspects of colonial and neo-colonial violence through

the state's imposition of an 'off-shore' refugee camp, as a 'prison'. Life for refugees held in detention in these ways become akin to disposable life (Tadiar, 2023). The connection I seek to draw is between 'Manus prison' (Boochani, 2018b), deaths at the border, and the legitimating actions of a colonial-settler state such as Australia, with a long history of subjugation, encampment and violence targeting certain populations (Tazreiter et al., 2022) including First Nations peoples. The writing of Behrouz Boochani, provides first-hand insights into everyday life and the materiality of the prison complex as well as the efforts by the Australian state to 'disappear' the refugees. Boochani was detained on Manus Island from mid-2013, along with one thousand other men and boys and subject to the particular cruelties resulting from indefinite and remote detention. This policy regime is described as deliberately punitive by numerous writers (Grewcock, 2013; 2017; Gleeson, 2016; Juss, 2017; Tazreiter, 2004; 2015; 2017). Border deaths occur on, over and because of the sovereign, territorial border, imposing a limited responsibility for life, including human life (De Leon, 2015; Last, 2020). Not only are border deaths linked to the geopolitics of the international system of states, but in a nihilistic turn, deaths at the border are an aspect of the design of the modern nation-state as elaborated by Mbembe and other scholars outlined earlier.

Other unresolved, historical injustices pose similar hauntings for nations and peoples. Indeed, the practices of racial capitalism in all parts of the world have ongoing traces of hauntings. In the Australian context, the unresolved legacies of colonising land, resources and people in an approach termed *Terra Nullius* (land without people) remains as a trauma haunting the land and settler society in violent actions directed at First Nations peoples (Tedmanson, 2008). The mentalities of the coloniser reverberate into the present, evident in numerous contemporary examples that also draw together the treatment of refugees by the Australian government with continued injustice to First Nations Australians. Attempts at erasure and silencing continue in Australia as in many other jurisdictions.

Understanding and transmitting the past to future generations, necessitates access to the heritage – artefacts, objects of ritual, performance and storytelling of the diverse histories created through colonialism and empire. And here there is also a challenge in creating access to the archives, both material and immaterial that store these histories. The material archives of the state, in libraries, museums, official archives and also public universities, have historically been the domain of a select elite group. More recently other forms of archiving, storytelling and intangible heritage are telling alternative histories. Refugee camps constitute part of this intangible heritage as accumulated memories and stories (Estudio et al., 2020; Hilal & Petti, 2018) that survive beyond the materiality of the camp or the detention centre, when it returns

to the desert, to the jungle, or is deliberately dismantled to hide evidence of harm and crimes.

For more than two decades, Australia's carceral archipelago has produced numerous sites of subjugation and death for displaced and exiled people. Australia's relationship with PNG and Nauru demonstrates a neo-colonial dynamic as aid and development are part of the equation, while developing nations remain dependent on richer nations to recover from the continuing legacies of colonialism. A key feature of Australia's border industrial complex of incarceration and violence are the multinational companies contracted to build, maintain, and manage the carceral sites. This is a transformation traced to the early 1990s with the neoliberal transformation of the public sphere in many parts of the world, including in Australia through 'reform' such as the privatisation of public utilities and shrinking government services to the public. Previously, during the period that mandatory and non-reviewable detention of refugees that arrived spontaneously began in 1992, immigration centres were run by the government. This meant that scrutiny of the conditions and practices within detention centres were open to public and media scrutiny through the regular reporting and scrutiny systems government departments are subject to. In 1998 immigration detention was privatised. The companies that run the offshore detention centres include transnational prison companies such as, Transfield/Broadspectrum, Group 4 Securicor (G4S), Serco, International Health & Medical Services (IHMS), Paladin, and Pacific International Health (PIH). They have all secured lucrative contracts without oversight or accountability for the way they manage and care for the already traumatised refugees. In Paladin's case, the contract was not made available for public tender. The privatisation of immigration detention centres in Australia mirrors similar developments in other Western countries (Mountz, 2020) and is being challenged by new abolitionist demands and movements (Wilson Gilmore, 2022).

In the Australian context, as in many other parts of the world including the Nordic region, the imposition of racialized borders and the extractive systems based on racial capitalism are opposed actively by individuals, groups and networks. This is also the case among refugee populations. On Manus Island, protests in many instances transformed into creative works of resistance among refugees, with local peoples and in collaborations with other outside Manus Island. Indeed, over the more than two decades of Australia's policies and practices of the carceral archipelago, many interventions, critiques and alternatives have been formulated, published and shared through various digital and creative means. Of great importance are the voices of those with lived experience of the carceral archipelago.

3.6 *Global Links and Relevance for European States*

Before concluding the paper, I will draw links between the focus on Australian practices toward refugees and the contemporary story of Europe in relation to the crisis narratives attached to migration. Patterns of policies, political rhetoric and practices of dehumanising migrants arriving by boat, echo, and in many ways borrow from the long-standing Australian practices. An important moment to consider in the recent history of new global carceral archipelagos of detention and deterrence of asylum seekers, is the so-called 'migration crisis' of 2015 in Europe. 2015 was typified as a migration crisis by political leaders, but also by many migration scholars, as the number of spontaneous migrants arriving in Europe reached numbers not seen since the end of the Second World War, with an estimated 1.3 million people arriving in the EU territories. Yet, the global population of refugees and displaced persons is over 108 million people and growing. Importantly, other scholars have problematised the use of crisis in relation to migration (De Genova, 2018, Ghosh, 2021, Tazreiter, 2019).

In the period since 2015, the EU has entered into numerous agreements to deter the arrival of spontaneous migrants (refugees, asylum seekers and other irregular migrants), as well as deporting many who are already within EU member states. Most recently, the EU signed an agreement with Tunisia to send asylum seekers there for their claims for protection to be processed (Wintour, 2023). This most recent deal in the geopolitics of migration borders follows a number of other deals struck by the EU, such as with Turkey and other North African states; the United Kingdom seeking a deal with Rwanda to move on asylum seekers; and many other Western states implementing securitised borders to asylum seekers and refugees. Notable also is Australia, in its decades long approach of sending asylum seekers to Manus Island, Papua New Guinea and Nauru. The European responses to spontaneous arrivals are not unique. In many other parts of the world barriers for asylum seekers and refugees include removal to remote sites of detention, forced deportation to dangerous situations and the withdrawal of access to basic welfare provisions. In Australia, the use of third states to detain asylum seekers and refugees began in 2001. The UK has more recently emulated Australia's laws, policies and administrative processes under the political slogan 'stop the boats', copied directly from the political campaign of Tony Abbot in 2013 which led to him becoming Australia's Prime Minister.

This paper has engaged with various writers' conceptualisation of racial capitalism, amounting to historically embedded systems and logics of laws, policies and everyday practices that are lived as global inequality and injustice in contemporary times. In my view, it is critical that these histories are

carefully explicated and unpicked to link the restrictions to asylum with global inequalities and injustice. The international rules-based order that has the International human rights system as a key pillar, is one key aspect of this system. With access to asylum as evidently quite dramatically curtailed, particularly in Western countries and regions such as the EU, these same countries face a conundrum. The values of democracy and human rights that are regularly espoused as fundamental, are at the same time withdrawn for refugees and asylum seekers. We have seen that the concept of racial capitalism, along with Mbembe's articulation of *necropolitics*, provide the theoretical framework for the discussion of the empirical evidence of the withdrawal of the right to asylum as acts of injustice.

The histories of racialization, traced to colonial and imperial regimes, values and logics and to historicise the understanding of a radical policy change in the governance of forced migration and the global effects of this change. The connections between Australian externalisation policies and more recent EU and UK approaches are evident with the outcome of increasing adoption of externalisation policies for the refugee protection system as a cooperative agreement between states. The deals struck by many Western governments transfer their responsibilities for asylum seekers and refugees to impoverished third countries, mostly in poorer countries in the South for a monetary payment amount to ethical traps. On the one hand, Western governments and intergovernmental and human rights organisations regularly wring their hands in public statements of regret at the tragedies of deaths at sea in the Mediterranean Ocean, the Pacific Ocean and many other sites of sinking vessels with asylum seekers aboard including babies and small children. Yet, on the other hand, the safe passage advocated as necessary for forced migrants to seek asylum are unavailable. The lives of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers continue to be treated as political capital and remain the target for increasingly restrictive and punitive policies. It is noteworthy that states spend far more public funds on deterrence and punishment of refugees, than they do on finding durable solutions to displacement. And here there are links to be made with Cedric Robinson's (1983) actuarial account of racial capitalism as the integration of ideology with political economy (extraction of value from human flesh). In the case of carceral archipelagos this logic is also extended to the enrichment of private global prison corporations through lucrative contract to run immigration prisons.

The activists and theorists referred to in this paper collectively offer a powerful critique of the racial capitalist necropower that cause the pain and death I describe. A key aspect of the nihilism of the systems of domination and violence are aptly characterised by Brown's assessment of the end-stage of neoliberalism, which she summarises in the following way:

Free, stupid, manipulable, absorbed by if not addicted to trivial stimuli and gratifications, the subject of repressive de-sublimation in advanced capitalist society is not just libidinally unbound, released to enjoy more pleasure, but released from more general expectations of social conscience and social comprehension". (2019, p. 167)

The harms and pains described are profound. They undo the world. The forms of resistance, often in creative forms, simultaneously point to new ways of making the world in collaboration.

Ultimately, the contemporary manifestations of colonial power practiced on Manus Island as a site of detention, exile and killing, remain as a haunting that connects Australia and Australians with Manus Island, the refugees held there, and the people of Manus. The physical buildings of the detention centre are removed, and the site appears returned to a fecund jungle. Yet the cruelty, pain and annihilation practiced there reverberate across the Bismarck Sea, linking Manus Island and Australia not only geopolitically, but through a continual haunting. The impact of a haunting presence that remains explored in this paper mitigates against erasure of those killed, disappeared and removed.

To return to haunting, to confront the horrors of the 'disappeared' through state-sponsored terror is "to contemplate ghosts and haunting at the level of the making and unmaking of world historical events" (Gordon, 1997:63). Spectral presences and absences accompany life, often as echoes of that which remains from state violence. The ghosts of the unjustly dead remain. We may not always be aware of their presence cognitively – yet we may sense unexplained emotions, feelings of unease, where a shadow passes across our day, a fog, an unexplained whisper across the membrane between conscious and unconscious; past and present; dead and living. In a new 'politics of becoming', the whole, not the sum of its parts that is premised always in reference to the outsider, the other, the annihilated, imagines life anew through a posthuman and more-than-human lens. Ultimately, the contribution of this article is to consider the geopolitics of the immigration border from a socio-cultural position and to ask what can we learn collectively from the marginalised and dispossessed to build a new world.

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PART 3

Transformations and Resistances



Easter Riots and the Politics of Autocratization in Reconquista Sweden

Edda Manga and Mattias Gardell

1 Introduction

Sweden, Swedes, Sweden's friends: our land does not feel well. Shall we be able to rebuild a secure and cohesive Sweden, the good home to all citizens, we must attack the roots of that which makes us divided and insecure. What we must do is also the best we can do for the rest of the world, Europe and the Western world at large. Sweden must stop being a deterring example, and yet again be a pioneering country. The country that straightened itself up, expelled criminals, Islamists and destructive searchers of fortune. The country that was down for the count but rose and stood tall. (Åkesson, 2023)

During the Easter holiday 2022, disturbances erupted in several Swedish cities following provocative demonstrations by nativist populist influencer Rasmus Paludan, who planned and performed a series of Qur'an-burnings throughout Sweden. In some areas, Paludan was met with silence or peaceful protests, while in others, protests turned into violent clashes with the police. In reaction to the Easter Riots several spokespersons for the Sweden Democratic party – a radical nationalist party with “Nazi roots” – blamed “multiculturalism”. Tobias Andersson, the Sweden Democrats' (SD) spokesperson for judicial policy, declared that “Alien cultures ruin Sweden,” SD Party Secretary Richard Jomshof equaled wearing a Swedish folk dress and hijab with a “rape of Sweden,” and SD Party Leader, Jimmie Åkesson insisted multiculturalism had “destroyed Sweden” (Andersson, 2022; Hellgren, 2022; Åkesson, 2022). Thus, the Easter Riots served as proof of the idea that democracy is threatened when people of different traditions, lifestyles, and religions coexist.

This chapter investigates the framing and use of the Easter Riots for promoting nativist political agendas and legitimizing autocratic measures, using the theoretical framework of racial capitalism studies. The chapter proceeds

as follows. In this introductory section, we present our theoretical perspective and define analytical concepts. Secondly, we trace the historical entanglement of race, religion, and nation in Sweden, establishing a genealogy of exclusion that informs the writers' present. This is followed by a discussion of the Swedish welfare state – *folkhem* – and how its egalitarian promise was historically limited by racial boundaries. Thereafter, we examine how neoliberal transformations contributed to rising inequality and segregation, setting the stage for the emergence of nativist discourses centred on “reconquering” Sweden. We then detail the radical nationalist provocation tactics that led to the Easter Riots, followed by an analysis of how the riots were instrumentalized to justify autocratizing reforms. In the final sections we unpack the legal and political restructuring enabled by the “paradigm shift” of the Tidö Agreement – a political deal struck in 2022 between the right-wing government and the radical nationalist Sweden Democrats – as it applies to Sweden, including attacks on civil society and media, culminating in a critical reflection on the remaking of the Swedish demos through racialized notions of belonging and exclusion. This contribution highlights both continuity and rupture in the historical management of racialized exclusion and exploitation in Swedish democracy.

The theoretical framework of racial capitalism studies emphasizes how democracy has historically functioned to protect racial hierarchies as systems of differentiated exploitation (Du Bois, 2012; Roediger, 2007). The work of Cedric Robinson shows that racism has been foundational for the political system in the United States, building a contradiction in its claims to democratic legitimacy (Robinson, 1983). The concept “*herrenvolk democracy*” has been used to name this contradiction, which has been described on slightly different terms by different scholars: as an extension of colonial ideologies, where one racial group claims both political and economic dominance, justifying it through ideas of superiority (Van den Berghe, 1967); as a system in which the dominant racial group enjoys full democratic participation, while minority groups are excluded through disenfranchisement, segregation, and violence (Vickery, 1974) and as a system where racial ideologies serve to divide labouring classes (Roediger, 2007). The concept of “*herrenvolk democracy*”, seen through the lenses of racial capitalism studies, highlights that the segmentation of the workforce in racially differentiated forms of exploitation through different levels of inclusion or exclusion from the demos, has been and is a persistent feature of western democracies.

While we do not primarily use *herrenvolk democracy* as an analytical term in itself, it serves as an orientation point for our perspective: a framing that

helps signal the paradoxes of democratic inclusion and exclusion at the heart of our analysis.

Our use of this concept is informed by our definition of racism as a technology of human sorting and unequal resource allocation (Manga och Gardell, 2022) that:

- a) Classifies individuals into distinct categories – such as races, cultures, ethnicities, or peoples – by attributing to them specific, purportedly inherent traits, and positioning them along a spectrum between what is considered valuable and what is deemed worthless life.
- b) Constructs a collective identity – producing a defined “people” who are believed to belong in a specific space, whose prosperity and well-being are secured by the exclusion or exploitation of those deemed “other,” who, in this framework, may be sacrificed or allowed to perish to enhance the flourishing of the valued group.
- c) Sustains systemic inequalities – by perpetuating an uneven distribution of status, privileges, resources, forms of exploitation, vulnerability, and opportunities based on the assumed category to which an individual is assigned.
- d) Enforces a spatial and social order – by assigning each individual a position according to a logic that each “kind” must occupy its “proper” place.
- e) Generates affect and desire – shaping fantasies and emotional investments that support and reproduce these classifications and inequalities.
- f) Naturalizes the established power order – by presenting the resulting boundaries as natural or inevitable, thereby legitimizing and protecting the social and political hierarchies that arise from this process.

In this chapter, we understand herrenvolk democracy as a political formation in which democracy does not stand in opposition to racism but rather operates within and is shaped by a pre-existing racial order – where inclusion in the demos is stratified through racialized technologies of human classification that sustain exploitative hierarchies, legitimize exclusion, and naturalize unequal access to rights, resources, and recognition.

We use the concept of ‘autocratization’, to analyse the ongoing shift in socio-political organization taking place in Sweden after the Easter Riots of 2022. The concept of autocratization refers to processes through which political systems – democratic or not – shift in the opposite direction to liberal democracy, toward autocracy or authoritarianism (Boese m.fl., 2022; Lührmann och Lindberg, 2019; Tomini, 2021). Autocratization includes regime shifts changing the terms for political participation, public contestation and the limitation

and accountability of political power in such a way that political participation becomes more exclusionary and political power increasingly repressive and arbitrary (Cassani och Tomini, 2020). Research in this field shows that notions of crisis and emergency are used by the executive power to bypass democratic constraints undermining democratic institutions while preserving the appearance of constitutional legitimacy. Narratives of crisis are thus associated with an elevated risk of autocratization (Lührmann och Rooney, 2021). Increasing inequalities between ethnic groups have also been associated with a higher likelihood of autocratization (Panzano, 2024).

While we do not attempt to offer our own comprehensive definition of democracy, we distinguish between explicitly exclusionary racial nativist forms of democracy – such as *herrenvolk* democracy – and efforts to establish more racially and ethnically pluralistic and civil rights-based inclusionary forms of democracy. Our analysis adheres to the established scholarship on autocratization, which presupposes a minimal understanding of democratic governance as entailing broad political participation, meaningful possibilities for public contestation, and the limitation and accountability of political power through civic rights, the rule of law, accountability and institutional checks.

2 Race, Religion and Nation

The entanglement of race, religion, and nation that resurfaced so starkly during the Easter Riots is not a recent development but rather echoes a long historical lineage that predates democratic rule in Sweden. To understand how these categories continue to structure the boundaries of belonging and exclusion, it is necessary to trace their co-constitution in the formation of the modern Swedish state and its imagined national community.

To be Swedish was for most of Sweden's 500 years' history to be member of the Evangelical Lutheran State Church of Sweden, and the Swedish State and Crown announced itself guardians and promoters of the One True Faith in the world. Jews, Catholics, Calvinists, Muslims ('Turks', 'Moors'), and Pagans ('Heathens') could not be members of the State Church and thus not 'members of Sweden', as citizenship was later defined. Neither could the Roma who were not registered by the Church and therefore excluded from the rights of citizenship, permanent residency, education, healthcare, social benefits (even though Roma people had lived in the territory before Sweden became Sweden). In practice, most Roma did not receive full citizenship and voting rights until

the Roma civil rights movement for social justice eventually succeeded in the 1960s. Colonial expansion in Saami territory and overseas, slave trade, commercial interest, transforming modes of production and wars won and lost contributed to propel new and revised processes of racialization and criteria for inclusion and exclusion in confluence with the increasing non-isomorphic flows of people, capital, technology, ideas and images across borders.

Arguing that race and religion; race and nation; religion and nation, emerge entwined does not mean they are synonymous, rather “co-constitutive in their *distinctiveness*” (Anidjar, 2014) While co-constitutive and emerging concurrently in a Christian European context of state formation and colonial expansion, race, religion and nation are distinguishable, contestable, transformative and transformable, sites of power and resistance.

Secularization – both in terms of the differentiation between “religion” and the State and in terms of personal faith – is not an abstract process but dependent on which specific religion the State or the individual differs from. In the secular reconfiguration of race/religion/nation in contemporary Swedish public discourse, Sweden is insistently presented as secular/Christian, which makes the existence of Muslims, secular or practicing, potentially problematic and contested. Being Muslim by birth, or parents’ birth, i.e., by blood, is to be born with an alienating essence of Muslimness often referred to in Swedish parlance as “background”. While frequently referred to, the concept of “background” is rarely explained or theorized in mainstream discourse. It is just there. It seems to cater to the liberal fantasy of the autonomous individual who frees herself from collective identities to be whatever s/he wants to be. Yet, like the stage décor of a theatre, the background frames the person who emerges and guides the spectators understanding of what they see.

Of course, to anyone holding his or her race/religion as something to “be” and proud of at that, the notion of “background” may be quite offensive. In the nativist populist eyes of the current Tidö Regime – a term we use to name both a discursive formation, organized around a specific regime of truth about migration, security, and national identity, and a form of governance that departs from standard practices of representative democracy, insofar as the leading political force, the Sweden Democrats, exerts decisive influence while remaining formally outside of government – it is the very presence of people with non-Western, especially Muslim and Black African, “background” that is offensive to Sweden and Swedish sensibilities. As will be explored below, having such a background may, it is argued, be part of the grounds for revoking residence rights and even the rights to citizenship.

3 A Short History of the *folkhem*

From the late 19th century Sweden built the vision of a '*folkhem*' (the People's Home), originally as a national-conservative corporatist concept that depicted a patriarchal hierarchy – like a father figure guiding a harmonious, unified family (Norocel, 2013). In its conservative version, *folkhem* emphasized order, national cohesion, and a naturalized social hierarchy. By the 1920s, however, the Social Democratic Workers' Party, established in 1889 as the political wing of organized labour, adopted the *folkhem* metaphor, re-defining it as a society for all, built on the pillars of social equality, solidarity, and progress. Per-Albin Hansson, a key Social Democratic Prime Minister, famously envisioned a *folkhem* without privilege or dispossession, where social and economic barriers would be dismantled and every family member count (Hansson, 2010).

Throughout the twentieth century, Sweden's dominant political idea was the *folkhem*, which likened government to a family home offering security and welfare for all citizens (Asard och Bennett, 1997). Inherent to the *folkhem* concept is its exclusionary dimension. Who belongs to the "folk" who enjoy the security and care of the home? Thus, the *folkhem* always contained restrictive elements and clear divisions between worthy and unworthy lives, in a racialized "Swedish Model" based on a tripartite alliance between capitalism, organized labour, and the government [or Capital, Labor, and the State], and social engineering to ensure social welfare to the worthy and exclusion of unworthy lives, e.g. by migration laws (e.g. banning Roma 1914–1954), compulsory sterilization programs of the racially unfit on social and eugenic grounds (1930s–1970s) or colonial exploitation (e.g. of Saami territories). The history of the *folkhem* is intertwined with the rise of popular movements, voluntary associations, and civil society organizations. With the suffrage reforms of the 1920s and the success of the Social Democratic Workers' Party in the election of 1932 that initiated 44 years of Social Democratic rule (with the Social Democrats securing more than 40 percent of the vote at each election), the welfare capitalist/socialist state grew in close collaboration with popular movements – temperance, labour, sports, free churches and popular adult education (Söderberg, 2024). From the mid-1930s to the mid-1980s, the *folkhem* policies in Sweden laid the rhetorical and political groundwork for what became the most comprehensive welfare state in any democratic country. By the early 1980s, Sweden was one of the most equal countries in the world. Social Democracy conceived itself as the Third Way, the alternative to Western Capitalism and Eastern Communism. Sweden's geographical location close to

the Soviet Union might have contributed to allowing the Social Democratic experiment with social justice without revolution.

While the *folkhem* promised egalitarianism, it did so within a racialized imaginary that relegated indigenous and migrant populations to marginality. However, this marginality remained largely spatially external to the heart of the political community, thus preserving an appearance of homogeneity at the centre. Also during the (relatively) egalitarian *folkhem*, immigration policies in Sweden were periodically very restrictive, often following racist logics targeting groups on the bases of race and religion (e.g., Roma, Jews) as well as labour policy considerations (Hammar, 1964). Arguments about migrants' threat to the wellbeing of the national population were used to justify closed borders, deportation laws and to limit refugees' access to asylum, citizenship and rights (Mörkenstam, 2006).

By the end of the cold war, Sweden took a neoliberal turn that gradually undermined the Swedish *folkhem* model and transformed the country from one of the more equal to one of the more unequal societies in the world in income and wealth distribution (Thörn & Larsson, 2012). Institutions owned by the common were privatized and run for profit on a deregulated market for education, healthcare and social welfare. Infrastructural facilities were sold to private entrepreneurs who let the public rent them back at a higher cost. A new cast of multibillionaires was born. By 2022, Sweden had 542 multibillionaires, one percent of all multibillionaires in the world (in which Swedes are one permille). Constituting 0.05 percent of the Swedish population, this cast owns more than eighty percent of the nation's assets, which means that the middle-class share of wealth is relatively modest (Cervenka, 2022; Suhonen, et al., 2021; Lapidus, 2023; 2019). Income inequality grew exponentially, and by 2018 Statistics Sweden reported the greatest gap between the country's rich and poor since the measurement began (OECD, 2015; Heggeman, 2018).

