Muslim immigrant women, navigating the temporal and spatial dimensions of racialization in Norway

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how racialized constructions of time and space shape the lived experiences of Muslim immigrant women in Norway, revealing how welfare institutions reproduce colonial hierarchies through temporal and spatial regulation. Drawing on biographical interviews and decolonial feminist theory, the analysis challenges Nordic exceptionalism and calls for a reimagining of care and relationality. It contributes to decolonial feminist studies of aesthesis by centering relational, embodied knowledge and amplifying the voices and epistemologies of those structurally marginalized within dominant welfare and social imaginaries.

KEY WORDS

RACIALIZATION, MUSLIM IMMIGRANT WOMEN, DECOLONIAL FEMINISM, WELFARE RACISM

INTRODUCTION

Across the Nordic region, welfare institutions are widely seen as symbols of equality and inclusion. However, for many racialized communities, these systems often perpetuate colonial hierarchies through subtle mechanisms of temporal and spatial regulation. This article explores how racialized time and space shape the lived experiences of Muslim immigrant women in Norway, revealing how welfare institutions, despite their universalist claims, sustain exclusionary structures. Rooted in a conceptualization of race as a fluid, relational construct, continuously produced through the spaces individuals navigate and the temporalities they encounter, this analysis examines the following question: *How do temporal and spatial dimensions of racialization shape the lived experiences of Muslim immigrant women in Norway?* The study draws on three biographical interviews conducted between 2022 and 2023 as part of a doctoral thesis.

These theoretical insights are grounded in the everyday realities of Muslim immigrant women, whose narratives reveal that racialization is not abstract but deeply embodied, emotionally charged, and materially experienced. For instance, feminist activist and writer Sumaya Jirde Ali (2018) recounts a distressing episode at a refugee fundraiser, where she was verbally assaulted with remarks such as: "Go home" and "They [the NGOs] help refugees in the Mediterranean. They should rather let them drown" (p. 35). This rhetoric exemplifies what Perocco and Della Francesco (2023) term a "racialized welfare discourse," which dehumanizes immigrants, particularly refugees, by framing them as "threats" to the nation. As Perocco (2022) argues, "together with Islamophobia, welfare racism structures the contemporary nationalisms" (p. 3). This highlights how welfare racism operates not only within welfare institutions but also as part of what Gullestad (2002) refers to as "everyday nationalism" (p. 272), woven into the fabric of everyday interactions, assumptions, and social norms.

This discourse is sustained by a pervasive "suspicion" of welfare abuse (Perocco & Francesco Della, 2023). Suha Alhajeed (2017), a Syrian refugee, describes the emotional toll of being perceived as a "threat," expressing the pain of feeling "unwelcome" and "different" in her account, "Don't Be Afraid of People Like Me." Similarly, Mihriban Mazlum (2016) highlights the burden of negative media portrayals: "I constantly read about how bad we Muslims supposedly are." Zahraa Sahib recounts a racist encounter on public transport, where a man shouted: "Damn Muslims – You don't have anything to do in this country. You are Muslim. We live in the West" (Sandven, 2021). These accounts expose a pattern of exclusion where Muslim identity is framed as incompatible with Western belonging. They show how racialized bodies are denied access to the temporal and spatial norms of inclusion, revealing the perceived impossibility of living in the West while being Muslim.

Such experiences underscore broader systemic issues embedded within a "racialized welfare regime" (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017; Mulinari et al., 2022). Rooted in colonial legacies, this regime is marked by the "resurgence of welfare racism" (Perocco, 2022), which disproportionately affects non-Western and non-White bodies. Within this framework, Muslims appear as "specters of colonialism," figures that haunt the supposedly "post-colonial" and "post-racial" landscape of Europe (Sağır, 2014). As Perocco and Francesco Della (2023) argue, "welfare racism" is a structural phenomenon, deeply embedded in "the colonial and racist foundations of the welfare state." It links historical colonialism to contemporary practices of exclusion, revealing how racism and capitalism shape welfare dynamics through disciplining of racialized bodies.

