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DECOLONISATION

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REDAKTIONSLEDELSENS FORORD

Det er med stor glæde og stolthed, at vi kan byde velkommen til dette særnummer om dekolonialisering af Kvinder, Køn & Forskning. Temaredaktionen præsenterer i deres indledning et stærkt og nødvendigt felt, som i disse år i stigende grad optager forskere, aktivister og offentlighed på tværs af discipliner og regioner. Deres arbejde har samlet et omfattende nummer, som vi er taknemmelige for.

Feminismen har gennem tiden haft et kompliceret forhold til kolonialismen. Mange feministiske teorier er blevet formet i et vestligt og hvidt centrum, som på forskellige måder var involveret i og lukrerede på koloniale praksisser. Disse praksisser er ofte blevet ignoreret ligesom erfaringer fra koloniserede områder enten blev overset eller reduceret til stereotype billeder af den undertrykte, ikke-vestlige kvinde. Sådanne blinde vinkler er blevet kritiseret af postkolonial feminisme, hvor blandt andre Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1984) og Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) tidligt pegede på, hvordan vestlig feminisme har været med til at reproducere de koloniale hierarkier, den ønskede at udfordre. Den vestlige feminisme har med andre ord både udviklet emancipatoriske analyser og samtidig været viklet ind i de magtstrukturer, som kolonialismen skabte.

Det er netop i det feministisk-postkoloniale felt, at vi finder nogle af de mest skarpe analyser af kolonialismens virkemidler. María Lugones' arbejde (2010) viser, hvordan kolonialismen ikke blot organiserede økonomi, land og ressourcer, men også formede kønnet som kategori. Hendes begreb om den moderne, koloniale kønsorden tydeliggør, hvordan racialisering, heteropatriarkat og kapitalisme blev sammenflettet og skabte nye hierarkier, der satte sig dybt i kroppe, familier og sociale relationer.

Således virker kolonialismen virker ikke blot ved siden af, men også gennem køn og seksualitet. Det gælder på tværs af den danske kolonihistorie, hvor kontrol over kroppe, intimitet og slægtskab har været centrale mekanismer. I Kalaallit Nunaat (Grønland) er dette særligt tydeligt. Som temaredaktionens indledning viser, synliggør de aktuelle afsløringer af spiralprogrammet, tvangsfjernelser og bortadaptioner af børn, hvordan kropslig autonomi, familieformer og reproduktion i årtier har været reguleret gennem racialiserede hierarkier. At dette først nu for alvor anerkendes i en dansk national sammenhæng, peger på hvor dybt koloniale logikker fortsat griber ind i både arktiske og danske nutider.

Kvinder, Køn & Forskning har tidligere beskæftiget sig med spørgsmål om kolonialisme. Allerede i 1996 udkom temanummeret Kolonialisme og postkolonialisme, og i 2000 fulgte temanummeret Orientalisme. Tidsskriftet har løbende publiceret forskning, der på forskellig vis berører kolonialisme, racialisering, hvidhed og imperialisme. Inge har dog systematisk centreret kolonialitet og dekolonisering som udgangspunkt, sådan som nærværende nummer gør.

I dag taler vi i stigende grad om dekolonisering snarere end postkolonialisme. Hvor postkolonialisme i højere grad fokuserede på diskurser, kultur som eftervirkninger af kolonialisme, retter dekolonisering sig mere mod de vidensformer, institutioner og materielle strukturer, som vedvarende opretholder kolonialitet. Fokus er på, hvilke stemmer der bliver hørt, hvem der har epistemisk autoritet, og hvordan forskning, arkiver og universiteter fortsat privilegerer bestemte perspektiver. Dekolonisering er derfor også et spørgsmål om vidensproduktion, om epistemologisk ulighed og om vores fælles ansvar for at afkolonialisere de strukturer, der former feltet.

Vi er særligt glade for at kunne præsentere et nummer af dette omfang. Et så fyldigt nummer viser, hvor levende, differentieret og analytisk stærk dekolonial kønsforskning er i den danske, nordiske, nordatlantiske og arktiske kontekst. Bidragene spænder fra historiske analyser til kunstneriske interventioner og essays, og de udfolder dekolonisering som både teori, metode og praksis. Det er en mangfoldighed, der betyder noget.

Nummeret udkommer på et politisk og historisk betydningsfuldt tidspunkt. Spiralsagen og tvangsadoptionen af grønlandske børn har rejst nye spørgsmål og svar om dansk kolonialisme. Den danske praksis med de såkaldte forældrekompetenceundersøgelser fortsat fjerner grønlandske børn fra deres familier, og debatten om dokumentaren Grønlands hvide guld såvel som Trumps ønske om at "købe Grønland" viser, hvordan koloniale logikker fortsat organiserer relationen mellem Danmark og Kalaallit Nunaat. Alt dette minder os om, at kolonialisme ikke tilhører fortiden. Den former den politiske samtale, vores institutioner og de måder, vi tænker køn, krop, viden og land på.

Samtidig fortsætter kolonialismen også internationalt. Måske mest tydeligt i den voldelige kolonisering af Palæstina, der fortsætter på trods af våbenhvilen og muliggøres af vestlige stater. I dette nummer bringer vi derfor også statementet: End Academic Complicity Now! som er skrevet af kollektivet Feminists Against Genocide. Selvom teksten således ikke er del af det samlede temanummer, har redaktionen valgt at bringe kollektivets tekst, fordi den formulerer spørgsmål om akademisk ansvar, feministisk solidaritet og medskyldighed, som i stigende grad presser sig på i både globale og lokale sammenhænge. Det peger på universiteters historiske og nutidige indlejring i koloniale og imperialistiske magtstrukturer og problematiserer, hvordan akademiske institutioner er impliceret i den fortsatte vold mod palæstinensere. Teksten udfordrer os som forskningsfællesskab på, hvordan kønsforskningen forstår sin egen rolle i en verden præget af ulighed, og den opfordrer til handling snarere end neutralitet. Når vi bringer statementet, er det i mindre grad for at definere en fælles position, og i højere grad for at skabe rum for samtale om, hvad feministisk og akademisk ansvar kan og bør indebære i vores samtid.

Dette særnummer kendetegnes ved sin aktualitet og

af den store bredde og dybde i de artikler, analyser og kunstneriske bidrag, der tilsammen undersøger dekolonialisering som et vigtigt kønsforskningsfelt. Tak til temaredaktionen for deres store arbejde og bidrag, og til forfatterne for deres generøsitet, viden og engagement.

God læselyst.

På redaktionens vegne,

Michael Nebeling Petersen, Camilla Bruun Eriksen & Mons Bissenbakker

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Introduction: Decolonisation, Gender Studies, and the Nordics

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IN TIMES LIKE THESE...

This special issue of Women, Gender & Research engages the theme of "Decolonisation". It comes at a moment that calls for critical and rigorous analysis of how structures of coloniality and hetero-patriarchy continue to shape the present (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), during a time when colonisation takes on renewed and continuing forms and appearances. Despite the growing attention to decolonial gender studies, thinking, and praxis globally (e.g. Cusicanqui, 2020; De Jong et al., 2018; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Lugones, 2023), the intersections between gender and coloniality in the Nordic region – and its former colonies – remain under-researched (e.g. Keskinen et al., 2009). Yet, the continued systemic repression of racialised, gendered, trans, queer, Two-Spirit, Indigenous, Black, and people of colour, as well as other marginalised groups in the Nordic countries underscores that colonial structures are not merely historical. They continue to shape the 'political moment' (Barndt, 1989) as it unfolds in everyday life, relations, governance, and knowledge regimes, demanding critical attention and scholarly intervention.

On September 24th, 2025, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen travelled to Nuuk, Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland), to issue an official apology for Denmark's intrauterine device (IUD) program, which from the 1960s systemically targeted Kalaallit Inuit women and girls (Statsministeriet, 2025). In Frederiksen's speech, she said: "What you were exposed to was unjust. It was a systematic discriminatory treatment. Because you were Greenlanders [Kalaallit Inuit]. And that was wrong." (Frederiksen, 2025, own translation). The apology followed the recent release of the report on the official inquiry into "Contraception Practices in Kalaallit Nunaat, 1960-1991" (Jensen et al, 2025). The report finds that at least 4,000 Kalaallit Inuit women and girls (p. 262) – some as young as 12 years old (pp. 179-180) and one reported case under 12 years of age (p. 8) – were subjected to IUDs, in many cases without their consent (pp. 203-204). The practice was executed on approximately half of the female Kalaallit Inuit population of reproductive age at the time. The IUD program was initiated and defended with reference to the Danish state's concerns over the rapidly rising number of Kalaallit Inuit and its potential "costs" to the Danish state (Graugaard, Pihl Sørensen & Stage, 2025, pp. 2-3, 10). Although often overlooked in current discussions of the IUD program, Danish reproductive policies on the Kalaallit Inuit population unfolded through the interconnected mechanisms of colonialism, racialisation, and gendered violence. The (neo-) colonial logics of the Danish political establishment positioned the Indigenous female body at the centre of its systems of subordination, administration, and governance (Graugaard & Ambrosius, 2023; Graugaard et al., 2025).

The aftermath of the IUD inquiry has been marked by both denialism and public outcry. While the Danish official apology was welcomed by many of the affected women and families as a long overdue recognition of past wrongs, it has also been perceived and critiqued as a political strategy to escape long-term accountability, compensation, and reparation. In this sense, the apology risks functioning less as a step toward justice than as a means of restaging Danish presence and authority in Kalaallit Nunaat through a rhetoric of reconciliation. Against the backdrop of the present practices of abortion pressure on expectant Kalaallit Inuit mothers, discriminatory 'parent legibility' tests towards Kalaallit Inuit parents, and the continued disproportionate forced removal and adoption of Kalaallit Inuit children in Denmark (Hegelund & Naamansen, forthcoming; Bryant, 2025b), excusing the reproductive injustice of the IUD program as a *past* wrong quickly escapes its contemporary continuities. Indeed, the IUD program exemplifies how the coloniality of gender endures in the Nordic present. Social work and welfare policies have long served as vehicles of racialised control, across the Nordic region – from eugenic sterilisations of "unwanted" populations in Finland until the 1970s (Clarke et al., 2024) to the overrepresentation of migrant children in Norwegian foster systems today (Ursin & Lysså, 2024). Such policies reflect the broader patterns in which colonial violence is reproduced and reframed as care and welfare to sustain control over Indigenous, racialised, and marginalised bodies and lives.

More broadly, the IUD program points to how coloniality operates through narratives of benevolence: Eugenic population control is framed as care, colonial governance as welfare, and extraction as progress. This idea of "benevolent colonialism" continues to inform Nordic self-perceptions as egalitarian and humanitarian, even as its racialised and gendered hierarchies persist. As a critical example, the promise of the common good of "green transition" technology is currently used to legitimise state-supported mining expansion and land grab of traditional territories in Sápmi – and operationalised to criminalise Sámi activists resisting it, as is seen in the Fosen court case and through intensified police enforcement on Sami activists in Repparfjord (Fjellheim, 2024; Larson, 2014; Spangen et al., 2015; Tuorda, 2014). Arguably, the escalating climate crisis – and many of the measures designed to address it – risk reproducing and intensifying colonial violence and injustice (Komposch, 2025), disregarding Indigenous sovereignty and relations to land within the territories now claimed as part of the Nordic region.

Shifting tectonics in geopolitics also reconfigure the political moment in the Nordic region that expose contemporary colonial structures; the global rise of the far right; ongoing genocides in Gaza, Sudan, and Yemen; land grab for the supply of natural resources and critical raw materials in Amazonia, and the new scramble for and militarisation of the Arctic, to mention a few. Simultaneously, we witness intensified repression of refugees, activists, and Indigenous peoples, accompanied by growing restrictions on academic freedom and dissent. Scholars, students, and journalists who critique colonial violence and racialised gender regimes face delegitimization, censorship, and even threats to their safety. This has been clearly evident in the context of faculty and student mobilisation for Palestine (Achenback et al., 2024; Alqaisiya & Perugini, 2024; Zisakou et al., 2025).

At the same time, this moment has also been the time of increased grassroot-based mobilisation for Indigenous rights, anti-racism movements, freedom flotillas, and feminist solidarity in the wake of the MeToo movement. The re-initiation of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 in the United States against police brutality and systemic racism (kennedy-macfoy & Zarkov, 2021) led to global mobilisation against structural inequalities (Amesu, 2021). These struggles demonstrate that decolonisation is not just an academic project but a lived and collective practice (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018).

Rather than treating colonialism as a phenomenon of the past, this special issue begins from the recognition that we inhabit a "world shaped by colonial histories" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 126), which continue to orient our relations to bodies, land, and knowledge. These orientations are never neutral; they shape how gender and sexuality are understood – from the enforcement of heteronormativity to the Eurocentric framing of queerness itself. The concept of *coloniality*, as developed by Aníbal Quijano (2000), remains a useful lens to capture these enduring power structures, even as feminist and Indigenous scholars have expanded his work to centre the constitutive role of gender in colonial knowledge regimes (Bohrer, 2020).

Bringing together decolonial, postcolonial, and Indigenous scholarship in conversation with gender studies, this special issue seeks to interrogate how the colonial archive of knowledge continues to shape the Nordic present – and what other epistemic forms challenge it. The contributions collectively ask how coloniality organises knowledge, subjectivities, and sexual, racial, and gender identities (Tlostanova, 2023) in the Nordic region and beyond. Drawing on diverse positionalities and experiences of colonialism and decolonisation, the contributors offer situated, relational, and deeply relevant insights into the entanglements of coloniality, gender, and power, while proposing decolonial feminist alternatives to the existing dominant knowledge practices, thereby demonstrating how knowledge production itself becomes a site of struggle and renewal. At the same time, the issue reflects that much work remains to be done within Nordic scholarship: It calls on us to con-

tinue practicing decolonial thinking within feminist studies – and feminist thinking within decolonial work. We understand this issue not as a conclusion but as the beginning of an ongoing conversation, one that we hope will foster future scholarship and collective practice toward epistemic justice, relational accountability, and healing within and beyond the Nordic region.

THE NORDIC COLONIAL LANDSCAPE

To situate this issue and the articles within their historical and geopolitical context, we turn to the colonial landscape of the Nordic region. The Nordic nation-states – Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland – have extensive and prolonged colonial histories that manifest in the present in different ways. This includes imposed national borders on Sápmi and political constructions such as the Danish Realm (Rigsfælleskabet), reflecting the ongoing colonisation of Indigenous people in the Nordic countries and the Arctic (Graugaard, 2020; Fjellheim, 2020).

Nordic colonialism extends beyond the Nordic area. Nordic countries emerged as global empires actively participating in slave trade, plantation economies (Naum & Nordin, 2013), resource extraction, and settler colonialism (Sverdljuk et al., 2020). Denmark held colonies in the Caribbean, West Africa, and the North Atlantic, as well as trading posts in India (Naum & Nordin, 2013). Sweden gained an international reputation for its contributions to transnational European pseudo-scientific debates on "race" (Mattson, 2014). Meanwhile, Nordic countries that were themselves under foreign rule – Norway, Iceland, and Finland – were also engaged in colonial activities. They conducted missionary work, produced and reproduced racist and colonial discourses (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012), and participated in settler colonialism (see Huhta, 2020; Eyþórsdóttir & Loftsdóttir, 2016).

The foreign rule of (some) Nordic countries lead to ambiguous positions. Finnish people were historically categorised within race science as inferior and 'not fully white' (Keskinen, 2019). Likewise, Icelanders were portrayed as 'not fully civilised', and Iceland became a site for European science tourism and resource speculation during the 19th century (Loftdóttir, 2024b). In response to Danish colonialism, Icelandic intellectuals sought to position Iceland as 'civilised' by reproducing racist discourses on other colonised peoples (Loftdóttir, 2019). Early twentieth-century Icelandic politicians even debated if Iceland had a legitimate claim to Kalaallit Nunaat as their "ancient colony", disregarding the presence and sovereignty of Kalaallit Inuit (Réttindi íslendinga á Grænlandi, 1948).

When acknowledged, Nordic imperialism has often been framed as benign and benevolent (Naum & Nordin, 2013, p. 10), differentiating it from other European forms of colonialism. In Denmark, the longstanding narrative of Danish economic benevolence in Kalaallit Nunaat has permeated Danish-Kalaallit relations (Lynge, 2006; Petersen, 1995). Such narratives have rendered Nordic colonial repression of Indigenous peoples largely invisible (Fur, 2006), when in reality, administration of different aspects of Indigenous people's lives was a key aspect of colonisation: Nordic nation-states presumed the right to determine what was "best" in terms of land use, culture, economic activity, and social structures (Aikio, 2022; Graugaard, 2018). These were also policies of elimination, as exemplified in Danish assimilation policies in Kalaallit Nunaat and in the assimilationist practices of the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish states towards Sámi people, in which Indigeneity was relegated to a bygone past (Dankertsen, 2022; Graugaard, 2018). The Nordic refusal to recognise (settler) colonialism in Sápmi and Kalaallit Nunaat has been crucial to maintaining the Nordic self-image of innocence and exceptionalism (e.g. Fur, 2006).

A recent example of this dynamic is the Danish Broadcasting Corporation's removal of the Kalaallit-Danish documentary, *Orsugiak – The White Gold of Greenland* (Pilehave & Rosing, 2025), from its public streaming platform only ten days after release. The documentary uncovers a largely untold history

of how Danish wealth was generated through cryolite extraction in southern Kalaallit Nunaat, and the serious, long-term consequences this had for the local Kalaallit Inuit community. In response, Danish politicians, newspaper editors, and large segments of the public swiftly sought to delegitimise the documentary and its sources – labelling it as 'misleading', 'fraudulent', and 'a mess', and as 'biased' due to its Kalaallit perspectives[1]. While the film was framed in Danish media as harmful to the relationship between Denmark and Kalaallit Nunaat – amidst geopolitical tension and Trumpian politics – the reception and subsequent removal were, in Kalaallit Nunaat and across the Arctic, widely experienced as the actual harm: an instance of colonial censorship of Inuit history. The immediate mobilisation of Danish affective defence and aggression echoes broader dynamics of white fragility, colonial denial, and silencing, underscoring that there is nothing exceptionally benign or benevolent about Nordic colonialism (Andersen, 2025; Bondebjerg, 2025; Bryant, 2025a; Danbolt, 2025; Gaïni, 2025; Juselius, 2025; Juselius & Koch, 2025; Sartini & Chahine, 2025).

Colonial denial remains a defining feature of Nordic exceptionalism. It manifests not only in public and political discourse – where racism is routinely denied or minimised (Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Johansson et al., 2024; Hübinette, 2012; Loftsdóttir, 2017) – but also in western epistemic authority through which Nordic colonialism has been studied and remembered. While postcolonial research has contributed important analysis of imperial and colonial history, it has often overlooked intersections of race and gender as constitutive of Nordic colonial modernity. As recent scholarship demonstrates, racialisation in the Nordic region is deeply entwined with ideas of civilisation, morality, and sexuality, where whiteness operates as a silent norm and as a measure of modern belonging (Andreassen & Ahmed-Andresen, 2014; Bjørlig, 2021; Guschke et. al, 2023; Graugaard et al., 2025; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). Colonial hierarchies in the Nordic region were thus reproduced not only through political and economic domination but also through gendered and racialised discourses that have positioned Indigenous peoples, and particularly Indigenous women, as subjects of governance and objects of moral concern. A decolonial feminist framework invites renewed attention to these intersections and the power structures that have rendered them invisible, urging scholarship to address how colonial hierarchies of race and gender continue to shape knowledge production and contemporary Nordic self-understanding (Frankenberg, 1993).

CULTIVATING DECOLONIAL FEMINIST THINKING IN THE NORDICS

Part of Nordic exceptionalism has been the notion of the region as uniquely gender equal (Holli et al., 2005), an image actively mobilised by Nordic governments to brand the Nordics internationally (Jezierska & Towns, 2021). Predominant narratives of the Nordics as "gender-friendly" welfare states – based on ideas of uniform "equality" – are exported as unique contributions to international development (Elgström & Delputte, 2016; Keskinen et al., 2021). These discourses on Nordic progressiveness around human rights and gender equality obscure the region's colonial histories and their continuities (Lundström & Teitelbaum, 2017). What, then, would it mean to interrogate these gendered dimensions, and to cultivate decolonial feminist thinking in the Nordics? *What would it mean to decolonise Nordic Gender Studies?*

Feminist and Gender Studies have long examined how gender is socially constructed and tied to power. Intersectionality – coined and developed by Black feminist scholarship (Crenshaw, 1989) – has become foundational in revealing how gender operates through race, class, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and age. Yet, as intersectionality has gained traction across different disciplines, white Eurocentric and mainstream Nordic feminists have often failed to interrogate whiteness as their own epistemic standpoint, thereby reproducing colonial patterns of authority (Cho et al., 2013; Guschke et al., 2023; kennedy-mcfoy & Zarkov, 2021). Mohanty's *Under Western Eyes* (1988) was an early and important critique of the failure of Western feminism to engage

with realities beyond the white, Western feminist experience, framing it instead as part of an ongoing colonial discourse.

Colonial histories have not only produced enduring constructions of "race" and processes of racialisation but have also conditioned the very terms through which gender, sexuality, and subjectivity are understood. Decolonial feminist thought approaches colonialism not as an external factor that intersects with gender, but as constitutive of it. María Lugones' theorisation of *"the coloniality of gender"* (2023 [2008]) demonstrates that binary logics and categories such as "man" and "woman" are European colonial constructs. Through what she termed the *modern/colonial gender system*, colonialism intertwined racial, gendered, and capitalist hierarchies that positioned white, bourgeois, heterosexual men as the standard of humanity, while relegating colonised peoples – particularly women of colour – outside the boundaries of "proper" gender. Race and gender thus emerged as co-constituted fictions that naturalised inequality, defining ideals of white femininity in opposition to the racialised caricatures of colonised women, while suppressing Indigenous gender and sexual identities (e.g. Cusicanqui, 2020; Robinson, 2020; Williamson, 2012).

Queer Studies, too, have been criticised for insufficient engagement with racialisation (Cohen, 1997; Ferguson, 2003), as well as ignorance toward Indigenous Two-Spirit and Trans epistemologies (Gill-Peterson, 2024; Presley, 2020; Robinson, 2020; Snorton, 2017). These omissions are not incidental but can be understood as a colonial continuity that reproduces the very exclusions decolonial approaches seek to challenge. Colonial logics are embedded not only in how race is constructed, but also in how sexuality is categorised, disciplined, and politicised. Jasbir Puar's concept of *homonationalism* (2007) exposes how queer inclusion becomes a nationalist tool, differentiating the "modern" white citizen from the racialised "other." Even amidst anti-gender backlashes, such logics persist across Europe, reinscribing colonial hierarchies of morality and belonging (Puar, 2013).

In the Nordic context, the concept of homonationalism has also proven useful in analysing queer-friendly national self-representations (e.g., Kehl, 2024; Nebeling Petersen, 2016). Yet, scholarship has given little sustained attention to the specific colonial continuities that undergird these progressive narratives. Lunau and Schröder (2025) explore how the assessment of 'genuine' queerness within queer asylum in Denmark and Germany works through logics of "colonial surveillance". In Iceland, queer migrants from the global south navigate multiple discriminations – recognised as queer yet racialised as perpetual "foreigners" (Sólveigar Guðmundsdóttir & Skaptadóttir, 2018).

Among the contributions to this issue, explicitly decolonial queer analyses remain largely absent. It is a perspective that sometimes appears at the margins – for instance, when a student in Chandra and Sigurðardóttir's study (this issue) reflects: "Learning about colonialism also teaches us that trans groups have always existed". Such insights remind us that intersectional, decolonial approaches remain vital for future feminist and queer scholarship in the Nordic context.

While Nordic decolonial feminism is still in formation, important groundwork has been laid. Indigenous and Black feminist scholars have introduced decolonial perspectives into critical debates on gender, racism, colonialism, and knowledge creation (e.g. Diallo & Yohaness, 2024; Hunter, 2023; Tlostanova et al., 2019; Knobblock & Stubberud, 2021). Their interventions highlight persistent omissions within mainstream Nordic feminism – particularly its reluctance to address racism and its entanglement with coloniality. As Knobblock and Koukkanen note, "the dismissiveness of white liberal feminism takes shape in the form of non-recognition, indifference, or plain ignorance" (2015, p. 278).

Such patterns persist where intersectionality and structural inequalities are treated as secondary to gender (e.g. Dahl, 2021), and where whiteness re-

mains the unmarked point of departure (Graugaard, 2020; Hübinette & Lundström, 2014; Loftsdóttir, 2024a). Despite a growing emphasis among white non-Indigenous Nordic feminists to "include" Indigenous feminist voices, Nordic gender studies have often failed to acknowledge the erasure of Indigenous people in Nordic societies (Dankertsen, 2021, p.145). As Knobblock and Kuokkanen (2015) argue, Indigenous feminism has frequently been sidelined, even though it challenges the foundations of colonial nation-states and their gendered hierarchies.

Articulated by thinkers such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2017), Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015), and Rauna Kuokkanen (2019), Indigenous feminism insists that gender justice cannot be separated from struggles for land, language, and collective continuance. It disrupts the liberal feminist narrative of progress by centring relational accountability, community well-being, and connections to land – principles that challenge the very notion of the male, sovereign nation-state. Bringing Indigenous and decolonial feminist thinking into dialogue therefore not only unsettles Nordic exceptionalism but opens pathways for relational, land-attuned, and accountable feminist practice in the region.

We suggest that advancing Nordic feminist theory requires confronting these absences – not as individual failings, but as epistemic and structural effects of colonial modernity. Cultivating decolonial feminist thought in the Nordics thus requires more than critique – it calls for renewed attentiveness to alternative knowledge systems, to the ongoing coloniality of gender and sexuality, and to the possibilities of feminist scholarship grounded in relational accountability and collective transformation.

REFLECTIONS ON POSITIONALITY AND THE EDITORIAL PROCESS

Undertaking this special issue has been a project shaped by and within decolonial aspirations, which have guided our approach in the different stages of production – from composing the editorial board and issuing the call for contributions, to the collaborative writing and editing process, and the development of our ethical guidelines. Working decolonially is and should not be a "metaphor" (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and it is not a checklist to be ticked off (Gani & Khan, 2024). It requires ongoing reflexivity, attentiveness, and accountability. We consider it essential to reflect on our positionality as editors to resist claiming to speak objectively from nowhere in particular (Haraway, 1988), and we have encouraged all contributors to similarly situate their positionality within their work. In our editorial work, working reflexively has been approached as a necessary practice for destabilising colonial knowledge hierarchies, challenging the centring of whiteness as 'neutrality', and holding our work accountable to its particular perspectives and potential blind spots.

As editors of this special issue, we are a group of scholars from, or residing in, different national contexts, territories, and colonial experiences in and beyond the Nordic region, including Denmark, Norway, Faroe Islands, Iceland, Kalaallit Nunaat, Germany, Columbia, and Canada. We are: Annika Isfeldt (Aarhus University), Èva Cossette-Laneville (The Arctic University of Norway), Josefine Lee Stage (DPU, Aarhus University), Julia Suárez-Krabbe (Roskilde University), Kristín Loftsdóttir (University of Iceland), Lars Jensen (Roskilde University), Naja Dyrendom Graugaard (University of Copenhagen), Rieke Schröder (University of Münster), and Turið Nolsøe (University of Southern Denmark). We work across different disciplines, institutions, and Nordic contexts (and beyond), with varied academic conditions and positionalities in relation to the colonial histories and structures of the region. While our perspectives differ, we share a commitment to advancing decolonial feminist approaches in the Nordics.

Importantly, this issue prioritises authorship and expertise that is grounded in and foregrounds lived experiences of colonisation, recognising that these insights are central to breaking with epistemic erasure in feminist scholarship. This has included conscious attention to editorial governance that supports

diverse, Indigenous, and other marginalised authors and forms of knowledges. We recognise that various forms of knowledge – artistic, embodied, practice-based, and collaborative – contribute crucially to understanding both colonisation and decolonisation (Cusicanqui, 2020) in the Nordic region. We hold that integrating these epistemologies is crucial to challenge dominant academic hierarchies and to affirm the necessity of plural, relational approaches to knowledge production. Our aim has been to foreground Indigenous epistemes, feminist methodologies, and alternative scholarly praxis through collaboration and co-creation, treating processes of knowledge production itself as a site of decolonial intervention.

OVERVIEW OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS

The contributions gathered in this special issue bring together a diverse constellation of voices interrogating colonial legacies and decolonial possibilities in and beyond the Nordic region. Working across disciplines, geographies, and methodologies, the authors engage critically with intersecting regimes of gender, race, and coloniality. Collectively, the contributions highlight how decolonial, feminist, and Indigenous perspectives can unsettle the epistemic hierarchies of the (Nordic) academy while offering transformative ways of knowing and being.

The articles are grouped into four interrelated thematic clusters: Histories and memories; Colonial continuities and Nordic complicities; Coloniality (and gender) in the welfare state; and Collaborative and artistic methodologies.

Histories and memories

Elizabeth Löwe-Hunter reinterprets the lives of Victor Cornelins and Alberta Roberts, Black colonial subjects from St. Croix who were 'transplanted' to Denmark in 1905. Using an Afrofeminist lens, she reveals how their stories unsettle Danish national memory and contribute to decolonising historical knowledge.

Signe Arnfred reflects on her experiences in Mozambique in the 1980s to examine how Nordic equality feminism, grounded in Enlightenment ideals, often reproduced colonial hierarchies. She situates this within a broader genealogy of Western feminist thought and its entanglement with capitalism, modernity, and empire.

Colonial continuities and Nordic complicities

Regine-Ellen Møller analyses sealskin production in Kalaallit Nunaat, demonstrating how gender-fluid practices resist colonial constructions of modernity while highlighting Indigenous economic resilience and community-based sustainability.

Patricia Lorenzoni exposes how Swedish media representations of "uncontacted" Indigenous peoples in Brazil reproduce colonial fantasies and Swedish exceptionalism, connecting media narratives to global structures of domination.

Juan Velásquez Atehortúa critiques Swedish media portrayals of Black women's activism during the Black Lives Matter protests of 2020, showing how intersectional practices of resistance are rendered invisible by racialised regimes of representation.

Coloniality (and gender) in the welfare state

Ruben Hordijk, Lene Myong, and Sophie Withaeckx theorise adoption as a colonial technology of severance, linking Nordic welfare-state governance to global hierarchies of family, race, and belonging.

Nezihat Bakar-Langeland interrogates the temporal and spatial dimensions of racism in the Norwegian welfare system, revealing how unequal access to time and care reproduces colonial hierarchies.

Amani Hassani examines Danish housing policies as racialised instruments of exclusion and displacement, showing how "racial banishment" fragments communities while simultaneously generating new forms of collective belonging and resistance.

Saleh Abdelaziz, Lina Mukhtar Mohageb, and Merethe Riggelsen Gjørding discuss carceral feminism and penal humanism in the Nordic context, proposing abolition as both a decolonial analytic and an activist methodology for dismantling intersecting systems of oppression.

Greta Jiménez explores Faroese early childhood education, identifying how Danish administrative frameworks sustain colonial temporalities, while pedagogical practices of hesitation and dwelling create everyday sites of resistance.

Sólveig Sigurðardóttir and Giti Chandra analyse Icelandic students' perspectives on decolonising higher education, emphasising the university's role in reproducing colonial knowledge and calling for curricular transformation.

Collaborative and artistic methodologies

Dorothy Amenuke, Julie Edel Hardenberg, La Vaughn Belle, Bernard Akoi-Jackson, Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld and Daniela Agostinho present an artistic collaboration that reconnects the geographies divided by Danish imperialism, showing art's potential to forge decolonial solidarities across the Global South and Nordic region.

Gry Lind Merrild Hansen and Ikimaliq Pikilak reflect on their curatorial collaboration for *Inuit Dimensions*, using collaborative autoethnography and the Mi'kmaw concept of "two-eyed seeing" to navigate asymmetrical power relations and explore the ethics of Indigenous/non-Indigenous co-creation.

Anne S. Chahine, Nina Hermansen, Nina N. Döring, and Jan-Erik Henriksen theorise affective spaces of collaboration between Sámi and non-Indigenous scholars, emphasising co-creation as a practice of epistemic justice.

Valerie Triggs, Shannon Leddy, Michele Sorensen, Nicole Rallis, Rita L. Irwin, and Ching-Chiu Lin undertake a 100-day inquiry into land-based learning, drawing on the Medicine Wheel teachings from Turtle Island to reimagine education as a relational, embodied, and decolonial practice.

Creative interventions, essays, and reviews

In line with our commitment to unsettling colonial structures of knowledge productions, the special issue also features other forms of knowledge such as art, multi-modal storytelling, poems and political speeches.

Henriette Bertelsen's poem voices intergenerational trauma rooted in the Danish IUD program in Kalaallit Nunaat, while **Aka Hansen's** poem reclaims Inuit matriarchal heritage and futurity.

Julie Edel Hardenberg's *Trophy - pearls* (2019) on the front cover and **Camilla Sejberg's** two pieces of artwork inside the issue visualise different aspects of Inuit feminist solidarity and collective mourning across contexts, including Palestine.

Klaudia Petersen's essay *Inuit for Palestine* links Danish colonial complicity in Kalaallit Nunaat to contemporary solidarity with Palestinians, while **Sophia Zisakou's** essay critiques claims of academic neutrality amid genocide, advocating for situated, resistant objectivity.

Finally, **Nina Cramer and Qwin Werle's** interview with **Tina Campt** explores Black diasporic archives and the radical possibilities of listening.

Three book reviews conclude the issue: **Anders Riel Müller/Yeonjun Song's** review of *Decolonial Sweden* (McEachrane & Faye, 2025) and **Kjerstin Uhre's** review of Eva Maria Fjellheim's PhD dissertation *Resisting Unfinished Colonial Business in Southern Saami Reindeer Herding Landscapes* (2024, The Arctic University of Norway), both of which offer new critical scholarship from the Nordic region to global decolonial debates. While **Rieke Schröder's** review of *Boundaries of Queerness* (Kehl, 2024) appears out of issue, the topics of homonationalism and racial politics in Sweden relate to the themes of this issue.

Complementing these contributions, the debate section features a statement from **Feminists against Genocide.**

Taken together, these contributions demonstrate the breadth of decolonial feminist scholarship emerging across and beyond the Nordic region. They illuminate how colonial histories persist in institutions, knowledge systems, and everyday practices, while also revealing possibilities for resistance, repair, and relational accountability. In the last section of this introduction, we want to turn to the possibilities.

LOOKING AHEAD: DECOLONIAL FEMINIST FUTURES

Decolonial feminist futures are grounded in the recognition that ways of knowing, being, and imagining precede and extend beyond colonial structures. As Mignolo and Walsh (2018) note, decoloniality involves undoing hierarchical structures of race, gender, heteropatriarchy, and class that continue to shape life, knowledge, and thought within global capitalism and Western modernity.

Looking ahead, decolonial feminist praxis in the Nordics – and globally – requires attending to plural possibilities: centring Indigenous futurities, embracing alternative epistemologies, and ensuring that racialised, gendered, queer, trans, Two-Spirit, Black, Indigenous, and other marginalised voices shape both the stories we tell about the past and the futures we imagine. This includes institutionalising these perspectives within research, policy, and education, to resist erasure and create space for collective, relational accountability.

By embracing counter-narratives, critical fabulation, and Indigenous narrative sovereignty, we open pathways beyond dystopia and beyond the limits imposed by the present system of racial capitalism (Davis, 1998; 2016, Hartman, 2008a; b). In doing so, decolonial feminist thought not only interrogates the legacies of coloniality but actively constructs futures rooted in alternative value systems, relationality, and justice (Svendsen, 2024). The contributions in this issue gesture toward these possibilities, reminding us that decolonisation is both an ongoing struggle and a creative, futuristic project: one that demands imagination, care, and solidarity across difference.

NOTES

[1] One of the editors of this special issue was a lead character in *Orsugiak - The White Gold of Greenland*, and became one of the main targets of the subsequent Danish media storm, accused of being academically incompetent, girlish, too emotional, and biased due to her Danish-Kalaaleq Inuk background.

Corrigendum: Following publication, the editors and authors identified two errors in the original version of the article. Both errors have been corrected in the current version. On page 13, the sentence "The report concludes that at least 4,000 Kalaallit Inuit women and girls, some as young as 11-12 years old, were subjected to IUDs, in many cases without their informed consent" has been corrected to: " The report finds that at least 4,000 Kalaallit Inuit women and girls (p. 262) – some as young as 12 years old (pp. 179-180) and one reported case under 12 years of age (p. 8) – were subjected to IUDs, in many cases without their consent (p. 203-204)." Also on page 13, the reference "(ibid.: 2)" in the sentence concerning the Danish state's concerns over the rising number of Kalaallit Inuit and its potential costs has been corrected to the intended source: Graugaard, Pihl Sørensen & Stage (2025, pp. 2-3, 10). The editors and authors regret these errors and thank the research group behind *Uvildig udredning af Antikonceptionspraksis i Kalaallit Nunaat i perioden 1960-1991* for bringing them to our attention.

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Afrofeministisk analyse som antikolonial metode

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ABSTRACT

Afrofeminist analysis as anticolonial method is an exploration of Danish mainstream representations of Victor Cornelins as exceptional and of how he chose to narrate his own story. I seek first and foremost to read his story through a lens that recognizes his human experience, especially as a small child. This includes but goes beyond Victor Cornelins and his companion Alberta Viola Roberts being held in a cage at a colonial exhibition in the amusement park Tivoli in 1905. This story is continuously retold with outrage in Danish media; however, these retellings often reproduce some of the violence they intend to trouble.

My reading aims to disturb accounts in which only the cage is made outrageous, and Black pain is otherwise normalized or overlooked. Reading the pain of colonial Black-child subjects with care, I am interested in the very human reactions to inhuman circumstances.

I do this by reading about his experiences as ordinary rather than spectacular. This is part of my commitment to a *Black feminist ethic of caring:* emphasizing the importance of individual expressions, the validity of feelings, and empathy as central to Black and afrofeminist knowledge production. I propose afrofeminist analysis as a method to unsettle default colonialist representations of the past.

KEY WORDS

AFRIKANSK DIASPORA, VICTOR CORNELINS, DANSK VESTINDIEN, KOLONIALITET, REPRÆSENTATION, AFROFEMINISME

I denne artikel undersøger jeg danske fremstillinger af Victor Cornelins som exceptionel, og hvordan han valgte at repræsentere sig selv. Jeg har nærlæst hans selvbiografi *Fra St. Croix til Nakskov: et livs eventyr* udgivet i 1976 suppleret af noter, breve og andre arkivalier. Disse er offentligt tilgængelige i Lokalhistorisk Arkiv i Nakskov. Jeg foreslår en afrofeministisk læsning og erindringspraksis som metode til at udfordre det kolonialistiske blik og den selektive hukommelse, hvormed Cornelins oftest bliver repræsenteret i den danske offentlighed.

Udover fremstillinger af ham og hans selvrepræsentation analyserer jeg hvordan hans erfaringer påvirkede hans selvforståelse. Først og fremmest søger jeg at læse hans historie gennem en optik, der anerkender hans menneskelige oplevelser, særligt hans oplevelser som barn. Dette inkluderer, da Victor Cornelins og Alberta Viola Roberts var indespærret på koloniudstillingen i Tivoli i 1905, men stopper ikke dér. Historien om buret bliver stadig genfortalt med forargelse i danske medier, men genfortællingerne ender ofte med at forårsage noget af den vold, de forsøger at kritisere. Hele det kolonialistiske foretagende, som børnenes objektgørelse var en del af, forbliver ubestridt og dermed normaliseret. Jeg bidrager med en afrofeministisk læsning, der deler en tilgang, Emil Elg (2021) valgte i artiklen "Omplantet," et ord Cornelins brugte til at beskrive sin ufrivillige migration sammen med Roberts. Gennem en sådan læsning sætter jeg børnene i centrum, netop som børn og forholder mig til deres sårbarhed og traumer, der er definerende for situationen. Jeg udfordrer normaliseringen af børnene som exceptionelle i typiske offentlige fremstillinger af Cornelins' historie. Det gør jeg blandt andet ved at læse hans beskrivelser af egne oplevelser som grundlæggende almindelige, menneskelige (børne)oplevelser. Disse overvejelser og analytiske tilgange er min forpligtelse til en *Black feminist ethic of caring,* som bl.a. bygger på Patricia Hill Collins' (2014) metodologi og epistemologiske intervention: en omsorgsetik, der fremhæver vigtigheden af individuelle udtryk, legitimering af følelser, og gensidig empati som centralt i sort feministisk videnproduktion.

Ligesom fremstillingerne af Cornelins i hans levetid, er den måde, han huskes på i offentligheden i Danmark i dag ofte gennem exceptionalisering af ham og hans erfaringer. Eksempelvis fik historien om Victor Cornelins og Alberta Roberts igen offentlig opmærksomhed for en stund, da salget af de forhenværende danske kolonier til USA blev markeret i 2017. I den forbindelse bragte DR og TV2 historier under overskrifterne: "Victor blev holdt i bur som turistattraktion" og "De sendte bud efter to 'negerbørn' og udstillede dem i bur i Tivoli" (Dr.dk, 2017; TV 2 Lorry, 2017). Det er kendetegnende for danske mediefremstillinger af Victor Cornelins, at de historiske dele er mere eller mindre direkte gengivelser fra hans selvbiografi, men uden faktisk at henvise til værket. Altså en simultan appropriation og usynliggørelse af Cornelins' intellektuelle arbejde (hooks, 2015; Jackson, 2019). I øvrigt er det kun én af historierne her, der hentyder til en anden persons tilstedeværelse, nemlig Alberta Roberts, hvorimod den førstnævnte udelader hendes eksistens fuldstændigt. Dog var DR's historie delvist bragt i form af en videooptagelse af Cornelins som voksen, hvor han fortæller sin historie. Det var muligvis en oplæsning fra bogen, tilsyneladende på et TV-show i 1970'erne efter udgivelsen. Her nævner han selv Alberta Roberts, da han forklarer at når han skrev 'vi', var det en reference til, hvordan de blev indespærret sammen. Hvordan må det mon have føltes at læse højt om sådan en voldsomhed på TV?

Min læsning er en praksis i at forstyrre narrativer, hvori kun buret gøres forargeligt og hvor sort smerte herudover normaliseres og overses. Denne læsning er funderet i en forståelse, hvor selve adskillelsen af børn fra deres omsorgspersoner kan betragtes som et overgreb. Hertil kommer den racistiske traumatisering og de mange omsorgssvigt, som børnene gennemlevede (og kun én overlevede), som danske mainstream medier systematisk udelader. Gennem en omsorgsfuld læsning af sorte, koloniale (børne)subjekters livserfaringer, er jeg interesseret i deres enormt menneskelige reaktioner på umenneskelige omstændigheder.

AT LÆSE SORT MENNESKELIGHED FREM FRA ARKIVERNE

Victor Waldemar Cornelius blev født den 3. august 1898 på St. Croix, på det tidspunkt koloniseret af Danmark som del af Dansk Vestindien, også inkluderende St. Jan og St. Thomas. Cornelins forstod som voksen, at årsagen til hans ufrivillige adskillelse fra sit hjem og familie var, at

han skulle uddannes til lærer og derefter vende tilbage for at undervise på St. Croix. Men der var allerede en planlagt koloniudstilling i København, og medarrangør Emma Gad havde sendt bud efter børn, som kunne fremvises i den vestindiske sektion (Freiesleben & Cornelins, 1998; Andreassen, 2015). Victor fik ikke noget valg, og hans mor, Sarah Eliza Allen, opgav ham heller ikke med fri vilje. Hun oplevede muligvis at blive overbevist af en insisterende forretningsmand ved navn Edward R. Ford, da hun havde trange kår og flere børn at forsørge (Andreassen, 2015). Navnet Cornelins er resultatet af en fejlagtig læsning af *Cornelius*, men Victor Cornelins er siden blevet citeret for at have sagt "Nu har jeg heddet Cornelins i 50 år, så lad os holde os til det" (Lundrup, 2010, s. 71).

Som syvårig befandt Victor sig ufrivilligt ombord på et skib, da han vågnede en morgen i 1905. Allerede langt væk fra sin mor og sit hjem i St. Croix, og omgivet af hvide mænd, han ikke kendte, på nær Hr. Ford, som tidligere havde besøgt hans mor (Cornelins, 1976). Alberta Roberts, en lille pige også fra St. Croix, var på samme måde blevet adskilt fra sin mor og sendt afsted til Danmark, kun fire år gammel. Cornelins huskede, at han kæmpede for at komme af skibet, men forgæves. Han huskede også, at han og Alberta kaldte efter deres mødre. Han havde ikke forstået situationens alvor dagen forinden, da hans mor klædte ham i søndagstøj og sendte ham afsted i en hestevogn sammen med Alberta. Han havde godt lagt mærke til sin mors tårer, men troede blot, at han skulle til byen og ville komme tilbage samme aften. Han anede ikke, at han aldrig ville se sin mor igen (ibid.).

Victor og Albertas rejse vækker genklang fra deres forgængeres transatlantiske bortførelse – nu fra Vestindien mod det europæiske punkt i trekantshandelen. Børnenes tvungne rejse fandt sted cirka 100 år efter forbuddet mod trekantshandelen trådte i kraft i 1802 og mindre end 60 år efter slaveriet blev afskaffet i det daværende Dansk Vestindien i 1848. At dele oplevelsen og overleve rejsen som skibskammerater har en særlig betydning inden for studiet af afrikansk diasporisk slægtskab.

På tværs af Caribien er kreolske ord, afledt af *shipmate* eller *ven* på forskellige europæiske sprog, blevet til udtryk som *mati* og *zami,* der betegner en særlig form for slægtskab. I dag bliver disse begreber ofte teoretiseret inden for Black Queer Studies (Lorde, 1993; Alexander, 2005; Wekker, 2006; Allen, 2012). De stammer fra historien om de 12,5 millioner afrikanske mennesker, som europæiske slavehandlere pakkede i lastrummene på slaveskibe og opdelte efter deres opfattelse af køn. Derfor dannede de tilfangetagne folk relationer blandt skibskammerater i samme kønskategori. Termerne *zami* og *mati* osv. konnoterer derfor afrikansk diasporisk, og særligt queer, slægtskab i det meste af Black Studies-litteraturen. Men det er også grundlæggende et begreb, der betegner slægtskab formet gennem kolonial vold og dominans, herunder tvungen adskillelse fra oprindelige familier og samfund (Wekker, 2006). Derfor kan vi forstå Alberta og Victor som placeret i en form for *mati*-relation. De blev bogstaveligt talt hinandens skibskammerater og delte sidenhen adskillige yderligere sorger, men gav også hinanden en vis trøst og glæde (Freiesleben & Cornelins, 1998). Som kunsthistoriker Temi Odumosu bemærker, skrev Cornelins konsekvent i første person flertal om sin tid i Danmark frem til Albertas død i 1924 (personlig kommunikation, 2023). Dette vidner om deres slægtskab gennem delte omstændigheder og om Cornelins' oplevelse af deres samhørighed. Jeg vælger derfor at fremhæve Alberta Roberts og at dvæle ved vigtigheden af deres relation gennem den voldsomme oplevelse det var, at blive revet op med rode.

AT UDFORDRE ENSIDIG HISTORICITET

Størstedelen af det, der er skrevet om Victor Cornelins i den danske kontekst, har fokuseret på, hvor usædvanligt hans liv var. Cornelins var en offentlig figur allerede inden udgivelsen af sine selvbiografiske erindringer. Han var velkendt i sit lokalmiljø i Nakskov gennem lærergerningen, foreningslivet og hans musikalske talenter. Fordi han var en sort person i begyndelsen af det 20. århundrede, tiltrak hans liv opmærksomhed uden for Nakskov. Gengivelser af hans liv og karriere har typisk fremhævet rejsen fra en tropisk ø til den københavnske metropol og de ekstraordinære aspekter af hans liv: fra at være opvokset fattig – og sort – til at blive skoleinspektør. Avisoverskrifter fra 1940'erne og 1950'erne lød typisk noget i retningen af: "Negeren, der blev overlærer" eller "En Lærer fra Dansk-Vestindien." Victor Cornelins valgte også selv denne narrative kurve som rammen i sine erindringer *Fra St. Croix til Nakskov: et livs eventyr*. Efter udgivelsen

i 1976 benyttede visse medier sig af sprogbrug fra bogen, for eksempel tabloidmagasinet Billedbladet i en tredelt serie om Cornelins under titlen "Jeg er nigger og dansker," hvilket er et direkte citat fra bogen. De tre dele blev henholdsvis kaldt "Min fantastiske skæbne," "Jeg blev udstillet i et bur," og "Jeg genså aldrig min mor." Selvom et tabloidmagasin som genre søger yderligtgående sprogbrug, viser jeg, hvordan spektakulære fremstillinger udgør et mønster på tværs af danske medier gennem tiden.

Cornelins tilstedeværelse som voksen, sort crucianer var sjælden, men ikke unik. Der var adskillige andre i Danmark i hans samtid, eksempelvis personer bragt til Danmark som børn for at få en læreruddannelse og derefter undervise i St. Croix (Freiesleben & Cornelins, 1998). Derimod er det ret unikt, at Cornelins skrev sit livs vidnesbyrd. Alberta Roberts og utallige andre sorte, koloniale subjekter forblev netop dette i de offentlige arkiver: koloniseringens subjekter hvis navne og historier ofte er ukendte i offentligheden. Under disse omstændigheder kan Cornelins betragtes som hverken mere eller mindre vigtig end andre. Men han efterlod et tydeligere spor og, vigtigst, så tog han kontrol over sit eget narrativ, hvilket de fleste andre i hans situation ikke fik adgang til. Dette er et af hans selvbiografis potentialer: den muliggør en sjælden stemme og et perspektiv fra en kollektiv erfaring. En erfaring, som danske historikere og medier har omtalt, portrætteret, karikeret, men også glemt eller komplet udslettet fra Danmarkshistorien. Dette er et ontologisk paradoks, der udtrykker den samtidige hyper-synlighed *og* usynliggørelse som sorte subjekter oplever gennem det hvide blik (Fanon, 1952; Ahmed, 2000; Kilomba, 2010; hooks, 2015; Kelekay, 2019). Dog har visse forskere og kunstnere allerede påbegyndt det omsorgsarbejde, det er at huske og bogstaveligt talt finde sorte personer fra forhenværende Dansk Vestindien i arkiverne. Heriblandt retter flere specifikt blikket efter Alberta Roberts, hvis fravær står i skarp kontrast til Cornelins' hyper-medierede tilstedeværelse (Belle, 2021; Cramer et al., 2021; Odumosu, 2019, 2020; Sampson, 2017).

At skrive om Victor Cornelins' liv på andre måder end de dominerende offentlige narrativer rejser spørgsmål om fortiden, hvordan vi ved noget om fortiden, og hvad der er at vide om den (Hartman, 2008). Historiske narrativer, skriver antropolog Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2015), er konstruktioner – altså en bestemt måde at genskabe fortiden på. Han henleder specifikt opmærksomhed til "an irreducible distinction and yet an equally irreducible overlap between what happened and that which is said to have happened" (ibid. s. 3). I Trouillot's ord opretholder den "ensidige historicitet," som Cornelins huskes og fremstilles igennem i den danske offentlighed, en bestemt forestilling, både af ham som person og af racial sortv nikmhed i Danmark. Samtidigt er der en fundamental udfordring i at skabe nye narrativer fra de samme arkiver. At forsøge at fortælle en historie om Cornelins som person, frem for Cornelins som (sort) sensation, kræver mere end blot adgang til arkiverne. Hvis man søger efter sorte personer i den transatlantiske kontekst, er arkiverne i sig selv voldelige, som akademiker og forfatter Saidiya Hartman skriver (2008). Efterkommere af de slavegjorte er dokumenterede gennem de samme magtforhold som var ansvarlige for deres forgængeres og egen undertvingelse (ibid.). Det vil sige, de er dokumenterede i arkiverne, *hvis* hvide historikere ser dem og *hvordan* de ser dem – som skibslast, som løsøre, som objekter i en udstilling. Selv når en selvbiografi eksisterer, som i Victor Cornelins tilfælde, bliver de samme få passager fremhævet i den danske offentlige erindring, men også på samme måde. Denne praksis reproducerer de samme fortielser. Hartman spørger: "How does one revisit the scene of subjection without replicating the grammar of violence?" (s. 4). Cornelins gør faktisk sine undertvingelsesscener tilgængelige gennem sit eget, værdige perspektiv og sin egen stemme – men disse passager udelades systematisk i den nationale erindring. Dette illustrerer hvordan muligheden for modfortællinger ikke blot er et konkret spørgsmål om, hvorvidt arkiverne er tilgængelige, men også et spørgsmål om magt (Derrida, 2008; Hartman, 2008; Trouillot, 2015; Odumosu, 2019). I det danske tilfælde bliver magt sommetider udtrykt ved, at alternative historiske narrativer fremstilles som ulæselige inden for Danmarkshistoriens præmisser. Anderledes sagt, inden for den hegemoniske vestlige epistemologi, hvori eksistensen af et sort, talende Jeg endnu ikke begribes. Hartman advarer da også mod dette, når hun skriver, at "the *history* of black counter-historical projects is one of failure, precisely because these accounts have never been able to install themselves as history, but rather are insurgent, disruptive narratives that are marginalized and derailed before they ever gain

footing" (2008, s. 13). Hendes pointe understreger den rolle magtforhold spiller i konstruktioner af fortiden og betydningen af de positioneringer, hvorfra historien er skrevet, husket og bevogtet.

SORTHED SOM SPEKTAKEL

Sensationaliseringen af sorte mennesker var ikke forbeholdt udstillingspladsen. Faktisk vakte Alberta og Victors tilstedeværelse stor opmærksomhed i det daglige liv i København, hvor en sort person var exceptionel og sandsynligvis et nyt syn for mange. Cornelins reflekterer over dette og sammenligner det med sin egen oplevelse af at være vant til at se hvide mennesker i St. Croix. Selvom de ikke var i flertal, var de hvide mennesker i St. Croix også vant til at se sorte crucianere og til "at behandle os som mennesker" (Cornelins, 1976, s. 24). Hans refleksion antyder, at i dette bestemte sted og i denne historiske tid, København 1905, var det spektakulære ved sorthed ikke blot en åbenlys eksotificering af racemæssige forskelle. Københavnernes reaktioner på at se ham og Alberta vidnede også om en begrænset eksponering for billeder af de danske kolonier og deres befolkninger i metropolen. Gennem hele den Dansk-Vestindiske kolonihistorie havde borgerlige familier bragt slavegjorte personer og deres efterkommere til Danmark, ofte som personlige tjenestefolk, men det var for det meste enkeltpersoner, som senere blev sendt tilbage til Vestindien (Nielsen, 2016, s. 231). Derfor var det så usædvanligt, som det var, for danskerne at se afrocaribiere.

Efter afskaffelsen af slaveriet i 1848 tog crucianere fortsat til Danmark, men igen individuelt og typisk sammen med velhavende hvide, danske familier eller som sømænd. Relativt få slog sig ned i Danmark (ibid.). Derfor var der aldrig en såkaldt postkolonial befolkningsgruppe af afrikanske efterkommere, som blev kulturelt assimileret, talte dansk og blev en integreret del af det københavnske byliv ligesom i andre europæiske hovedstæder. Derudover har der lejlighedsvis været sorte personer fra Afrika og USA, men ikke sorte fællesskaber eller samfund som sådan (McEachrane, 2016).