Reflecting increasing inequalities, Swedish cities became the most segregated in Europe (Thörn & Thörn, 2017). Housing segregation is based on class, but as class co-varies with structural discrimination on the basis of racialized ethnicity, religion, and culture, class distinctions increasingly acquired a racialized dimension (Molina, 1997). (De)linked to Swedish cities are geographically and discursively separated underclass areas, in media and political discourse named "areas of exteriority" (*utanförskapsområden*), as if they were islands of non-belonging within the national borders. With a high concentration of residents with a non-Western, often Muslim, and Black African, heritage, these areas were increasingly abandoned by the welfare state which was replaced by intensified policing and private security (Sernhede et al., 2016; Wolgast

et al., 2018; Agerström et al., 2012; Arai et al., 2008; Schclarek Mulinari, 2020; Neergaard et al., 2017; Larsson et al., 2012).

Labor migration from non-Nordic countries had officially ended already in 1972, and the segregated underclass areas were disproportionately populated by asylum-seekers with relatives. Previously, asylum-seekers had predominantly fled the crumbling Third Reich from Germany, the Baltic countries, and Eastern Europe (after the Second World War); the military dictatorships of Latin America (the 1970s); and the Iran-Iraq war and authoritarian states and civil wars in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, Eritrea, and Somalia (the 1980s.) Coming during the neoliberal transformation of Sweden were refugees from the ethno-nationalist wars in former Yugoslavia (the 1990s) and the War on Terror, e.g. Afghanistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, (2001–2020s). The latter categories of refugees met movements of solidarity and hostile violence, welcoming networks and burning homes. They became objects of restrictive policy reforms and provided lucrative business opportunities for the new class of multibillionaires operating in the privatized migrant industry and gig economy (Cervenka, 2024).

With Jimmie Åkesson and the Sweden Democrats (SD) – the *folkhem* metaphor reverted to its conservative version (Hellström och Nilsson, 2010). Åkesson specifically advanced a patriarchal vision of Swedish society, glorifying male-dominated industrial work while dismissing women's and immigrants' labour realities. Åkesson uses the term *folkhem* in reference to “the Swedish people” in contrast to the “establishment” and to residents with migrant background as the home for “real Swedes”, the “common folk of the land”. In SD rhetoric, the *folkhem* concept comes to signify the organic connection between a racialized people and their homeland. This positioning has allowed SD to claim direct inheritance of the *folkhem* ideal while attacking the current political establishment – including the Social Democrats – as out of touch with “common folk.” The SD claims to be the true guardians of the *folkhem* aimed at rallying disenchanted voters around a nostalgic vision that pits “authentic” Swedes against immigrant “Others”.

This national-conservative reversion draws on longstanding tensions between the egalitarian ethos of the Social Democratic *folkhem* vision and exclusionary constructions of the Swedish nation. The emergence of universal representative democracy was based on the idea and social practice of “national unity” (Rustow, 1971), according to which the “Swedish people” was historically, racially, ethnically, culturally and religiously homogeneous. National unity was construed through the exclusion of groups seen and handled more or less violently by the state as racially, religiously or culturally alien and therefore potential threats to the Swedish nation (Carlsson, 2004; Valentin, 1924; Åmark, 2013; Nordblad, 2021; Montesino, 2010; Montesino Parra, 2002; Rekola, 2015).

Transforming social realities contributed to rising tensions, aggravated by media portraying migrants as a problem (Strömbäck, 2017; Theorin & Strömbäck, 2020). In 2017 alone, Swedish media published 23,478 negative articles on migrants (Söderein, 2017). “Alternative facts” on migrants and crime flooded radical nationalist social media while contrafactually insisting such news reports were censored (Merrill, 2020). Especially exposed to negative media attention were Swedish Muslims (Axnér, 2015; Ekman, 2015; Horsti, 2017). Anti-Muslim discourse co-occurred with raising levels of anti-Muslim hate crime. By 2018, six out ten (59%) of Sweden’s mosques had been exposed to physical violence (Gardell, 2015b; 2018).

4 Reconquering Sweden

4.1 *The Great Replacement and Reconquista*

Populist nationalists pointed at the presence of visible migrant communities as a sign of the betrayal of the political class. In collusion with the economic, intellectual, and cultural elites, the story goes, the corrupt political establishment had opened the gates of the nation to an “invasion” of racial and cultural aliens to “replace” the native (white) Swedish folk. Adopting the anticolonial language of national liberation, nativist politicians nostalgically promised voters to repel the invasion and restore the *folkhem* to Swedes only. “Swedes are white, and the country is ours”, as the refrain of a nationalist singalong goes.

The Great Replacement narrative is not confined to Sweden, but echoes across (white) “Euroland” territories in the global North. The importance of the Great Replacement theory to radical nationalism was (re)discovered by mainstream media with the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, 2017, when the diverse digital underground of post-45 fascism and militias left their social media platforms to march under the motto *You Will Not Replace Us*, and, again, through *The Great Replacement* manifesto posted online by Brenton Tarrant prior to his livestreamed massacre on Muslims in Christchurch, New Zealand, March 15, 2019.

In journalistic accounts, the Great Replacement theory is widely attributed to the French identitarian Renaud Camus *Le grand remplacement* (Camus, 2011) but has in different versions been recycled in the radical nationalist milieu since the late 19th century, and uses an imagery rooted in the Crusades and the Spanish Reconquista (Gardell, 2021; Horswell och Awan, 2019). When Tarrant’s *Great Replacement* (2019) manifesto quotes Pope Urban II (1095) calling for a Holy War against the “impious race of the Saracen” (the Muslims), his reference was common to the rhetoric of the white radical nationalist milieu

he addressed. “Muslims will be expelled from Europe yet again after major bloodshed and millions of dead across the continent,” Anders Behring Breivik (Breivik, 2011:741) the “Knights Templar Crusader” stated in 2083: *A European Declaration of Independence*, the call to arms he distributed on the day of his 22/7 terror attacks in Norway. “There will only be two options” for white Europeans, identitarian alt-right ideologue Guillaume Faye (Faye, 2016) says: “our historic disappearance, or a *reconquista*.”

4.2 *The Tactics – Fanning the Flames*

How, then, to launch a new *reconquista*? When white radical nationalists looked around, they were few and far between. Most white people were preoccupied with other things than doing the white revolution. To fascism, the revolutionary segment of radical nationalism, the post-1945 loss of popular support was especially painful as it claims to be the True Voice of the People in whose name it fights. Across the Atlantic, a similar bewilderment spread among American white supremacists after losing the battle against racial desegregation. To this double blow came the rise of anticolonial liberation movements in Asia and Africa, and the colonial boomerang by which previously colonized people poured into the heartlands of the imperial powers. “The White Man has lost!”, Joseph Tommasi of the Los Angeles-based National Socialist Liberation Front exclaimed in *Strategy for Revolution* (ca 1974). “We are an occupied people in our own land who must now develop a totally different outlook on revolution.”

Rallying the masses behind the old symbols of racial greatness, e.g., the swastika and the fiery cross, did not work anymore. An important segment of post-45 fascism sought to regain its popular appeal by adopting what Gardell elsewhere (Gardell, 2022, 2023) have named the “Peter tactics”, i.e., by denying its past. By rebranding and refashioning its outlook and message, focusing on anti-immigrant issues, law-and-order, national values, and new enemies (e.g., Muslims), this segment eventually merged with other streams of anti-establishment populist nativism to launch new radical nationalist parties, some of which became quite successful. Other segments of post-45 fascism sought to reconcile their claim to represent the true will of the people with the factual absence of popular support by portraying the People as sleeping, spellbound by malign forces (cf. the *Sleeping Beauty*) or as totally corrupted by the System, in extreme versions to the extent that the People primarily exist as reference in narratives of the past or the future.

To the scattered remnants of white radical nationalism out there, violence was used as an alarm bell to awaken the sleeping people to immediate danger and cleanse the nation from corrupting elements. Already in the 1970s, white American fascists developed a tactic to enter areas marked by frustrations

with racial injustice to “fan the flames” by racist provocations, hoping to escalate racial fears and hatreds. With time, this developed into the “Leaderless Resistance Tactics”, with racist serial killers killing to them unknown targets selected by their looks or names, and lone wolves entering churches, supermarkets, schools, work places, housing areas, public squares, synagogues, mosques, randomly killing people who happened to be there; again, hoping to push things in directions favourable to somehow regain political power through the ballot or the bullet (Gardell, 2021).

The public Qur’an burnings that eventually ignited the Easter Riots in Sweden 2022 were a variety of the same tactics.

4.3 *Easter Riots*

The Easter Riots were not isolated responses to Islamophobic provocation. They marked an explosive release of accumulated societal tensions within a democracy increasingly tasked with managing internal colonial subjects through differentiated rights, surveillance, and coercion.

The main instigator of the Qur’an burnings on the Easter Holiday 2022 was radical nationalist Danish Swedish political influencer Rasmus Paludan (b. 1982). Recurrently portrayed as a buffoon, Paludan is a performance artist, and a hate-crime convicted lawyer, reprimanded for violating the code of conduct of the Danish Bar and Law Society (Retten i Næstved, 2020; Søndberg och Walentin, 2019; Toft, 2019). In 2017, Paludan was expelled from the New Right (*Nye Borgerlige*) when his speech at a *For Frihed* (“Pro-Freedom”, the Danish PEGIDA) rally against the Great Replacement surfaced. “Our streets and alleys will be transformed to rivers of blood,” Paludan shouted, “and the blood of the alien enemies will end in the sewer where it belongs” (Karker, 2019; Søgaard och Bloch, 2017).¹

In 2017, Paludan launched the Hard Line (*Stram Kurs*) party centred on prohibiting Islam and expelling all Muslims and non-Westerners from Denmark (Stram Kurs, 2019). “The enemy is Islam and Muslims,” Paludan said (Paludan, 2018). “The best thing would be if there were not a single Muslim left on this earth.” His campaign in the Danish elections of 2019 was based on livestreamed racist provocations, a technique here called *The Racist Spectacle*, staged in

1 The Moderates, Christian Democrats, Liberals and Center party was already in favour of joining NATO before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. As the Russian effort to take Kiev failed, the pro-Putin leaning Sweden Democrats changed hat and decided to favour a NATO membership in mid-March 2022. May 15, 2022, the party board of the Social Democrats made a historic turnaround in favour of NATO. As the proposition to join NATO was put before the Riksdag the following day, only the Left and Green party were against.

low-income, low-status areas with a high concentration of Muslim and Black African residents, in Denmark known as “ghettoes.” Knowing that YouTube’s algorithms privileged videos with extreme and sensationalist content, later confirmed in several studies (Ledwich och Zaitsev, 2019; Ribeiro m.fl., 2020), the Spectacle follows a basic pattern. Paludan shows up with a camera crew in a ghetto, protected by his security detail and the police, and livestream himself hurling racist slurs and spitting, kicking, and burning the Qur’an, using offended residents held back by the police as part of the show. Cross-posted on social media platforms, Paludan’s Racism-as-Entertainment videos attracted tens of millions of viewers, more than all the campaign videos of all other parties combined (Gjerding och Dahlin, 2019).

The peak of the election campaign came on Palm Sunday 2019, a month after the Christchurch massacre, when protests against the Racist Spectacle in the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen turned into violent clashes with the police. Enthused, Paludan took his Spectacle abroad. Finding himself black-listed in France, Germany, and Belgium, Paludan opted for Sweden. Joining the ethnonationalist Alternative for Sweden (AFS) for the Church elections of 2021, Paludan amplified his Reconquista message by posing as Archbishop of the (online) Church of Saint James, the Muslim-Slayer (*Sankt Jakob Maurerdræberens Kirke*), named after Santiago Matamoros, the Patron Saint of Spain, the brother of Jesus the Christ and the first Christian martyr who, according to legend, fought the Muslims (*Moros*) during the Reconquista.

Between the years 2020–2023, Paludan gained permission to stage public Qur’an burnings in about one hundred locations in Sweden, predominantly in ‘areas of exteriority’. The series of burnings that sparked the Easter Riots were part of Paludan’s 2022 election campaign. Having been expelled from AFS, Paludan ran as Hard-Line Sweden. The Party Program (Ban Islam; Expel all residents with Muslim and non-Western background); and campaign tactics (the Racist Spectacle) was the same as before, often spiced by appearing in military west and helmet for show.

During the Holy Week of 2022, Paludan crisscrossed six/seven locations between Maundy Thursday (April 14) to Easter Sunday (April 17), some of them twice: Jönköping, Linköping (twice), Norrköping (twice), Rinkeby, Örebro, and Landskrona/Malmö. Escorted by the police, he succeeded to burn the Qur’an at two of these locations (Jönköping, Malmö) but failed in the others, either stopped by violent protests (Linköping, Norrköping, Örebro), forced to change location (Landskrona/Malmö), or abrupted halfway (Rinkeby). Media impact was immense. In April 2022, Swedish media published 5,432 pieces on Paludan and the Qur’an burnings (Retriever Research, 2023), predominantly centred on

the violent clashes with the police named the Easter Riots (*påskupploppen*) or the Qur'an Riots (*Qur'ankravallerna*).

The images were dramatic: Police officers in riot gear against a background of raging flames of fire towering black nightly skies, burning police vans, masked rioters, wrecked riot fences, flying stones, debris and molotovs, sirens, bangers, policemen aiming guns, burned-out cars, streets of violence, ruins of war. In the immediate aftermath, official police records counted twenty-six severely hurt police officers; fourteen civilians seriously wounded, three protestors shot by the police, and twenty damaged police vehicles (Hagström, 2022); numbers rising significantly during the post-riot assessment of events. By November 2023, at least 149 individuals had been arrested, out of which 110 have been charged, 87 were tried, and/or convicted for crime during the Easter Riots.

5 The Autocratic “Paradigm Shift”

The Easter Riots were used to legitimize measures differentiating access to rights and welfare for racialized segments of the population as a “response” to the societal “crisis” they were held to represent. Framing the riots as an existential threat to Swedish society enabled nativist political actors to advance measures that, under the guise of restoring order, served to reconfigure the demos. This process reflects a recurring logic of *herrenvolk* democracy, where moments of perceived crisis are mobilized to consolidate authority and reinforce racialized boundaries of belonging – on the premise that a well-ordered society must be governed by the representatives of the “civilized people” to hold back the “barbarians.” In the Tidö Agreement, the term “paradigm shift” was used to signal a fundamental reorientation of the proposed political agenda.

As a ‘response’ to the Easter Riots, on April 21, 2022, the Sweden Democrats launched a 30-point program named “30 Proposals to Meet the Assault on Sweden.” It begins by establishing the Easter Riot Narrative: During Easter, a new level of attacks against Swedish society and democracy took place, with large-scale assaults on the police, directly aimed against ‘freedom of expression’ (Paludan’s right to burn the Qur’an), a fundamental right protected by the Swedish constitution. The SD Program continues: “Large groups in Sweden lack respect for the Swedish society” and are “reared from childhood to hate and distrust [Sweden’s] social institutions, authorities and majoritarian population”. This was but “the tip of the iceberg”. In “many residential areas and

neighbourhoods, Swedish society has been pushed aside by criminal gangs and Islamists in alliance.” Sweden needs therefore to “reconquer its lost territories” (Sverigedemokraterna, 2022). The police force must “advance the frontiers” with a clear mandate to “destroy” (nedkämpa) those who assail society and “establish supremacy.” Further efforts are needed to break the destructive norms and structures in “culturally burdened” milieus and address migration which, according to the Program is their root cause. To this effect, the Sweden Democrats propose 30 concrete measures to “push back” the “enemies of society” and “re-establish Swedish law throughout Sweden” (Sverigedemokraterna, 2022).

This Program would become the backbone in the 2022 electoral campaigns and the basis for the government’s ruling charter, the Tidö Agreement for Sweden. The proposals went beyond and indeed disrupted the principles of the legal order they claimed to defend. Besides conventional tough-on-crime demands (more police, harder punishments, more prisons, weaponize the police, employ the military, declare emergency laws), the proposals included a series of measures previously considered too extreme for a liberal legal order – some requiring constitutional changes. Repressive measures aimed directly at people of “culturally burdened background” and those living in “areas of exteriority” – with religions, cultural and criminal “parallel structures” fostering “disrespect for public institutions and majoritarian culture” – included anti-Muslim measures (closing mosques, Muslim schools, and Muslim civil society associations; banning the Muslim Veil; expelling Islamist preachers; restricting Muslim immigration); and imposed rules of exception in “culturally burdened” zones to map individuals using AI, drones, and cameras; detain [without trial] individuals deemed unfit to freely live in society, and collective punishment. Should a “culturally burdened” family member disrespect Swedish norms and values, engage in criminal activities, or assault society, the whole family could be fined, lose their social rights, the custody of their children, and their rights of residency. In addition, the possibilities to revoke the citizenship of individuals guilty of “socially subversive” crime should be investigated.

5.1 *The Election 2022*

The Easter Riot impacted greatly on the 2022 campaign, tipping voters in favour of the right wing opposition. Jimmie Åkesson consistently linked rising crime to immigration and Islam. Drawing on politicized nostalgia, the SD election campaign promised voters to *Make Sweden Great Again* by restoring the *folkhem* for real Swedes – and culturally compatible migrant communities loyal to Swedish values and majoritarian culture. At the same time, the Sweden Democrats attempt to align two ideological currents that are typically seen as incompatible: radical nationalism and neoliberalism. In their electoral

platform, they position themselves as neither right- nor left-wing and argue that their nationalist agenda can be effectively combined with neoliberal economic principles. They claim that greater welfare for Swedes can be achieved through market economy mechanisms, “freedom of choice in welfare,” and international trade – so long as these are subordinated to the interests of the Swedes. This rhetorical move, championed by party leader Jimmie Åkesson, seeks to reconcile economic liberalism with an exclusionary nationalist project, yet it rests on a structurally unstable foundation. The very neoliberal mechanisms they advocate – privatization, deregulation, and the erosion of public services – contribute to the dismantling of the welfare state and ultimately affect all residents, including “Swedes.” This contradiction is disavowed through a fantasmatic projection of the racialized others, who are blamed for social decline. In this way, the material effects of neoliberal restructuring are masked by a politics of scapegoating, in which social insecurity is attributed to the presence of outsiders and as the result of successive conservative and socialist governments’ failure to prioritize the needs of Swedes rather than to systemic economic transformation.

The Sweden Democrats advocate putting “Sweden first” by redirecting public resources to benefit what they describe as “hardworking citizens” and “local communities rarely benefiting from industrial or natural resource revenues.” This is to be achieved not by challenging profits in welfare or addressing the neoliberal plundering of the commons, but by cutting benefits and public expenditures for immigrants “who have contributed minimally to building Swedish society.” In this framing, Åkesson differentiates between so-called productive and parasitic immigrants, positioning the latter as burdens on the system. According to their fusion of nationalism and neoliberalism, rebuilding welfare and restoring “security” for Swedes is best achieved through support for business, work incentives, and a narrowed distribution of benefits – reserved for those deemed to legitimately belong.

The Moderate Party, which led the right-wing coalition under Ulf Kristersson, launched their campaign under the slogan “Let’s get Sweden in order” (*Nu får vi ordning på Sverige*) directly capitalizing on the Easter Riots Narrative. Like the Sweden Democrats’ electoral campaign, the Moderates campaign envisions a future conflating nationalism and neoliberal economic policy

Beneath the surface, around the corner, is a Sweden where the rule of law has triumphed over violence. Where the work line has replaced the subsidy line. Where green innovations, world-leading education, research and new jobs – not riots and shootings – give Sweden big headlines. (Moderaterna, 2022)

The Moderates propose an ‘integration’ policy where cuts in social security benefits are designed to “incentivize” migrants to “make stronger efforts” to integrate. The platform frames high unemployment for foreign born as the effect of a moral defect called “benefit dependency” – not mentioning the scientifically well-documented occurrence of discrimination in the labor market. Migrants’ benefit dependency is to be counteracted by measures like a restriction of eligibility to social benefits for immigrants until they meet certain criteria regarding work or educational attainment, a benefit cap targeting 50 000 households – “the majority of which are foreign born” (Moderaterna, 2022) – ensuring that benefits never reach the level of a salary, a requirement of full-time activity for obtaining social benefits, and abolished multi-child supplement for child allowance. The Moderate platform also proposes to exclude from the guaranteed age-based pension, people who have “not worked in Sweden”. Like SD, the Moderates propose tax cuts for “working people” and Swedish pensioners. (Moderaterna, 2022).

This nativization of the welfare system, to which the other coalition parties the Liberals and Christian Democrats, subscribed (KD, 2022; Liberalerna, 2022), underlies more prominent, spectacular and debated platform proposals, such as requiring Swedish language proficiency and Swedish values tests for obtaining permanent residency and citizenship and criminalizing and punishing with deportation certain forms of sociality as a way of “dismantling parallel societies”. At stake in the election campaign of the right-wing coalition was *formalizing* a racialized segmentation of access to rights and benefits in the Swedish welfare state, including a racialized segmentation of the use of force and punishment and a redistribution of resources from precarious and expelled workers to workers with privileged forms of employment, through tax reductions.

Calling to *Make Sweden More Like Sweden*, the Social Democratic Labor Party – then in power – also turned into politicized nostalgia and called for law and order and stricter migration policies, stressing economic integration (e.g., getting more immigrants into work). Although the Social Democrats abstained from much of the coalition’s nationalist rhetoric about cultural integration, in favour of economic integration, their electoral platform did not really oppose or offer an alternative to the coalition’s “paradigm shift”. The same can be said of the Center Party that departed from the dominant political reaction to the Easter Riots Narrative emphasizing the equal importance of protecting freedom of expression and fighting discrimination. The platform recognized segregation and exclusion as important issues, particularly in urban areas. Still, their proposed measures, being cut from the same neoliberal cloth, ended up attaching migration policy and migrant’s rights to value production, while

stressing the need of removing barriers to entrepreneurship for people of foreign background (Centerpartiet, 2022).

The exceptions to neoliberal rationality as truth-vision of society were the platforms of the Green and the Left parties. The Green party's electoral platform focused on solidarity and sustainability, envisioning a "green welfare society" centred on climate action, social justice, and equality. While the Green platform did advocate targeted law enforcement against organized crime, their approach emphasized socio-economic support, community collaboration, progressive taxation, and improved social services in disadvantaged areas (Miljöpartiet de gröna, 2022). The *Left Party's platform* pointed to the growing economic inequality in Sweden, which they interpreted as the result of neoliberal market policies prioritizing profit over people's well-being (Vänsterpartiet, 2022). The platform emphasized the need to rebuild the welfare state, nationalize critical services, and redistribute wealth from the wealthy to the working class. The platform argued that rising crime is a result of socioeconomic inequality, not just a lack of law enforcement, and called for more social investment, better education, and employment opportunities to address what they saw as the root causes of crime and social unrest.

5.2 *An Agreement for Sweden*

With twenty-one percent of the vote, the Sweden Democrats became the largest party of the right-wing coalition which together obtained close to 50 percent of the votes. They negotiated an "Agreement for Sweden" at Tidö Castle, built during the Swedish Era of Great Power by the statesman Axel Oxenstierna who was the de facto ruler of the Empire of Sweden when the monarch, the underage Queen Kristina, was regent on paper only. Withdrawing the *cordon sanitaire* from the Sweden Democrats, *The Tidö Agreement for Sweden (Tidöavtalet: en överenskommelse för Sverige)* (SD m.fl., 2022) gives the reformed national socialist party a similar position of dictating politics from behind the scenes in the new government formally led by Ulf Kristersson (Moderate) as Prime Minister and Ebba Busch (Christian Democrat) as Vice Prime Minister, with Johan Pehrson (Liberal) as Minister of Employment and Integration.

To "solve Sweden's huge social problems" without rolling back the neoliberal reforms that allow welfare entrepreneurs to drain resources from the common, the Tidö Agreement focuses on monitored acculturation and detention/deportation of unassimilable elements.

The Tidö Agreement represents a significant shift in Sweden's political landscape (Aylott och Bolin, 2023; E. Bergman m.fl., 2024). The Agreement establishes the new government's political program and concretizes the measures to be undertaken by the new government, including increased surveillance and

policing in immigrant-heavy areas through “visitation zones”, harsher penalties for gang-related crimes, equating children with adults in regard to criminal legislation, penalizing families to convicted criminals and deporting foreign nationals involved in criminal activities without necessarily having them convicted (Sundhall och Hillén, 2024). These measures are portrayed as addressing a failure of law enforcement in controlling immigrant criminality and protecting “Swedish values”.