This dynamic is particularly evident in Norway, where the national image of inclusivity and egalitarianism contrasts sharply with the lived experiences of many racialized individuals (Gullestad, 2002, 2005). For example, Roma and Tater (Romani) communities face ongoing racism and exclusion, rooted in a history of state violence, such as forced sterilizations and child removals (Lauritzen, 2022, 2023). Today, despite dominant narratives of equality, people of Black

African descent face racial profiling, labor market discrimination, and social exclusion (Diallo, 2023). Such contradictions reveal how colonial legacies, including racial biology history, shape Norwegian society (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021; Kyllingstad, 2017; Stærkebye Leirvik et al., 2023).

Dankertsen and Kristiansen (2021) argue that "the interplay of colonization, welfare policies, assimilation policies targeting the Sámi, and racialization created a social hierarchy between those deemed civilized, rational, and self-sufficient and those who are not" (p. 3). The authors emphasize that Norwegianization policies were closely aligned with a flourishing field of Nordic (master) race research, which sought to classify so-called "primitive" peoples, including the Sámi against supposedly "superior" races (p. 3). This racial logic is woven into the fabric of "Norwegian values," positioning "Norwegianness" as "inherently superior" (p. 3).

Such binaries position non-Western individuals as subordinate within the welfare state, manifesting as a perceived "moral superiority of Norwegian culture" and serving as an "implicit expression of the racial hierarchies in Norwegian society" (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021, p. 8). This embedded hierarchy explains the persistence of welfare racism in Norway, traceable to early Norwegianization policies that racialized the Sámi as the "Other."

As Perocco (2022) notes, "welfare racism is as old as the welfare state itself," and "has never faded" (pp. 1-2). In recent years, it has gained "new momentum" through increasingly restrictive migration policies and a growing "war on migrants" (p. 2). This shift, from a war on terror to a war on migrants, reflects a deeper fear of enemy within, echoing "the specters of colonialism" (Sağır, 2014), that have historically shaped Europe (Goldberg, 2006).

This article situates the narratives of Muslim immigrant women within the broader racialized welfare regime, what Mulinari et al. (2022) describe as a system that "emerged from colonialism," and continues to govern racialized populations through the rearticulation of colonial hierarchies. It shows how both historical and ongoing colonial relationships inform contemporary constructions of Western and non-Western subjects. The women's narratives reflect the exclusionary structures, which manifest both in everyday encounters, such as microaggressions, discrimination, and social exclusion, and in more extreme and violent forms.

These structures find their most brutal expression in acts of racialized violence, such as the 22 July 2011 terrorist attacks, the 10 August 2019 mosque shooting, and the murder of Johanne Zhangjia Ihle-Hansen, and most recently, the murder of Tamima Nibras Juhar in August 2025. Bangstad (2014) argues that the 22 July attacks were not the actions of one disturbed mind, but the result of a political climate where racist and Islamophobic discourses have been increasingly normalized. While exceptional, such acts reflect a wider context that allows the marginalization of Muslims and other racialized communities in Norway.

This article contributes to decolonial scholarship by tracing the colonial legacies embedded in Norwegian welfare and migration regimes, while also adopting a research praxis that centers the lived experiences and epistemic contributions of Muslim immigrant women. Their situated knowledges challenge dominant narratives that often cast them as passive recipients of policy or care, instead of foregrounding their analytical insights, affective labor, and strategies of resistance. In doing so, the article disrupts hegemonic frameworks and opens space for alternative ways of knowing, being, and relating within and beyond the welfare state.

WELFARE RACISM AS A MANIFESTATION OF NORDIC COLONIALITY

Recent scholarships have increasingly challenged the idealized image of the Nordic welfare state as universally inclusive. The concept of welfare racism has emerged to describe how welfare institutions, despite

their universalist claims, reproduce racial hierarchies and systemic inequalities (Mulinari, 2025; Perocco, 2022). This includes not only unequal access to resources but also governance through surveillance, exclusion, and conditional inclusion.

Although often celebrated as progressive, Nordic countries remain deeply entangled with colonial histories and structural inequities (Alm et al., 2021; Dankertsen, 2016; Diallo, 2023; Keskinen et al., 2009). Scholars such as Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe (2023), Mulinari et al. (2022), and Padovan-Özdemir and Øland (2022) critique Nordic exceptionalism, revealing how welfare structures operate through "racial capitalism"—a logic of differentiation, assimilation, and exclusion. Padovan-Özdemir and Øland (2022) argue that race is central to the welfare state's institutional logic, particularly in its treatment of non-Western migrants and refugees (p. 3).