Da Victor Cornelins som barn netop var ankommet til Danmark fra St. Croix, fandt han derfor opmærksomheden "yderst forstyrrende, men også uforståelig" (Cornelins, 1976, s. 24). Han beskrev turen fra børnenes plejefamilie til udstillingen i Tivoli, ledsaget af en 14-15-årig hvid pige:

> Når den unge pige sammen med os to sorte børn viste sig på Rådhuspladsen, blev der trængsel om os. Alle trafikanterne glemte deres oprindelige ærinde, fodgængere, cyklister, ja sågar sporvognspassagerer stimlede sammen om os for at se de mærkværdige skabninger, den unge hvide pige havde ved hånden. Man troede ikke rigtig på vores ægthed, og flere prøvede med tommelfingrene på vores kinder, om den sorte farve lod sig gnide af, andre ruskede i vores hårtotter for at finde ud af, om det var paryk eller virkelig ægte negerhår. Inden vi nåede over Rådhuspladsen, var sammenstimmelen så stærk, at vi næsten ikke kunne komme videre, før en af de kæmpemæssige politibetjente kom os til hjælp og banede os vej ned ad Vesterbros Passage (s. 24).

De mange forhold, der gjorde Alberta og Victor sårbare – deres unge alder, den nylige frarøvelse af forældre og det at være uledsagede børn i et fremmed land – har sandsynligvis forstærket oplevelsen af at blive transformeret fra børn til spektakulære objekter. Nogle af de følelsesmæssige reaktioner, som Cornelins senere beskrev, tyder på, at denne andetgørelse var skadende: "[...] her i København blev vi nærmest anset for at være nogle løjerlige dyr, der nok var sluppet ud af en Zoologisk Have. Denne fornemmelse gjorde os skræmte, så vi var bange for at komme på gaden og blive set, og vores ængstelse forplantede sig til den unge pige der førte os." (s. 24). Senere, efter ankomsten inden for Tivolis porte, skrev Cornelins følgende:

Dette at skulle være en udstillingsgenstand andre mennesker til moro gjorde mig ikke alene undselig men også rasende i mit indre. Jeg gemte mig undertiden mellem pakkasser og kulisser, men jeg blev snart fundet frem igen og fik nu og da et nakkedrag af en eller andens flade hånd for at understrege, at jeg *skulle* holde mig på 'arenaen'. (s. 26).

Gennem disse erindringer udtrykker Cornelins både følelser – frygt og vrede – og hans tilsvarende adfærd som reaktion på, hvad han oplevede: at gemme sig. Ud fra disse scener kan vi derudover spørge, hvilke sanseindtryk og

følelser det må have fremkaldt i ham i situationer, hvor han ønskede at gemme sig, men ikke havde nogen steder at flygte hen? I den kontekst blev dét at spytte efter publikum én af de få tilgængelige måder at sige fra på i mangel af skjulesteder. Hans udadvendte reaktion siger noget om et relativt modstandsdygtigt barn, der trods forandringer og traumer stod op for sig selv og hævdede sin menneskelige værdighed, som han selv formulerede det. Men at trække sig indad og forsøge at gøre sig mindre eller usynlig ville også have været forståelige løsninger for et barn i hans og Albertas situation.

Victors selvfølelse og handlekraft er dog ikke et bevis på, at han var upåvirket af de voldsomme oplevelser. I flere tilfælde beskriver han, hvordan tidlige erindringer fra København påvirkede ham som voksen. Under værnepligt i Danmark var det tradition at marchere gennem byen, hvor kasernen lå. Som sort soldat i den danske hær i 1930'erne bad Victor om en undtagelse – om ikke andet, skrev han, så på grund af "komisk udseende" (s. 87). Men faktisk skyldtes det, at hans udseende igen udløste overvældende og angstfremkaldende reaktioner i det offentlige rum:

Nej, når folk på vor vej opdagede den sorte soldat inde i kolonnen, stod de stille og kikkede og gjorde andre opmærksomme på det kuriøse syn, ja børn og unge fulgte bag efter marchkolonnen og råbte op. Jeg følte mig i sandhed sat tilbage til 1905 og de larmende begivenheder på Rådhuspladsen ved Albertas og min tilsynekomst. Selv om det krøb i mig ligesom i kejseren, der i eventyret gik i procession i den bare skjorte, holdt jeg som "Den standhaftige Soldat" kæft, trit og retning, til vi svingede ind i kasernegården, og et kraftigt smæld af porten fortalte mig, at den larmende hob var lukket ude --- for denne gang.

Den ualmindelige opmærksomhed, som jeg vakte, iklædt soldatertøjet, fik mig til at ansøge om tilladelse til at gå civil, når jeg ikke var i tjeneste (s. 87).

Her beskriver Cornelins scenarier, som tilsyneladende ikke havde ændret sig i de årtier fra hans ankomst til Danmark og til hans voksenliv. Synet af ham blev stadig opfattet som spektakulært og skabte kaos i det offentlige rum. Ligeledes var hans følelsesmæssige reaktion stadig præget af angst. Hans reference til H.C. Andersens *Kejserens Nye Klæder* skaber en sammenligning mellem hans oplevelse af eksponering og bogstavelig nøgenhed. Når Cornelins sammenkæder chok og oplevelser med at blive gjort til objekt for ekstrem nysgerrighed i de hvide danskeres øjne, udtrykker han, at objektificering altså ikke var noget, han vænnede sig til over tid. Tværtimod blev traumet vækket.

Selvom det var lige så ubehageligt som voksen, havde han på det tidspunkt flere muligheder for at forsøge at mildne ubehaget ved den raciale spektakularisering. For det første lærte han at undertrykke sine følelser, indtil han var væk fra det offentlige rum. Men han forsøgte også at forhandle sin deltagelse i militærmarchen, omend uden succes. Derfor var hans alternative anmodning – om at bære almindeligt tøj i stedet for uniformen i sin fritid – en måde at minimere den hyper-synlighed, som fulgte med den. Ikke alene var paraderne og marchen gennem byen allerede en form for optræden, men Victor var dertil sort og den eneste sorte soldat i kolonnen. Opmærksomheden blev derfor rettet mod ham på en overdrevet, iscenesat måde, hvilket hans daglige ærinder, uden orkester og uniformeret parade, ikke ville forårsage i samme grad. Vi kan også medtænke kontrasten mellem hans racialisering som sort og uniformen som et dansk nationalsymbol, som noget der understregede det ekstraordinære. Og det kan tænkes, at han forsøgte at undgå marchen netop ved at spille på den nationalistiske logik, hvori en dansk soldat naturligvis var en hvid soldat, og at en sort soldat derfor ville fremstå komisk, som han skrev. I øvrigt kan den status, der fulgte med uniformen, også have forstyrret de forforståelser, der blev tilknyttet sorte personer som underlegne, og føjet til paradokset.

Cornelins beskriver også andre måder, hvorpå han forsøgte at undgå iscenesættelsen, som værnepligten medførte, for eksempel ved at simulere sygdom for at blive indenfor, mens resten marcherede. Victor Cornelins' senere liv som lærer og offentlig taler taget i betragtning, er der ingen grund til at tro, at han var indadvendt eller led af social angst. Hans behov for at skjule sig som voksen, siger derfor meget om, i hvor høj grad den racialiserede eksponering overvældede ham.

Ved anden lejlighed genkalder Cornelins andre slags situationer, hvor tidligere traumer igen blev aktiveret:

I mit senere liv som lærer for hvide børn var det ofte min opgave at gøre udflugter til zoologiske haver men børnenes iver efter at komme hen til abeburet såvel som deres åbenbare morskab over de springende og hvæsende smådyr derinde huede mig ikke. Jeg huskede alt for tydeligt, da jeg selv sad bag tremmerne!!! (s. 27).

At være vidne til indespærrede væsener og deres kropslige tegn på frygt fremkaldte Cornelins' egne minder og vækkede et ubehag. Dertil, som han skrev, forholdet mellem de skræmte dyr bag tremmerne og de larmende, begejstrede hvide børn, for hvem dyrenes lidelse var underholdning. I modsætning til eksemplet med soldaterparaden, beskriver Cornelins hér ikke en situation, hvor han selv blev gjort til objektet. Men som lærer på en skoleudflugt blev han vidne til noget, der var tæt nok på hans egen oplevelse af krænkelse til, at han relaterede og blev berørt.

Cornelins' bevidsthed og erindring om buret er et stærkt symbol, og bliver et narrativt greb i hans fortælling – eller som forsker i nordisk kolonihistorie, Temi Odumosu foreslår, som en kronotrope han anvender til at rejse tilbage i tiden (personlig kommunikation, 2023). På denne måde refererer Cornelins til oplevelser af at føle sig indespærret gennem hele sit liv, ikke bag fysiske tremmer, men via restriktive omstændigheder i hans sociokulturelle miljø. Buret kommer altså til at symbolisere måder, hvorpå hans selvfølelse, sjæl og sind blev begrænset af de normaliserede raciale definitioner af tilhørsforhold og menneskelighed gennem hans liv i Danmark. Hans fortælling udfordrer på den måde den majoritetsdanske sensationelle og exceptionalistiske fremstilling og belyser den underliggende struktur bag de kolonialistiske, racistiske retfærdiggørelser af at indespærre to små børn som udstillingsobjekter.

Begge de ovennævnte eksempler illustrerer i øvrigt racialiseringen som relationel. Som Cornelins selv reflekterer, var det ikke selve det faktum, at nogen bliver kategoriseret som sort eller hvid, for eksempel, der forårsagede de hvide danskeres ukontrollerede reaktioner. Den politiske filosof Frantz Fanon beskrev præcist denne præmis: "[...] ikke alene skal den sorte mand være sort; han skal være sort i forhold til den hvide mand" (1952, s. 90). Folk, der er født i en sort majoritetsbefolkning og derefter flytter til Europa, heriblandt Fanon, har berettet at 'blive' sorte i denne overgang. Tidligere var de ganske enkelt personer. Tilblivelsen opstår, idet de bliver tiltalt (*hailed*) eller omtalt som 'anden' (Althusser, 1971; Ahmed, 2000; S. Hall, 2011). Med Frantz Fanons (1952) berømte ord lød det derfor "Se! En neger!" første gang han rejste til Frankrig fra Martinique (s. 91-94). Vi kan forestille os et lignende københavnsk scenarie, ledsaget af pegende fingre og stirrende blikke i Victor Cornelins' tilfælde.

Relationalitet og tiltale illustrerer dermed racialiseringens produktive karakter. Det handler lige så meget om at *gøre* race, som det handler om at *være* eller ikke-væren (Fanon, 1952; Glissant, 1997). Og samtidigt med at tiltalen producerer racemæssig andetgørelse, skaber og vedligeholder den talehandling også en racialiseret norm – i dette tilfælde, racial hvidhed. Dette er en historisk og kontekstuelt specifik kategorisering, og en del af effekten er usynliggørelse og dermed normalisering af racial hvidhed. Hvidhed konstrueres altså som den menneskelige standard. De voldsomme reaktioner på synet af sorte personer sagde derfor mindre om caribiernes sorthed end om den hvide befolknings etnocentrisme og begrænsede kendskab til andre folk. Men i særdeleshed kan det også forstås som en reaktion på at møde sorte personer i andre roller end den designerede kategori 'slave' (Hartman, 2008; Hartman & Wilderson, 2003). Den gængse befolkning var ubevidst om racegørelse, og racistiske hierarkier var del af den almene viden om menneskelig diversitet på det tidspunkt, opfattet som sagligt kva tidens såkaldte racevidenskab, eugenik (Andreassen, 2015).

De mange lag, der medvirkede til spektakulariseringen af Victors sorthed, bestod af overlappende betydninger mellem racialiseret andetgørelse (i relation til umarkeret 'førstegørelse' som hvid), fremmedhed (faktuel herkomst fra et andet sted) og kulturel forskellighed (normer og sprog anderledes end de danske). Selvom racegørelse var den primære markør for Victors forskellighed fra de hvide danskere, var det samtidigt en kendsgerning, at han kom fra et andet sted og til dels var opvokset i en anden kultur. Det interessante er dog, at forventningen om, at disse elementer var lig med hinanden, ikke ændrede sig væsentligt i løbet af hans levetid. Dette blev ved med at gælde, selvom hans omstændigheder tvang ham til at blive fuldstændigt integreret og assimileret til kulturel danskhed. Det viser,

at når det kommer til stykket, kan kulturel insider-position ikke kompensere for racemæssig forskellighed i den danske kulturelle (etno-nationale) logik. Der sættes stadig automatisk lighedstegn mellem ikke-hvidhed og fremmedhed. Disse forskelligheder er desuden konceptualiseret hierarkisk (Carby, 2019; Diallo, 2019; Hunter, 2021, 2023).

Victor Cornelins havde ikke noget valg og måtte tilpasse sig de sociale og racemæssige omgivelser, men derimod vænnede han sig aldrig til racismen. Det, konstant at blive benævnt som anderledes og værende mindre end et menneske, forblev fremmedgørende og skadeligt for ham. Pointen her er, at hans oplevelser ikke blot var afhængige af hans individuelle tilpasning. Oplevelserne med racisme var også et resultat af dynamikken mellem den specifikke hvide samfundsgruppe og konstruktionen af sorthed. Her er det relevant at minde om karakteristikaene ved det danske koloniale forhold til Dansk Vestindien på det tidspunkt. Selvom kolonierne var under dansk administration, var de hvide europæere, der slog sig ned der som plantageejere, handelsmænd osv., i høj grad fra andre europæiske lande. Historiker og forsker Neville A. T. Hall (1985, 1992) kaldte faktisk de danske kolonier *'empire without dominion'* med hentydning til hvor lille indflydelse dansk kultur reelt havde i Dansk Vestindien. Cirkulationen af viden til og fra øerne har derfor spredt sig i forskellige retninger snarere end en udveksling primært mellem den danske metropol og besiddelserne. Dette efterlod danskerne i København i relativ uvidenhed om sorte dansk-vestindere og øerne generelt.

I en kontekst, hvor racemæssig sorthed løbende konstrueredes som noget usædvanligt, blev spørgsmålet om en sort persons 'ægthed' – tommelfingeren på kinderne, trækken i håret – også gentaget i det uendelige. Forholdet mellem den danske offentlighed, den almene kollektive bevidsthed og repræsentationer af sorthed formede de konkrete møder med sorte afrikanere og afrikanske efterkommere. Det betød, at det hvide danske samfunds langsommelige tilpasning til den racemæssige diversitet når som helst kunne kaste Cornelins ud i komplekse kropslige og følelsesmæssige forstyrrelser. Dette var Cornelins' 'bur'. Fanon beskriver sådan en realitet som en hyper-bevidsthed om ens egen krop, ens hud, blodet, der ruser, og ens dirrende vrede over at blive reduceret. Vi kan tænke på Fanons ord som et intellektuelt udtryk for den passende vrede bag unge Victors spytten. "Det hvide blik," skriver Fanon, "det eneste gyldige, dissekerer mig allerede," og dekonstruerer dermed hans menneskelighed om og om igen, ved hvert eneste nye møde med en hvid person (Fanon 1952, 95).

FREMMEDGØRELSE SOM EKSISTENTIEL PRÆMIS I DANMARK

Ved at læse opmærksomt og lytte nøje efter, hvilke konnotationer racegørelsen som sort fremkalder i den danske forestillingsverden i ovenstående eksempler, kan vi se at Cornelins flere gange nævner måder, hvorpå hans 'ægthed' bliver testet af det hvide publikum. Sorthed opfattes som et lag, måske et kostume, udenpå på en forestillet, mere virkelig (og hvid) krop. Dennes ægthed bliver nødt til at blive bekræftet, ved at mærke, om håret og huden (farven) faktisk tilhører personens krop. På samme måde, gennem det hvide blik, må afrohår være en paryk, eller måske er den krusede tekstur kunstigt fremstillet – implicit, at det må være en manipulation af 'normalt' hår, forstået som glat, blondt hår. Det er karakteristisk for nordeuropæiske opfattelser af fysisk racialisering at eksteriørisere racemæssig sorthed (Essed, 1991; Habel, 2008; Kilomba, 2010; El-Tayeb, 2011; Wekker, 2016). Forestillingen om et sort subjekt bliver slet ikke begrebet, men derimod er der en hyper-fokusering på hudens farve, som opfattes som en ydre påføring og ikke som en hel legemlig tilstedeværelse. At betvivle sorte menneskers ægthed samt feticheringen af selve huden er den dag i dag en definerende del af dansk racismes udtryk og er ikke forbeholdt fortiden (Hunter, 2023). I den danske racialistiske forestillingsverden er det, som om sorthed og andre ikke-hvide kroppe ikke kan integreres i en verden, hvor fænotypisk variation eksisterer. I stedet fastholdes anderledeshed som noget afvigende, der altid holdes op mod den dominerende norm: racemæssig hvidhed som standard for menneskelighed.

De former for spektakularisering, som Victor og Alberta blev udsat for, var ikke udelukkende et produkt af deres tid. Men det er en almindelig vestlig opfattelse, at samfundet udvikler sig lineært i retning af mere og mere social lighed eller i det mindste tolerance. Men afhængigt af konteksten er synet af en sort person stadig spektakulært i Danmark

i det 21. århundrede (Hunter, 2021, 2023). Pointen hér er, at de dybt rodfæstede raciale forestillinger reproduceres over tid gennem diskurser og praksisser, der på én gang konstruerer og forstærker en bestemt forståelse af 'sandhed'. Dette gælder for eksempel normaliseringen af danskhed *som* hvidhed, men også selve menneskelighed/humanitet som grundlæggende hvid (Weheliye, 2014; Wynter, 2003). Men hvis vi tilgår antagelsen om progressivitet over tid anderledes, kunne vi spørge: hvorfor skulle racisme automatisk forsvinde blot på grund af tid? Hvis vi udfordrer gængse forestillinger om dansk uskyld, høj moral og progressivitet, kan det give plads til en kritisk lyttende praksis over for vidnesbyrd fra sorte danskeres liv og andre i margen af danskhed.

Med læsningen og analysen af Cornelins' liv, er det mit håb at illustrere måder hvorpå den kollektive erindring i høj grad er medvirkende til at fastholde nationale forestillinger både om fortiden og nutiden. Ved at læse Cornelins' selvbiografi i sin helhed og samtidigt læse mig ind i den kontekst, der omgav ham, har jeg belyst den ensidige historicitet, der dominerer den danske offentligheds hukommelse og repræsentationer af Victor Cornelins. Når jeg læser og lytter til, hvad Cornelins berettede, træder racismens mønstre frem gennem hans minder og hans traumer, altså de måder hvorpå racistiske oplevelser blev vækket igen og igen, sideløbende med at nye, dehumaniserende erfaringer byggede sig op. Det tegner derfor et ganske anderledes billede af hans livshistorie end den, hvor Tivolis menneskeudstilling var den eneste og værste form for dehumanisering, han oplevede. Snarere var den kolonialistiske kontekst rammesættende for hvor normal og kontinuerlig dehumanisering forblev i hans liv. Racisme var ikke enestående hændelser, men en struktur.

En sort feministisk, omsorgsfuld erindringspraksis som denne kan derfor bidrage til at belyse, hvordan den danske strukturelle racisme, og specifikt anti-sorthed, kan påvirke sorte personers selvforståelse. Netop fordi det ikke er isolerede hændelser, men derimod den kulturelle status quo, bliver det en eksistentiel præmis. Udover de mange konkrete former for vold og nedværdigelse, som sorte danskere erfarer gennem deres liv i Danmark, må de altid forholde sig til en diasporisk stedsløshed, som den danske etno-raciale nationalisme producerer. Victor Cornelins' raffinerede og dybt rørende erkendelse af sin racialiserede stedsløshed som præmis får lov at stå som et af de sidste ord, som en påmindelse om vigtigheden af modlæsninger fra margen (Hill Collins, 1986; hooks, 1989).

Hvorfor var jeg, Afrikas ætling, eller SØN AF DE SORTE, som Richard Wright siger, blevet ført op på disse nordlige strande? Hvorfor skulle jeg vedblivende betragtes som nær slægtning til aben, når alt i mit arbejde i og udenfor skolen lykkedes så godt? Var jeg alligevel kommet på den gale hylde? Hvis jeg ikke var det, hvorfor havde jeg fået hvid mands oplæring og dannelse, når jeg dybest set i andres øjne blev anset for en vild mand? Hvorfor var jeg i det hele taget sort, når mit liv levedes blandt hvide?

Gennem min læsning har jeg insisteret på at forstå Victor Cornelins som et almindeligt menneske og derimod det kolonialistiske, racialiserede hierarki som det ualmindelige og umenneskelige. En præmis, der producerer en eksistentiel krise. Denne normalisering af Cornelins' erfaringer er netop mulig fra min position som sort dansk forsker og min afrofeministiske metodologi. Det er ikke fordi historisk viden og afro-diasporiske danskeres perspektiver ikke er tilgængelige i danske arkiver. Snarere er den offentlige danske repræsentation fortsat præget af ensidig historicitet, yderst selektiv hukommelse, såvel som både underrepræsentation og misrepræsentation (Fanon, 1952; Hunter, 2018, 2023; Skadegård Thorsen, 2020). Især i forhold til, hvem der anerkendes som videnproducerende, forskere, eksperter, journalister. Jeg håber at denne modlæsning og holistiske lytning til hvordan Victor Cornelins faktisk fortalte sin historie, kan inspirere til grundige, kontekstualiserede og ambitiøse studier af de kostbare arkiver, vi trods alt har til rådighed. I skabelsen af afro-diasporiske danske teorier er *Fra St. Croix til Nakskov* skelsættende. Den udgør også generelt et spejl af Danmarks hverdagsracisme og kolonialitet. Den bør som minimum læses i sin helhed og ideelt forstås gennem sin grundlæggende sorte subjekt- og erfaringsposition i en hvid verden, hvorfra den er skrevet.

NOTES

[1] Nakskov lokalhistoriske arkiv: A1064/109 – 2000/22 og A1064/144.

[2] Nakskov lokalhistoriske arkiv: A1064/114;117;118.

[3] Hvis man laver en simpel online søgning på Cornelins' bog på dansk, kan man se de præcis samme udsnit og udeladelser fra side 22-27 fra hans selvbiografi blive reproduceret på tværs af officielle danske hjemmesider og personlige blogs. Det kan let se ud som om størstedelen faktisk ikke har læst bogen i sin helhed, men bare kopierer internt.

[4] "Man anskaffede et bur!!! Her blev Alberta og jeg anbragt, og tilstrømningen til den vestindiske afdeling blev større end tidligere, måske fordi der gik rygter om, at vi var menneskeæderbørn, der var farlige og ikke måtte gå løse. Der kom da også mange børn, som stak fingrene ind til os for at prøve, om vi bed på, og mange voksne kom med chokolade og andet mundgodt for at vise deres venlighed. Alberta, der var meget medgørlig, indkasserede mangen en lækkerbid i dagens løb, men jeg, hvem denne indespærring gjorde ganske desperat, lønnede enhver tilnærmelse, den være sig venlig eller uvenlig, med nøjagtig samme konfekt: -- en velrettet spytklat ---!!" (Cornelins, 1976, s. 27)

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Om kønsforståelsens kolonialitet og om kritik af ligestillings-feminismen

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ABSTRACT

The idea of gender equality, as used by the UN, the World Bank and generally in development work in the global South, is rooted in mainstream Western conceptions of gender in terms of male dominance/female subordination, often with gendered fields of action: men dealing with money, women with care. In this context 'gender equality' is understood as women entering into male domains of wage work and money, much less in terms of men taking over tasks of care. With a point of departure in the author's confrontation in matrilineal northern Mozambique with very different ideas and norms regarding relations between women and men, the paper follows two different lines of investigation: the first line of investigation looks into decolonial conceptions of gender as developed by African feminist thinkers Ifi Amadiume and Oyèrónké Oyèwùmi, later picked up by Latin American philosopher Maria Lugones in her concept: 'the coloniality of gender'. The other line of investigation looks into the historical background for Western conceptions of gender, including the decisive impacts of emerging capitalism and philosophy of modernity/Enlightenment, coinciding with extensive witch hunts. Gendered implications of the Western move from 'tradition' to 'modernity' are discussed, including critique of mainstream ideas of gender equality.

KEY WORDS

DECOLONIALITY, MODERNITY, GENDER EQUALITY FEMINISM

Udgangspunktet for denne artikel er min stigende frustration over de måder, hvorpå en vestlig kønsforståelse promoveres globalt. Det sker gennem institutioner som FN, Verdensbanken og diverse bistandsorganisationer, oftest uden mindste forsøg på indsigt i, hvordan lokale forståelser af køn og seksualitet eventuelt er skruet sammen. Denne fremfærd ligger i direkte forlængelse af kolonitidens mission og indførelse af vestlige normer og tankegange i de erobrede kolonier, og den har resulteret i det, som den argentinske feminist-filosof Maria Lugones (2007) kalder *the coloniality of gender*, 'kønsforståelsens kolonialitet'. Mit arbejde med disse problemstillinger har skærpet mit blik for, hvordan den almindelige vestlige kønsforståelse, som er både dikotomisk (mænd/kvinder) og hierarkisk (mænd over kvinder), producerer et begreb om kønsligestilling, som i virkeligheden er ligestilling på mændenes præmisser. Det er også det, der sker i bistandstankegangen, hvor 'gender equality' betyder, at kvinder skal ind på områder, hvor der før fortrinsvis var mænd. Virkelig ligestilling ville indebære, at mænd også skulle ind på områder, hvor der før fortrinsvis var kvinder.

Artiklens overvejelser har rod i mit eget liv. Jeg har i mange år arbejdet som underviser i udviklingsstudier på Roskilde Universitet, hvor jeg blev konfronteret med bistandssystemets tankegange. Samtidig arbejdede jeg forskningsmæssigt med antropologisk datamateriale og indtryk fra det nordlige Mozambique, hvortil jeg i start 1980erne var blevet udsendt af den mozambiquiske nationale kvindeorganisation, OMM *(Organização da Mulher Mozambicana)*. Disse to ting hang ikke sammen. Resultatet blev en tosporet forskningsagenda, det ene spor med fokus på mit mozambiquiske datamateriale: Hvordan det mon kunne forstås? Det andet spor med kritisk fokus på den vestlige kønsforståelse: Hvor kommer den fra, og hvorfor ser den ud, som den gør?

Artiklen har form af en komprimeret rapport fra disse forskelligtrettede men alligevel også sammenhængende, projekter. Det hele startede med Rødstrømpebevægelsen, den danske udgave af den nye kvindebevægelse, der opstod i store dele af den vestlige verden omkring starten af 1970erne, sideløbende med andre venstrefløjsbevægelser, som studenterbevægelsen og Vietnambevægelsen mod USA's krig i Vietnam. Jeg studerede kultursociologi ved Københavns Universitet og var aktiv i Rødstrømpebevægelsen fra 1971 og frem. Efter magisterafhandling om kønsteori i 1973 blev jeg ansat på det nyoprettede Roskilde Universitet, hvorfra jeg i 1980 fik orlov for at rejse til Mozambique, sammen med min kæreste og vores to små døtre.

Artiklens første afsnit handler om mit arbejde i OMM i Mozambique – et arbejde som umiddelbart var overraskende og modsætningsfyldt, men som på den lidt længere bane satte gang i nye tanker angående køn. Artiklens andet afsnit går ind i den nytænkning, som blev nødvendig; tankegange, som nu betegnes som dekolonial tænkning, og som er baggrunden for selve begrebet om kønsforståelsens kolonialitet. Jeg trækker i dette afsnit især på de dekolonialt tænkende nigerianske kønsforskere Ifi Amadiume (1987, 1997) og Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí (1997), som har haft stor betydning for mine bestræbelser angående forståelse af køn i Mozambique. Mozambique blev efter en elleve år lang befrielseskrig mod det portugisiske koloniherredømme i 1975 et uafhængigt land med en socialistisk inspireret regering, og med et politisk program der gik ud på så hurtigt som muligt at forvandle det mozambiquiske samfund fra et traditionsbundet småbrugs-landbrugssamfund til et moderne samfund med stor-skala landbrug og moderne industri: Fra tradition til modernitet (Arnfred, 2011).

Fordi den vestlige kvindefrigørelsesbevægelse fra slutningen af 1800 tallet, den såkaldte 'første bølge', i Danmark organiseret i Dansk Kvindesamfund stiftet 1871, klart var knyttet til det, som i den danske sammenhæng kaldes 'det moderne gennembrud', og fordi den form for kvindekamp, som jeg oplevede i det nordlige Mozambique, og som den dekoloniale tænkning hjalp mig med at sætte på begreb, var nærmest det modsatte, nemlig en *modstand* mod den form for modernitet, som den mozambiquiske regering ønskede at fremme, blev jeg nødt til at tænke nærmere over 'det med det moderne'. Artiklens tredje afsnit hører derfor til i forskningsagenda nummer to, som her handler om almindelige danske/nor-

diske forståelser af netop 'tradition' og 'modernitet'; hvordan kvinder er positioneret i disse forskellige sammenhænge, og hvordan kvindefrigørelse under disse betingelser typisk er blevet forstået som kamp for ligestilling med mænd.

Afsnit fire går videre med undersøgelser af, hvorfor vi i den vestlige verden forstår køn på den måde, som vi gør? Dikotomisk og hierarkisk, med mænd og kvinder som fast definerede størrelser og med mænd som de magtfulde? Mine oplevelser i det nordlige Mozambique samt mine læsninger af Amadiume's og Oyèwúmí´s værker havde jo vist, at sådan er det ikke nødvendigvis andre steder. Jeg har derfor kaldt dette afsnit 'Bagom det moderne: Kvindeundertrykkelsens historie i Europa'.

Afsnit fem 'Ligestillingsfeminismens globale sejrsgang' er en kritik af de måder, hvorpå en særlig vestlig kønsforståelse – udviklet under helt specifikke historiske omstændigheder i Europa fra 1500-tallet og frem – efter afslutningen af anden verdenskrig, gennem vestligt initierede institutioner som FN og Verdensbanken, promoveres som generelle og universelle. Artiklens sidste afsnit 'Ligestillingsfeminismens bagside' diskuterer ligestillingsfeminismens mangler, ikke bare i ikke-vestlig kontekst, men i også danske/nordiske sammenhænge.

MIN EGEN BAGGRUND FOR AT STILLE SPØRGSMÅL VED VESTLIG KØNSFORSTÅELSE

I 1980 tog jeg midlertidig afsked med både kvindebevægelse og venstrefløj i København og rejste sammen med min kæreste og vores to små børn til Mozambique, hvor befrielsesbevægelsen Frelimo (*Frente da Libertação de Moçambique*) få år forinden havde vundet krigen mod den portugisiske kolonimagt og nu stod med mangel på alle former for uddannet arbejdskraft. Fordi udviklingen i Mozambique under Frelimo var socialistisk inspireret, var der – her i den kolde krigs periode – ikke noget officielt bistandssamarbejde med lande som Danmark. Men solidaritetsorganisationer havde kontakt til Frelimo-regeringen, som ansatte folk fra vestlige lande som såkaldte *cooperantes*, dvs. ansættelse af mozambiquiske autoriteter på lokal løn. Jeg kom efter eget ønske til at arbejde i den nationale kvindeorganisation, OMM. I oktober 1982 blev jeg af OMM sendt nordpå til provinsen Cabo Delgado, der grænser op mod Tanzania, og hvor befrielseskampen mod portugiserne havde været mest intens.

Det var velkendt, at mange kvinder i det nordlige Mozambique havde været aktive i befrielseskampen, både som støtte for guerillakrigerne, og også selv som soldater. OMM (og Frelimo) regnede derfor med, at disse kvinder nu ville være en modernitetens fortrop for samfundsforandring i kamp mod traditionelle skikke og tankegange. Det var derfor en overraskelse for OMM-ledelsen i Maputo – og også for mig selv – at de kvinder, som jeg interviewede i Cabo Delgado, og som stort set alle sammen havde været aktive i befrielseskrigen, på ingen måde var til sinds at opgive deres traditionelle initieringsritualer. Disse ritualer blev af både Frelimo og af OMM betragtet som indbegrebet af kvindeundertrykkelse, men for kvinderne selv var de åbenbart meget vigtige. Hvordan kunne dette nu hænge sammen?

Jeg havde på dette tidspunkt i over et år interviewet kvinder i by og på land omkring hovedstaden Maputo i det sydlige Mozambique, hvor vi boede, og hvor OMM's hovedkvarter også befandt sig. Kvinderne i Cabo Delgado var langt de mest politisk bevidste og velartikulerede af alle de almindelige ikke-uddannede kvinder, jeg havde mødt. Hvordan kunne det være, at netop disse kvinder insisterede på fortsat at praktisere disse ifølge Frelimo/OMM forældede og kvindefjendske ritualer? På OMM's liste over kvindeundertrykkende skikke stod initieringsritualerne øverst (OMM, 1977). Jeg kæmpede i årevis med at få denne modsætningsfyldte situation sat på begreb. Med de kønsanalytiske redskaber, jeg havde med hjemmefra, kunne jeg ikke begribe, hvad det her gik ud på? Før årene i Mozambique havde jeg, i tilknytning til Rødstrømpebevægelsen, været kønsforskningsaktiv i flere år og skrevet både bøger og artikler. Men her i Cabo Delgado kom jeg til kort.

Faktisk var det først mange år efter, at jeg var vendt tilbage til Roskilde Universitet og efter at jeg havde stiftet bekendtskab med Ifi Amadiume's (1987, 1997) og Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí's (1997) bøger, at det lykkedes mig at få mit materiale fra Cabo Delgado sat på begreb. Maria Lugones' begreb om kønsforståelsens kolonialitet (2007) hjalp til med at få det hele til at hænge sammen. Det havde naturligvis været min egen medbragte kønsforståelse, der havde stillet sig i vejen for min forståelse af, hvad det handlede om for kvinderne i Cabo Delgado. Jeg kom – helt modsat OMM's og Frelimo's forståelse – til at se kvindernes ritualer som en slags 'women's rallies' – som kvinders mulighed for at styrke og udvikle det kvindefællesskab, som de nu følte truet af Frelimo's felttog for modernitet; en modernitet som i praksis betød en styrket patriarkalsk struktur og usynliggørelse af kvinders samfundsmæssige bidrag og positioner (se videre i Arnfred, 2011).

OM DEKOLONIAL TÆNKNING OG OM BEGREBET 'KØNSFORSTÅELSENS KOLONIALITET'

Udtrykket 'kønsforståelsens kolonialitet' (*the coloniality of gender*) blev lanceret af den argentinske feministiske filosof Maria Lugones i forlængelse af Anibal Quijano's begreb om 'magtens kolonialitet' (*the coloniality of power*) (Quijano, 2000), men også som en kritik af Quijano's ureflekterede overtagelse af et europæisk/vestligt syn på køn. Anibal Quijano var peruviansk sociolog og filosof og en af grundlæggerne af den 'dekoloniale skole' – en tankeretning som nægter at acceptere den påståede universelle gyldighed af europæiske/vestlige tankesæt, og som derfor bygger på tænkning med rødder i lokale tankeformer og i analyser, som tager højde for ikke-vestlige forhold.

Quijano's innovative begreb om magtens kolonialitet handler om kapitalisme set fra Latinamerika, hvor racialisering som undertrykkelsesform står centralt, med ideen om race som:

> a new mental category to codify the relations between conquering and conquered populations; the idea of 'race' as biologically structural and hierarchical differences between the dominant and the dominated. So those relations came to be considered as 'natural' (Quijano, 2000, s. 216).

Pointen hos Quijano er, at biologien produceres af magten, der er intet naturligt ved race; race er magtforhold fra start til slut. Efter kapitalens oversøiske ekspansion, først til Amerika og siden til Afrika og Asien, opstod ifølge Quijano en ny verdensorden baseret på ideen om race. Det er denne verdensorden, han sigter til med betegnelsen 'magtens kolonialitet' (2000, s. 218).

Forestillingen om race reducerede alle folkeslag rundt omkring til slet og ret ikke-hvide: Quijano anfører, hvordan de forskellige befolkningsgrupper - aztekerne, mayaerne, quechuaerne, inkaerne osv. - før europæernes ankomst var befolkningsgrupper med forskellig historie, forskellige sprog, forskellig hukommelse og identitet. Tre hundrede år senere havde de alle kun én identitet, og det var en racialiseret identitet. Nu var de alle sammen indianere (Quijano, 2000).

Sydafrikanske Kopano Ratele rapporterer tilsvarende fra Afrika:

> "There were no black men in this country before the arrival of the Europeans. 300 years ago black people were other things. They were amaZulu, amaXosa, amaNdebele, amaSwazi, basotho, batswana, khoi and san etc. … They had not yet been defined as black" (Ratele, 1998, s. 38).

Udover påpegning af race som magtforhold forklædt som biologi, er Quijano også optaget af de mentale konsekvenser af hele denne koloniale erobringshistorie, og ikke mindst af undertrykkelse af lokale vidensformer og af den kolonisering af forestillingsevnen, "colonization of the imagination" (Quijano, 2007, s. 169), som også fandt sted. Det, som tjente som rettesnor for kolonimagtens handlinger, var europæiske forståelser af modernitet og rationalitet, tankegange som blev udformede af blandt andre René Descartes. Descartes (1596-1650) sætter rationaliteten i højsædet: "Cogito ergo sum" – jeg tænker, altså er jeg til.

Den, der tænker, er en mand, en hvid mand, "the Man of Reason" (Lloyd, 1984). Desuden lancerer Descartes en form for dualistisk tænkning, som for det første deler verden op i todelte modsætninger, og for det andet værdisætter modsætningerne: det ene er bedre end (og/eller bestemmer over) det andet, altså *hierarkiske dikotomier*. Rationalitet/følelser; tanke/krop; menneske/natur; mand/kvinde – er typiske eksempler på denne type modsætninger. Det er i Descartes' system kun subjektet, det mandlige, hvide subjekt, der kan tænke og som har betydning. Denne type tænkning har været bestemmende for den europæiske forståelse, både af ikke-hvide, som Quijano understreger (2000), og af kvinder, hvilket så er den forståelse, som Lugones gør op med (2007).

Europæerne implementerede hierarkier alle vegne i kolonierne. Andre folkeslag blev anset som laverestående i et hierarki, som gik "from 'primitive' to 'civilized', from 'irrational' to 'rational', from 'traditional' to 'modern', from 'magic-mythic' to 'scientific', in sum to something that could be, in time, at best Europeanized or 'modernized'" (Quijano, 2000, s. 221). Quijano's tankegang videreføres af Lugones: "This way of knowing was imposed on the whole of the capitalist world as the only valid rationality and as emblematic of modernity" (Lugones, 2007, s. 192).

Lugones bygger på Quijano's arbejde, men hun tilføjer et kritisk blik på mainstream vestlige forståelser af køn. For der første, siger hun, er køn ikke noget med en kvinde/mand dikotomi. Hun citerer bl.a. Oyèwùmí's rapporter fra Nigeria om forståelser af køn, som ikke harmonerer med den kønsforståelse som den europæiske kolonimagt bragte med sig. Når Oyèwùmí skriver, at der ikke var nogen 'kvinder' i Nigeria, før europæerne kom til landet (1997, s. ix), handler det om, at der i det før-koloniale Nigeria ikke var en kategori af mennesker, som samlet set betragtedes som kvinder. Køn var i det hele taget ikke en kategori, og slet ikke en kategori, som havde med magt/ikke magt at gøre. Opfattelsen af kvinder som en kategori – og dertil en kategori, som var underlagt mænd – var noget, der kom med kolonialismen. Oyèwùmí skriver videre, citeret af Lugones: "For females, colonization was a twofold process of racial inferiorization and gender subordination. The creation of 'women' as a category was one of the very first accomplishments of the colonial state" (Lugones, 2007, s. 197).

På grund af europæernes kønnede blik blev koloniseringen i afrikanske lande gennemført i samarbejde med lokale mænd. De europæiske kolonimagter tog for givet, at kønsmagt i Afrika var struktureret på samme måde, som de kendte det hjemmefra, og at det naturligvis var mænd, der bestemte. I det omfang, hvor kvinder faktisk havde samfundsmæssig magt, forblev denne magt usynlig for det koloniale blik. Som rapporteret af både Amadiume (1987, 1997) og Oyèwùmí (1997) kunne kvinder i Nigeria, ligesom i andre dele af Afrika, have magtfulde sociale positioner, som høvdinge og ledere på linje med mænd. Men dette ændredes med kolonialismen; europæerne så kun mænd, og de installerede mænd i alle politisk vigtige positioner. Hvor der var et dobbelt mand/kvinde lederskab – ofte konstrueret på den måde, at mændene tog sig af sociale og økonomiske anliggender, som fordeling af jord, relationer til andre lokale grupper og til tilrejsende fremmede, mens kvinderne tog sig af de mere åndelige magisk/mystiske aspekter, såsom relationer til afdøde og endnu ufødte medlemmer af slægten (Amadiume, 1987a) – her så kolonimagten kun de mandlige høvdinge, som så på forskellig vis blev indrangerede ind i det koloniale politiske system. De kvindelige ledere gik under radaren, kolonimagten opdagede slet ikke deres eksistens.

Frelimo, den nye statsmagt i Mozambique, led af tilsvarende blindhed. Frelimo forstod sig selv som socialistisk, men angående forståelse af køn lignede de til forveksling den tidligere kolonimagt. Frelimo havde styr på de mandlige ledere, men de kvindelige ledere forblev usynlige for Frelimo, og kvinderne kunne derfor fortsætte deres virksomhed hele vejen igennem. Dette var eksempelvis tilfældet i det nordlige Mozambique, hvor jeg mødte de målbevidste kvinder, som satte hele den tankeproces i gang, hvori også denne artikel indgår.

Det var min læsning af Amadiume's og Oyèwùmí's værker, der åbnede mit blik for de anderledes kønsforhold mange steder i Afrika, og som muliggjorde begrebsliggørelse af de tilsyneladende modsætninger, jeg havde mødt i det nordlige Mozambique. Amadiume og Oyèwùmí analyserer i deres forskellige bøger (Amadiume 1987, 1997; Oyewumi 1997, 2016) hver deres oprindelsessamfund i henholdsvis det østlige (Igbo) og det vestlige (Yoruba) Nigeria. De understreger begge, at køn er samfundsmæssigt, ikke biologisk bestemt: Køn er ikke knyttet til bestemte kroppe, køn afhænger af kontekst og situation. Dette er også udtrykt ganske eksplicit af Amadiume i titlen på hendes første bog: *Male Daughters, Female Husbands* (1987). Og køn er ikke i sig selv en magtposition. Magt er ikke relateret til køn, men til slægt og alder. Nogle slægtsgrupper (på engelsk: *lineages*) kan være mere magtfulde and andre, og magt afhænger også af relativ alder (på engelsk: *seniority*). Desuden er køn ikke indbygget i sproget. Som Oyèwùmí skriver: "It is possible to hold a long and detailed conversation about a person without indicating the gender of that person … There is, however, considerable anxiety about establishing seniority in any social interaction" (1997, s. 40). Dette står i modsætning til størstedelen af europæiske sprog, hvor personer og køn knyttes sammen. Men sådan forholder det sig ikke med mange Afrikanske sprog: "Yoruba language is gender-free … [Also] Yoruba names are not gender specific" (Oyèwùmí, 1997, s. 29).

Tilsvarende med den køns-ubestemte betegnelse *oba*, der betyder 'regent' (Oyèwùmí, 1997, s. 30), på engelsk oversat til 'konge'; dette blev så – kombineret med Yorubaernes lister af navne på historiske regenter – til 'lister over konger', selv om mange af disse 'konger' måske var kvinder. Der foregår altså, ifølge Oyèwúmí, en *patriarkaliseringsproces* (1997, s. 29). Som hun også skriver et andet sted: Hver gang englænderne så en trone, forestillede de sig en mand siddende på den. De af Amadiume og Oyèwúmí beskrevne ikke-på-forhånd kønnede universer er alle, ved at blive registrerede og beskrevne af europæiske antropologer, blevet forståede ind i det for europæerne allerede eksisterende kønssystem.

En anden dekolonial pointe er begrebssætningen af moderskab. I den vestlige kønsforståelse indtager moderskab ofte en ambivalent dobbeltposition. På den ene side vurderes moderskab højt, både af mange kvinder (og mænd) som gerne vil have børn, og af den danske stat, herunder statsminister Mette Frederiksen og hendes ofte udtrykte bekymring for faldende fødselsrater. På den anden side betragtes kvinder fortsat ifølge statens egne økonomiske regnemodeller som en underskudsforretning, der koster mere for statskassen end mænd – et forhold, der påpeges kritisk af Emma Holten i bogen *Underskud* (2024). Betragtet i ligestillingsfeministisk kontekst bliver moderskab til en forhindring i ligestillingskapløbet med mænd - en forhindring, der helst skal afvikles så hurtigt som muligt.

I direkte opposition til denne vestlige mainstream-tænkning indfører Amadiume et 'moderskabsparadigme', for det første for at tilvejebringe, som hun skriver, "a shift of focus from man at the centre and in control to the primacy of the role of the mother/sister in economic, social, political and religious institutions" (1997, s. 80), og for det andet for at uddybe og begrebssætte moderskabets centrale betydning. Også på dette punkt tænker Amadiume og Oyèwúmí parallelt, hver med deres særlige fokus, men begge engagerede i samme begrebsmæssige kamp mod mainstream vestlig tænkning angående køn.

'TRADITION' VERSUS 'MODERNITET', MED KVINDERNES FRIGØRELSE I DET MODERNE

Det er mit synspunkt, at kønsforskning i Danmark/Norden har meget at lære af den dekoloniale tænkning, både angående racialisering og angående køn. Det er vigtigt at nedbryde det etnocentriske paradigme i vestlig tænkning, der har påvirket og formet kønsforskningen både i Danmark/Norden og globalt. Alligevel vil jeg også gerne forstå tidligere generationer af danske/nordiske kvinder, der så frigørelsen i det moderne. Det handler for eksempel om de skrivende kvinder i 1800-tallet, der som konsekvens

af den uanfægtet mandsdominerede kultur typisk var blevet overset, bl.a. af Georg Brandes, den ikoniske danske talsperson for 'det moderne gennembrud' i litteraturen.

Pil Dahlerup gjorde en historisk indsats ved med sin doktordisputats i 1984 at sætte fokus på det moderne gennembruds *kvinder*. I 2024 havde kunstmuseet Den Hirschsprungske Samling i København en udstilling og udgav en bog, *Kvindernes moderne gennembrud*, der handler om danske kvindelige billedkunstnere/malere i perioden 1880-1910. De fleste af disse kvindelige malere var blevet overset af både samtid og eftertid. Af de 23 malere, som udstillingsarrangørerne havde fundet frem, har mange indtil nu været helt ukendte i offentligheden. Det, som interesserer mig i denne sammenhæng, er disse 23 kvinders personlige liv, som de fremgår af de kunstnerbiografier, der afslutter udstillingskataloget (Bech & Rønberg, 2024, s. 278-325). Af de 23 kvinder levede otte alene, otte var gift – heraf to uden børn, to med ét barn og fire med 2-3 børn – og syv levede/boede sammen en anden kvinde, to af disse par med et adopteret barn. Kvinderne rejste meget og flere af dem havde omfattende internationale netværk. Det, jeg gerne vil vise her, er *omkostningerne* ved 'det moderne', fra kvinders side set. I praksis var det for mange kvinder et valg mellem familie eller karriere, her virksomhed som professionel billedkunstner. Det er på denne baggrund ikke så underligt, at moderskab blev valgt fra; for flertallet blev også ægteskab valgt fra: af de 23 var der 15 som valgte at bo alene, eller sammen med en anden kvinde.

Til trods for disse omkostninger – omkostninger, som på ingen måde var tilsvarende for mænd – blev 'det moderne' set som en frigørelsesvej for kvinder. Det er også denne vej, Simone de Beauvoir udstikker i bogen *Det andet Køn* (1949). Bogen beskriver udførligt europæiske kvinders underordnede situation, først og fremmest belyst gennem litteraturen – hovedsageligt litteratur skrevet af mænd, hvori kvinder figurerer. Beauvoir protesterer imod denne situation; hendes bog er et kampskrift imod kvinders underordning. Løsningen for Beauvoir bliver 'ligestillingsfeminismen', som handler om at kvinder skal tilegne sig og indgå i mændenes verden. Kvinders verden beskrives ikke attraktivt hos Beauvoir. Mændenes verden er spændende, kreativ, indbyder til skabende virksomhed, 'transcendens'. Hvorimod kvinders verden er kedsommelig, tvangsmæssig, fuld af gentagelser, 'immanens' (Beauvoir, 1949/1965, s. 161). Kvinder er trælbundne, underlagt arten; svangerskab og moderskab beskrives som en pinefuld belastning fra start til slut; "udmattende, kræver tunge ofre … fødslerne deformerer kroppen og gør kvinden gammel før tid" (s. 57) – der er ingen ende på kvinders trængsler som konsekvens af svangerskab og moderskab. Den ligestilling, som Beauvoir argumenterer for, er éntydigt ligestilling på mændenes præmisser.

Simone de Beauvoir's tænkning var nyskabende på det tidspunkt, hvor hun skrev denne bog. Bare det at pege på og protestere mod de europæiske samfunds klare mandsdominans var vigtigt og nyt. Det problematiske er den betydning, som bogen har fået – helt op til i dag. I Rødstrømpebevægelsens tid i 1970erne læste vi ikke Beauvoir. Mange af os så os selv som socialister; vores paroler handlede om klassekamp og kvindekamp. Planen var, at lave samfundet om, så der blev plads til både kvinder, mænd og børn på nye måder; det var ikke bare kvinderne der skulle ud på arbejdsmarkedet, mændene skulle også ind i familielivet. Den Beauvoir'ske ligestillingsfeminisme var ikke attraktiv i den mere venstrefløjs-prægede del af Rødstrømpebevægelsen. Men ting flyttede sig lige så stille. Indflydelsen fra USA gjorde sig gældende, og i Linda Nicholson's autoritative antologi fra 1997: *The Second Wave,* indtager Beauvoir en prægnant position.

Den dekoloniale tænkning er for mig at se et effektivt modsvar mod Simone de Beauvoir. De Afrikanske dekoloniale feministers fokus på moderskabets centrale placering i deres egne samfund åbner op for helt andre typer af samfundsanalyse, hvor forældreskab og omsorg regnes med.

BAGOM 'DET MODERNE': KVINDEUNDERTRYKKELSENS HISTORIE I EUROPA

Sideløbende med min opdagelse af de dekoloniale feministiske tankegange begyndte jeg at spekulere på, hvordan det mon kunne være, at vi i Vesten/Europa tænker køn på den måde, som vi gør: Kvinder som underordnede i forhold til mænd; mandlig dominans, kvindelig underordning. Vi troede i Rødstrømpebevægelsens tid – fejlagtigt – at køn i hele verden hang sammen på denne vis: "*The universal subordination of women*" (se f.eks. Young et al., 1981). Det var også derfor det tog så lang tid for mig – efter mine oplevelser i Cabo Delgado – at finde ud af, at sådan var det altså *ikke*. Det viste sig, at køn opfattes, tænkes og leves på andre måder andre steder i verden. Og faktisk også i andre tider i Danmark/Norden, har opfattelsen af og tænkning om køn set anderledes ud.

Med tiden er jeg kommet til at betragte den vestlige kønstænkning – den med mandlig dominans/kvindelig underordning – som ikke bare en vestlig ø i verden, men også en ø i historien. De to bøger, som især har inspireret mig i den historiske analyse – Maria Mies 1986: *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale,* og Silvia Federici 2004: *Caliban and the Witch* – peger begge på den økonomiske/kapitalistiske udviklings helt centrale betydning for tænkning om køn i Europa. Hvis man går tilbage i vores egen før-kapitalistiske europæiske historie, finder man kønsforhold, som minder mere om Amadiume's og Oyèwúmí's rapporter fra Nigeria end om Simone de Beauvoir's beskrivelser af mændenes frie verden og moderskabets forbandelser.

En anden bog, som har inspireret på tilsvarende vis, er Grethe Jacobsen: *Kvindeskikkelser og kvindeliv i Danmarks middelalder* (1986). Jacobsen er historiker; hun skriver om, hvordan ikke bare bondebruget på landet, men også håndværkerhusholdningen i byerne var tokønnet. En håndværksmester var simpelthen et par, siger Jacobsen: mand og kone. "Den ideelle økonomisk og sociale enhed i lauget var familieværkstedet … Mesterkonen sørgede for indkøb af råvarer, salg af værkstedets produktion, og for madlavning, pasning og pleje af svende, lærlinge, tjenestepiger og børn" (1986, s. 121). Jacobsen understreger komplementariteten i henholdsvis mænds og kvinders arbejde: Forskellige, men lige nødvendige. "Der er ikke tegn på, at det ene køns arbejde blev vurderet højere end det andet. Begges arbejde var nødvendigt for at familien og samfundet kunne fungere" (s. 109). Beskrivelsen afspejler en dualistisk, men ikke hierarkisk, kønsforståelse.

I Jacobsens analyse spiller Reformationen en vigtig rolle for forskydningen af kønsligevægten i retning af mandlig dominans, i hvert fald i Nordeuropa; Reformationen prægede folks måder at tænke på og dermed også deres opfattelser af mænd og kvinder. Der var dels ændringerne i kirkelivet, hvor Jomfru Maria, der tidligere havde haft en central position som kvinde og mor, nu blev tilsidesat til fordel for en rent mandlig guddommelighed bestående af Fader og Søn. Samtidig blev normer og regler for borgerklassens liv slået fast; for Luther var kvindens plads i hjemmet, som hustru og moder. Ægteskabet står centralt og angiver kønsrollerne: kvinden som husmor, manden som forsørger. Kvinders verden indskrænkes til hjemmet og underlægges ægtemanden (Roper, 1998).

Det mest brutale ved Reformationen var dog heksejagten. Den tyske feminist og sociolog Maria Mies skriver indsigtsfuldt om hekseprocesserne. Hun peger på, at heksejagten ikke, som man måske kunne tro, var den mørke middelalders sidste krampetrækninger, men tværtimod "a manifestation of the rising modern society" (Mies, 1986, s. 83), det samfund, hvor kvinder ikke har plads. Den italienske-amerikanske forsker Silvia Federici beskriver tyve år senere heksejagten som "a war against women," tidsmæssigt sammenfaldende med kapitalismens opkomst (Federici, 2004, s. 14).

Reformationen blev indført i Danmark 1536, Den første heksebrænding fandt sted bare fire år senere, i 1540. Peder Palladius, netop udnævnt som Sjællands biskop, drog rundt i sit stift for at oplyse almuen om den nye lære, herunder også at advare mod troldkvinder og troldmænd. Kloge mænd og koner, som ellers ofte nød respekt og agtelse lokalt, blev nu

mistænkeliggjort. Langt de fleste af disse kloge folk var kvinder. Selv om mænd også kunne være troldfolk, var kvinder i klart overtal blandt dem, som i heksejagtens storhedstid – i Danmark fra 1540 til 1693 – blev brændt på bålet. Ifølge gængs historisk periodisering er 'middelalderen' navnet på den periode, der slutter med Reformationen. Når man taler om 'den mørke middelalder' er det set fra Palladius' synspunkt de århundreder, der ligger før "evangelii klare lys og dag," (Wittendorf, 1984). Denne synsvinkel er stadig dominerende, men set fra kvinders synspunkt er det anderledes. Ikke fordi samfundet ikke også i middelalderen havde været patriarkalsk, men det var patriarkalsk på en anden måde, med større råderum for kvinder. Ifølge Jacobsen blev 1500 tallet "det århundrede, hvor kvinder langsomt, men sikkert tabte terræn med hensyn til mulighed for udfoldelse på egne præmisser, både på det økonomiske, på det sociale og på det religiøse plan" (Jacobsen 1986, s. 165).

Jeg er med tiden kommet til at anskue både Reformationen og hekseprocesserne som helt centrale for den kønsmæssige forskydning, der sker denne periode: fra et tilsyneladende nogenlunde kønsbalanceret samfund med forskellige arbejdsopgaver for mænd og kvinder, uden at det ene køns arbejde blev vurderet højere end det andet, til et langt mere éntydigt patriarkat, hvor kvindens rolle i hjemmet som hustru og moder bliver underlagt ægtemanden. Disse ændringer bliver endnu tydeligere med den begyndende industrialisering, hvor de mandlige og de kvindelige funktioner, som i før-industrielle samfund havde fundet sted i samme fysiske enhed – bondebruget, håndværksvirksomheden – bliver skilt ad i offentligt og privat, med fabrikken og lønarbejdet, den mandlige sfære, på den ene side og på den anden side hjemmet med det ubetalte husarbejde som den kvindelige sfære.