Foreigners “enjoying Swedish hospitality” are “bound to respect foundational Swedish values” and cannot “offend the population by their behavior.” Exactly what this means is not specified, although the document clarifies that grounds for expulsion include “remarks on their ways of life” and “association” with “clans” and “milieus” that threatens the (unspecified) “foundational Swedish values” (SD m.fl., 2022:37).

The Agreement includes goals such as restricting access to welfare and healthcare to Swedish and European citizens, making citizenship harder to obtain and requiring proof of “decent morals,” self-sufficiency, and adequate skills in Swedish language, history and culture. It also proposes to promote voluntary return of immigrants with residency permits, only temporary protection statuses for asylum seekers, expand the possibilities to deport foreign citizens, and initiate constitutional change to make citizenship revokable (SD m.fl., 2022:38).

The Tidö Agreement “paradigm shift” represents a significant movement away from liberal democratic principles toward autocratic governance, imposing inequality between groups, stricter social controls and expanding arbitrary political power. This shift was legitimized through crisis narratives portraying the Easter Riots as symptomatic of the threat of multiculturalism to Swedish society, providing justification for autocratizing measures. Policies restricting access to welfare, citizenship, and public services operate not merely as responses to crises but as systematic enforcement of a racial order, a herren-volk democracy where minority groups are tolerated only insofar, and as long as, they are profitable and are denied full belonging to the demos.

6 The Legal Re-ordering of Things

Two years into the Tidö Agreement for Sweden, the Swedish government in September 2024 boasted that 96 percent of the work designed by “the four cooperating parties” to “get Sweden in order” had been “initiated” or “accomplished” (The Swedish Government, 2024). The government vowed to “press

forward with full force” to “make Sweden richer and more secure”, aiming at “improving the welfare” of “the whole Swedish people.” Key elements of this triumphant declaration should be highlighted. Firstly, the fact that the status of the Sweden Democrats had transformed from pariah to partner was glossed over by the normalizing reference to the “the four cooperating parties”. Secondly, describing Sweden as being almost “in order”, signalled that the government saw the historic gap between the nation’s rich and poor and the fact that 80 percent of the nation’s assets had been concentrated into the hands of 0,05 percent of the population, i.e., the new cast of multibillionaires as the normal order of things. Thirdly, the aim of “improving the welfare” of “the whole Swedish population” highlights the question of who belongs to “the Swedish People” whose welfare will be improved and who constitutes the problem.

6.1 *NATO and the Transit from Welfare to Warfare*

Entering the Second Half of the Tidö Era, the Tidö Regime pointed out that Sweden did so as a NATO member. The decision to abandon Sweden’s long-honoured principle of neutrality was never put before the people, not even discussed. The proposition to join NATO was accepted by a majority of the Riksdag parties in May 2022, before the September 2022 elections, and left to the coming government to effectuate. Sweden’s entry was stalled as Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson and Foreign Minister Tobias Billström met expert negotiator Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan at the doorstep of NATO. In early November 2022, a jubilant Kristersson flew to Ankara to seal the deal with flowers in his hand (literally), paying homage to Atatürk in the mausoleum and (physically) looking up to Erdoğan before the assembled world press, only to be snubbed. As NATO expansion requires unanimous acceptance, Turkey had conditions to be met. Thus began a repetitive cycle of negotiations, with Erdoğan raising the stakes each time Sweden announced that all was set, even at the expense of principles previously held unfringeable. By 2024, Erdoğan had got most of everything he wished for. Sweden and Turkey had entered a bilateral “security agreement” and “counterterrorism” cooperation; Sweden had promised to not support Kurdish fighters or Fethullah Gülen sympathizers; to take a tougher stand on public gatherings in support for groups Turkey named “terrorists” (including PKK and YPG/PYD) and thwart attempts to collect or provide financial aid to such organizations; slow down criticism of Turkish limitations on academic freedom, political dissent and freedom of the press; to extradite a number from a list of 73 political refugees wanted by Turkey, or to find ways for doing so; to support Turkey’s application for EU membership and visa-free travels in Europe; and to reverse the arms embargo

imposed on Turkey due to its military incursions against the Kurdish YPG in Syria. In addition, the US rolled back its sanctions against Turkey and allowed its purchase of US F-16s.

The protracted NATO negotiations with Turkey modified the Tidö Regime's use of the public Qur'an burning spectacle as a political reference. In addition to seeing the protests as an attack on Sweden, the Qur'an burnings themselves became a problem. Responding to Erdoğan's outrage following a Qur'an burning in front of the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm January 21, 2023, Kristersson (Kristersson, 2023) found the act "disrespectful" and expressed his "sympathy for all Muslims who are offended by what happened in Stockholm today." Following a Qur'an burning staged at Eid al-Adha (June 29) 2023, a few days ahead of the NATO summit in Vilnius,² Foreign Minister Billström "strongly condemned" Qur'an burnings as "Islamophobic", and the Minister of Justice Gunnar Strömmer indicated that such acts may be handled by imposing restrictions of the fundamental rights of freedom of assembly and protest, a fact communicated to Erdoğan at a closed meeting that turned his "no, never" to a "yes" (Billström, 2023).

The Inquiry on Public Assemblies and Swedish Security (SOU 2024:52, 2024) ordered by the Minister of Justice argued for restricting the freedoms of assembly and protest on "new grounds" that would make it possible for the police to refuse permission of public gatherings when "necessary" because "it is clear" that there is a "substantial danger" that such a gathering could "threaten Swedish security" or "Sweden's interests abroad". Remarkably, while the Inquiry does find that these new grounds for banning the freedom of assembly and protest rest on the (obviously quite flexible span of possible) interpretations of the key terms "Swedish security", "necessity", "being clear" and "substantial danger" it still claims that these new grounds would only apply in "exceptional cases". The Inquiry was supposedly made to handle future Qur'an burnings. However, as the Civil Rights Defenders pointed out, Qur'an burnings that are staged to target the Muslim community and aiming at provoking a reaction that would lead to a prohibition of Islam and the expulsion of Muslims are better dealt with as hate crime (Civil Rights Defenders, 2024). No new laws or limitations of fundamental freedoms are thus necessary. Should the suggested restrictions on the rights to assembly and protest be adopted, the Civil Rights Defenders found it likely that it could be applied to repress any and every kind of popular opposition and dissent in other political areas, as had already been seen in the efforts to repress radical climate activism. In their comment to the Inquiry, the Civil Rights Defenders pointed out that there is no legal definition

2 This Qur'an burning was not staged by Paludan but by Salwan Momika.

of “Swedish security” in Swedish law. Moreover, the fact that the Inquiry suggests that any threat the State may find against “Swedish security” may be classified, makes imposing the suggested restrictions of these fundamental rights legally insecure and may seriously undermine Swedish democracy.

The Tidö Regime saw the transition of Sweden from a welfare state towards a warfare state. While joining NATO was presented to the public in terms of defending Sweden's independence and security, the opposite transpired. Sweden was no longer free to be an independent voice and actor internationally, as it now was part of NATO and the European Union. Military adds popped up everywhere in public spaces: “The world is changing. Be ready”. In November 2024, the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (MSB) distributed the booklet *In Case of Crisis and War* to all households in the country. “To all residents of Sweden”, the booklet opens: “We live in uncertain times”. “Military threat levels are increasing. We must be prepared for the worst-case scenario – an armed attack on Sweden”. Besides military violence there are other ways of undermining us, MSB explicates, “cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, terrorism, and sabotage. These types of attacks may occur at any time. Some are happening here and now.” Rest assured: “If Sweden is attacked, we will never surrender. Any suggestion to the contrary is false.” (MSB, 2024a). In December 2024, MSB informed the public that it had tasked Sweden's Church pastors to localize space for 500 000 coffin graves to bury the Swedes that will die in battlefields and cities. “A crematorium is dependent on electricity and gas”, Jan-Olof Olsson at MSB explained. “War can lead to supply shortage, and you need a plan B. Then coffin burial applies, and this requires more space than urn burial” (MSB, 2024b). War against the enemy from abroad and within requires vigilantism. Surveillance systems, including CCTV cameras, face recognition systems, drones, and mobile camera units/robots, were installed in ‘areas of exteriority’ and urban cityscapes. Across Swedish cities, street police carrying Heckler & Koch MP5 submachine guns became common. In May 2024, Sweden installed the Israeli Elbit System *Red Sky* on the Riksdag building in central Stockholm and bought Israeli drones to surveille the city. The fact that Sweden imported “combat-proven” Israeli military technology (Elbit Systems, 2024) as Israel was under investigation by the International Court of Justice for the crime of genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza should be noted.

6.2 *Silencing Civil Society and Media*

The Tidö Regime effectively sought to silence, quench or deconstruct civil society associations, arenas of cultural creativity and diversity, solidarity associations, peace groups, women's associations, and social movement driven adult education associations, thitherto cherished as vital to the Swedish model of

democracy. The means to do so ranged from raising legal issues to defunding and various combinations thereof. Mainstream Muslim civil society associations, e.g., Sweden's Young Muslims and the Ibn Rushd Study Association, that sought to engage members as constructive and creative Swedish Muslim citizens, had their funds cut and shot down. By December 2024, every single of the 23 Islamic "free schools" in Sweden had shut down, after shaky or classified allegations, ranging from economic irregularities to accusations of acting as agents of a clandestine Muslim Brotherhood or Jihadist conspiracy against Sweden. It was not only about Muslims. Funds for self-organized migrant and/or "ethnic" voluntary associations, including the Gambian National Association (with 45 local cultural centres), the Serbian Women's Association and the Swedish-Kurdish National Association (with local affiliations), that worked with theatre, music, dance, arts, handicraft, sports and education were cut off "to favor integration" (Pehrson, 2023). Public funds were cut for solidarity associations (e.g., the Palestine Solidarity Association in Sweden; Solidaridad Suecia-América Latina; Emmaus in Sweden), associations for human rights and democracy (e.g. Reporters Without Borders; The Swedish Forum for Human Rights; International Legal Assistance Consortium); and peace associations (the Swedish Peace and Arbitration Association; The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in Sweden). Institutions and associations in the cultural sector were downsized or defunded, which affected scores of local and regional theatres, cultural centres, opera houses, music scenes, artisan- and creativity centres, archives and museums (Lindkvist, 2019). A similar wave could be observed at the municipal level. In Sölvesborg, cultural policy was reoriented to focus on "recreating a shared identity," with drastic cuts to libraries, culture, and adult education. In Botkyrka, the Multicultural Centre – a museum and knowledge centre documenting and exploring migration and migrant experiences – was defunded. Similarly, educational centres and residential colleges for adult education operated by trade unions, civil society organizations, neighbourhood improvement associations, anti-drug groups, ex-convicts, religious institutions and workers' collectives or cooperatives were de-financed and/or shut down.

Slamming Swedish media as "the enemy of the people" (Bylund, 2016), the Sweden Democrats had for years vowed to "replace", "get rid of" or "stop" Swedish Media (Ekroth, 2014). SD Party Secretary Linus Bylund envisioned setting up a "Truth Commission" and having critical reporters punished and apologize to the People (Bylund, 2020; Tamas, 2016), and SD Member of Parliament Martin Kinnunen (Kinnunen, 2015) motioned to cut all press subsidies to small, "openly politicized", papers. With the Tidö Agreement, their time had come. In a sweeping change, non-commercial Swedish media, including Public Service,

cultural magazines, organized workers' media, and green and leftwing media were de-financed in whole or in part.³ In addition, the directives of Public Service were revised, and the task of promoting equality and reflect diversity in shows and news coverage was replaced with tasking Public Service with reflecting "the country and the People" as "a whole" (SOU 2024:34, 2024).

6.3 *Sweden's Foundational Values and the Re-making of the People*

In line with its retrotopian vision to Make Sweden Great Again, the Tidö coalition systematically sought to re-make the Swedish People to fit nostalgic imagination, i.e., as a White, Christian/Secular, Swedish-speaking majoritarian nation with defined national minorities (spoken of in possessive terms as "Sweden's national minorities") and rooted in Sweden's "foundational values". While spoken of as essentially Swedish, these fundamental values are not defined, neither in law nor in the constitution or any governmental declaration, only spoken of in tautological terms as "Sweden's fundamental norms", "way of life", and "traditional culture". As the mythic essence of *Swedishness*, Sweden's fundamental values is a "Thing" (Žižek, 1993), that Swedish thing of Swedishness that makes a Swede a "Swede"; that which Swedes *are* or *have*, but others lack, never can "be" or aspire to "become", yet are required to "adhere to", "be loyal to" and "respect" in order to be Swedish residents or citizens. To become a Swedish citizen is to become a "member of Sweden", which is not the same "thing" as *being* Swedish but as close as it may get. Thus, there is an important difference between "being" Swedish in essence and being a member of Sweden, between being a Swedish Swede and a Swedish citizen; you can be both, one or the other, or none of them. This is the difference SD's Björn Söder sought to convey when he said that Jews, Saami and Kurds cannot "be" Swedes, irrespective of whether they were Swedish citizens or not (Orrenius, 2014). Swedish Swedes are one thing, Jews, Saami and Kurds another "thing". To radical nationalists of Söder's kind, this difference is reproduced for generations and too many citizens that "are" different "things" will invite conflict and civil war. Ideally, each "thing" should therefore be in its proper place, separated and remain in their assigned space on the map of racialized spatial order. Of course, ideals are complicated by realities. Activated as an instrument of exclusion and inclusion, Sweden's "foundational values" is an occult trope, a mythic extraction of condensed essence that, while indefinable, is used to

3 A myriad small non-commercial media lost their subsidies, e.g., Arbetaren, Brand, Fria Tidningen, Syre, Proletären, Offensiv, Flamman, Feministiskt perspektiv, and Aktuellt i Politiken. The cuts in Public Service took a toll on investigative journalism and the media library and archive.

assign different judicial rights, values and statuses to the various individuals and families who live in Sweden.

November 20, 2023, the Tidö Regime appointed a Special Inquiry aiming at legalizing the expulsion of foreigners who do not “respect foundational Swedish values” and have a “decent” and “well-behaved” (*skötsamt*) way of life. The Directive (the Swedish Government, 2023b) emphasizes that this goes beyond the obligation to follow the laws of the land. “The Government finds it important to be able to expel foreigners” also due to “further deficiencies” in their “way of life”. The person “who is in Sweden and enjoys Swedish hospitality” is “obliged to show respect to foundational Swedish values” and should in no way “disrespect” the (majoritarian Swedish) population. A central concern for the Inquiry is to explicate exactly which non-criminal “shortcomings in the way of life” should form the legal basis for expulsion, such as “association” or other forms of “closer contact” or “participation” with “criminal networks or clans or violent (*våldsbejakande*) or extremist organizations and milieus that threaten foundational Swedish values.”

A similar Inquiry was in September 2023 tasked to make it more difficult to become a Swedish citizen, in addition to the restrictions already made in naturalization law (prolonged time of residency; adequate skills in Swedish language and society, self-sufficiency, debt-free/credibility) that went into effect October 1, 2024. The notion of a “decent and well-behaved way of life” reappeared in the Directive (the Swedish Government, 2023a) as key to acquiring Swedish citizenship, which should include an investigation of the way of life the applicant previously reflected abroad and a specified minimum number of years without complains about breaking the rules of conduct in Sweden. Added to the test of sufficient skills in Swedish language and society should be the applicant’s understanding of democracy and the democratic process.

To Tidö Minister of Migration Johan Forssell, carrying a Hamas or PFLP associated banner in a Palestine Solidarity rally should be sufficient ground for revoking residence rights and expelling a foreign citizen from Sweden (Forssell, 2024). In July 2024, Isra Barham, Master student in Architecture at Chalmers University of Technology, was denied Swedish citizenship due to her engagement in the Student Protest Movement against the Israeli genocide of Palestinians in Gaza. The specific case concerns Bahram and fellow students wearing Kafiya scarves singing the *Leve Palestina* song and offering solidarity coffee on campus at lunch break, Dec 5, 2023. The Vice Chancellor filed a complaint, which was sufficient for the Migration Authority and the Migration Court of Appeal to turn down Bahram’s application for citizenship on the grounds of her violating the rules of living a decent and well-behaved way of life (Söderlin, 2024).

According to Swedish law, citizenship is either given by birth (if one of the parents is a Swedish citizen); by adoption by a Swedish citizen or by naturalization. The rights of citizenship are protected by constitutional law and are permanent. In 2023, the Tidö Regime suggested a constitutional change that would allow authorities to revoke the rights of citizenship for naturalized citizens born abroad (SVT, 2023). That year, the Minister of Justice (Strömmer, 2023) suggested that the possibility to revoke Swedish citizenship should be extended to include naturalized citizens who have no other citizenship. Stripping individuals of the rights of citizenship would in that case mean that Swedish democracy will produce stateless individuals, something that also would require constitutional change. By December 2024, Åkesson went further down the line. Authorities should be empowered to revoke the Swedish citizenship of citizens born in Sweden to naturalized Swedish citizens (Rohwedder, 2024).

Getting Sweden in order required ridding society of racialized or culturalized criminality. A stream of measures was implemented or proposed to this end, including an Inquiry to restrict begging by “EU-citizens” (a political euphemism for Roma people from South/Eastern Europe). In 2024, a law authorized the police to define temporal “Security Zones” in which they could stop-and-frisk anyone looking criminal (Polislag, 2024; the Swedish Government, 2024). Unsurprisingly, the first reports showed that 96 percent of the individuals controlled “looked alien” (Schclarek Mulinari och Wiezell, 2024) and did not carry anything illegal. While ineffective to combat gang violence, the police method contributed to giving violent crime the face of an alien. The Tidö Regime’s war on crime quickly meant overbooked prisons. The government therefore set up an Inquiry to rent prisons abroad on a permanent basis and to a lesser cost than incarcerating convicts in Sweden (Ju2023:E HR2023/01430 2023; Justitiedepartementet, 2023).

As the Tidö Regime anticipated that its measures to restrict the rights of asylum and migration, residence and citizenship, would require practical administrative problems, it commissioned the Migration Authority to establish Return Centers, the first announcement of which coincided with the public Qur’an burning at Eid al-Adha 2023. However, to its frustration, the Tidö Regime found the combined measures insufficient. Revoking residence rights, expelling people who disrespected Sweden’s foundational values, expanding the prison system and making it harder to become a member of Sweden still meant that a huge residue of the unwanted remained in Sweden, even if predominantly separated in areas of exteriority. In December 2024, the Tidö government announced its coordination of five State Departments to encourage this segment of the population to repatriate voluntarily. To live in “enduring

exclusion” is highly problematic, a press release from the Ministry of read (Justitiedepartementet, 2024). “It is better for all involved parties if they would consider returning home.”

Making “Sweden richer and more secure” did not only involve remaking the People by excluding the others and offering “repatriation assistance” (Forssell, 2024) of the unassimilable surplus population that (yet) could not be legally expelled. “Reclaiming” order and welfare also necessitates encouraging labour migration of highly qualified and other kinds of workers important to Sweden’s competitiveness (Justitiedepartementet, 2024). This dual strategy exposes a stark tension within the regime’s nationalist ideas and capitalist imperative to attract a dynamic, skilled workforce. In effect, Sweden’s new policy framework is marked by a contradictory logic – one that simultaneously seeks to purify the nation’s demographic composition from negatively racialized others and leverage the benefits of selective migration in a global economy.

7 Conclusion

Sweden’s current political trajectory reflects a deep transformation in the relationship between democracy and racial capitalism. Historically, European racial capitalism operated in a colonial landscape where “pre-modern,” extreme forms of exploitation and exclusion were geographically and legally – whether in the form of overseas colonies or marginalized internal regions excluded from democratic governance, such as Sápmi in the Swedish case. This spatial and legal separation allowed racial capital to profit from coexisting forms of exploitation while upholding democratic legitimacy at the national level by distancing and disavowing the racialized subjects of exploitation,

Today, the Tidö Regime, attempts to redraw the colonial divide by expelling racialized others from the national imaginary and the territory while implementing differentiated systems of rights and policing tied to migration background and perceived productivity. Racialized migrants are treated as internal colonial subjects and governed through regimes of surveillance, reduced rights, precarization, and territorial stigmatization. These dynamics intensify the contradiction between formal democratic inclusion and colonial forms of exploitation and can be seen as a key driver of Sweden’s ongoing autocratization. Sweden thus exemplifies how contemporary racial capitalism reconfigures democratic states into racialized hierarchies of belonging, citizenship, and exploitation. Recognizing these dynamics opens a pathway for reimagining democracy beyond the racialized logics that have historically structured both its promises and failures.

The Easter Riots of 2022 functioned as a catalyst in Swedish political discourse, enabling the right-wing regime to reframe a conflict between national welfare and global capital as a matter of national security caused by multicultural migration. By presenting the Easter Riots as evidence of an alien Islamist threat taking root in Swedish society the Tidö Regime intensified the affective effect of their nationalist rhetoric, casting itself as the defender of Swedish democracy, foundational values and welfare. This narrative, in turn, served to justify autocratizing measures – expanded surveillance and policing, constitutional change restricting freedom of expression and assembly, and legalization of a racialized segmentation of the population in terms of rights, levels of taxation and access to welfare.

Seen through the theoretical frame of racial capitalism, this autocratization process relates to broader changes in the spatial ordering of value extraction connected to “work”, “precarious work,” and “non-work” at a global level (Bhattacharyya, 2018:3). The spatial colonial divide that formerly adjudicated differential value to geographically separated segments of the world population (colonial centres versus colonized territories, or later the distinctions within First/Second/Third Worlds) now operates within the national borders of privileged states like Sweden. This development has given rise to racially differentiated geographies within the national state, exemplified by the emergence of enclosed “areas of exteriority” and systematic deportation practices. The racialized zonification of nationalist geographies generates lucrative opportunities for an emerging class of multibillionaires profiting from the privatized migrant industry and gig economy creating “pockets of exception” (i.e., zones exempted from democratic rule and full civic rights), juxtaposed with the segregated, predominantly white and affluent suburban areas. Full civic rights are increasingly reserved for residents classified as essentially Swedes, while they are conditionally or partially granted or denied entirely to various racialized groups defined as migrants, having inherited “migrant background,” or as “alien.”

Although racialized zonification has existed for a long time, the discursive, administrative, and legislative measures following the Easter riots represent a particularly intensive stage of this process. The constructed “crisis” of “mass-migration”, “multiculturalism” and “Islamization” has been instrumentalized to legitimate a dramatic “paradigm shift”: one that departs from the idea of universal democratic inclusion in the *folkhem* in favour of a politics of deportation and legalized racism. Consequently, Swedish democracy has been reoriented to enforce racial hierarchies, rendering “expulsable” and “deportable” populations as super-exploitable labour and scapegoats in nationalist rhetoric (Khosravi, 2011). The rights of people of ‘migrant’ and ‘migrant

background' are hierarchically distributed according to their ascribed economic value and mediated through race/religion: almost full, but conditional, citizenship to those considered "assimilable" and valuable for the country; permanent but conditional residence rights for migrants considered culturally distant but making a "honest living", eligible for help to "remigrate" for those not expected to assimilate (become valuable), expulsion or deportation for those considered a threat to (Swedish) values, the "illegal", "criminal", "dangerous" or "dishonest". This differential distribution of rights not only excludes significant segments of the population from the demos but also blurs the lines between citizens and migrants, making citizenship conditional and tethered to racialized notions of belonging (Lindberg, 2022).

As this chapter has shown, the politics of "Reconquista Sweden" operates according to the logics of racial capitalism, establishing a Swedish variety of 'herrenvolk democracy' in which structural inequalities intersect with racist policies and legislation to exclude large segments of the population from the benefits of welfare, labour rights, equality before the law, and full democratic participation. This emerging legal order connects with a historical legacy of restricting migration and excluding groups not perceived as Swedish since the early days of Swedish democracy. However, this troubling direction is neither predetermined nor inevitable. Recognizing the autocratic perils of the politics of Reconquista, opens an avenue for reclaiming and revitalizing the more inclusive historical strands in Sweden's democratic tradition. It suggests possibilities for collectively imagining a democratic future that transcends racialized divisions of forms of exploitation and belonging in struggles for equality and rights, where constructions of security, welfare, and democratic participation include the voices, rights, and well-being of all those living at a given point in time in the territory of the democratic state.