Expanding this critique, Mulinari (2025) introduces the concept of "temporal racism," which refers to the governance of racialized populations through prolonged waiting, bureaucratic delays, and the erasure of time. These practices, according to Mulinari, create racialized temporalities where time itself becomes a site of control and exploitation. Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe's (2023) further contend that racism in the Nordic region is embedded in the "racial foundations of capital accumulation." Their analysis indicates that welfare systems perpetuate white supremacy by classifying non-Western migrants, Afro-Nordics, and Indigenous people such as the Sámi and Inuit as "non-belonging, absent, criminal, or barbaric" (p. 1). This categorization sustains exclusionary national imaginaries.

Mulinari et al. (2022) call for deeper analysis of how welfare, race, and capitalism intersect, showing how social policies reproduce inequality by racially categorizing individuals and determining who qualifies as a legitimate right-bearer. This results in forms of "subordinated inclusion" and "precarity" (p. 96), where racialized individuals are included only under conditions of surveillance, control and marginalization.

Gender equality, often seen as a cornerstone of Nordic identity, is implicated in these exclusionary dynamics. Mulinari et al. (2009) argue that gender equality has historically functioned as a "civilizing mission," reinforcing racial hierarchies by contrasting the modern Nordic nation with its racialized "others" (pp. 37–38). Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe (2023) extend this critique by showing that Nordic feminism frequently neglects racial diversity, thereby reinforcing racist and Islamophobic structures. They call for the decolonization of feminism and dismantling of dominant white feminist epistemologies, which continue to function as a "prison" for many non-Western and non-white individuals in Europe (pp. 10–11).

RACIALIZED TIME AND SPACE

Building on critiques of welfare racism and Nordic coloniality, this section conceptualizes racialized time and space as interconnected dimensions of power that structure the lived experiences of racialized bodies. Rather than treating temporality and spatiality as neutral or universal, this framework understands them as historically produced and politically charged, shaped by colonial legacies and contemporary regimes of racial governance.

This article adopts a relational and institutional approach to racialized time, viewing temporality not as a linear or objective, but as socially constructed and politically regulated. Time functions as a mechanism of governance, used to discipline, delay, and differentiate racialized subjects, while space operates as a site of inclusion and exclusion, shaped by moral hierarchies and institutional boundaries.

To develop this framework, I draw on the works of Quijano (2000), Mills (2014), Hanchard (1999), Khosravi (2019), and Mulinari (2025). Quijano's understanding of colonial temporality reveals how modernity positioned Europe as the pinnacle of progress, relegating colonized peoples to subordinate temporal and spatial orders (2000, pp. 541-

542). Mills' notion of "White time" shows that settler colonial states "erase" non-white temporalities, reinforcing whiteness as the norm for full humanity (2014, pp. 30-31). Hanchard`s (1999) concept of "racial time" highlights how access to institutions and opportunities is unevenly distributed along racial lines while Khosravi (2018) argues that immigration regimes keep migrants in bureaucratic limbo, denying them "coevalness"—the recognition of living in the same historical moment. Mulinari (2025) brings these insights into the Nordic context, showing how welfare institutions regulate racialized and gendered bodies through temporal discipline and spatial confinement.

Collectively, these perspectives inform the analytical framework, focusing on how racialized time and space are operationalized through institutional routines, bureaucratic procedures, and moral discourses. This synthesis offers a nuanced analysis of how Nordic welfare institutions regulate time and space for racialized individuals, despite claims of neutrality and universality. Racialized and gendered temporality and spatiality are not abstract concepts, but lived realities that determine access to rights, recognition, and belonging.

METHOD

This study is grounded in the lived experiences of Muslim immigrant women in Norway and shaped by my own positionality as a Muslim immigrant woman and researcher. It recognizes participants as knowledge producers who, through sharing their lived experiences, generate theoretical insights into the structures shaping their lives. This approach resists "epistemic coloniality with its characteristic subject/object division" and embraces a relational methodology that requires articulating "one's active positionality" (Tlostanova, 2023, p. 158).