Tidens billedsprog med videnskab (mænd) overfor natur og trolddom (kvinder) stemmer overens med Palladius' og protestantismens sprog med evangeliets lys overfor papismens mørke. Samtidig ændres den overordnede metafor for naturen i denne periode fra noget levende: en organisme, en livgivende moder – til noget dødt: en ressource, en mekanik. Dels legitimerer denne nye metaforik de overgreb på naturen, som kapitalismen lagde op til, dels flytter den tyngdepunktet fra det kvindelige – naturen som livgivende moder – til det mandlige: naturen som lydigt og passivt objekt for mandlig beherskelse. Carolyn Merchant beskriver i bogen *The Death of Nature* (1980) denne afgørende omvæltning, som tidsmæssigt sammenfalder med både begyndende kapitalisme og begyndende kolonisering. Kolonisering , kapitalisme og modernitet hænger sammen. Som sagt af Walter Mignolo, en hovedteoretiker indenfor den dekoloniale tankeretning: "Coloniality is constitutive of modernity – there is no modernity without coloniality," (Mignolo 2011, s. 3).

LIGESTILLINGSFEMINISMENS GLOBALE SEJRSGANG

Dekoloniale teoretikere bruger Quijanos begreb om kolonialitet til at påpege, hvordan de økonomiske og sociale relationer, som blev etableret under kolonialismen, ikke ophørte, selv om de tidligere koloniserede områder for langt de flestes landes vedkommende blev formelt uafhængige stater i perioden efter anden verdenskrigs afslutning i 1945.

En vigtig faktor i denne sammenhæng var USA's interesse i at bryde de koloniale bånd, der bandt lande i det globale syd til europæiske magter; USA støttede derfor uafhængighedsbølgen og var også initiativtager til et nyt verdensomspændende økonomisk system, hvor den amerikanske dollar fik en central placering. De nye globale økonomiske institutioner, der i denne sammenhæng blev oprettet, Verdensbanken, (oprindeligt IBRD *The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development*) og *International Monetary Fund* (IMF), har begge hovedkvarter i USA. Det handlede nu ikke mere – i hvert fald ikke formelt – om udbytning af kolonierne, men derimod om støtte til økonomisk og samfundsmæssig udvikling. *United Nations*/FN blev ligeledes oprettet kort efter anden verdenskrigs afslutning, også med hovedkvarter i USA.

Formelt og ideologisk lagde de globale magthavere vægt på at understrege bruddet med kolonialismen og at påpege, at der nu begyndte noget nyt. Dekoloniale tænkere peger typisk på andre aspekter. "Coloniality is different from colonialism," skriver den puerto ricanske filosof, Maldonado-Torres. Men mange ting er alligevel de samme: "Coloniality … refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations" (Maldonado-Torres 2007, s. 243). Ndlovu-Gatsheni, historiker fra Zimbabwe, er enig: "Colonialism [was] a constitutive part of Euro-North American-centric modernity … [but] the dismantling of direct colonial administrations did not give rise to a 'postcolonial world'" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, s. 485-486). Derfor blev begrebet om 'kolonialitet' relevant. "Today, African leaders continue to manage and maintain the global system after replacing direct colonial rulers. … Globalization is, today, still driven by coloniality on a world scale" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015, s. 486).

Dette betyder også, at den globale verden, vi har i dag, stadig bærer dybe præg af koloniale magtrelationer. De begreber og tankegange, som aktuelt anvendes af internationale institutioner, har rødder i koloniale magtforhold. I starten blev økonomisk udvikling i de tidligere kolonilande set som noget, der først og fremmest angik mænd, men hen ad vejen kom kvinder i stigende grad på banen, både i de FN-orkestrerede udviklingssammenhænge og også i Verdensbankens programmer.

Med hensyn til arbejdsdelingen mellem Verdensbanken, IMF og FN kan man se det sådan, at FN sørger for en diskurs, der på passende måde integrerer kvinder i den globale udviklingstænkning (som har udgangspunkt i den vestlige verden og i en vestlig kønsforståelse), mens Verdensbanken og IMF tager sig af den økonomiske iscenesættelse. Dette er baggrunden for striben af *UN World Conferences for Women* i slutningen af det tyvende århundrede, fra den første i Mexico City 1975, over konferencerne i København 1980, og i Nairobi 1985, til den fjerde *UN World Conference for Women* in Beijing i 1995. Federici er kritisk i forhold til disse FN initiativer: "UNs self-appointment as the agency in charge of promoting women's rights enabled it to channel the politics of women's liberation within a frame compatible with the needs and plans of international capital and the developing neoliberal agenda," siger hun (2012, s. 98).

Det, der skete i løbet af disse konferencer var ikke mindst, at et fælles globalt bistandssprog angående kvinder og udvikling blev etableret. Ifi Amadiume beskriver, på baggrund af hendes egen deltagelse i flere af disse konferencer, hvordan sprogbrugen skiftede "from a community or grassroots-articulated focus to professional leadership imposed from above. [With this shift] issues and goals have become repetitive in a fixed global language, and discourse is controlled by paid UN and other donor advisers, consultants and workers (Amadiume, 2000, s. 14). Amadiume påpeger også, hvordan selve den hyppige afholdelse af FN konferencer i start 1990erne - *Human Rights* konferencen i Wien 1993 og *Social Summit* i København 1995, blandt flere andre – bidrog til, at deltagerne begyndte at tale det samme sprog og bruge de samme begreber. Denne sproglige ensretning på vestlige præmisser udtrykker lige præcis det, Lugones (2007) beskriver med begrebet *kønsforståelsens kolonialitet*: Forhold angående køn bliver formuleret og forstået i et globalt standardiseret sprog med rødder i en vestlig kønsforståelse.

For kvinder betød Verdensbankens *Structural Adjustment* programmer – i Mozambique fra slut 1980erene og frem – blandt andet, at kvinderne, dersom de da ikke direkte blev fordrevet fra deres jord, i tillæg til den subsistensproduktion, som de hele tiden havde stået for, nu også skulle deltage i diverse "*income generating programmes*" og/eller "*micro credit schemes*" (World Bank, 2012). Structural Adjustment handlede overordnet om privatisering af tidligere statsejede virksomheder og nedskæring af offentlige udgifter, kort sagt en markedsorienteret økonomi. Kvinders 'frigørelse' gennem markedsøkonomien understreges. Kvinder i det Globale Syd opfattes *a priori* som undertrykte; 'empowerment' peger på en vej ud af un-

dertrykkelsen, en vej som typisk handler om penge.

Devisen er, at kvinderne, som i forvejen står for det meste af subsistensproduktionen, herudover også skal involveres i pengeøkonomien: uden pengeøkonomi ingen kapitalakkumulation. Denne ekstra arbejdsbelastning bliver i Verdensbankens sammenhæng tryllet om til kvindefrigørelse og kønsligestilling. *Gender Equality and Development* strategien søsættes i Verdensbankens *World Development Report* 2012 (World Bank, 2012). Her lancerer Verdensbanken *gender equality* som en '*win-win*' situation: kvinderne vinder og økonomien gør ligeså.

Sådan forholder det sig ikke nødvendigvis set fra kvindernes side. Nogle allerede velstillede kvinder kan måske drage fordel af Verdensbankens programmer; for andre bliver det bare endnu mere arbejde og endnu større fattigdom. Grundlæggende er det 'kønsforståelsens kolonialitet' (Lugones, 2007) som politisk operativt begreb, den vestlige ligestillings idé brugt som frihedsfane for kvinder i ikke-vestlige lande. Denne tilgang kører nu verden over. Med kønsligestilling og "empowerment" i front, i praksis i form af lønarbejde, mikrokredit eller hvad det nu kan være. I virkeligheden er denne form for kønsligestilling kapitalismens værk, som bl.a. bidrager til at usynliggøre alt det andet arbejde, som kvinderne også laver – typisk i form af subsistensproduktion, børnefødsler, børnepasning, husarbejde med videre.

LIGESTILLINGSFEMINISMENS BAGSIDE

Et hovedproblem ved ligestillingsfeminismen er netop denne usynliggørelse af alt, som ikke omfattes af pengetransaktioner. Dét gælder både i Afrika, og i den vestlige verden. Mange mennesker værdsætter givetvis det, som ligger udenfor pengenes verden, som det vigtigste i livet: venskaber, kærlighed, sociale relationer i det hele taget, omsorg. Emma Holtens bog, *Underskud. Om værdien af omsorg* (2024), peger på dette forhold. Holten påviser, hvordan alt det, der ligger udenfor vareøkonomien anskues som noget, der bare står "til rådighed". Det gælder naturen, luft og vand, men også omsorg – der oftest er *kvindelig* omsorg. Som Holten skriver i sin kritik af den klassiske økonomiske videnskab, grundlagt af Adam Smith: "Omsorg fremstilles som en uendelig ressource. Hvis der er et barn, der hyler, en 50-årig moralfilosof, der skal have frokost, eller en syg person, der har brug for hjælpende hånd, så skal der nok være en kvinde, der ordner det," (2024, s. 79). Målestokken, det der gør økonomi til en videnskab, bliver *priser*. I samfundslivet er der dog, som alle véd, en hel del vigtige ting, der ikke handler om priser. Som Holten konstaterer: "Vi lever omgivet af et økonomisk sprog baseret på, at gensidig afhængighed ikke eksisterer" (2024, s. 61). Det som usynliggøres af det økonomiske sprog, viser sig i høj grad at være kvinders ulønnede indsats for at tage sig af børn og syge, pleje sociale relationer og i det hele taget sørge for, at hverdagen kan fungere. Hovedparten af disse ting kan sagtens udføres af mænd, men på baggrund af den kønsmæssige magtstruktur er det blevet sådan, at det meste af det ubetalte arbejde er havnet hos kvinderne.

Dette betyder også, at ligestillingsfeminismens fejrede facade, med majoritet-kvinders indmarch på chefkontorerne, i markante lederstillinger og politiske toppositioner med videre, skjuler en mindre celeber bagside i form af husarbejde og børnepasning, der nu ofte varetages af andre kvinder fra andre samfundslag, tit også fra andre lande, til en ringe løn. I det Marxist-feministiske manifest *Feminism for the 99%. A Manifesto*, udgivet 2019 af den amerikansk feminist-filosof Nancy Fraser m.fl, kaldes ligestillingsfeminismen slet og ret for *corporate feminism* (2019, s. 1), 'direktionsfeminisme'. Dekoloniale feminister kalder denne type feminisme for *kolonial feminisme:*

> This feminism wears heels, suits, and uses bankcards. They look at themselves in the mirror as 'actresses' of a society and not as subjects of a collective political change. It is a feminism, which has disposed the spontaneous organizing of women, and neutralized it in non-governmental organizations, foundations, academies and political parties (Rodriques Castro, 2021, s. 4).

Denne koloniale feminisme – som kan iagttages mange steder, og som udøves ikke kun af rådgivere

og konsulenter i FN og i Verdensbanken, men også af vestlige kvinder og mænd i mangfoldige NGOer – er det praktisk-politiske udtryk for 'kønsforståelsens kolonialitet'.

KONKLUSION

Artiklens gennemgang og diskussion af 'kønsforståelsens kolonialitet', som udtryk for den vestlige kønsforståelses globale sejrsgang, på bekostning af andre kønsforståelser andre steder i verden, rummer en række pointer. For det første er det artiklens formål at vise, at den vestlige kønsforståelse – som generelt karakteriseres ved et dikotomisk, hierarkisk mand/kvindeforhold, hvor kvinder er den underordnede part: '*the universal subordination of women*' – ikke er en universel forståelse, og at kønsforhold andre steder ofte opfattes på andre måder. For det andet er det også et formål at undersøge den vestlige kønsforståelses historiske rødder i Europas ganske særlige historie, med Reformation og heksejagt; og med begyndende kapitalisme og kolonisering i kombination med nye tankegange i forhold til naturen, samt med en moderne filosofi, der direkte udstikker et dikotomisk, hierarkisk mand/kvindeforhold, og hvor frigørelsesvejen for kvinder bliver at erobre en plads i mændenes verden. Den tredje pointe handler om den resulterende ligestillingsfeminisme, som nedvurderer og usynliggør de aspekter af kvinders liv – herunder moderskabet – som ikke passer ind i ligestillingsmodellen. Ikke des mindre går denne ligestillingsfeminisme nu sin sejrsgang globalt, som led i FNs og Verdensbankens bestræbelser på at institutionalisere vestlige normer overalt. Det er ikke mindst i denne sammenhæng, at begrebet om 'kønsforståelsens kolonialitet' kan bruges til kritisk at pege på vestlige kønsnormers indflydelse og magt.

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Contemporary Development of Qassaaneq in Iserdor, East Kalaallit Nunaat

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the contemporary development of *qassaaneq,* which is the manual removal of fat from sealskin using an *ulu* (crescent-shaped knife) in Iserdor (Isortoq), East Kalaallit Nunaat (East Greenland), exploring the theme of fluidity and adaptability of Kalaallit (Greenlandic-Inuit) gendered roles in sealskin production. This study contributes to management and organization studies by centering Kalaallit perspectives on work and organizing. Mainstream knowledge production in the field is constructed by coloniality which marginalizes non-Western and Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and understanding work and organization. Drawing on fieldwork, this study explores how the Iserdor community organizes *qassaaneq* for sealskin trade, examining the tensions and efforts to sustain *qassaaneq* and their visions for future. The findings reveal how the community navigates tensions between colonial structures and their Indigenous worldview, offering insights into alternative ways shaped by their values and practices.

KEY WORDS

COLONIALITY, MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATIONS STUDIES, KALAALLIT NUNAAT, GENDERED ROLES, SEALSKIN

INTRODUCTION

This article illuminates a localized way of organizing sealskin production in the hunting community called Iserdor (Isortoq) in East Kalaallit Nunaat (East Greenland) with approximately 50 inhabitants where sealskin trading is the primary economic activity. Drawing on interviews with Iserdor hunters and women from 2021, the analysis focuses on the contemporary development of *qassaaneq*, which is the removal of fat from sealskin by using an *ulu*, a crescent-shaped knife. Historically practiced by Inuit women in the Arctic (Peter et al., 2002), this article explores the fluidity of gendered roles and adaptability of *qassaaneq* as part of broader efforts to sustain and develop sealskin production. These localized practices stand in contrast to historic representations that have mischaracterized Kalaallit (Greenlandic-Inuit) sealing practices as male-dominated (Williamson, 2011) and belonging to the past without any connection to contemporary society (Graugaard, 2020; Pfeifer, 2019). Instead, this study highlights how *qassaaneq* in Iserdor is a living, adaptive practice with ongoing economic, social, and cultural significance to Kalaallit.

This article engages with the coloniality of management and organizations knowledge (MOK) that has historically privileged Western epistemologies that largely embrace the idea of unbridled economic growth while marginalizing alternative epistemologies (Banerjee et al., 2021). Coloniality operates by imposing a modern, colonial, and gendered system that positions the white, bourgeois, European male as the fully developed human above other genders, races, and non-humans (Lugones, 2010). Those who have been deemed inferior, irrational, primitive, and traditional have been *Othered* from knowledge production. As a result, non-Western and Indigenous experiences and perspectives remain underexplored, especially in the English language (Cuoto et al., 2019; Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Manning, 2021).

The article is organized into five sections. First, the research setting in Iserdor to provide context about the community. Second, the theoretical framework addresses the coloniality of MOK, situating the research within discussions on colonial power structures that marginalize non-Western Indigenous ways of organizing. Third, the methods section describes a decolonizing research approach as an Indigenous scholar. Fourth, the analysis examines the efforts and tensions involved in sustaining *qassaaneq* and explores the Iserdor community's aspirations for the future of sealskin production. Finally, the conclusion summarizes key contributions of the study.

RESEARCH SETTING: SEALSKIN PRODUCTION IN ISERDOR

Iserdor is located in the Ammassalik region of East Kalaallit Nunaat where Tasiilaq serves as the main town alongside surrounding settlements: Kulusuk, Kuummiit, Sermiligaaq, and Tiilerilaaq (Tiniteqilaaq). The Ammassalik region has a distinctive history, culture, traditions, and language compared to West and North Kalaallit Nunaat. Eastern Kalaallit were perceived as less developed than Western Kalaallit by Danish authorities and were thus excluded from Danification policies from the 1950s that included the Danification and industrialization of West Kalaallit Nunaat (Hendriksen, 2013; Markussen, 2024). As a result, the fishing industry remains underdeveloped, leaving communities like Iserdor reliant on sealskin trading for income.

Records from 1942 describe Iserdor as a permanent settlement consisting of six stone and turf houses, one also functioning as a school and another as a church (Hovelsrud-Broda, 1999). Today, all buildings are wooden and Iserdor is equipped with key public infrastructure: helipad, electricity, school, church, and general store called Pilersuisoq. In 2021, there were four to six hunters in Iserdor throughout the year. Other community members were mainly occupied in the public sector.

Iserdor has a service house called Sullissivik that has a room for *qassaaneq* and another room with four chest freezers to store sealskins. The Sermersooq Municipality employs one person to facilitate sealskin trading, and two older women to perform *qassaaneq* when the hunters come back from hunting. After *qassaasut* (those who carry out *qassaaneq*) remove the fat from sealskin, the sealskin is stored in a bag with salt in the freezer until it is transported to the headquarters of the national sealskin company Great Greenland in Qaqortoq, South Kalaallit Nunaat. Great Greenland is a state-owned enterprise subsidized by the government to finance sealskin trading with hunters. Great Greenland receives approximately DKK 26 million every year in government support. Its societal role is to help support livelihood for hunters in remote areas with few alternative sources of income (Departement for Finanser og Ligestilling, 2023). Thus, a reduction or elimination of government subsidies to sealskin trading could increase hunters' dependency on social aid or prompt migration from settlements and smaller towns to larger towns (Garde, 2013).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The field of management and organizations studies (MOS) has suffered from epistemic coloniality in the last 170 years (Ibarra-Colado, 2006). Coloniality refers to a pattern of power in which Eurocentrism has enabled the reproduction of territorial, racial, and epistemic domination relationships after the end of colonial administrations (Cuoto et al., 2021; Grosfoguel, 2002; Quijano, 2000). The pattern works by displacing and marginalizing the bodies, actions, ideas, and knowledge of the Global South which, from the ontology of coloniality, is considered non-modern (Ibarra-Colado, 2006; Manning, 2021). It is the ideas of the male, white, and bourgeois philosophical thought that have been naturalized to represent the neutral, objective, and universal truth in the field of MOS, and as a consequence, denying others access to their own representation (Gherardi, 2009; Manning, 2021; Nkomo, 1992).

The epistemic erasure also manifests in how organizing practices within non-Western and Indigenous communities are represented. For instance, in the context of Kalaallit Nunaat, the ontology of coloniality has shaped representations of hunting-related activities as exclusively dominated by men, erasing the interdependent nature between men and women and the significant contributions of women to the production and development of hunting economy such a sealskin (Williamson, 2011). According to Poppel (2015), researchers generally agree that, prior to colonization, the division of labor in Inuit communities was gendered, with men primarily engaging in hunting and women assuming reproductive roles, which reproduce the colonial and patriarchal gaze. By contrast, Williamson (2011) argues that women's role in society extended far beyond reproductive responsibilities as they also played an integral role in hunting-related activities across various contexts. It was the woman's responsibility to prepare sealskin in various ways according to its use such as for making clothes, *qaannat* (qajaq, plural), or to sell sealskin (Peter et al., 2002). In Iserdor, such interdependent gendered roles have been documented over time. A 1962 study (Sutton, 1964) and subsequent research in 1999 (Hovelsrud-Broda, 1999) describe gendered division of labor in which men and women maintained mutual respect and interdependence within the community.

While the logic of coloniality has colonized the epistemic, cultural, social, and political systems, the logic of coloniality has also imposed capitalism as an economic and civilizing force to the point where people cannot consider any other alternative (Dussel & Ibarra-Colado, 2006 in Manning, 2021). In doing so, the logic of coloniality also manifests itself in what has become taken-for-granted assumption about growth as a central tenet of organizational and economic activity. Growth is understood as progress which aligns with the colonial narratives that prioritize accumulation, expansion, and extraction (Banerjee et al., 2021). This naturalization of capitalist systems has created a monoculture of economically rational organizations, erasing other modes of organizing that

value collective well-being over capitalist imperatives (Cuoto et al., 2021).

In Kalaallit Nunaat, this logic is visible in contradictory positions on the future of sealskin trading. Some politicians argue that continued subsidies for sealskin trading are essential as sealskin trading helps to support the livelihoods of hunters with few sources of alternative income. By contrast, a 2023 government report recommends phasing out sealskin trading, framing it as socio-economically unsustainable and claiming that it diverts potential labor from other industries that need labor (Departement for Finanser og Skat, 2023). Ending the subsidies and phasing out sealskin trading would have significant economic and cultural consequences for those whose livelihoods depend on it such as in Iserdor.

METHODS AND FIELDWORK

Any research conducted *in* and *on* Indigenous Peoples raises sensitive and complex issues of power relations between researcher and research-participants, subjectivity due to researcher positionality, and in relation to that, epistemic interpretation (Banerjee & Tedmanson, 2010; Smith, 1999). In relation to this study, I recognize my positionality as Nuummioq (someone from Nuuk), educated from Western universities on American and Scandinavian business principles, and have migrated to Denmark. On one hand, I hold a privileged position to have insider knowledge about our collective history, culture, and traditions as Kalaallit. For instance, my grandmother has worked with sealskin, I have tried performing *qassaaneq* as part of school curriculum, and I come from generations of hunters and fishermen. On the other hand, I am an outsider in Iserdor, a community with its own distinctive language, history, and culture. Fieldwork for three weeks is not enough to form relations with community members and to form contextual knowledge about their specific sealing practices. It is thus reasonable to ask what authorizes me to speak on localized organizing in Iserdor that is located 600 km from my birthplace and 2,700 km from Denmark. Drawing on the reflections of Banerjee and Tedmanson (2010), I recognize that any attempt to engage with voices and practices that are often marginalized in dominant discourses requires careful ethical consideration. Rather than speaking *for* the people of Iserdor, my aim is to illuminate organizing practices that emerge from the margins which challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative pathways from within Kalaallit Nunaat.

My methodological approach was guided by 'critical reflexivity as a relational process' (Gerlach, 2018) which emphasizes reflection on one own's positionality (Alvesson et al., 2008; Holmes, 2020), asymmetrical power relations with research-participants, and accountability in terms of representing research-participants (Gerlach, 2018). To reduce power asymmetry between myself and research-participants, I encouraged them to speak in their native language Dunumiisu (Eastern Kalaallisut (Greenlandic)), I moved away from "researcher as expert" by telling them that I was in Iserdor to learn from them (Gerlach, 2018), and I let them decide the day and time for interviews as to not interrupt their hunting-related activities.

I employed the following qualitative methods to gain insight into the community's organizational practices and perspectives on sealskin production: a) recorded focus group interview with four out of six hunters to explore the themes of the supply-side working practices and the hunters' future dreams and concerns for sealskin production and hunting, b) unrecorded focus group interview with the women of Iserdor to explore their interests and roles in sealskin production and sealskin making, and on their dreams and concerns for sealskin production and hunting, and finally c) recorded interview with the CEO of Great Greenland about their plans for sustaining and developing sealskin production. While these methods provided useful insights into the contemporary development of *qassaaneq*, I remain critical toward the limited timeframe of fieldwork inevitably constrained the depth of relationships and the breadth of observations I could make, particularly in relation to locally specific ways of practicing *qassaaneq*. Therefore, my findings should be read as situated interpre-

tation shaped by the voices and experiences shared with me during the short but intensive engagement.

I would like to acknowledge the socially constructed gendered framework that has shaped my research design and fieldwork. During my fieldwork, I operated with presupposed assumptions about gender, which influenced my interactions with research-participants. Specifically, I did not inquire about participants' gender identities and instead relied on my own interpretations. For example, in an invitation to a focus group interview, I addressed individuals I perceived as women in the community under the heading, "Invitation to Women of Iserdor" (own translation from Kalaallisut to English), (Møller, personal communication, 2021). Of those invited, eight individuals attended whom I presumed to be women. The division of labor in Kalaallit hunting societies has also historically been gendered, with men and women traditionally taking on distinct responsibilities (Williamson, 2011). To maintain alignment with the gendered language used during fieldwork and to reflect the historical context of gendered roles in Kalaallit Nunaat, I will continue employing gendered terminology in the forthcoming analysis.

ANALYTICAL FRAME

One of the purposes of a decolonizing research approach is to promote pluriversality (Cuoto et al., 2021). The purpose of this article is thus not to make a detailed attempt to define practices that could be generalized, but to better understand how the Iserdor people organize the production of sealskin. This section brings an analysis of the way that the Iserdor community understand and organize their work in sealskin production through the practice of *qassaaneq*. The analysis is structured in three parts: 1) The efforts of sustaining *qassaaneq*, 2) the tensions of sustaining *qassaaneq*, and 3) their hopes of future development of sealskin production in their homeland.

THE EFFORTS TO SUSTAIN QASSAANEQ

The practice of *qassaaneq* is only one of many other practices that Kalaallit women have practiced for generations to transform raw, animal, skin material into essential items such as clothing, tents, kayak, and *umiaq* (large skin boat), as well as into tradeable products such as sealskin (Williamson, 2011). *Qassaaneq* has historically been gendered where skills and knowledge have been passed down through generations of women. In the context of sealskin production, the contributions of women, which are transforming raw sealskins into a tradeable product, have been indispensable. This first part of analysis focuses on the critical role of *qassaaneq* in sustaining sealskin production, examining how this historically gendered practice has evolved to become fluid and adaptable in response to changing social, economic, and cultural dynamics.

As Lugones (2008) points out, the European, white, bourgeois, colonial, modern man was constructed as the embodiment of civilization within the logic of coloniality, while the European, white, bourgeois woman was confined to a reproductive role and serving the man within the domestic sphere. This patriarchal and colonial framework was prevalent among Danes during the early colonization of Kalaallit Nunaat, where they commodified seals and transformed the Kalaaleq hunter into an efficient supplier of seal blubber and sealskin (Graugaard, 2018; Thomsen, 1998). Danish businessmen, operating under their patriarchal assumptions, viewed men as the heads of Kalaallit households and presumed that economic activities were primarily conducted by men. This colonial and patriarchal gaze has rendered the roles of Kalaallit women, portraying production and development of sealskin as male-dominated activities while ignoring the collaborative and interdependent nature of Kalaallit social organization as in other Inuit societies (Pfeifer, 2019; Williamson, 2011, Chapter 7).

By erasing women's critical contributions such as *qassaaneq*, this patriarchal lens creates a significant blind spot about sealskin production and development which risks preventing a comprehensive understanding of the practices in the production process that sustain and develop sealskin production.

In Kalaallit Nunaat, significant political and societal attention has been given to the sealskin ban imposed by the European Union in 2009 and its impact on hunters. Following the ban, the Government of Kalaallit Nunaat and institutions such as the Fishermen and Hunters Association in Greenland (KNAPK) have published various statistics highlighting its effects. These include data on hunters' income losses, the decline in seal hunting, and the sharp decrease in sealskin trading, all of which demonstrate that the ban has disproportionately affected hunters particularly those with few alternative sources of income (e.g., Fontaine, 2014; Departement for Fiskeri, Fangst og Landbrug, 2012). However, the large attention given to hunters in sealskin production creates an unintended perception that only hunters contribute to the sealskin industry. This unintended idea reproduces the patriarchal perspective established during the early colonization of Kalaallit Nunaat. While it is important to address the ban's impact and advocate for hunters' rights, I would like to expand the scope of perspective to focus on the number of seals caught and the number of sealskins traded to shed light on the often-overlooked practice of *qassaaneq* and its critical importance to sealskin production and development. Data on the number of seals caught in recent years is limited, with the most recent unofficial statistics from the Government of Kalaallit Nunaat dating back to 2017 (Departement for Fiskeri, Fangst og Landbrug, personal communication, 2020). These figures indicate that approximately 90,000 seals were caught in 2017, yet only about 30,000 sealskins were traded. It means that 60,000 sealskins were thrown away or kept for private use. In comparison, prior to the sealskin ban in 2005, approximately 190,000 seals were caught annually, and around 115,000 sealskins were traded. The data shows a decline in seal hunting, but also in the practices of preparing sealskin for trade such as *qassaaneq*. More importantly, it underscores the critical role of *qassaasut* in sealskin production, because Kalaallit continue to hunt seals for purposes beyond sealskin trading alone. One could say that there would be no sealskin production without *qassaasut*.

According to a 1999 study by Hovelsrud-Broda, the cultural identity of the people of Iserdor was closely tied to gendered divisions of labor, particularly in relation to seal hunting. Every male hunter acknowledged that his success depended on the knowledge and skills of the woman he partnered with, while women understood that their own and their family's food security relied on the hunting abilities of their male partner or other male household members. Despite the clear division of labor, Hovelsrud-Broda observed a strong sense of mutual respect and interdependence between genders, similar to the observations by Williamson of Kalaallit in general (2011). She also noted that elder women actively transmitted their skills in sealskin preparation to the younger generation, although often met with reluctance which is a tendency she linked to shifting attitudes toward sealskin among younger women (Hovelsrud-Broda, 1999). More than two decades later, these dynamics appear to have intensified. According to the then-CEO of Great Greenland, fewer women across Kalaallit Nunaat are learning and practicing *qassaaneq*, contributing to the gradual disappearance of this culturally significant practice (The then-CEO of Great Greenland, personal communication, 2021. In Iserdor in 2021, two elderly women were employed by the Municipality of Sermersooq to perform *qassaaneq*. When they are unavailable, sealskin production halts, even if hunting continues. In a focus group interview, women from Iserdor confirmed that younger generations are generally uninterested in learning *qassaaneq* and the elder women are hesitant to pressure them into doing so. One older woman expressed a strong desire for younger women to take an interest in learning practices for preparing sealskin, noting with concern that many are not engaged in traditional activities (Focus group interview with women, personal communication, 2021). This

reflects not only a generational shift in values but also the vulnerability of gendered knowledge systems under changing social and economic conditions.

Due to a decline in the number of women capable of performing *qassaaneq*, Great Greenland has experienced an impaired quality of sealskin. The CEO of Great Greenland said that hunters also sometimes carry out *qassaaneq*, but with a knife instead of an *ulu* (a crescent-shaped knife). It is worth mentioning here that *ulu* has historically been used by women. This shift highlights two important issues: first, *qassaaneq* is a form of gendered expertise, traditionally passed down among women and rooted in embodied knowledge; second, replacing *ulu* with a conventional knife, combined with a lack of technique, often results in lower-quality sealskin. The quality of sealskin depends on the skills of *qassaaneq*. Recognizing the economic importance of *qassaaneq*, Great Greenland has taken steps to sustain the practice, as proper *qassaaneq* techniques guarantee the best sealskin quality and thus leads to higher consumer prices. To mitigate the decline of this skill, Great Greenland has organized workshops across the country to teach hunters how to perform *qassaaneq* with an *ulu*. As a result, some hunters have acquired the necessary skills to carry out the practice themselves (The then-CEO of Great Greenland, personal communication, 2021. This suggests that the practice of *qassaaneq* is being adapted by including hunters, predominantly men, to perform it with the primary aim of sustaining sealskin production and not necessarily to preserve traditions for their own sake.

This shift in gender roles highlights how efforts to sustain *qassaaneq* are leading to an increasing involvement of men in the preparation of sealskin for trade. As more men take on this role, the practice of *qassaaneq* undergoes a transformation that could ultimately reframe sealskin production as a male-dominated activity. This adaptation not only alters the division of labor but also raises critical questions about the erasure or reconfiguration of women's roles in sealskin production and development. It reflects broader structural changes within Kalaallit sealing practices, shaped by economic pressures, labor shifts, and evolving gender dynamics.

However, when hunters carry out *qassaaneq*, they receive no additional compensation such as those *qassaasut* employed by the municipality who are compensated for their work (Former hunter in Iserdor, personal communication, 2024). Hunters are not entirely optimistic to take on this added responsibility, because it complicates their role as hunters where they receive more work without further monetary compensation in a job already physically demanding and facing economic challenges (Former hunter in Iserdor, personal communication, 2024).

THE TENSIONS OF SUSTAINING QASSAANEQ

This second part of the analysis illustrates tensions of sustaining *qassaaneq* through examining how hunters and *qassaasut* understand work and organization. I identified earlier in the article how the logic of coloniality promotes the pursuit of endless economic growth. The assumption of growth without any limit is taken for granted in mainstream management and organizations studies, where the understanding of organizations as the vehicles for generating continuous material prosperity is reproduced (Banerjee et al., 2021). Part of the decolonizing project is to move in an alternative direction from universalist theoretical models about organizations (Cuoto et al., 2019). By introducing the Iserdor way of understanding and doing organizational work, this part of analysis seeks to challenge the dominant narratives and offer an alternative that values human needs over capital gains.

In 2021, there were six hunters and two *qassaasut* in Iserdor. The hunters supply Great Greenland primarily with skins from ringed and harp seals. Based on the data that I obtained from the Fishermen and Hunters Association in Kalaallit Nunaat (KNAPK) for 2020, the Iserdor hunters supply Great Greenland with over 1,000 units of sealskin per year. There are plenty of ringed and harp seals in the Kalaallit waters and they are not considered endangered species (Naalakkersuisut, 2020). According to the hunters,

seal meat is distributed within the community while the leftovers are given to feed sled dogs (Focus group interview with hunters, personal communication, 2021). Upon returning from a successful hunt, the hunters carry the seals ashore, open them up, remove the skin, and extract the meat. The skin is then handed over to *qassaasut* to remove the fat from sealskin. The practice of *qassaaneq* is physically demanding, and as a result, sealskin production in Iserdor often comes to a halt when *qassaasut* become tired, fall ill, or complete their designated work hours. Here, hunters from the focus group interview describe the production process that follows the rhythm of *qassaasut*. Hunter A: "When *qassaasut* stop, we also stop. It is primarily up to *[qassaasut]*."; Hunter B: "It would be nice to have a machine. Sometimes *qassaasut* also do not want to work. When sealskins become too many, they become tired and do not want to work anymore."; and Hunter C: "The women, *qassaasut*, they have limitations. During summer and fall, *qassaasut* cannot keep up when harp seals come." (own translation from Kalaallisut to English), (Focus group interview with hunters, personal communication, 2021).

When that happens, no one in Iserdor forces them to keep on working to meet certain production goals. Unlike hierarchical management systems that set rigid production targets or prioritize capital gains, the practices in Iserdor are rooted in human-centric values. There is no single leader dictating production goals or adopting corporate motivation strategies to achieve specific output levels. Instead, production is driven by the well-being and agency of individuals, reflecting a balance between economic participation and communal care. This approach contrasts with mainstream organizational models, which typically prioritize profit maximization and set production targets. In Iserdor, no such pressure exists to achieve a specific number of processed sealskins per day. Instead, the production flow is determined by the well-being of *qassaasut*.

However, hunters are not satisfied when the production of sealskin temporarily stops, because it decreases the amount of sealskin they can trade. For instance, hunter B wants *qassaavik* which is a machine that removes fat from sealskin, because a machine unlike humans cannot become tired. Hunter A also sums up what hunters in Iserdor in general want:

Hunter A: "We wish for a *qassaavik* and more chest freezers. As a result, sealskin traded would increase which would also be good for Great Greenland. If possible, it would be good if prices of sealskin could increase as it would alleviate our work. The number of hunters declines when prices go down and rises when prices go up." (own translation from Kalaallisut to English) (Focus group interview with hunters, personal communication, 2021).

According to the hunters interviewed in the focus group, they are capable of hunting more and believe the quantity supplied to Great Greenland could be higher (Focus group interview with hunters, personal communication, 2021). Their desire to increase supply is, however, not driven by a pursuit of limitless economic growth, but by the need to raise their income in order to sustain their profession as hunters. For instance, hunters talk about the inability to pay for the costs of hunting such as purchasing cartridges and fuel for sailing. In those cases, the hunters lend each other money in exchange for seal meat for their dogs. This is exemplified below:

Hunter A: "Everything is so expensive nowadays, cartridges and fuel are expensive (…). If sealskin prices increase, it would be good. It would alleviate hunters. I would also like to mention that for the second year in a row, my request to borrow money to buy a boat has been denied by the bank, because I am only a hunter. They cannot accept that I only trade sealskin. Another example, [hunter B] has tried to borrow money from the bank to buy a new motor for his boat, but he was also rejected because he is only a hunter. Well, hunters are being neglected." (own translation from Kalaallisut to English), (Focus group interview with hunters, personal communication, 2021).

There is a risk that this account may be read as romanticizing the Iserdor hunters as disinterested in economic gain which would reproduce a longstand-

ing trope in academic representations that construct Indigenous Peoples as inherently anti-capitalist or ecologically noble. This kind of framing can obscure the economic pressures that Indigenous Peoples face and inadvertently depoliticize their actions. At the same time, a purely economistic perspective, which would be an analysis based on market rationality, might overlook the culturally and relationally embedded nature of the hunters' organizing practices. My empirical data complicates both perspectives. The Iserdor hunters do seek to increase production of sealskin, but not to pursue limitless economic growth as other large corporations. Rather, their motivations are grounded in the need to sustain their profession to be able to fulfill everyday responsibilities under precarious conditions such as changing sealskin prices, rising costs, and when Great Greenland temporarily stops sealskin trading. Their practices reflect a pragmatic engagement with market economies that is shaped by interdependence, sustaining their way of life, and survival, rather than capitalist expansion. In this sense, they are navigating, and not rejecting, the pressures of capitalist modernity.

THEIR HOPES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT IN SEALSKIN PRODUCTION

This final section of the analysis examines the Iserdor community's aspirations for the future of sealskin production. In focus group interviews, both hunters and women in the community expressed a strong desire for better sealskin prices and the acquisition of a *qassaavik* to replace the manual practice of *qassaaneq*. Their overarching hope is to increase hunters' income to a sustainable level, ensuring they can continue their profession without financial instability. The community sees technological advancement in sealskin processing and improved trading conditions as vital for preserving their way of life. During a focus group interview with women, one participant articulated a shared concern that if hunting is not supported and developed, Iserdor risks being shut down. She emphasized that increasing sealskin prices is necessary to make trading economically viable to the hunters and to prevent the community from being forced into decline (Focus group interview with women, personal communication, 2021).

Despite the centrality of hunting in Iserdor, there is a lack of recent studies providing concrete data on the economic conditions of hunters. However, it is well-documented that hunters who do not have supplementary income from activities such as fishing or tourism often struggle to make ends meet. In such cases, their wife's income becomes a crucial financial pillar for maintaining both the hunter's profession and the household's livelihood (Rasmussen, 2005; Sejersen, 2003). In early colonization, the Kalaaleq hunter was a key figure in the economic framework of Danish colonial administration (Bjørlig, 2021; Thomsen, 1998). Today, however, the hunter's economic role has diminished significantly, leaving many reliant on government subsidies and their wife's earnings to sustain their hunting activities. This shows that the interdependency between hunters and women in sustaining a hunting lifestyle continues within a modern-colonial world.

Beyond sealskin trading, hunters supplement their income by selling various game-hunting byproduct, including whale blubber, narwhal tusks, polar bear hide and skulls, and walrus meat. However, these earnings rarely cover the full costs associated with hunting, such as fuel, cartridges, and boat maintenance. Economic hardships have led to adaptive financial strategies within the community. Hunters often lend and borrow from one another, exchanging meat for necessary supplies, such as seal meat for sled dog food in return for fuel or ammunition (Møller, personal communication, 2021). Given these financial strains, many hunters in Iserdor support acquiring a *qassaavik*, believing that mechanizing *qassaaneq* could enable them to process more sealskins for trade with Great Greenland, ultimately increasing their income. The women in the focus groups similarly expressed their support for bringing *qassaavik* to the community, emphasizing that it would alleviate the economic burden faced by hunters.

However, *qassaavik* is not the only technological in-

novation that has transformed sealskin production. Great Greenland has already introduced machinery that has replaced several practices historically carried out by women. In the past, women were responsible not only for *qassaaneq* but also for *qapiaaneq* (the fine scraping of fat residues) and drying the skins using an *innerfik*, a wooden frame that stretches the skin for drying (Lennert, 2021). With industrialized processing, these steps have been eliminated, leaving only rinsing, *qassaaneq*, and salting before skins are stored in freezers for sale. If a *qassaavik* were to be introduced, it would effectively eliminate the last remaining manual stage in sealskin preparation besides taking the skin off the seal, displacing generations of specialized knowledge that women have passed down.

From the perspective of Eurocentric modernity, one could argue that adopting *qassaavik* risks erasing elements of the indigeneity of Kalaallit, replacing local knowledge systems with mechanized efficiency. However, historical precedent suggests that Inuit have long embraced technological advancements to enhance survival and quality of life, as seen in the development of the *qimusseq* (Inuit sled) (Karetak et al., 2017). Thus, while mechanization may alter (Indigenous) Kalaallit knowledge systems, it does not necessarily sever Kalaallit technological innovation from its cultural roots. The potential environmental impact of increased sealskin production also remains constrained by logistical factors, such as freezer storage limitations and the availability of transportation for sealskin transport.

The CEO of Great Greenland is open to the idea of implementing *qassaavik*. However, several challenges must be addressed, as noted by the CEO. First, there are only few *qassaavik* machines left in the world, and no new ones are being produced. This presents a significant issue if a machine in a community were to break down, there would be no replacement parts or reserves available to repair it. Second, logistical difficulties arise in transporting the machine to remote locations where there are no vehicles capable of transporting it from the heliport to its final destination. Third, some remote areas lack running water, a requirement for operating the machine. Finally, Great Greenland has encountered communities with *qassaavik* that remain unused due to fear or reluctance to operate the machine. For these reasons, Great Greenland continues to advocate for sustaining the practice of *qassaaneq* (The then-CEO of Great Greenland, personal communication, 2021; The then-CEO of Great Greenland, personal communication, 2024).

Ultimately, the Iserdor community's vision for the future of sealskin production is shaped by both practical and cultural considerations. While mechanization offers a potential path to financial stability to sustain the hunting profession, it also raises profound questions about the preservation of practices that have been inherited for generations and the role of hunting in contemporary society. Whether or not *qassaavik* is introduced, the ongoing dialogue within Iserdor highlights a community actively negotiating its place in an evolving economic and political landscape.

CONCLUSION

This article analyzes the contemporary development of *qassaaneq* in Iserdor, exploring the theme of the fluidity and flexibility of gendered roles and changing socio-economic landscape. By centering the contemporary development of *qassaaneq* as the primary unit of analysis, this study captures the nuances of gendered labor and the Iserdor community's approach to sustaining and developing sealskin production. This challenges the dominant narrative that sealing practices are traditional and disconnected from modern society. The findings illustrate that a sealing practice such as *qassaaneq* remains a vital, evolving practice that adapts to contemporary needs. Historically performed by women, *qassaaneq* is projected to being taken up by hunters who are predominantly men, which illustrates the fluidity of gendered roles in the Kalaallit society in the context of sealskin production and development. While patriarchal narratives have obscured women's critical contributions to hunting practices, shifting gendered labor roles, socio-eco-

nomic changes, and possible technological advancements are only now raising critical questions about the future of women's involvement in sealskin production.

Moreover, this study reveals that the Iserdor community operates within a complex space shaped by both modern-colonial structures and their own worldview. While embedded in global neoliberal structures and labor markets, they assert their own organizational logic, resisting the rigid production targets characteristic of Western economic models. Instead of prioritizing profit maximization, the production flow follows the rhythm of *qassaasut* and aligns with the community's broader goal of sustaining their way of life as hunters in Iserdor. This challenges conventional management theories by demonstrating that work and organization can be structured around relational, adaptive, and community-driven principles rather than purely economic imperatives.

NOTES

[1] 'Isortoq' is the official, written name in Kalaallisut (official Greenlandic language). I choose to write 'Iserdor' to reflect how the locals spell their homeland.

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“What About Gender Equality in the Jungle?”

– Tropes of the Unknown, Swedish Gender Exceptionalism and Indigenous Rexistence in Brazil

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ABSTRACT

This article examines tropes of the unknown and Swedish gender exceptionalism using a series of photographs taken in the Brazilian state of Acre in 2008. Upon publication, the photos sparked sensation worldwide for supposedly depicting a community ‘untouched’ by the outside world. In Sweden, they came to be particularly understood within a discourse of gender equality. Drawing on, among others, Sara Ahmed’s concept of ‘strangerness’, Alcida Ramos’ ‘hyperreal Indian’, and studies of gender exceptionalism in Sweden, the article places the photos and their reception in a wider context of colonial violence, complicity, and denial of coevalness. In an effort to widen the perspective on the continuing life of non-colonized communities, the article further argues that even while justified and necessary, critique of colonial tropes of the unknown risks reproducing a conflation of the modern with the present that keeps foreclosing the possibilities of other worlds. Instead, in a final reflection, the article turns to the mobilisation of Indigenous women in Brazil and the articulation of a politics of *rexistência.*

KEY WORDS

REXISTÊNCIA, INDIGENEITY, INDIGENOUS BRAZIL, GENDER NATIONALISM

INTRODUCTION: THE PECULIAR CASE OF A SUPPOSED HOAX

"What about gender equality in the jungle?" This question was posed in a Swedish public service radio broadcast in 2008, discussing photos from the Brazilian state of Acre near the Peruvian border. Shot by Gleilson Miranda during an overflight by Brazilian indigenist state agency Funai, the photos showed a small group of men and women standing next to a couple of longhouses, looking up at the aircraft. A press release by NGO Survival International (SI) informed that they showed one of several uncontacted Indigenous communities in the area.

The story was picked up by international media, and soon the 'uncontacted' turned into the 'unknown', 'untouched', 'newly discovered', and 'last of their kind'. Headlines included "Incredible pictures of one of Earth's last uncontacted tribes" (*Mail Online* 30/5), "Tribe Found Untouched by Civilization" (*CBS News* 30/5), "A new tribe discovered" (*El Imparcial* 30/5), and "Unknown Indian tribe found in South America" (*Aftonbladet* 30/5). While SI had stressed the vulnerability of the group in the face of illegal logging, the tropes of discovery and untouchedness soon became the narrative. British *Daily Mail* speculated on the community being "likely to think the plane [… to be a] large bird", and in Swedish *Aftonbladet* readers were informed that the people caught on camera

> are believed to be the very last that have had no contact with the surrounding world. No one knows how they build their villages, what food they eat and how their language has developed. [--- They] probably have been living a life unchanged for 10,000 years.

Despite describing the community as "the very last", the article concluded by stating that there are around "100 groups of people spread over the globe who do not know the modern world" (Berglund 2008).

The sensation lasted little more than a fortnight before the story of the 'unknown' was 'revealed' as a 'hoax'; the community had been 'discovered' already in 1910. Focus now shifted to accusations against Funai and SI for seeking to make a publicity stunt. New headlines read: "Secret of the 'lost' tribe that wasn't" (*The Observer* 22/6) and "'Unknown' Indian tribe was known" (*Dagens Nyheter* 24/6).

It was in the interval between supposed 'discovery' and 'hoax' that a Swedish public service radio show, *Science Radio Weekly Magazine*, engaged with the photos lifting the question of 'gender equality in the jungle'. In this article, I explore both the premises for this question, and the political implications of the continuing resistance of communities popularly labelled 'unknown'. In this, I will relate the colonial frontier in Amazonia to Swedish gender exceptionalism and raise questions of colonial complicity.

The aim is twofold: *Firstly*, to use this specific empirical example of the radio broadcast to explore contemporary coloniality in the intersection of contested sovereignty in Indigenous lands, Swedish gender equality nationalism, and tropes of the unknown. *Secondly*, to make a theoretical argument on how the refusal of communities such as the one depicted in the 2008 photos, points towards the need to rethink the relation between modernity, time and space. To enable this rethinking, learning from contemporary Indigenous mobilisation centred around *rexistence* is pivotal.

My article is a response to María Lugones' (2007, p. 206) call for a detailing of the workings and functions of the modern/colonial gender system, and takes the form of examining the neglected relation between Sweden and the Amazon region both as colonial imaginary and as reality.

Before presenting in detail the empirical example, I will offer a short note on situatedness and terminology, and briefly contextualize the place of modernity's 'unknown'.

ON SITUATEDNESS AND TERMINOLOGY

I write from the position of being the descendant of settlers in two colonised lands: Pindorama and Sápmi. Implicit in the construction of the Acre community as 'unknown' is, of course, that they are unknown to an imagined 'us'. This 'us' immediately includes the photographer, as well as myself. Foreclosed is any identification with the people before (or rather under) the camera.

In the original press release, however, it is made clear that Funai had previous knowledge of the Acre community. They were classified as 'isolated', the term used in Brazilian indigenist policy for communities with none or very sparse contact with colonial society (Lorenzoni & Silva 2014).

Isolating oneself from colonial contact is a strategy of survival, and not a static condition. Far from being 'untouched', thes communities might, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro emphasizes, vacillate between contact and 'isolation' over the course of history, 'disappearing' for long periods of time only to reappear at a later date (Castro 2019, pp. 10–11). Further and problematically, 'isolation' refers only to lack of contact with modern/colonial society. Even if anthropologists and NGOs in recent years have increasingly used the term 'people in voluntary isolation', I argue that this still reduces the social diversity of the Amazon region to a simplified dichotomy between the Indigenous and the modern/colonial.

I will, when referring to communities living in conditions like the Acre community, use the term 'non-colonized'. By this term I understand communities that, by refusing contact, have managed to retain autonomy in the face of colonial pressure – even as they might have had to profoundly adapt their way of life to it. These communities can be said to represent the most radical form of Indigenous resistance against those policies and practices that strive to, as stated in the Indigenous legislation, "harmoniously integrate" Indigenous populations into the nation (Law 6.001/1973). I will use the official term – 'isolated'– within quotation marks only when referring to the communities as conceptualized by colonial society.

STRANGERNESS, UNTOUCHEDNESS AND COLONIAL MOURNING

When entering into global visibility as supposedly 'unknown', non-colonized communities appear as strangers to the modern world. Sara Ahmed stresses that what constitutes the stranger, rather than lack of knowledge, is a specific kind of knowledge making the stranger recognizable as "somebody we know as not knowing". She therefore suggests a move away from investigations of 'otherness', and towards investigations of 'strangerness' (Ahmed 2000, pp. 49-51).

The reception of the 2008 photos articulated a specific kind of popularized ethnographic knowledge, handed down through decades and even centuries as stereotypes of people inhabiting a space 'outside' time. This knowledge persists in media and popular culture despite decades of critical cultural and scholarly discussion. As in the quote from Swedish tabloid *Aftonbladet*, the ones 'unknown' appear as stuck in a static but rapidly vanishing past, profoundly incompatible with the modern world. Modern, in these cases, is completely identified with the present.

The trope is not new. In the opening of her classic study *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*, Anna Tsing (1993) recalls another sensational 'discovery' in the early 1970s: the 'stone age' Tasaday in the Philippines, initially satisfying a colonial desire for the pristine. These too were later alleged to be a 'hoax', and not as 'pristine' as initially claimed. Tsing argues that not only do images of 'pure' and 'authentic' natives risk striking back at ongoing struggles, but they also obscure the complex histories these communities have as part of colonial modernity (Tsing 1993, pp. ix–x). In the Brazilian context of NGO activism, Alcida Ramos has made similar points. Using Jean Baudrillard's concept of 'simulacrum', Ramos criticizes the "fabrication of the perfect Indian whose virtues, sufferings, and untiring stoicism have won for him the right to be defended". A 'hyperreal Indian' takes the place of flesh-and-blood Indigenous per-

sons, who in turn risk not appearing as 'Indigenous enough' to deserve being defended (Ramos 1998, p. 276).

Such a 'hyperreal native' also enters both fine salons of art and luxurious coffee table books as a highly aestheticized 'last of its kind'. Sebastião Salgado's *Genesis* (2013) project and, even more grandiloquent, Jimmy Nelson's *Before They Pass Away* (2013) are two lavish manifestations of what Renato Rosaldo (1989) has termed 'imperialist nostalgia'; that is, the act of mourning that which one has oneself declared doomed.

"WHAT ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY IN THE JUNGLE?"

Let us now turn to the Swedish broadcast from June 2008. *The Science Radio Weekly Magazine* is a public service show popularizing academic research for a broader public. The scope is wide, topics ranging from technological innovations and medical breakthroughs to historical discoveries. In the brief time interval between the announced 'discovery' and the backpedalling revelation of a 'hoax', a special feature was broadcast on gender roles in Indigenous Amazonia. A senior professor of anthropology was invited as expert on the region's Indigenous inhabitants. As mentioned, the feature was framed by the question: "What about gender equality in the jungle?"[1]

We need to inquire into the premises that made this question appear not only as possible, but also as reasonable. The feature was introduced by two studio reporters discussing one of the newspaper articles in which the photographs were printed:

> **Reporter 1**: So here is a photo showing Indians aiming their bows at an airplane flying over them […] And this group on the photo is supposed to depict an isolated group, that is, isolated from the big world.
>
> **Reporter 2:** Yeah, and people were really fascinated by them. They received lots of attention and one came to think about how it is possible that there are still white spots on the map today. "Newly discovered Indian tribe threatened by illegal logging", the headline ran.
>
> **R1**: Yes, that was the message. […] Funai] wishes to call the world's attention to get an end to illegal devastation of the rain forest, and it is said that this is one of the biggest threats against these Indian tribes living in the protection of the jungle. But what kind of social system is it that Funai […] wants to protect? What about, for example, gender equality in the jungle?

The threat to the community is trivialised by the verifiable fact of illegal logging being summarized as a 'message' based on assumptions ("it is said"). Further, the need for, or desirability of, protection is implicitly related to level of 'gender equality'.

This dialogue is followed by an interview with the anthropologist who, it is explained, lived for several years in the 1970s and 1980s with "Indians in Amazonia", and who according to R1 "has this to say about the rigid gender roles of the jungle". Importantly, in post-production, the reporter's questions have been cut out. The interview is edited as a series of statements by the anthropologist, with added interventions in the form of interpretations, explanations, and conclusions by the reporter. Three specific themes related to gender are dwelled upon: division of labour, division of roles in public life, and sexual relations. I will quote the feature at some length, so as to allow for a reading also of the editing:

> **Anthropologist**: In Amazonia, taken as a whole, it's like this that women are farmers, they take care of the crops. They are often regarded, so to say, as the ones to carry life on […], while men tend to be hunters, fishermen, gatherers of certain fruits and so on. […] Moreover, usually, in general I think, it's the men who fulfil so to say the ritual and religious roles.
>
> **R1:** No, there does not seem to exist any equivalent to female priests nor female politicians among the isolated Indians of Amazonia.

A: Well, it's the men who hold political power, and it's usually very much based on some kind of ritual, that is, religious authority. And then, usually, as I said earlier, men have the ritual and religious roles and therefore also the political power. So in this, one could say, I think, in general, that women are not that much involved in [politics]. But this is far from saying that women don't have influence. On the contrary. […] My experience was that older women, for example, have an incredible influence, one listens to what these women say. In the community where I worked in the very eastern part of the Colombian Amazon, men spoke of the women as mothers of life. You see, there was an enormous respect for these women who had given birth to many children. But in a political process of sorts in a more conventional sense, […] that was simply the domain of men.

R1: Yes, in the jungle men formally rule. And these rather ironclad gender roles also seem to be reflected in the area of sexual relations. Marriage between men and women is rigidly regulated. […] And sexuality where women are involved seems to be hidden. At the same time, men show great tenderness towards one another.