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The Trade Union Confederation, Neoliberalism and the Emergence of an Ethno-racist Sweden: Is Trade Union Anti-racism Possible?

Anders Neergaard

1 Introduction

At the beginning of November 2022, the Swedish Transport Workers' Union (hereafter referred to as Transport) lost a legal battle as the Swedish court decided that it is illegal to exclude politically active Sweden Democrats from union membership (Frisk, 2022). A representative of the Sweden Democrats (SD) appears happy and content on the TV screen and claims that no one is to be excluded because of political affiliation. The union's role is to represent workers, continues the SD representative (SVT, 2022). Transport's argument for exclusion was based on the SD not accepting its fundamental values concerning the equal value of all people. Transport also argued that freedom of association gives unions, as well as other civil society organisations, the right to choose who can be members. The legal battle also highlights one of the many forms of resistance that LO and its unions have employed through more than thirty years of organised racist successes, which is to confront a party that is perceived by many as a threat to democracy. Transport's attempt to prevent the presence of SD activists in the union reflects the continuous, sometimes successful and occasionally courageous work that trade union activists, some women and/or racialised people have done and do to maintain and develop a socially critical ideology and practice for social justice, in which issues of feminism and more recently anti-racism have to some extent become visible.

This conflict illustrates an aspect of the dilemma faced by Swedish trade unions today, with more than 20 percent of the population voting for the ethno-racist party the SD in 2022. Regarding LO members, 27 percent voted for the SD in 2022, an increase from 24 percent in 2018 (the corresponding figure for those who identified as workers and voted for the SD was 29 percent in 2022 and 24 percent in 2018).¹ The SD, which despite normalisation, as most

¹ See Valu (2022) and 2018 (<https://www.gu.se/valforskningsprogrammet/pagaende-projekt/vallokalsundersokningar-svtvalu>).

clearly expressed in the Tidö Agreement,² from its Nazi and racist roots, sometimes ideologically and politically exhibits an explicitly racist (and, according to some, proto-fascist) worldview. In it, migrants are to blame for virtually all of Sweden's problems, with support from a "culturally Marxist" establishment (Thorén, 2015, p. 33, citing Jonsson, 2015). At the same time, the SD's parliamentary voting record and cooperation with traditional right-wing parties show how the party has in practice increasingly abandoned its care-racist welfare policies, maintained its ethno-racism (the construction of racism through a combination of ethnicisation and racialisation) and embraced (though not fully) more and more neoliberal economic policies (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2022).

In terms of membership numbers, the trade union movement is one of the strongest forms of organisation in Sweden. Despite working life being racialised, this means that the trade union movement, and especially the trade unions linked to the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), is the organisational body that most people with foreign background are members of. At the same time as support for the SD is growing among LO's members, the proportion of members with a foreign background is also growing. This is taking place in parallel with not only a racialised stratification of the class structure in the Swedish labour market, but the same process also permeates the internal stratification of the working class, where gender and racialisation are strongly correlated to wages and working conditions in worker occupations (Neergaard, 2021).

LO has historically been a trade union movement for the promotion of the working class, but where the worker has often come to be identified with white men. Women and racialised workers have gradually, often as a result of struggle, gained access to some of the results of the trade union struggle (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2004; Johansson, 2008; Yalcin, 2010). Consequently, LO advanced a series of significant inclusionary reforms to avert the marginalisation of migrant workers. The employers' association consented to the provision of and partially funding Swedish language education. At the national level, the LO played a pivotal role in ensuring voting rights in municipal elections, which were contingent on residence rather than citizenship (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2004).

Most studies agree that the neoliberal shift has severely weakened the role of unions, and increasingly strong racism threatens to further weaken them (Gumbrell-McCormick & Hyman, 2018; Lehdorff et al., 2018). In this context,

2 <https://moderaterna.se/app/uploads/2022/10/Tidoavtalet-Overenskommelse-for-Sverige.pdf>.

a number of researchers argue, using the concept of new social movements, that other political subjects have the ability to offer new societal visions, new times, and new political subjects. Trade unions as a force for social change, these researchers argue, belong to a bygone era (Standing, 2011).

This chapter's point of departure is that the strength and ability of trade unions to influence societal development cannot be written off. The aim is to explore the possibilities and limitations of trade unions by analysing LO and its affiliated unions' work against racism. Inspired by the black radical tradition's conceptualisation of racial capitalism (Robinson, 2000) and research that highlights collective forms of resistance through the concept of imagined solidarity, the chapter analyses how issues of racism and anti-racism are highlighted and dealt with in LO and its affiliates. The overall question is whether this practice can be understood as trade union anti-racism, that is, both as part of core operations and as an anti-racist practice.

With the help of interviews and documents, an analysis is made of the understanding of racism and how work against racism is conducted in three arenas of trade union struggle: the societal arena, in industrial relations with employers and within the workers' collective.

2 Previous Research

International and national unions' policies across Europe now express the broad universal principle that all workers should be treated equally, regardless of their ethnicity, race, religion or nationality [...] Almost everywhere trade unions criticise the xenophobic far-right political parties, who are trying to exploit the national majority workers' sense of grievance at a wider process of change about which they are never consulted and in which they are almost always victims in one way or another. (Jefferys, 2007, pp. 2–3)

The trade union movement but also trade union research in the Western world have recognised the growth of right-wing nationalist and racist parties as an increasing problem for many trade unions (Lehndorff et al., 2018). Both hegemonic research on trade unions and the trade unions themselves agree, based on two fundamental statements: 1) that racism, often encoded in xenophobia and far-right parties, is the result of neoliberalism's attack on the working class (understood as the white male working class) and 2) that combatting neoliberalism is primary, and combatting the effects (xenophobia and right-wing extremist parties) of neoliberalism is secondary (Jefferys, 2015).

The tension between combatting racism and holding together the workers' collective where racism pits workers against workers, is expressed by Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman as follows: "[Unions] in most cases wish to pursue progressive, anti-racist policies but are also reluctant to alienate members and activists with very different opinions" (2018, p. 230). The problem with this analysis is that it understands xenophobia and the far-right party to be an effect of neoliberalism and not an effect of structural racism. This means that the trade union movement's long history of exclusion and subordination of racialised workers is rendered invisible. Furthermore, it means that racism, and thus anti-racism, is not theorised beyond neoliberalism.

We are inspired by another theoretical tradition, which conceptualises the racism we see in the Western world's (especially male) white working class and which David Roediger names in his book *The wages of whiteness: Race and the making of the American working class* (1998; see also Du Bois, 1935). The "wages of whiteness" is questioned by the neoliberal project, but within a global racial capitalism; that is, the privilege, which characterised especially white male workers, to gain access, albeit limited, through a Keynesian welfare regime to the results of over-exploitation of the global South. This privilege was generated by racial capitalism partly through the transfer of value from the global South (Bonacich, 2008; Lauesen, 2024). It was also, partly because racialised workers in the global North constituted a reserve army, heavily over-represented among the unemployed and as employees in low-wage jobs with the worst working conditions (Neergaard, 2021). The structural racism involved did not need to be explicitly expressed as a xenophobic and radical right-wing political project; it was normalised as "natural" racialised inequality.

Although there is a reluctance both within the trade union movement and in much of the research on unions to theorise on racism beyond employers being able to profit from it and the irrational opinions of workers, the social development of recent decades has created an increasing interest in going a little further in understanding and analysing racism in relation to the unions (Ouali & Jefferys, 2016). Wrench (2004; see also Wrench, 2015) identified four different approaches: the "colour-blind" approach that stressed "equal treatment" regardless of ethnicity or skin colour; a "level playing field" approach, recognising the need to make visible and remove certain unfair barriers; an approach based on "equal opportunities" aimed at proportional representation in the longer term through ensuring the visibility of lack of representation; and finally, an approach based on "equal outcomes", which used quotas and advocated affirmative action to achieve proportional representation of minorities in the shorter term. Wrench also noted that racism was not uncommon among certain trade union activists in particular (for Italy, see Cillo & Perocco, 2015).

3 Theoretical Framework

The concepts of *racial capitalism* (Melamed, 2015; Robinson, 2000) and *racialised capitalism* (Virdee, 2019) have emphasised the central role of racism and its inherent link to capitalism, which organises exploitation and over-exploitation through racialised processes locally, nationally and globally. In recent decades, the concept of *racist neoliberalism* (Bhattacharyya, 2018) has been used by a number of scholars to explore the relationship between racial capitalism and the current neoliberal agenda. It has further emphasised the specificity of the racist constitution of neoliberalism (Kundnani, 2021), with a culture of individualism and “free choice” that marginalises the systematic impact of racism on people’s lives and reduces the role of public policies in challenging structural inequalities (Lentin & Titley, 2011, p. 168). The ethno-racial social order is characterised by an increasing emphasis on racism that partly goes hand in hand with neoliberal policies of inequality, but partly is in conflict through an inclusive care racism directed at the white, especially male, working class, where the Tidö Agreement³ is the Swedish example.

Research into the Swedish model has generally focused on class relations – especially between organised labour and capital – and marginalised the labour market’s gender regime and, more relevant to this chapter, its racialised character. Inspired by Roediger’s argument that we should “draw lines connecting race and class” (2017, p. 15), it is key to understand the Swedish context of racial capitalism. Starting from the classic quote that “race is the modality in which class is lived” (Hall et al., 1978, p. 394) we would add that in the Swedish context, migrant background is a central modality in which race is lived.⁴ In Sweden, more than two-thirds of people with a migrant background belong to the working class, compared with half of those with a Swedish background (Neergaard, 2021).

For Dyson (1999), racism is often in itself a form of identity politics and has been used by white workers to preserve jobs and maintain their wages of whiteness. Secondly, race has always been an important factor in determining the distribution of social and economic benefits among workers. Identity politics based on these historical facts should therefore not be denied but recognised as a legitimate expression of the struggle of oppressed groups against

3 <https://moderaterna.se/app/uploads/2022/10/Tidoavtalet-Overenskommelse-for-Sverige.pdf>.

4 It is also linguistically institutionalised by the words *immigrant* (constantly immigrating, instead of *immigrated*) and *second-generation immigrants* (people who have not immigrated but who are constantly immigrating, instead of the *children of immigrated people*).

racism. Instead of “whitewashing” (Dyson, 1999, p. 170) this history, the labour movement will only be able to move in a progressive direction if it can overcome white (male) identity politics.

Elements of global racialised capitalism, including structural unequal exchange (Singh & Eisenmenger, 2010; Ricci, 2019), foreign direct investment⁵ and supply chain capitalism⁶ are important in themselves, but are rarely discussed in relation to trade unions (and even less so, Swedish unions [see, however, Sjölander, 2005]; Räthzel et al., 2014) even though it would make visible the reproduction of global racialised capitalism. In this chapter, these global dynamics constitute a peripheral framework, but need to be noted to clarify within which frameworks racism is discussed in the trade union part of the labour movement.⁷ Each of these parts of global racialised capitalism has direct and indirect links to trade union struggle; both here (the global North, exemplified by Sweden) and there (the global South).⁸

Tsing uses “superexploitation” in her analysis of capitalism and supply chains to make visible and explore exploitation “that depends on so-called noneconomic factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexuality, age, and citizenship status. Super-exploitation is exploitation greater than might be expected from general economic principles” (2009, p. 158).

Together with changes in economic policy, labour market policy and a rapid imposition of restrictions in migration legislation, there is a push towards unfree work (especially for those with temporary residence permits), temporary employment contracts and general precarisation. Employment security issues are thus more pressing for racialised workers despite a colour-blind discussion of regulatory changes (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2023). We use super-exploitation to capture how legislation, social institutions and their norms affect the ability of racialised workers to sell their labour according to the Marxist principle of abstract labour, that is, varieties of unfree labour. This

5 Foreign direct investment is defined as an investment that reflects the long-term interest and control of a foreign direct investor resident in one economy in an enterprise resident in another economy (a foreign subsidiary).

6 *Supply chain capitalism* refers here to commodity chains based on subcontracting, outsourcing and similar arrangements where the independence of the constituent companies is legally established even as the companies are disciplined within the chain as a whole.

7 However, it should be noted that the interview guide did not cover these issues.

8 For unequal exchange in general, see Bieler et al. 2016; Ricci 2019; for foreign direct investments with a focus on Sweden, see Sjölander 2005; Räthzel et al. 2014, for *supply chain capitalism*, see Huws 2008. Clearer arguments on how racialisation and class are woven together in these processes are presented by Tsing 2009 and Bonacich et al. 2008.

means that super-exploitation arises not only through supply chains crossing national borders (global capitalism) but also within individual states (national capitalism). National capitalism is, on an abstract level, an oxymoron, but makes visible a space for the regulation of capitalism, regulation that can occur through a combination of state legislation and collective agreements between workers and employers. In the introduction to a journal theme issue on trade union responses to the restructuring of the global value chain, Ursula Huws asks: "Could the chains that link workers ultimately become a means for the stronger to haul the weaker up towards their level, rather than a means for dragging them down to the depths?" (2008, p. 9; see also Räthzel et al., 2014). This is a question that we explore specifically in relation to LO practices on trade union anti-racism.

4 Methods and Material

The material for this chapter consists of interviews with trade union representatives, documents from the LO-affiliated unions and newspaper articles. Interviews have been conducted with representatives of LO and its affiliated unions at central and association level, at section/district level and with local representatives.⁹ This material has been supplemented with trade union documents and media texts from trade unions as well as other press. To get a longer-term perspective, material from a previous study (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2004) is also used, which includes interviews, union documents and media texts from the trade union press, but where the focus was on understanding the conditions for trade union active migrants within LO, although it also included issues of racialised discrimination and racism within the union and trade union practice in these issues.¹⁰

Based on the purpose of exploring whether, and if so to what extent and through what practices, LO and its associations combat racism and can be understood as anti-racist, the analysis of the material has been carried out using theory-driven thematic analysis. Traditionally, research on trade unions has often been based on interest analyses, where the focus has been on class,

9 Most of the interviews were conducted by research assistant Celina Ortega Soto, the remainder were done by the authors.

10 It is interesting to note that the Sweden Democrats are not mentioned in the book based on interviews in the late 1990s, while Nazis and racists are mentioned, albeit to a relatively limited extent, and where the definition of racism is usually narrow and strongly linked to Nazism and racist or Nazi organizations. Through the concept of everyday racism, racism also begins to be visible in workplaces and among LO members.

but where gender and racialisation have also grown in importance. At the same time, as is clear when we analyse interviews and documents, self-interest arguments are woven together with identity formation and, in both cases, emotions are often directly or indirectly present. In the analysis of the material, these three aspects – interest, identity and emotions – are woven together in an attempt to understand how union representatives discuss the issues.

5 Sweden in Transition: Racialised Capitalism, Industrial Relations and LO

LO occasionally mentions with pride that it is the largest organisation for migrants in Sweden, despite declining trade union membership levels, especially among foreign-born workers. And, although LO constitutionally stands for the equal value of all people, racism and xenophobia are generally seen as an effect of capitalism's increasing class divisions and inequality, which can be managed through trade union and political struggle to narrow the class divisions, where internal education and internal and external advocacy are key elements.

Analysing trade unions in this complex three-part perspective (the societal arena, in industrial relations with employers and within the workers' collective) places them as central actors, not only in capitalist social orders but also in gender and racialisation regimes. In their role in the organisation and mobilisation of wage workers, trade unions build up diverse inclusive and exclusive collectives and solidarities that cover class, gender and ethnicity/racialisation, which are expressed in more or less explicit discourses and practices. Furthermore, within the system of industrial relations, trade unions represent and fight for their members, creating and reproducing specific forms of solidarity in working life, the labour market and in workplaces. They respond to employers, but also to other central trade union organisations and trade unions – locally, nationally and internationally. Finally, as actors within the wider political arena, trade unions try to influence politics and enable the fulfilment of the political goals structured by policies and practices in the first two arenas, and where success here has a positive feedback effect on the bargaining power of trade unions towards employers and internal trade union solidarity.

This description of history suggests three partly overlapping phases of racialised capitalism in modern Sweden. Sweden was long seen as a middle way between capitalism and socialism, where a reformist labour movement with ideological and political hegemony and government power formed the basis for Keynesian-inspired economic and welfare policies, with declining

class polarisation and an increasingly strong element of gender equality and multiculturalism – this is not the Sweden of today (Dahlstedt & Neergaard, 2019). Methodologically, it is always difficult to establish exactly when societal transformations take place, but we have previously argued that the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the abandonment of Keynesian policies, which negatively affected the ideological and political hegemony of the labour movement and the welfare regime (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2022). This meant a transformation to a neoliberal social order where the situation of racialised workers changed from inclusive to exclusive subordination. The 2022 election is likely to be highlighted as the symbol of a further transformation of society in which the neoliberal regime, that emerged in the shadow of Keynesianism, is about to be transformed into an ethno-racist social order characterised by a stronger racialisation in the tension between exclusive subordination and exclusion, although this process was initiated earlier, some would argue in the autumn of 2015 when a major shift in asylum and refugee policy was implemented. This description of history suggests three partly overlapping phases of racialised capitalism in modern Sweden.

5.1 *LO in Racialised Capitalism's Societal Arena*

In this and other respects LO is to promote social development on the basis of political, social and economic democracy characterised by equality and a feminist philosophy. The task is based on the fundamental view of the equal value and rights of all people. (LO, 2020, p. 4)

The above quote is from LO's statutes and constitutes the overall societal goal of its activities. The quote reflects a development where social and economic democracy, which has usually been understood as class policy based on narrowing class divisions, but for a period also questioned the power of capital through ownership by the introduction of employee funds as a form of ownership, has evolved to include a "feminist philosophy". The issue of anti-racism, especially focused on the SD and xenophobia, is captured in "the equal value and rights of all people". In this section, the trade union fight against racism in the societal arena is explored, and it becomes clear that the focus is not really on the issue of racism but rather the threat from the SD.

"It goes without saying that LO will take the fight against the SD," replied Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson.

"We took the fight against the Nazis in the 30s and it goes without saying that we will take it against their present-day followers as well. For us,

the fight against racism and xenophobia is a core trade union issue. It's a question of union commitment and of no one being placed outside the community. I'd like to see an alliance between LO and you students in the fight for the equal value of all people."¹¹

In the quote above, the LO President in 2015 expresses his view of the SD by implicitly linking the fight against the SD with the 1930s' fight against the Nazis. There is a common rhetorical thread between the battles of the 30s and LO's participation in various forms of alliances, organisations and manifestations against Nazism, fascism, racism and xenophobia. A significant part of this has been in the form of international solidarity. Björn Horgby writes about how LO, together with the Social Democrats, was a driving force in the labour movement's refugee aid, which assisted refugees with social democratic and union links on the run from Nazism and fascism (Horgby, 1996). Håkan Thörn (2010) writes about how LO participated in the struggle against South Africa's apartheid regime. While much of the focus was on international solidarity, Jan Jämte (2013) points out that LO was also active in alliances, networks and organisations in Sweden during the 1980s and 90s where racism was not only reduced to its marginal practices in the form of right-wing organisations but also linked to the rights of migrants, such as in the slogans "Stop racism, stop discrimination against migrants, strengthen the rights of migrants and solidarity between Swedes and migrants" (Jämte, 2013, pp. 207–9).

The quote is also interesting because it highlights the importance of alliances in the fight against racism by referring to "you students". It reflects a weakness of the trade union movement in that it finds it difficult to mobilise its members in the struggle, even though statements indicate that they are prepared to participate in it. In our study of the organisation Fackligt Aktiva Invandrare (Trade Union Active Migrants), one of its founders discusses the issue of trade union strength in terms of the number of members and summarises some of the views on the Swedish trade union worldview that many of those interviewed in the study highlighted in various ways:

Do you know why they are so strong, because they never use it ... it's like, how should I explain it to you ... when I was a child my parents had a parlour ... we were one of the first families to have such a room ... we were never allowed to use it, but we thought we were better than the others in the neighbourhood ... it's the same for Swedish trade unions ... have

11 (https://www.lo.se/start/nyheter/allians_med_studenter_mot_rasism 2015).

you seen them mobilise against globalisation, have you seen them on the streets when people lose their jobs ... if something isn't used, it's nice and it's big but it's like my mum's parlour. (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2004)

The quote focuses on the sharp change of direction towards neoliberal policies in the 1990s and how it affects the entire working class, and especially racialised workers, and how this great "parlour" was not or could not be mobilised in this struggle. Similar reasoning is found in the following quotation 25 years later when the neoliberal economic policies remain but are now supplemented with increasingly stronger and explicit racist policies.

It feels like the trade union movement was absent for many years, we're still the world's strongest trade union movement, the Swedish one, and we're riding that wave, to some extent. In the 80s we were stronger than ever and we were quite content, so then we kept riding that wave. (Interview person (IP) 2.22)

While the first quote highlights the question of why its strength is not being used, the second quote, after the statement "we're still the world's strongest trade union movement", looks back nostalgically to the 1980s when the trade union movement was even stronger.

The fear of the SD and members' support for the SD is the main focus of union discussions about racism and fighting it. There is a tension here between dealing with the view of the SD as fascist, racist or at least xenophobic and members' sympathies for the SD. One of the interviewees says:

I think people are quite good. I don't think nearly a quarter, a fifth of the Swedish population are racists. I really don't think so. I don't want to believe it, maybe I'm naive. But I sometimes think that people don't understand the context. (IP 7)

In the next quote, an analysis of the members and who votes for the SD is developed. Although the interviewee concludes that the SD does not defend the weak, the quote breaks the pattern of explicitly linking it to neoliberalism and wider gaps. Instead, the SD's and an increasingly strong social discourse are highlighted, where migrated people are linked to terrorism and crime, and how this is internalised among members and becomes the basis for voting for the SD.

We have talked a lot here in the section and the association and at central union level too, because we have, many of our members have actually left

the red block and gone to the SD, and it's usually been members with low education in our union, dissatisfied members, ignorance, but yes, that's the three things for it. If you, if you listen to how they answer, they have no grounds for it ... They think because your name is Mohammed, you're a terrorist ... Or if you come from the Balkans, you're a criminal. But they don't have any facts, so they are basing it on no knowledge ... it's really a very dangerous development. Where are we going? Not the hostile party that's on the rise, but the people who don't understand what they're getting into, what they're giving their vote to. Because who you give your vote to matters. Not because it talks, but when push comes to shove. For our members, well, I call it suicide, because if you listen to the others, that party, the hostile party, they don't defend the weak. (IP 2.27)

The quote says a lot about how the category of race and racism is understood in unions and in Sweden. Since racism and racists are evil, it is important to construct an image where those who support them "don't understand what they're getting into", and in the long run racism is not the real problem, but rather its effects in a broader sense. One of the effects highlighted is how the increasing support for the SD will mean a weakening of support for the Social Democrats. LO and its affiliates mainly conduct trade union activities, but in the election campaign the so-called party-union collaboration is manifested by LO and many of the unions in various ways, directly or indirectly, standing up for the Social Democrats. The following quote highlights how the election campaign is a forum for fighting the SD by means of training courses, where the focus is on labour issues instead of racism.

Before the election campaign, for example, we had one-day training courses where we would, where we went through with elected representatives mainly how to respond to this SD talk, so to speak, to give them some tools. How we should look at it, that we should focus on our issues, worker issues. And the SD has actually voted against all worker issues we've had up for discussion ... just explain, not like "vote Social Democrat, or vote for them there", not like that, but instead "we're working on these issues, the SD has voted against them". (IP 2.21)

In the quote above, the connection is to the election campaign and one-day training courses, whereas the (normal) training courses usually last longer and are focused on how elected representatives should handle SD sympathies. Although the training course is not about directly urging people to vote for the Social Democrats, that is the goal, and it is to be achieved by showing how the SD votes against "all worker issues".

Fascism also features in some interviews of national and regional representatives. Here the focus is on the SD as a central part of a right-wing extremist and fascist movement. When fascism is used, it also involves an analysis that focuses less on racism, as is made clear in this quote:

It's fascism that's really the greatest threat to the labour movement in any political sense. It's because they are fascists that they will throw us in prison when they come to power, but racism affects our members and union work. (IP 1)

The quote disconnects racism from the core of worker issues and the union. The question is whether it is an unwillingness or lack of analysis that makes the conditions of the racialised working class as workers invisible. The fight against racism becomes either a humanistic, idealistic conception of the struggle against evil or, more prominently, against the racism and right-wing extremism threatening the conditions of "Swedish" workers because of the pursuit of right-wing economic policies and the threatening of trade union rights. This division means rendering invisible not only the conditions of the racialised workers, in society as well as specifically in the labour market, but also racism itself as a threat to democracy.