I position myself as a researcher originating from southern Anatolia, raised in a lower socioeconomic household and shaped by the tensions between state-led Westernization policies and Islamic values within the domestic sphere. This background is not a static backdrop but it has a dynamic influence on my research perspective and methodological choices. My relocation to Norway over a decade ago through family reunification further informs my understanding of the complexities faced by Muslim immigrant women. My investment in this topic is thus deeply shaped by my positionality as a racialized Muslim immigrant woman, which informs both my analytical lens and my relational engagement with participants.

The analysis draws on three interviews selected from a broader set of nine biographical interviews conducted between 2022 and 2023. Participants were recruited through a snowball sampling, with the only inclusion criterion being self-identification as a Muslim woman with an immigrant background. Interviews were conducted both digitally and in-person, in settings chosen by participants, including workplaces and cafés. The three interviews were selected for their depth and relevance to the research question, offering rich narratives on how racialization is experienced across time and space.

Ethical considerations were central to the research process. Verbal and written consent was obtained from all participants, and SIKT—the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research—was consulted to ensure ethical handling of sensitive data. All interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and with selected excerpts were translated into English. Pseudonyms are used throughout to protect participant confidentiality.

EMBEDDED COLONIAL STRUCTURES

Latifa, an Iraqi woman who arrived in Norway as a quota refugee in 2009 with her family, shares a narrative shaped by war, displacement, and systemic exclusion. Her experiences illustrate how racialized time and space operate within contemporary societal structures, revealing the emotional and material weight of colonial legacies

Her experiences move beyond a personal account, reflecting broader patterns of imperial violence and structural inequality. The enduring impacts of European and US imperialistic endeavors, as emphasized by scholars (Ahuja, 2021; Puar, 2020), are evident in her narrative. This global colonial legacy is not confined to her life in Norway—it extends back to her homeland, aligning with Dankertsen and Kristiansen's (2021) assertion that "colonial structures in the Nordic region and the non-Western world share a common same political, economic, and ideological foundation" (p. 10).

Latifa describes how the lives of women and girls have been profoundly shaped by the war and instability in Iraq. Following the rise of ISIS, she was forced to wear hijab, and her job opportunities were limited due to U.S. inquiries into Iraq concerning nuclear weapons, leading to chaos in her field of work. She states:

> "There was war from the 70s to 82, and later, in the 90s. I graduated in 1995. Then we had problems with nuclear weapons. We were supposed to work in the lab. We couldn't then, due to limited opportunities, and crises of chemical and nuclear weapons. There was a crisis for a period, and the next opportunity was to work as a teacher. This crisis affected the whole society and the entire culture; we are paying the price for it. I started working as a teacher instead of using my professional skills."

The temporal aspect of racialization is evident in Latifa's account of conflict, which disrupted her educational and career trajectories. Although she completed her education in 1995, subsequent nuclear weapons-related crises severely limited job opportunities in her field. This highlights how broader imperial projects in the region (Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon and Iran) shape individual life trajectories, situating people like Latifa within a temporal framework marked by instability and constrained possibility.

Equally significant is the spatial dimension of racialization in Latifa's experience. In Norway she encounters labor market barriers that reflect how her professional qualifications are not recognized, confining her to roles such as mother-tongue teacher for refugee kids—despite her science degree and extensive teaching experience.

Now in her 50s, after decades of teaching, Latifa still struggles to secure stable employment, highlighting the temporal and spatial inequalities she faces in the Norwegian context. A key obstacle is the requirement to pass a higher-level Norwegian language exam. Despite 15 years of teaching in Iraq and 10 years as a mother-tongue teacher in Norwegian school—a total of 25 years— new regulations mandate that she pass this exam to qualify for other employment opportunities. This raises a critical question: what is the purpose of requiring a language exam when her decade-long experience in a Norwegian school already demonstrates her language competence? What genuine interest lies in demanding such extensive preparation from Latifa, only to "steal" her time (Khosravi, 2019; Mulinari, 2025)? Rather than serving as a meaningful assessment, the exam represents an imposed temporal and spatial constraint that limits her access to more stable employment opportunities. Latifa herself notes that she struggles with "concentration, both in preparing for the exam and during the test itself."

Latifa's narrative evokes a sense of "belatedness" (Khosravi, 2019), where she does arrive too late to opportunities that should have been available to her based on her qualifications and prior experiences. Her years as a science teacher do not translate into present-day benefits; instead, they represent a squandered opportunity, embodying the notion of "wasted time" and unrecognized labor (Mulinari, 2025). This situation underscores how access to resources and opportunities is often 'racialized' and stratified through colonial legacies, illustrating the broader impact of historical injustices on contemporary lives.