A: In these specific Indian communities, since they are so divided between men and women, precisely because of these rather strong divisions of roles, one is struck by a much greater physical intimacy between for example young men, because they socialize all the time. And, by contrast, men and women do not socialize publicly at all. But, I mean, sexual intimacy on the whole is, in a way, an arena that's somewhat hidden. […] What one sees is often, for example, young men going around and holding each other, hugging each other, sleeping together and so on. What's interesting from my own experience of these communities is that it's, so to say, male intimacy that one sees and that is noticeable, much more than female. The women work out on the fields and come home and cook and take care of small children and so on, while the men perhaps sit and hold each other in another corner, I almost said [laughter]. But that is more or less the scene.

R1: No, gender equality among the isolated Indian groups of Amazonia doesn't seem to reach up to the ideals stated in the political constitutions, but also in practice, in many parts of the big world outside, among others the countries where the Indians live.

Although the show brings in an anthropologist, he does not appear as the real authority. Highlighting Ahmed's point on the stranger as already known, the anthropologist's experience is remodelled so as to confirm the assumptions of the reporter and enabling him to speak with an authority emerging from assumed contact with 'first-hand experience'. In line with Ramos' argument on the 'hyperreal *índio*'[2], the professional ethnographer is perceived as a phenomenon of first kind, one more accessible than Indigenous people themselves, and thus turns into an *ersatz* for the 'real native' (Ramos 1998, p. 282). The access this white and male 'informant anthropologist' has to gendered relations is taken for granted, and even extended to a community in a whole different area than the one from his fieldwork experience.[3] And yet, it is the reporter and not the anthropologist who draws the conclusions, selectively and at times contradictorily, each time beginning with a firm 'no' or 'yes'. The 'ironclad' character of female subjugation among the non-colonized of Amazonia is confirmed.

Towards the end, the discussion of gender roles speculatively enters the sphere of sexuality. The anthropologist's slightly embarrassed vagueness is underlined by the reporter's conflation of sexual relations and physical intimacy: "*Sexuality* where women are involved seems to be hidden. At the same time, men *show great tenderness* towards one another [italics mine]." In the juxtaposition of intermale tenderness with heterosexual discreetness, it is already assumed that male tenderness is sexual per definition. Further, the expression of physical tenderness between the Indigenous men in public, a striking contrast to modern Western masculinity norms, becomes in Amazonia merely more evidence of the subjugation of women. The question in the introductory dialogue

– "what is then the kind of social system that Funai […] wants to protect?" – is given its answer in the general conclusion: "gender equality […] does not seem to reach up to the ideals […] in the countries where the Indians live."

In what follows, and still part of the first aim of the article, I will relate this conclusion to two contexts that might help us to think about its premises, one Brazilian and one Swedish. The first is the colonial frontier as a zone of sovereignty in the making, and concerns the situation in which the photographs were produced. The second is Sweden's construction of itself as gender-equal, and concerns the situation in which the radio program was produced and broadcasted.

FRONTIER SOVEREIGNTY

Despite the declared intent of the photo publication to draw attention to illegal logging in Peru, I will in this section focus on Brazil. The reason is twofold; firstly, the photos were produced and published partly through a Brazilian state agency. Secondly, they refer to the situation of non-colonized people on what is internationally recognized as Brazilian territory, which means the Brazilian state is recognized as the legitimate holder of sovereignty over their land.

Giorgio Agamben's (1998; 2005) analysis of the sovereign decision/exception and biopolitics has been important for the renewed interest in sovereignty within political theory of the last decades. While related discussions have had strong focus on the paradoxical revocation of the law in order to maintain the law, less attention has been paid to liminal spaces in the process of being included in the law, that is, colonial frontiers of expansion. The presence and continuing resistance of non-colonized communities, not subsumable within the logic of the nation-state and yet inevitably caught within its realm, undermines the legitimacy of the territorial state.

Like any nation-state project whose claimed territory is inhabited by non-colonized communities, Brazil is haunted by a contradiction. Agamben observes the etymological proximity between *nation* and *birth* (*nascere*), pointing to how the one born human – *nato* – from the 18th century onward dissolves into the nation (Agamben 1998, p. 128). With *ius solis* as the foremost principle of citizenship in Brazil, national territory is the very material base of a supposed coincidence between *nascere* and *nation*. And yet, here we have people who cannot (as with the figure of the 'migrant') be understood as 'aliens'. Instead, they are both *indigenous* to the territory and utterly *strange* to the nation. With José de Souza Martins (2009, p. 21), we can see how at the colonial frontier of expansion the *nascere/nation* relation collapses in a space-time that simultaneously signals a moment of national birth and the terror of national death.

A national mythology of harmonious racial miscegenation, as well as several projects to move Portuguese speaking populations to the Indigenous inlands, are ways in which the discrepancy between nation and territory has been managed within Brazilian nation-building. With Antônio Carlos de Souza Lima (1995), I see indigenist politics as constitutive of this national project. During republican times – 1889 onward – 'national integration' became the euphemism of a continuing colonial expansion inlands, in which non-colonized people should be 'integrated' as 'national workers'. It was an enterprise guided by 'peaceful' principles, with the national flag and anthem carried out to the dense forests, and with little choice given to those not necessarily interested in becoming part of the nation. Although Brazil's first state indigenist agency *Serviço de Proteção ao Índio* (SPI, founded 1910) nominally had the task of protecting, Lima calls it a "continuation of colonial war by other means" (Lima 1995).

Mbembe (2003) problematizes Agamben's discussion of sovereignty, arguing the concept of biopolitics is inadequate in accommodating colonial warfare. For Mbembe, colonial war is an expression of absolute hostility, the colony a formation of terror and a zone of necropolitics rather than biopolitics. Brazilian miscegenation nationalism however – in which 'Indigenous blood' is claimed as a mark of the nation – calls for a yet more multifaceted understanding of colonial war. In line with Ramos (1998) and Antônio

Paulo Graça (1998), I read Brazil's relationship with Indigenous peoples as a possessive love affair. Force is rewritten as affection, reflected in the indigenist vocabulary of its own expansion front as a 'front of attraction'. Brazilian indigenism encompasses the whole spectrum from paternalistic tenderness to explicit desire to exterminate. This helps us understand as logically consistent, what might otherwise be perceived as a failure or dysfunction on behalf of the state: while SPI's goal was not only to integrate but also to protect – a task passed on to Funai when replacing SPI in 1967 – in practice its operations opened the country's interior for colonial invasion, with disastrous consequences for Indigenous communities (Baines 1991; Rodrigues 2018).

Only with the democratic constitution of 1988 did Indigenous peoples become recognized as full citizens. At about the same time, Funai changed its policy towards non-colonized communities from actively promoting integration to letting the communities themselves decide if they wanted contact. Formally, the Brazilian state thus stepped back from its ambition to actively colonize remaining non-colonized communities.

In a country where significant parts of the territory remain unregulated, the recognition of indigeneity has given rise to a paradox. The 1988 constitution defines Indigenous right to land as pre-dating the state, and thereby independent of it. And yet, only the (federal) state holds the power to guarantee this right. Land that has not yet become privately owned is governed at (non-federal) state level. when areas are settled by land investors, a first step is taken in a process of transforming public land into private property. Land ownership in Brazil thus to a large extent comes to be, as Mbembe (2003, p. 25) puts it, through the "writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations".

Yet, if the land is inhabited by Indigenous peoples, all property titles are nulled. This leads to a paradox: those who have long survived by hiding, now need to become visible. When indigeneity was still defined as a transitory stage on one's way to full citizenship, Indigenous lands were expected to eventually become privatised land. With the 1988 constitution, however, the special status of Indigenous lands has no end date. In areas where latifundia is forming, landlords might prefer to wipe out whole 'unknown' communities to secure the land for themselves, and documentation becomes a crucial tool to prevent massacres. This is the violent landscape of capital driven land expansion that constitutes the background for the decision to publish the 2008 Acre photos.

In these zones of colonial expansion, sovereignty takes on multiple and sometimes contradictory shapes. With formal state presence being weak, what is understood as 'national integration' works through both legal, illegal and extra-legal expansion of private capital (Martins 2009). Colonial entrepreneurs work alternately in cohort and conflict with public agencies. The power to declare who should live and who might die, a common definition of sovereignty, is expressed as much through state omission as through active violence.

Conflicts around Indigenous land in Brazil are as old as colonial expansion itself. We will now shift focus from the colonial expansion in Brazil, to how the colonial frontier in Amazonia is made sense of in Sweden from within an ideological framework of gender relation, modernity and 'Swedish' values. From the contextualization of the photos, we thus turn to the contextualization of the quoted radio show. Why 'ironclad gender roles'? And how does this articulation connect to the expansion of capital at the colonial frontier?

GENDER EQUALITY AS PRODUCTION OF INNOCENCE

Lugones argues hegemonic feminism equates being 'white' in the sense that it is "enmeshed in a sense of gender and gendered sexuality that issues from […] the light side of the modern/colonial gender system" (Lugones 2007, p. 187). Colonization has profoundly restructured ways of perceiving and practicing gender, enforcing new differentials and systems of subor-

dination. Lugones' argument is that this restructuring is not only a consequence of colonial dominance, but a key mode through which it functions. The transformation of colonised females into 'women' in a specific Occidental sense turns loss of traditional power into a prerequisite for a promised future of gender equality (Lugones 2007). It is in recognition of the non-reducible difference between colonial and local concepts of sex and gender, including the difficulty in conceptualizing female forms of power, that Marcia Camargo in her collaborative study of Pataxó femininity uses the Pataxohã word 'jokana' rather than the Portuguese word for 'woman' (Camargo 2024).

In the radio show, the explicit negation of women's influence in the conclusions becomes an all too clear illustration of Lugones' point. Several Nordic scholars have discussed gender equality as part of nation-building projects in the Nordic countries, connecting nation-building to colonial complicity (Mulinari et. al. 2009). Most of these studies have focused on how notions of the Nordic countries as particularly gender equal shape discourses on the 'integration' of immigrants. Jennie K. Larsson (2015, pp. 225–233) shows how Swedish integration policies in the 21st century specifically address how immigrant women should be emancipated by adopting 'Swedish' values, supposedly expressed in their willingness to become paid labour. At play is an equality nationalism that can be understood alongside Jasbir Puar's 'homonationalism' (Larsson pp. 254, 271–272). Further, Ann Towns has shown how the Swedish state, from the 1990s onward, promulgated an identity as the gender-equal country *par excellence*. Notions of modernity and secularization has been increasingly connected to gender equality, giving Sweden a particular place in the world. A government communication from 2000 even proposes Sweden has 'in fact […] come the farthest in the world' (Towns 2002). In 2014, Sweden declared itself the first country to have a 'feminist foreign politics' (Regeringskansliet, 2018).

Both Larsson's and Towns' studies discuss how the notion of gender equality as connected to specifically 'Swedish' values, becomes a way to culturalize social difference between racialized groups while turning attention away from Swedish gender *un*equal realities. Gender equality comes to signal 'Swedishness', while unequal gender relations signal 'un-Swedishness'. Much like Ahmed's stranger, the gender-unequal 'immigrant' is already known through their strangerness, and Sweden is thus absolved from responsibility for the internal production of inequality along both gendered and culturalized/racialized lines (Towns 2002, p. 167).

This helps us understand the context in which gender *in*equality becomes a preferred frame through which Swedish public radio presents the sensation of an 'unknown' community in Amazonia. Despite the apparent astonishment over "white spots on the map *today*", these unknowns seem quite well known, that is, as strangers to modern, equal gender norms. The non-colonized community is subsumed into an evolutionist narrative of modern equality, while the brutality of the colonial frontier is obscured. In what way then, does this connect to colonial complicity?

Analysing nineteenth-century travel narratives, Mary Louise Pratt discusses 'strategies of innocence', consisting of techniques through which writers of travel narratives distance themselves from the colonial system they are part of, thus absolving themselves of complicity (Pratt 1992, p. 7). Linking Pratt's discussion of colonial complicity to Towns' observation on the absolving power of the construction of gender equality, we might connect the two contexts I have sketched; that of the photographs and that of the radio feature. One way to understand this connection is through the flow of goods and capital between a growing agricultural sector in the South and a consumption market for agroindustrial products in the North. In recent decades, Brazil has become the largest producer of soybeans in the world, the grand part of which is utilized as livestock feed. Brazil is also one of the largest producers of ethanol which feeds a global market increasingly hungry for 'green' fuel. Further, Brazil is the largest exporter of beef in the world. These grand-scale environmentally destructive practices are some of the enterprises for which logging clears the ground, pushing the frontiers of agribusiness forward. Sweden has a consid-

erable import of all these products.[5] For people who keep resisting being colonized, the space is steadily shrinking.

TEMPORALITIES OF REXISTENCE

Now turning to the second aim of this article, I wish to return once again to the argument of terminology. Defining specific communities as 'non-colonized' does not imply that they are, as official terminology states, 'isolated'. Rather, these are communities resisting colonial pressure and struggling to keep their autonomy. Further, as Castro (2019) argues (although using the term 'isolation'), the relation between non-colonized and colonial society is not a static one; neither is there a discontinuity between these communities and the struggles of those who have long histories of being forcefully integrated into the state. The individuals on the 2008 Acre photographs had their bodies painted in red of annatto and black of genipap, a widespread custom in Indigenous Amazonia. These same colours were used in the campaign launched by the nationwide Indigenous organization *Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil* (APIB) in 2019, *Nenhuma gota mais* (not one more drop [of Indigenous blood]). Sílvia Guimarães and Mariana de Castilho see these paintings as a way to inscribe one's body as political; the paint symbolizing a tradition tied to the land as well as the violence suffered in the struggles for these lands (Guimarães & Castilho 2021, pp. 338–339).

The threads running between different places and different Indigenous struggles urge us to rethink the relationship between modernity, time and place. Tsing, quoted earlier, sees a poverty of imagination in the modern narratives of 'untouched' peoples. She argues that the systematic denial of the possibility of difference in any deeper sense *within* the modern world, reduces communities struggling for their integrity to a 'dying Other' (Tsing 2014, p. x; Fabian 2014). However, a construction of the 'modern world' as encompassing each and every social community, is also problematic. Such a move reproduces a conflation between the modern and the present that is, in itself, an ideological component of modernity. Modernity might understand itself as a temporal category, but its abode is spatial rather than temporal. Colonization of time and the denial of non-modern coevalness are mechanisms through which colonization of space keeps being legitimized.

We need to recognize that while non-colonized communities share the present with us, they are not part of the modern. Because they are deeply affected *by* colonial modernity, yet not subsumed *into* it, they are not easily intelligible unless reduced to Tsing's 'dying Other'. However, even critiques of the modern often appear unable to imagine a world outside the modern, thus confirming an incompatibility between non-colonized communities and the present. Therefore, I argue, there is an urgent need to listen to those liminal spaces of inside/outside colonial modernity that Indigenous people themselves have long had to navigate. Brazil is particularly interesting in this sense.

Returning to the briefly mentioned mythology of racial mixing: as several scholars have noticed, the figure of the *índio* – always placed in the past – is at the very heart of ideological national formation in Brazil. As a mythical ancestor, the *índio* is doomed to disappear with the arrival of colonial society, remaining, however, as a bloodline in the new national people (Lima 1995; Ramos 1998; Fernandes 2015; Graça 1998; Monteiro 2000). Indigenous peoples themselves, however, have shown no intention to discreetly disappear and become reduced to a bloodline. Refusing to let themselves become assimilated into the nation, and sometimes resurging as Indigenous after long periods of hiding as 'nationals', resisting Indigenous communities point to the failure of the nation to realize itself on the whole of its territory. Being at once the very heart of the nation *and* marking its outer limits, the Indigenous movement navigates an ideological space in which inside and outside coincide. For Castro, their continuing stubborn presence is a "symbol of the immanent resistance against the project of exterminating differences". Immanent, for their very existence is per definition a resistance, that is, a *rexistence*. It is, as it were, "a past that never pass-

es", and in this subversive temporality the non-colonized is decisive for what Castro calls the mobile horizon of Indigenous resistance. (Castro 2019).

Taken seriously as a political rather than a temporal phenomenon, the continuing persistence of non-colonized communities exposes a foundational flaw in the legal fiction of the legitimacy of the modern territorial state. After all, with what legitimate right can a state *today* (to paraphrase the radio reporter) claim sovereignty over 'white spots' on modernity's map? Against the poverty of imagination Tsing criticizes, these spots show that not only are other worlds possible; they exist. For those of us who are children of settlers rather than the unsettled, this existence urges us to *listen* to those living their life in rexistence.

And indeed, the dissonance is strong between articulations from female Indigenous leadership in Brazil and evolutionist narratives of promised gender equality. One of the more prominent new female leaders in Brazil, Watatakalu Yawalapiti, is often mentioned as representing an 'Indigenous feminism'. Watatakalu, from Alto Xingu in the south-eastern part of the Amazon area, played an important role in the female mobilization before and during the April 2019 *Acampamento Terra Livre* (ATL),[6] where a nationwide women's plenary decided on a motto – 'Territory: our body, our spirit' – for the march of Indigenous women later that year. While media portraits of Watatakalu tend to focus on how she, during her teens struggled to escape an arranged marriage and go to study in a 'white people school', her own voice does not subsume these events into a story of individual emancipation. Rather, she speaks of an ongoing struggle to mobilise Indigenous women around tradition, around culture. Watatakalu does not break with tradition to be free but rather navigates a hostile colonial present in order to connect, reconnect and recreate tradition. In an interview for *Museu da Pessoa* (MdP 2019)[7], the story of leaving an arranged marriage, far from signalling a break from 'ironclad' gender roles, becomes part of her assuming a birth-assigned role as leader for her people (Watatakalu & MdP 2019). For Watatakalu, preservation of culture is a dynamic process, including the building of community across cultural and linguistic diversity:

> Today we know that we are a very big people. Borders doesn't matter. It doesn't matter from where you are, if you are from another country, if you are from here, from Brazil. We are all relatives [*parentes*]. To see that we are a united people, rich in diversity, in language, in culture, and that there are a lot of non-Indigenous people who have a lot to learn with our people (Watatakalu & MdP 2019).

Since 2017, the women's plenary has been part of the program at every ATL. It was in 2019 however, during the Bolsonaro government, that the articulation of female Indigenous struggle received broader attention in the non-Indigenous world. This was reflected in the first nationwide march of Indigenous women in August 2019, and in this march uniting with the likewise nationwide march of rural women the same month. The motto of the march, mentioned above, connects the bodily experiences of Indigenous women to sufferings in a colonized land. In an embodied language of Earth as Mother, relating both to similar struggles around the planet and to local material and territorial realities lived in a situation of ongoing colonial expansion, then executive coordinator of APIB Sônia Guajajara[8], stated at the 2019 ATL:

> We always say: Your mother, you do not negotiate. Your mother, you do not sell. Your mother, you care for her. Your mother, you protect her. And we will never allow the agroindustrial companies to win this battle. We will never allow the mining companies to win this battle. We will never allow the return of colonization to win this battle (Bone Guajajara 2019).

In Sônia Guajajara's speech, a territory cut into pieces by private property acquisition, is re-embodied as Mother. The colonial imaginary which turns the female Indigenous body into a metonym for the conquered territory, is rejected at the same time as the spiritual and bodily connection between women and Earth is reaffirmed. The insistence on Earth as an embodied political subject is, as Castilho and Guimarães note, far from mere symbolism. Rather, it is oriented

towards food sovereignty, physical integrity, and the survival of all things visible and invisible (Castilho & Guimarães 2021, p. 323). It is both material and spiritual.

The stressing of women's bodily and spiritual connection to Earth as Mother sits uneasily with dominant strands of Western feminist critique. Yet, as Kena Azevedo Chaves shows, it resonates with feminist strands rooted in experiences of colonization in the Americas (Chaves 2021). Defying dichotomizations between constructivisms and essentialisms, it points to frequent blind spots in Western discourses on gender equality, in which the non-Western subject can access a promised freedom only by subjugating themselves to the logics of colonial modernity.

Conclusion

No other region on the planet is inhabited by so many non-colonized communities as Amazonia. I have used an example from Swedish Public Service radio to discuss how media coverage of such communities, even when briefly recognizing the threat against them, deploy strategies to not talk about the violence at the colonial frontier as part of a world that is also 'ours'. This avoidance is achieved through strategies of innocence that activate tropes of untouchedness, isolation, and unawareness. In the Swedish example, the construction of innocence is interwoven with the construction of a specific 'Swedish' gender equality, on the basis of which the very right to exist of cultures known as 'unknown' can be questioned. Following Lugones' argument on the central place of gender relations and their restructuring, 'gender equality' becomes both a confirmation of colonial dominance and a negation of one's own complicity in it.

What could have been made different? For one, is it far-fetched to imagine that, instead of having an anthropologist in the studio, a commentator from Sápmi would have been invited to talk from experiences of colonialism? And if this seems far-fetched, what does it say about the denial of colonial presents, and the ability to imagine Indigenous people as political agents, in Brazil *and* Sweden?

A promised emancipation from a non-modern collective into free individuals has historically been central to the ideological justification for conquest of Indigenous peoples, and has little to offer in the struggle for survival and justice. Living rexistence – *rexistência* – opens other spaces. For, as I have argued, the abode of modernity is spatial and not temporal, as evidenced by the continuing rexistance of those who have for centuries succeeded in staying at the territorial outside of the modern/colonial regime. But it is also evidenced in the struggle of those at the margins of colonial society who keep rexisting, not primarily as individual carriers of rights, but as collectives including the land itself, its humans, and its non-humans. The struggle and care for Mother Earth, painted in the red of annatto and the black of genipap, is a making of a politics of the possible, taking place in our shared present.

NOTES

[1] The archived show can be accessed at https://sverigesradio.se/vetenskapsradionsveckomagasin.

[2] I use the term índio untranslated from Portuguese whenever referring to a figure encompassed in a national mythology, rather than to people of flesh and blood.

[3] We might contrast this presupposed access with how Indigenous scholar Rosani Fernandes delicately explains her relation to a Tembé Tenetehara community, and the importance of her being both woman and a *parente* (that is, Indigenous) even if her own community (Kaingang) is geographically and linguistically distant from the Tembé Tenetehara (Fernandes 2015, p. 347)

[4] This policy of non-contact was briefly abandoned during the Bolsonaro government 2019- 2022 (Castro 2019, p. 9).

NOTES

[5] For links between the Swedish consumption market and Brazilian agribusiness, see several reports of NGO Swedwatch, all available through https://swedwatch.org/publications/.

[6] Acampamento Terra Livre (ATL) is a nation-wide Indigenous mobilization taking place every April in Brasília since 2004, and organized by the organization *Articulação de Povos Indígenas do Brasil* (APIB)

[7] Museo da Pessoa is a virtual and collaborative project of recording and archiving the lives of people from different population groups and social classes. https://museudapessoa.org/

[8] Since 2023 Sônia Guajajara is Minister of Indigenous peoples in the Lula government.

[9] The research for this article has been carried out with the support of Hilding Svahn's Foundation for Latin American Research, Riksbankens Jubileumsfond, and the Centre for Multidisciplinary Studies on Racism, Uppsala University.

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Black barrio women's BLM demonstrations in Sweden 2020

– A decolonial analysis of corporate media's regime of anti-Black misrepresentations

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the Black Lives Matter (BLM) demonstrations in Sweden during the COVID-19 pandemic, centering on how Swedish corporate media constructed a racialized regime of representation. Utilizing Stuart Hall's theories of encoding, decoding, and transcoding, enriched with decolonial approaches from recent literature on the BLM-movement, the study reveals how media outlets perpetuated stereotypes and marginalized Black activists—especially young Black women—through White framing and the dominance of Blue Lives Matter narratives. The research foregrounds the leadership of Black barrio women, who organized protests characterized by poetic and artistic speeches that transformed resistance into collective joy and healing. The article also examines the varied responses of Swedish police, highlighting instances of feminist policing strategies that disrupted entrenched racialized stereotypes and fostered dialogue rather than confrontation. By critiquing intersectional failures in media coverage and institutional practices, the study calls for systemic change to address the ongoing marginalization and racism faced by Afro-descendant communities. Situating the Swedish BLM movement within the broader context of global anti-racist struggles, the article underscores the vital role of decolonial perspectives and Black feminist leadership in advancing racial justice and challenging the prevailing structures of exclusion and misrepresentation.

KEY WORDS

BLACK WOMEN, RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION, CORPORATE MEDIA, SWEDEN, INTERSECTIONAL FAILURE

INTRODUCTION

The onset of the COVID-19 quarantine overlapped with global anti-racist protests. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement organized countless protests in 2020 against police brutality and the killings of people of African descent in the U.S. and other countries with large Black populations. The widely shared video of George Floyd's death, filmed and posted on internet by 17-year-old Black Teenager Darnella Frazier (Lennox, 2022), sparked global outrage and challenged the mainstream media's control over how Black people are represented, leading to a major shift in their portrayal. During the pandemic, Black communities mobilized to fight both the virus and systemic racism, holding protests against police violence and structural discrimination. In Sweden, the pandemic overshadowed responses to police violence against Afro-descendants. Anders Tegnell, head of the Epidemiology Authority, attributed higher infection and death rates to "the high number of immigrants" from Somalia, Iraq, and Syria, stating these groups were "very driving" in the statistics and that authorities were working to inform them about the crisis (SvD, 2020).

When the Black diaspora protested the racist stereotypes prompted by Tegnell's remarks, far-right groups criticized the BLM movement for demonstrating during the pandemic. On June 7, 2020, the day after Sweden's National Day, BLM women organized a major protest in Gothenburg—likely the largest ever led by Afro-descendant women in Sweden. Black barrio women delivered speeches using poetic language to counter anti-Black stereotypes. This article analyzes how the press depicted this event through what Stuart Hall (1997) calls a "racialized regime of representation" (pp. 224-228), focusing on Black and youth barrio women. It asks how Swedish media, in a country known for gender equality, enacted this regime toward BLM leaders. My approach is both empirical and interpretive. My involvement began unexpectedly. First, I was swept up in the energy of Sweden's BLM online protests. Then I found myself helping draft solidarity statements with other scholars and, on June 7, 2020, while returning from a trip, I passed through Heden, a sports area in central Gothenburg, and observed people gathering for a BLM demonstration. With only a few minutes of battery left on my camera, I decided to record as much as possible. I joined the crowd, recording the demonstration and later sharing those moments online (in Femsusdev, 2022).

To explore how Sweden's racialized regime of representation operates, I gathered media coverage of the June 7 protest using a news database, then selected key articles from other demonstrations in Stockholm, Örebro, and Malmö for content analysis. For examining White-framing and racialized coding, I draw on Harris and Patton's (2019) framework for "undoing intersectionality" and Crenshaw et al.'s (2011) concept of intersectional failure. Listening to the powerful speeches of young BLM women in Gothenburg, I draw upon Harris and Patton's (2019) "doing intersectionality", and Hall's (1997) trans-coding strategies to see how organizers projected positive Black images and turned joy into resistance, following Ince's (2018) insights. Concretely, then, in the next section I construct an analytical framework that draws upon Hall's crucial insights regarding encoding, decoding, and trans-coding (Hall, 1980, 2003), but which I complement with feminist, decolonial, and recent BLM scholarship and name 'colonial encodings', 'decolonial decodings', and 'decolonial trans-codings'.

DECOLONIZING THE RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION

Hall (1997) argues that constructing the "Other" as different is key to a racialized regime of representation, which operates on the following levels: on a linguistic level, meaning relies on difference; "Black" is defined in opposition to "White," with whiteness as the dominant term. On the social level, meaning is created through interaction; the Other is essential for defining ourselves. On the cultural level, societies classify and exclude those seen as impure or abnormal, often making the marginalized symbolically

central. Finally, on the psychological level, the Other shapes our sense of self and identity, representing what we lack, what we do not have, and what we desire (Hall, 1997, p. 227).

Hall's theory is central to understanding how Swedish corporate media construct and reinforce images of Black people through the racialized regime of representation. This process defines social realities, politics, and national identity through the othering of Black and people of color. It is, however, not a static process. Indeed, before the pandemic, the image of Black people in Gothenburg shifted from being seen as an "inferior race" to a threat to daily city life through the media's activation of the Orientalist and Islamophobic discourse on Islamic terrorism. A salient example relevant to this article is a specific case where intersectional feminist solidarity among women connected to the documentary Burka Songs 2.0 became the main target of mediatized attacks (Jakku 2018, Nilsson 2019). The initial idea was for the film maker Hanna Högstedt to walk down the Champs Elysée wearing a burka while singing the Marseillaise to performatively critique the French burka ban. However, the movie developed into a discussion of privilege, the colonial gaze, Islamophobia and representation. (Diaz 2017, p. 20–21). In 2017, a particular screening of the film followed by a panel conversation between the film maker and human rights activists Maimuna Abdullahi and Fatima Doubakil was cancelled by Ann Sofie Hermansson, then local Social Democratic leader, claiming that Abdullahi and Doubakil are "extremists," and comparing them to Nazis, fascists, and ISIS members. The corporate media suppressed Abdullahi and Doubakil's responses (Abdullahi, 2024, p. 255), and the intersectional conversation between the two Black, Muslim human rights activists and the White, anti-racist and LGBTQ activist was effectively silenced. The media's linguistic framing systematically labelled Abdullahi and Doubakil as "matter out of place," accepting Hermanssons order of excluding them from public events and cultural spaces. This marginalization silenced them and exposed their families to job loss and economic instability while casting suspicion on all Muslims in the city. When the activists sued Hermansson for defamation, the court proceedings became a "spectacle of the Other" (Hall, 1997). The trial put the plaintiffs in the position of the accused, as academics debated whether they were "extremists." Ultimately, Hermansson's stereotypes about their "extremism" prevailed, and the court did not find the resulting harm punishable. This reinforced the racialized regime, turning the accusers into defendants.

The Gothenburg feminist movement, despite its diversity, failed to defend Abdullahi and Doubakil, and the film's intersectional-political potential. Hall (1981, 1997) notes that media texts can be read differently depending on the audience's social position and interpretive framework. He identifies three audience positions: The first is coding, in which the dominant-hegemonic position is used for accepting the intended meaning. The second is the negotiated position for partly accepting but adapting the message. The third position is the oppositional or trans-coding strategy for "rejecting the intended meaning and taking an existing meaning and reappropriating it for new meanings" (Hall 1997, p. 259).

Hall stresses that trans-coding/oppositional strategies have been used to contest racialized regimes of representation since the 1960s through three basic moves. The first consists of reversing stereotypes. Here, Black characters challenge White-imposed images by portraying themselves as neither superior nor inferior, but fully human, rejecting dependence on White norms (Hall, 1997, p. 260). The second move consists of introducing positive images to replace negative stereotypes with positive representations of Black people, life, and culture (Hall, 1997, p. 262). The third move consists of contesting representation from within, stressing that as meanings are unstable, we need to enter the struggle over representation to contest ambivalence and prevent fixed meanings (Hall, 1997, p. 263). While Burka Songs 2.0 exemplifies an instance of potential intersectional coalition-building, the film's narrative and framing are not at the hands of the Black Muslim women that became the main targets of the media's racialized

regime of representation. I argue that this power to take control over the framing, the narratives and coalition-building strategies was characteristic of the BLM women-led demonstrations. In order to reveal how this is so, the remaining parts of this section complements Hall's insights on oppositional strategies with decolonial perspectives advanced by Black scholars committed to the study of the BLM, namely; what I call 'colonial encodings', 'decolonial decodings', and 'decolonial trans-codings'. This framework provides insights into the intersectional trans-coding strategies used by the organizers of the June 7 Gothenburg demonstration and earlier protests in Stockholm, Malmö, and Örebro.

COLONIAL ENCODINGS: BLUE LIVES OVER BLACK LIVES

The waves of BLM demonstrations and the intense anger expressed by many protesters following the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman in 2013 and further after the murder of George Floyd have generated a unique media dynamic, updating the slogan "Black is Beautiful" for the contemporary demand of "Black Lives Matter." In the latter iterations of these protests, and drawing on Hall's (1980, 1997) concept of encoding, large segments of the press constructed a linguistic framework that refused to criticize racist police violence. Instead, the media frequently portrayed the police as victims of violence perpetrated by racialized groups seeking to voice their grievances through BLM mobilizations. Fekete (2022) has analysed this narrative, which she calls "Blue Lives Matter," noting how it both ignores police misconduct and elevates the police to a privileged status, thereby justifying their use of violence under the pretext of fulfilling their duties.

DECOLONIAL DECODINGS

Youth have become central agents in the BLM, engaging in decoding practices as described by Hall (1980). Since BLM's founding in 2013, a core goal has been protecting minors from police abuse. Baskin-Sommers et al. (2021) observe that many young demonstrators leveraged media platforms for rapid information sharing and viral protest dissemination. Hall's theory anticipated marginalized groups reclaiming discourse through social media decolonization. Indeed, Lee and Ahmed (2024) emphasize the pivotal role of social media in amplifying racialized participation in protests with significant political impact. Even before the major 2020 protests, Nummi et al. (2019) highlighted the innovative digital activism of young BLM activists, who strategically used online platforms. These authors also identify the persistent problem of "White framing" in media, which systematically discriminates against Black populations and reinforces Hall's (1980, 1997) encoding concept. Such framing is often militaristic and legalistic. Militaristic in the sense that violent imagery depicting Black communities as threats and/or police unions advocating militarized tactics are used, thereby legitimizing state violence. And legalistic in the sense that the predominantly White judicial systems and media perpetuate White-aligned narratives, and disproportionate law enforcement targeting non-White individuals through fines and arrests, deepening systemic inequalities is widely practiced (Davis & Shaylor, 2020).

DECOLONIAL TRANS-CODINGS

Arguably, the BLM movement has built a Black counter-frame that, echoing Hall's (1997) trans-coding, critiques racial violence, rejects negative stereotypes, affirms the humanity of people of African descent, and asserts rights to freedom, justice, and equality. Yet, the invisibility of Afro-descendant women in police violence debates remains a critical gap. As Davis notes, this erasure overlooks the foundational leadership of Black women in radical movements (Srikanth, 2025). Patton and Njoku argue that "the violence Black women have endured has been both physical and psychological. Physical violence occurred by guns, rape, and sheer force, while psychological violence was enacted through spirit murder, which is the killing of one's soul" (2019, p.

1166). Drawing on Patricia J. Williams and Kimberle Crenshaw, Patton & Njoku describe this 'spirit-murder' as an intersectional failure, where Black women's lives are devalued, blaming them for their own tragedies, and ignoring their deaths and suffering. The media, of course, plays an important role in this regard. Coherent with the critique of intersectional failure, Harris and Patton (2019) identify four ways in which intersectionality is "undone": when used as a buzzword, limited to feminist analysis, through exclusionary citation, and by reducing its complexity. To "do" intersectionality, Harris and Patton (2019) therefore recommend honouring original Black feminist theorists in citations, advocating for social justice and change, and creating knowledge that drives institutional transformation.

Resonating with Audre Lorde's theorization on anger, Ince (2018) stresses that rage from centuries of colonial racism, expressed in street protests, is crucial for confronting systemic oppression and structural violence. Complementing Harris and Patton, he contends that racism shapes society's response to non-White anger, and genuine Black emancipation requires an intersectional struggle that includes all racialized groups. Ince introduces four resistance tools that extend beyond Hall's (1980, 1997) trans-coding strategies: the first tool involves recognizing the limits of White institutions as inherently incapable of protecting non-White populations from racism. Second is the rejection of White guilt denial, which other authors have described as "White explanations" (Ahmed, 2011) and "White fragility syndrome" (DiAngelo, 2011). Third, identifying and naming expressions of racist oppression as essential acts of resistance and, finally, to embrace joy as a transformative and pedagogical form of resistance.

In the next section, I operationalize these analytical tools in the in-depth analysis of the intersectional trans-coding strategies used in the context of the Swedish BLM demonstrations.

THE RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION ON THE BLM DEMONSTRATIONS

In the days before the demonstrations, major streaming platforms and digital giants expressed support for the BLM movement, while Swedish media focused on protests in U.S. cities, often reinforcing stereotypes of violent protesters and echoing slogans like "The police have to stop murdering us." Similar demands were heard in Brazil, where police killed over 500 people in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in two months (TT, 2020b). As Ince (2018) argues, the press largely failed to represent Black and non-White populations, instead using colonial linguistic frames (Hall, 1997) to depict anti-racist protests as threats to the established order, leaving White framing unchallenged.

The national *Svenska Dagbladet* reported that, instead of street protests, public support for BLM took the form of a massive digital demonstration aimed at the U.S. embassy (Grönvik, 2020). Early June Swedish press coverage of BLM was limited and avoided addressing police racial brutality in Sweden. This denial of White guilt (Ince, 2018; Ahmed, 2011; DiAngelo, 2011) was interrupted by two acts of opposition, or trans-coding (Hall, 1997). The first was an op-ed by Teysir Subhi (2020), published in the local *Göteborgs-Posten*. Subhi, an Afro-Swedish city council member for the Feminist Initiative Party, called for urgent action against discrimination targeting Black and other racialized communities in city suburbs, highlighting routine harassment by police and private security. She criticized politicians for claiming "reverse racism" was the response police received from racialized residents. By engaging in the struggle over representation from within (Hall, 2003), Subhi's article exposed what Fekete (2022) has described as the *Blue Lives Matter* syndrome dominating perceptions among politicians in the city hall.

DECOLONIAL TRANS-CODINGS AT BLM DEMONSTRATIONS IN STOCKHOLM, MALMÖ, AND ÖREBRO

Beyond Teysir Subhi's article in *Göteborgs-Posten*, a second oppositional scenario unfolded in the streets, led by young women from the BLM movement. The first of these demonstrations began in Stockholm on June 3. Due to restrictions imposed to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, public gatherings were limited to no more than 50 people. Although the police initially granted a permit, they later revoked it when the number of attendees exceeded this limit. The organizers—young BLM women—accepted the police's decision to suspend the permit. However, this decision angered many protesters, who, numbering in the thousands, continued the demonstration independently.

Police responded by using pepper spray, as well as hitting and pushing demonstrators. The situation escalated in several streets throughout the city center. At one point, a police patrol equipped with batons was moving through the area but was quickly surrounded by protesters. Until then, press descriptions continued to maintain a linguistic frame intended to mute the Other (Hall, 1997), thereby perpetuating the racializing regime of representation.

Tensions rose, and when a confrontation seemed imminent, a female police officer separated herself from her colleagues and knelt in front of the protesters, raising her fist in the air. Interpreted as a symbolic gesture of anti-racism, the officer then displayed a small banner borrowed from one of the demonstrators, which read, "White silence is violence." This performance had been used by other police officers in different demonstrations in US (Lennox, 2022) and calmed many of the protesters, who responded by celebrating the officer's gesture (Fernstedt & Svensson, 2020).

The moment sparked debate in leading liberal media. By seeking reconciliation instead of fuelling the "Blue Lives" versus "Black Lives" divide, the police chief intervened from within (Hall, 1997), disrupting the racialized regime of representation.

The far-right press labelled the BLM demonstration as left-wing extremism, following a racializing encoding strategy (Hall, 1981) now used by legal and political elites to frame Afro-Swedes' political actions as "extremization" (Abdullahi, 2024). The corporate press reserved its strongest criticism for the police chief, who refused to reinforce the racializing stereotype. Through trans-coding (Hall, 1997), the chief stated that "the police were on the side of the demonstrators." The far-right press argued that this sympathy aligned the police with left-wing extremists (Fria Tider, 2020). Thus, a trans-coding strategy was used to openly contest the racialized regime prescribed by far-right parties.

Conversely, a liberal editorial supported *Blue* Lives Matter (Fekete, 2022), criticizing the demonstrators' banners in Stockholm—especially those targeting the police. Attempting to sanction these as "a matter out of place" (Hall, 1997), the editorial claimed BLM was importing a U.S. problem absent in Sweden. It contrasted the heavy U.S. police presence in Afro-descendant neighbourhoods with Sweden's minimal presence in segregated areas, finding it intolerable that police in these Swedish areas faced both attacks and "insulting banners" at the BLM protest (Expressen, 2020). These editorials reveal a form of White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), where criticism of institutional racism is seen as betrayal of a system viewed as "benevolent" and "tolerant" toward racialized individuals—a shared form of exceptionalism in the Nordics (Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe, 2023)

A review of banners at the demonstration reveals inconsistencies in Expressen's racializing discourse. An SVT photographer documented banners with messages like "Black Lives Matter!", "No justice, no peace," "No freedom until we are equal," "Never will they crush us," and "Defund the police" (SVT Ny-

heter, 2020). These slogans expressed resistance and demands for justice, not "insulting" content. Through a process of trans-coding, the banners challenged dominant representations.

In response to the Stockholm demonstration, Gothenburg organizers were required to explain how they would manage crowds exceeding 50 people (SVT Nyheter, 2020). An epidemiology professor criticized the BLM movement's insistence on protesting, calling it a "fuck you" to pandemic containment efforts (Malmqvist, 2020). Such coverage constructed a stereotype of BLM as "matter out of place", alien to the national community.

Furthering this stereotype, *Dagens Nyheter* (DN) published an interview on the upcoming BLM demonstrations in Gothenburg and Malmö, framing organizers as "disrespectful" of the national community—a view echoed by national epidemiologist Anders Tegnell. While sympathetic to the cause, Tegnell argued that police should not risk public health by allowing gatherings beyond official limits (Holmgren, 2020). Both SVT and DN thus imposed a cultural sanction, labelling the demonstration as "illegal" (Hall, 1997) and reinforcing the image of BLM as a threat to public health.

A BLM demonstration in Malmö saw police forced to disperse the crowd as participants quickly exceeded 300, eventually surpassing a thousand. According to *Skånska Dagbladet*, the female police chief responded by engaging in dialogue with organizers (Eriksson, 2020), balancing the right to protest with COVID-19 restrictions—directly countering the silencing of dissent described by Hall (1997) and perpetuated by politicians, the press, and leading male epidemiologists.

On Sweden's National Day, the regional newspaper *Nerikes Allehanda* reported that a BLM protest in Örebro, organized by youth mobilized via social media, also defied official health regulations and police expectations. Initially prepared to break up the rally, police instead saw around 400 young demonstrators begin to march. As in Malmö, the female police chief chose dialogue and accompaniment over confrontation, again resisting the "muting the Other" described by Hall (1997) and reinforced by mainstream media. These feminist policing strategies set the stage for the subsequent Gothenburg demonstration.

THE BLM DEMONSTRATION IN GOTHENBURG

Calls from left-wing organizations, echoing leading epidemiologists and public health authorities, urged the postponement of the Gothenburg protest. These appeals reinforced the prevailing racialized regime of representation and sought to silence the Other in constructing White identity (Hall, 1997). Despite these pressures, 2,300 people had already committed to attending two days before the event (Aktuellt i Fokus, 2020). The BLM movement's defiance exposed the fragility of the White democratic system, as Black activists anticipated and challenged dominant discourses from right-wing politicians, epidemiologists, and the corporate press.

Traditional left-wing movements, including the (White) feminist movement, distanced themselves, further illustrating the White framing that BLM organizers confronted (Nummi et al., 2019). In response, women from Gothenburg's suburbs adopted a Black counter-framing (Nummi et al., 2019), encouraging poetic, artistic speeches over conventional union leader addresses. This approach, embracing joy as resistance (Ince, 2018), transformed each speech into a celebration of resistance against police brutality targeting Afro-descendant communities, countering entrenched racist stereotypes (Hall, 1997).

The BLM demonstration unfolded then in three stages. The first stage was the gathering at Heden, where organizers carefully implemented biosecurity measures to curb the spread of COVID-19. The second stage was the core event, with speeches and artistic performances at Heden. The final stage was the march, during which participants walked through the city's main streets before returning to Heden for the demonstration's conclusion.

THE DECOLONIAL GATHERING AND SPEECHES AT HEDEN

During the gathering, the field—approximately half the size of a football pitch—was divided into marked rectangles, each designed to accommodate 10 to 15 people. Hygienic measures were mandatory, with hand soap and face masks provided at the entrance. Thanks to the organizers' detailed biosecurity planning, the police allowed the protest to proceed, even though the crowd exceeded a thousand people. This approach countered the stereotype of BLM as a group defiantly disregarding public health regulations.

I was particularly struck by what occurred during the second act, as the speeches began. The scene was filled with photojournalists and elite members of major media outlets, who positioned themselves behind the speakers, seemingly disengaged. The group of speakers and organizers comprised about ten young individuals, underscoring what Baskin-Sommers et al. (2021) have emphasized regarding the cardinal role of Black activists in sustaining the BLM movement. Notably, eight of these young activists were women, confirming the Black feminist character of the demonstration.

However, when the first young man took the floor, a group of male photographers suddenly rushed to the front, throwing themselves on the ground and contorting themselves to capture dramatic angles—from below, from the side, or any other eye-catching perspective. In stark contrast, when the young Black barrio women stepped up to speak, the photographers returned to a state of lethargy and disinterest. Journalists, identifiable by vests emblazoned with their company logos, chatted on their phones or idly waited, showing little interest in the content of the women's speeches.

This selective attention by photographers—aggressively documenting the male participant while ignoring the Black women speakers—constituted a visual erasure, deliberately muting and Othering Black female activists. Such blatant invisibilization of the young barrio women, who were instrumental in organizing the event, metaphorically attempted to "kill the souls" of the women (Harris & Njoku, 2019) on stage. As a pattern of intersectional failure (Crenshaw et al., 2015), this ostracism could also be perceived as an expression of White fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), reflecting an unwillingness to listen to the Other and confront anti-Black racism.

At the start of their speeches, one of the female organizers briefly explained the original goal of the demonstration. In a calm and sincere tone, she opened by saying:

> "The question we have asked ourselves, which we want you to reflect on as well, is: Why are we here? Because as everyone knows, these traumatic images circulate on the internet, and we have asked this question to ourselves individually, as organizers." (Femsusdev, 2020)

Within this framework of collective healing, the speeches were both poetic and political, each one concise and impactful. One by one, the speakers were invited to the microphone. The audience embraced this approach, listening attentively and responding with respect and admiration, applauding each intervention. Beyond projecting a positive image to counteract stereotypes of Blackness (Hall, 1997), the speakers and audience were united in a performance where joy was intentionally embraced as a form of resistance (Ince, 2018) against the dominant racialized regime of representation perpetuated by the press.

Following this strategy, the first female speaker delivered a deeply emotional account of her lived experience, expressing transgenerational anguish that she felt compelled to share with the audience. Her speech offered a powerful critique of the consequences of racial violence and asserted the full humanity of people of African descent (Ince, 2019).

Next, the young Black barrio woman serving as Toastmaster delivered her main speech, reading from her phone. Her remarks were primarily anti-colonial, emphasizing the humanity of Black lives: "—I am here because the colonial legacy must end! Be-

cause I'm tired of being a projection surface for the inhumanity of whiteness! An idea that has devoured Black lives for generations!" (Femsusdev, 2020) Her talk clearly articulated what Hall (1997) identifies as the psychological function of using Black Otherness to construct one's (whiteness) own identity. The next speaker, a Muslim woman wearing the hijab, stepped forward and offered a vivid account of the everyday realities of racism in both the United States and Sweden. She declared: "—Here we stand again, several men later, several souls less, in solidarity with our African-American siblings. In obligation to influence internationally, in obligation to influence nationally." (Femsusdev, 2020) By embracing the global character of the protest, she further emphasized how the scientific genealogy of racism also materialized in colonial landmarks: "—In the country with theories that only weigh for racism, in the city where we pass colonial heritage on the way to work or on the way home..." (Femsusdev, 2020) She referenced sites such as Iron Square, a location where political demonstrations for justice and equality convene and depart almost weekly—spaces that have been analyzed by Sawyer and Osei-Kofi (2020) in their studies of colonial history. In her passionate speech, she also challenged the glorification of academic figures like Carl Linnaeus, who was being questioned by the BLM movement in Sweden at that time (Hübinette et al., 2022), and after whom one of the city's grandest avenues and busiest squares is named.

Her criticism extended to the corporate media, whose representatives stood conspicuously behind her, neither photographing her nor showing any interest in her words. Their presence seemed aimed at both "killing her soul" (Harris & Patton, 2019) and concealing the pervasive racism ingrained in police practices, media narratives, epidemiological discourse, and political structures. She was explicit in highlighting the persistence of racism that the media continues to deny within Swedish society. The speaker continued her address with a powerful critique of the illusion that racism has been eradicated, directly challenging the audience:

> "But I must ask—racism is gone, for whom? For the perpetrators, of course. We are accepted and respected only when we conform to the education you provide us. We write report after report showing the injustices we face—the way police target those of us with more melanin, the way White officers tackle pregnant women in front of their children, and how they criminalize our youth. These reports show how we are denied care, how we are excluded from fair opportunities in the workplace, and how the statistics reveal our shortened lifespans. They also highlight the anguish of mothers living in communities marked by systemic neglect and discrimination." (Femsusdev, 2020)

Rather than merely describing a racialized regime of representation, she depicted an apartheid-like system. To conclude her powerful antiracist address, she unequivocally emphasized the accountability of the police, highlighting the terror experienced by residents of Gothenburg's suburbs—particularly within the Afro-Muslim diaspora—during encounters with law enforcement.

> Here we are, in the midst of a pandemic. Yet, it is us who are hit the hardest! We demand justice—to dismantle the racist structures that perpetually target us. Here we are, in a pandemic once again. And still, we bear the brunt of its impact. For generations, we have spoken out about the racism we endure. But who do you call when it's the police who are doing the beating? I've personally tended to the wounds of our brothers, injured by police gunfire. Who do you turn to when it's the police who are harassing you?" (Femsusdev, 2020)

Echoing global BLM demands to defund the police and dismantle racist structures, she reminded the audience that the police have consistently failed to protect Black lives (Ince, 2019). Her speech also dismantled the glorification of "*Blue Lives Matter*" (Fekete, 2022), often advocated for the suburbs in the corporate media. Instead, she asserted the full humanity of people of African descent (Ince, 2019) in the multicultural suburbs, which, during the pandemic,

lost many social leaders—a devastating blow for both African diasporas and their broader communities.

Her poetic speech was a vivid expression of "doing intersectionality" (Harris & Patton, 2019), referencing decades of research documenting the persistent ethnic and racial segregation in the city. She warned that in a city divided along lines of class, race, and gender, racism within the police force remains rampant.

THE DECOLONIZING WALK THROUGH THE CITY

In keeping with the goal of projecting a positive image and countering stereotypes perpetuated by the corporate press, the demonstration entered its third phase after the speeches: a march through the city. The route began at Heden, continued along Vasagatan and Victoriagatan, and proceeded to Grönsakstorget. From there, participants followed the street to its end, turned right toward Brunnsparken, and eventually looped back through the Ullevi area, returning to Heden.

A particularly notable aspect of this march was the unexpectedly friendly demeanor of the police toward the demonstrators. Officers wore standard patrol uniforms, service caps, and soft-soled shoes—there were no riot helmets, combat fatigues, or shields in sight. Even more striking was the police's decision to actively join the demonstrators, rather than standing aside. This can be interpreted as a clear act of trans-coding (Hall, 1997) by the police, aiming to challenge and regress the stereotypes promoted by right-wing forces among epidemiologists, politicians, and the corporate press.

Police officers walked in pairs, engaging freely in conversations and blending in with the crowd, much like any other participant. The atmosphere evoked what Bloch (2000) describes as a "utopian surplus"—a fleeting moment in which protesters and police walked shoulder to shoulder, symbolically advancing toward a shared vision of a city and a Swedish society free from racism and police brutality, embodying the ideals of BLM.

As the march concluded, my camera battery had died, so I took a shortcut back to Heden, where the demonstration was set to end. Upon arrival, I saw the marchers reaching their intended destination around 15:30. However, rather than dispersing, the demonstrators decided to take another lap around the circuit. The police continued to accompany the group, showing no intention of leaving. While I found this unexpected, I was too exhausted to continue and decided to head home to rest.

THE RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION STRIKES BACK

When I later reviewed the news coverage of this BLM demonstration, I found a series of stories focusing exclusively on the vandalism that occurred several hours after the march, between 17:00 and 18:30, upon returning to Heden. There was no mention of the initial gathering at Heden, where young Black barrio women successfully brought together thousands of people while adhering to biosecurity measures. Nor was there any coverage of how participants marched peacefully through the city, transforming the demonstration into what felt like an anti-racist celebration.

This media narrative reveals a persistent White framing (Nummi et al., 2019) intent on reestablishing the racialized regime of representation by labeling BLM as an "extremist movement." On one hand, this stereotype is rooted in denying the intellectual and political agency of the BLM movement. On the other hand, the White framing shifted to a *Blue* Lives Matter perspective (Fekete, 2022), focusing on a limited group of "violent individuals known by the police"—even though the police, in an act of trans-coding (Hall, 1997), emphasized that these individuals "have nothing to do with the demonstration itself" (Börjesson & Rogsten, 2020).

Through this lens, the corporate press weaponized stereotypes to blame the BLM movement for post-demonstration events, while refusing to document the presence of women at Heden and instead

amplifying images of Black men confronting police. Media coverage fixated on the Nordstan riots, casting Black people as "matter out of place" in Sweden and erasing the voices of young Black barrio women who spoke out against Sweden's racial regime and the police as its enforcers. No participants were interviewed; instead, the media silenced Black perspectives (Hall, 1997) and relied exclusively on police narratives, privileging Blue lives over Black lives (Fekete, 2022).

The biased descriptions adopted by the media perpetuate a narrative that linked the BLM movement to violence. Headlines consistently emphasized BLM's involvement at the outset of the events, often accompanied by selective statistics and descriptions of the movement's origins, thereby framing the riots in central Gothenburg within this skewed context (Börjesson & Rogsten, 2020, p. 8). Meanwhile, the true architects of the remarkable demonstration—where police and protesters marched shoulder to shoulder against racism—remained unnoticed and unacknowledged by the corporate media.

In response to criticism, some media outlets attempted to adjust their reporting by offering a different perspective on the BLM movement. Seeking to regain lost audiences and to mitigate their own stereotyping narratives—and intersectional failures (Crenshaw et al., 2015)—the media shifted their focus to Murphy Alex, a Nigerian-born Black man who had recently moved to Gothenburg from London. Alex happened to be passing through the Nordstan shopping mall when a group of young Afro-Swedes broke windows and looted items. The predominantly White press highlighted Alex's intervention in stopping the looting as an act of heroism, framing him as evidence that not all Afro-Swedes should be viewed as socially resentful. Instead, Alex was celebrated as an "exemplary Black citizen." For example, *Dagens Nyheter* emphasized that even Jan Eliasson, the former Swedish Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, publicly praised Alex's actions, stating, "He (Alex) was alone, but in any case, he did more alone than all the others combined in the fight against racism" (Hedberg, 2020).

This effusive praise for a Black man who did not participate in expressing discontent at Heden represents another form of White framing (Nummi et al., 2019), effectively "killing the soul" of Black women (Patton & Njoku, 2019) by sidelining their leadership and activism. As an expression of intersectional failure (Crenshaw et al., 2015), it is particularly telling that Alex himself, after weeks of being lauded by the media, was finally allowed to express his discomfort. He emphasized that the focus on his actions detracted from the real purpose of the BLM demonstration: the urgent demand for racial justice and the recognition that Black Lives Matter (P4, 2020).

THE SWEDISH RACIALIZED REGIME OF REPRESENTATION AGAINST BLM WOMEN

This article has tried to update Hall's frame for racialized regime of representation with colonial encoding, decolonial decoding and decolonial trans-coding in two directions. First to outline intersectional failure, and second to move closer to an understanding of how BLM with its demonstrations pushed Swedish society toward new utopian futures. Regarding intersectional failure, corporate press stereotypes became bricks in the White wall constructed by elites—politicians, epidemiologists, and press editorials. During the days around the nation day celebration on June 6, 2020, the social elites, under the guise of COVID-19 protection, reinforced one more time the existing racial regime shaping public opinion, culture, and the White identity of Sweden, marginalizing Afro-Swedish rights. Yet another example of White framing, the COVID-19 emergency neglected the full humanity of people of African descent in three significant ways. First, by denying them unconditional access to healthcare. Second, by heightening health requirements on the BLM movement for organizing their anti-racist protests during the emergency. Third, by once again failing to protect the Black population from racism embedded among epidemiologists, politicians, and in the reporting of the corporate press, before, during and after the protests.