In addition to the top-down approach seemingly connected to the party-union collaboration that focuses on getting LO members to vote for the Social Democrats, there are recurring bottom-up initiatives on work against racism and xenophobia. These usually remain at local or section level within unions or at LO district level, but sometimes they can go all the way up to LO congresses.

One such example is the Swedish Union for Service and Communications Employees' (SEKO) motion to the 2020 LO Congress "to give the LO General Council the task of urgently developing an action plan against racism and xenophobia", which met with a positive response from the General Council and was adopted by the Congress. The motion is interesting because it, and LO's response to it, makes clear what we see as LO's dominant understanding of racism and xenophobia, where it occurs and in what ways and how it can be fought. It is also interesting to note a slight watering down from the text of the proposal to the response from the General Council – although there is a basic consensus.¹²

SEKO's understanding of racism is expressed using the terms racism, xenophobia and everyday racism, but in LO's response only xenophobia and

12 Landsorganisationen (2020). Motions and statements: Point 13. Vårt uppdrag. LO's 29th Congress. Stockholm: Landsorganisationen (pp. 74–75).

everyday racism are present. SEKO sees a causal chain where there is an erosion of welfare, which leads to inequality that creates discontent, which leads to finding scapegoats, and adds that the discontent also leads to increased support for the Sweden Democrats, including among the members of the LO unions. But unlike LO, which sees accelerated inequality as the cause of the Sweden Democrats' success and xenophobia, SEKO complements its analysis with a need (for LO) to clarify that we never pit groups of workers against each other and that we can never accept expressions of racism in our workplaces.

While both texts lack a structural analysis of racism, there are openings for such an analysis in SEKO's motion, with reference to the basis of accelerating inequality and to values, that are not found in LO's response. SEKO locates racism in the societal debate, but sees it as also too often being found in our workplaces, that is, among LO members. LO has, for its part, a vaguer, but broader, understanding while also locating everyday racism and xenophobia in workplaces and to discrimination and arbitrariness (unclear what is meant here). SEKO emphasises continued work on training elected representatives and employees and advocacy efforts to combat racism and xenophobia, but also a need for clearer leadership within LO on these issues, and that it is not possible to combat racism and xenophobia as part of everyday union work. In line with how SEKO sees racism partly/mainly (a little unclear) as an effect of inequality, the fight for an equal society becomes a prerequisite for combatting racism and gender equality.

There are three notable silences in the SEKO motion and the LO General Council's response. The victims of racism and xenophobia (the racialised, the migrant) are never mentioned other than by the word "group". The second silence concerns employers, who are not mentioned explicitly, and hardly implicitly, in the SEKO motion, although this is a little more unclear in LO's response which mentions discrimination and arbitrariness that can possibly be interpreted as employer practices. A third silence is that, with the exception that SEKO links the struggle for equality also to increased gender equality (cf. trade union feminism), gender is absent, which is interesting given that the Sweden Democrats are highlighted as a major problem, a party that is often described as anti-feminist and with significantly lower support among (working-class) women.

About a year after the LO Congress decided on "an action plan against racism and xenophobia", the 2022 election result meant a new government consisting of the Moderates, the Christian Democrats and the Liberals, with parliamentary support from the Sweden Democrats who were allocated a share of parliamentary committee chair positions. Through the Tidö Agreement, a large part of policy was formulated as a joint project of the four parties, with an

internal cabinet that includes the SD party leader and makes joint decisions on all budget issues and other agreed policy areas. This has meant that the chair of the Labour Market Committee is the SD Member of Parliament Magnus Persson. This development saw the chair of the Swedish Construction Workers' Union (Byggnads), announcing that "we will establish contact with the SD"¹³ and the day after, the President of LO following up with:

"We will talk to the SD.

We have a mission and that is to make sure that the members of the confederation have the very best possible conditions. It is our duty to talk to all those who make political decisions so that they can understand how their decisions affect the members of our confederation," says Susanna Gideonsson.¹⁴

Reactions to this included that from Jonas Andersson, chair of Byggnads youth section, Unga Byggar, who responded:

The SD should be kept as far away as possible. They are not compatible with our ideology and our fundamental values. They are our main opponent, with xenophobic policies, and are neither good for our members nor for society.

This brings the question of LO's ideology, values and practice into sharp focus in the societal arena. In a context where the traditional right wing tries to combine its neoliberalism with an increasingly explicit racism, while the SD with its care racism for white people increasingly, if not yet completely, adopts neoliberal policies, the question of how LO and its affiliates should navigate the political arena becomes increasingly difficult. Although it is too early to draw any clear conclusions, the issue of the fight against racism seems increasingly marginalised within LO and instead the focus is on saving what can be saved of a social democratic welfare regime that is shrinking at an ever-increasing speed. In this context, defending the Swedish model of industrial relations becomes increasingly important, and at the same time more complicated, and this is a theme we focus on in the following section.

13 https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/val-2022/lo-toppen-vi-kommer--etablera-kontakt-med-sd/?utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=EchoboxExpressen&utm_source=Facebook.

14 (<https://www.dn.se/sverige/lo-basen-vi-kommer-att-samtala-med-sd/>).

5.2 *Industrial Relations in the Labour Market*

The commercial trade sector is exposed to racist expressions through the close proximity of employees to the customers [...]

Racism is particularly noticeable in working life, where people with foreign names find it more difficult to get a job and many have to take jobs for which they are overqualified. People with a foreign background are over-represented in occupations where wages are low and working conditions are poor. Some employers use workers with a foreign background to squeeze wages and conditions. Everyone suffers from different forms of racism in the labour market [...]

Instead of explaining social problems as a result of resources being used to enrich a few instead of to safeguard the well-being of us all, they blame the most vulnerable. The best long-term strategy to counteract this development is to pursue a policy of a more equal distribution of power and resources. This will make people less susceptible to the suspicion and worry that the right-wing extremists' mobilisation is based on.¹⁵

The quote that begins this section is interesting for a number of reasons. Firstly, the quote comes from Susanna Gideonsson, who at that time was president of the Swedish Commercial Employees' Union, and later, as president of LO (as quoted above), argued that LO had to talk to the SD, reflecting the change LO seems to have undergone after the 2022 election. The second reason, which was discussed at length above, is that it so clearly highlights the development of society towards increasing inequality and insecurity that the right-wing extremists are mobilising, and which is thereby leading to the spread of racism. Implicitly, it is yet more infantilisation of parts of the working class, where their political choices (to support a racist party) are explained by their inability to think rationally (i.e. to focus on the enrichment of the few). The third reason, which brings us to the theme of this section, is the presence of racism in working life and industrial relations in the labour market.

Although the focus is in many ways on employers (those who are enriched, those who discriminate, those who subject migrants to [extra] poor working conditions), the word 'employer' is used only once in the long quote and then limited to "SOME employers use labour with a foreign background to squeeze wages and conditions".

¹⁵ Rasismen är vardag för många Handelsmedlemmar, Susanna Gideonsson, President of the Swedish Commercial Employees' Union (15 November 2018). <https://www.etc.se/debatt/rasismen-ar-vardag-manga-handelsmedlemmar>.

For LO and its affiliates, the collective agreement is sacred. The research is in relative agreement that this has served them well for a long time, often encapsulated in the idea of the “Swedish model”. Although research is more divided in neoliberal times, it remains the formula for success. In both the texts and the interviews about the SD, xenophobia and racism, the issue of industrial relations and the labour market is marginal.

We [want to] educate and organise and make our members understand that they aren't ... it's not the migrants' fault that things look like they do. It's definitely not them and it's not labour migration that makes ... it's not those people who come here and want a job that make them lose their jobs, it's the companies [breathes in] that dump wages and conditions. (IP 2.15)

Although right-wing policies are the central explanation for the SD's growth, and that it is employers who are exploiting migrants, there is sometimes also an explanation where migration and migrants play a part. There is an idea that “they” are the main or at least an additional cause of societal problems, for example that “they” take “our” jobs or become strike-breakers as in the quote below.

There was anger that they came here as strike-breakers. Then the anger is directed at the workers who came here, and we have a huge challenge in getting our members and construction workers to understand that they shouldn't be angry with the workers because they are themselves in a vulnerable situation, and they of course only want a job, and maybe have a terrible time in their countries. They just want to survive as well, but the employers are exploiting them, they're the ones we should be angry with, and we have, there is, there's no denying, that we have quite a lot of support. The SD support among our voters, among our members, because the only thing they see and hear is that the SD wants to close the borders and then they think that labour migration will also stop ... but that isn't the case. And we have, we have big challenges. (IP 2.23)

Sometimes it is clear that these are ideas that the members who support the SD have, but sometimes it becomes a sliding narrative where the interviewees and leadership partly acknowledge this depiction of the problem in general. This takes place through the highlighting of failed migration or integration policies where “the others” implicitly become part of the problem, or as in the quote above where “employers are exploiting them” but where they (“them”)

simultaneously become a problem. In this context, the SD promise to close borders as a universal solution becomes, in its simplicity, a productive racist strategy.

The Swedish trade union movement, together with the Social Democrats, has historically strongly identified itself with inclusive nation-building, but where labour migration has at the same time been regulated in consultation with the unions. In previous texts we have discussed the practice of the labour movement in the 1970s and 80s through the concept of inclusive subordination (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2004). This practice was not characterised by either the struggle against racism or even an awareness of racism but was first and foremost rooted in the idea that the working class should keep, or be kept, together. In a period characterised by declining class divisions, full employment and a growing economy, union focus was on avoiding internal stratification. Central to this period was a neo-corporatist structure in which labour and capital negotiated within Keynesian economic policies.¹⁶ As migrant (and female) workers had both poorer wages and working conditions, several strategies for inclusion were developed, although these did not question their subordinate position in the labour market and in the working class.

The culture of negotiation and collaboration is often the framework for how racism is discussed by the interviewees in relation to employers. Discrimination based on ethnicity and bullying as the form in which racism is manifested is noted. Although employers have policies against discrimination, efforts according to the interviews, are limited to having employees read through the policy. In several of the interviews there is a desire from union representatives to emphasise the role of the company (which is laid down in law) in combatting these practices. At the same time, as we return to in the next section, there is an unwillingness among the unions to address these issues if it can be avoided, because they at least partly involve situations that pit members against other members.

Yes, employers, they have a lot of obligations to the employees, that is, gender equality plans and equality plans and all that. So that they're serious [laughs a little] ... (1P 2.18)

16 In the post-war period, the trade union movements came to play a significant role in social policies in a triad of states, employers and trade unions that has often been termed neo-corporatism (Schmitter & Lehbruch 1979; see Neergaard 2000, for Sweden; see Allund, & Schierup 1991, for the neo-corporatist organisation of migrants by ethnicity.

Employers, I think employers have the same guidelines there, where you mustn't in any way disadvantage anyone because of the things mentioned in any way at all. (1P 2.23)

The quote is interesting because it indicates that the employers and the unions are fundamentally in agreement on the work against discrimination and on the equality plan. At the same time, it becomes clear that these are not central issues for either the employers or the unions, and that they rarely involve anything that leads to conflict.

Sometimes silence can scream, and this is one such occasion. In the review of both the texts and the interviews, it becomes clear that the fight against racism is a marginal issue in industrial relations between union and employer. The silence is screaming because industrial relations are the most fundamental and core tasks of the unions, to represent workers in negotiations, agreements and conflicts with employers, but racism and the fight against racism is not a real issue here. In the previous section, we saw that the societal arena is a place for struggle against racism, a racism that was mainly an effect of economic right-wing policies, the presence of “the Others” and the insecurity this brought about. In the next section we move the focus to the workers, the union and its members, an arena where the issue of racism, xenophobia and especially the SD is given considerable space.

5.3 *Stopping Racism within the Workers' Collective: Education, Education, Education*

Racism has become a work environment problem. Workers are pitted against workers in hostile conversations during breaks. The union is now changing strategy.¹⁷

The quote above is from the preamble to the article “The fight for the coffee room” in the industrial workers' newspaper, which focuses on the need for education, a topic we will return to soon. The preamble is interesting because it links back to the previous section on industrial relations in the workplace and the employers' responsibility for the work environment, but it takes a different direction and focuses on what the unions do. It is also interesting because it talks about racism, not discrimination or bullying. In this section, we focus on the union struggle in the workplace, not between employers and workers, but

17 <https://da.se/2017/04/kampen-om-fikarummet/> [15 March 2023].

between workers and workers. We highlight education – the tension between a panacea and the only means available to combat the SD, xenophobia and racism in the workplace.

The course has been going on for a while when Pelle Hasselgren asks the participants to try giraffe language with the help of role-playing games.

He reads: “You’re a shop steward and you’re talking about wages.”

Member: “I don’t need a pay rise, most of it goes in tax to give the coloureds benefits.”

You: “?”

The course leader has hardly finished reading, when a participant suddenly says out loud in a broad Skåne (Scanian) accent:

“Yes, that’s the way it is, I say!”

There follows a burst of laughter.

The quote above is from the article “The fight for the coffee room”, with which we began the section. It concerns the trade union course “Förebildning” (role modelling). It is a method based on listening until someone has finished speaking, reporting what you react to without adding judgemental words and then responding according to the model

when you say/do (something racist/sexist), I get (sad/upset/disappointed), because (it goes against my/union values) and I would like (that you don’t say/do it again).¹⁸

The idea is to learn how to deal with intolerant members in a way that reduces the risk of confrontation. However, in the example above, the subsequent laughter and comments following the article show that racism and xenophobia are so strong that they are even to be found among members who sign up for trade union courses, although they are often perceived as the most committed to combatting racism and xenophobia.

Courses, training, workshops and lectures have been an established part of the labour movement since its inception. The Workers’ Educational Association (ABF) brings together the educational courses of the entire labour movement, and these are complemented by LO and its affiliates’ own study activities, which are our focus here. For the trade union movement, education activities have been a central part of building class identity, self-consciousness

¹⁸ An example of this is expressed by interview person 2.8 in the subsection above when they say “When you say this, I think it’s ... It makes me sad”.

and knowledge of its operations. It was in many ways expected that most interviewees would mention this as important in their work against racism, xenophobia and the SD's increasing influence. And yet, we were struck by how central it was, appearing to be almost the only "real" resource in this work. Admittedly, in relation to the societal arena, many interviewees highlighted the need for different economic policies for increased social justice, focusing both on a nostalgic history of social democracy and a more future-focused renewal project.

At the same time, as we made clear above, social interaction risks, often with reference to the coffee room and especially in male-dominated workplaces, becoming a school for developing and reinforcing workers' xenophobia and racism through tough jargon and the presence of educated and conscious racists. In this context, the interviewees' emphasis on education appears as the central tool, a tool that could also be used here and now.

The interviewees persistently return to questions about educational courses. We interpret courses as a fundamental tool in creating a union identity, a sense of belonging to a union. The courses are not just about educational content; the location where they are held provides an opportunity to meet with other trade union activists and to feel like part of the union. The location (outside the home and workplace), taking time off from work (and domestic responsibilities) and being in another place creates a breathing space for union activists in a context of bourgeois hegemony.

There are few studies on trade union educational activities (Calveley & Shelley, 2016) and the role they play in the trade union struggle. In the field of trade union education focused on racism and xenophobia and how to combat it, research is even more limited (Mamode, 2019).

In the 2002 municipal council elections in Landskrona, the SD received almost 9 percent of the vote, and "Jobbare mot rasism" (Workers Against Racism) was founded there in 2004 as a reaction to new social changes where open racism became increasingly legitimate and where it was clear that workers were being interpellated. From 2002 to 2022, support for the SD constantly increased and a significant amount of this came from male white workers. "Jobbare mot rasism" can be said to be a precursor to the educational courses discussed here, with the focus then as now directed at a combination of racism, xenophobia and members' support for the SD.

Almost everyone we interviewed highlighted education as the most important thing they could do to combat the SD, racism, and xenophobia in general. "[We] have a section! On xenophobia, we have it in all courses" (IP 2.9) can be said to be the basic starting point and the lowest common denominator

among the interviewees. But while this union representative stopped here, there were many who further developed their accounts with arguments for and against different educational approaches. In the following quote, the interviewee highlights one specific course that is contrasted with another and thus highlights the differences in the basics of education against racism:

Those who've done this course, they become really active messengers in a different way. And they can throw themselves into a situation where they meet a liberal or where they meet Sweden Democrats, and they can argue because they're talking about material interests, and that's much easier to get people to understand than this liberal feel-good anti-racism, as it were. And we talk about how we should, why we should fight racism, it's for self-interest really, as a labour movement. And you can think that's problematic in many ways, but we're also talking about solidarity, of course. But the important thing is to talk about that all forms of division, no matter on what basis, counteract your own self-interest. Racism will give you less pay; you'll be shooting yourself in the foot. That works. It works very well ... so what Expo does is after all some kind of liberal anti-racism, as it were. (IP 4)

Our reading of the quotation is linked to the development of trade union work against racism in connection with the emergence of the SD as an increasingly powerful political factor in society in general and within the working class specifically. "Workers Against Racism", which started locally and developed into a collaboration at national level between the Construction Workers' Union, the Commercial Employees' Union, IF Metall, the Municipal Workers' Union and the Union for Service and Communications Employees, was based on the idea that knowledge of racism and the SD, together with an emphasis on the labour movement's values would influence attitudes and thereby reduce prejudice, xenophobia and racism. Eventually, the issue of combatting xenophobia, the SD and racism became an issue for LO, and in 2011 the project "Everyone can do something" was launched, which aimed at both LO Union members and school students. The project was developed in collaboration with Expo. When the interviewee talks about Expo as liberal feel-good anti-racism, it partly reflects how they present themselves:

Expo defends the democratic society against the threat posed by racism. Our fundamental values are that people should not be judged by where they come from, by what their faith is, or by their appearance. We believe

that racism is countered best by arming people with knowledge of the mechanisms and language of racism and how it is organised. We are not tied to any political position on a Left-Right spectrum.¹⁹

Expo provides the trade union movement with knowledge and a pedagogy that knowledge of racism leads to it being counteracted, basically a liberal understanding of racism which has been partly embraced by the trade union movement. As an alternative to this, the interviewee promotes a pedagogy against racism that focuses on self-interest and material interests. This is linked to a class reductionist view that racism divides the working class, and that it leads to racism giving “you [even] less pay; you’ll be shooting yourself in the foot”.

Another example that focuses less on the SD and racism and instead on trade union issues is provided by the following interviewee’s account:

We have a three-day course which is good, which the Electricians’ Union actually came up with, it was their course from the beginning, because they understood that we have to do something drastic here. Because there are so many, they have the same problem, Byggnads have the same problem, so we’ve tried to produce ... they produced a great union political ideology course that doesn’t really say “SD are racists, SD are racists” all the time, but we focus on our issues instead, we base it on those. It is really, really great that we’ve all embraced and started on, so that feels really great. So we try to constantly work with these, with those questions, but our biggest, our biggest challenge is to safeguard all the members/elected representatives who sit in these rooms, who get to hear all this and face it, dare to stand, stand up to it and dare to say it. Because it’s not that easy. (1P 2.21)

While the interviewee begins by highlighting how good it is to focus on union issues, and not on “SD are racists”, it ends with members and elected representatives on the shop floor being exposed to the SD’s racist narratives. We want readers to consider the interviewer’s comment “it’s not that easy.” The account conveys how racism has become hegemonic or normalised in workplaces, where attempts to question or resist require courage (dare to stand, stand up to it and dare to say it).

Arguments to shift the focus from the SD to our issues have existed both among Social Democrats and in the parliamentary left for a few decades. They

19 <https://expo.se/om-expo>.

are based on the idea of a unified working class, where “our issues” (class issues) should be at the centre. They are often based on a reasoning that, since it is increasingly tending to move towards bourgeois economic, labour market and trade union policies, the SD would be exposed, and workers would vote for parties that more clearly represent their issues. This is a problematic analysis that does not take into account that, for white workers, racism can at least generate privileges in the short term (wages of whiteness). Furthermore, it renders invisible the fact that for many racialised workers, issues of racism and the SD are part of everyday life and are thus “their issues”, not only as “inhabitants” but also as workers. Migrants are present in this quote when the interviewee discusses the union’s will to

educate and organise and make our members understand that they aren’t, it’s not the migrants’ fault that things looks like they do, it’s definitely not them and it’s not labour migration that makes, it’s not those people who come here and want a job that makes them lose their jobs, it’s the companies [breathes in] that dump wages and conditions. (IP 2.15)

The SD’s policies, despite the image of the threatened (white) Swedish folkhem, have increasingly shifted in a neoliberal direction. As such, and as the interviewees claim, the SD are anti-union. But for white workers, the SD can be a rational choice to defend their privileges as whites. It is doubtful whether making whiteness, which is fundamental to the SD support, invisible would help elected representatives to get work colleagues to vote differently.

Transport is one of the unions, perhaps the only union, that excludes active Sweden Democrats. “Active” is anyone who carries out duties for them, for example, and not only Sweden Democrats, if you’re an active Nazi in an organisation, you’re not in, but I don’t think that’s enough. That is, I don’t think that’s the solution to everything, we have to invest in education, in a serious way. It sounds clichéd when I hear it myself, and relationships and working with people, working with people, meeting people, listening to people, hearing people’s problems, because if you don’t listen to people, who the hell will listen to you? (IP 2.22)

In the following quotes, the interviewees almost automatically highlight education as the “be-all and end-all” in combatting the SD, xenophobia and racism, often in combination with talking to people. In the other quotes, this is elaborated to it being able to create solidarity and reinforce identification with equal value for all. In the third quote, the interview subject links education as

a means to foster class identity. Through the example of construction workers and assistant nurses, they show the need for an inter-gender community that is being hampered by differences in pay.

Yes, it's education [laughs]. Talking to people. (IP 2.12)

Educating people in the right direction towards more solidarity, but this with the very foundation of the union about the equal value of all. I don't see anywhere else where we can, where you can reach out in that way. As we could do or as we are doing. We just have to organise ourselves better. (IP 2.12)

We must educate as well, that's like the be-all and end-all, even when it comes to class. Because the Swedish construction workers may not consider themselves as really working class, I would say, because they earn better than assistant nurses, I wouldn't say that they are highly paid, but they, they definitely have a higher salary than other LO occupations, and so they may not really see themselves as ... so they don't really understand the class perspective, the class issue. (IP 2.15)

We conclude this subsection with quotes that, through comments about the courses and perspectives on the future, come to very different conclusions.

The SD are a xenophobic party, which makes it strange that anyone can sympathise with them. But it's about education there too, and it's not a quick fix either. Now we've done it. They've advanced their positions year by year. And soon, I don't know if we can fix it, to be honest. (IP 2.17)

The success of the SD among LO's, mainly male, voters both surprises and concerns the interviewee. In the quote, SD is linked to xenophobia (not racism) and with the comment that it is strange that anyone can sympathise with them. The solution is education, even though the interviewee sounds unsure and concludes that this is not a quick fix. The quote ends with concern, almost resignation, about whether the SD success in the union can be stopped. The next quote, although the interviewee notes that the goals have not been achieved, has an air of optimism:

But I think we, we, yes, we aren't, we aren't quite there yet, but we're on the right track anyway, yes, I think it, it's getting better and better. (IP 2.8)

Although there is an emphasis that the goal is yet to be achieved, the main messages are that they are “on the right track” and “it’s getting better and better”. It is unclear whether this refers to local operations, the union or is meant more in general, and what this means in light of the SD’s constantly increasing support among LO members, which has continued since the interview.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has tried to develop a discussion on trade union work against racism or trade union anti-racism. The discussion has focused on a variety of issues that partly overlap and partly pull in different directions. However, an overarching question has been whether the unions’ work against racism – and it does exist, even if it is not at the centre of union activity – makes it possible to talk about trade union anti-racism and, if so, what it means. One possible answer would be to distinguish work and the fight against racism from anti-racism, depending on how one understands racism. If racism is seen as structural and one is attempting to combat racism, we think that it should be called anti-racism. Such a definition has two potential strengths. On the one hand, it clarifies practices that can counteract and combat racism without being called anti-racism. On the other hand, it also allows anti-racism, based on different structural analyses, to be understood in the plural.