It also signals the resurgence of 'welfare racism,' where individuals like Latifa are forced to navigate a system

that 'devalues' their contributions, or prevents them from contributing, based solely on their racial and immigrant status. As her children approach adulthood and she nears a divorce, Latifa begins to reclaim her time and enjoy her life. Yet, as Mulinari (2025) observes, time itself becomes "racialized," leaving her with limited autonomy over how it is spent. Her time is structured by labor, care, and survival, leaving little space for leisure or rest.

When I ask Latifa about her dreams, a more private and vulnerable side of her emerges. After our first meeting, she shares, "I have never shared these with anybody, only you." This moment opens a window into the layered textures of Latifa's lived experience, her embodied reality shaped by racialization, exhaustion, and a longing for reprieve. Her reflections reveal not merely a desire for invisibility, but a deeper yearning for transformation: to reclaim a sense of self beyond the constraints imposed by structural marginalization.

> Latifa: **"**My dreams, [pause] living alone, having a job. To hide myself a little (sighs and cries)." […] **"**In a forest, don't know. To relax a little (cries). Come to life again, as another person. I don't want to be visible to anyone."

Latifa's narrative exemplifies the interplay between the temporal and spatial dimensions of racialization, showing how individual lives are profoundly shaped by both historical injustices and contemporary societal structures. Her desire to "hide" is not merely an act of withdrawal but a response to the cumulative effects of being hyper-visible as a racialized subject while simultaneously rendered invisible within institutional frameworks. The legacy of colonialism not only constrains her educational and career trajectories but also confines her within specific spatial and social boundaries, perpetuating cycles of marginalization and instability.

Yet, Latifa's story is not solely one of suffering, it is a testament to resilience and the pursuit of self-determination. Her longing for solitude, safety, and renewal reflects a deeply human aspiration: to reclaim self-determination and reimagine a life beyond the confines of racialized surveillance and exclusion.

NAVIGATING INVISIBILITY WITHIN RACIALIZED WELFARE REGIME

Latifa was the third woman I interviewed. After our conversation, as I accompanied her to the parking lot, she smiled calmly and said, "Participating in the interview felt therapeutic." She added that "other women in her circle would also benefit from being interviewed." Her words reflect the importance of relationality, empathy, and shared experiences among women, fostering an environment where their voices can echo and affirm one another.

This theme was echoed by another participant, Semiha, who was born and raised in Pakistan. When asked about her motivation for participating in the project, she expressed a strong desire to share her experiences to help other women facing similar challenges:

> "I wanted to participate because I want to share my experiences. The life I have had, and what I went through… If someone else is in the same situation, I hope my story can help them. During the difficult times, I often didn't know where to find help. Now I understand, looking back and reflecting on what I needed back then and where to find help. It has been very hard because I haven't received much support and had to cope with everything alone. I have gone through so many things by myself."

Having lived in Norway for nearly 30 years, Semiha is approaching her 50th birthday. She described her journey as "tough," marked by a persistent lack of support as she navigated various hardships mostly on her own. Her perspective underscores the critical role of sharing as a means of connecting with others who have endured similar struggles, reinforcing the idea that sharing can lighten the heavy load, and offer validation, guidance, and hope.

Semiha's motivations are deeply intertwined with the temporal and spatial dimensions of racialization within what scholars have termed the welfare racial regime, a system that produces and sustains gendered and racialized inequalities. Despite her long residence in Norway, she remarks today, "I don't know where to receive help." She feels "misunderstood" by the welfare apparatus, NAV (Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration). Her narrative illustrates what Mulinari (2025) describes as "temporal racism," manifested through "invisibilization," "waiting," and "wasting" (p. 11).

Mulinari explains that "by rendering both their [foreign-born unemployed women] past and current work experience invisible, temporal racism creates a context where exploitation and the extraction of their value remain unseen" (p. 6). This definition aptly captures Semiha`s experiences across various NAV-facilitated trainee positions, from kindergartens to retail stores, as well as the extensive time and care she devoted to her family. After arriving in Norway at a young age, she had hoped to continue her education but instead became the primary caregiver for one of her children who was left disabled due to a medical error. Her caregiving responsibilities extended to her ill husband and their other children. Despite living in a welfare state that promotes its services at all levels, Semiha's narrative reveals a different reality: that it is often the family, particularly women, who provide care, and this unpaid labor remains largely invisible to the welfare apparatus. This exposes the gendered and racialized blind spots of the welfare system.