In terms of utopian futures, following Harris and Patton's (2019) recommendations on "doing intersectionality" female police chiefs adopted a more dialogical, feminist approach, engaging with demonstrators to ensure the protests continued peacefully. It appears that this shift in police behavior was significantly influenced by the involvement of women in managing the demonstrations on both sides. It is still premature to conclude whether this police conduct corresponds to a feminist turn resulting from the policy of gender equality adopted in Sweden by this authority. What is new is that this conduct represented a refreshing expression of opposing racism from within (Hall, 1997). However, the press overlooked all these expressions of a utopian future, instead ostracizing women in general in a further exercise of intersectional failure, thereby keeping the racialized regime of representation unchallenged.

Finally, in line with alternative citation practices for "doing intersectionality" (Harris & Patton, 2019), and to enter the struggle over representation (Hall, 1997), the young barrio women leading Gothenburg's BLM movement staged a decolonial demonstration, disrupting the dominant White framing that upholds the racialized regime of representation in the press. Their joyful, empowering resistance enacted a Black counter-framing, contributing to the "utopian surplus" in the ongoing struggle for a society where Black Lives truly Matter.

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The Colonial Logic of Severance:

Adoption, Child Removal, and the Separation from the Past

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces severance as a decolonial concept with a particular focus on adoption. Severance names and connects the manifold ways of crafting subjects and governing social relationships by cutting people off from their past and community, in particular through the targeting of children transplanting them into new relations and futures. It encompasses (1) the separation from the plural past, (2) the governance of childhood and family life, (3) the appropriation and crafting of subjects for nation-building, empire, and racial capitalism. Countering the oft-assumed exceptionality of adoption, we locate it within the colonial logic of severance and its varied historical and contemporary practices across the globe. We approach adoption as one of the sinews of the (Euro)modern systems of targeting children and family-governance based on systemic attacks on the past and "illegitimate" forms of kinship. We approach this reflection as a plurilogue, maintaining a plurality of voices in an attempt at coalition-building across fragmented identities.

KEY WORDS

SEVERANCE, ADOPTION, COLONIALITY, CHILD REMOVALS, KINSHIP, TEMPORALITY

> We were forced to inherit an erased memory, and we were prevented from even seeing the erasure itself.
>
> —Ariella Aïsha Azoulay

INTRODUCTION

Adoption is often considered as an apolitical, even morally desirable practice, distinct from other (post) colonial and state-based ways of governing families and children and only concerning those directly involved (adoptees and adopting families), with little regard for first families and the broader socio-political implications. In this article, we introduce the decolonial concept of *severance* to embed modern systems of adoption within the various (Euro)modern systems of targeting children and communities, as constitutive of modern subject-formation and nation-building. Building on critical adoption studies (Hipchen, 2024; Hübinette, 2021a; Trenka et al., 2006; Wexler et al., 2023), we recalibrate adoption as a practice that is at the heart of the (Euro)modern[2] fabrication of individual and national subjects, entailing the destruction of shared worlds and the ripping apart of families that are not meant to exist in these configurations. Adoption as a system is therefore inherently entangled with colonialism, racial capitalism, nation-building, middle-class aspirations, dis/ability, policing of mothers and families, and is replicated in myriad variations across geopolitical and intersectional positionalities.

The (Euro)modern systems of adoption took shape alongside the construction of the modern nuclear family. The making of the nuclear family is historically, legally and philosophically intertwined with racial and colonial logics governing kinship and therefore also with the unmaking of other kinds of kinship (Högbacka, 2016). The modern family as institution and ideology has traditionally been based on biological blood ties and the production of "legitimate" offspring for the transference of property. Modern adoption, involving the severing of all legal ties with the first family, is a legal artifice to produce a non-related child as a "legitimate child" of the adopting family (Briggs, 2021; Terrell & Modell, 1994). Rather than challenging the modern construct of the family, adoption artificially mimics and legally re-enforces it. Adoption is distinct from the manifold ways in which non-Western communities care for children across histories and cultures. The circulation of children for purpose of care, education, or apprenticeship has been, and continues to be, common. Yet unlike (Euro)modern adoption, such practices do not normally imply the social and legal rupture with communities of origin that marks adoption (Carriere, 2007; Fonseca et al., 2015).

We introduce the concept of severance (Hordijk, 2024) to name the manifold forms of (Euro)modern violence that tear social fabrics and structures of kinship apart by targeting children, cutting them off from a plural past, and transplanting them into new relations and futures by imposing colonial, national, racial, and gendered identities. Severance is a relational concept that seeks to outline the logic undergirding a variety of practices central to the governance of childhood and family-life, manifested most clearly in colonial practices of child separation. We characterize severance through three interrelated elements: (1) the separation from the plural past, (2) the governance of childhood and family life, and (3) the appropriation and crafting of subjects for nation-building, empire, and racial capitalism. These elements will be further fleshed out below in our personal/political and inter/national genealogies of adoption.

We situate our intervention within, and seek to reconfigure the relations between, the following fields and discussions: *Decolonial theory* has had some influence on critical adoption studies, but the reverse is not necessarily true. Here, we attempt to contribute to the decolonial analytical toolbox by emphasizing the complexity and plurality of subject-positions in adoption, paying attention to the intermeshing nature of processes of gendering, classing, dis-abling,

racializing in the imperial governing of children, families, and subjects. A focus on adoption shows the need for developing a decolonial language that can complicate the central yet elusive and binary concept of "colonial difference" (Mignolo, 2000).

Feminist and queer theory has a rich tradition of deconstructing and criticizing the nuclear family (Barrett & McIntosh, 2015; Gumbs, 2016; Hill Collins, 1998). In recent years, *family abolition* has gained much traction, drawing on Marxist, Black, and Indigenous feminisms (Lewis, 2022). Adoption usually plays a marginal yet revealing role in such critiques. Often it is uncritically hailed as a positive feature able to denaturalize the family. In this rendition, it often remains disconnected from histories of racialization and empire. Critiques of adoption are usually dismissed as bio-essentialist and naive attachments to the ruse of "the natural family" (e.g. Lewis, 2019; Weeks, 2021, p. 446). We problematize such framing and aim to demonstrate the importance of embedding critiques of adoption into queer and feminist politics.

Further, we situate ourselves within *Critical Adoption Studies* and its efforts to understand adoption in the context of colonial histories and postcolonial Global South/North-relations (Cawayu, 2022; Gondouin & Thapar-Björkert, 2022; Posocco, 2022; Wexler et al., 2023). Such scholarship articulates the colonial logic that undergirds the modern systems of adoption and explores the often overlooked connections between transnational and domestic adoption, as well as the links with other technologies of child removal.

By writing together in a plurilogue, as one transnational adoptee (Lene), one domestic adoptee (Sophie), and one non-adoptee (Ruben), we created shared frames of analysis underscoring the entanglement of forces of (Euro)modernisation and colonisation in the differential production of subjects, without conflating differences or emptying out locality.

We start by discussing various colonial strategies of severance across periods, arguing for a structural undergirding colonial temporal logic. Next, we discuss our personal stories to illustrate how severance operates differentially in differently positioned subjects. Finally, we turn to contemporary adoption debates in Scandinavia, illustrating how severance continues to condition responses to adoption controversies.

COLONIAL STRATEGIES OF SEVERANCE

The destruction of alternate forms of sociality and kinship, severing children from a sustaining and relational pastness, is strongly connected to colonial and nation-building projects and the imposition of the white nuclear family as the norm of civilized family-life. Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2019) argues that children serve as "political capital" for nation-building, especially for settler colonial regimes: "Childhood in settler-colonial contexts is a potent site for imperial and colonial control, colonial anxieties, and dispossession" (2019, p. 13). In Palestine, the systemic attack on children is a key feature of Israel's settler colonial project and an attempt at containing, fragmenting, and debilitating Palestinian lives and communities, foreclosing any Indigenous Palestinian future.[3] On the one hand, Indigenous children pose an obstacle to settler futurity because they are connected to ways of life that undermine settler colonialism. On the other hand, they are also "a possible 'solution' to settler expansion and control" (2019, p. 14). Severance from Indigenous pasts and the bio/necropolitical governance of Indigenous childhood life serves to pre-empt Indigenous temporalities and resistance and to instil a settler chronolinear civilisational temporality as the only imaginable futural horizon (Azoulay, 2019).

Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2019) connects the ongoing genocidal onslaught on Palestinian children to other cases of settler colonialism. The Stolen Generations in Australia, or the boarding school systems on Turtle Island with their stated aim to "Kill the Indian, save the Man", are notorious examples of negating Indigenous pasts and identity, preparing a menial labour-class serving white supremacist settler nations, whilst facilitating massive systemic abuse

and neglect within a genocidal project. Similarly, the colonisation of Sami communities happened in part through subjection to various family-laws and through the boarding schools (Knobblock, 2022). The deliberate cutting off the intergenerational transmission leads to fragmentation (Dankertsen, 2016), to forced disavowal of one's past, and orients toward a white supremacist national ideal of subjecthood that will forever remain unattainable through an essentialised difference. Fragmentation through the severance from the communal past has as its ultimate aim to pre-empt any Indigenous claim to futurity, to erase Indigenous identity, forcefully relegating it to a closed off past that has no bearing on the present or future (Azoulay, 2019; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

Severance is a general feature of extractivist colonial strategies. In non-settler colonies, the governance of "mixed" (*métis*) children, especially their classification as "orphans" and subsequent relocation to religious orphanages and colonial schools, was central to the maintenance of racial boundaries and hierarchies (Blouin, 2025; Mak et al., 2000). Practices of separating children continued in the aftermath of decolonisation. For example, after independence, in the former Belgian colonies Rwanda, Burundi, and Congo, *métis* children were systematically separated from their African families and many of them were shipped to Belgium to be raised in foster or adoptive families (Heynssens, 2017).

Scandinavian forms of severance are connected to an imperial humanitarianism that has been central to the Scandinavian self-image. For the Danish missionaries in India, the "saving" of the heathens from their "bad parents" or heathen and "uncivilised" families was considered as crucial to ideas of civilization, family, race, and religion (Vallgårda, 2015). In recent years, survivors, activists, and scholars in Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark have examined the Danish state's operationalization of severance. This involves practices such as the removal of Kalaallit children from Kalaallit Nunaat, including the 22 "experiment children" appropriated in 1951 to form an assimilated elite (Jensen et al., 2020; Thiesen, 2023), and the private, unregulated abductions/adoptions of Kalaallit children into white Danish families from the early 1950s until the late 1970s (Tróndheim, 2010). There are clear continuities with the ongoing forced adoptions and removals of Kalaallit children in Denmark (Adler Reimer as cited in Sørensen, 2023; Bryant, 2025). These different practices of severance which are simultaneously tearing apart relationality and policing Kalaallit communities, have often relied on narratives of modernization and progress. Moreover, they have unfolded vis-á-vis the Danish state's far-reaching family planning regimes in Kalaallit Nunaat, such as the intrauterine device (IUD) program from 1967, which resulted not only in "the loss of an extensive generation of Kalaallit children but also of the future they would have mobilized" (Dyrendom Graugaard et al., 2025, p. 10).

STORIES OF SEVERANCE

In this section we situate our own stories in relation to severance. Through our differently situated knowledges and inter/national political contexts, we explore the emergence of adoption systems in their (post)colonial, racial, classed, and gendered dimensions. Whilst emphasizing the irreducible differences in subject-positions and experience, we reiterate the argument for the need of shared frameworks and relational concepts.

Sophie: Refusing fragmentation – reclaiming shared worlds

The notion of severance provides an opportunity to reconnect what is too often separated, even in some decolonial analyses of adoption: the interlocking nature of processes of gendering, classing, dis-abling, and racializing, marking the (un)making of families across the globe as expressions of an overarching colonial logic. Recognizing such interconnections enables us to better understand the linkages between domestic and transnational adoption, but also between adoption and contemporary family-making through assisted reproductive technologies (ART). Thinking from my own personal story, I reflect on

how the impression of being alone and exceptional is itself an effect of severance as it works to individualize, fragment, and depoliticize adoptee experiences.

Separated from my white Catholic Belgian mother soon after my birth in 1979, I was handed over to social services and placed in a foster family that eventually adopted me. As the story went, my mother, who was suffering from mental disabilities, was unable to care for me and my African father was unknown and apparently not interested. For years, I was invested in this compassionate story, contrasting the unwillingness of my first parents with the generosity of those who re-homed me into a stable, more capable, more suitable family. It took me years to re-imagine and reconstruct this story, as one in which a mentally disabled woman was stripped off the opportunity to bond with her newborn child; in which laws governing marriage and divorce mandated that my father's name could not be inscribed on my birth certificate, as she was married to another man at the time; in which social workers refrained from informing my father about his parental rights; in which my father's Senegalese family was not informed about where I had been transferred to and had been wondering for years where I had been. It took me years to re-understand my story as one in which one type of family—marked by a multiplicity of racial and religious backgrounds, "illegitimate" relationships and disability—became disqualified and replaced by a "proper," legally recognised, Catholic, nuclear family environment.

The story seems atypical and singular. Only after years of engaging with both domestic and transnational adoptees did I come to realise that my experience was not exceptional at all. I now easily recognize myself in the experiences of loss, disconnection, and fragmentation marking the stories of transnational adoptees who yearn the erasure of their cultural, religious, and linguistic backgrounds and struggle to meaningfully connect with retrieved family members (Withaeckx et al., 2023). I see the experience of my first mother reflected in the decades of systematic forced adoptions organised by Catholic and Protestant authorities in Belgium and the Netherlands, affecting thousands of women deemed unfit to raise their own children (Smits van Waesberghe, 2021). I can relate the refusal to enable my atypical first family from existing to the colonial Belgian state's investment in removing *métis* children from their African families and re-homing them in Catholic orphanages and Belgian white families (Candaele, 2020).

I see our inabilities to connect such apparently very different experiences as an intrinsic part of severance. Tuhiwai Smith (2012) describes how colonialism involves the "systematic fragmentation" of colonized communities, disconnecting them from "their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations, and their own ways of thinking, feeling, and interacting with the world" (2012, p. 28). Splitting, carving up, and disconnecting are also features of adoption. Adoption individualizes and depoliticizes the adoptee experience by erasing the collective character of the adoptee experience (Trenka et al., 2006). Adoption does not only separate children from parents; it also separates siblings and even twins from each other, placing them in separate families and locations, and actively preventing them from knowing about each other's existence. Adoptees mostly grow up isolated from other adoptees, an experience which is exacerbated for those growing up in rural areas. Coping strategies like acquiescing and expressing gratefulness rather than anger or sadness further compound isolation and prevent the development of a collective consciousness that can form the basis for political action (McKee, 2019).

Fragmentation and depoliticization further occur through the common treatment of domestic and transnational adoption as deriving from unrelated histories rather than as deeply entangled, and mutually informed practices. For example, some European countries have recently publicly admitted the harms of past practices of domestic adoption within their boundaries. Yet, contemporary transnational adoptions are driven by exactly the same dynamics informing these now condemned domestic adoptions in Europe: poverty, stigmatization of unwed mother-

hood, discrimination (Bos, 2008; Högbacka, 2016). Nevertheless, these same governments are reluctant to put an end to transnational adoptions.[4]

Adoption is also inseparable from the expansion of family-making through Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART): the increased demand for these technologies (notably surrogacy) and the desire for genetically related children have been identified as linked to the shrinking demand for adoption (Scherman et al., 2016). At the same time, ART now replicates much of the geopolitical, gendered, and racialized inequalities, and exploitation that mark adoption practices.

Re-politicizing adoptee experiences requires us to recognize the shared pasts that mark the (un)making of families across the globe. This includes the building of solidarities between domestic and transnational adoptees, but also between adoptees and donor- and surrogacy conceived people: all of them result from globalised, racialised, and gendered reproductive inequalities, privileging the constitution of some kinds of families to the detriment and destruction of others. By reclaiming the shared worlds that shape our experiences, we can refuse fragmentation and position ourselves as emanating from entangled histories that cannot, and should not, be separated.

Lene: Relating to a plural past

I am interested in the concept of severance because it invites us to reflect upon the multiple dimensions of separation and appropriation. In the case of adoption: from the bureaucratic logics and the biopolitical technologies that enforce separation to how adoptees challenge these structures by politicizing how the erasure of our pasts conscripts us into futures defined by coloniality. At the same time, severance may be used to think more carefully about how we understand and re-relate to a plural past.

I live and work in Denmark and Norway where different modes of adoption are central to the biopolitical fabric of the welfare state. I was born in South Korea in 1972, presumably in November, and adopted to Denmark in April 1973. I have little information about my pre-adoption life and the specific circumstances and processes that enabled a Korean social worker to assign me the status of adoptable child.

In her examination of the emergence of South Korea's transnational adoption system, Koo (2024, p. 2) describes how Japanese colonial rule (1910-45) implemented the family registry (*hojŏk*) which assigned legal status per family unit. As a patrilinear order everyone in each household was registered under the name of the male head of the family. The patrilinear *hojŏk* system continued until 2008 when it was replaced by the Family Relations Register, which registers every family member individually. I have no knowledge of whether I exist on a *hojŏk*, but as many Korean adoptees I have an "orphan registry" (*koa hojŏk*) which has been crucial in facilitating adoptions from South Korea. As Koo explains, on the *koa hojŏk* the child is entered "as the head of a single-person household, leaving blank all familial information such as details about the parents" (2024, p. 2). Thus, it simultaneously constructs "orphanhood" and ascribes legal status to the child based on this status.

As a document that makes the child adoptable, the *koa hojŏk* is ambiguous. It erases and forecloses information about the child's relations to kin and family, but it also prescribes a new origin. The *koa hojŏk* resembles the conventional *hojŏk* in that it stipulates the geographical origin (*pon'gwan*) of a family name (2024, p. 20). The combination of *pon'gwan* and family name is important: it places those with the same family name (e.g. Kim or Park) into different kinship groups based on the clan's geographical origin (2024, p. 20). As adoptees we have been assigned names and *pon'gwans* on our *koa hojŏks*, however, in 1976 the South Korean government decided that adoption agencies should use "Hanyang" (Seoul) as geographical origin on all *koa hojŏks*, because no family names were thought to originate from there (2024, p. 20). This implied that agencies could avoid inscribing adoptees into already existing kinship groups. According to Koo, establishing Hanyang as an origin placed children in a "symbolic terra nullius with no

ties to any Korean lineage groups" (2024, p. 20). Hanyang was thus invented as "an imaginary origin that was created only to erase both itself and the adopted children from the Korean nation" (2024, p. 20)

My *koa hojŏk* follows this template. As an infant assigned the name Cho Shinhee, I am listed as the head of my household with no other family members. Hanyang is entered as the origin of Cho, my family name. Thus, my *koa hojŏk* from 1973 anticipates the 1976 directive instructing all adoption agencies to use Hanyang. As a fictional adoptee origin, Hanyang operates simultaneously to erase our ties to family and nation, *and* as "a symbol of the impossibility of fully severing transnational adoptees from South Korea" (2024, p. 22). As Koo points out, it is ironic that the Korean authorities would later find out that there is, in fact, one name that originates from Hanyang—that is the name of Cho.

As an able-bodied infant, cut off from kin, and head of my own household, I was considered a perfect child for a white, adoptive family. I have searched for my Korean family, but I belong to the large group of adoptees who exist without (physical) reunion and with no or little information about family. The meaning of search and reunion processes has changed significantly during my adult life. Over the past 30 years, adoptees have turned search and reunion into a normalised desire and experience, not something to be automatically shunned (for the complexities of reunion see e.g. Docan-Morgan, 2024; Kim, 2010). These processes have generated crucial knowledge about the violences of the adoption system, the experiences of our first families as well as the irreversible consequences of family separation, and the potentials for mediating parts of its harmful impact. In this sense, search and reunion have not only been significant and life-changing for individual adoptees and first families, but also pivotal for critical adoptee thinking and the politicization of adoption critical movements.

Notably, these developments have occurred alongside a shift in pro-adoption discourse and policy that increasingly places more emphasis on the preservation of adoptees' "roots," right to access information about the "past," and/or to seek reunion (De Graeve, 2010). At stake in this discursive annexation is the production of a new set of adoption morals that renews credibility in the adoption system, and the creation of new domains of adoption governance attuned to control and mediate how adoptees should relate to the past (Stuvøy & Myong, 2023). "Knowledge" about our pasts has thus been turned into a convenient and depoliticized solution to adoption trauma.

In the context of these political struggles, I wonder what it means to exist without reunion *and* in opposition to a system geared to erase our pasts and murder what could have been? In what ways does existence without reunion allows for alternative modes of relating and reconnecting to a plural past and for building abolitionist futures that are not contingent upon family reunion? If we wish to engage with these questions, decolonial critiques of adoption must build upon a plurality of adoptee standpoints, including knowledges generated from experiences that exist without the possibility of, or desire for, family reunion. This is not the same as reproducing the colonial logics that make the relations between us and our first families disposable or to minimize the harmful consequences of family separation. It is an attempt to expand the horizon of adoptee resistance, solidarity, and liberation.

Ruben: *Dutch Family-Politics, Adoption and Nation-Building*

Adoption is not in my family history (or at least not that I am aware of). But what the ongoing conversations with my co-authors on severance and adoption have made clear is that my position is not so much one of an *outsider* to adoption, but of *implication* within the imperial formations of family-politics from *inside* the nuclear family. Adoption is inseparable from the violent construction of the nuclear family, as the civilisational bourgeois ideal in whose name kinship-systems and social communities continue to be broken down and policed. By considering myself

as an *outsider* to adoption, I would repeat the isolating of adoption from systems of family-governance within nation-building and racial capitalism, foregoing a shared frame to understand the entanglement of these systems of power.

My family history (to which I do have access) inevitably denaturalises the alleged ideal of the nuclear family that has played its ideological part in sustaining modern systems of adoption. I find a non-exceptional story of my grandparents' generation aspiring to move from working class to middle class and to partake in normative postwar Dutch nation-building. My grandfather, a mineworker, chose not to pass on his first language (a local Dutch dialect), so as to instruct the children in "civilised" Dutch (*algemeen beschaafd Nederlands*), to unburden them by marks of regionality-*qua*-inferiority. His first wife, from a Polish migrant family, also did not pass on her first language (Polish). Although she was happy to drop her Polish name to avoid daily discrimination and to ascend to an unquestioned Dutch white identity, the more important reason for her not to speak Polish was patriarchal anxiety of my grandfather. Not tolerating a language spoken in the house he did not understand, he claimed patriarchal authority to control her actions, movement, and speech (as isolated housewife and mother, disconnected from the past and giving up on future-dreams outside the role of housewife). By choosing not to pass on their first languages, the plural cross-border working class migrant histories disappear so that the Dutch middle-class family could emerge. The severance from languages, cultures, the plural past, and the forms of violence inside and outside the family that cause, inflict, and repeat these cuts, continue to be transmitted in silences that run through the ideal(ised) form of family that served 20th-century nation-building and capital-accumulation. Growing up, I never questioned my Dutch identity, but by piecing together and retelling a multigenerational story I have come to see the violent histories that made this unquestioned "natural" identification possible and enabled all the privileges of a white Dutch (cis)male citizen from a middle-class family. Through silences around these histories, the nuclear family appears as natural and the white normative citizen/subject appears as a natural being, undone of its relation to a past of plural languages and cultures.

The local and national family-politics from which a middle-class Dutch subject could emerge, shed of the traces of a plural past, occurred in the post-war years based on rebuilding the nation through conservative family-politics. Its slogan: "family-restoration restores the nation" (*gezinsherstel brengt volksherstel;* Houwink ten Cate, 2024, p. 27). In 1956, the first Dutch adoption law was introduced, primarily aimed at domestic adoption. For decades to come, young unwed mothers were forced to give up their children for adoption. Norms around gender, race, and religion were decisive in the fate of thousands of children and mothers. It was considered to be the mother's moral duty, as atonement for her "sin," and to be in the best interest of the child, by offering them a future in a "proper" Christian household (Smits van Waesberghe, 2021).

SCANDINAVIAN ATTACHMENTS TO SEVERANCE AND ADOPTION

In this last section, we return to the case of Denmark to illustrate how severance continues to condition responses to recent criticisms on adoption. The Scandinavian[5] countries have long cherished a self-image as civilisationally progressive and gender-equal societies: a self-representation that sustains various colonial forms of severance, ranging from transnational adoption to (other) eugenicist approaches to race and family. Therefore, the potential dismantling of one adoption system will not necessarily destabilise other practices of severance, rather it might reinforce them. At stake here is not only that desires and demands for children create new markets for adoptable children but also that deep-seated (Euro)modern attachments to severance are nurtured and reconfigured through shifting adoption practices and political attempts to reform the systems.

Historically, Danish governments have sought to mitigate abuses in transnational adoption by imposing reforms of the adoption system (Stuvøy & Myong, 2023). In recent years, adoptee activists have focused on exposing and problematising legal transgressions, human trafficking, and human rights violations while at the same time emphasising the importance of family reunification. Critical adoptees and groups such as Danish Korean Rights Group (DKRG) have called for investigations that first and foremost seek accountability through legal frameworks. The Danish government has repeatedly rejected such demands, and in the beginning of June 2025 secured a parliamentary majority for an agreement allocating 22,8 mill. DKK to a so-called impartial investigation, covering the years 1964-2016 and spanning 70 sending countries (Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing, 2025). The agreement also allocates 2 mill DKK for an analysis with the aim of "developing one or more models for a future adoption system" (2025, p.1). It is significant that this analysis must consider *both* transnational and domestic adoption.

The Danish case illustrates how political moves to investigate adoption practices are deeply entangled with intentions to continue and rebuild adoption systems. The promise of reform—rather than abolition or legal accountability as proposed by some adoptees—reveals the ongoing attachment to severance. The technologies of child removals change and shift in the context of these struggles (Lindgren, 2021). While transnational adoptions are (temporarily) suspended in Denmark awaiting the review and the scaffolding of a future adoption system, a majority in Danish parliament has concurrently worked to strengthen the provisions for forced adoptions (Sehested Rom, 2024) and/or adoptions from the foster care system. Danish political support for forced adoption arrangements has increased over the past 15 years. Similar tendencies can be seen in Norway, Finland, and Sweden (Järvinen, 2024; Lind et al, 2024). These measures target groups who are already marginalised due to austerity, disability, Indigeneity, and/or migrant or refugee status.

These briefly sketched trajectories indicate a turn in which the biopolitical calibration of contemporary adoption is increasingly mobilised through rationales of "child protection" and carceral and punitive logics (Mulinari, 2024) that overlap and coexist with humanitarian imperialism (Withaeckx, 2024), Nordic racial exceptionalism (Hübinette, 2021b; Loftsdottir & Jensen, 2012), and colonial care (Prattes & Myong, 2025). Moreover, what emerges from this is how white reckonings with abuses in adoption are mobilized to create new grounds of legitimacy for adoption. What continues to connect these different modalities of child removal and appropriation—across transnational adoption, domestic (forced) adoption, and foster care—is the severing of the plural past and the inherently violent premises of what constitutes a desirable subject and a "proper" family within the borders of the Scandinavian welfare state.

CONCLUSION

What (dis)connects the genealogical threads of adoption and family separations across Scandinavia, Belgium, the Netherlands, South Korea, Senegal, Congo, Palestine, Kalaallit Nunaat, and Sápmi, is the colonial logic of severance: the separation from the plural past for the sake of imperial identity-formation and nation-building through the governance of childhood and family. Adoption is one of the sinews of the (Euro)modern strategies of targeting children and governing families based on systemic attacks on the past and "illegitimate" forms of kinship.

In this contribution, thinking through our personal experiences with disconnection, displacement, and family-formation, we attempted to create shared frames of analysis to understand the connections between practices of child separation and family formation across a variety of sociopolitical contexts. We allowed ourselves an associative and relational way of writing and thinking, highlighting the entanglements based on the multiple directions of our conversations. We followed the threads of the various fragmented identities that are (differentially) imposed on us in

an attempt at unlearning and coalition-building. This way, we aim to counter the divisive fragmented identities that separate adoptees as an isolated group and special case.

Our exchanges have brought out varied, but interconnected ways in which families, national identities, and subjects become constituted through the erasure, transformation, and re-arrangement of communal kinship-ties. Such practices affect both the adopted and non-adopted and play out in different ways across the colonial difference, in varied ranges of intensity and violence. The notion of severance enabled us to draw connections among practices often separated in academia and the political imaginary, which helps to challenge the assumed exceptionality of adoption. In its unrelenting logic of erasing and eradicating genealogies, practices, and family types that do not conform to the aims of (Euro)modern, nationalist ideals of identity and family, all of us are in some way or another affected by severance. At the same time, we have also examined how adoption continues to operate as an efficient tool informing humanitarian imaginaries of the nation and of "proper" parenting, as is especially outspoken in the context of Scandinavia. This serves both as an intervention in and bridge to various queer and feminist critiques of the family, which too often have dismissed critiques of adoption as a bio-essentialist attachment to an alleged "natural family." While adoption has become the object of incisive criticisms and its systematic abuses can no longer be ignored, current political attempts at redeeming and revising adoption continue to ignore the violent histories of colonialism and nation-building and reproduce investments in (Euro)modern systems of severance. Rejections of calls for suspending and abolishing adoption express a deep-seated attachment to the underlying humanitarian welfare state narratives that constitute adoptive families and receiving nations as benevolent actors working for "the good" of child and nation. The logic of severance continues to operate then through a variety of practices—from shifting technologies of adoptions, the forced removal of children, to the genocidal politics of the settler colonial state. Disrupting severance will require a more radical engagement with the underlying logic constituting the system of coloniality, as it continues to operate across the globe in variegated, yet intimately entangled, modalities.

NOTES

[1] Author names are listed alphabetically, reflecting no hierarchy of contribution.

[2] (Euro)modernity is a critical renaming of the West, indicating the hegemonic imperial project based on Euro-American colonization of the past 500 years, without pinpointing it to a geographical space (Hordijk, 2024). (Euro)modernity is, to differing degrees and in different ways, at work at every locality. Simultaneously, each locale contains plural histories and other resources that are creolized and/or antagonistic to it. (Euro)modernity thus allows for clarity on the hegemonic imperial Western formations across the globe, without demarcations of "the West vs. the Rest," which would separate subjects into those who reside "inside" or "outside" of modernity. Nor does it imply that only Euro-American actors have agency in the construction of Euromodernity. Instead, it serves to highlight interconnections and complexity of plural positions, always implicated in and constituted by (Euro)modernity, but also in relation to a plural past. The movement of (Euro)modernity is precisely the varied forms of severance from, and absorption of, this plurality.

[3] Israeli nation-building also employs its severance from the plurality of Jewish pasts through Ashkenazi-models of national identity. Mizrahi Jews were forced to be separated from their pasts (portrayed as barbaric) in myriad ways, for example through the illegal adoption of children of Yemenite Jews. Between 1949 and 1950, an unknown number of Yemenite children were declared dead and put up for adoption for Ashkenazi families as to de-Arabise the Jewish population of Israel (Liebel, 2024).

NOTES

[4] In Belgium, the Flemish government and bishops formally apologized in 2015 for the forced adoptions between 1950-1980 and denounced the harmful separations of mothers and children. Despite reports revealing the systematic illicit practices in transnational adoptions, the Flemish government declared in 2021 that there is "a future for intercountry adoption" in Flanders and refrained from an adoption stop (VRT, 2015).

[5] We use Scandinavian, rather than Nordic, to emphasize the leading role of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark in transnational adoption. The three countries have the highest number of transnational adoptees per capita.

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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 set-

tler 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 resi-

dence 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 "tempo-

ral 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 po-

litical 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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Erasing Communities:

Coloniality, Racial Banishment, and Denmark's Ghetto Policies

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Denmark's 2018 public housing policies, arguing they function as a mechanism for managing Muslim communities in public housing estates. It analyses these policies based on a theoretical framework of coloniality and the framing of Muslims as threats to Danish social cohesion. The article then shifts focus to the experiences of racialised residents in targeted housing estates, drawing on ethnographic data from Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense. These residents highlight the significance of community care, intergenerational ties, and informal support networks. The article demonstrates how the ghetto policies reflect a coloniality enacted through racial governance, aiming to banish and erase Muslim communities from their neighbourhoods. By introducing the concepts of coloniality and racial banishment, the article argues that Denmark's housing policies serve as tools of social and spatial control, used to manage its Muslim population, erase their spatial history, and dismantle community life.[1]

KEY WORDS

HOUSING POLICY, MUSLIMS, RACIAL GOVERNANCE, COLONIALITY, URBAN DISPLACEMENT, COMMUNITY ERASURE

INTRODUCTION

In 2021, Denmark began large-scale demolitions of public housing estates. This started four years after the government introduced its ghetto policies, outlined in *One Denmark without Parallel Societies: No Ghettos in 2030* (Government, 2018, henceforth: the ghetto report). These policies aim to eradicate public housing estates where so-called non-Westerners make up more than 50% of the residents. This article focuses on the civilising premise to demolish these neighbourhoods and manage non-Western communities. This civilising premise is juxtaposed to the counter-narratives of community care, social uplift and intergenerational ties. The racialisation of non-Western residents as a Muslim Other (which is never mentioned explicitly in the policy documents) is at the heart of the government's public housing policies. Nevertheless, the experiences of those who inhabit these public housing estates depict a diverse community built on informal support networks. Throughout this article I interchange between 'Muslim', 'Other' and 'non-Western' to emphasise the racialisation of non-Western immigrants and descendants as Muslim Others. Non-Westerners might not *actually* be Muslim, however in political discourse and public consciousness non-whiteness is assumed to be non-Western, which in turn is assumed to be a representation of the Muslim Other (Hassani, 2024).

I use the concept of "the ghetto" to refer to how these neighbourhoods are described in the 2018 report and the ghettoisation discourse in the years prior to the introduction of these housing policies (Seemann, 2021). There is a racialised element in the ghetto-rhetoric which underscores the racial composition of these housing areas as essential to their deprivation. The current Social Democratic government has since adopted "parallel societies" as the main descriptor of these neighbourhoods. While both concepts—ghettos and parallel societies—problematise racialised populations, there is a long history of critical scholarship on ghettos that connects the Danish ghetto with the historical idea of the ghetto as a neighbourhood for abject citizens. I deliberately use "the ghetto" to highlight the rise of the Danish ghetto as a structurally racist phenomenon linked to a racial hierarchisation, which is invisibilised yet remains omnipresent in Danish racial welfare regime (cf. Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017).

Most of Denmark's public housing estates were built during the housing boom following World War 2. Many of these estates have since been inhabited by various influxes of labour migrants and refugees (Shultz Larsen, 2014). The influx of labour migrants and refugees from the global South attests to colonial structures that push people of the global South towards life in the global North (Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2018). These structures cannot be disconnected from the national and local histories. Hence, I bring a discussion of these structures into the Danish urban context through the concept of racial banishment as an expression of coloniality (Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe, 2023; Roy, 2022). Ananya Roy (2022) defines racial banishment as state violence against racialised people and communities, seeking to erase their presence from urban environments. Her concept is useful to think with in relation to the Danish ghetto policies, as the government has made racial hierarchization an explicit signifier in its attempt to dispossess racialised communities and promote a white repossession of urban landscapes. The implementation of state control over public housing estates—which historically were community run and managed through the concept of tenants' democracy—and the subsequent banishment of racialised communities is a concrete configuration of coloniality in Denmark. In this sense, the government's integration paradigm should be understood as an essential feature of this coloniality expressed through a civilising discourse aimed at controlling Denmark's Muslim population materially, socially and culturally.

The article starts with a discussion of a community-centred methodological approach to ethnography. It then traces historical and conceptual frameworks that explain how frames of coloniality manifest in the Danish context. I analyse the policy discourse that problematise Muslim residents in public hous-

ing, unpacking the 2018 ghetto report's premise of integration and connect it to the wider otherisation of Muslims in political discourse. I then conduct an ethnographic analysis of racialised communities impacted by the policy in Denmark's three largest cities. I focus on narratives from three young women, who grew up in estates currently targeted by the ghetto policies. These narratives highlight community life, intergenerational connections, and informal support networks. Finally, I discuss how racially hierarchizing policies express a racial banishment of non-white bodies and communities, which in turn can be understood as a material manifestation of coloniality. I argue that Danish ghetto policies manage the Muslim population and erase Muslims' spatial history and community life tied to public housing estates through racial banishment. This reflects a settler-colonial practice of home dispossession and spatial erasure that are becoming hallmarks of gentrification efforts in many cities across the Global North (Kent-Stoll, 2020).

COMMUNITY-CENTRED ANALYSIS OF URBAN POLICIES

Depicting a counter-narrative to the deprived Danish ghetto, Copenhagen-based artist of Palestinian descent, Banaan Al-Nasser, uses the demolitions of a public housing estates in Denmark as a creative point of departure. Her art installation—*All that Remains*—represents residents' memories on broken yellow bricks from demolished buildings. Zooming in on the bricks, they include pictures of children playing outside their family flat, a mother waving to her child outside from her flat window. The installation includes miniature make-shift satellite dishes that beautified so many of our childhood flats and opened the world of the Global South to our parents lingering for a home they had to leave for physical, economic or generational safety.

This piece of art is not trivial. What the Danish government imagines of the ghetto betrays the fond childhood memories my interlocutors and I had; far from war, economic instability and surrounded by

"All That Remains", art installation by Banaan Al-Nasser at Viborg Art Hall, photo: Rine Flyckt

community. The art piece rejects the dehumanised image of the dangerous ghetto that threatens Danish society. Ultimately, Al-Nasser's art highlights the state's racialised violence of destroying and dismembering communities that have played an essential supportive role for disenfranchised populations.

I was raised in a stigmatised housing estate in Copenhagen's western suburbs; the same one my grandparents settled in when they arrived in the country. This is the auto-ethnographic backdrop that guides my reading of policy documents and my conversations with my interlocutors. I see Al-Nasser's installation as a reflection of my own connection to the history of public housing in Denmark. Simultaneously, it is a representation of the narratives of my interlocutors who embody different migration histories, life stories and community involvements.

I take note of Gani and Khan's (2024) recent critique of how positionality statements can become performative acts that risk reifying and upholding racialised power dynamics in research. Instead Gani and Khan (2024) highlight how auto-ethnographic methods have been developed by women of colour to ground their research in their experiences and communities. My research approach to Denmark's ghetto policies draws on this legacy. While the seeds of this project were grounded in my auto-ethnographic experiences, they developed in conversations and reflections with racialised communities most impacted by the racist tropes that inform the ghetto policies. My interlocutors are mutual conversational partners; they

shared their experiences, and I shared mine, layering and challenging each other's perspectives. My ethnographic approach is thus a community-grounded analysis of state violence and power over racialised communities drawing on policy analysis, spatial narratives, qualitative interviews and participant observation in public housing estates in Denmark's largest cities: Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense.

FROM COLONIAL LEGACY TO COLONIALITY IN THE PRESENT

Denmark views its history as benevolent: it was a small empire that supposedly never inflicted too much harm on its colonies (Jensen, 2018; Padovan-Özdemir & Øland, 2022). The dominant national narrative is that its colonial violence never reached the calibre of its British, French and American counterparts. It is a narrative that refuses to re-evaluate Denmark's legacy in its current policies (Padovan-Özdemir & Øland, 2022; Suárez-Krabbe & Lindberg, 2019). However, Denmark has a four-century-long colonial history contributing to the enslavement, extraction, exploitation, and dispossession of peoples, resources, and land in the global South and the Arctic (Graugaard, 2009; Jensen, 2018). In fact, Denmark's colonial powers remain in the Artic region through its annexation of Kalaallit Nunaat (what Denmark has named Greenland) and the Faroe Islands. Although these two countries are supposedly autonomous territories, they remain under Danish jurisdiction. Particularly, Kalaallit Nunaat cements Denmark's geopolitical importance to NATO and US militarisation policies. Thus, from the beginning of the UN's decolonisation efforts in the 1950s and 60s, and through manipulative colonial politics, Denmark has refused to pave the way for independence. By annexing both Kalaallit Nunaat and the Faroe Islands, Denmark has ensured its colonial control, particularly over the countries' foreign and defence policies (Larsen, 2018).

The Danish dehumanisation of Muslims as inferior to 'Westerners', has a historical forerunner in the racialisation of the Inuit population of Kalaallit Nunaat in mid-century Danish modernisation policies in the colony (Hassani, n.d.). In reality, by enforcing capitalist structures, these policies promoted the erasure of Inuit economic, cultural and linguistic practices (Graugaard, 2009; Jensen, 2018). The Danish racial capitalist state formation was thus built on colonial frames that enforced racial hierarchization and preceded the arrival of Muslim labour migrants in the late 1960s.

Denmark's role in Western imperialism is not and has never been insignificant, although often played out to be on the periphery of the major global powers (Jakobsen & Rynning, 2019). How are these frames of coloniality expressed through *local* governance? I am here drawing on Quijano's (2000) seminal essay on how coloniality upholds global structures of power, capitalism and subjectivity to maintain white supremacy on a global scale. Focusing on coloniality in the Nordic region, Groglopo and Suarez-Krabbe (2023) clarifies how Quijano's concept of a matrix of coloniality enables us to understand how race and racism become organising principles that permeates social, political, economic and environmental systems. Groglopo & Suarez-Krabbe argue that coloniality's structural *and* social influence enables us to move from an analysis of macro-structures to the local and everyday lives. In fact, I argue there is an urgency to analyse the concept of coloniality in its local iterations, both through policy analysis (structural) and ethnographic analysis (phenomenological). In this regard, Kent-Stoll (2020) explains how coloniality as a concept clarifies the racial capitalist logic that shapes urban policies. Understanding coloniality through Ananya Roy's (2022) concept of racial banishment enables a way to understand how racialised bodies and spaces become erasable, while white bodies and spaces are seen as urban progress (Kent-Stoll, 2020).

Coloniality allows us to approach the racial question to understand modes of power on a national, urban, and political economic level that uphold and reproduce colonial structures of white supremacy. The focus is thus on the political processes that racialise Muslims. These processes say more about the racial

welfare state than anything significant about Muslim communities. Taking Denmark's housing policies as an example, it is worth emphasising that public housing was an essential part of the Danish welfare state. That is until Muslim communities moved in, and the white middle-class moved out. As the ghetto report states, these communities punched "holes" in the map of Denmark (Government, 2018, p. 5). In the government's framing of holes, Muslim residents are literally erased. This erasure allows for infractions on liberties that would normally be contested. This is essentially the coloniality of being (Quijano, 2000); the power to decide whose humanity is invisibilised; whose communities are deemed a threat to the nation-state; who can be banished and thus have their social presence and community histories eradicated from city spaces.

Danish research on housing policies often highlights territorial stigmatisation (Jensen & Christensen, 2012; Risager, 2022; Shultz Larsen, 2014;), the connection between urban and migration governance as well as experiences of displacement (Jensen & Söderberg, 2022; Lundsteen, 2023; Söderberg, 2024a). There is, however, a limited conversation on how these policies seek to banish Muslim communities from major cities. This article tackles this by building on previous scholarly conversations, emphasising how the racialised aspect of these policies is essential to understanding Denmark as a racial welfare regime (Hassani, n.d.; Mulinari & Neergaard, 2017). The ghetto policies exemplify the state's use of urban control over the urban poor, leveraging urban spaces as tools for immigration governance (Turan, 2021). However, a substantial point in the *ghetto* report, is the inherently racial concept of the ghetto. The main culprits that render an area a ghetto are not simply the urban poor, but rather the number of racialised residents across income levels, employment or other socio-economic factors. The racial is an essential component to the policy, even more so than the neoliberal measures that are introduced through these policies.

THE GHETTO REPORT

To understand the coloniality of Denmark's social policies, we must retrace the political and epistemological developments behind them. These policies are saturated with civilisational discourse—particularly in relation to integration policies—yet do not explicitly mention Muslims or religious and cultural practices. The concept of civilisationalism reproduces the colonial discourse of the "civilised West" vs. the "primitive Rest". In Danish integration policies, it is often expressed as the basis of racial hierarchisation and the need to adopt (civilised) Danish values, rejecting (primitive) Muslim values. To unpack the politically oppressive character of "integration" as the main socio-political framing of the ghetto policies, we must understand how integration is framed as integration into "civilisation" (Schinkel, 2017):

> The government envisions a cohesive Denmark. A Denmark built on democratic values such as freedom and the rule of law. Equality and open-mindedness. Tolerance and gender equality. A Denmark where everyone actively participates.
>
> Over the past nearly 40 years, Denmark's ethnic composition has changed significantly. In 1980, there were 5.1 million people in Denmark. Today, we are close to 5.8 million. The population growth comes from abroad—both immigrants and their descendants. The majority of the new Danes have a non-Western background. (Government, 2018, p. 4)

These two paragraphs introduce the ghetto report. The former emphasizes two key elements: cohesiveness and democratic values. While it does not yet clarify what is meant by a cohesive nation-state, it defines democratic values as freedom, rule of law, open-mindedness, and gender equality. Understanding this framing within a wider discourse of white supremacy, these are often concepts claimed Muslims lack (Bhattacharyya, 2009; Ghumkhor, 2019; Norton, 2013; Razack, 2004). Nevertheless, the paragraph does not acknowledge any racial or power dynamics, presenting itself as colour-blind. This sort of

colour-blind rhetoric is an attempt to divert attention away from racial structures by promoting a raceless framing in which race remains implicit yet omnipresent (El-Tayeb, 2011; Hassani, 2023; Padovan-Özdemir & Øland, 2022; Theo Goldberg, 2006; Younis & Jadhav, 2020). The second paragraph shatters the colour-blind veneer by focusing on non-Western population growth. Pandering to the moral panic of non-Western immigration is a well-known element in Great Replacement conspiracy theories (Obaidi et al., 2022). Such conspiracies argue that the white population of Europe is quickly being replaced by a Muslim immigrant population.

The report continues with a colour-blind description of people who are disconnected from Danish society:

> The problems are evident. Children, young people, and adults who live their lives in Denmark but are effectively disconnected from Danes and Danish society.
>
> Holes have been punched in the map of Denmark. Many live in more or less isolated enclaves, where far too many residents fail to take sufficient responsibility (Government 2018, p. 5).

Maintaining colour-blindness, the report does not specify here who the subjects are that are isolating themselves from Danish society. However, going back to the introductory paragraphs, it clearly includes nationalised immigrants and their descendants. In fact, a resolution passed in parliament in 2017, just a year before the ghetto report was published, emphasises the racial distinction between non-Westerners and *real* Danes:

> The Danish Parliament notes with concern that there are areas in Denmark today where the proportion of immigrants and descendants from non-Western countries exceeds 50%. It is the Parliament's view that Danes should not be in the minority in residential areas in Denmark. The government and Parliament have implemented a series of stricter measures that have significantly reduced asylum immigration and counteract parallel societies. The Parliament urges the government to continue working towards a political goal of reducing the number of asylum seekers and family reunifications coming to Denmark (Parliament Resolution, 2017).

This resolution was passed with a majority of MP-votes from the centre-right and paved the way for a policy-distinction between non-Westerners and white Danes. It is thus no longer enough to be a naturalised Danish citizen. Instead, the racialised categorization of individuals as non-Western facilitated the introduction of public housing policies tied to the proportion of non-Western residents—naturalised citizens and non-citizens alike—in a given housing estate.

Islamophobia and xenophobia in legal policies have previously been limited to campaigns that vilified Muslimness (e.g. banning female judges from wearing hijab or women from wearing niqab in public spaces) or border control (particularly targeting asylum seekers and their families). This new racial distinction between non-Westerners and Danes expands the government's reach to target several generations of racialised citizens through policy. This is exactly what the ghetto policies do. Under the guise of integration, the ghetto report is an introduction to how the government can socially control non-Westerners through social policies. The reasoning for this control is based on what the government defines as the burden of parallel societies on the social cohesion in society. The report highlights five issues with parallel societies: 1) a threat to democracy, 2) unsafe, driving out resourceful citizens, 3) limited opportunities for children and youth due to language barriers, 4) a threat to women's freedom and the existence of domestic violence, and 5) an economic burden on the welfare state (Government 2018, p. 5). The first point emphasises how housing areas with a large proportion of racialised residents pose a *threat* to Danish liberal values. This is the justification to dismantle these communities. The second point underscores middle-class (presumably white) residents moving away from these housing areas, emphasising feelings

of "unsafety". The government does not make the colour lines explicit here (cf. Du Bois, 1994); however, the resolution passed in parliament the preceding year notes how (white) Danes are becoming a minority in some of these areas. It is their feelings of "unsafety" that is prioritised. The third point claims children and youth lack upward social mobility. This is attributed to their failure to learn Danish properly. The government's claim is contradicted by recent educational research, which shows that socially disadvantaged racialised students often achieve higher social mobility than their parents (Khawaja & Jaffe-Walter, 2024).

The fourth point is perhaps the most explicit in its reference to Muslims while remaining hidden in colour-blind terms. The government's concept of negative social control, or the related concept of honour related conflicts targets Muslim families outright yet remains implicit in its focus on non-Westerners (Jaffe-Walter, 2024). The implication here is that Muslim men dominate women because of their religious values, resulting in domestic violence and restrictions in sexual freedoms. This refers to imperialist logics of saving Muslim women from Muslim men; an orientalist trope that has been a driving force for the War on Terror and the depiction of the dangerous brown man (Bhattacharyya, 2009) and the oppressed veiled woman (Ghumkhor, 2019). Finally, parallel societies are a financial burden, stemming from the high number of unemployed residents. A deeper analysis is needed to link this point to the racial capitalist foundations of Denmark's migration and border policies (Hassani, n.d.). However, it is important to mention here that this point on capitalist value is connected to the previous points on the positioning of Muslims outside society, particularly Muslim women through Muslim men's control. For instance, when the government introduced a policy in 2025 to force immigrants on social benefits to work for their benefits, they argued that this would help immigrant women join the labour force. In other words, the racialised Other only holds value through their contribution to capitalist structures. There is research depicting the historical context that increase migrant and refugees socio-economic precarity, including: discrimination in the job marked, increased vulnerability to economic downturns, and being likely to possess low-skilled, low-income precarious jobs (Padovan-Özdemir & Moldenhawer, 2017). By enforcing a system of *labour-for-benefits* rather than *labour-for-wages,* this policy introduces a new era in racial capitalist exploitation in Danish social policies. The policy increases migrant socio-economic precarity, but, more importantly, it creates a potential for an apartheid system in labour rights.

The policy analysis depicted in this section demonstrates how Danish civilisationalism, understood as white supremacy, is often underlying much of the political rhetoric which emphasises the Others' supposed irrationality, incompatibility and oppressive character. While this Other is assumed to be Muslim, it will never figure as such in grey literature. Instead, the emphasis is often placed on the integration of the non-Westerner (Rytter, 2019; Schinkel, 2017). This, I would argue, is an example of a coloniality of being, which dehumanises the Muslim as a quintessential Other.

ETHNOGRAPHY OF COMMUNITIES AND CARE

The article so far has emphasised the state narrative on ghettos. Such a policy analysis is essential to understanding the racial structures that seek to banish Muslim communities from Denmark's major cities. In the following, I shift my analysis from structures to communities. The following analysis centers racialised residents' experiences, demonstrating how the government are destroying a vital lifeline for migrant settlement in Denmark.

The ethnographic analysis draws on 23 interviews, five neighbourhood walks with residents in public housing estates, and several fieldtrips and visits over extended periods of time across public housing estates in Copenhagen, Aarhus and Odense. The fieldwork was conducted in 2023-24 over multiple visits. Interviews were conducted in Danish and transcribed us-

ing AI transcription tools, which were then corrected ad verbatim as needed. Interviews were coded and analysed in Danish, and interview-extracts were subsequently translated into English. I emphasise three narratives: Sarah from Aarhus, Dina from Odense and Nadia from Copenhagen. These three young women narrate their experiences coming of age in public housing estates currently targeted by the ghetto policies. Each of these stories highlight recurring themes that emerged from the research.

PATTERNS OF SETTLEMENT

Public housing in Denmark is based on a not-for-profit housing model that has attracted working class and lower middle-class families since its inception. Municipalities are allowed to allocate up to 25% of public housing in a particular estate to people with various social needs (including but not limited to refugees given asylum in Denmark). This has meant that there has always been a mix among residents between social tenants and tenants who acquired their homes through an open allocation system. However, many who achieve socio-economic stability often choose to purchase a home, thereby leaving the public housing sector (Sørensen, 2015). The exploitative measures most labour migrants arrived under in the 1960-70s, meant they often remained in precarious financial positions, particularly after the 1980s recession. Many could never afford the option of homeownership. Likewise, many refugees arriving during this economic recession, as well as a shift in the labour market towards a skilled labour force, meant they often remained excluded from employment. They rarely achieved financial stability to enable homeownership (Andersen et al., 2013).

Most of my interlocutors, who had a refugee background, moved into housing estates directly from asylum centres after gaining permanent residency status in Denmark during the late 1980s and 1990s, when obtaining permanence was easier for refugees. My interlocutors who came as labour migrants or are descendants of labour migrants, their families moved into the estates upon arrival and the family remained in the neighbourhood. In a few cases, my interlocutors needed accommodation for their growing family or following a divorce. Regardless, all families needed decent affordable housing, and the only ones readily available were the ones stigmatised in public for their "ghettoisation". Often, these families found a close-knit, supportive community that remains invisible in political discourse but became the primary reason for their long-term settlement in a particular neighbourhood.

My conversations with residents in these housing estates were widely diverse, even within the same estate. They emphasised different strategies for navigating society in terms of migration status, citizenship and socio-economic resources. What is important to note is that nothing in my interlocutors' narratives, or elsewhere, indicates that these communities self-segregate. Rather, various societal factors, including government encouragement of (white) middle-class flight towards homeownership, and the affordability and availability of stigmatised public housing estates, have meant that socio-economic precarious residents have ended up in these so-called ghettos and established meaningful supportive communities.

"WE'LL CATCH EACH OTHER": A MICROCOSM OF SOCIETY IN AN AARHUS ESTATE

Sarah is a young Palestinian woman raised in a housing estate in Aarhus, Jutland. Her parents arrived during the Lebanese civil war and were given social housing after being granted permanent residency. Sarah's family, like many Palestinian refugees in Denmark, were displaced from Palestine following the Nakba in 1948 due to Israel's settler-colonial project. They were exiled in Lebanon, living in permanent refugee camps, until the Lebanese civil war displaced them again.

In 1991, Sarah's family settled in a housing estate with working-class Danes, and Turkish and Kurdish labour migrants who arrived in the 1960s and 70s. The

flats were spacious and affordable, making them an obvious solution for the municipality to house newly arrived refugees. Sarah shares her experiences in the following excerpt:

> "[I]t's as if that refugee camp my parents lived in, in Lebanon was just…. Like, a little selection of those people were placed in [X]. They all knew each other's families and knew who everyone was—they knew each other's families from Lebanon.
>
> […] There's a completely different immediacy in the way people act. A completely different way of being caught when you fall and of taking responsibility for one another, where there's this expectation that we'll catch each other. […] Just things like when my mom is sick, how many people make food for her. Or come by after they've been traveling, or even just when I visit her. The old neighbour who remembers me, who knows I love those pastries she makes, […] and she makes them and tells my mom to come and pick them up. Then we end up standing at the door chatting for a long time." (Sarah, interview 2023)

Describing her life in this housing estate in Aarhus, Sarah describes a social fabric that is communal, reminiscent of the refugee camps in Lebanon. Palestinians in Lebanon live in permanent refugee camps; they are not entitled housing outside the camps and have limited opportunities for education and employment (Al-Natour, 1997). Nevertheless, these refugee camps are microcosms of society; there are schools, stores, GPs, etc. Like these encampments, Sarah's estate gave her family everything they needed. Until recently, cars were not allowed inside the estate; children could roam safe and free, and neighbours knew each other. As the number of refugees grew, neighbours created a microcosm of a society on the margins of Denmark. Neighbours who understood the challenges of exile made everyday life not only survivable but convivial, despite the dehumanising and racially capitalist exploitative state-narratives of integration (Gilroy, 2004; Padovan-Özdemir & Øland, 2022).