Based on documents and interviews, we have explored rhetoric and practice in relation to three arenas for intervention: wider political arena, industrial relations and within the workers’ collective. Being active within the wider political arena against racism basically consists of two different aspects. On the one hand, work against neoliberalism forms the basis for the union’s understanding of how racism can be explained. There is a nostalgic narrative here that under the Keynesian welfare regime there was a policy of full employment and a reduced social divide, and thus there was no basis for racism in the working class. A special feature here is also the issue that unions can (help to) control labour migration, since both EU membership and labour migration have been seen as a threat and thus a basis for racism. The second intervention focuses on “the equal value of all people” and is centred on fighting the SD and their racism and emphasising that attitudes that distinguish between people are wrong.

Work between unions and employers against racism in working life and through industrial relations has mainly focused on joint declarations against racism and xenophobia, and the responsibility of employers to prevent discrimination and ensure a work environment free of racist and xenophobic

harassment from managers and employees. This arena of trade union struggle, which has historically been the core activity of collective agreements and local and centralised negotiations, is the arena where the issue of racism and xenophobia comes up least in our material.

Finally, the workers' collective is the third arena for the fight against racism and xenophobia. This arena is both the most complex and the most important from a strategic perspective. It is complex because it involves tensions, conflicts and possible antagonism between workers in the same workplace and in the same union. It is the most important arena because LO's basic strategy has been both to have a high degree of organisation and to use specific activities and ideological work to create the imagined solidarity that results in union strength. In this arena, education is the dominant practice used to combat racism, through the training of ombudspersons, elected representatives and members; education that uses a number of different pedagogies and emphases.

With the above-mentioned distinction between work against racism and anti-racism, it is clear that the limited and over time uneven work against racism that has been made visible in the chapter is to be called work against racism (not anti-racism), which is mainly understood as an effect of capitalism and class oppression – a class reductionist analysis, and as ignorance interpellated by the SD.

We have shown in the chapter that the major threat of racism is not racism in itself but rather that it is perceived to threaten trade union solidarity and (Social Democratic) political mobilisation. We have also shown that there is a will and a practice to reduce, with a few exceptions, the work against racism to a marginal issue. Not primarily out of a lack of interest, but mostly because of the lack of strategies to do so. The starting point has mainly been how the union can combat support for the SD and xenophobic jargon and opinions rather than understand its connection to racism and the need for trade union anti-racism. There is an idea that this can be done without changing the trade union organisation and its basic practices and without provoking the members who support the racist practices, which would risk manifesting conflicts and/or these members leaving the union.

The structural analysis found in the LO unions is reformist, Marxist-influenced and characterised by the idea of the Swedish model of industrial relations. Two central aspects here are on the one hand the economic policy of a Keynesian-inspired high-wage economy in which low-wage jobs are rationalised away towards the global South, and on the other hand seeing labour migration as labour supply but only when needed (reserve army of labour). As a consequence, racism is seen as an effect of capitalist (increasing) inequalities, which means a lack of, and an unwillingness to develop, a structural understanding

of racism and racial capitalism. The LO trade unions represent their members, and especially their white male members in Sweden, and, despite some internationalist activity, ignore the global character of capitalism (what early Marxists saw as the super-profits of imperialism) and the link between racial formation and racial capitalism.

Applying a racial capitalism perspective is, as noted in the introductory chapter of the volume, complicated but an important way of transcending methodological nationalism. While this chapter focused on the Swedish working-class trade union confederation and its affiliates' discourse and activities concerning racism and anti-racism in Sweden, we did note that this also has global dimensions for a trade union organisational complex within (and beyond) a small but active racial imperialist country.

Thus, through their nation-state focus and by seeing racism as an effect of national capitalism's inequalities, the trade unions risk participating not only in the reproduction of global racial formation (Bonacich et al., 2008) of which Sweden is a part, but also in reducing racism to a combination of neoliberal policies with increasing inequality and the SD's political project. Apart from during the football World Cup and when the super-exploitation of global race formation is made visible as many displaced people drown on their way to fortress Europe, or when the worst form of exploitation of racialised labour becomes a newspaper article, racism is not really the problem. Our conclusion is that the general practice in LO and its affiliates, with local and individual exceptions, is to see the fight against racism as a struggle against the SD, and as a struggle against a divided workers' collective – not anti-racism. In this practice, not only does structural racism become invisible, but so do all the racialised workers who make up 30 percent of LO members and almost 40 percent of the working class.

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Neo-apartheid Metropolis: Racial Capitalism and Subaltern Struggles in Urban Sweden

Carl-Ulrik Schierup, Aleksandra Ålund and Ilhan Kellecioglu

At the turn of the millennium, Sweden was still celebrated as an ‘exceptional’ welfare state, promoting a vision of inclusive multiculturalism, social justice, and open democracy. However, by the third decade of the 21st century, it has become a society increasingly dominated by far-right, racist political forces. Over the past three decades, a profligate commodification of the welfare system, a take-over of public housing by corporate financial capital, deepening precarisation of labour, exacerbated residential segregation and polarized spatialization of inequality have fuelled growing divides along racial and class lines. These are indicators forging a predatory interconnection of racism and capital accumulation. On that background we discuss in this chapter empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives on a structurally and spatially ingrained racial capitalism in what we identify as ‘neo-apartheid’ Stockholm; yet contested by subaltern struggles rooted in stigmatized, segregated, and securitized local communities.

The chapter sets out from a discussion of a so-called ‘Swedish exceptionalism’ (Schierup and Ålund, 2011) in terms of a changing character of power and governance. From there we take a step back to a principled discussion of ‘racial capitalism’; a concept that in *Black Marxism* Cedric Robinson (2000) picked up from the South African debate on apartheid in the 1970s (e.g. Wolpe, 1972; Alexander, 1979; Nkosi, 1973). This, we argue, was a debate with potential for reaching an understanding of what we call the ‘neo-apartheid city’ related to today’s Swedish social and political-economic urban reality. Proceeding from there we record segregation, racial stigmatisation, predatory housing policies and precarious labour, conditioning livelihoods in Sweden’s most disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. We reflect on the positionality and voices of the subaltern, confronted by epistemic violence under conditions of an expropriative racial capitalism, reproduced by political discourse and institutional practice. We offer an approach to subaltern struggles centred on a local case, focusing on movements contending the financialization of housing and the precarization of labour.

We conclude with a discussion of these struggles, exposed to the conditionality, vagaries, and challenges of what Agamben (2005) has defined as a pending 'State of exception'.

1 The Eclipse of Swedish 'Exceptionalism'

A so-called 'exceptional' Swedish post-World War II welfare state is famed for once having gotten "the furthest along in undermining capital's power" and building "the most liveable society in history" (Sunkara, 2019: 105–106), with a substantive equality of political, social, and labour rights independent of background or identity. The glimmer of this mirage has today eclipsed under the weight of transformed relations of power in an EU-aligned 'regulatory state' (Majone, 1997); a transmuted Sweden, that exhibits the Union's most advanced 'austerity regime' with a social fabric fragmented along lines of race and class (Streeck, 2014; Schierup & Scarpa, 2017). In tandem with a step-by-step deregulation of protective social and labour provisions, the depoliticization of formerly powerful labour unions, and the co-optation of civil society, the state has become a partner to corporate capital in a radically commodifying re-regulation of the welfare-institutional framework. Centre-right and centre-left coalitions, which have alternated in power since 1991, have acted as "relay runners to promote inequality and profiteering" (Therborn, 2018: 3). Together, they have reduced taxes on inheritance, wealth, and residential property to zero, made capital income less taxable than labour income, and tightened the scope of social benefits, which have become increasingly difficult to access. Since the early 1990s, Sweden has been the OECD member with the fastest increase in income inequality. From a society, in the 1980s still known for being one of the most egalitarian, Sweden has today come to figure as one of the most unequal concerning the distribution of wealth. A lacerated Swedish welfare system is being drained further through charges to the state budget from a militaristic rearmament answering to "geopolitical tensions"; by EU top diplomat Josep Borrell (2024)¹ diagnosed as evolving "in the direction of the West against the Rest".

Exacerbated inequality and precarity of livelihoods and labour concur with a transformation of the political process. The centre-right and centre-left have converged towards the hegemony of a neoconservative 'extreme centre' (cf. Ali, 2018), with visions of solidarity, equality and social justice sacrificed, and

1 Appropriating Stuart Hall's (1992) famed de-colonial maxim.

political legitimacy riding on fear mongering and a collective obsession with the allegedly non-belonging ‘other’, depicted as welfare scroungers, potential criminals, and a peril to ‘social cohesion’. This may appear as an appropriation by mainstream parties across the traditional left-right divide of the political discourse of the Sweden Democrats (*Sverigedemokraterna*), a nationalist and racist neo-conservative political party with a Nazi and Neo-Nazi past. The party has, incrementally, during the 2000s, bled the votership of both the traditional left and the traditional political right, and its politics of hate and islamophobia has fomented racialisation and deepening socio-political rifts between workers. Yet, “the fish rots from the head”, as the saying goes, or as paraphrased by Bartels (2023), “Democracy erodes from the top”.

A furtive racist agenda has engulfed the political mainstream in competition for the votes of a disoriented electorate, which no longer finds reassurance in the traditional narrative of welfare state solidarity (Schierup & Scarpa, 2017). Racism is so, in a conjuncture of political and social crisis, marshalled to foster the state’s authority over a perturbed population with discourses of threat to the nation trumping class and societal divides (cf. Rajaram, 2018: 630).

It is a conjuncture at which the erosion of the institutions of the welfare state came to be evasively diagnosed as ‘system collapse’ under the weight of ‘excessive immigration’ and the ‘unintegrated’ Other within (Interview, 2015). Phenotypical markers of “color, bone, and hair” (Du Bois, 1903: 13) are indeed rendered ‘invisible’ yet retaining their function as covert indicators for discriminatory institutional practices. In the hegemonic narrative of race spuriously unprejudiced concepts – such as ‘culture’, ‘integration’ or ‘social cohesion’ – function as epistemic carriers that reproduce colonial ideology. Or, as brought out in a podcast by Soar Ali (Folkets Husby, 2023), a local anti-racist activist in Stockholm: “Sweden is in crisis ... The West argued that colonial expansion was a road to civilization ... Today this mission is directed towards us, ‘the others’, in multiethnic suburbia ... A new version of the imperial model”. This hints at a racial capitalism with spatial dimensions, demarcating precarious communities in the larger cities – with a high proportion of citizens with their background in Africa, West Asia, Latin America, the Balkans, and the former Soviet Empire – in terms of the floating signifier of ‘outsidership areas’ (*utanförskapsområden*). They are guzzled by an ‘advanced marginality’ (Wacquant, 1996) and victimized by a racializing epistemic chain corresponding to the castigation of France’s ‘banlieus’; *Badlands of the Republic* (Dikeç, 2007). These northern ‘badlands of the kingdom’ (Schierup, Ålund & Kings, 2014) are in common political parlance designated as *förorten* (literally ‘the suburb’).

A racist logic, embedded in the signifier of ‘the suburb’, emerges more clearly in the homologous designation of ‘outsidership areas’; the latter, like

the former, subsumed under a stigmatizing epistemology with ‘integration’ as the overarching political-ideological denominator. The notion of ‘outsidership areas’ was initiated by the People’s Party² (Folkpartiet, 2004). Their social vulnerability and perceived unruly character are understood as void of structural-institutional causes, based on a self-inflicted reproduction of deviant cultures, transmitted from generation to generation. Cultural differences vis-à-vis the so-called ‘majority population’ are considered to create a state where groups living in ‘exclusion’ or ‘outsidership’ do not understand how “central social arenas work, nor the set of values and cultural reference points that give these arenas their cohesive cultural glue” (Folkpartiet, 2004: 8). Cures for the healing of ‘outsidership’ is proscribed in the guise of civilizational education to ‘entrepreneurship’ and disciplinary schooling of the culturally deviant, non-integrated Other to embrace the morals of liberal democracy in “the meeting between mutually incompatible individual or group-related value systems, goals and ambitions” (Swedish Government, 2008: 59).

1.1 *A Nation Ripped Apart*

Beyond moral panic, what surfaces is “a war against the suburb” (Wirtén, 2012), with epistemic, ideo-political, social, welfare institutional, economic, and securitization dimensions. The inhabitants in these areas suffer incommensurably from commodification and refraction of a formerly universalist public welfare system. This corroborates precarisation of livelihoods and labour, and a spatially articulated, racial and class inequality, with Sweden’s larger cities having become among the most segregated in Europe in terms of race and class, with as many as fifty percent of children in the poorest neighbourhoods in Metropolitan districts growing up in poverty (Thörn & Thörn, 2017). It is a state linked with a transmutation of the welfare institutional system, forging an increasingly discriminatory, structurally rooted and institutionally reproduced, racial formation. It includes a profit driven financialization of housing, an austere migration and refugee policy, and a commodified primary and secondary school system, the obtrusively corrupt and asocial dynamics of which are observed to “rip the nation apart” (Kornhall & Bender, 2018). It has, resulted, predictably, in dropouts and in criminal violence enrolling ever younger teenagers and children. Yet, the victims of an oppressive systemic change are blamed for their own vulnerability.

2 Swedish *Folkpartiet*, today *Liberalerna* (‘The Liberal Party’).

Bio-political measures targeted at 'outsidership areas' through social work – for moral improvement, discipline and conforming behaviour – have long been overshadowed by escalating police violence and extensive racial profiling (Schclarek Mulinari & Wolgast, 2020), involving policy bids for the mass-incarceration of ever younger individuals. In tandem with this realignment across the extreme centre the discriminatory epistemic carriage of 'outsidership areas' has become accentuated by the adoption, in media and politics, of the notion of 'parallel society'. It was canonized through a report by the police authority (Polisen, 2017) listing sixty-one housing areas as an alien world apart, supposedly ruled as 'parallel' social structures by extremists and criminal gangs. This calls, emphasized the former social democratic premier, Magdalena Andersson (Instagram, 2022), for a battery of disciplinary action, including incremental securitization and the sharpening of austere politics of workfare through special treatment of 'welfare dependent parents'. Upping the ante, she escalated the securitization agenda in 2023 by proposing the deployment of the Swedish army to enforce law and order in disadvantaged suburbs, while her party actively supports drone surveillance. This was seconded by proposals from a leading politician of the Sweden Democrats for introducing curfews, and by a governmental proposal for the use of electronic foot shackles, to keep control of adolescents and children seen to be running a risk for being drawn into criminal activity (Socialdemokraterna, 2024).

It is a development that is prone to become exacerbated by the implementation of the so-called *Tidö Agreement* a neo-conservative political compact adopted in 2022 by a centre-right government in alliance with the Swedish Democrats. It harbours a series of discriminatory stratagems, including special legislation relating to disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods. It envisaged, among other, forms of securitization outlawed on Swedish territory in general, including the institution of special so-called 'visitation zones' in chosen 'outsidership areas'. This licenses the police to search any person in these areas, without previous suspicion or reason given; a practice veritably existing for long (Schclarek Mulinari & Wolgast, 2020), but in 2024 set into law formally by parliamentary decision. The *Tidö* agreement foresees, moreover, area-based discrimination concerning housing and social policy. It anticipates politically stipulated wages for certain occupational groups, and the sharpening of already austere measures towards inhabitants who are dependent on social benefits. It corroborates, beyond the confines of liberal legality, the moralistic category of *vandel* ('*deportment*') as criterium för belonging, and conversely as liability for deportation upon revoking residence permit or citizenship. Altogether, concludes a review of the *Tidö Agreement* (Sundborg, 2022), this

represents a “headway towards an authoritarian state ... a Swedish apartheid with a part of the population subject to a number of special laws”. Indeed a “successful segregation” muses Tanvir Masur (2024), sardonically twisting the political mainstream’s racial slogan of ‘failed integration’.

Securitization, racial stigma, and systemic cleavages underpin expropriation of the livelihoods of society’s most disadvantaged in stigmatized suburban communities, operated – to be substantiated below – as floating reserves for financial profiteering and cheap precarious labour. It suggests that a radicalized form of Swedish racial capitalism can be critically analysed by identifying features resonant with those that forged the infrastructure of the South African apartheid state.

2 Stratagems of Neo-apartheid

Since the caving in of apartheid, after the formal retreat of the South African racial regime, ‘apartheid’ has been extensively adopted as a metaphor indicating different forms of discrimination under conditions of neoliberalism. However, reasons Chiodelli (2022), “this carries the risk of eroding the political and symbolic vigor intrinsic to the notion of apartheid. In essence, if apartheid is everything (in other words, if it is *any* form of discrimination), maybe it is nothing”. Apartheid is no *ordinary* concept. It is an exceptionally charged and historically significant designation. In rearticulating the notion, it is crucial to adopt a “selective and cautious broadening which maintains some of the original characteristics of apartheid and, therefore, allows to preserve its specificity in relation to other concepts, such as discrimination and inequality” (Chiodelli, 2022).

It involves totalizing practices of discrimination towards ethnically or culturally designated groups, aiming at making them fluidly procurable economically and politically, institutionalized through spatial separation. What distinguishes instances of **neo-liberal apartheid** is the way discrimination is institutionalized – not through explicit racial legislation, but through more insidious mechanisms. Rather than relying on overtly racist policies based on phenotypical markers like skin colour, these forms of exclusion operate through subtler, more elusive structures. It implicates different means of exercising power, in terms of a scalar fragmentation of ‘the neo-apartheid city’, articulated through localized struggles (Bradlow, 2021).

In what follows, we set out from a perspective of south African scholars on apartheid in South Africa, in contrast with Robinson (2000) leaning heavily onto the Marxist tradition of political economy (cf. Levenson & Paret, 2013).

We will relate their arguments to contemporary theories of racial capitalism and examine their significance in uncovering the dynamics of racial capitalism in urban Sweden.

2.1 *Primitive Accumulation Revisited*

Martin Legassick and Harold Wolpe were among the South African scholars theorizing the political economy of the apartheid regime. In 'The Bantustans and Capital Accumulation in South Africa' (Legassick & Wolpe, 1976), they elaborate on Marx' classical concepts of 'primitive accumulation' and the 'reserve army of labour' as key for understanding the apartheid system's rationale, stratagems and institutional setup. They also emphasize that in depth analysis of apartheid, its race legislation, its extreme securitized segregation, and its developmental dynamics must relate to the global capitalist system, dominated by imperial monopoly capital. They thus, in consequence, insert the idea of racial capitalism into the global framing of primitive accumulation belonging to the intellectual heritage of Rosa Luxemburg (2003 [1913]).

This relates to Luxemburg's theory of imperialism in *The Accumulation of Capital*, where she contested the idea that primitive accumulation, conceived as the bloody *prehistory* of capitalism effected by naked political violence, should be a once and for all historical event. She maintains that primitive accumulation is a continuous, integrated, and essential constituent of capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism, arguing that "the accumulation of capital, seen as an historical process, employs force as a permanent weapon, not only at its genesis, but further on down to the present day" (Luxemburg, 2003 [1913]: 351). It is in fact the life blood of capitalism per se; a social and economic system of a fundamentally dual character of which, as condensed by Wang (2018: 113), "one sphere is governed by freedom of contract and the rule of law while the other is dominated by political violence and looting carried out by hegemonic capitalist nations". Luxemburg's penetrating analysis of colonialism and imperialism and her discerning description of "the havoc wreaked upon what we now call the Global South" (Hudis, 2023), speaks critically to today's dominant theories of globalization in the voice of an "unsung hero of postcolonial theory" (Dabashi, 2020). "Rather than casting slavery and Native genocide as temporally circumscribed events that inaugurated the birth of capitalism in the New World ... Luxemburg's approach shows how the racial logics produced by these processes persist to this day" (Wang, 2018: 115).

This helps us to address contemporary processes of financialization and political force crucial for capital accumulation; as claimed by David Harvey (2012) dispossessing the urban masses of 'rights to the city'. Nancy Fraser (2022: 27), in turn, argues in *Cannibal Capitalism* – with reference to the tradition

of Black Marxism – that capitalism has, across its historical transmutations, always been ‘structurally racist’ (2022: 27). She recuperates Luxemburg’s duality of capital accumulation by reengaging the Marxian concepts of ‘expropriation’ and ‘exploitation’ in a discussion of historical and contemporary racial capitalism. In the same instance, however, she also criticizes Marx for discounting the question of race and racism in his conceptualization of capitalism.

Forcible and illicit dispossession and ‘expropriation’ of labour and resources, argues Fraser, has been the ‘backstory’, as well as “an ongoing, albeit unofficial, mechanism of accumulation, which continues alongside the official mechanism of exploitation” (Fraser, 2022: 7–8). Shifting articulations of racism remain contingent on the persistent interplay between expropriation and exploitation embedded within the political orders of capitalism and their historical transformations. The ‘expropriation’ of racialized ‘others’ serves as a necessary precondition for the ‘exploitation’ of ‘workers’. Accordingly, Fraser concludes, “the two exes are systemically imbricated aspects of a single capitalist world system. And the division between them correlates roughly but unmistakably with what Du Bois called ‘the color line’”. This apparent ontological *a priori* of capitalism is, however, critically historicized in her understanding of the present hegemony of an extraordinarily predatory financial capitalism. She acknowledges that this necessitates at least a partial reassessment of the systemic racial bifurcation along the axes of exploitation and expropriation. Beyond a sustained racial dichotomy, a plurality of dispossessing expropriation under the sway of financialization is subjecting, Fraser argues, ever broadening population groups, even in the contemporary global North, to a multifarious state of encumbering precarity, on the far downside of socially necessary costs of reproduction. It is a condition roughly corresponding also to what Mario Marini (2022 [1973]) has termed ‘super-exploitation’; customarily considered a quintessence of labour and life of the capitalist periphery under the peril of imperialism. This crossroad, also designated as ‘the Brazilianisation of the West’ (Beck, 2000), is a proliferating process, with a spread of temporariness, insecure employment, discontinuity, loose informality, and including dispossession of rights of citizenship that were taken for granted by white majorities during the ‘thirty glorious’ years the Fordist welfare state. It is, a debilitating condition that not only shapes the present but also lay claims to the future (e.g. Tsianos, 2007: 191), crossing Fraser’s two ‘exes’ and with an extensive spread and variability (Schierup & Bak Jørgensen, 2017).

A disproportional range and multiplicity of precarious population groups, bereft by our contemporary ‘great exclusion’ (Jordan, 1996), remain racialized Others (Schierup & Ålund, 2015). They carry the ‘double weight’ of a ‘toxic risk’ of *hyperprecarity* (Woolfson & Likic-Brboric, 2008; cf. Lewis *et al.*, 2015). This

signifies the embeddedness of multiple points of mutually reinforcing vulnerability in global processes of discrimination, expulsion, super-exploitation and coercion, targeting migrants and post-migrants in the global north, and expressly across the global south in societies for centuries ‘underdeveloped’ by a racializing coloniality (e.g., Rodney, 2018). Nevertheless, the observation that “we are all precarious” (i.e. dispossessed) today (Seymour, 2012) – echoing Fraser’s observation concerning the proliferating state of precarity under contemporary financial capitalism – urges us to take a step back recuperating an ontology of ‘racial capitalism’, devoid of preset systemic functionalism; essentially in line with Robinson’s (2000) historical analysis in *Black Marxism*. Hence, the capitalist mode of production does not simply create a superstructure or ideology of racism. Capitalism as a concrete empirical reality is on the contrary constituted by the very history of racism (Rajaram, 2018: 629; cf. Hall, 1996). Rather than a fixed property of the capitalist mode of production, the reconfiguration of today’s racial capitalism in terms of ‘precarity’ represents a novel motion in a path-dependent historical bricolage.

2.2 *Racism, Coloniality and the Reserve Army of Labour*

Accordingly, the confluence of racism and capitalism is a historically ‘contingent’ rather than a ‘logical’ necessity (Go, 2021). This speaks to the distinction, argues Julian Go (2021), between the theory of *capital* and the theory of *capitalism* in the writings of Marx. While the former, the theory of *capital*, offered a “formal and abstract representation of the inner workings of capital”, its contradictions and accumulation, the latter, the theory of *capitalism*, “refers to capitalist development and dynamics in their empirical specificity”. While *Capital* (Marx, 1976 [1885]) and other of Marx’ major theoretical works were rather scant in terms of reference to racism, his correspondence with colleagues, journalistic, and other writings demonstrate that “Marx not only discussed race, slavery, and colonialism but saw them as central for capitalism” (Go, 2021: 42).