Over the years, Semiha has been placed in various job training programs facilitated by NAV but has never secured a permanent position. Nearly a decade ago, she sustained an injury that continues to affect her daily life. Despite this, she was repeatedly sent to courses and programs that failed to address her specific needs or circumstances. As she explains:

> "No one understands me. I've suffered, and I'm in pain, but for ten years, they've sent me to different courses. They don't understand. For ten years, I`ve applied for disability benefits, but I keep getting rejected."

Only after a decade she was finally referred to a rehabilitation program and a pain-management course. When asked if she had applied for such services earlier, she stated that she had not known they were available to her:

> "I didn't know I had that right. It's my GP who knows. They've used up all my ten years, back and forth, back and forth, on different courses: computer course after computer course. Then, work training. After that, at a job interview, they asked why I left my previous job/trainee. I explained that I have had an injury, and they said, 'There is no job. If you couldn't work before, you can't work now.' There has been so much discrimination. NAV has done so much to me. I went to different workplaces, and because of my injury, they keep saying 'no' to me. I spent six months on a course, a six-month course, and afterward, I couldn't even go to physiotherapy because I was so exhausted."

Semiha recounts a long and exhausting journey through the Norwegian welfare system, marked by repeated cycles of training, rejection, and physical strain. Over the course of ten years, she was sent "back and forth" between various courses—computer training, IT programs, and work placements—without any "meaningful" outcome. Despite her efforts, each opportunity led to further marginalization. When she finally secured job interviews, she was met with skepticism and dismissal. Employers questioned her employment gaps and, upon learning about her injury, told her: "There is no job. If you didn't work before, you can't work now." These encounters, compounded by what she describes as persistent discrimination from NAV, left her feeling devalued and discarded.

Semiha's story is not just about personal hardship. It is a powerful illustration of how racialized and disabled individuals are cycled through welfare routines that fail to recognize their needs, capacities, or rights. Her experience exemplifies how institutional neglect,

under the guise of support (through repeated follow-ups controlling and wasting her time), becomes a form of structural violence, one that erodes dignity, health, and hope over time.

Mulinari emphasizes that a key aspect of "temporal racism" involves prolonged periods of enforced waiting while one remains unemployed" (p. 11). Semiha's narrative embodies this struggle, as she is caught in a state of limbo, waiting in uncertainty. As she states "they (employers) never recruit us," pointing to the systemic lack of opportunity for permanent employment and the exploitation of racialized labor. Her time, she explains, has been both "controlled" and "wasted"—a core mechanism of temporal racism (Mulinari, 2025, p. 11).

Building on this, Mulinari (2025) argues that temporal control is not limited to the present or future; it also extends backward, erasing the value of past labor and knowledge. As Mulinari explains, temporal racism operates through "invisibilization" on two levels: first, by "disregarding their work prior to arriving in Sweden" and second, by "categorizing their activities within the unemployment complex as nonwork." (p. 8) These mechanisms erase the value of racialized women's labor and time, reinforcing their marginalization within welfare systems.

This dynamic resonates with Perocco's (2022) analysis of the return of welfare racism, where the underlying logic is "suspicion." Mulinari (2025) notes that the refusal to acknowledge prior education is a way to "steal time," highlighting the erasure of labor and value that temporal racism produces (p. 9). Moreover, she emphasizes that "racialized waiting" is deeply "gendered" (p. 9). The denial of previous education and work experience, combined with prolonged periods of waiting, creates a system in which the welfare racial regime exerts control over racialized women's time, effectively stealing or erasing it.

This form of temporal control is not neutral; it is embedded in broader structures of racial capitalism that devalue the time and labor of marginalized groups. Within this framework, suspicion becomes a disciplinary tool, justifying the surveillance, regulation, and devaluation of racialized individuals in the welfare system.

"YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND - IN NORWAY WE HAVE LAWS"

Naila's account offers a deeply insightful critique of how racialized structures operate within the Norwegian welfare system. Her experiences reveal contradictions between Norway`s ideals of equality and the realities faced by racialized bodies, particularly non-European refugees. Through her narrative, we see how welfare racism, racial capitalism, and the temporal and spatial dimensions of racialization intersect to produce exclusion, frustration, and a sense of disposability.