"HOW TO LIVE IN A NEW COUNTRY-HACK": COMMUNITY CARE IN AN ODENSE ESTATE

Another young woman, Dina, describes a similar experience in more detail emphasising community care and support. Dina, who is of Syrian background, was raised in an estate in Funen, outside of Odense. Like Sarah's family in Aarhus, Dina's family was allocated a flat after being granted asylum in the 1990s. In the following excerpt, she explains the feeling of safety in this neighbourhood, and why this was important for the refugee experience of exile:

> "[E]ven though people came from different places and countries and so on and had different stories and different experiences of fleeing […], there was still a sense of community. Like, there was still this thing where, well, we all have something in common, and that's that we all started fresh in Denmark, and in some way, that was something we shared. Like, people had an understanding of each other, even if they didn't understand each other linguistically or culturally. But there was still some kind of understanding, and there was a kind of compassion, in a way, that I can really remember—or that I can think back on now. […]
>
> But also, sharing experiences, being there for each other, and making sure that others knew if there was some kind of tip, or some kind of hack, or something—like, '*how to live in a new country*'-hack, you know? Those things, people shared with each other." (Dina, interview 2023)

Residents in the Aarhus estate and the Odense estate were mostly refugee families. However, not all residents shared the same background. Instead, Dina emphasises the foundations of communion: the shared experience of exile. This framing is distinctive, standing apart from the government's categorization

of "non-Westerners," which obscures such nuanced relationships. Many refugees in Funen were Palestinians who had fled the Lebanese civil war, but in the 1990s, and later, during the War on Terror in the early 2000s, refugees from Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq and Afghanistan began arriving and later, Syrians fleeing the civil war settled as well. Dina emphasises care, compassion and support in her recollections. The housing estate Dina grew up in housed refugees from many different parts of the Global South; however, in government discourse, they were all merged into the same colour-blind non-Western categorisation, which has been sensationalised into fears of parallel societies.

"EVERYONE KNOWS EVERYONE": INTERGENERATIONAL TIES IN A COPENHAGEN ESTATE

If Aarhus and Odense are known for their refugee communities, the housing estates in Copenhagen's western suburbs were home to many labour migrants. These families arrived in Denmark during the post-WWII production boom. Many residents in these housing estates have intergenerational narratives of community building through everyday life. One young woman of Moroccan descent, Nadia, described her family connections to her housing estate. It spans three generations. Her grandfather having arrived as a labour migrant, and joined by his wife and children, including Nadia's mother, who was a young girl at the time. Nadia's housing estate has been in and out of the government's lists of socially deprived areas for several decades. Nevertheless, many migrant families rooted themselves in these neighbourhoods. Families became lifelong friends that extended familial ties. Nadia explains the community that is created by living in such proximity:

> "I grew up in a place where everyone knows everyone. We have community, we are together, we do things, we organize different things together. We eat dinner together. We eat breakfast together. Like, that whole social community is what I grew up with" (Nadia, interview 2023).

This familiarity extends generational and cultural spaces. Community building here is understood as an avenue to settlement and intergenerational rootedness. It is spatial comfort and local belonging that is not equated with state-defined Danishness. In fact, integration rarely came up among my interlocutors when speaking about their community. Rather, this conviviality existed regardless of government discourse. It existed despite the territorial stigma attached to the housing estates. Residents knew the socio-economic challenges of being part of the politically disenfranchised. Nonetheless, my interlocutors emphasise the respite these communities provided their families. They related how these estates enabled them, as descendants of migrants and refugees, to achieve upward social mobility and an ease navigating a society that often reduces them to a threat to the white supremacist image of Denmark.

NAVIGATING RACIAL GOVERNANCE AND BANISHMENT

The young women above describe how their supportive communities helped their families establish themselves in Denmark, enabling them to achieve upward social mobility. Though their parents struggled to achieve economic stability, all my young interlocutors had professional and university degrees. When they remained in their childhood estate, like Nadia, it was by choice: proximity to elderly parents, accessibility to employment and rootedness in the locality. If they moved, like Sarah and Dina, this too was an informed decision. They moved to Copenhagen for professional and social opportunities, like many in the typical migration stream of young adults from Jutland and Funen. At the time of our interview, Dina's parents were facing evictions because of the ghetto policies. Dina explained that despite her parents' reluctance to leave the community they helped establish, it was better to take control of their rehousing and join her in Copenhagen than let the municipality relocate them to an estate far from

their community. Dina's parents' choice demonstrates Groglopo & Suarez-Krabbe's (2023) argument that coloniality has both structural and social implications. Thus, coloniality is a concept to understand how racial hierarchization becomes a policy tools, which influences social life and everyday choices. Within the context of Denmark's ghetto policies, this is expressed through racial governance focusing on social, cultural and economic parameters.

Roy's definition of racial banishment is useful to understand the ghetto policies as "state-instituted violence against racialized bodies and communities" (Roy, 2022, p. 41). Banishment emphasises legally imposed spatial exclusion through social control techniques that are punitive, demonstrating governmental coercive power (Roy, 2022, p. 44). Roy suggests understanding racial banishment as the other side of George Lipsitz concept of "the possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz in Roy, 2022, p. 44). These two concepts share the same racial significance in Denmark's ghetto policies. They aim to banish racialised communities to enable white Danes to fill the so-called "holes on Denmark's map" (Government, 2018, p. 5). It is in this pattern of racial dispossession and white repossession that a settler-colonial logic is expressed.

Roy continues to argue that social control of racialised communities is implemented by fusing "civil and criminal legal authority". Denmark implements such a social control by criminalising certain racial tropes attributed Muslim families under the category "honour-related conflicts". While not explicitly targeting Muslim religious and social life, government guidelines on the reporting duties for teachers emphasise sexual conduct, dress, friends and "re-education trips" (longer vacations to parents' country of origin) as possible indicators of honour-related conflicts (Children and Education Ministry, 2020). These indicators are in public consciousness associated with Muslim values that conflict with Danish values (Jaffe-Walter, 2024). Public employees are tasked with monitoring Muslim families for signs of "negative social control", where Muslim parents are allegedly controlling their children's social lives, particularly related to sexual and social behaviours (Jaffe-Walter, 2024). Thus, through carceral logics, the government responsibilises public employees to enforce punitive tools to socially control Muslim families (Hassani, n.d.).

CONCLUSION

Danish public housing policies are aimed at managing, surveilling, and ultimately banishing Muslim population from public housing estates. The ones who can evade and navigate these policies are the ones who have Danish citizenship, socio-economic stability and whose community life is not necessarily grounded in local proximity. They can obscure the racialisation of their Muslimness because of their class positioning and thus evade—to a certain degree—the state-sanctioned racism expressed through the ghetto policies. What remains is housing policies that can be understood as localised expressions of coloniality seeking to banish and dispossess racialised Others from urban centresto then financialise public housing and ultimately promote a white return to the cities.

Returning to Al-Nasser's art installation, *All That Remains*, it foregrounds a counter-narrative to the government's vilification of racialised communities. The broken bricks serve as a powerful symbol of the violence, destruction, and community banishment caused by the ghetto policies. Al-Nasser's work thus underscores the historical and familial ties these banished communities have to their housing estates. Through an analysis of the ghetto report, I have argued that this racial banishment is an expression of coloniality within the nation-state, rooted in white supremacy. As a manifestation of local expressions of coloniality, Denmark's housing policies renders certain bodies erasable while positioning others as essential to progress. However, this is only one part of the story. Drawing inspiration from Al-Nasser's focus on residents, this article spotlights the stories of racialised residents in three different housing estates affected by government policies. These stories reveal

experiences of embeddedness, care, intergenerational family histories and informal support networks that are essential to community. It is within these narratives—emerging from the vilified margins—that we find the potential for decolonisation. Decolonisation is intrinsically associated with land and homes—it is not simply an intellectual process. It is a vital aspect of navigating colonial structures of power for these communities to cultivate and sustain a sense of shared home, despite their disenfranchisement and banishment.

NOTES

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Seeds of Change: Dialogues on Decolonial Abolitionism

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ABSTRACT

Amid the intensifying intertwining of criminal justice and migration control in the Nordic region (Aas, 2014), this article seeks to reanimate abolitionist conversations from within. Framed as a curated dialogue, we reflect on our relationships to abolition as activists, academics, writers, facilitators, and implicated subjects (Rothberg, 2019). Guided by the spirit of the djobbeur (Glissant, 1997), we come into coalition to deepen our understanding of abolition as an analytical framework and an organizing strategy. Our conversations move iteratively through three interlinked themes: Nordic exceptionalism, carceral feminism, and penal humanism, as we examine how justice is imagined and practiced in the Nordic context and beyond. Tapping into the possibilities of the otherwise, we explore alternatives to the punitive logics of the modern/colonial world, grounded in a vision of decolonial abolitionism. We conclude by emphasizing the importance of situating the Nordic within global entanglements; challenging exceptionalist narratives and affirming abolition as a continuous struggle grounded in connection and interdependence.

KEY WORDS

ABOLITION, NORDIC EXCEPTIONALISM, PENAL HUMANISM, THE AFTERLIFE OF SLAVERY, CARCERAL FEMINISM

COMING TO AND DOING ABOLITION

The political shift toward penal excess has been a central topic in both academic and public debates globally for decades (Balvig, 2005; Fonseca, 2018; Garland, 2012). In the Nordics, scholars have highlighted the complex entanglement of care and punishment within public institutions (Smith & Ugelvik, 2017). As Barker (2017) notes, welfare and penal systems "work in tandem" (p. 28), which results in more restricted access to welfare for migrants and their descendants. Meanwhile, as Aas' (2014) concept "bordered penalty" describes, legal institutions are increasingly used to deport migrants and their descendants. This aligns with Pratt's (2008) prediction that increasing punitiveness in the Nordic region is shaped by anxieties over national identity and social cohesion. Informed by this intensification of penal logics, there is a resurgence of interest in penal abolitionism and restorative and transformative justice practices (Davis et al. , 2022). In this article, we seek to contribute to the resurgence by staging a dialogue on abolition between three authors based in Denmark and Sweden. While abolitionist thought had significant traction in the Nordic region during the 1960s and 1970s (Mathiesen, 2014/1986), Nordic voices have been notably absent from the vibrant global conversation on abolition over the past decade. Rejoining these discussions is crucial, especially given how Nordic prisons are often internationally portrayed as models of "humane" incarceration (Humphreys, 2023). These representations both obscure the violence embedded within Nordic carceral systems and are mobilized to legitimize incarceration. Thinking abolition from the Nordic context calls for critical engagement with myths of "humane punishment" and the structures that uphold them—necessary steps toward addressing harm without carceral systems. While earlier abolitionist literature emphasized class (see, e.g., Mathiesen, 2014/1986; 2006/1990), race was largely absent. Though, often framed as peripheral to colonialism, the Nordic countries participated in and profited from the global structures established through the *longue durée* of colonialism, and they continue to benefit from its enduring afterlives (Lauesen, 2021). As such, it is necessary to address the increasingly differentiated governance within the region, structured through notions of citizen and noncitizen, "Western" and "non-Western" (Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe, 2023). Abolition is thus not solely about dismantling prisons, but also global structures of domination that generate social harm and frame prisons as the necessary solution. The decolonial abolition we envision demands an understanding of the Nordic context as deeply entangled in global systems of extraction and violence.

We first met in spring 2024 at a seminar at Solidaria Center, an autonomous space in Stockholm, where activists from across Europe gathered to exchange ideas. We attended representing our respective collectives: Saleh and Lina from *Kollektivet Jordens Fördömda*, a writing and popular education collective, and Merethe from *Restore CPH*, a network engaging with conflict processes, community accountability, and collective self-determination. We quickly discovered a shared commitment to abolitionism and a desire to exchange analyses, strategies, and experiences. We found common ground in understanding abolition as a praxis that not only recognizes harm-producing relationships, practices, and institutions, but also shifts how we move through the world. As bell hooks (2014/1994) describes her relationship to theory, we, too came to abolition as we were hurting, in search of a location for healing or perhaps even more so, in search of how to move through life in meaningful and generative ways. After the seminar, our conversations moved online. We spaced our meetings intentionally with pauses, allowing ideas from one conversation to mature before we gathered again, like planting seeds in soil. Drawing from our experiences, we sought to illuminate the interplay between the local-global and historical-contemporary, while highlighting how carceral structures interconnect. To this end, we turned to creolization as a method, invoking the figure of the *djobbeur* (Glissant, 1997)—a creole word referring to someone without a fixed profession or set task, who, due to the marginalized economy of the Caribbean, navigates the world by discerning what is available and what needs to be done. Ac-

cording to Glissant (1997), creolization is a process through which diverse cultures, histories, and forms of knowledge meet, intertwine, and give rise to a relational understanding of reality. As Parvulescu and Boatcă (2023) observe, creolization "weav[es] the experiences of former colonies, imperial peripheries, and racialized populations into the analysis of both historical and contemporary processes" (p. 127). In contrast to the tendency in Eurocentric epistemologies to work through isolation, linearity, and disciplinary purity, creolization centers entanglement, interdependence, and the irreducible complexity of relation. Thus, for us, as activists and thinkers, entangled collective thinking and continuous dialogue are indispensable. The ethos of the *djobbeur* reminds us to mobilize all the resources we have, to think across histories and geographies, and welcome all to join the struggle with accountability. To be an abolitionist is, in many ways, to embody the spirit of the *djobbeur*. Guided by the *djobbeur*, we engaged with each of our particularities. In our first conversation, we shared our personal journeys into abolition and unpacked myths of Nordic exceptionalism (Jensen & Loftsdóttir, 2022). The second conversation centered on carceral feminism and the use of prison in both revolutionary and social justice struggles, and its limitations. In the final session, Saleh and Merethe explored penal humanism's relationship to the penal welfare state, questioning the humanism underpinning systems designed to control and contain, which Lina offers post-reflections on.

NORDIC EXCEPTIONALISM: NOT SO MUCH AN EXCEPTION AS A DISGUISE

Lina: Ideas around "Nordic exceptionalism" really shaped my upbringing. I was born in Stockholm to Muslim immigrant parents. My childhood was marked by what anti-racists in Sweden call "tacksamhetsskuld", an indebted gratitude. Because Swedish society was "the most just and generous in the world", I owed assimilation to its structures in return. Implicitly, I also learned that any failure to assimilate was my own fault. Unlearning this is a long, still ongoing process. I moved to the U.S. at almost 18 and witnessed the Black Lives Matter movement reshape discourses around justice. Over time, I and many others became increasingly more abolitionist. Derecka Purnell (2022) outlines this collective shift well: as we all witnessed campaign after campaign for law reforms failing to protect hundreds of Trayvon Martins every year, it became clear that racism cannot be outlawed, as our world is predicated on it. The answer had to be abolition.

I also started asking new questions, like: what stake do the Nordics have in colonialism? I found that without the exploitation of racialized people, wealth would not have been accumulated here. This happens both through an uneven distribution of resources globally (Lauesen, 2021) and domestically through, amongst other things, a segmented labor market where racialized people dominate low-wage jobs with poor working conditions (Mulinari & Neergaard, 2023). Thus, we are no exception in the Nordics, and also complicit in the racist world order that abolitionists wish to abolish. What about you, Merethe?

Merethe: My path to abolitionism started with an early reckoning of how the justice system—and punishment more broadly—would not offer a meaningful reckoning to the harm I had experienced. Later, working with SAVN [En. MISS], an NGO supporting incarcerated people's relatives, exposed me to the ripple effects of punishment. My political engagement grew in grassroots activism against border regimes and asylum prisons and shaped my understanding of the threads that bind various systems of oppression together. Today, I'm most excited by prefigurative politics; working relationally to build a world where conflict can be a space for personal and collective transformation.

Living in a so-called welfare state—more accurately, a penal welfare state—deeply shapes how we relate to state institutions. We are socialized to trust the state as a collaborative partner, even as it differentiates between us, through its presence in everyday institutions like kindergartens, hospitals, and eldercare

(Gärtner & Prado, 2016). While I absolutely value aspects of this system, it has also contributed to a highly individualized society, displacing care from communities and weakening relational capacities. This dependency not only deepens our reliance on the state for care and problem-solving, but also weakens our ability to critique the harm it produces, thereby sustaining the myth of Nordic exceptionalism. When the state is seen as the default caretaker, it becomes harder to imagine responses to harm beyond institutional frameworks. Yet, the welfare system is largely compensatory: rather than preventing harm systemically, it addresses it when it's already occurred (Thygesen & Brønsted, 2023). Challenging the idea that the Nordic countries stand apart from the global punitive turn is a vital abolitionist task. While there are material differences in incarceration rates and conditions, these should not obscure the fact that punitive logics are still deeply entrenched. Nordic exceptionalism risks concealing this reality, making critical engagement all the more urgent. What has been your journey, Saleh?

Saleh: My critical thinking, shaped especially by Black studies and decolonial thought, is inseparably woven into the experience of being a refugee and living in exile. Yet, for a long time, I overlooked the prison's central role in a world shaped by colonialism and capitalism. As Wael Hallaq (2018) argues, colonialism is not only a project of domination but a totalizing system that seeks to transform all aspects of life. This is evident in the colonial organization of space. Frantz Fanon (2022/1961) describes the colonial city as violently divided: one zone for colonizers, another for the colonized, divided by barracks and police stations. The prison is a crucial site that maintains the colonial order—a third zone where bodies resisting or disrupting colonial structures are forcibly confined. Thus, the prison is not merely punitive; it is a constitutive element of the modern/colonial way of ordering space. In the context of Palestine, the establishment of a settler-colonial state necessitates the creation of spaces of abjection—most notably refugee camps and prisons. These spaces are emblematic of what Achille Mbembe (2019) calls "death-worlds," zones inhabited by "living dead." The Zionist prison, as political prisoner Walid Daqqa (2010) teaches us, is also a site of experimentation aimed at "searing consciousness" and producing subjects conditioned to accept their abject position.

Understanding the colonial ordering of space on a global scale is essential to critically examining the dynamics of the Nordic countries and their welfare states. Victor L. Shammas (2024) argues, that Nordic social democracy operates by creating a "cupola"—a dome-like structure that shields the majority within. However, this protective dome cannot sustain itself without relying on a "global hinterland" of racialized labor, cheap goods, and natural resources. While projecting an image of self-sufficiency, benevolence, and egalitarianism, this order is fundamentally upheld by a worldwide system of exploitation and domination (Lauesen, 2021). Thus, the egalitarianism enjoyed by the majority of insiders through the Nordic welfare model—which neoliberalism now threatens—is deeply entangled with ecological devastation and the creation of "death-worlds." In short, it depends on violence displaced elsewhere.

Lina: There are different ways to approach abolition. For some, the focus is on learning non-carceral ways of responding to violence in interpersonal relationships and social movements. Transformative justice is a popular tool for this, which Generation 5 (2007) defines as a framework that shifts responses to harm from focusing on punishing an "offender" toward addressing the root causes of violence. By understanding structural and interpersonal origins of harm and addressing the healing needs of all affected by it, we can be more effective at preventing it. Transformative justice places responsibility and accountability on a community level, recognizing that harm doesn't occur in isolation, but within relational contexts where bystanders also hold some responsibility to intervene and prevent. In my experience, this can be essential work in Sweden as many of us don't participate in community life outside family or close friend groups, so we have few opportunities to develop the skills and resources needed for abolition.

However, an abolitionist critique of these community-based, non-punitive responses to violence also exists. Some question whether these responses are genuinely non-punitive, while others point to situations where harmed individuals do not want a non-violent or non-carceral accountability process. Usually, when this argument is invoked, the person who has acted harmfully is framed as an oppressor, and thus as representative of violent structures. Drawing from the first abolitionists who fought slavery with violence, they call upon this legacy and make no claim of working to undo carcerality at its core. These tensions raise essential questions for abolitionists.

Seeing these perspectives helped me understand how crucial it is to understand the different ways in which carcerality functions. In Sweden, for instance, the carceral system functions to protect the state's racist and capitalist interests (Philipson Isaac, 2024). That's different from how punitiveness operates in a community context, when desires to exact revenge against a racist or misogynist arise, for instance. While still reflecting carceral logics, the function in the latter example is retribution *against* racism or misogyny, not in favor of it, and the power differential is obviously large, comparing a community affected by racism and misogyny to the Swedish state. This complexity deepens when comparing contexts such as revolutionary Burkina Faso in the 1980s under President Thomas Sankara, where carceral systems served other purposes. So, there's a flexibility to abolition, but for me, a nuanced understanding of colonialism and imperialism is imperative to grasp the limitations and possibilities of abolitionist tools in the broader pursuit of liberation.

Merethe: What I will add to what you already are bringing is how abolition rejects the detached and simplistic approach to critique, which suggests, "Just apply *this* analysis to *this* institution, and that's all we need to understand oppression." Instead, abolitionism offers a framework deeply concerned with relationality, connection, intersection, and the "both-ands" (Davis et al., 2022). Understanding the larger structures we are entangled in—imperialism, capitalism, colonialism—allows for exploring the strategies we can use to engage with, challenge, and dismantle them. It relates to the flexibility that you speak of, Lina, and I think it pushes us to form coalitions, to see how struggles overlap and are inherently linked.

Within this layered and complex framework, I often reflect on how we can recognize the shifts we are part of. For now, I find that the impact of engagement is most tangible at the local level. I try to stay attuned to how the small reverberates within the broader, how transformation unfolds in the interplay between intimate moments and structural change. I've also found guidance in the work of Liat Ben-Moshe's concept of abolition as a *dis-epistemology* (2018), to better embrace this uncertainty. It demands humility and a willingness to act without full clarity; to fumble, to revise, and to stay open to reimagining. The question *"What is the right strategy?"* often sparks intense debate within social movements. But perhaps, as you suggest, Lina, the answer lies in embracing many strategies, acknowledging that we can never fully know how our engagements will reverberate into the future. We need those committed to interpersonal and community work of care and transformation, those who steadfastly refuse violence, and those carrying the long-term torch for structural change. And history reminds us—such as with the abolition of enslavement—that some moments have also called for violent uprising. Abolition urges us to explore, collectively, the multiple paths we can take.

Saleh: I've been reflecting on the term abolition itself. As you both noted, it originates in the struggle to abolish racial slavery. The term is generative, pushing us to rethink history, temporality, responsibility, and politics. To speak of abolition is to acknowledge that slavery isn't truly over. We live in its "afterlife" (Hartman, 2022). Slavery and colonialism are not merely past events but infrastructures of the modern/colonial world. Infrastructure is not static; it requires constant renovation and reconstruction. Similarly, the racial mechanisms of exploitation, dominance, and dehumanization persist, sometimes in disguise, sometimes brutally unchanged, as seen in Gaza. The

Palestinian catastrophe, *al-Nakba*, is not confined to 1948 but unfolds daily as a living structure, demanding reckoning and resistance, as Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian (2022) illustrates.

Whether we theorize the relationship between the enslaved and the Black through "temporal entanglement" (Hartman, 2022) or argue, as Frank B. Wilderson (2010) does, that Blackness is paradigmatically synonymous with enslavement, one point remains clear: the Black cannot assume the position of the *free sovereign subject*. Nor should we aspire to it. As Fred Moten argues, abolition also demands dismantling freedom and sovereignty, given how deeply intertwined they are with slavery and colonialism (interviewed in El-Hadi, 2018).

Only by *refusing what was refused* to us from the outset, can we listen to those who have been relegated to zones of "social death"—or, as Moten (2013) prefers, "political death". Blackness, even under conditions of enslavement, persisted as a communal experience. Dispossessed of everything, what remained was a terrible nothingness connecting those who shared that dispossession. This shared nothingness paved new ways of being together: the seeds of abolition and the embryo of a world beyond this one. To be abolitionist is to remain with the dispossessed, to hear nothingness whisper, and to embrace the creolized and impure. Drawing on Moten's engagement with Glissant, it means to "consent not to be a single being" (interviewed in El-Hadi, 2018), refusing the normative ideals of liberal subjectivity and the sovereign possessive individual. It is the cry we've shouted in the streets for almost two years: *We are all Palestinians.*

Lina: I really appreciate what you're both saying. Thinking through abolition challenges us to recognize that we're not out of this yet, and that those who were never meant to survive are still resisting. It reminds us, that we're part of the same ongoing project, just at a different point in the timeline. In a future where true freedom becomes possible, people might look back at today's "Black of the world" (Mbembe, 2020) and see us as still enslaved. What you said, Merethe, makes me think that this is about building power. If we're serious about moving toward liberation, we need to tap into the broad set of skills and tools we collectively have, understanding their most effective uses. I'm also thinking about agency. Colonialism's fixedness removes agency, making us immovable, and what looks like progress may not truly be it. It's difficult to envision a way out.

Merethe: As you spoke, Saleh, I thought about the subject positions imposed by the carceral system: victim versus perpetrator. Our lived experiences are far more complex, encompassing multiple, overlapping subject positions with various implications (Rothberg, 2019). I think your reflections and the concept of "creolizing" highlight the generative creativity that arises when we transgress rigid divides. I think back to Sarah Schulman's (2016) critique of how harm is both overstated and understated in the Global North. The genocide in Palestine, at times reduced to a mere "conflict," is a harrowing example of understatement. Overstatement involves the use of dramatic language where, for instance, a disagreement is labeled as abuse. This may stem from a fear that one's experience will not be taken seriously unless it fits a clear-cut narrative of harm. One way to resist this tendency is to listen to, and take seriously the smaller frictions and harms, to reduce the perceived need for inflated language. In sharing, resistance may mean loosening our hold on fixed subject positions and exploring how our impact might still be heard. Wrestling with over- and understatement also brings us into contact with Nordic myths of innocence and exceptionalism. What becomes possible when we reject both personal and national fantasies of purity? Letting go of the illusion of safety that these terms provide opens space to more deeply engage with responsibility, healing, and repair.

CARCERAL FEMINISM & WHAT IF WE PUT THE PRISON IN THE HANDS OF 'THE GOOD PEOPLE'?

Saleh: Let me begin outside the Nordic "cupola" to

confront a contradiction at the heart of many movements seeking to change the world. The "post-colonial moment" offers a telling example: newly independent states inherited colonial infrastructures; borders, legal systems, carceral logics, and security apparatuses. This complicates liberation projects. Though the reasons for incarceration shifted, its function endured: preserving the (post-colonial) state by neutralizing bodies marked as threats to the order. Even Sankara's Burkina Faso used prisons to contain perceived counter-revolutionaries, such as middle-class teachers. Despite vastly different political aims, the prison persisted as a mechanism for maintaining the colonial spatial order and, fundamentally, the state itself. This tension is evident in how carceral feminism assumes that prisons can effectively address gender-based violence. Such faith in incarceration reveals how deeply entrenched the logic of punishment remains, along with the colonial ordering of space. The challenge is to unlearn these inherited structures and imagine justice beyond carcerality and the state.

Merethe: Yes, a core issue is the persistent hierarchy that appoints someone the power to punish. This structure—where individuals or governing bodies wield the power to captivate bodies and inflict pain—may target different groups at different times, which, of course, reflects different intentions and changes the effect of incarceration. Yet, the underlying logic of penal systems persists. Your point, Saleh, also brought to mind the origins of the Danish prison system, initially administered by the military and directly tied to imperial enterprises, including forced labor and the production of military supplies (Heinsen, 2016). This connection is critical, as it adds to the arguments of abolitionists like Angela Davis (2011), showing how the prison system in a U.S. context perpetuates the logic of enslavement. In Denmark, as historian Johan Heinsen's (2016) work illustrates, the penal system was part of the imperial project and (trans)national enslavement from the outset. This suggests that, at least from a Nordic context, the prison should also be considered an institution that enabled and extended such structures and logics.

Lina: True, but I also think it's important to recognize that the function of the prison can differ by context. An imperial-colonial state and a repressive society are not the same. Take Sankara's socialist revolution: imprisonment was used to manage counter-revolutionary forces. Obviously, not a perfect solution, but rather the measure available in a highly volatile situation—one in which powerful external actors sought to undermine the revolution by exploiting existing internal divisions within Burkina Faso. The revolution was under pressure from imperial forces exploiting internal divisions. So, while prisons played a role, the analysis must account for historical differences.

Saleh: While there are radical differences, the inheritance of coloniality meant marginalizing indigenous ways of addressing harm. In Eritrea, before colonial rule, my ancestors lived in communities where harm was resolved through ways that prioritized restoration and reconciliation. Incarceration is now the fundamental state logic. "Decolonization" brought sovereignty but entrenched the structures of control. Similarly, within the Nordic region, while of course a nuanced story, the former prison-free society of Kalaallit Nunaat has now become a country where punishment is a dominant part of their way of handling harm, contrasting former practices which defied isolation from communities (Brinkgaard, 2017; Larsen, 1982). Decolonial abolition in a Nordic context is for me also about being curious of these former practices, understanding what is lost, and what we could relearn, including engaging with and supporting Indigenous ways of being together.

Lina: Of course, I agree with you, and I've seen conflict resolution based on restitution, responsibility, and repair in places like the camp for Tigrayan refugees that my mom worked in. In the camps, people turn to indigenous practices and traditions because the state is not all-encompassing. This holds vital lessons for us about decolonization. But I think my point about Burkina Faso is about self-criticism, as an abolitionist with ideals and radical critiques. It's easy for us to sit here and say what the "decolonial" thing to do is. We risk placing disproportionate ex-

pectations on those resisting oppression, expecting them to always choose non-punitive paths amid violent struggles.

Merethe: This discussion relates to the persistent hope that prisons offer quick fixes. Even in revolutionary moments that challenge dominant norms, there's a desire for immediate solutions, removing those deemed "the problem". I appreciate the humility you introduce, Lina. Can we stay with that while also combating one of the great myths of prison: that if "the right people" run it for "just causes", it can deliver justice? This belief fuels carceral feminism, where social movements seek justice through carceral instruments. In Denmark, the group *Lev og Lad Leve* [Live and Let Live] recently launched a national campaign encouraging queer people to report hate violence to the police. While this may increase visibility and give some a sense that their experiences are being taken seriously, it also risks reinforcing insecurity for marginalized communities. Moreover, the threat of punishment does little to prevent hate crimes in the first place.

Lina: Right, within the carceral feminist structure we live under, only some people are allowed victimhood. I witnessed this firsthand recently. We were at a bar where a Black man flirted with a White woman. When she rejected him, the owner demanded that he leave. The owner ended up violently ejecting him: first punching and pushing him inside the bar, then kicking him in the street, as the man bled. The man ended up calling the police to report the beating. The police came, but the only investigation they did was asking the woman and the bar owner whether the man had committed a crime. The woman repeatedly said no, and she was still asked if she wanted to file a police report. The man saw that the police weren't taking his complaint seriously. He told them that, and the police responded by screaming at him, speaking condescendingly, and threatening to take him by police car if he didn't leave. The man kept saying to himself: "Isn't this Sweden? Aren't the police supposed to be fair?". As Lauri, Carbin and Linander (2023) write, carceral feminist interventions interact with larger discourses around crime and punishment, which are highly racialized concepts. Black and brown men are primarily thought of as criminals, so minor mistakes—such as flirting with someone who turned out not to be interested in you—will be viewed as a reportable crime under the auspices of "protecting women", while actual violence being waged against Black and brown men is ignored. What capacity for justice can a penal system have under these conditions?

Merethe: This example reminds me that, in the Nordic context, public institutions are at times conflated with being for the commons, even though they also serve to regulate, discipline, and shape citizens in line with the state's capitalist and global interests. Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2022) call to build "life-affirming institutions" is central to the abolitionist project. In the Nordic context, this means recognizing that welfare and justice institutions are not inherently benign but can also produce harm, as they did for the man you witnessed. The task is to remain committed to reimagining and creating institutions that truly support collective life, care, and flourishing.

ESCAPING PENAL HUMANISM: GET OUT OF THE LUKEWARM WATER AND GET READY TO ASK FOR MORE

Merethe: It's crucial to engage with this notion that prisons can function humanely. How can the infliction of pain and punishment ever be humane? The reputation of Nordic countries as egalitarian, respectful of human rights, and even "feminist," feeds the myth of penal humanism (Lemos, 2021) and constructs the image of a "good punisher." Norway, like its neighbors, is often held up internationally as a model of humane incarceration, leveraging this status in international courts (Lohne, 2023). This idealization is double-edged. While it may inspire less punitive regimes, it also stifles deeper critiques of Nordic carceral structures and limits the imagination of abolitionist alternatives. Presenting prisons as humane legitimizes their existence, sustaining reformist projects, and what Lauren Berlant (2011) terms "cru-

el optimism"—an attachment to compromised structures that cannot truly satisfy our needs. To combat this myth, we must expose the unsolved harms even within "kinder" carceral practices: the pacification of harmed communities, the masking of systemic violence, and the disconnection from the social roots of harm. Simultaneously, we must cultivate alternatives that do not ask how to reform prisons, but how to build something entirely better.

Saleh: Listening to you, Merethe, reminds me of the deeper ties between state sovereignty, punishment, and notions of humanity. In political philosophy, police power often escapes scrutiny. Many abolitionist discussions approach it sociologically, but as Melayna Lamb (2024) shows, police power is philosophically foundational, tied to visions of the state of nature. Hobbes (2017/1651) imagined humans as naturally violent and self-interested, locked in a "war of all against all." To survive, individuals surrendered power to a sovereign who could monopolize violence and impose order. As Lamb puts it, "the state engenders order; and it is this which is the very definition of police" (2024: 45). However, violence remains intrinsic, especially projected onto racialized bodies, as Denise Ferreira da Silva (2009) notes. These bodies are seen as inherently violent, as "human-animals," as exemplified by an Israeli minister's description of Palestinians (Al Jazeera, 2023). This framing renders the abolition of police almost unimaginable. If violence is seen as "the state of nature", then policing becomes indispensable. Abolition must thus confront these deep philosophical assumptions, not just institutional structures.

Merethe: Yes, and Hobbes' framework also determines who is granted state protection. Protection is extended only to those who have entered this so-called "social contract", reinforcing a divide between protected insiders and vulnerable outsiders. Indigenous peoples, stateless persons, and migrants largely fall outside this protection. This division is visible in the carceral policies of today. In the Nordic context, non-citizens are increasingly constructed as *deportable* subjects (de Genova, 2002) and they are excluded from so-called rehabilitative efforts such as education (Madsen, 2023). Most recently, the Danish government signed an outsourcing agreement with Kosovo to rent prison space specifically for people with deportation sentences; an externalization of border control that further stratifies the prison population (Gjørding et al., 2024). Carceral practices are thus deeply entangled with migration control (The Freedom of Movement Research Collective, 2018). The Nordic penal model's reputation for humanism may obscure the reality that carceral structures are part of reinforcing racialized, colonial, and exclusionary logics.

Your reflections, Saleh, also bring to mind Adriana Cavarero's (2009) argument that vulnerability is an inescapable human condition. She suggests that this condition invites two possible responses: to care or to wound. In a way, beyond functioning as a theory of rule, Hobbes can also be seen as a response to human vulnerability, but which keeps centering violence in the pursuit of preventing violence. Yet, if we center responding to human vulnerability through care and solidarity, it opens the possibility of different societal arrangements; grounded in an ethic of interdependence, coexistence, and the sustaining of life.

Saleh: Exactly! This Hobbesian view, as you argued, Merethe, denies the relational nature of human existence and obscures sociohistorical power structures. To understand the production and distribution of violence, abstract notions of human nature are insufficient. By examining the sociohistorical and material conditions that produce violence, we can see how the Nordic welfare state–often celebrated for its "humane" penal system–is deeply embedded in exploitative global structures shaped by racial capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism. Rather than comparing prisons across different contexts, we should examine the structures that produce and sustain them. The central task is not to debate the relative "humanity" of "isolated" carceral systems but to critically interrogate the global systems that generate and differentiate prisons. Our efforts should focus on dismantling these structures, challenging the very world

that necessitates prisons in the first place.

Merethe: Absolutely. Life in the Nordic region has flourished, in part, through the suffocation of life elsewhere. Our states, while mitigating some inequalities, are still embedded in global structures of exploitation. I also think we are socialized to see ourselves primarily as citizens of a nation-state, and this fact limits the horizon of our solidarity. A kind of national moral exceptionalism is fostered where we learn to extend empathy and responsibility predominantly inward, rarely interrogating how, e.g., the resources that sustain our systems are entangled with the dispossession and displacement of others. Yet, as Shammas (2024) argues, the Nordic welfare-capitalist model sustains itself through global extraction of labor, materials, and value, while limiting its distributive promises to predominantly those with citizenship. Being abolitionists in the Nordics invites us to hold complexities: acknowledging that the Nordic states may partly reduce inequality internally but also perpetuate inequality. We need to develop a nuanced understanding of the structures, myths, and blind spots sustaining these systems and explore alternatives.

Lina's post reflections: Reading Saleh's and Merethe's conversation, I am reminded how penal humanism has helped Sweden sustain a sense of moral superiority. As Lundström and Hubinette (2020) explain, when race biology lost legitimacy, Sweden shifted toward "color blindness" and internalized a moral hierarchy, branding itself as "civilized," and "humane." This self-image likely helped foster penal humanist ideals, because it follows that a civilized society also should deal with its criminals in a "humane" way. As race, often coded as "culture", resurfaces in public debates, we witness a retreat from penal humanist rhetoric. Growing demands for harsher punishments, especially toward racialized groups, reflect a pervasive perception that Sweden has been too lenient and welcoming to immigrants. This signals a new phase, where penal humanism is increasingly challenged.

CONTINUING THE STRUGGLE WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE DJOBBEUR

By embracing the spirit of the *djobbeur*, we have connected diverse manifestations of carcerality across the globe, attending to the underlying logics that sustain these systems despite contextual differences. Thinking critically about Nordic exceptionalism, penal humanism, carceral feminism, and abolition in the Nordic region requires situating it within the *longue durée* of global racial capitalism. By questioning the use of carceral systems as tools of social justice, we must remain alert to what remains unchallenged—and what may be worsened. Isolating the Nordic, or relying on selective comparisons, risks reproducing Nordic exceptionalism; treating it as *an exception to*, rather than *part of,* global structures. While being a region with an expansive public welfare system working through a mix of rehabilitative and retributive justice cultures, this is not a satisfying endpoint. Therefore, we push for transformation of the Nordic penal welfare states, through visions of what might actually be life-affirming institutions that could provide us with planetary and human welfare.

In these times of rising fascism, it may feel tempting for activists and scholars to retreat into nationalist or regional struggles in a bid for protection. While understandable, this risk undermines the possibilities of transregional solidarity and hinders addressing the global structures of harm. Staying connected across differences is vital. Our iterative dialogue reflects a belief in abolition as a living, unfinished process; one responding to present urgencies while rejecting fantasies of isolated histories and geographies. It is precisely this complexity that can deepen our sense of interconnected struggle. It invites us into continuous transregional dialogue, to build coalitions, and to engage in creolizing processes of thought and action. As Glissant (1997) so beautifully says: "We know ourselves as part and as crowd, in an unknown that does not terrify. We cry our cry of poetry. Our boats are open, and we sail them for everyone." (p. 9). We thus end our dialogue for now with a wish for *djobbeurs* of the world to be in coalition.

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Disrupting Colonial Time:

Decolonial Temporalities and Practices of Care in Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

This article explores how Faroese Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) both inherits and disrupts colonial temporalities embedded in global education policy. Using decolonial theory and Barad's idea of spacetimemattering (Barad, 2007), the article examines how landscape, weather, and cultural rhythms shape pedagogical practices that foster temporalties of resistance. Through ethnographic vignettes, the article highlights practices like spontaneity, hesitation, and dwelling as cracks in colonial time that unsettle developmentalist logics. Rather than seeking universal outcomes, Faroese ECEC enacts situated, relationally emergent approaches to time, knowledge, and care. These moments challenge standardized educational frameworks and give rise to a distinctly Faroese pedagogy—situated, responsive, and rooted in the daily experiences of children and educators.

KEY WORDS

COLONIAL TIME, TEMPORALITIES OF RESISTANCE, EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE, FAROESE PEDAGOGY, RIGSFÆLLESSKABET, SPACETIMEMATTERING, CRACKS / FISSURE-PRACTICE

INTRODUCTION

Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and Denmark together form the Rigsfællesskab—an arrangement that binds these distinct nations, with their divergent languages, cultures, climates, and identities, into a shared political framework (Harhoff, 1993). While presented as a community, the Rigsfællesskab reflects a colonial history that continues to shape the relationships between its members (Thisted et al.,, 2021). This arrangement grants home rule to both the Faroe Islands and Greenland, enabling them to exercise authority over several areas, including education. Despite this autonomy, the influence of Danish educational frameworks remains pervasive, and the Faroese development of ECEC has been shaped by Danish norms and practices: The Faroe Islands did not establish their own pedagogical education until 1988 (Kjølbrø, 2009), and until 1989, Faroese daycare institutions remained under Danish supervision (Jiménez, 2023). This means that the Faroe Islands inherited a sector already shaped by Danish administrative logics. Moreover, a considerable number of Faroese pedagogues are trained in Denmark, and many Faroese parents and children have their first experience with institutional childcare while living in Denmark during periods of higher education, taking these experiences back with them, where they continue to inform expectations, practices, and understandings of the good life in daycare (Jiménez, 2023).

At the same time, there is currently no existing research on Faroese daycare institutions or the pedagogical practices that can be found within them. Nor is there any research on Faroese childhoods. Knowledge about children's lives in daycare, their experiences in rural villages (*bygdir*), and the transition from village life to institutional care exists primarily in the form of orally transmitted stories—a shared reservoir of lived experience and collective memory. My work (Jiménez, 2023) shows that the emergence and institutionalization of daycare in the Faroe Islands has necessarily drawn on Danish pedagogical and administrative models. Importantly, these models are not culturally neutral frameworks; rather, they are deeply embedded in Danish cultural imaginaries and historical understandings of childhood and institutional life (Gulløv, 2019), and they exert a form of definitional power, through seemingly universal ideas within education policy—such as quality, care, and development. What is treated here as colonial is therefore not solely a national relation to Denmark, but also a broader epistemic logic—rooted in neoliberal governance forms such as evidence-based practice and economic rationalities, and, as de-colonial studies suggest, part of coloniality: the enduring presence of colonial power and knowledge structures that continue to shape institutions, norms, and self-understandings long after formal colonization has ended (Mignolo 2007; Quijano 2019;). In the Faroese context, where there is little independent research on childhood or pedagogy, such knowledge regimes encounter minimal resistance, allowing dominant frameworks to settle and shape practice largely uncontested.

These Danish influences do not remain static. They are continuously mediated and reinterpreted by local contexts, shaped by distinct material-discursive conditions, such as nature, culture, and geopolitics (Staunæs, 2014; Staunæs et al., 2018). The aim of this article is not only to illuminate these forms of dominance. It also seeks to show how Faroese ECEC gives rise to distinct pedagogical practices. Through empirical attention to how global logics are inhabited, resisted, or reconfigured, the article seeks to materialize a specifically Faroese way of doing daycare. The tensions between global frameworks and local reconfigurations call for an approach that is both situated and responsive. This article offers a critique from within—a perspective situated within the system's tensions and entanglements, rather than outside them. It rests on the recognition that knowledge is not neutral: what counts as valid or authoritative is shaped by historical, political, and geopolitical conditions. Rather than propose a return to local essence, the analysis attends to how knowledge and practice emerge through hybrid (Bhabha, 2004) and shifting relations.

Seen through this lens, the Faroese ECEC sector becomes a site of tension—between *inherited* policy frameworks and emerging practices that interrupt or resist their logics. A Faroese pedagogy, then, is not a predefined model but an emergent and situated practice. It becomes visible precisely in its difference (Bhabha, 2004) from Danish/colonial temporalities. Where colonial time emphasizes efficiency, measurement, and future-oriented development, in contrast, a Faroese pedagogy foregrounds open-endedness, responsiveness, and rhythms shaped by weather, landscape, and communal life. In this way, a Faroese pedagogy challenges colonial time by loosening linear schedules and making space for spontaneity, hesitation, and dwelling. A Faroese pedagogy is thus the central analytical object of the article. It is developed through ethnographic fieldwork and grounded in the material-discursive conditions of everyday institutional life. It's materialized through its capacity to disrupt colonial time and unsettle the dominant temporalities embedded in global education policy frameworks.

TOWARDS METHODOLOGIES OF RESISTANCE – AN ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

How can we gain knowledge of phenomena for which no (scientific) vocabulary yet exists? More precisely, how can researchers engage with and discern these phenomena when the available language—understood as material-discursive artifacts like theories, logics, or policies—is not yet adequate to grasp them? A common approach in science has been to build on existing knowledge when exploring the new (Kuhn, 2015). As researchers, we stand on each other's shoulders, reducing the need to start from scratch. But this reliance also naturalizes existing frameworks, shaping what can be known. From a decolonial perspective, such naturalized knowledge is a trap. It limits the frames through which we investigate and the possibilities of what can emerge. How can I provide a faithful description of life in Faroese daycare institutions? Faithful, here, does not imply that Faroese ECEC has an essence waiting to be revealed. Rather, it calls for a study that produces potent knowledge (Haraway, 2018)—knowledge that reaches beyond positionality to account for sociocultural categories, situated histories, and material-discursive entanglements. This means allowing a broader inclusion of materiality, while attending to how meaning is produced between nature and culture (cf. Højgaard in Haraway, 2018, p.13).

Within this framing, I draw on the notion of cracks (Walsh, 2018)—small fissures in dominant logics that open spaces for alternative ways of being and knowing. Cracks are not grand ruptures. They are situated, material-discursive events that suggest resistance and transformation. Importantly, cracks are both analytical and methodological in orientation, supporting the broader strategy suggested above. Cracks help us notice how other temporalities and practices emerge in everyday life. To ground this strategy, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork for several years across multiple Faroese sites. These engagements, which included participant observation and interviews, were not only data collection. They were also material-discursive encounters, where knowledge was co-produced in specific situations. In this sense, ethnography became both a methodological tool and a way of staying with the material-discursive entanglements of Faroese ECEC, directly responding to the need for new methodologies mentioned earlier.

Method	Scope	Data types
Field immersion	6 months (2017–2021). Conversations with kindergarten leaders, teachers, friends and family; visits to kindergartens across the country; meetings and conferences.	Headnotes, embodied sensations
Participant observation	6 weeks in 3 kindergartens (2019)	Field diary
Visual methods	Created and collected during fieldwork (2019–2022)	≈300 pictures, drawings, short films, maps, paintings
Document analysis	Ongoing engagement with policy and public texts (2017–2022)	Danish and Faroese laws, social technologies, OECD reports, books, newspaper articles, etc.
Interviews	12 interviews: 2 focus groups + individual interviews (2017–2021)	Audio recordings and transcripts with teachers, administrators, and union representatives

To describe Faroese ECEC faithfully, then, is a kind of scientific advancement—a crack of hope that shows ECEC can take many forms and invites us to choose how to do it. New ways of being and doing emerge through these cracks—in-between spaces that expand our perspectives. But where are they? Nowhere specifically, yet possibly everywhere. Cracks arise through particular vantage points: they are situated, material-discursive events that open up spaces of possibility and suggest alternative strategies for living, knowing, and acting. My aim is to develop a fissure-practice (Walsh, 2018) within the context of Rigsfællesskabet, aiming to materialize different ways of practicing ECEC that offer potential for change and a good life for both children and pedagogues. Demonstrating the world's pluralism (Reiter, 2018) is an end in itself—and one that enacts resistance.

THE OPERATIONALIZATION OF A FISSURE-PRAXIS

This fissure-praxis—the analytical approach that generates both colonial time and temporalities of resistance—is an evolving process of meaning-making, achieved through diffractive readings and agential cuts (Barad, 2007), which reshape relations between knower and known, as well as between (de)colonized and (de)colonizer. Grounded in empirical material from a multisited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), this praxis serves as the cohesive force that binds these fragments, guiding both analytical direction and methodological navigation. Rather than seeking intention behind action, the approach follows how pedagogy emerges through encounters with global policies, bodies, landscapes, routines, and atmospheres. It is in these often-unplanned entanglements that other temporalities become possible.

I operationalize my fissure-praxis by examining the relationship of difference (Bhabha, 2004) between colonial time and temporalities of resistance. On one side, I construct the phenomenon of colonial time through diffractive readings of education policy —a notion of time with universalizing tendencies that adheres to particular definitions of quality and the good life in ECEC. On the other hand, I focus on the temporalities of resistance that emerge through my ethnographic fieldwork, which arise from material-discursive situated relations at 62°00'N 06°47'W—in other words, from the unique space-time-matterings (Barad, 2007) within Faroese ECEC. Both aspects are interwoven with the complex realities of daily life in daycare settings. The core and driving force of my analysis lies in the agential cut between the temporality constructed by global ECEC policies and the emergent, situated temporalities within the Faroese context. Yet, it also entails recognizing and exploring their relationality and interconnectedness: colonial time is embedded within the historical foundations

of ECEC, while temporalities of resistance surface as sporadic disruptions—moments that, although they do not erase colonial time, hold the potential to transform it. Education-policy-driven temporality thus becomes a colonial construct against which Faroese ECEC is *measured*, ultimately giving rise to de-colonizing temporalities.

SENSITIVITY AS BOTH METHOD AND SYSTEMATICITY

One of the most transformative insights I've gained from Haraway (2018) and Barad (2007) is the deconstruction of traditional objectivity. This "god-trick" assumes a detached observer, separate from field and matter. My approach rejects this, treating research as a material engagement that requires sensitivity: the researcher becomes an interpretive apparatus, attuned to the field. This embodied sensitivity, informed by multimodal (Dille & Plotnikof, 2020) and dialogic methods (Phillips, 2008), enables dynamic interpretations shaped through intra-action. Interpretation becomes distributed—not imposed—emerging through the field itself. Faroese pedagogues were thus not mere participants but co-creators of knowledge. This approach follows how pedagogy takes shape through the meeting of bodies, landscapes, routines, and atmospheres. It is in these encounters—often unplanned—that other temporalities become possible. The research process becomes open-ended (Barad, 2007) and shaped by diverse agencies beyond full control. Inclusion and exclusion remain fluid, guided by the field and its material-discursive complexity.

POSITIONING

I subscribe to a view of the world, society, and human beings as infinitely complex and hybrid (Bhabha, 2004). Positioning of both author and text is thus contingent and, in some ways, an undesirable necessity. I am keenly aware that pedagogical work is deeply gendered and racialized. Educators are often reduced to instruments of care, subject to poor working conditions, and afforded little societal value. In this sense, this article is clearly positioned as a critique of neoliberal regimes. These regimes have contributed to what many call a global care crisis. Early childhood educators around the world often report feeling "exhausted, undervalued, and leaving" (United Workers Union, 2021)—a sentiment I recognize from years in the profession. The article explores ways of being in practice that resist reducing children to becomings and educators to tools. Another aspect of my positioning comes from the decision not to address gender and religion directly. During my PhD, I was often encouraged to do so, both inside and outside academia. Arguments included statements like: "The Faroese are deeply religious, and therefore inherently misogynistic and homophobic." I have resisted this framing. I find it reductive and problematic. Too often, such narratives function not as genuine inquiry but as boundary-making discourses. These discourses position "them" in Denmark as inherently more progressive, secular, and emancipated. This contrast risks reproducing colonial logics and renders the *periphery* legible only through presumed backwardness, rather than on its own terms of complexity and possibility.

COLONIAL TIME IN ECEC

Simone de Beauvoir and Frantz Fanon both assert that oppression profoundly shapes and limits an individual's embodied experience of time (Stendera, 2023). Building on this, I argue that conceptions of time are not merely neutral or abstract frameworks but actively reconfigure experiences of oppression, resistance, and freedom. Specifically, the phenomenon of colonial time constrains and disciplines both children's and pedagogues' bodies, subjecting them—and ultimately the entire field of ECEC—to an ongoing cycle of performance and productivity. This cycle prioritizes standardized measures of development, leaving little room for engaging with the nuanced complexities of lived experiences. Time, as Hjelt et al. (2023) emphasize, is central to education as a whole and to ECEC in particular, shaping not only

the rhythms of daily practices but also the underlying values and power structures that govern them.

ENTRAPPING BODIES, SILENCING TIME: COLONIAL DEVELOPMENTALISM IN ECEC

When we turn to ECEC, the governance of time becomes strikingly visible. Far from being neutral, temporal regimes in daycare reflect colonial and developmentalist legacies. Time, often produced as absolute and linear, has come to function as a resource to be optimized—a logic rooted in industrialization and Scientific Management (Vaaben & Plotnikof, 2019). In ECEC, this legacy is evident. Time structures not only daily routines but also expectations of progress, learning, and outcomes. Opening hours from 7 AM to 5 PM reflect more than just practical arrangements—they mirror the rhythms of the labor market and embed daycare within broader systems of economic productivity. Within this framing, time is transformed into an apparatus of investment: something to be filled with measurable development, structured activity, and future value.

This investment logic is perhaps most clearly articulated in the work of economist James Heckman, whose Heckman Curve illustrates the economic return on investments in early childhood. Here, time is not just linear—it becomes financialized, and childhood is framed as an opportunity to secure future societal gains. The logic of developmentalism thus casts children not as persons in the present but as deferred citizens—sites of potential to be cultivated through structured intervention.

This logic permeates both policy and pedagogy, cementing colonial developmentalism as a governing force in ECEC. In Denmark, prevention discourses have long shaped the ECEC field (Nielsen, 2013), and intentions to counteract "negative social inheritance" remain central. According to §1.3 of the Danish Daycare Act (Dagtilbudsloven, 2022), daycare institutions are tasked with "preventing exclusion and negative social inheritance." These political intentions are materialized through learning plans and pedagogical standards—what Brinkkjær (2013) describes as "state-guaranteed pedagogy"—which are explicitly aimed at optimizing outcomes, particularly for children from so-called 'deficit homes'. In this framing, children (and by extension their families) are positioned as needing intervention. They become objects of knowledge, rather than holders of knowledge. Positioned through a deficit lens, they are assessed, categorized, and redirected according to standardized indicators of development and success. As Pérez and Saavedra (2017) and Rancière (2004) suggest, this relationship stabilizes a hierarchy: the knower and the known, the evaluator and the evaluated. It reaffirms not only epistemic asymmetry but also temporal control—the child must be brought into line with a normative timeline, a universalized "good life" that assumes sameness in development despite material and cultural differences. Paradoxically, this entrapment may reinforce the very inequalities it seeks to dissolve (Kirkeby & Munck, 2021). Children are molded to fit developmental standards that do not align with their lived realities. Their time and potential are governed by expectations formed elsewhere.

Pedagogues are also governed by colonial time. They carry society's hope for the future, tasked with shaping the next generation of children. As the profession becomes increasingly bound by documentation, assessment, and quality control (Ahrenkiel, 2018; Plum, 2014; Togsverd, 2015), pedagogues are asked to function as extensions of policy rather than context-sensitive professionals. The result is a dual form of instrumentalization: children as future investments and pedagogues as policy implementers. This dynamic reflects a broader neoliberal logic that fuses productivity with care, efficiency with intimacy. Pedagogues are expected to care *well*, but within the structures of accountability and performance. Yet how can meaningful care flourish in systems that do not care for the caregiver? This contradiction reveals a hidden crisis: a care system that undermines itself by marginalizing those expected to sustain it.