This comes for example to expression in his writings on the Irish working class in England, as below in an often-quoted letter addressed to his collaborators in The United States:

All English industrial and commercial centers now possess a working class split into two hostile camps: English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker because he sees in him a competitor who lowers his standard of life. Compared with the Irish worker he feels himself a member of the ruling nation and for this very reason he makes himself into a tool of the aristocrats and capitalists

against Ireland and thus strengthens their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social and national prejudices against the Irish worker [who] ... sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of English rule in Ireland. (Marx, 1975 [1870])

This confluence of coloniality, racial stigma, and class fractionalization, with the Irish working class in England as an exemplary case, Marx compares to the relation between poor whites and the black population in the former slave states of the USA. He observes how this racial split between workers is “intensified by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes”, thus helping to sustain capitalist hegemony and problems of working-class mobilization of the time.

Yet, history tends to repeat itself, albeit in new robes. Essentials of the racial conflicts dividing labour in 19th century England reappears in a discriminative configuration of race, class, nation and coloniality in contemporary neo-apartheid Sweden and much of Europe, experiencing austerity, protracted social crisis, and the rise of a discriminatory nationalism, to which we have related in the preceding. The prevalent political recipe is ‘integration’, ‘assimilation’ or expulsion of the ‘alien’, the culturally deviant; indeed, not squarely unlike a prejudiced formula for solving the problem of the Irish worker once prescribed by Friedrich Engels (1971 [1845]). Marx, however, distanced himself from Engels’ prejudices, analysing racial divisions and conflict within the working class through a critical lens, related to the disciplinary dynamics of *the reserve army of labour* (Duggan, 2013). It is a multidimensional theory whose core principles continue to offer insights into migration and hyper-precarity, racial discrimination, and the spatialization of super-exploitation (Rajaram, 2018); an analytical and empirical issue to which we shall return shortly.

3 Two Faces of Hyper-precarity

In her paper “The return of primitive accumulation”, also Saskia Sassen (2010) theorizes dimensions of the contemporary precarization of labour and livelihoods. She sees, like Fraser, processes of precarization as systemically related to the hegemony of the most complex and powerful global financial system ever seen. It has risen to its “full capacity for destruction” after the end of the cold war, she argues, in tandem with “a vast expansion of primitive accumulation” of a new contemporary nature, implemented by sophisticated organizational mechanisms (Sassen, 2010: 52). One prevalent stratagem is the development of new coercive mechanisms for financialised housing speculation with a racial

signature, expropriating disadvantaged populations of their precarious livelihoods. Another stratagem, contingent with the first, is related to an increasingly pungent casualization and informalisation of labour, low wage part time employment, and bogus self-employment in a burgeoning gig economy.

This dual perspective on politics of hyper-precarity is what concerns us in the following, related to the Swedish context. It is the dispossession of the most disadvantaged in our society of their livelihoods “through an ongoing confiscatory process”, as couched by Fraser (2022: 36), which sustains capital accumulation in a decomposed and crisis-ridden socio-economic system. They are a lucrative prey for the financial operations of transnational housing corporations, which reap hyper-profits through sham renovations and unfounded rent increases in racially stigmatised housing areas. These are, at the same time, areas that – contingent on the very dynamics of their forced segregation in conjunction with disciplinary politics of welfare and labour – feed ‘occupational ghettos’ as containers for a super-exploitable reserve army of the neo-apartheid metropolis.

3.1 *A Monstrous Hybrid: The Stealthy Financialization of Swedish Housing*

Sparked by de-regulation and commodifying reforms of the 1990s, and with Sweden following the European Union’s privatization policy, a financialization of housing has taken place, with global investment corporations like Blackrock and Blackstone as powerful actors (European Commission, 2020; Gustafsson, 2021; Christophers, 2022). As a consequence, rental housing in Swedish cities has come to straggle in an ambivalent state in which housing is (still) officially seen as a universal social right, yet on the other hand as a commodity for capital accumulation (Kadıoğlu & Kellecioğlu, 2023; Kellecioğlu, 2021). A public housing policy emasculated by a stealthy stepwise de-regulation and commodification, juxtaposed by haphazard neoliberal re-regulation, constitutes, in effect, a ‘monstrous hybrid’, muses Christophers (2013) that creates and reproduces socioeconomic inequality (cf. Thörn & Polanska, 2023. See also Molina in this volume). Although Swedish housing policies are thus not (yet) full bread neoliberal, a systemically engrained ‘entrepreneurial governance’ can be identified, argue Thörn and Thörn (2017), as a driving force for race-class segregation of Swedish cities. This implicates an underlying consensual priority of political and economic elites on private investment in pace with a capital affirmative process of institutional de- and re-regulation. It feeds a development (Thörn & Thörn, 2017: 294) “where some urban areas are viewed as financial assets and others are left to decline” The implication is a step by step, but highly “selective, re-making of parts of the city for upper- and middle-class consumption [...]

and displacement of poor people that increases social segregation" (Thörn & Thörn, 2017: 294–5).

Several studies have documented how this 'selective remaking' implicates the covert operations of transnational financial corporations, entailing (using Fraser's terminology introduced above) stratagems of 'expropriation' of people's livelihoods in poor racially segregated communities. The resulting hyper-precarious situation for families living on the income margin has created overcrowding and the eviction of the poor. This is a regime, conclude Blackwell et al. (2023) in a critical analysis of Swedish housing politics, which systematically favours financial capital and construction companies. It generates housing shortage; it leads to fewer and more expensive hiring contracts. The resulting overcrowding among the lowest income groups is among the most severe in Europe. This is a type of situation "where you have finance basically determining your housing policy or finance determining the makeup of your city", explains Sorchá Edwards, Secretary General of Housing Europe (cited by Ellena, 2022); a situation where affordable housing is at risk as major investors acquire residential properties across Europe.

One illuminating international study on the financial dealings of global housing corporations in Berlin, Stockholm, and Malmö was, seen from the perspective of tenants in rental housing, undertaken in 2020–21 by a German-Swedish research group, CRUSH, the Critical Urban Sustainability Hub (CRUSH, 2020). A local case study within that larger project, of special interest for our focus in this chapter, was undertaken by Kellecioglu (2021) on the community of *Husby*, situated in the Stockholm region of Järva.

The Järva region has a population close to 100,000, characterized by a polarized social geography. It includes Kista Science City, an advanced IT cluster, serving a network of strategically integrated cutting-edge companies and relevant service institutions, side by side with poor residential communities, such as Husby, in which more than two fifths of families with children live under conditions of excessive precarity, twenty times more often than in more privileged ('white') areas of the capital. In the Järva community Husby – one of those communities branded by the police and the dominant political and mass media narrative as a problematic 'parallel society' – a vast majority of the residents are born outside of Sweden or have two foreign born parents. Husby is home to a majority of low-income households with precarious livelihoods affected by overcrowded housing, a high level of unemployment, precarious working conditions, and dependence on a fluctuating gig economy. Close to every fourth child in the community is recorded to live in poverty. Living conditions in this well-planned and well-constructed municipal rental housing area have deteriorated due to successive privatizations and a lack of maintenance.

Livelihoods in the area have declined due to a diminishing presence of institutions for health and education and other public and private services.

Municipal housing has become a prey for privatization and hit and run short term profiteering. Husby is a revealing and thoroughly studied case of this. Since the privatization of a substantial stock of the community's municipal housing, bought from the municipal housing company, Svenska Bostäder in 1996, it has been appropriated by and sold among nine different corporations, of which Blackstone, one of the world's largest and most powerful transnational financial corporations, was one (Kellecioglu, 2021). While profit calculations have ruled the sales process during this entire period (1996–2023), the development since privatization has suffered from deficient investment in maintenance by private landlords.

During a certain period, the Swedish housing enterprise Hembla, acted as a shell-company for Blackstone, the main owner. In 2019 the housing stock managed by Hembla across Sweden was sold on to the German multinational company of Vonovia, but still with Hembla as a sub-contractor in charge of management. Hembla, now rebranded as Victoriahem, is a joint stock company responsible for managing and maintaining privatized housing complexes in communities with a high population of non-European backgrounds. These communities are often disadvantaged in terms of the power to defend their formal civic rights, not only in Husby, but also in other parts of Sweden. Vonovia, with Blackrock among its main investors (Gustafsson, 2021), is one of Europe's largest real-estate corporations; notorious among locals in Järva and elsewhere for fake-renovation and bogus rent increases as well as neglected maintenance of their housing stock (Kellecioglu, 2021).

Compared to the other municipal housing complexes in Husby, still managed by Svenska Bostäder, the privatized properties have experienced a notable decline in standards between 1996–2023, often accompanied by a lack of maintenance that has negatively impacted residents' health. A conspicuous difference between municipal and privatized property remains in this respect, even though what is left of a formerly subsidized municipal housing stock in Husby and Sweden has become pressured by re-regulations demanding profitability for organizations in the public sector.

This contrast is obviously, as demonstrated by critical Swedish housing studies, related to continuous processes of accumulation by expropriation by corporate owners and managers, with a racial signature. Alongside strategies for added value through gentrification, super profits in privatized property are captured by fake renovations; an investment strategy, loading tenants with exorbitant and illicit rent increases (Gustafsson, 2021), while processes of 'renoviction' are forcing poor tenants, unable to pay an injudiciously increased rent,

onto the street (Polanska and Richard, 2021). This takes place through multiple strategies of slippery domination, which is amply documented by Kellecioglu (2021) in his report, *From Within the Hell of Hembla* (Swedish original: *Inifrån Hemblahelvetet*), based on interviews with tenants in Husby. Resting on this research and other critical research in Sweden and elsewhere in Europe it appears reasonable to conclude that national and international regulations remain insufficient to protect populations in disadvantaged communities, with homes disrupted through malfeasant confiscation of precarious livelihoods. It includes improper maintenance, sham renovations and, effectively, expropriative dispossession of substantial rights to decent housing (Kadioglu & Kellecioglu, 2023). As we shall discuss further below, this has called for local civic mobilization and the formation of national and international alliances in defence of this basic citizen's and human right.

3.2 *Occupational Ghettos*

A proliferating financial extractivism in housing is flanked by the function of Sweden's most disadvantaged urban communities as incubators for occupational ghettos populated by a super-exploited precariat; "valuable because it is vulnerable" (paraphrasing Bauder, 2006). It is a process related to what Harvey (2001) identifies as a 'spatial fix' through the production of new forms of uneven geographical development, with processes such as gentrification, and the class-race polarization of the urban space being functional in relation to crisis driven stratagems of accumulation. In tandem with this, embedding specific values onto a fragmented urban space narrows the alternatives for poor segregated groups to involve themselves in public, political and social life, thereby also constraining their range of alternatives in terms of labour.

The notion of 'occupational ghetto' was coined by Feuchtwang (1982) with reference to types of employment that are insecure, monotonous, often dangerous, dirty, and mostly poorly paid. They are traps in the labour market from which transition to other, more attractive, more varied, and better-paid forms of employment is extremely difficult; traps in which disproportionately many ethno-racial minority groups are held captive, contingent on racial stigma. Employers routinely take advantage of the racial minorities' personal network for their recruitment purposes; networks going through family, neighbours and friends who are already employees of the occupational ghetto but excluded from social networks, which could provide access to upward social mobility across more attractive segments of the labour market.

Hence, we contend in extension of Feuchtwang's (1982) argument that occupational ghettos serve as containers for a latent, racially segregated, *reserve army of labour* (cf. Molina, 1997). The logic is that cyclically occurring

crisis for the valorisation of capital generates a lay-off of regularly employed labour to be absorbed by (an ever *latent*) reserve army of labour consisting of a *surplus population* of unemployed and of workers locked up in precarious jobs. A reserve army of surplus workers is, however, all but 'superfluous' to accumulation. Surplus populations work, as phrased by Rajaram (2018: 628), "the dark underbelly of capitalism; its backstage operations where cheap and irregular labour is used up in the search for hyper profit".³ The surplus population is consequently also functional, in being instrumentalised for putting pressure on the (relatively privileged) employed in the regular army of labour.⁴ These may thereby be forced to increase the intensity of their work or their working hours, expanding through this the rate of surplus value appropriated by capital. The looming consequence is the fragmentation of working-class solidarity, fuelled by racism and nationalist populism: like in the paradigmatic case of the Irish working class in England, and reiterated in variable shapes across history, like in the current Swedish crisis driven obsession with the threat to the nation by the 'culturally deviant', 'non-integrated' Other. It is a narrative circulated by mainstream and social media that sanctions the function of the 'disposable', or the 'excluded' across an increasingly swollen precarious 'underbelly' of Swedish capitalism. Thus, the concept of 'surplus' or 'disposable' is relational (Rajaram, 2018: 630); with capitalism, in Sweden and across a crisis ridden imperial west, currently becoming ever more dependent on racialised hyper-precarious labour.

The precarious reserve army of a transformed Swedish 'regulatory state' is held in a floating condition of insecurity through austere welfare and labour market politics. with discriminated racial subalterns as the most vulnerable (Schierup & Scarpa, 2017: 55ff), yet also by manipulation and super-exploitation of an always at hand *transnational reserve army* of labour (cf. Duggan, 2013). A floating transnational reserve army of circulant migrant labour, including refugees exposed to a commodified asylum process, is produced, and reproduced by sustained coloniality, imperial extractivism and wars, in tandem with environmental degradation. It is periodically mobilized as a hyper-precarious labour force; in contemporary Sweden and Europe, subjected to a dispossessive temporality of migration, asylum, and citizenship regimes, barring their access to the right to have rights (cf. Philipson Isaac, 2024).⁵

3 Evoking images of Fraser's (2022) 'expropriated' labour and Marini's (2022 [1973]) notion of 'super-exploitation'.

4 Akin to Fraser's idea of 'exploited' labour.

5 For a complex analysis of migration and the idea of citizenship as a regulatory tool of exclusionary inclusion see also, e.g., Bauder (2006).

One indicative example of the institution of 'occupational ghettos and the functionality of a reserve army of hyper-precarious surplus populations is that of the Swedish *construction sector*.⁶

Construction used to be an advanced showpiece of the Swedish Model of regulated employment, decommodification of labour, and of a continuous upgrading of technology, wages, and labour qualifications, resting on centralized negotiations and agreements between a powerful union of construction workers and the national employers' organization. It benefitted, until neoliberal reforms of the mid 1990s, from state support and unstinting public subsidies in the service of building affordable housing for working class families (see further Molina in this volume). The union of building workers (*Byggnads*) was during the heyday of the Swedish welfare state characterized by a certain craft guild ideology, and it for long successfully defended wages among the highest for Swedish blue-collar workers. It was a privileged domain for 'white' labour, with few women and immigrants, or workers of migrant background, employed (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2023, and the chapter by Neergaard in this volume).

In the 2000's, confronted with EU directives, the power of the builders' union to sanction labour market regulation has faded, and the basic premises of the compact between labour and capital refracted, with the result that a majority of enterprises in construction now stands outside the system of collective agreement, and a third of all building workers are no longer union members (Ågren, 2014). In tandem with this the organization of labour has changed dramatically through the extension of new employment strategies. This pertains, among other, argues Slavnic (2010), to the informalisation of labour relations under conditions of changing state/corporate business power relations, with opaque chains of subcontracting bypassing existing laws and regulations in a country where the informal economy used to be of marginal importance. Through stratagems of sub-contracting hyper-profits are expropriated by large corporations in construction and by financial capital. The actual labour process may take place in small enterprises in the informal economy way down the chain of subcontracting, engaging migrant labour for subminimal wages, doing unauthorized working hours under abhorrent conditions, without concern for occupational safety and health, and with scant opportunities for holding the corporations on the top of the value chain answerable.

In this transmuted industry the typical worker is no longer the privileged white blue-collar union member, but racially stigmatized residents of

6 Also discussed in Irena Molina's contribution to this volume.

vulnerable communities like Husby, working under precarious circumstances, with part-time or per hour jobs, under opaque circumstances in informal chains of sub-contracting, with no or insecure contracts, and often without union membership or support. Or it may be migrant workers, or asylum applicants under hyper-precarious conditions. And they are the very same building workers who are engaged in expropriative renovation projects in disadvantaged urban areas, thereby minimizing the labour costs for real estate managers, and raising the profits of the financial corporations on top of the value chain.

Construction offers only one among numerous examples of occupational ghettos in Sweden. Others are, for instance, located in cleaning, home assistance, public transport, taxi driving, jobs as assistant nurse, and in online warehouse retailing (SCB, 2023; Rydström *et al.*, 2023).

An illuminating example is *home care*, a niche in the Swedish urban labour market, which in the 2000s has experienced a deep-seated organizational change (Buller, 2023). This is related to extensive processes of commodification through outsourcing of welfare services to private entrepreneurs. It is a transmuted regime extracting hyper profits through the expropriation of poorly monitored public funding, combined with a harsh labour-saving strategy. This is instrumented through a predatory intensification of the labour process, exposing care workers to exorbitant stress and early burn out. Every single work task has become calibrated and monitored according to a stringent time measurement regime, implemented through disciplinary surveillance by a constantly wired, digitalized management. It even affects work processes within sectors still under direct public management, which are now subject to profitability demands due to competition with private entrepreneurs. As a result, the precariousness of labour effectively removes the emotional and caregiving aspects of work – qualities that are typically seen as inherently linked to certain occupations and tasks (Farris, 2017). Buller (2023) argues that these strategies of precarity are realized through constant pressure from employers in the trade, who extract new sources of precarious labour from a national reserve army, with racial minorities being the most vulnerable and accessible. Additionally, employers exploit the boundless resource of a transnational labour reserve, where workers are engaged under unstable, temporary conditions. It is an institutional remaking followed by ‘white flight’ (Bråmås, 2006) from what is becoming an increasingly locked up occupational ghetto. This is paired with mounting pressure on remaining regularly employed care workers; mostly citizens with a migrant background or with longitudinal migrant status, and exposed to racial discrimination, barring them from access to alternative jobs.

4 Place Struggles

Extended conditions of precarity and racialized expropriation have been confronted by contestative countermovements of the subaltern, carrying emancipatory imaginaries of realizable utopias. New political solidarities and visions of transformative practice have emerged globally and locally. They have experienced pressure under the weight of asymmetrical structures of power and politics, directed at co-optation and depoliticization of ‘civil society’, enticingly branded as ‘business-civil society-public partnerships’; a grounding constituent of neoliberal hegemony making (Schierup, Ålund & Kellecioglu, 2021). Yet, movements have also demonstrated capacities for sustainable contestation beyond temporary activist campaigns. This has taken different modalities across the world. It implicates that activist visions and practices need to be scrutinized in a perspective of discursive and institutional path dependency.

In Sweden a new transethnic, antiracist and translocal justice movement of the subaltern resounded across marginalized urban spaces following the 2008 financial crisis (Sernhede, León Rosales & Söderman, 2019). By re-inscribing their communities into the city and the wider space of the Swedish state and society, they produced a ‘differential space’ (Lefebvre, 1991), or what among Swedish suburban activists came to be referred to as *place struggles* (León Rosales and Ålund, 2017), alluding to past working-class struggles, but reading predicaments of the political on spatialized terms. The Megaphone (*Megafonen*), an activist group founded in Husby, was to become a vigorous mouthpiece of the new movement. It involved sustained activism against exclusory city planning, against sham ‘renoviction’, and the privatization and financialization of public housing. It stood out as an articulated ‘voice’, bringing out the deep structural-institutional causes for the ‘noise’⁷ of a violent riot, triggered by illicit police action, and raging across Stockholm communities for five days in May 2013 (Schierup, Ålund & Kings, 2014). It became an alternative forum for articulating “the language of the unheard” (King, 1968) through critical investigations on racism, discrimination and rights, engaged in the development of counter-epistemic knowledge and anti-racist awareness training. It was influenced by US black struggles and movements in the global South, such as Brazil and South Africa (e.g., Al-Khamisi, 2017). It supported alternative art and poetry. Through these pursuits, racially branding notions like ‘integration’ or ‘Swedish values’ were confronted by counterepistemic notions like ‘social justice’, ‘organizing’, ‘place-struggle’ and ‘popular awareness raising’.

7 Alluding to notions by Dikeç (2007).

Stigmatizing epistemes like ‘outsidership’, ‘foreigners’ or ‘cultural deviancy’ were confronted by a critical language of ‘stigmatization’, ‘discrimination’, ‘renoviction’, ‘race profiling’, ‘securitization’, and ‘militarization’.

The Megaphone built its impact on self-directed politics of solidarity traversing ethno-cultural and confessional divides and on dialogue and collaboration with critical circles in established CSOs. It managed to keep a balance between what Miraftab (2004) – in her research on Cape Town – with reference to Antonio Gramsci’s understanding of ‘civil society’, discusses in terms of the critical ‘invented spaces’ of contentious movements versus an often-depoliticizing absorption into ‘invited spaces’ so-called ‘participatory governance’. They, thereby, succeeded in developing counterhegemonic practices in order to “expose and upset the normalized relations of dominance” (Miraftab, 2004: 1). The Megaphone has left a legacy behind it in a local anti-racist common, the community centre of *Folkets Husby* (‘The People’s Husby’), founded in 2016. It implies the ‘reinvention’ of an urban common with roots in the Swedish labour movement of the late 19th century; the institution of The People’s House (*Folkets Hus*), which became a rebranded meme for a targeted founding of several community centres in marginalized urban communities (Léon Rosales, 2019), loaded with good intentions for empowering the subaltern to speak.

Oases of Organization, a visionary publication by Al-Khamisi and Rezai (2023 [2019]), anticipates the impact of this rebranded People’s House, through anti-racist media production, popular education and research, and citizens’ influence on education, labour and urban development. It would boost collective power, by uniting people in demonstrations, manifestations, and protests, contending welfare cuts, the selling out of public housing to venture capital, and the discriminatory closure of public institutions; and it would challenge stigmatizing media discourse. Yet, beyond visions, and alongside the reality of a rich anti-racist activity, a heavy dependence on financing from the city government and established NGOs for its many activities, confronts *Folkets Husby* with a sustained challenge; in line with Antonio Gramsci’s (1971) original idea of a constrained civil society fighting a constant ‘war of position’ across the institutions of the state, which it is incorporated into and ultimately subordinated to.

However, reliance on public funding in terms of ‘partnerships’, as well as the degree and type of conditions they entail, vary from activity to activity (Schierup, Ålund & Kellecioglu, 2021). In the following we discuss more closely two ongoing projects, run by two organizations based in *Folkets Husby*. They are both relatively independent from public and NGO funding, and they relate to the cases of expropriation that we have discussed in the preceding

section of the chapter: the organization *Ort till Ort* (literally 'Place to Place' or *Neighborhood to Neighborhood*) contesting the financialization of housing, and *Husby Arbetarcentrum* (*Husby Workers Center*), *HAC*, concerned with precarious labour. Like The Megaphone before, these organizations develop transversal dialogue, network building, and alliances with other CSOs.

4.1 *Ort till Ort: Combatting the Financialization of Housing*

Ort till Ort is a local activist organization for the right to the city. It is member of a European coalition of housing activists (European Action Coalition for the Right to Housing and the City). The organization supports households exposed to evictions and dispossession rent increases, not least related to fake renovations. It links activists around housing issues in national and international solidarity. It has been active in organizing rallies against market-driven rent setting in the housing sector. A notable achievement was its part in the mobilization of a national movement against a pending political bill on market-driven rent setting in 2021. In collaboration with the Tenants' Association, the Civic Council of Northern Järva (*Norra Järva Stadsdelsråd*), and the Welfare Alliance, Ort till Ort arranged a start-up meeting for residents in Stockholm, in Folkets Husby, in February 2020. The mobilization against 'market rents' continued with demonstrations, which took place on 18 April 2021 in 155 locations around Sweden. The demonstrations brought together more than seventy organizations, networks, and local associations; a popular mobilization crossing generations and bringing together a variety of local communities, civil rights organizations, established civil society organizations and trade unions. A similar movement inaugurating meeting was held on 27 October 2023, in preparation of a national rally of a coalition for the protection of tenants' rights and livelihoods, facing a historically unprecedented rise of rents, announced by municipal and private landlords, at a time when an increasing number of families experienced grave difficulties in making ends meet.

This sustained popular mobilization reflects the potential of what Castells (1996: 498) has called a 'counterforce of places' – a critical response to the dismantling of the welfare state and the polarization of the city in terms of class, race, and place. When such mobilization includes a diversity of participants moving in the same direction, we can speak of an emergence of a counter-hegemonic 'network of equivalence' (Purcell, 2009), which realizes ideas of transversal solidarity beyond that of the local community.