Naila's migration journey, arriving in Norway via family reunification after completing her first year of university in her country of origin, illustrates the temporal dislocation experienced by many migrants. Her additional year in high school, following a year of language instruction in Norway, reflects the delayed recognition of skills and qualifications common among non-Western immigrants. This aligns with Mulinari's concept of racialized temporal inequalities, where migrants' lives are placed in a state of suspension and their potential contributions are rendered "surplus" or "disposable."

Drawing on her years of work with refugees in a Norwegian municipality, Naila describes how the welfare system discriminates against non-Western refugees through the logic of racial capitalism, where labor and lives are differentially valued. Their time is not recognized as productive or valuable, echoing Mills' notion of White time, in which whiteness is associated with full temporal agency, while racialized others are denied the ability to "make history." Rather than being seen as skilled and capable members of society, they are perceived as excess. This reveals how welfare institutions, under the guise of neutrality, reproduce racial hierarchies by selectively allocating resources

and opportunities.

> Naila: "I think that it is discrimination that I see very clearly now among Norwegians. It's really great and positive that Norwegians have opened their doors to Ukrainian refugees. But at the same time, in practice, I see that they want to receive only Ukrainians. […] They say it's because they have relevant education, and that their education and work experience are similar, well, it's European. So, I understand the reasoning, but at the same time, there are many others who also have education and are eager to learn quickly. So, I think it's a bit unfortunate. I see it very clearly. I've worked here for more than fifteen years. I can say the same about universities."

The preference for Ukrainian refugees, justified through cultural proximity to 'Europeanness,' exemplifies how racialized logics of inclusion operate. This reflects Quijano's (2000) argument that modernity positioned Europe as the apex of progress, relegating others to subordinate temporal and spatial orders. The state's selective generosity reveals a spatial politics of belonging, where proximity to whiteness determines access to opportunity.

> Naila: "When the war started, [name of the] University sent out information that they had language course, and it was tailored specifically for Ukrainians. It said that 'this course is only for Ukrainians.' So, we had to contact them. And it's a regular grant that was given, only for Ukrainians. But it's from the state. Someone told me, 'Naila, when the state discriminates, why should we… It's the state that did it.'"

This selective allocation of resources creates racialized zones of inclusion and exclusion within the welfare state. Public institutions, universities, municipalities, reception centers, become spatial instruments of control, determining who belongs where, and under what conditions. Hanchard (1999)'s concept of "racial time" helps to illuminate how access to institutions, services, and opportunities is unevenly distributed along racial lines, and how these inequalities are both produced and recognized within everyday interactions.

> Naila: "So, you know, I sometimes feel frustrated because the municipality has, like, its values—equal services, right? When I started here, there was a lot of talk about treating everyone equally, not discriminating against […] But (laughs) now I see clear and obvious discrimination, and that's unfortunate."

Naila's frustrations with the inconsistent application of rules expose the discretionary power of the welfare racial regime, which shapes experiences based on racialized identities. The contrast between rigid deadlines for some and flexibility for others signifies how temporal racism operates through selective enforcement. As Mulinari argues, "the time of certain groups" is rendered invisible or subordinated.

> Naila: "When refugees in reception centers wanted to settle in our municipality or elsewhere, I asked about university and upper secondary school, regarding application deadlines. Some said, 'Naila, you have to understand, here in Norway we have rules, we have laws we have to follow. We can't discriminate. That's how it is for Norwegians, there are deadlines, and the same applies to reception centers. When it comes to resettlement refugees, we need time to prepare, we can't just receive them immediately? You have to understand, in Norway we have laws.' It's like a completely different world."

This phrase, "a completely different world" reveals a spatial hierarchy of worlds, where Norwegian norms are constructed as inherently superior, rational, and lawful, while the migrant's background is rendered incompatible or problematic. This echoes Khosravi's concept of "coevalness," where racialized migrants are denied recognition as living in the same historical moment, instead positioned as temporally and culturally out of sync.