THE (UN)MATERIALITY OF COLONIAL TIME: UNIVERSALISM AND EPISTEMICIDE

Colonial time operates as an abstract, universalized framework that imposes a linear, standardized vision of childhood development—often detached from the material realities of children's lives. It prescribes temporal expectations (e.g., when milestones should be reached) based on a singular vision of the "good life" (Roberts-Holmes & Moss, 2021). These abstractions overlook the specific material-discursive conditions—natural rhythms, cultural practices, social contexts—that shape diverse childhoods. By enforcing universal temporalities, colonial time marginalizes and erases locally embedded ways of knowing, leading to what Santos (2014) refers to as epistemicide: the systematic destruction of local knowledge systems. This un-materiality manifests in policies, curricula, and frameworks that treat time as a neutral backdrop rather than a co-constitutive force. Developmental benchmarks often assume children should reach milestones (like language or social behavior) at the same age, regardless of environmental or cultural context. Such standards flatten diverse experiences, denying how children's development intra-acts with material conditions—such as rural or urban life, socio-economic status, or even weather. Colonial time reduces this complexity to a homogenized timeline aligned with capitalist and industrial logics of productivity and standardization. It also actively suppresses alternative temporalities—those rooted in nature, community, or cyclical time (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). These relational temporalities challenge linear progress but are erased by the singular narrative of colonial time, which dictates how time should be experienced and managed. This temporal imperialism detaches time from the material world even as it shapes it.

The consequences are tangible and extend from these conceptual frameworks into policy. For instance, the Ghetto Law in Denmark (Folketinget, 2018) mandates early intervention programs in marginalized areas, assuming that standardized timelines can rectify "deficits." As a result, children become objects of intervention, while their lived realities and agencies are overlooked. Thus, the supposed un-materiality of colonial time has very material effects: it legitimizes policy, shapes pedagogy, and reinforces cultural hegemony by dictating how time should be lived.

TEMPORALITIES OF RESISTANCE

In this section, I will unfold the temporalities of resistance. First, I consider how Faroese daycare practices have been historically intertwined with Danish daycare traditions. Next, I describe what I see as an intrinsic part of Faroese daycare culture: the Faroese social organization through the bygder (small rural communities), as well as the influence of nature and weather. Then, I elaborate on how non-knowledge should be understood as a disruption of the colonial order, unsettling colonial conceptions of time. Ultimately, I demonstrate how these disruptions materialize through spontaneity, hesitation, and dwelling.

In the 1960s and 70s, Faroese pedagogues trained in Denmark returned home carrying new perspectives (Jiménez, 2023). There, they encountered Danish pedagogical practices and seminar culture (the pedagogue education places at that time), inspired by reform pedagogy and progressivism (Korsgaard et al., 2017). When they returned, their familiar landscapes and customs were viewed through a blend of Danish educational ideals and Faroese heritage. As pedagogues in a limited number of daycares, they began the process of translation—understood as the situated adaptation and transformation of educational ideas across contexts (Staunæs et al., 2014). In doing so, they contributed to the transformation of the field that shapes a Faroese pedagogy today, which does not develop in isolation but is deeply entangled with the material-discursive landscape of 62°00'N 06°47'W. This landscape is not merely a backdrop but a rich, interwoven tapestry where nature, culture, and time are mutually constitutive—entangled, agential, and continuously reconfiguring the world. Drawing on Barad's concept of spacetimemattering, I analyze

how the intra-action of local material-discursive conditions and reform pedagogical ideals *from* Denmark—distilled into the concept of selvforvaltning (Korsgaard, et al., 2017), or autonomy in learning and self-directed activity—fosters the emergence of temporalities of resistance.

MATERIAL-DISCURSIVE CONDITIONS FOR RESISTANCE IN THE FAROESE BYGD

During World War II, British soldiers stationed in the Faroe Islands coined the term *The Land of Maybe* (Norgate, 1943) to describe the islands, reflecting their perception of a culture where plans and expectations seemed fluid, shaped by the surrounding environment. Although the term originated as a reflection of uncertainty, the Faroese have since embraced it as part of their identity, symbolizing authenticity and resilience in globalized times (Gaini, 2011). This label captures the interplay of natural forces—unpredictable weather, rugged geography, and isolation—that continue to influence Faroese life. Harsh storms, perilous roads, and limited infrastructure have historically imposed barriers to travel, forcing communities to adapt and hybridize nature with infrastructure, shaping Faroese culture and practices, including those in daycare.

The Faroese bygd (settlement) exemplifies this entanglement of nature, culture, and pedagogy. Each bygd is geographically defined by cultivated lands (bø) and uncultivated lands (haga) (Joensen, 1987), with boundaries internalized by adults through communal ties and land ownership (Vestergaard, 1978). For children, boundaries were less about ownership and more about the material limits of exploration. Oral histories and scattered texts describe the bygd as a playground where children navigated streams, mountains, fields, and fjords, engaging in self-directed activity shaped by their environment (Joensen in Kjølbro, 2008). Experiences shifted with seasons and weather: long dark winters, thick fog, and turbulent seas imposed limits, while endless summer nights and calm winds expanded opportunities for play. Such conditions fostered a culture where freedom and adaptability were central to childhood, and the unruly geography became a co-creator of experiences. In this sense, self-directed activity becomes an expression of spacetimemattering, where time, space, materiality, and discourse intertwine to shape lived experiences.

Building on Altamirano-Jiménez's (2021) concept of body-land— emphasizing the inseparability of bodies and the landscapes they inhabit—this entanglement can be seen as an embodied negotiation between individuals and the land. Faroese childhoods exemplify this relationality: children's agency and movement are directly influenced by the land's material features—cliffs, streams, fog, and endless skies. In turn, their play inscribes meaning onto the landscape, weaving human narratives into the natural world. This dynamic is constitutive of a Faroese pedagogy, where unpredictability is intrinsic to cultural life. The apparent disorganization of Faroese life is thus not disorder but a continual negotiation with nature, developing identities and practices capable of resisting homogenizing global pressures. These intra-actions create a fluid relationship between children, environment, and community, fostering a pedagogy rooted in autonomy and self-directedness, where children's agency is deeply entangled with their surroundings. In this way, the concept of body-land frames Faroese ECEC as an intricate entanglement of human and non-human forces, offering a radical alternative to linear, goal-driven models of education.

MOMENTS OF NON-KNOWLEDGE: THE ROLE OF COLONIAL TIME-DISRUPTORS IN A FAROESE PEDAGOGY

I use non-knowledge to describe moments when the pedagogue is unsure, caught in a singularity (Hylgaard, 2023) that resists generalization, or simply operating outside predictable patterns. In these moments, both the pedagogue and the child are engaged in a shared process of discovery, in resonance with

their environment. Thus, the pedagogue does not anticipate what will happen next; rather, she is open to the external influences that may emerge through intra-actions with children and the environment. These moments disrupt linear routines, resisting the mechanistic view of education as a series of predefined steps toward development goals. In this sense, they also disrupt the ordering logics through which knowledge becomes legible, predictable, and governable in the order dictated by colonial time. Non-knowledge interrupts this order, allowing for other forms of attention and responsiveness to emerge. Rather than imposing rigid structures, a Faroese pedagogy embraces the apparent dis-organization. Thus, these practices emerge not from a deliberate strategy, but from an attunement to the possibilities opened up by the landscape, weather, and shared rhythms. This fluidity fosters a pedagogy rooted in adaptation, spontaneity, and relationality, creating temporalities of resistance that align with the rhythms of the islands themselves. In this way, unpredictability is not a limitation but a rich resource, cultivating a pedagogy that thrives in the interplay between nature and human agency.

Spontaneity, hesitation, and dwelling create alternative rhythms, freeing pedagogues from rigid schedules and allowing for creative exploration beyond standardized curricula. The main argument is that time disruptions, while apparently chaotic, enable new temporalities that support joint discovery. Faroese daycare practices contrast sharply with Danish systems, where spontaneity is framed within structured pedagogical goals (Dagtilbudsloven, 2022). For Faroese pedagogues, spontaneity is intrinsic to daily life, not an add-on to planned activities. As one pedagogue said when asked about time: "I want more time to do nothing." This 'nothing' expresses a wish for the freedom to follow the child's lead and move naturally through the day, without being bound by external expectations. It suggests a view of time not as a tool for predefined goals, but as an open, relational field in which the unknown and unexpected can emerge.

SPONTANEITY – THE FUTURE IS UN-CERTAIN

> "The outdoor environment calls the children and pedagogues into action. The weather is unusually good, with a stunning view of the fjord, yet there are no structured plans in place. The pedagogue had initially considered making ice cubes outside with a small group of children, but the day took an unexpected turn. A new henhouse, recently assembled by some parents lured with beer, has replaced the old one. The old henhouse, still sitting in the chicken yard—about 1.2 by 4 meters—is in need of removal. Initially, the assistant offers to do it alone, but eventually, the pedagogue decides to involve five boys aged 4–7 in the task. The boys fetch tools from the workshop—hammers, crowbars, and large pliers for nails—after being told what to look for. They begin dismantling the henhouse, managing the task almost entirely on their own. The pedagogue intervenes sparingly, only when absolutely necessary or in response to specific requests. She frequently asks open-ended questions, such as, 'What do you think we should do next?' rather than giving direct instructions. Over the course of more than an hour, the boys remain fully engaged, breaking down the henhouse into smaller pieces and loading the fragments into a wheelbarrow. Not a single child leaves the task. The pedagogue later remarks, 'It's good to be allowed to work.' Meanwhile, five other children play indoors, and two alternate between inside and outside. Children choose their activities freely, embodying the idea that well-being is something we do" (Author's field diary, 2019).

This vignette shows how spontaneity, as a temporal practice, disrupts colonial time—understood here as the linear, efficiency-driven logic of global ECEC policy. The dismantling of the henhouse was unplanned, emerging from the contingencies of the day—weather, materials, and mutual attunement. It functioned as a temporal fissure: a moment where dominant timelines were loosened, allowing for improvisation and situated agency. The pedagogue's minimal inter-

vention supported the children's autonomy, affirming them as knowing participants rather than passive recipients of knowledge. Their sustained engagement and mutual coordination exemplify a relational temporality that welcomes uncertainty instead of managing it. A similar temporal crack appears during the institution's weekly Friday singalong:

> "After half an hour of structured singing—where children and adults sit in a circle and take turns choosing songs—most of the children drift out of the room. A few pedagogues follow, but several remain. Then, quietly, they decide to keep singing. 'What should we sing?' one asks. They agree on a song and begin to sing, smiling as if stealing a moment for themselves. Eventually, some children wander back in, drawn by the sound. Another song is chosen. And sung." (Author's field diary, 2019).

This scene may seem minor, but it offers a clear example of a momentary break in institutional rhythm where new social configurations become possible—not as resistance in the sense of refusal, but as a gentle re-routing of time, away from productivity and toward presence. This elasticity of time, seen in a Faroese pedagogy, reveals forms of care that are not reduced to meeting external goals, a form of care that is not instrumentalized. The pedagogues' lingering song is not part of a plan, a curriculum, or a child-centered strategy. It is for them, too. In this way, they momentarily step outside the logic of performance and optimization, instead inhabiting a shared temporality of pleasure and presence. Rather than being reduced to agents of future outcomes, the adults appear as participants in a relational and atmospheric pedagogical field. Thus, spontaneity is not a chaotic interruption but a culturally embedded everyday crack in colonial time**.** It transforms the uncertainty of the future into a possibility for relational growth and improvisation. These cracks allow something else to be felt, known, and done. They are pedagogical events that make room for a Faroese way of doing ECEC, not by rejecting structure entirely, but by allowing it to loosen, bend, and respond.

HESITANCY - TIME STOPS (AND MAYBE REVERSES)

> "After lunch, the children are allowed into the gym. In one corner, two older boys from the after-school program have gathered a large collection of colorful foam building blocks. It's hard to see exactly how they are playing with them—it seems more like storage. The boys are occupied elsewhere, leaving the blocks untouched. The preschoolers are building a fort and take a few blocks that seem unused. The older boys, irritated, want all the blocks, the bikes, and other toys scattered about, probably from when they were alone in the gym. The tension escalates as they start to confront the younger children. The atmosphere is charged. The young pedagogue seems uneasy, his discomfort palpable. My presence seems to add pressure. He cautiously approaches the boys, trying to mediate the conflict, yet the situation intensifies. Here, hesitation appears: instead of pushing for a quick resolution, taking charge, or asserting control—especially in the presence of an outsider—he retreats inward, questioning and proceeding with caution. Twenty minutes later, a different pedagogue arrives and reframes the conflict as an issue of sharing. She helps the children come up with a way to divide the blocks, giving the older boys a narrative that helps them reframe their behavior as something more than mere disruption. Thus, time and intervention intertwine. Time does not simply move forward; it takes detours and even rewinds. Sharp judgments and evaluations keep time—and the children—fixed in place, limiting the opportunity for transformation. Clear lines create boundaries, often keeping both adults and children confined to predefined roles" (Author's field diary, 2019).

In this vignette, hesitation interrupts colonial time. Here, that means the linear, efficiency-oriented temporality that underpins modern educational governance, where conflict requires swift resolution and roles are predefined. The young pedagogue's pause deviates from this script. Rather than intervening

immediately, he withholds action and creates a temporal fissure—a break that allows ambiguity and alternative relationalities to surface. Delay is not failure here. Hesitation here echoes Haraway's (2016) staying with the trouble—a refusal of resolution, a dwelling in complexity. More than just a delay, it is a practice of resistance. It lets time bend, loop, and create space for others to act. The pedagogue's pause signals not passivity, but attentiveness to the situation's unfolding. He resists imposing coherence where care is required. In doing so, he performs a pedagogical gesture that suspends colonial time, allowing something different to emerge. When the second pedagogue enters, she does not erase the pause but builds on it—re-narrating the conflict in ways that shift the dynamics. Her intervention is not merely solution-oriented, but transformational, made possible by the earlier temporal pause. Hesitation becomes a form of time-work—a decolonial gesture that resists premature closure, loosens hierarchies, and reopens roles. It enacts a Faroese pedagogy that values presence over control, and relation over resolution.

DWELLING – TIME IS REDIRECTED AND PROLONGED

Dwelling is about staying with, lingering in the thick present. It means being in a moment that does not ask to be solved or accelerated. In Faroese daycare institutions, I often observed how time was stretched rather than segmented—how children and adults dwelled together without haste, transition cues, or direction toward the next activity. Dwelling thus becomes an embodied and materialized resistance to colonial time: the linear, future-oriented logic embedded in global ECEC governance, where time is optimized and progress measured in outcomes. One such moment emerged during lunch:

> "There is food now. 'The cold buffet' is set up along the windowsills. The children are seated at three tables and take turns getting their food with a little help. They wait patiently, enjoying the conversation around them. Dwelling… some children take longer to decide what to eat, chatting with the adults. We eat for quite a while, over half an hour. When they're finished, they clear their plates into the dishwasher and quietly drift off to other rooms or into the hallway, starting their own games. There's no conflict between the children who are still eating and those who have finished and gone to play. Two children remain behind, talking about their food and playing 'crocodile' with dried fish. They linger over their meal, playing, talking, eating, completely absorbed in their activity. Meanwhile, the other children spread out across the room, playing. The adults converse together. There's a calm and relaxed atmosphere. It feels as though there is space for 'all activities,' for both children and adults. After half an hour, one child announces, 'I'm done, I'm going to play.' The other follows five minutes later" (Author's field diary, 2019).

This vignette does not describe a break in the day—it *is* the day. What stands out is the tempo: the slow unfolding of time that is not dictated by a schedule. Children transition smoothly between eating, playing, and talking without needing instruction. There is no boundary between what counts as learning and what does not. This looseness creates pedagogical spaciousness, where rhythms coexist. Their lingering, their talk and play with food, the unhurried transitions—none of this serves a policy-defined purpose, yet it is full of relational meaning and epistemic agency. The children are developing temporal knowledge: sensing the pace the moment requires, stretching time, and letting go. Dwelling performs what I call a crack in institutional time. Through it, something undefined can take place. It emerges as a refusal of epistemic reduction. This is a refusal to equate learning and time with measurability. Dwelling allows space for slowness, spontaneity, and being-with, and time does not accumulate toward assessment—it expands relationally. These practices bend time outward, holding open the possibility that care, learning, and presence can be enough, and are a quiet insistence that other pedagogical worlds already exist. I observed such dwelling not only during

meals but also in disorganized parts of the day. In one daycare, a large sofa in the hallway became a quiet space—especially on stormy days when outdoor play was impossible:

> "One child sits on the sofa in the hallway with a doll for a long time. They investigate the doll, play with it, and make sounds. Other children rush past, but this child remains absorbed in their play. Eventually, the child leaves the sofa and runs into the large gym, where a new game begins, without any adult involvement" (Author's field diary, 2019).

These moments, often away from adult oversight, allow children to explore and dwell in a slower rhythm—making time, rather than being made by it.

IN/CONCLUSION: TEMPORALITIES OF HOPE IN A FAROESE PEDAGOGY

The practices of hesitation, spontaneity, and dwelling reveal how Faroese ECEC reclaims time from the linear demands of colonial and developmentalist frameworks. These pedagogical acts do not follow a predefined plan—they arise in attunement with landscape, weather, and the relational textures of daily life. In these disruptions, time ceases to be a neutral measure of progress and becomes a generative force for shared inquiry and situated knowing. Rather than opposing structure altogether, these temporalities stretch and loosen it—making space for difference, slowness, and the unexpected. A Faroese pedagogy, as shown here, challenges the epistemic hierarchy of standardized developmental norms and foregrounds children and pedagogues as co-constructors of time, care, and knowledge. These are not simply moments of resistance, but affirmations of a pedagogical mode that draws strength from its entanglement with place, bodies, weather, and rhythm. Drawing on my previous work, I propose the term *at reika* (Jiménez, 2023) to name this mode—a Faroese pedagogy that unfolds through distributed agency, relational temporalities, and an openness to the unknown. In Faroese, reika means to wander without a destination, to drift or roam in attunement with one's surroundings. It is especially associated with children moving through the bygd—curious, unscheduled, and absorbed in their environment. In this sense, Reika becomes more than a metaphor. It names a culturally embedded way of being and moving that informs everyday pedagogy, and materializes a decolonial pedagogy: locally rooted, temporally expansive, and epistemically plural. It is not a grand alternative to the system, but a practice already alive within it— an everyday, decolonial hope.

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Decolonial practices in higher education: Student perspectives in Iceland

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ABSTRACT

While universities in postcolonial nations like India and South Africa have been engaged in decolonising curricula in higher education for several decades, universities in Europe have largely not progressed beyond integrating postcolonial scholarship into their curricula, to a genuine decolonisation of curricula in the Fanonian sense of '[changing] the order of the world' (Fanon, 1963, p.36). Indigenous scholars, activists and researchers in the Nordic region have analysed the denial of colonial histories and the production of Nordic exceptionalism (Belle, 2019; Kuokkanen, 2019; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2021; McEachrane, 2018). Yet, colonial history is often not taught in universities as a mandatory subject (Drugge, 2019; Njau, 2018). This lack puts an enormous gap in the knowledge base of students and knowledge workers in higher education and the broader community's understanding of knowledge production. Through focus group interviews conducted in 2024 with students from the school of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences and participatory action collaboration, we collected and analysed student perspectives on the place, necessity, and pedagogy of decolonialism at the university of Iceland.

KEY WORDS

DECOLONISING HIGHER EDUCATION, PEDAGOGY, CURRICULUM, RACE, COLONIAL HISTORY, WHITENESS

> I mean to begin a conversation and a project of collaborative, participatory, research and popular education to begin to see in its details the long sense of the processes of the colonial/gender system enmeshed in the coloniality of power into the present, to uncover collaboration, and to call each other to reject it in its various guises as we recommit to communal integrity in a liberatory direction.
>
> -Maria Lugones, "The Coloniality of Gender," 2008
>
> "You can't just, I don't know, start in the middle of history and try to explain how the Western world got so powerful without explaining where they stole their resources from."
>
> -Student in literary studies, 2024

INTRODUCTION: DECOLONIALISM, GENDER, AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Decolonisation and education form an unsettling pairing. Efforts toward decolonisation in education take diverse forms worldwide, emphasising commitment to Indigenous knowledge, land rights, and interrogating teaching materials and practices for silences, absences, misrepresentations, and erasures of the impact of European colonialism (Asher, 2017; Jain, 2015; Mbembe, 2016; Viswanathan, 1996). These omissions are part of the ongoing legacies of European colonisation and linked to how Enlightenment thinkers constructed what Aníbal Quijano called the "coloniality of power" (Quijano and Ennis, 2000). Postcolonial and decolonial scholars have analysed and critiqued how colonial practices shaped disciplines and how "omission" and "silence" are sustained by technologies of colonial "innocence" (Bakar-Langeland, 2025; Wekker, 2016). Decolonial labour examines colonial structures, how they are invisibilised and continue to shape how education is constructed, governed, assessed, and taught, how colonial perspectives become "knowledge" or accepted research data, which sustains unequal social systems (Tuck & Yang, 2012). These foundational assumptions affect who occupies the role of the educator, what we teach, and how and to whom knowledge is disseminated (Bhambra, 2014; Chasi, 2021).

While universities in postcolonial nations like India and South Africa have been working towards decolonising higher education for decades (Jansen 2019; Manathunga, 2020; Mbembe, 2016), universities in Europe have mostly not moved beyond absorbing postcolonial scholarship into academia toward decolonisation in the Fanonian sense of '[changing] the order of the world' (Fanon, 1963, p.36). In some cases, such work has been subsumed into familiar poststructural critiques without a sustained commitment to change or has even resulted in a "cooptation of critique" as a form of suppression (Eriksen & Svensen, 2020; Groglopo & Suárez-Krabbe, 2023). To address the deep influence of colonial structures on education, we need to fundamentally reconsider "the order of knowledge"; who teaches, the positionalities of students, what is taught, and the pedagogies used. It entails an interrogation of the historical biases and geo-political exigencies that underpin notions and constructions of knowledge (Chasi, 2021; Querejazu, 2016). A genuine decolonial turn in higher education would mean thoroughly restructuring educational materials, spaces, and structures – going beyond surface syllabus revisions or more inclusive bibliographies. It also requires a reckoning with how academic institutions continually reproduce colonial power structures, shaping curricula and pedagogies, so that even disciplines committed to critiquing power risk reinforcing those structures if they do not reckon with colonial legacies.

The imbrications of gender and the colonial enterprise and their mutual impacts have been well studied over the past few decades (Félix de Souza & Selis, 2023; Ghosh, 2004; Lugones, 2023; Oyewumi, 2002; Spivak, 1986;). Colonialism was gendered in its masculinised paternalism and the emasculation of its colonised peoples, and gender equations in colonies and imperial spaces were deeply impacted by colonial overlays of European/colonial ideas and gen-

der norms. We therefore see the work of feminism as inseparable from that of decoloniality and hold that they must be practiced as a single, integrated approach. We began this article with the words of decolonial feminist Maria Lugones who critically analysed how colonial hierarchies continue to reassign power to whiteness, even within spaces committed to feminism. In her analysis of the "coloniality of gender," she highlights the overrepresentation of white women whose theories fail to engage with racial or colonial structures, narrowing feminist critique to their own lived realities and in so doing continue to reproduce colonial structures in their critique:

> It is part of their history that only white bourgeois women have consistently counted as women so described in the West. Females excluded from that description were not just their subordinates. They were also understood to be animals in a sense that went further than the identification of white women with nature, infants, and small animals […] Erasing any history, including oral history, of the relation of white to nonwhite women, white feminism wrote white women large (Lugones, 2023, p. 52).

Lugones deepened Aníbal Quijano's concept of the "coloniality of power," showing how coloniality operates through gender relations alongside race and class, with women of colour and Indigenous women viewed as inferior by the same measures used by colonial masters towards colonised peoples. This coloniality of power persists in how knowledge is understood and produced today, shaping what counts as "knowledge," who decides, who is included in syllabi, and what is taught where and to whom. Lugones' insight that the gendering of colonial power is also the colonialism of gendered power underscores the need to continuously dismantle these power relations by radically questioning how knowledge is produced and disseminated in higher education. Thus, while policies on diversity and inclusion, including gender, are important for curriculum development, they neither guarantee equality nor necessarily reckon with colonial legacies (Icaza & Vázquez, 2018; Lay & Magnúsdóttir, 2024; Wekker, 2016).

We come to this work as two women, teachers, and researchers at the University of Iceland. Giti Chandra, born and raised in India, has extensive experience in teaching and researching colonial histories and decolonial feminist work, while Sólveig Sigurðardóttir, born and raised in Iceland, specialises in literature and histories of Nordic colonialism. We are committed to bringing decolonial feminism into our study of colonialism and higher education, especially into educational settings through our teaching and collaborations inside and outside the University. Giti Chandra launched a project at the University of Iceland to support discussions on decolonising curricula and pedagogy in the Schools of Social Science, Humanities, and Education, and to link these efforts with similar work across the Nordic region. Through individual meetings and sessions, faculty and researchers came together in workshops and seminars. While the project aims to initiate and lay groundwork for future collaborations, we recognise that the kind of radical "decolonial turn" we seek as decolonial feminists is beyond the current scope of the project, and that such change must come from staff, students, researchers, and faculty.

We recognise that within the University's strict hierarchy, lasting change must come through long-term collaboration among those who make up the institution. Over the past three years, we have therefore worked with students, staff, and faculty to explore the state of coloniality and decolonial approaches to education and action at the University. In 2024, we conducted eight focus group interviews with students from the Schools of Education, Humanities, and Social Sciences, documenting their perspectives on how colonial history is taught and what they see as possible decolonial options within the University of Iceland (Eriksen & Svensen, 2020). While these collaborations continue, this article focuses on insights from discussions with our student collaborators.

The questions guiding our research build on the work of decolonial feminists, Indigenous scholars, and ac-

tivists in the Nordic region who have examined the denial of colonial histories and the production of Nordic exceptionalism. We find that any discussion of colonialism and the Nordic region must interrogate narratives portraying the nations of the region as "benevolent," exceptional, or even "nicer" than other European empires (Fjellheim, 2020; Hakon Lingner & Graugaard, 2022; Knobblock & Kuokkanen, 2015; Svendsen, 2020). Indeed, the Inuk/Kalaaleq artist Julie Edel Hardenberg has centred how the dominant projection of "nice" operates as a cultural artefact in Denmark, describing the colonial empire seeing itself as the "most humane among the inhumane" (Stien, 2023, np). Despite a rich tradition of colonial critique in the Nordic region, colonial history is often not a required subject in universities, and significant moves toward decolonisation have faced backlash (Olsson et al., 2024, SAIH). There remains, moreover, an urgent need to centre colonial analysis and challenge the "coloniality of gender" within Nordic education (Lugones, 2023).

This lacuna in high school and university curricula has not gone unnoticed, as our student collaborators at the University of Iceland repeatedly raised the lack of teaching on colonial histories and the continuing impact of European colonialism in their discussions. A key finding for us is the students' frustrations with how knowledge is presented in their disciplines. Importantly, these frustrations reveal their awareness of colonialism's societal impact and their own need for tools to analyse its influence on their fields. This aligns with their critique of the limited time devoted to contextualising the knowledge presented in class and the absence of multiple perspectives or insights from thinkers outside Western Europe and North America, a gap they often framed through the university's silence on the ongoing genocide in Palestine. Students noted a disconnect between what they learned about European colonial histories via social media and other online sources and what was taught in classrooms. The urgency of their frustration was also felt in the fact that they offered various suggestions for how the University of Iceland could work towards decoloniality with regard to curriculum.

THE ICELANDIC CONTEXT: COLONIALITY, INNOCENCE AND SILENCE

At the University of Iceland, histories of colonialism are not mandatory in curriculum, nor are educators broadly required to engage with decolonisation across disciplines. This aligns with many higher education institutions in the Nordic region (Bakar-Langeland, 2025; McEachrane, 2018). Such a substantial gap in students' and knowledge workers' understanding can affect how disciplines develop and what they offer communities (Höglund & Burnett 2019; Louie et al., 2017). The omission of Nordic colonial history from higher education, alongside neglect of Indigenous insights, is reflected in historian Gunlög Fur's (2013) analysis of Swedish educational materials that undermined or rendered Nordic colonialism suspect or "unthinkable". This violent unthinkability is also evident in studies of colonial legacies in the Icelandic context. Meanwhile, Indigenous thinkers have long demonstrated decolonial epistemic approaches, methodologies of cocreation, and mutual processes within academia (Graugaard & Lingner, 2022; Nutti, 2016; Svendsen, 2020; Tuhiwai Smith, 2021).

Coloniality in Iceland has been studied through the trope of Nordic exceptionalism, where Iceland's history as part of the Danish colonial empire is used to downplay the harm of coloniality within Icelandic society (Jensen & Loftsdóttir, 2022). Scholars have examined how colonialism intersected with nation-building, showing how thinkers of the nineteenth-century independence movement used racial ideologies to argue Iceland belonged among "civilized nations," merging whiteness with citizenship (Ellenberger, 2025; Halldorsdottir & Kjaran, 2019; Jóhannsson, 2003; Loftsdottir, 2012). Iceland has also marketed itself as a progressive, even leading, society in gender equality, which can be used to silence those that speak up about colonial and racist legacies in Icelandic society today (Halldórsdóttir & Gollifer, 2018; Tietgen, 2025). This view was also raised in the group discussions, along with the disproportionate amount of racist and sexist abuse faced by immigrant

women of colour. Meanwhile, studies show that the economic gap between native Icelanders and immigrants grows, and people of foreign origin in Iceland report elevated levels of discrimination based on origin, race, or ethnicity (Gísladóttir & Staub, 2024). Tracking Iceland's gender progress is a complex task given the strong link between whiteness and womanhood in equality discourses (Einarsdóttir, 2020).

To better understand how coloniality takes shape at the University of Iceland, we sought conversations with people working in and through the institution. We adopted a participatory action research (PAR) approach, viewing knowledge production as a cocreation among multiple actors (Lenette, 2022), as opposed to the more extractivist mode of researcher/subject interaction. We chose PAR for its alignment with decolonial work rooted in community-based efforts to drive social change (Baum et al., 2006; Esterberg, 2002). As a commitment grounded in long-term collaboration, we write from within ongoing work with students, faculty, and staff about their perceptions of coloniality and decolonial efforts at the University of Iceland (Caxaj, 2015).

In this work, we aim to learn from knowledge makers – students, faculty, researchers, and others in academia – in and around the Nordic region who emphasise that confronting colonial structures requires far more than analysing the harm they cause; "decolonization requires more – a genuine overturn of existing hierarchies" (Junka-Aikio, 2016, np). We were also reminded that imposing a language or terminology on collaborators is itself a form of coloniality, as many of us work side by side across disciplines without a shared vocabulary. This involves pursuing systemic change (beyond individual research or activism) and addressing the persistent omissions, silences, and absence of Indigenous knowledge, epistemologies, and ontologies essential for truly decolonial education (Menon et al., 2021; Salinas, 2020).

GATHERING AT THE MARGINS OF THE IVORY TOWER

The project began with over a year of discussions between Chandra and research scholars and faculty about the absence of decolonial initiatives at the University. As one scholar connected her to others, Chandra assembled a group of faculty and senior researchers (master's and PhD level) from various disciplines interested in this work. Individual and group conversations evolved into workshops and seminars, fostering a sense of community and network building through wide-ranging, intensive discussions on understanding coloniality as a lived experience in Iceland and how the University is shaped by these colonial structures. After reaching out to teachers, we focused on students. Surveys and conversations revealed the need to balance faculty-dominated dialogues by archiving students' experiences of how colonial histories are taught at the University (Hansen, 2022). We saw the importance of creating a counter-archive to existing material and non-material archives of conventional wisdom, syllabi, best practices, bibliographies, accepted canons, 'fathers' of disciplines, and 'classic' texts that largely privilege Eurowestern, male, and colonially influenced scholars, theories, data, and ideologies without recognising or acknowledging this privileging.

The power differentials of bringing faculty and students together could have skewed or silenced some responses. Trying to avoid this, we reached out to all students in the Schools of Social Science, Humanities, and Education and organised eight focus groups. Sampling was carried out through invitations distributed through university email lists, its website, and word of mouth. We compiled ten groups of three to five participants each, coming from different disciplines. The discussions followed a semi-structured interview format: students received guiding questions but could discuss the topics freely. All groups were asked the same questions, though follow-up queries during the discussion varied by group.

Drawing on our understanding of the determinate universe of decolonial processes (Altheide, 1996), we aimed to use these discussions to collectively develop analytical categories that could inform future curriculum building, pedagogy, and research. We see this as an initial step in a complex socio-academic system where faculty and students occupy diverse raced, classed, abled, and gendered positions. We also recognise the potential challenges in classrooms largely staffed by Icelandic or other European faculty, while the student body better reflects Iceland's shifting racial demographics. By creating discussion opportunities for students to explore decolonial options, approaches, and visions for education, we hope to foster deeper institutional collaboration (Høiskar, 2020). Thus, while the immediate goal of these discussions was to gather insights on students' lived experiences, our broader aim is to move beyond description and develop theories and teaching plans with students, staff, and faculty, grounded in data through a contrapuntal analysis that "takes into account the perspectives of both the colonised and the coloniser, their interwoven histories, their discursive entanglements – without necessarily harmonising them or attending to one while erasing the other" (Garuba, 2015, para. 19).

Establishing trust and openness with our collaborators was a major concern. As a woman of colour from India in a predominantly white university, Chandra often reflected on how her presence might influence faculty or student responses on colonialism. How would answers differ if only Sigurðardóttir, who is racialised as white, were present? How did our roles as university teachers affect students' critiques of the institution? These power dynamics were evident in workshops and interviews. With faculty, our precarious employment may have shaped how seriously they engaged with us, while some students expressed an awareness of hierarchies by praising individual teachers and reflecting on the labour of teaching and specific burden on temporary faculty (Olsson et al., 2024). Other complexities included possible confirmation bias, and the likelihood that students who volunteered for these discussions were already inclined toward decolonial topics (Bernard, 2006).

To reduce the tension of what might feel like an interview where students were expected to give the right answers, we adopted a neutrally friendly stance, remaining encouraging listeners and receptive participants rather than expressionless observers. Eschewing the blank note-taker option, we acknowledged that the topic could evoke emotional or potentially traumatic responses and aimed to create a welcoming space where participants felt comfortable expressing their feelings. Sometimes a student asked for clarification of terms like coloniality or decolonialism, making it hard not to influence the conversation. Often, groups reached shared understandings of concepts such as "colonialism," "whiteness," and "decolonial" by drawing on prior studies, individual experiences, or social media, so the dialogue itself became a collaborative, reflexive process around vocabulary.

The following sections focus on three key questions we posed to the groups: do you feel there are gaps regarding colonial histories in your curricula; do you feel represented in your syllabi; and what practical suggestions do you have for addressing any gaps you identified? In our analysis, we pay close attention to the contexts in which students situated these questions and highlight common threads in their responses. We consider their language and recurring phrases as they explored ideas, offering our own careful reflections. Throughout, we have aimed to stay as true as possible to students' actual speech, preferring this to overediting for clarity or smoothing out the non-linearity and colloquialism of spontaneous conversation. For nearly all speakers, English was not their first language.

VISIBLE OMISSIONS: THE LACK OF COLONIAL HISTORY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A key theme that emerged was students' expression of feeling a lack of vocabulary to describe how colonialism has shaped their disciplines; as noted, some asked us to define or clarify the term. Most common-

ly, students said their fields did not address colonialism or colonial history directly, with the topic usually arising only when students themselves raised it in class. The word awkwardness came up often, signalling a shared sense that the topic might cause friction or strong emotions. In linguistics, one student highlighted the absence of deeper discussions on how languages develop and spread, and how colonialism underpins these processes. While recognising the harm this omission caused their field, the student felt conflicted about where to direct critique, noting – perhaps influenced by our presence – that university teachers are often precarious, overworked, and face many challenges. Still, they argued that education quality suffers without teaching colonial history and its impact on academia. Echoing Gloria Wekker's (2016) concept of white innocence, some students described teachers using harmful racial stereotypes, though most focused on the damage of silence regarding colonial history and/or racism. Another student took a stronger stance on the importance of teaching colonial history, and the difficulties teachers face, stating:

> "It's ridiculous how late I learned about this [...] Every department should have material on colonisation. If the department does not have a specialist, you can basically do an online lecture from all over the world, you have no excuse to not reach out and find somebody."

The sentiment of embarrassment came up repeatedly among white students born in Iceland when discussing the absence of colonial history in their university disciplines and earlier education. They noted either a complete lack of acknowledgment or that too little classroom time was devoted to meaningful discussion. This neglect led some to suspect information was deliberately omitted, creating distrust toward teachers and individual courses. Reflecting this impatience, one student remarked: "You can't just, I don't know, start in the middle of history and try to explain how the Western world got so powerful without sort of explaining where they stole their resources from." Another student from the Humanities lamented the absence of discussions on colonialism's influence on the field, pointing out that classes instead used euphemisms like "development":

> "[…] it influences everything like in our understanding of the world, if we understand how it was in the past and like who connects what and like how it happened, then we can understand better in today's world and like also in the politics, but also in linguistics like it's interesting from the point of view of language, like how colonisation influenced the language like local languages, how did colonisation change the African languages, how the Dutch in South Africa influenced the whole language and development there."

Noting there was "not really" any mention of colonisation in their curriculum, one student offered examples of how contemporary and historical cases could be incorporated into class. A student studying economics said the link between studying colonialism and economics was obvious, though its absence in his courses suggested otherwise. A student from the Humanities observed that while "colonisation" came up in classes relating to history or geography, it was their sense that it was treated as a distant past event: "like all this happened in seventeenth century... it's just like something that happened back then." This sense of disconnect between colonial history and the present echoes Gunlög Fur's (2013) analysis of history education in Sweden, where nation-state imaginaries shape the omission of colonial histories and their ongoing impact. However, as another student pointed out, this kind of compartmentalisation does not confront the turmoil of the present. "Unfortunately," she continued "it may be this is my personal opinion, but we are seeing it in our times right now. The colonisation happening in Palestine, unfortunately, yes, and people do not talk about it in the classroom." Furthermore, the feeling of being implicated in this unnarrated, unrecognised history is palpable; as a student from sociology put it: "everyone is like taking place in it, even if you're not affected by it."

This need to connect education with the present and with their own lives was evident in the discussions. Moving beyond the more obvious power structures such as race and nationality to gender, one student spoke of the intersections of marginalisations including sexuality and gender, saying that a decolonial perspective:

> "[…] would help minority groups a lot because like with trans people, people think that we just appeared in the past few decades not knowing that before WWII there was an active clinic in Germany and that was one of the first things destroyed by Nazis. Learning about colonialism also teaches us that trans groups have always existed."

As is clear from this statement, in the process of these discussions, we saw that some students had given the subject deep thought and were able to draw on vocabulary about neo-colonial power structures and their intersections, while others were newer to these concepts and were describing power relations as they spoke. Many expressed concerns regarding the received view of objectivity in research and neutrality in curricula. In the process, they were reaching for a new commonality, something not offered as a theoretical ideal but based on the physical bodies and material histories of people and nations. The idea that education needed to include these histories to be relevant to them as students and to their understanding of the world was strongly present.

INTERSECTION OF MARGINALISATION PERPETUATED BY LACK OF TEACHING OF COLONIAL HISTORIES

One of our opening questions was "Do you feel represented in the classroom?" Here, we made clear that representation did not have to be only in terms of race or language but could include gender, sexuality, ability, and citizenship status, among other axes of identifications. Often the word "representation" felt too formal and, collectively, we refined the question as "do you feel that the syllabus and the coursework include you?"

Almost all the students who were born and raised in Iceland, as well as many of the white, European students affirmed that their own subject positions were well represented in terms of race and culture, even sexuality, gender, and ability, but followed this with a caveat about their own awareness of their positionality. One student responded with "maybe too well [represented]" as another agreed and added "says woman born in Iceland, raised in Iceland, who speaks Icelandic." Students repeatedly mentioned that an acknowledgment of gender identities was embedded in the classroom, but that women and LGBTQI+ positionality recognition were mostly limited to whiteness, a pattern that is in line with Icaza and Vazques's (2018) study of education in the Netherlands.

Students described how the lack of acknowledgment of colonialism – let alone decolonial initiatives – reinforced whiteness as a universal norm (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021). One student, quoting an article, called this the "pale, male, and stale" approach. Discussing her syllabi, she admitted being so accustomed to linking knowledge with European/North American male perspectives that "when you see a name on the syllabus you automatically think of a white," with another student finishing, "man." Some pointed to specific exclusions tied to their ethnicities or countries of origin. They felt this could even shape research by non-Icelandic students under supervisors whose expertise was mainly Nordic/European. One student shared how she had to abandon a project on her home country because her instructor lacked the necessary context and advised, given how different her home country was from Iceland, that she should do her research on Iceland. She reflected: "I also want to do something probably for my country, for my home city... So, I have to give up that idea. I can't. I can't do that. So, I feel like I didn't see my identity. When I was doing the project, yeah." On the other hand, when areas outside the Euro-Nordic are included in curricula or class discussions, the perspectives offered had caused a source of dismay to some students who may be from the region under discussion. One student longed for a more nuanced view of her home country:

> "I would say that the curriculum could benefit from like the idea of decolonisation, because various Icelanders think of my country, they think of stereotypes, but in fact we have more than 200 nations living there, and they all have at least their own – not accent, more like a dialect, different culture, different dishes."

Curricular marginalisation such as this one, and consequent pedagogical discrimination were often felt and/or voiced in varying levels of frustration on the part of students, both with the enforced liminality in the classroom and the limitations placed on their work and educational possibilities.

WHERE DO WE FIND OURSELVES? HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY

When discussing the lack of teaching about colonial histories and their sense of what decolonial labour might mean in a university setting, many students navigated the conversation towards the role of the university in connecting students to a sense of a "global" perspective. There was a repeated sentiment of the need for the university to exemplify respect for global histories and knowledge. In this context the term "global" became a response to the overrepresentation of European history and perspectives. For some students, decoloniality and education was not necessarily tethered to critique or analysis but to an openness, a positive approach, to the idea of a "global perspective":

> "Yeah, I think that if you consider it from the global perspective, if you want to be part of the globalisation, you need to know about others as well. You don't need to be self-centred. So, I think maybe, yeah, global citizenship education would be possible."

Discussants across ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, and ability circled back to this idea articulated by the student above, saying that an understanding of the complex histories of discrimination and collaboration was essential to their sense of themselves and their place in a globalised world. For others, the turn from colonialism to a globalised world seemed to be propelled not so much by a misplaced sense of guilt but by the need to understand the ways in which the present turbulent state of the world might be explicable. Even as one student acknowledged that they were not sure "how colonisation works globally in a specific country," they added "I feel like it will help our understanding of the world." We saw a kind of poignant urgency to make sense of an increasingly chaotic world and the conviction that a good education should be able to prepare students for living in and making sense of that world. Some students had previous experiences at other universities which contributed to their sense of there being a lack of discussion of colonialism at the University of Iceland, while others mentioned social media as a reference point for where they could access information regarding colonialism and its impact on education, an insight that was not present in the classroom. As one student said: "we all exist in this colonised world, and we are affected by it in many and different ways, not acknowledging structural racism creates chaos." The recognition of history as a present force that impacts everybody's life in diverse ways leads also to a sense of positive engagement with the world around/outside the university, prompting a sense of purpose produced by an actionable education. There is a real recognition of the need to construct a reliable narrative for "how we got here" in terms of having access to a global history that includes the centuries of colonisation and is not relegated simply to the past but connected in meaningful ways to the present (Svendsen, 2020).

We asked if they thought policy change was important, and if so, what recommendations they had for the university, and some students were quite clear about the changes they would like to see. Suggestions offered were both at the micro and macro levels; from incorporating colonial histories into curricula as a matter of implicit inclusion – in the same way that gender, sexuality, and abilities are included – to the more explicit "because of course, every depart-

ment [should introduce the topic or have material on colonisation]" as one student in Anthropology put it "in every class, every year". Such a fundamental re-ordering was seen, in many ways, as part of actual practices of equality and equity – ideals that hung in the balance. Even within the framework of a certain degree of equality among students at the University of Iceland, actual equity could only be brought about by simple yet specific measures. One student, however, pointed out a foundational barrier:

> "[One] way [to work against colonial legacies in academia] is probably to give more funds to those researchers or students from, like, immigrant communities. As far as I know, every year the university gives a certain amount of grants to researchers or to students, but more than half of them are Icelandic."

Even while all academics in the Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education lamented the paucity of funds and the consequent competitiveness of whatever grants are available, the fact that little sponsorship was available to non-Icelandic scholars is a clear and powerful endorsement of the need for decolonial work within spaces of higher education in Iceland.

CONCLUSION: MANDATORY EDUCATION ON COLONIAL LEGACIES FOR ALL DISCIPLINES

This study is part of a project archiving student experiences of how colonial histories and legacies are taught at the University of Iceland. Through an online survey that was followed up by focus group discussions, we documented students' accounts of how European colonisation was addressed in their fields. Students often linked the presence or absence of teaching about colonialism to teachers' desire and ability, or the lack thereof, of introducing and conducting related readings, discussions, and studies. Our findings show some students were acutely aware of this lacuna, especially in introductory and methodology courses, and some felt it important that we convey their frustrations to university authorities to prompt policy change. Across all three schools and various departments, students identified a lack in their academic training on the implications of colonialism for the history of science and the European university's ties to colonial practices. They described this gap as tangible, with some noting that it was treated as an elephant in the room during class.

As collaborators and co-participants in this project, students from the Schools of Education, Humanities, and Social Sciences shared their insights, classroom experiences, and visions for what higher education could be. A key takeaway from these discussions is the need to critically examine the university as a producer and disseminator of knowledge. A crucial practical and policy recommendation is that educators and students work together to create interdisciplinary spaces where all can learn about the Euro-Nordic university's foundations and how its history is embedded in colonialism. Continual training in this knowledge is urgently needed amid rapid AI development, growing inequality, and persistent neo-colonial violence. Students increasingly argue they would better understand the world and their place in it through education that highlights the histories behind today's inequalities and injustices. As teachers, we also note the precarity of academic work and the importance of creating spaces for deep analysis of our teaching material, syllabi, and pedagogy. Everything depends on sustaining and learning with and from Indigenous, marginalised, and decolonial scholars from both the Nordic region and beyond. As one student put it, this is crucial labour "because it influences everything."

NOTES

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Informed Consent Statement Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

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[1] All data from focus groups and interviews is presented in a way that ensures participants' anonymity, in line with their informed consent. While the discipline or research area of participants is an important aspect of the data collected, we have had to state their background more broadly in cases where we considered such details a potential risk to their anonymity.

[2] The survey went out to undergraduate students but graduate and phd students heard about it and asked to participate. We had mixed groups with participants from various disciplines from the three schools, sessions were organised by participant availability.The difference in disciplines came up in conversation and was discussed. There were notable differences in terms of disciplines and schools - with some being much better equipped in terms of introducing colonialism and/or race, class, and gender as part of their curriculum.

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Reparative Encounters:

Stitching fragmented histories through artistic research

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ABSTRACT

This article explores what happens when artists, who have been separated by coloniality, meet across different geographies. Which experiences, vocabularies and strategies resonate across different spaces, how are different practices transformed through encounter, and how can they, in dialogue, reveal new horizons for repairing colonial legacies? The article explores these questions drawing on the ongoing work of the Reparative Encounters network for artistic research. Established in 2023, Reparative Encounters brings together artists and curators from the US Virgin Islands, Ghana, Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark, locations differently impacted by Danish colonialism. Throughout 2023-2024 we have organised three encounters — in Nuuk, St. Croix and Kumasi — where we met to share artistic practices with each other and to learn from each context. In this article, we reflect on these three encounters to create an "alterarchive" of the insights and possibilities that began to emerge from these meetings. Activating our method of working alongside each other, we write alongside, bringing together reflections, images and poems, to consider what happens when our bodies, histories and practices meet across various locations. Throughout, we reflect on the relation between artistic research, repair and coloniality, and foreground artistic praxis as a means for creating new vocabularies and spaces for inserting other forms of knowledge and being.

KEY WORDS

DANISH COLONIALISM, ARTISTIC RESEARCH, REPARATIVE, US VIRGIN ISLANDS, GHANA, NUNARPUT/KALAALLIT NUNAAT

Julie Edel Hardenberg, Columbus Landing, Saint Croix. 2024. Video still.

INTRODUCTION

What happens when artists, who have been separated by coloniality, meet across different geographies? Which experiences, vocabularies and strategies resonate across these different spaces, how are their practices transformed through encounter, and how can they [artworks/artists/curators], in dialogue with each other, reveal new horizons for repairing colonial legacies? In this article, we speculate on these questions drawing on the ongoing work of the *Reparative Encounters* network for artistic research. Established in 2023 after prior collaborative experiments in the artistic and academic spheres, *Reparative Encounters* brings together artists and curators from the US Virgin Islands (USVI), Ghana, Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark, locations differently impacted by Danish colonialism.

Our premise is that Nordic colonialism had — and continues to have — both entangling and disconnecting effects: while it forcefully connected regions through the material entanglement of people, capital and technologies, it also displaced and severed people from their own histories, identity, kinship, archives, cultural and spiritual expressions (Bastian, 2003; Graugaard & Ambrosius Høgfeldt, 2023; Hunter 2023). While Danish colonialism was enforced, experienced and contested in fundamentally distinct ways in Kalaallit Nunaat, USVI and Ghana, our network works from the premise that there are numerous connections across these experiences that remain to be explored. We draw inspiration from historian Lisa Lowe's *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) in which she investigates the "often obscured connections" between European liberalism, settler colonialism in the Americas, the transatlantic African slave trade, and the East Indies and China trades in the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Lowe, 2015, p. 1).

The transatlantic slave trade is one example that caused a massive uprooting of people and a radical cut from their history and kinship between the African continent and the plantations in the Americas. The forced assimilation of Inuit people through historically disruptive practices such as the removal of Indigenous children from their contexts and forced adoption into Danish families is another example of split and alienation from one's own history and identity. While these practices differ in time, space and scope, they produce colonial legacies that can be explored in dialogue. We suggest that connecting such legacies has the potential to create a critical vocabulary to name structures of power, to foster mutual and self-knowledge, and to animate solidarity across different struggles for decolonisation, sovereignty and liberation.

Our network is composed of core members La Vaughn Belle, visual artist based in Saint Croix, USVI; Julie Edel Hardenberg, an Inuk-Kalaaleq visual artist and researcher from Nuuk, currently a PhD fellow at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and University of Copenhagen; Dorothy Amenuke, a visual artist based in Kumasi and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST); Bernard Akoi-Jackson, artist, curator, writer and educator who works from Accra/Tema/Kumasi, and Lecturer in the Department of Painting and Sculpture at KNUST. Both Amenuke and Akoi-Jackson are members of the artist collective and art incubator blaxTARLINES. Katrine Dirckinck-Holmfeld, a visual artist, independent researcher and educator based in Denmark; and Daniela Agostinho, Portuguese visual culture scholar and curator, working from Aarhus University.

Our work as a group builds on previous collaborations that grew out of the 2017 centennial of the sale of the former Danish West Indies to the U.S.A. and the digitisation of the Danish colonial archives, including *Archives that Matter. Infrastructures for Sharing Unshared Histories* (Dirckinck-Holmfeld et al, 2018; Agostinho et al 2019); *Connecting with the Archives: Reclaiming Memory* (CHANT, 2018); La Vaughn Belle's exhibition *For Alberta and Victor: A Collection of Conjurings and Opacities* (Belle, 2021-2022); and the audio walk *Voices in the Shadows of Monuments* (Tshibanda et al, 2022).

Building on these projects, we conceive the network's artistic practices and collaborations as a process of making *alterarchives* (James, 2024). We draw on curator Erica Moiah James' usage of the term "alterarchive" – which she mobilises to describe Belle's exhibition *Being of Myth and Memory* – to situate our artistic practices as interventions in and disruptions of the colonial archive. These interventions not only inscribe perspectives that have been left untold, but also create new aesthetic forms with which to record those perspectives. With the prefix *alter*, we signal that we view these practices as transformative, as actively reshaping historical archives and narratives, not least by engaging in *poiesis*, that is, in creating new artistic forms that reimagine what an archive can do.

We share an understanding of artistic research as a practice that "seeks to create new questions and new forms of knowledge, using the kinds of embodied-material-conceptual thinking that goes hand in hand with art making" (Cotter, 2024, p. 15). Artistic research's critical potential lies in posing questions to the limits of our most established ways of knowing, while at the same time acknowledging that the limits of knowing are tied to the limits of being. In this approach to artistic research already lies a relationship to feminist and decolonial practices, in that we have run up against the foundations and limits of knowledge and of who counts as a subject (imposed by modernity/coloniality).

The notion of the titular *Reparative* signals our various approaches to decoloniality through artistic research. Central to our practices is an understanding that colonialism separates and alienates, creating ruptures that remain to be repaired. We understand reparative not as the reconstitution of something to its previous whole, but as being tied to the poetic and creative dimensions of repair, as the possibility of telling varying stories that colonisation occluded or thwarted. Artistic research intervenes in these spaces of rupture by creating new aesthetic forms and relationships. We conceive repairing as a process that is ongoing, rather than something that will ever be complete. And we see conversations between communities that have been differently impacted by colonialism, and creative solidarity between them, as central to this process. Inspired by Ferreira da Silva (2022), we approach the reparative as an ethics and "unattainable horizon" that we must strive towards. There is no repairing without decolonisation, without dismantling and unraveling the structures that have been put in place by modernity to segregate and exploit.

Our previous collaborations showed a need to decenter Denmark and its terms of discussion on the legacies of colonialism, to instead facilitate conversations across the USVI, Kalaallit Nunaat and Ghana, to center the knowledge, vocabularies and practices which are often erased from historical archives and contemporary discussions about the ongoing legacies of Danish colonialism.

Throughout 2023-2024 we organised three encounters — in Nuuk, St. Croix and Kumasi — where we met to share artistic practices with each other and local publics and to learn from each context.

In Nuuk, we gathered around Hardenberg's exhibition *Nipangersitassaanngitsut // Those Who Can't be Silenced* at Nuuk Art Museum (Hardenberg, 2023) with the public programme *First Encounter*. In Saint Croix the encounter occurred around Belle's exhibition *Being of Myth and Memory* (Belle, 2023-2024), curated by Erica Moiah James, at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts in Frederiksted, with the programme *We Were Never Meant to Meet*. The third encounter was in Kumasi, Ghana, organised around Amenuke's exhibition *FIGURES OF STITCH AND OTHER FIGURES* (Amenuke, 2024) at the Great Hall Foyer, KNUST, curated by Bernard Akoi-Jackson, in collaboration with the Department of Painting and Sculpture (KNUST) and blaxTARLINES KUMASI.

The exhibitions became entryways into each artist's practice, which gave us an opportunity to get to know the practice of each artist in more depth, whilst also working as a lens into the context that they emerge from and speak to. These anchor exhibitions became a vehicle for dialogue between the artists of the network and brought us into active contact with practitioners and communities who are becoming valuable associates to the network.

In Kumasi, we also curated an experimental collective exhibition/programme entitled *"... flowing and floating like fragments and extensions: of waters, lands and skies..."* (Reparative Encounters network, 2024) at Opoku Ware II Museum at KNUST, which was a first experiment in exhibiting our practices together, featuring works that we created in conversation throughout the project.

When we met in Nuuk, we more or less by chance created a method of working alongside one another. This became a repeated method throughout the encounters in St. Croix and Kumasi, with the artworks traveling and changing through the different spaces, enfolding contexts and conversations into the pieces. This method has also shaped this article: we are writing alongside one another, sharing reflections, images, poems and artworks (e.g. Acharya & Muasya, 2023; Diallo et al [Kollektiv Omsorg, 2023), to consider what happens when our bodies, histories and practices meet across various locations. Eschewing a linear form, the article attempts to preserve the rhythm and eruptions of sensation and thought sparked throughout the encounters. Inspired by our joint exhibition *flowing and floating like fragments and extensions*, we experiment with fragments as carriers of meaning to be stitched and as vehicles for conversation.

I. FIRST ENCOUNTER: NUUK

Of Perceptions and Realities

What makes perceptions and
what constitutes realities?

What are those markers that inform whether one is considered "this" or "that"?