4.2 *Husby Arbetarcentrum (HAC): a Budding Community Unionism*

For a start the unorthodox syndicalist trade union, The Central Organization of Swedish Workers (*Sveriges Arbetares Centralorganisation/SAC*), took charge of local matters relating to labour, doing counselling based in *Folkets Husby*. It

offered support on issues of employment and work conditions. SAC has, contrary to mainstream unions, been heavily involved in voluntary counselling aiding undocumented workers in their struggle for the right to have rights.

From 2019 these activities were taken over by the Husby Workers' Centre (*Husby Arbetarcentrum/HAC*), associated with SAC. However, unlike SAC's workplace orientation, HAC is a profoundly *localized* trade union organization, based in Husby with operations in the Järva area. Its transversal coalition building with other locally based organizations and networking nationally and transnationally to evoke ideas of a 'community unionism' (cf. Munck, 2019), bringing the idea of direct grassroots action to a head. HAC's political position, focusing on the local urban community, and a holistic perspective on the protection of livelihoods of the subaltern, relates both to the Swedish labour movement and to the work of *Ort till Ort*, and the Swedish Tenants Association.

Concurrent with this, HAC describes itself as a historical innovator of the Swedish labour movement with a focus on the radically changed conditions of the 21st century labour market; changes which affect the subaltern Other. That is, "workers who lack many of the elementary [...] union rights that the labour movement has fought for more than 100 years" (HAC, 2024a. Our translation). Its mission is based in and evolves from the local community. But rather than seeing the focus on the local community as a limitation, this constitutes a strength according to its founders, Shamal Ali och Jonis Farah (GigWatch-Podden, 2022). In today's fragmented labour market, they argue, there are no longer the occupation-based worker collectives that previously formed the basis for union mobilization and collective action. This applies not least to those parts of the labour market that are marked by fragmented and precarious working conditions, super-exploitation, precarious and temporary employment, without union protection, and to which residents of poor and stigmatized urban areas are disproportionally relegated. Thus, other trade union strategies are required where organization, solidarity mobilization, and mutual support based on the local community, are fundamental. This relates also to the intersection of class, race, and gender; and on the background of the vulnerability of women, not least those employed in the care sector,⁸ HAC has established a dedicated women's section to address the specific needs and concerns of women within the organization, providing a platform for support, advocacy, and empowerment.

HAC is consequently an activist organization working outside the framework of traditional unions. It is envisaged as a meeting place for education and socialization for people who may feel isolated, as residents as well as relating

⁸ Driving a successful campaign, for example, relating to an unlawful termination of a local women, employed by a firm in the care sector (HAC 2024b).

to their situation at work. Within the framework of HAC, and Husby of the People, residents of the area can meet, learn about their rights, exchange experiences, and collaborate with others in a similar situation. This extends beyond abuse and controversies pertaining to work and the labour market, but relating to housing, education, and the local population's entire life situation, including, for example, popular mobilization confronting abuse in a dilapidated, spatially fractured, and racially tinged health system, in confrontation with politics and institutions of urban governance (e.g. HAC, 2024c).

Members of HAC can participate in information and educational activities and acquire legal help relating to disputes with employers, not least regarding unpaid wages, bogus employment conditions and other work-related problems. These are often problems that, in mainstream trade unions, vanish in the 'bureaucratic apparatus', comments *Shamal Ali* (GigWatch-Podden, 2022). He refers furthermore to the range of problems that the unions are not able, allowed, or willing to get involved in. This applies not least to the situation of those without contracts, gig workers or undocumented migrants. Meetings and exchange of experience can push individuals to feel active and involved and motivate them to take part in collective actions, like blockades, directed against hyper-exploitation and injustice in a fragmented labour market. Like Ort till Ort, HAC has been involved translocally, for example in the nationwide mobilization of a protest movement against deteriorations in the Employment Security Act of 2020.

5 Reflections on a Wagering State of Exception

We have discussed how politics of expropriation relating to housing and labour has forged precarious livelihoods and contingent employment without security, protection, and predictability. It captures, as voiced by Melgaço and Xavier (2022), the role of race in the urban process, the formation of value and of places and on how the triad – colonial, racial, and capital – is deeply implicated in contemporary power modalities.

We have related these contemporary processes to the idea of 'primitive accumulation' as elaborated by South African Marxists, inspiring Cedric Robinson, to the theory of accumulation by Luxemburg (2003 [1913]), and as picked up and developed by, among others, Fraser (2022). Yet, it is cardinal to emphasize, as articulated in critique of South African Marxists (by e.g., Posel, 1983) – among others the legendary Harold Wolpe (e.g., 1972) – that positing an upfront relation between politics of apartheid and class driven requirements of capital accumulation bears a problematical undertone of 'functionalism'.

No class or class faction can establish a stable regime based on the exercise of force alone but is bound to base its power on a consensual hegemony, amalgamating a plurality of positional interests and of class trajectories. Thus, Pillay (2017) contends, the problem for the South African National Party, the prime architect of apartheid, was that it was never capable of forging a dependable political hegemony but had to take recourse to continuous violent action in upholding a volatile racist regime, which was not unambiguously functional in terms of shifting configurations of capital accumulation and interests connected with this.

Similarly, the hegemony of what we have designated as the Swedish 'extreme centre' is bound to rest on feet of clay. Like the South African apartheid regime, it is an unstable formation amalgamating differential positions. It is veiling a shared incapacity for tackling the legitimacy crisis spawned by erosion of the welfare state under the cover of a floating blame the victim discourse, centred on 'immigration' and the 'parallel society' of the unruly subaltern 'suburb'. At the same time, it rests on a financialised political economy that accumulates, *inter alia*, by expropriating the livelihoods of the same subaltern 'outsiders'. This rocky neo-apartheid appears, like the South African apartheid regime before, driven to take recourse to discriminatory legislation and naked force through criminalization, securitization, and militarization.

The precarious urban spaces, of which the community of Husby is a case, could from this perspective be seen as the battlefield of what Agamben (2005) calls a 'state of exception'. It is defined as the extension of state power through which rights of citizenship can be reduced, surpassed, or denied by governments, and in the process of which boundaries between the citizen and the noncitizen become increasingly blurred. These ongoing 'irregularising' policies and practices of citizenship that currently affect all of us, also recall the salient distinction between, what Nyers (2006) calls, the 'essential citizen' as opposed to the (suspect) 'accidental citizen' thrown on to asymmetric and debilitating surveillance and securitization. This brings attention to the particularly vulnerable condition of, not only undocumented labour migrants and refouled asylum seekers, but to that of inhabitants of migrant background and their offspring across generations, endowed with all formal rights of citizenship, but deprived of substantial opportunities to exercise the same.

We have illustrated this with examples from Husby. Husby belongs to those parts of urban Sweden where 'accumulation by dispossession' (Harvey, 2004) related to municipal housing and a precarious labour market, are particularly intense. This exposes the expression of a racial capitalism in which modes of dispossession or 'expropriation' (Fraser, 2022), are matched by a regime of systemic division, securitization, and violent repression, mounting to what we

have referred to as a state of 'neo-apartheid'. In their daily reality these communities are confronting a militarization of police action mounting to the call, resounding across the extreme centre, for intervention by the nation's armed forces. This is evidently meant to settle with proliferating criminal organizations, but apt to lead to new and aggravated cycles of 'the war against the suburb', as enlightened welfare politics are substituted by mass-incarceration of criminalized teenagers in an emerging 'lockdown Sweden'.⁹ As Soar Ali expresses it in the Husby Podcast (Folkets Husby, 2023), referred to earlier, this war-like pose does "not blame political or structural problems, but the victims of them. There is no more democracy, equality, or freedom of expression. We have no right to express ourselves. This collision between political rhetoric and reality leads to political contempt."

Soar's emphatic statement bears similarity with what Martin Luther King (Autodidact, 2024), towards the end of his life, downheartedly expressed with reference to the Black condition in US cities: "until the underclass is given justice and opportunity, we will continue to perpetuate the anger and violence that tears the soul of this nation ... there is no value in being integrated in a burning Society". This reminds us of Luxemburg's (2003 [1913]) argument that capital must destruct to accumulate. Thus, expropriation through the financialization of housing and the super-exploitation of precarious labour leads inexorably to the destruction of the vulnerable communities on the backs of which capital profits. It feeds the dystopia of criminalization and the proliferation of deadly Mafia-like organizations as an eerie reflection of the dominant 'values', bottom up, of a democracy rotting from the head; and it spawns new cycles of apartheidising securitization.

Yet, in that same conjuncture movements from below, rooted in the most disadvantaged parts of the metropolitan cityscape, continue to insist on bringing forward needs for recognition of the subaltern as a political voice against the erosion of democratic frameworks of rights, livelihoods, labour, and community.

The Stockholm community of Husby has for decades been a centre for the emplacement of urban justice movements with a counter-hegemonic character, by mobilizing transversal resistance and indicating alternatives to the very apartheidising divisions forged by a fragmentating Swedish racial capitalism. Thus, the community-based cso, Ort till Ort, which we have discussed above, challenges expropriation of tenants' meagre income by transnational financial corporations that have appropriate privatized housing markets.

9 Alluding to *Lockdown America* by Michael Parenti (2000).

The other organization discussed, *The Husby Workers Center* (HAC), challenges the super-exploitation of the city's most disadvantaged through the emplacement of an innovative 'community unionism'. It is radically deviant from the contemporary mainstream Swedish trade union model, but reminiscent, in microcosmos, of the (today faltered) unionism that once challenged apartheid in South Africa (Munakamwe, 2022). Both organizations or movements share ambitions for developing alliances and contestative practices transversing scales: the local, the translocal, the national and the transnational.

These contending voices and actions may from the perspective of more privileged places of metropolitan Stockholm, Sweden or Europe appear off-centre; of concern only to a minority of marginalized subalterns in socially and culturally distant, suburban 'homelands'. Yet, their voice of contestation concerns all who care for a genuine democracy, freedom of expression, and social justice. The struggles that take off from such allegedly 'marginal' spaces carry forward alternative knowledge and epistemics. They bear a potential impact central for the future of all of us, subjected to a political regime fermenting the very ills that King (1967) once identified as the three deep-seated and intertwined predicaments of the United States: racism, exploitation and a militarism, with police violence on the inside intertwined with colonial warfare on the outside. The values of society need to be restructured, he argued. Seen from this perspective, the subaltern struggles across Sweden's stigmatised urban communities are, together with a multitude of related struggles and counter-epistemologies of the 'South', in the geographical north as well as the geographical south, of intrinsic global import.

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Index

- Algorithm 173–175, 180–182, 193–196
- Amin, S. 14, 92, 146
- Anticolonial theory 18–20, 24–26
- Anti-racism 111, 145–147, 290–292, 319–321
- Apartheid 1, 22, 53, 71, 112, 143, 154, 281, 299, 321–323, 335–337, 347, 350–352
- Areas of Exteriority 263, 268, 270, 277, 283
- Attitudes towards immigration 38, 42–44
- Australia 55, 78, 183, 224–226, 238–240, 254–256, 257
- Automation 173–175, 180–182, 193–196
- Balibar, É. 12, 192
- Behrouz Boochani 229, 254–256
- Bhambra, G. 15–16, 89, 146
- Bhattacharyya, G. 34, 49, 53–54, 66, 68, 84, 87, 178, 198, 200, 206, 237, 239, 283, 294
- Bhattacharyya, T. 16, 138–140
- Black Marxism. *See* Robinson, C
- Black radical tradition 2, 17, 57, 121, 147, 239, 293
- Bonilla Silva, E. 15, 32–34, 56, 89
- Borders 9–10, 92–96, 104–105, 142, 167–169, 173–175, 181–183, 202, 224–226, 233–236, 244, 296, 307, 349
- Cabral, A. 19, 121, 146
- Capitalism. *See also* welfare capitalism 1–3, 10–12, 22–24, 32, 116, 122
- Capitalist racism 114–115
- Carceral archipelago 224–225, 244–246
- Care 6–7, 16, 154–156
- Caring racism 156, 162
- Civil society 4, 18–20, 176, 183, 257–259, 277, 339
- Class 1–4, 12–14, 31–33, 41–43, 53–62, 88–89, 129, 147, 249, 264, 290–292, 302, 322, 336
- Colonialism. *See also* internal colonialism, settler colonialism 2, 4, 8, 10–12, 15–16, 18, 33, 35, 46, 55, 86, 156, 224, 327
- Colour line 86–95
- Community unionism 341, 345
- Complicity 5
- Counterhegemonic forms of knowledges 2
- Crimmigration 10, 17, 18, 27, 62–63, 72–73, 81, 173–175, 207, 220–222
- Deaths/ at the border 18, 59, 138, 232–235
- Demography/demographic 4–5, 15, 43, 44, 123, 178, 188, 201, 282
- Destitution 61–63, 64–66, 185, 193, 224–226
- Dispossession. *See also* Spatial dispossession 11, 16, 33, 35, 67, 86, 153, 178–179, 182, 185, 192, 206, 226, 238, 262, 328, 331, 334, 343
- Du Bois, W.E.B. 8, 12, 15, 86–88, 93, 121, 258, 323, 328
- Easter Riots 257–259, 275–277, 288–290
- Education 7, 27, 36–38, 49–51, 91–93, 102–103, 125–130, 189–190, 202–203, 230, 260–262, 271–273, 279, 301, 341
- Employers 7, 17, 35, 41–43, 52, 60–64, 90–91, 97–99, 105–106, 124–126, 127, 161, 195–196, 218, 273, 290–292, 308–335
- Entrepreneurial self 114
- Entrepreneurship. *See also* Immigrant entrepreneurship 69–70, 81–83, 114–116, 138–140
- Ethnoracism 22, 90, 163, 290–292
- Eurocentric narratives 2–5, 12–14
- Exclusionary racism 2–4, 20–22, 31–33, 55–57, 58, 95–97, 156
- Exploitation. *See also* super-exploitation 2–7, 31–33–47, 49–50, 55–57, 64, 85–86, 100–102, 127–129, 155, 199, 202, 258, 293, 344
- Exploitative racism 2–4, 21, 31–33, 55–57, 157
- Expropriation 8, 16, 34–36, 47, 147, 178, 213, 224, 321–332, 338, 342
- Federici, S. 17, 52, 147
- Finland 20, 49–51, 61–63, 114–116, 125, 138–140
- Flexible accumulation 115
- Folkhem [people's home] 258, 262–265, 270, 283, 313
- Food system 49–51, 52–54, 61–63

- Fraser, N. 33, 34, 36, 149, 202, 213–215, 217, 327–329, 330–332, 335, 342–343
- Gender 10–12, 85–86, 93–94, 127, 147–149, 154–156, 225, 296–298, 342
- Gilmore, R. W. 54, 70, 84, 179, 244
- Goldberg, D. T. 15, 62, 154, 199–200
- Great Replacement 259, 288–290
- Hall, S. 2, 8, 14, 38, 90, 148, 150, 154, 294, 322, 329
- Haunting 224–226, 243–244, 254–256
- Herrenvolk democracy 258–260, 284–289
- Housing inequality 196–198, 321–323, 343–345
- Housing policies 205–207, 321–323
- Housing provision 196–198, 343–345
- Immigrant entrepreneurship 114–116, 138–140
- Imperialism. *See also* racial imperialism 4, 10–12, 20–22, 25, 33, 62, 77, 84–85, 107, 146, 178, 247, 266, 317, 328
- Indigenous people 11–12, 20–22, 35, 57, 67, 149, 159, 228, 238–239, 263
- Industrial relations 89–90, 290–292
- Inequality 4–7, 12–14, 33–34, 39, 45–46, 88–89, 116–127, 189, 202–204, 240, 245, 258, 273, 321–323
- Innocence 4–5, 49–51
- Integration 5–9, 63–66, 69–70, 92, 115, 124–125, 159, 176–177, 181–182, 190–191, 196–198, 209–210, 247, 273, 290–292, 306, 326–338
- Internal colonialism 10–12, 20–22
- Internal devaluation 118
- Intersectionality 19, 34, 138–140, 150
- Invented and invited spaces 339
- Labour market 16–18, 36–38, 84–86, 98–99, 115, 124–127, 160, 185, 291, 343
- Lauesen, T. 7, 12–14, 85, 107
- Levenson, Z. and Paret, M. 1–2, 53, 121, 146
- Light entrepreneurship 126–127, 136–137
- Logisticality 180
- Logistification 173, 175, 177, 180–182
- Luxemburg, R. 14, 327–328, 342, 344
- Manus Island 230–23, 242–243
- Marini, R. M. 25, 54, 328
- Marxism 12–15, 19, 23–25, 121, 150
- Mbembe, A. 57, 70, 233, 237, 240–241, 246
- Melamed, J. 16, 45, 53–54, 122, 148–149, 179, 192, 294
- Methodological nationalism 6, 13–15, 19–20, 86
- Migrant women 114–116, 154–156
- Migrants 5–7, 41–43, 54–55, 90–91, 123, 138, 154, 176–178, 196–198, 201–203, 223, 271, 291, 343, 351
- Migration 5–7, 38, 41–42, 50–52, 62–63, 85, 91–92, 122–125, 149–150, 156, 173–175, 196–198, 229–231, 261, 271, 283–285, 343
- Migration control 63, 98, 173–175, 224–226
- Militant epistemologies 18–20
- Mills, C. W. 50–51, 53–55, 58–59, 67–68
- Morality 58, 66–69, 75
- More-than-human 231, 239–240, 247
- Municipality 162–163, 176, 181–183, 196–198, 208–217
- MV Tampa 231–232
- Necropolitics 69–70, 149–237, 224–226, 242, 254–256
- Neo-apartheid 321–323, 335–337, 350–352, 353
- Neoliberalism 8–12, 37, 45–46, 88–92, 115, 257–259, 271–272, 290–292, 319–326
- Non-standard employment 119, 125
- “Nordic exceptionalism” 2–5, 12–14
- “Nordic model” 5–7, 12–14, 59, 118
- Nordic Research Collective for Critical Racism Studies 1–3
- Omi, M. and Winant, H. 15, 148
- Palestine 13–15, 18–20
- Paludan 257–259, 288–290
- People’s house 339
- Platform industry 50, 61, 63, 67, 68, 125, 177, 192
- Politics of Autocratization 257–259, 288–290, 290–292
- Post-migrants 329
- Precarity 16–18, 41–43, 61–70, 121–123, 329–337

- Prediction 41, 173–175, 181, 190–192
 Primitive accumulation 327–328
 Quran burnings 257–259, 288–290
 Race/religion 257–259, 288–290
 Racial capitalism. *See also* reproductive racial capitalism 1–3, 10–12, 22–24, 31–33, 46–47, 50–51, 68–69, 84–85, 101–103, 147–148, 177–178, 198–200, 225–226, 258–259, 292–293, 323–327
 Racial capitalism 46, 51, 69, 85, 102, 146, 177, 181, 199, 215, 225, 258, 292, 324
 Racial Contract 49–51, 63–66
 Racial division of labour 41–43, 52–54, 140, 151
 Racial hierarchy 12–14, 31–33
 Racial ideologies 31–33, 55–57, 258–260
 Racial imperialism 8, 13, 20–22, 86, 105–107
 Racialised workers 41–43, 91–95, 148, 114–116, 154–156, 292, 298
 Racialization 12–14, 31–33, 54, 114–116, 178, 196–198, 200–202, 224, 236–237, 261–262, 318
 Racialized social systems 31–33, 42–44
 Racism. *See also* caring racism, exclusionary racism, exploitative racism 1–3, 31–33, 41, 43, 52–56, 84–86, 104, 119, 156, 193, 202–203, 258–259, 291, 305, 322–335
 Reconquista 265–266, 268, 284
 Refugee detention 224–226, 254–256
 Refugee dispersal 173–175, 180–182
 Refugee integration 196–198, 290–292
 Refugee migration 173–175, 196–198
 Refugee reception 196–198, 220–222
 Refugee resettlement 173–175, 196–198
 Refugeeization of workforce 67
 Refugees 67–68, 125, 152, 179–180, 185–187, 196–198, 220–222, 224–226, 275, 335
 Relationality 173–175, 180–182
 Reproductive justice 138–140, 172–174
 Reproductive racial capitalism 1–4, 11, 15, 145–146
 Reserve army of labour 16–18, 41–43, 335
 Rights 34–35, 41–46, 63–66, 99–104, 163, 177–179, 181, 187, 203–204, 224–226, 260, 270, 277, 299
 Robinson, C. J. 1–2, 14–16, 31–34, 45, 51–54, 86–87, 107, 121–122, 145–148, 153, 164, 178, 180, 183, 200, 237–239, 246, 258, 294, 321, 326, 329, 342
 Rodney, W. 14, 54
 Roediger, D. R. 38–40, 48–50
 Rural 53, 153, 178, 185–188
 Said, E. 18, 146–147
 Scavenger methodology 56
 Settlement act 175–176, 197, 202–205
 Settler colonialism 16, 18, 35, 156, 159–160, 225, 227–228
 “Shitty work” 49, 52–53, 57, 60–61, 63–65, 67
 Shock 50–51, 57, 59–60, 118
 Social Democracy 5–7, 12–14, 262, 310
 Social movements 13–21, 46, 166, 257–259, 321–323
 Social reproduction 13–15, 54, 150–151, 240
 South Africa 12–14, 23–25, 152, 338, 345
 Spatial dispossession 179
 Stockholm 185, 276–277, 322, 323, 332, 338, 340, 344–345
 Stumpf, J. 9, 62
 Super-exploitation 7, 12, 33, 85, 88, 92, 104, 200, 295–296, 328–330, 335, 345
 Sweden Democrats 5, 9, 37, 95–96, 98, 163, 226, 257–258, 264, 26–271, 274, 278, 290, 303, 314, 323, 325
 “Swedish exceptionalism” 9, 85, 106, 225, 321
 Swedish foundational values 257–259, 288–290
 “Swedish Model” 1, 8–9, 84–85, 89–90, 92–94, 99–101, 104–106, 196, 262, 277, 295, 304, 306, 316, 336
 Swedish racial regime 5, 10, 32, 40, 156
 “Swedishness” 11, 106, 152, 272
 Tidö agreement 5–9, 97–98, 108, 226, 257–259, 269–270, 274, 290–292, 295, 326
 Trade unions 6, 93–96, 117–120, 290–292, 319–321, 345
 Transnational corporations 10–12, 60, 120, 152, 252, 319, 331, 345
 Tsing, A. 12, 14, 52, 85, 88, 295

- Unfree labour 49–53, 61–67, 91, 103, 111, 142, 296
- Urban 7, 153, 174, 177, 187–188, 197, 199, 206, 215, 217, 272, 277, 321, 325–327, 334, 337–339, 342–343, 345
- Virdee, Satnam 15–16, 54, 89, 93, 99, 294
- Wage suppression 119–124
- Wages of whiteness 85–86, 101, 111, 293, 314
- Wekker, Gloria 1, 55–57
- welfare capitalism 1–2, 5–7, 10
- Welfare state 5–7, 13, 68, 91, 116–117, 154, 174, 196–198, 218, 257–259, 272, 277, 289, 322, 336, 340
- White Australia Policy 224–226, 272
- White ignorance 2, 8, 49–51, 64–66
- White innocence 49–50
- White radical nationalism 266–67
- Xenophobia/xenophobic 45, 257–259, 292–293, 302–306, 314–316

The anthology brings racial capitalism to bear on the archetype of welfare capitalism – often referred to as the ‘Swedish’ or ‘Nordic model’. This is done with the aim of qualifying and challenging some institutionalised understandings of welfare capitalism represented by Sweden and, to a lesser extent, Finland. Few studies have focused on continental Europe or the Nordic region. In this edited volume, the focus is on theoretically inspired and empirically grounded analyses of Sweden in the Nordic context, exploring the Swedish capitalist welfare model from a perspective that places processes of racialisation and racial regimes at centre stage.

Irene Molina, *Professor in Human Geography at the Institute for Housing and Urban Research, Uppsala University. Her main areas of interest are the dynamics of racialization and urban segregation. Among her publications: “Capturing Displacement” International Journal of Urban and Regional Research 49 (4), 852–875 (co-author, 2025).*

Diana Mulinari, *Professor Emerita of Gender Studies, University of Lund, Sweden. Her work is inspired by anticolonial feminist traditions. A recent publication (co-author) is The impossibility of Social Inclusion: The Ethno-Racist Welfare Discourse in Sweden (Routledge, 2025).*

Anders Neergaard, *Professor at REMESO, The Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society, Linköping University. His research focuses on power, inequality, resistance and social movements. Recent publications are The Power of Silence: Variations in the Reproduction of Racial Capitalism Among White Male-dominated Trade Unions in Sweden (Routledge, 2025).*

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