> Naila: "But suddenly that world changed (laughs). The deadlines suddenly disappeared. Yes, [name

> of] University suddenly said it was completely fine to make contact. All those deadlines that were there, kindergarten applications, and all those difficult forms, suddenly became simplified. So, it is possible if the will is there […] if not, then there are lots of excuses."

The abrupt removal of deadlines and simplification of procedures for Ukrainian refugees underscores the selective adaptability of institutions. What is presented as fixed and non-negotiable, "we have laws," is in fact, flexible and contingent on racialized perceptions of worth and belonging. This exposes the myth of bureaucratic neutrality and reveals how racialized time is strategically manipulated to include or exclude.

Naila's experiences show that racialized time and space are not abstract concepts but institutionalized practices that manage, marginalize, and control racialized populations within the welfare state. Her account makes visible how temporal delays, spatial exclusions, and moral hierarchies are not incidental but systemic, embedded in the very structures that claim to serve all equally.

CONCLUDING REMARKS – REIMAGINING

This article reveals that the Nordic welfare state, often idealized as inclusive and egalitarian, cannot be fully understood without acknowledging its entanglement with racial capitalism and colonial legacies. The concept of welfare racism exposes how welfare institutions, while appearing neutral, often operate through mechanisms of racial differentiation, assimilation, and exclusion. These mechanisms disproportionately affect racialized groups, particularly Muslim immigrant women, who experience a form of subordinated inclusion that is conditional, precarious, and deeply racialized and gendered.

Challenging the myth of Nordic exceptionalism, the analysis shows how coloniality persists in the everyday functioning of welfare operations. The selective inclusion of certain refugees, based on perceived proximity to whiteness and Europeanness, reveals how "White time" (Mills, 2014) functions as a temporal logic privileging those aligned with dominant racial and cultural norms. Within this framework, time is not distributed equally: those deemed closer to whiteness are granted faster access to rights, resources, and recognition, while racialized non-Western migrants are subjected to temporal suspension, prolonged waiting, and bureaucratic delays.

This racialized and gendered structuring of temporality and spatiality reveals how welfare systems do not merely distribute care, but also regulate who is allowed to 'move forward' in time and space, and who is kept behind. These systems determine who progress socially, economically, and institutionally, and who is held back through bureaucracy, surveillance, and moralized distinctions, often justified through claims of neutrality or cultural backwardness. Building on Mulinari's (2025) concept of temporal racism, this analysis highlights how welfare systems function as mechanisms of temporal and spatial control, shaping who is allowed to inhabit the future and who remains stuck in a suspended present.

The discourse of gender equality, celebrated as a hallmark of Nordic progressivism, becomes a civilizing mission that upholds racial hierarchies. When feminist policies fail to account for racial and religious diversity, they risk becoming tools of exclusion rather than liberation. As Groglopo and Suárez-Krabbe (2023) note, feminism can become a "prison" for non-Western and non-white women unless it is radically reimagined through decolonial and intersectional frameworks.

This dynamic connects directly to the article's broader framework of racialized time and space. Welfare systems that fail to recognize pluriverse ontologies operate on racialized timelines of emancipation, expecting racialized women to conform to linear, Western narratives of progress. These women are expected to inhabit particular spaces, and to move through time in ways that align with dominant expectations. This reinforces their marginalization within welfare

institutions that claim to be universal and egalitarian. By focusing on cultural difference rather than systemic inequality, welfare policies deflect attention from the racialized and gendered dimensions of labor markets, housing, education, and welfare access. In doing so, they risk explaining exclusion through 'their culture' rather than acknowledging deeply political and institutional forms of marginalization.

Despite structural constraints, moments of resistance, joy, and reimagining emerge. Latifa's longing for solitude and renewal, her desire to reclaim time and space, is not merely expressions of exhaustion. These are acts of refusal and imagination, a desire to exist beyond the gaze of racialized surveillance and to inhabit a space of dignity and self-determination. Such moments challenge the logic of disposability and assert the right to dream, heal, and belong.

To move forward, decolonizing the welfare state is essential. This involves recognizing its colonial foundations and centering the lived experiences of those who are structurally excluded. Their insights offer both critique and alternative visions of care, relationality, and justice. It requires a shift away from universalist ideals that obscure racialized exclusions, and toward transformative politics rooted in solidarity, relationality, and accountability. Dismantling welfare racism demands a fundamental restructuring of how we understand care, relationality, and equality.

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