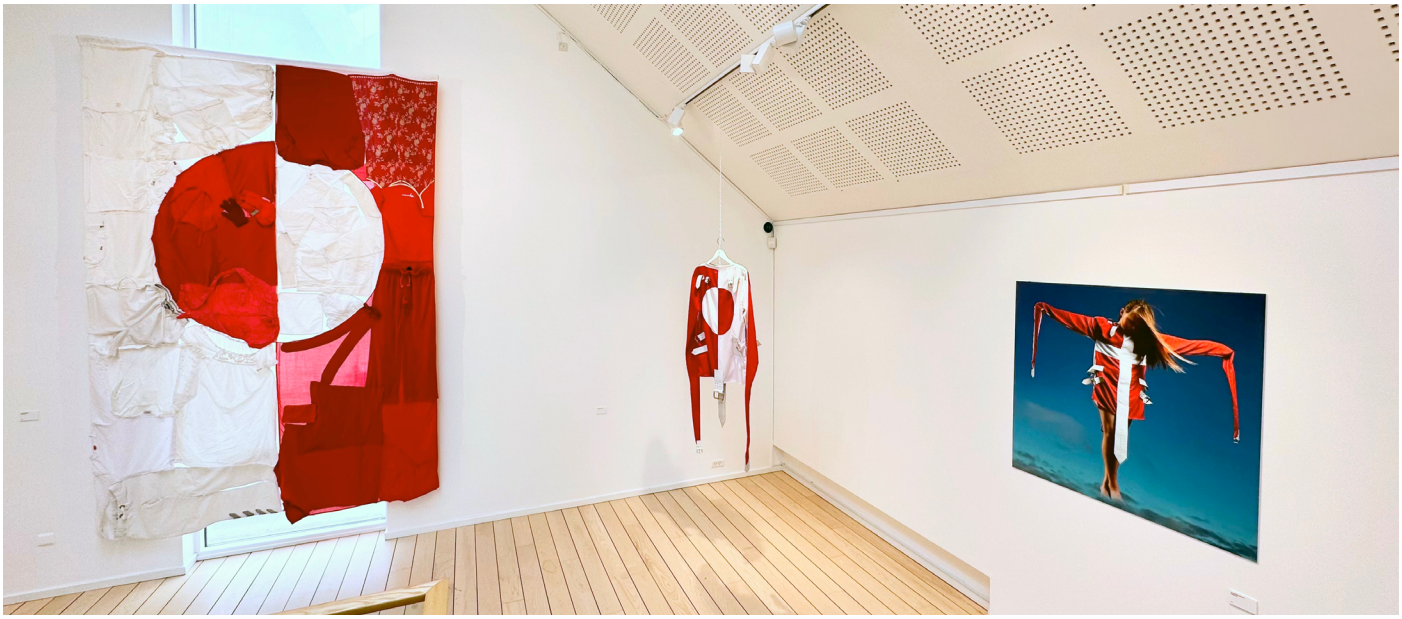
How are our Norths, Easts, Wests
and Souths designated?

Who determines who we are and
what we can be called?

There is always a palpable tension between
what is seen and what we wish to show

There is often a rift between what is intended in perceptions and the intent that is aroused by realities

In the end, realities are what they
are and as for perceptions…



Julie Edel Hardenberg, *Nipangersitassaanngitsut // Those Who Can't be Silenced* at Nuuk Art Museum, 2023. Installation view.

MY FIRST ENCOUNTER

My first introduction to Greenland comes in 2017, 100 years on the anniversary of the sale and transfer of the former Danish West Indies to the United States. There was a renaming of course. We are now called the U.S. Virgin Islands even though officially we are the Virgin Islands of the United States. This transfer also began the U.S. relinquishing their claims to Greenland, leaving Denmark to claim it entirely for themselves. This part we do not learn when we commemorate *Transfer Day* every year on March 31st. So, in a way it makes sense that my first encounter with Greenland would be inside a Danish museum in a new exhibit on the cusp of the centennial called "Voices From the Colonies". The introductory text reads:

> The Danes colonise areas of their own. From Greenland in the north, to India in the south. No colony is the same. The only thing they have in common is that the colonised are always non-European. Each colony has its own terms for existence and the power relations between people. This is where we begin. In the Danish colonies and the encounter between the colonisers and the colonised.

I know we have something more in common than 'we are not European'. I also know we have a beginning before encounters with Europeans. In the next panel text I read I am so bothered by it all I take a picture of it to remember.

> There are always souls to be saved. Danish missionaries come to Greenland to convert Inuit Greenlanders to a life as good Christians. But they are to continue their traditional life as hunters. Because the Danes can make a tidy profit on sealskins, whale blubber and baleen. The Danish colonial power establishes a trade monopoly and system that regulates the lives of Greenlanders. The Greenlanders themselves are skeptical. Danes are not the only people they can trade with. Whaling ships from other countries regularly sail by the coast of Greenland.

Whose voice is this? It's as if the museum narrator's voice suffered from some kind of disease of colonial entanglement. Or maybe they were never separate and distinct at all. Regardless, and for the record, there are not always souls to be saved, and the "good" before Christian is relative, and there is no need for permission to continue your traditional life as hunters of whale, seal or baleen. Isn't it a wonder how words can be so damn obfuscating all while seemingly telling a truth.

Years later when I actually go to Greenland I first feel the familiar smell of salt in the air even though it's in the summer and very cold. At Julie's house that sat on a mountain I saw bits of glaciers floating in the harbor like broken teeth. They were gleaming even though they were still evidence of some kind of decay. There were no trees, yet there was still something familiar to me in the landscape. It was the attempt to order nature, to be in charge of the ice and the mountains and the sea.

Nearby I saw a statue of the missionary from the museum text. I won't bother to mention his name, but he towers on top of a hill facing the sea. It reminded me of the sugar mills we have at home and I know that may seem unrelated. One is human and the other destroyed humans. This structure of a man is singular while there are over 100 sugar mills dotting the landscape on St. Croix. It is true though that they both brave the wind. What I feel is akin is how they seem to express time, how the tall bronze man seems to collapse time and how the coral and brick sugar mills ruin any possible division of past, present and future. They all are there to haunt us.

When we visit the Tunniit artist Ikimaliq Pikilak in her home I am entranced by the orange walls in her living room. They look like the kind of warm glowy orange of a sun receding beyond the horizon line. I can see Nuuk is like home in that way that there are horizon lines everywhere so it makes sense to me too that they would be on their faces marking the transitions of life, girl-woman, woman-mother. It's true these things deserve their own kind of monument.

In Julie's exhibition there is a picture of an Inuit girl that has braids and is wearing a t-shirt with the colors of the Jamaican flag. Her skin is light brown and as I look at Julie's play on race and presentation I realize that this girl looks so much like my own daughter that I take pictures of them both and create a collage on my phone to see them side by side. I show the group and we all marvel at the resemblance. It makes me wonder about the places where lines are not fixed, where there is slippage and the contours are unable to hold the power of rigidity and the separateness it creates. Instead, the power transfers in an ability to amble and yield.

On our last night we take a picture together. It harkens to the picture taken in 1912 with people who were brought from the colonies to Denmark to take a craft class. This time we bring ourselves together redrawing the colonial lines.

I KNOW YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN

I recall our film-screening and conversation in Nuuk, where your works appeared "alongside" one another — your voices crossing by chance or association: A coin in Julie's *My First Coin* (2022) echoed the coin in La Vaughn's *In the Place of Shadows* (2021), given by the Queen of Denmark to Alberta Viola Roberts and Victor Cornelius, two children taken from the Danish West Indies to be exhibited at the 1905 Colonial Exhibition at Tivoli gardens. Their stories of forced removal echoed the many Inuit children taken from families in Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark until this day (e.g Hunter, 2003). In your film, La Vaughn, you speak to Alberta and Victor, while recalling your own move as a child from the USVI to Wisconsin:

> "When you leave a colony to go to the mainland, you basically migrate to the same country. You did that too in a way, leaving the Danish West Indies to go to Denmark. But a place inside a place does not mean that is the same thing… different rules, different gaze, I know you know what I mean".

I remember how the film resonated deeply within the audience…

Julie Edel Hardenberg, Blondigenous, 2024.

WHITENDIGENOUS

J: Y*ou know, as an Inuk Kalaaleq - Greenlander I was thinking about whether I would be considered white when I go to Ghana?*

B: *Yes, you will be considered white.*

J: *But I don't consider myself a white person. For example, when my daughter was studying at an international high school and took part in a discussion about representation, she was perceived as white, even though she told them that she is an indigenous inuk – with blond hair and blue eyes.*

B: *Yes, but she will still be considered a white person.*

WORKING ALONGSIDE ONE ANOTHER

In Nuuk, we gathered at Julie and Svend Hardenberg's café, Kaffivik, to work with our different artistic practices "side by side" in an intimate café setting. Customers came and went, we met new people who brought new perspectives to the conversations. The warmth in the room and the smell of the materials at hand — jute sacks, sealskin, Dannebrog flags, watercolour, charcoal, coffee — gave me a glimpse of what an artistic research environment shaped by other affects and materialities might look and feel like. This vision deepened during our third Encounter in Kumasi, visiting the MFA/PhD programme at The Department of Painting and Sculpture at KNUST. The department has succeeded in decolonizing the curriculum and stifled Eurocentric conceptions of art handed down by the British colonial system. As members of blaxTARLINES and through their teaching, Dorothy and Bernard have contributed to the development of their own pedagogy and a "quiet revolution" (Kissiedu & Simbao, 2021) that involves concepts such as transforming art from "commodity to gift" and the "gown must go to town". Practices and pedagogies that are material consciousness, collaborative and community oriented, and turn away from the art object as commodity and something only to be enjoyed by a privileged elite.

La Vaughn Belle, *Being of Myth and Memory*, Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts, Frederiksted, 2024. Installation view.

II. WE WERE NEVER MEANT TO MEET: SAINT CROIX

The second encounter took place within the framework of Belle's exhibition *Being of Myth and Memory* (Belle, 2023-2024) held at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts in Frederiksted, Saint Croix. In the text introducing the exhibition, curator Erica Moiah James writes:

> Living requires us to remember. But how does one live, thrive, dream about futures when so much of one's memories have been erased; when remembering requires our bodies to relive the violence and shame of the past, making forgetting a form of protection? How do we live fully when the landscape we encounter daily holds histories of our subjection? And how might we craft post-colonial futures in this landscape, the same arena as our abjection?

In the exhibition, we sensed how colonial histories are present and make themselves felt everywhere, in landscapes, bodies and atmospheres, as Belle creates a sensorium with which to register them. But her work also registers how landscapes, bodies and atmospheres have always had a poetic capacity to transform and become an unruly pathway towards their own kind of sovereignty. Belle's work remakes the fragmentary traces of subjection into new narratives, images and forms that create spaces for other stories, subjects and possibilities to emerge.

Belle's practice offers a vocabulary with which to articulate our work with reparative encounters: she makes it possible to re-member ruptured histories, register colonial effects that continue to be obfuscated and unacknowledged, and at the same time she creates forms and narratives with which to reimagine and reorient oneself, opening up portals that give us access to other versions of past present and future (Sewer, 2023).

In Saint Croix, we titled our screening and public programme *We were never meant to meet,* a reference to

La Vaughn's video work *Between the Dusk and Dawn (how to navigate an unsettled empire)* (2023), in which Belle positions herself between two locations, Point Udall in St. Croix and Point Udall in Guam, spaces that represent the eastern and westernmost points of the American empire. Filming the sunrise in St. Croix and the sunset in Guam, Belle draws a video-cartography, bringing together two distant locations that "were never meant to meet". In a similar vein, our network brings together disparate positions within the Danish empire whose connections are obscured by the very workings of coloniality. By meeting across differences, sharing experiences and reflections, we unearth and create new "intimacies" — not only the historical intimacies between continents concealed in archival silences, but also new creative relations that give rise to new vocabularies from those silences.

Julie Edel Hardenberg, *Meant to meet,* 2024.

MEANT TO BE

We were never meant to meet. The sentence struck me, especially the words *meant to*. I read the lines on a poster advertising the evening's film screening and artist talk in which I would participate as part of La Vaughn's exhibition *Being of Myth and Memory* at the Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts in Frederiksted.

Being born in Kalaallit Nunaat in the 1970s was a time of baby booms — a period when Danish workers came to Greenland seeking opportunities, like my father. My mother had me when she was young, so I grew up in a household not just with her, but also with my grandparents, uncles, and aunties. They all gave me a lot of positive attention, especially my grandfather, who was my beloved mentor and friend.

One day, while playing with other kids, some of them asked me whether I had a father or not. Until then, it hadn't been an issue for me, so when I got home, I asked my mother about him. When I learned he was a white Dane that had moved back to Denmark, it surprised me, but it also sparked my curiosity towards the Danes in my hometown and the presence of Danish culture.

I soon realized that many other kids typically had an Inuk mother and a Danish father, and apparently, most of them didn't know their fathers, just like me. For me, it often created a sense of ambivalence, because it became obvious that I wasn't "meant to be" since I was a result of a brief romance between two young people. To cope, I created my own narrative about myself, that gave me legibility and allowed me to dissociate from the feeling of alienation.

At the time, I didn't have a perception of colonialism, or being a subject of coloniality. I just knew that I often felt alienated in my own hometown, as if I didn't belong there. There was always this sense of being observed and measured in society. I felt home with my Inuit Kalaallit family and peers, those who spoke my mother tongue Kalaallisut.

Later when I entered the institutions, like the public school system, I was again confronted with the feeling of being alienated. As a child, I quickly sensed an expectation to identify with one culture over the other, accompanied by the underlying question: Who do you belong to? – as if there was something at stake between the Kalaallit and the Danes.

This became clearer when we were divided in two classes – a Danish class and a Kalaallit class – a white class and a non-white class. I soon realized there were ethnic hierarchies, ranging from fair skin to dark skin, and that you weren't considered white un-

less you had blond hair and blue eyes, just like the angels I'd seen in pictures. And I knew I didn't look like an angel.

Later, when I decided to study abroad, I got in touch with my father and met his family. It gave me an insight into Danish culture and the narratives around Denmark's presence in Kalaallit Nunaat. Studying in other Nordic countries made me aware of the limits of the discussions concerning colonialism, since most Scandinavians lack both the foundational understanding and the vocabulary to address Nordic colonialism (Lynge, 2006).

I later understood why, when I became familiar with the term "Nordic Exceptionalism" (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2016). My mere presence and articulation of alternative perspectives often felt challenging for others. I was often seen as the one creating awkward situations, particularly among Danes who still perceive themselves as helping us "develop" our society. From a historical perspective, they view themselves as the most humane colonizers in a world of inhumane ones and often expect gratitude in return.

Over time my perspective and longing for a place where I could belong to, has shifted from striving to be accepted, to instead appreciating places and communities that have experienced coloniality. This has given me a profound sense of belonging — a feeling of being *meant to be*.

Rigsfællesskab

i en verden

af magtkampe

slås i om mig

som var jeg jeres egen

blive til noget

men helst vor egen

som et lille redskab

vi bruge kan

Kapital

du ser mig som et stykke inventar

henvist til mørke og forglemmelse

altid forbundet med handel

og ideer om storhed

men hør

se og mærk mig

for det menneske jeg er

for den jeg er

Julie Edel Hardenberg, Empowerment & Empowered, 2024.

Danskhed

der var engang

en fortælling

om de mest humane kolonisatorer

blandt de inhumane

danskhed i Danmark

danskhed i Grønland

danskhed på Færøerne

Nordatlanten og Island

danskhed i Dansk Vestindien

Tranquebar

Guldkysten og mange andre steder

Veltilfreds

Min brune 'etnicitet'

står i kontrast

til min danske

veltalenhed

ENCOUNTERING THE REPARATIVE ENCOUNTERS...?

Experiencing art is not just about a final product or object in an exhibition space but more importantly the process of making/creating. It thus involves all the gatherings within the experience in various spaces.

Spaces are identified through various means and impregnated with the duality of homogeneity and heterogeneity with their inherent politics of inclusion and exclusion or centre and periphery. These characteristics of space exist within the everyday, where spatial perceptions have grown to include diverse aspects of the individual's social life and experiences and social relations, where space is socially produced as reiterated in Tuan's (1990) notions of topophilia and topophobia. Consequently, Space is produced by subjectivities and psychic states in which social relations take place (Rogoff, 2000). Traveling from Ghana to Nuuk and the USVI thus comes with personal and communal experiences that reveal how space and the art experience are bound.

Commonalities hit spaces in the presence of movements and exchanges. This was the case of the art experience in Nuuk Art Museum, when we experienced each other's practice in Julie 's exhibition, our film screening and presentations. Ensuing conversations brought along similarities and differences in art experience of artists and audience about "the everyday" as expression in and of art. In Hardenberg's café, Kaffivik, where remnants of jute sacks from the café's roastery were used by artists, art experience was not just about the use of the jute sack for artwork but the aroma in the atmosphere. Coffee here, coffee there… Hmmm!!! The aroma. The café space became an art studio for the moment of our visit. Swimming in the coffee aroma brought my mind to my own work, *Coded,* from my exhibition, *Twists, Turns and Broken Doors* (Amenuke, 2017). *Coded* was the experience of aroma too, but that of cocoa. A room filled with empty cocoa jute sacks. These sacks filled the exhibition space like the way the fermented cocoa smell engulfed the exhibition space, so similar to the art-making experience at *Kaffivik*. Spaces may be similarly different…

St. Croix also possessed the experience of the familiar and unfamiliar. Moving through the township of Saint Croix comes along with memories of colonial histories, similarities in objects and spaces of St. Croix and Ghana. Ghana's forts for example, Cape Coast and Elmina Castle, which were encountered in the third encounter and that of Fort Christiansvaern in Christiansted beamed the thought of independence as one engages these historical spaces. What could be freedom to an artist as she engages these spaces? Could these lead an artist to engage elements of flight and/ or swimming off?

At the studio of La Vaughn in St. Croix, discarded materials from the Frederiksted carnival witnessed in the second encounter became a language of "flight" in the work *Over the Sea* I created. Feathers picked from the neighbourhood after the carnival became the main material for this work. Bold colours of the feathers were the choice for this "freedom flight". The feathers, arranged in an undulating manner on the upper surface of a plaid fabric from La Vaughn's studio, came with a painted expression of a seascape at the lower part of the work.

The experience of being together with colleague-artists, getting meals, drinking coconut at the beach etc. presents the practice of the everyday within the practice of art creation in a special way.

Dorothy Amenuke, *Over The Sea* (2024)

III. FLOWING AND FLOATING LIKE FRAGMENTS AND EXTENSIONS: OF WATERS, LANDS AND SKIES.... & FIGURES OF STITCH: GHANA

Flowing and floating

When in the skies,

Water flows

And so does the land.

When in the water,

The sky floats

And so does the land

And as for us,

We all flow and float

Bernard Akoi-Jackson, *Slow walk* (2024), performative intervention at Opoku Ware II Museum, Kumasi.

THE FIGURES OF STITCH AS A FIGURE FOR REPARATIVE PRACTICES

Dorothy Amenuke, *Multiple Layers*, FIGURES OF STITCH AND OTHER FIGURES, KNUST, Kumasi (2024)

The third encounter took place within Dorothy Amenuke's exhibition *Figures of Stitch and Other Figures* (2024). In her artist talk, Dorothy explained: "I understand stitch as a term binding and holding together thought. When a human being is opened up through surgery, you have to bring them back together through stitching" (Amenuke & Akoi-Jackson, 2024). She described how community is also stitched into the work through participatory practice. Encountering the work physically revealed the materiality of the "stitch": burned, cut, sewn, woven, glued, moulded from paper pulp, dyed by hand, or patched over other stitches. "Stitch" itself becomes the figure, reflecting Dorothy's sculptural and spatial sensitivity.

Through this expansive notion of the stitch, Dorothy's praxis prefigures the reparative as invoked in our network, *Reparative Encounters*. In previous work we noted that the legacy of slavery may be irreparable — it's "beyond repair" (Dirckinck-Holmfeld 2022; Scott, 2018). Rather than signaling a finite gesture, we emphasise the "reparative practice" as processual and transformative. A feat we may never fully complete, but one that compels us to build infrastructures

of solidarity that foster a different present and future. Here stitch expands our notion of the reparative to become an ability to bind and hold thoughts together through the material encounters. With Dorothy's analogy to surgery, I am reminded that, as we engage in reparative practices, we continue being broken anew. This physicality and materiality of the reparative practice that stitches and pieces fragments together, also became apparent in the physical and material encounter with the work of Julie's exhibition in Nuuk and La Vaugn's exhibition in St. Croix. What all of your work reveals is the multilayered, temporal aspect of the reparative practice: as an enduring, long-term process, that layers new stitches over old ones.

In Dorothy's large-scale installations, pillows grow into and out of each other, occupying and reshaping space. The pillow-works stem from the saying "let's go see Abrewa": the elderly woman in the community whom everyone turns to in times of difficulty. To "go see Abrewa" also means to sleep over a problem, to "give it to the pillow".

I can't help but think of the story of Abrewa as a metaphor for artistic research. A process of dealing with problems and questions considered and woven into fabric, some long, some short, some soft, some firm and entangled. The story of Abrewa also invites us to consider the opacity (Glissant, 1997) of artistic research as a process of unfolding and folding, through which some knowledge is revealed, while other parts remain concealed. Through Abrewa, the matriarchal figure, it also asserts artistic research as a form that emerges from feminist, decolonial art practices that actively engage with problems in our communities. This also recalls your pillows, Julie, that you have produced between Nuuk, St. Croix and Ghana and throughout your PhD. They become a way of working through your research questions on the embodied experience of colonial alienation — and giving those concepts and experiences a body (Hardenberg & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2023).

THE LAST BATH ON MY WAY HOME

The very first time I really understood my place in the world happened while reading *Roots* by Alex Haley (1976). It happened when I was 12 years old while reading the description of the journey that is described as the Middle Passage, the one where captured Africans cross the Atlantic ocean packaged together with their skin rotting in their own vomit and shit. It was then that I understood why I was living on these mountaintops peeking out of the Caribbean Sea, how my five grandmothers got here before me. For hours an upset of tears and sorrow reached back toward a home that I could only hold in my imagination. That imagined home was fraught with other people's description of what Africa was, it was as fragmented and colonized as most people's imag-

Assin Manso Ancestral Slave River Site, Ghana.
Photos: La Vaughn Belle & Julie Edel Hardenberg

inings of where I was. So I knew that my first trip to Africa would be another kind of reckoning.

One of the most moving and surprising parts of the journey occurred at a place called Assin Manso. It was known as the location of "The Last Bath", the last place where captives would be bathed before the 40 mile walk to the castles on the coast. This place was in a lush bamboo filled forest with a river that parted in two. One side of the river was where the dead and dying were thrown and the other was where people would be bathed while still in chains. When I stepped up to put my feet in the water I was amazed to find gold dust glimmering in the sand. As I rubbed some of it along my forearm, the specks of gold remained. I then realized that those who were to be sold into slavery would have walked this leg of the journey glittering in gold. It's not something I have ever heard or read anywhere, but only something I would have known after experiencing it myself. Such is the beauty and power of bodily knowledge which has become increasingly important in my practice.

Many people died on their way to this part of the Transatlantic Slave trade. Many more died on their way to the coast, then at the forts along the coast, then on the ships and then of course we know the cane fields were death camps. I understood in a new way what a miracle I am. On this side of the Atlantic to have survived is to be a fraction of the fraction of the fraction that did.

I loved being in Ghana. And although there is evidence in everything of the shared history of being colonized, it's the first place I've been where I felt the colonial gaze wasn't winning. There were so many moments of reprieve. Like when we visited Bonwire and witnessed kente cloth being made. I thought this was here before, after and will be in the future. It didn't feel under threat in the way it feels to be constantly under threat at home.

What I left feeling is a sense that I must return. And not once, but forever, that this is a place I must always go back to, like the sea.

OUTRO: CRAFTING FUTURES

Dorothy Amenuke, …*Through the Sun*….. 2024.

What we know:

The past

The present

And the future?

That's not for us to know

But on this, we can speculate

And that's exciting enough….

We began this article with a series of questions: What happens when artists, who have been separated by coloniality, meet across different geographies? Which experiences, vocabularies and strategies resonate across these different spaces, how are their practices transformed through encounter, and how can they, in dialogue with each other, reveal new horizons for repairing colonial legacies?

Throughout our encounters, we have witnessed glimpses (of possibilities) that emerge when working alongside in the spaces created by colonial rupture. In the sun stitched by Amenuke in response to the sun setting on the horizon of Belle's exhibition in Frederiksted. In Hardenberg's strands of hair blow-

ing under the relentless wind on the shore of Columbus Landing in Saint Croix, a space of Indigenous resistance honoured in Belle's sculpture *Sovereign*. In their dialogue, they open up spaces of relation that Glissant theorised as new forms and epistemologies that emerge from the cracks inflicted by coloniality (1997).

In this article we have created an encounter between our practices, to share with each other and our readers the insights that emerge when our bodies, histories and practices meet across time and space. We conveyed our understanding that through collaborative artistic research, the forced ruptures of coloniality can be reimagined to produce a space for other vocabularies and experiences to emerge. We share these insights to contribute to ongoing conversations about the relation between artistic practice, artistic research and decoloniality. We offered our evolving reflections on repair/reparative as a framework for thinking about the role of artistic practices in contexts of decolonisation: rather than striving towards an impossible reconstitution and closure (there is no restoring of what has been), the reparative creates new infrastructures, forms and possibilities from within the ruptures. These forms make it possible to reveal the overlooked, confront and reframe colonial structures, hold together different thoughts and experiences, and issue forth new concepts (*stitch*, *freedom flight*, *meant to be*…) with which to imagine and craft other futures.

NOTES

[1] The network's activities have been made possible by funding from the Globus programme, Nordic Culture Fund.

[2] The audio-walk Voices in the Shadows of Monuments featured contributions by Julie Edel Hardenberg, La Vaughn Belle and Bernard Akoi-Jackson among others. Reparative Encounters builds on previous research projects Entangled Archives, Archival Encounters, Min(d)ing the Academy and Reparative Practices in the Cultural Archive of Colonialism.

[3] We extend our gratitude to Vár Eydnudóttir, Aka Hansen, Ikimaliq Pikilak, Juno Berthelsen, Aviaja E. Lynge, Varna Marianne Nielsen, Kuluk Helms, Svend Hardenberg, Kaffivik, Nivi Christensen, Nuuk Art Museum, David Berg, Chalana Brown, Hadiya Sewer, Tiphanie Yanique, Frandelle Gerard, Monica Marin, Theda Sandiford, Lisa Mordhorst, Caribbean Museum Center for the Arts, karî'kachä seid'ou, Theresah Ankomah, Elolo Bosoka, Fatric Bewong, Adwoa Boakyewaa Amoah, Ato Annan, Halimatu Iddrisu, Isaac Donkor, Andrews Siaw Nubuor, Richard Ahenkan Yeboah, Justice Gyimah, Daniel Agyei Agnmor, Opoku Ware II Museum, Foundation for Contemporary Art Ghana, all the members of blaxTARLINES and the students of the Department of Painting and Sculpture at KNUST Kumasi.

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Dekolonisering af dansk-kalaallit samarbejde(r)

Samrefleksioner over udstillingsprocessen omkring *Inuit Dimensions* i rum46

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the authors examine the collaborative exhibition process behind the exhibition Inuit Dimensions in the exhibition space rum46 in 2024. By employing a collaborative autoethnographic approach, the authors critically reflect on the power dynamics inherent in their partnership. The study identifies nuances of the complex notion of authority throughout the collaboration, from institutional framing and artistic decision-making to public engagement. The authors highlight how relationality and trust can provide a shared experience of "Two-Eyed Seeing" alongside a deeper understanding of the "Borderlands" within and between their positions. Relational accountability is thus a key factor in the ongoing efforts to decolonize art practices and disrupt neocolonial hierarchies in collaborations between Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark. Ultimately, the authors call for continued critical reflection in cross-cultural collaborations to ensure equitable and reciprocal partnerships.

KEY WORDS

DANISH-KALAALLIT COLLABORATIONS, COLLABORATIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY, RELATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY, POSITIONALITY, POWER NEGOTIATIONS

INDLEDNING

Ferniseringen af udstillingen *Inuit Dimensions* i rum46 i efteråret 2024 var kulminationen på flere måneders samarbejde mellem artiklens to forfattere; Ikimalik Pikilak og Gry Lind Merrild Hansen. Denne artikel udgør en forlængelse af vores samarbejde i form af en dekolonial øvelse: at udøve en fælles post-refleksiv gennemgang af et udstillingssamarbejde med fokus på forståelser af magt, relationer og positionering mellem en kalaaleq inuk[1] kunstner og en dansk forsker. Inspireret af metoden "collaborative autoethnography" (Lapadat, 2017; Mertens et. al. 2024), vil vi her dele erfaringer og refleksioner fra vores samarbejde, fra projektets initiering og planlægning til ferniseringen af udstillingen.

Vores samarbejde var båret af samtaler, gensidig tillid og bevidsthed om de sociale og historiske betingelser, vi står i som henholdsvis kalaaleq inuk og dansker. Vi repræsenterer herigennem komplekse og sammenfiltrede positioner, der samtidig ofte er i fare for at blive forstået gennem forsimplede, dikotomiske rammer, knyttet til kolonialt betingede hierarkier. I artiklen undersøger vi, hvordan samarbejdet både har talt ind i og udfordret de asymmetriske magtforhold – forstået som strukturel, geopolitisk og epistemisk magt – der i dekolonial forskning lokaliseres i "North–South collaborations" (Kontinen & Nguyahambi, 2020; Mertens et al., 2024; White, 2020). Sådanne samarbejder kritiseres for at fastholde ulighed, hvor den ene part definerer rammer, økonomi og mål, mens den anden reduceres til "udfører" eller "informant". Akademiske samarbejder mellem kalaallit inuit og danskere kritiseres tilsvarende for at reproducere sådanne ulige relationer (Vold et al., 2024).

Hvor forskningen indenfor "North-South collaborations" typisk fokuserer på akademiske projekter, undersøger vi her en kunstnerisk udstillingsproces. Samtidig indgår arbejdet med *Inuit Dimensions* i et akademisk forskningsprojekt gennem Grys ph.d.-afhandling. Vi repræsenterer dermed også positionerne som henholdsvis universitetsforsker (Gry) og en praksisbaseret, kunstnerisk forsker i oprindelig kultur baseret på oprindelig viden og selv-struktureret læsning (Ikimalik).

Med denne artikel ønsker vi at bidrage til arbejdet med at dekolonisere og skabe mere ligeværdige relationer i samarbejder mellem Kalaallit Nunaat og Danmark. I stedet for at anvende den generaliserende betegnelse "North–South" foreslår vi at forstå vores samarbejde som et dansk–kalaallit samarbejde – for derved at anerkende det specifikke koloniale forhold mellem Danmark og Kalaallit Nunaat. Samtidig er vi bevidste om og kritiske overfor de dikotomiske forståelsesformer, som begrebsapparatet og dekoloniale analyser kan risikere at understøtte og forstærke. Snarere end et fastlåst magtforhold anser vi vores samarbejde som en relationel proces, præget af skiftende former for beslutningsmagt og fagligt afsæt. Med afsæt i begrebet "relationel accountability" som ramme, undersøger vi, hvordan samarbejdet kan blive et sted for gensidig forpligtelse og kompleks erkendelse frem for reproduktion af binære forståelser af magt. Dette indebærer desuden, at forskellige former for viden respekteres i deres egen ret, frem for at blive oversat til én dominerende forståelsesramme. Vi placerer os dermed i en feministisk, dekolonial og intersektionel tradition, der forstår viden som situeret og relationel, og som længe har fremhævet samarbejde som en etisk og epistemologisk forpligtigelse (Haraway, 1988; Wilson, 2008). Vores bidrag udgør herved et eksempel på, hvordan et sådant samarbejde faktisk kan tage form i praksis – med dets spændinger, forhandlinger og erkendelser, og ved at gøre selve samarbejdet til genstand for kritisk refleksion.

I det følgende afsnit vil vi give en uddybet præsentation af vores positioner som afsendere, samt en introduktion til kollaborativ autoetnografi som det her er anvendt. Efterfølgende gennemgås selve udstillingsprocessen omkring *Inuit Dimensions* i rum46, hvorefter artiklen afrundes i en afsluttende efterrefleksion.

RELATIONELLE POSITIONER

Vores respektive positioner og relationer udgør selve grundlaget for samarbejdet. Vi vil derfor præsentere os selv med inddragelse af relevante informationer om vores professionelle og personlige liv, for at vise de relationelle sammenviklinger mellem os.

Ikimalik Pikilak (1990): Jeg er anaana[2] til to døtre og værge for vores hund. Jeg kommer fra en familie med blandede rødder: min far er dansk og min mor er inuk, og jeg har halvsøskende på begge sider. Mine halvsøskende på min fars side er danske, min halvsøster på min mors side er inuk og min tvillingesøster og jeg er begge dele.

Til dagligt arbejder jeg primært som praktiserende udøver af kakiornerit[3] i Nuuk. Ud over at lave tunniit[4] er jeg forfatter og visuel kunstner, hvor børnebøger, film og malerier er de medier jeg primært arbejder med. Tunniit anser jeg som et kommunikationsværktøj baseret på inuits vidanssystemer. Den viden og forståelse inuit har, har gjort så stort indtryk på mig, at jeg bearbejder det gennem forskellige medier. Det gør jeg både for selv at forstå og lære, men også for at formidle vores oprindelige viden videre. På den måde er inuits viden og forståelse blevet den røde tråd og drivkraften i alt, hvad jeg laver. Jeg ser det, jeg laver, som frø der skal spire og være til rådighed for hvem, der nu ville opsøge og finde samme glæde i det, der inspirerede mig til at skabe dem.

Gry Lind Merrild Hansen (1998): Jeg bor sammen med min kæreste og vores lille datter i Aarhus. I mit professionelle liv er jeg ph.d.-studerende ved Kunsthistorie på Aarhus Universitet. Her forsker jeg i samtidskunst fra Kalaallit Nunaat, der adresserer og udfordrer dansk kolonialisme og kolonialitet.

Ud over min kunstfaglige interesse i feltet, så bunder min interesse for kalaallit kunst og kultur også i min tilknytning til landet gennem min familie og min opvækst. Da min mor var barn, flyttede hun med sin far til Kalaallit Nunaat, hvor han mødte min ningiu[5]. Min mor har derfor halvsøstre, der er inuit. Min mors søskende og deres børn (mine mostre, morbror, fætter og kusiner) anser jeg som min nære familie. Jeg har også selv boet i Qaqortoq i det sydlige Kalaallit Nunaat i seks år af min barndom.

Ved siden af min ph.d.-ansættelse er jeg frivillig ved udstillingsstedet rum46. Her varetager jeg forskellige og skiftende funktioner, bl.a. som kasserer og fundraiser, men somme tider også som projektleder og kurator, hvilket var tilfældet under planlægningen og udførelsen af udstillingen *Inuit Dimensions*.

Under samarbejdet har vi haft det privilegium, at vi deler en familiær relation som ajaaraq[6] & niece. Vores forhold er tæt; formet både af forbindelsen igennem Ikimaliks far, der også er Grys morfar, og af den tid, hvor vi begge boede i Syd-Kalaallit Nunaat. På den ene side understøtter dette gensidig tillid, men på den anden side gør det samtaler om svære emner, såsom vores forskellige koloniale positioner og arv, mere sårbare, som følge af, at vi ikke ønsker at risikere vores nære relation.

DEN KOLLABORATIVE AUTOETNOGRAFISKE UNDERSØGELSE

I denne artikel udfører vi en autoetnografisk undersøgelse af vores samarbejde. Som forsker Naja Dyrendom Graugaard fremviser, udgør selv-refleksionen fra autoetnografien en tilgang til at vende det analyserende blik mod sig selv (2020) og bidrager herved til, at man som forsker kan stille sig kritisk over for de implikationer, som ens egen position indebærer. Da vi udfører vores auto-etnografiske undersøgelse i fællesskab, lægger vi os op ad den beslægtede metode kollaborativ auto-etnografi, der udgør en: ”multivoiced approach to autoethnographic research” (Lapadat, 2017). Som Judith C. Lapadat fremhæver, indebærer autoetnografisk metode en etisk risiko, der knytter sig til solo-forskerens blinde vinkler samt til faldgruber forbundet med repræsentation (Lapadat, 2017, p. 589). Den kollaborative autoetnografiske til-

gang kan således udgøre en metodologisk styrkelse af autoetnografiens potentiale. Ved at inkludere to eller flere forskellige personer, der indgår i en fælles refleksion, dækkes bredere og mere nuancerede perspektiver. Metoden bliver derfor fremhævet som særlig egnet i forbindelse med projekter, hvor bidragsydere fra forskellige koloniale og/eller sociale sfærer indgår, som det er tilfældet i "North-South collaborations".

Vores kollaborative autoetnografiske analyse tager form som en fælles retrospektiv refleksion over udstillingsprocessen fra udstillingens initiering til udstillingens åbning. Analysen er inddelt i tre dele: Del 1: Udstillingen initieres, Del 2: Udstillingen skabes og Del 3: Udstillingen åbnes. Hver del indeholder to korte vignetter, som relateres til artiklens fokus gennem efterfølgende samrefleksioner.

Vignetterne er baseret på vores erindringer og repræsenterer de tanker, beslutninger og overvejelser, der var aktuelle for de forskellige dele af udstillingsprocessen. Med den in-situ og ad-hoc-baserede tilgang, der har defineret vores udstillingssamarbejde, har vi ikke under udstillingsprocessen strukturet vores udvekslinger på måder, så de kunne indgå som empiri for en akademisk analyse. Vi har derfor gengivet forløbet, som vi i fællesskab erindrer det, hjulpet på vej af mailudvekslinger, officielle dokumenter, fotodokumentation og samtaler mellem os, efter udstillingens afslutning. Vores tilgang har visse ligheder med det, der i nyere etnografisk metode betegnes som *patchwork ethnography* (Günel, Varma & Watanabe 2020), hvor viden skabes gennem relationelle forløb, tilbagevendende samtaler og stykvis, gensidig involvering - snarere end gennem en lineær og isoleret feltadgang eller vidensskabelse. I lighed med denne og andre post-etnografiske tilgange (f.eks. Lapadat 2017) afviser vi forestillingen om den ensomme, heroiske feltforsker – en figur, der også har præget narrativer om forskning i Arktis (Rasmus & Ulturgasheva 2017). I stedet tilbyder vi her en model for, hvordan viden kan skabes i forhandling, gensidighed og relationel ansvarlighed (Wilson 2007, Tuck & Yang 2014, Smith 2021). Dette betyder ikke, at asymmetrier ophæves, men at de – som også Günel et al. fremhæver – anerkendes som en del af kompleksiteten, hvor forskellige former for viden, modstand og sameksistens kan virke sammen i praksis.

Samrefleksionerne repræsenterer vores efterfølgende fælles refleksioner over magt gennem forløbet. I samrefleksionerne inddrager vi teori, som vi postrefleksivt har anvendt til at forstå og begrebsliggøre perspektiverne fra vignetterne. Da Ikimalik bor i Nuuk, Kalaallit Nunaat og Gry i Aarhus, Danmark, har vores samtaler både op til, under og efter udstillingsprocessen foregået online. De møder, som vi har afholdt specifikt i forbindelse med udarbejdelsen af denne artikel, har vi optaget og transskriberet med henblik på at bruge dem til undersøgelsen. Vi har besluttet at lade de inddragede transskriptioner stå i rå form, for at lade den mundtlige samtale, der har været grundlæggende for samarbejdet, få plads mellem den skrevne, og mere polerede, tekst. Artiklens indhold er også baseret på tekstproduktion, som vi hver især har forfattet i perioder mellem vores samtaler. I forlængelse af de temaer, der er dukket op i samtalerne, har Ikimalik forfattet en række korte tekster om sin (kolonialt prægede) identitet, dekoloniale rejse og sine tanker bag det udstillede kunstværk. Gry har hertil haft til opgave at inkorporere egne refleksioner, vores fælles refleksioner og Ikimaliks refleksioner i en form, der kan kategoriseres som en akademisk artikel. Gry har således haft størst indflydelse på ordlyden i kraft af at have udført det sammenstykkende arbejde, men gennem en løbende feedback-proces, har Ikimalik læst og kommenteret artiklen, og hun anerkender at være repræsenteret i tekstens pointer og konklusioner.

Du vil som læser støde på afsnit med forskellige afsender-konstellationer. Der vil bl.a. være afsnit, hvor Ikimalik og Gry står som individuelle afsendere. Disse afsnit repræsenterer vores respektive erindringer over de dele af udstillingsprocessen, som vi varetog individuelt. Der vil også være afsnit, der repræsenterer vores fælles refleksioner om udstillingsprocessen og samarbejdet. Disse afsnit består af

samskrevet tekst – som denne – baseret på samtaler, sammenstykket af Gry og efterfølgende tilpasset og godkendt af Ikimalik. Du vil desuden støde på fotodokumentation og udsnit fra officielle dokumenter, under den følgende gennemgang af udstillingsprocessen omkring *Inuit Dimensions* i rum46.

DEL 1: UDSTILLINGEN INITIERES

1:1 Vignet: Den institutionelle framing

Gry: rum46 er et kritisk, frivilligdrevet, non-profit udstillingssted i hjertet af Aarhus. De seneste år har stedet hovedsageligt arbejdet med etårige, tematiske projekter, hvorigennem kunstudstillinger og dertilhørende events adresserer samtidige, underbelyste og/eller marginaliserede problemstillinger. Via udveksling og interaktion i det sociale, politiske og kulturelle felt fremviser de involverede kunstnere, aktører og debattører nye rum, handlingsmuligheder, og alternativer i forhold til det samfund, det selv er en del af (rum46, 2024). rum46 bliver økonomisk finansieret gennem fundraising til et-årige projekter. En økonomisk struktur, der på den ene side er præget af usikkerhed grundet den relativt kortsigtede planlægning, men som på den anden side giver frihed i forhold til at skabe udstillingsprogrammer af høj aktualitet, da temaerne og de udstillede kunstnere besluttes løbende. I 2024 arbejdede rum46 ud fra et årsprojekt med titlen *små rum*, der tog udgangspunkt i en undersøgelse af, hvordan kunstnere og kulturer genopbygger deres historier og virkeligheder gennem deres praksisser. Med dekolonisering af viden og historieskrivningen som et gennemgående fokus, præsenteredes udstillinger, der modsatte sig nedbrydende, macro- og homogenisere(n)de narrativer. (rum46 2024)

Som følge af den ad-hoc-baserede organisatoriske og økonomiske struktur rum46 er bygget op omkring, opstår der ofte ændringer i programmet som året skrider frem. Året 2024 var ingen undtagelse. I foråret 2024 modtog vi et afbud fra en kunstner, der skulle have udstillet i efteråret. Herved opstod muligheden for at invitere en anden kunstner med et aktuelt kunstprojekt ind under undertemaet *Myter & Magi,* der var defineret som en undersøgelse af alternativer til "rationelle, videnskabeligt dokumenterbare og kvantificérbare" tilgange til vidensproduktion (rum46, 2024). I styregruppens samtaler om mulige kunstnere, der ville kunne bidrage til *Myter & Magi,* blev Ikimalik bragt op som forslag. Ikimaliks kunstneriske praksis ræsonnerede med de tanker og ønsker vi havde til temaets udstillinger. Vi blev i styregruppen enige om, at jeg skulle sende Ikimalik en invitation.

1:2 Vignet: Hvorfor Ikimalik sagde ja

Fra samtale d. 21/01/2025

***Gry**:"Hvorfor sagde du ja? Hvad var det for nogle tanker du gjorde dig, da du fik invitationen?"*

***Ikimalik**: "Altså en ting er, at jeg føler, jeg har et ansvar for, hvordan jeg kan række ud eller rykke på grænserne. Og så fordi de her forestillinger – det der er blevet skrevet af udefrakommende om vores forfædre – stadig er et billede, der dominerer rigtig meget i dag. Jeg følte, at hvis jeg kan – hvis der bare var en mulighed for at plante de her små frø, som med tiden kan udvikle sig – eller at det kan være med til at skabe nogle tanker. Det behøver ikke at rykke med det samme, men bare det, at hvis nogen har set det – at det, der så er beskrevet om vores forfædre, ikke er det, der "justifies who they were".*

At det både var en mulighed for at plante de her gode frø, men også at det var meget spændende temaer, fordi jeg har dykket så meget ind i – og har fået så meget dybere forståelse for vores mytefortælling – altså det, der engang var så pinligt og også skammeligt for mig. Jeg lærte ikke, at myter eller fortællinger om angakkut[7] var noget jeg skulle være stolt af, og jeg har ikke lært, hvordan jeg skulle forstå dem, eller hvilken læring der var i dem i det hele taget. Og det har været så kraftfuldt for mig.

Men så også fordi du er min niece! Haha. Det at du er min niece var ligesom den åbne dør. Ellers tror jeg ikke, at jeg havde været interesseret lige nu. Men hvis der var nogen måde, hvor jeg kunne hjælpe dig og dine interesser og dit studie, så vil jeg selvfølgelig gerne gøre det."

Gry: *Tak – det har du gjort! Haha"*

1:3 Samrefleksion:

Med udgangspunkt i den definition af magt, som præsenteres i kritikker af "North-South collaborations", repræsenterer rum46s invitation til Ikimalik på den ene side en reproduktion af koloniale, asymmetriske magtrelationer i samarbejder mellem aktører fra Kalaallit Nunaat og Danmark. rum46 (implicit Gry) udgjorde den beslutningstagende aktør, der definerede projektet og styrede økonomien omkring udstillingen. rum46 honorerede Ikimalik for udstillingen, men kunne ikke tilbyde betaling for materialer og kunstproduktion, ligesom de ikke kunne tilbyde betaling til en rejse til Danmark. Også den geografiske lokation for udstillingen udgør en reproduktion af koloniale forhold. Ikimalik forventedes at bruge tid og energi på at 'uddanne' et dansk publikum om dansk-kalaallit-relationer gennem sin kunstneriske praksis. Tid og energi der kunne være lagt i at styrke og støtte Kalaallit Nunaats interne kunstscene.

Samtidig befandt rum46 sig ikke i en entydigt magtfuld position. rum46 manglede en udstillende kunstner til deres program – ikke mindst for at imødekomme de forpligtelser, de havde overfor de danske fonde, der havde støttet programmet. Ikimaliks rolle som beslutningstager om, hvorvidt hun ønskede at udstille, var således suveræn. I denne sammenhæng kan det være relevant at tænke i forlængelse af begrebet "refusal", som det formuleres af bl.a. Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang (2014) og Audra Simpson (2014) I deres analyser er "refusal" ikke et fravalg af deltagelse, men en aktiv og suveræn handling, hvor marginaliserede aktører nægter at lade sig assimilere ind i koloniale eller akademiske logikker. Som Tuck og Yang skriver, er "refusal": "a generative stance" snarere end en tilbagetrækning. I vores tilfælde valgte Ikimalik ikke "refusal" – men det forhold at hun kunne have sagt nej, viser at magt i samarbejdet ikke kun lå i at definere rammer og økonomi, men også i muligheden for at afvise deltagelse, stille betingelser eller tie. Ikimalik valgte ikke "refusal", men fremhævede sit ja som en personlig, relationel gave snarere end som en formaliseret accept. I den forstand var deltagelsen ikke givet på forhånd, men aktivt givet.

Magtfordelingen i samarbejdet kan yderligere nuanceres ved inddragelse af den institutionelle ramme. rum46s organisatoriske struktur ligger sig op ad en form for 'adhocracy'-lignende struktur (Mintzberg, 2000), hvilket kan defineres ved at være en strategi, der ikke blot accepterer, men direkte bygger på kaos, usikkerhed og kreativitet som grundlæggende for at etablere en buttom-up proces "which allows strategy to emerge from operational decision making rather than forcing operational decisions to conform to strategy" (Bilton, 2007, s. 92). rum46 som udstillingssted byder altså på andre temporaliteter og beslutningsmodeller end mange etablerede kulturinstitutioner og indebærer på et institutionelt plan et potentiale for at facilitere samfundskritiske samtaler, hvori neokoloniale magtforhold og strukturer kan udfordres.

Et andet relevant perspektiv er, at det kan være svært at være den, der byder op til samtaler om kolonialitet, når man som Ikimalik tidligere har oplevet at blive mødt med modstand og vrede i samtaler herom – både i offentlige sammenhænge, men også i vores private familie. Samtaler om kolonialitet har for eksempel været årsag til, at Ikimalik i perioder har taget et afstand til nære familiemedlemmer. Dette har haft betydning for hendes overvejelser om samarbejdet med Gry, hvilket også fremgik af vores samtaler:

> ***Ikimalik**: "At vi tager de her emner op, har selvfølgelig været med bevidsthed om, at det måske også ville skabe utryghed mellem os to. Men jeg er mere tryg ved det, fordi det er dig, der har taget initiativ til det."*

At Gry inviterede Ikimalik skabte andre forudsætninger, end når Ikimalik fra sin position selv har bragt dem op.

DEL 2: UDSTILLINGEN SKABES

2:1 Vignet: Udstillingens indhold

I den følgende tid indgik vi i samtaler om udstillingens indhold og form. Efter Ikimaliks forslag besluttede vi, at udstillingen skulle sætte fokus på kalaallit fortællingers historiske funktion som videnskilder blandt oprindelige kalaallit inuit. Samtidig skulle udstillingen adressere, hvordan dansk kolonialisme i Kalaallit Nunaat historisk har undertrykt mytens legitimitet som videnskilde. Vi havde således en dekolonial agenda: at understøtte kalaallit epistemologi og samtidig udfordre nogle af de fremherskende danske narrativer om Danmarks kolonihistorie i Kalaallit Nunaat, der fortsat fastholder en ide om Danmark som en særlig "god kolonimagt". Et narrativ, der er blevet defineret som en form for "nordisk exceptionalisme" (Jensen & Kristín, 2022; Körber & Volquardsen 2023). Dansk kunst og kunsthistorieskrivning har ligeledes understøttet et kolonialt narrativ. Både gennem danske maleres portrætteringer af Kalaallit Nunaat og gennem danske forfatteres beskrivelse af kunst fra Kalaallit Nunaat (Arke, 1995; Jørgensen, 2023; Witcombe, 2022). Som den prominente kunstner Pia Arke fremviser i sit essay *Etnoæstetik* fra 1995, er romantiske og primitivistiske diskurser om kunst fra Kalaallit Nunaat ikke mindst funderet i bogen *Grønlands Kunst – Skulptur, Brugskunst, Maleri, Samtidskunst* (Kaalund, 1990). Bogen var det første trykte opslagsværk om kalaallit kunsthistorie, der blev udgivet, og har derfor haft betydelig indflydelse på opfattelsen af kunst fra Kalaallit Nunaat – især i Danmark. I kraft af sin indflydelse på den internationale – og særligt den danske – forestilling om kunst fra Kalaallit Nunaat, har hendes fascination af det særligt "oprindelige" og "eksotiske" i kalaallit værker bidraget til at begrænse kalaallit kunstnere i deres praksis.

Bevidste om disse problemstillinger indgik vi i samtaler om, hvordan vi i vores samarbejde kunne undgå at reproducere lignende problematiske antagelser. Vi blev enige om, at udstillingen skulle bestå af to dele: et kunstværk, skabt af Ikimalik, og et bibliotek kurateret af Gry. Biblioteket skulle inkludere forskellige indgangsvinkler til at reflektere over kunstværkets tematikker, som vi inddelte i følgende overordnede temaer:

- Kalaallit kunsthistorie
- Kunstbøger med kunst fra og om Kalaallit Nunaat
- Kalaallit litteratur om kalaallit fortællinger/minder
- Dansk kolonihistorie i Kalaallit Nunaat
- Dekolonial tænkning og praksis
- Oprindelig forskning og viden

2:2 Vignet: Tankerne bag kunstværket

Ikimalik: Kunstværket *Inuit Dimensions* blev til efter en række erkendelser, jeg fik, mens jeg ledte efter svar på vores traditionelle kropsmarkeringers betydning. For et årti siden blev jeg klar over, at vi i vores kulturer havde traditionelle kropsmarkeringer før koloniseringen af vores land. Der var noget ved overraskelsen over, at jeg på det tidspunkt aldrig havde hørt eller vidst noget om vores forfædres tunniit, der ramte mig. Jeg fornemmede et stort hul mellem vores forfædre, som havde kropsmarkeringer, og frem til nutiden, hvor jeg ikke kendte nogen med traditionelle tunniit. Hvad var der sket? På dette tidspunkt forbandt jeg endnu ikke det, at vi i Kalaallit Nunaat var holdt op med at udøve kakiornerit, med dansk kolonisering. Jeg kendte knapt til udtrykket 'kolonisering' – jeg havde hørt om det og vidste, at det var sådan, at Danmark kom i relation til Kalaallit Nunaat, men jeg vidste ikke, hvad det betød, og hvad det har betydet for vores forfædre, vores folk, samfund, kultur, sprog og vores kollektive identitet. Jeg havde ikke nok viden om vores inuit-forfædre forud for koloniseringen eller viden om selve koloniseringen, eller hvad vores folk havde været igennem frem til i dag, til overhovedet at kunne formulere disse spørgsmål.

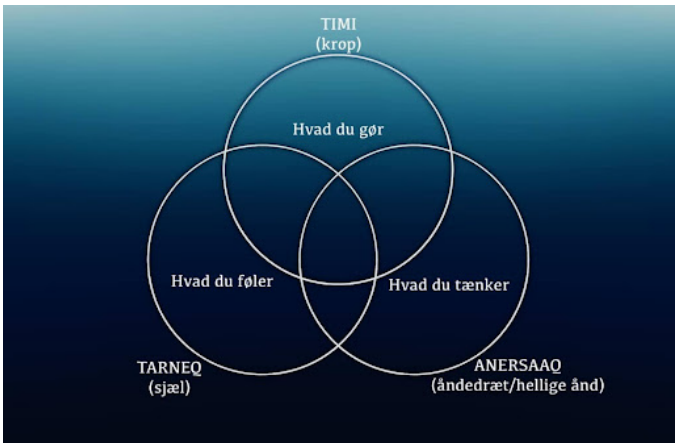
Den samme undren opstod i arbejdet med myten, eller som jeg hellere kalder det: minder og fortællinger. Når jeg tidligere har læst oprindelige fortællinger/minder eller missionærers og arktiske forskeres beskrivelser af vores forfædres ceremonier, ritualer eller taburegler, forstod jeg fortællingerne, som de var beskrevet: Ulogiske. Men det sad mærkeligt i mig, uden at jeg kunne sætte en finger på, hvad det var, der var galt. Det var som om jeg havde forkerte briller på.

Gennem mine studier om vores oprindelige kulturer lærte jeg, at livet i vores epistemologi består af Sila og Silap Aappaa[8]. Sila tilslutter vi os gennem vores første åndedræt ved fødsel, og Silap Aappaa kommer vi tilbage til efter vi udånder vores sidste ved døden (Merkur, 1991; Sonne 2017). Jeg blev også bekendt med begreberne; "timi", "tarneq" og "anersaaq"[9], der ifølge forskeren Karla Jessen Williamson udgør et paradigme for kalaallit inuits videnssystemer. Hun beskriver, at timi, tarneq og anersaaq udgør ligeværdige kilder til viden (Williamson, 2011). Tarneq sammen med bevidstheden fra anersaaq, udgjorde vores indre verden og timi oplever livet i den ydre verden gennem kroppens sanser. Hvad vi føler og hvad vi tænker, er kræfterne bag vores krops reaktioner, og vores indre er derfor med til at påvirke den ydre verden, som vi indgår i.

Med disse erkendelser følger også en erkendelse om individets indre verdens tilknytning til andre individers indre verden: Når der er to eller flere, der engagerer sig i hinanden og i hinandens oplevelse, forstærkes det ikke bare – oplevelsen bekræftes gensidigt og bliver en fælles oplevelse og realitet. Det kan både foregå på individuelt og kollektivt plan.

Den indsigt var de briller, jeg havde manglet, da jeg læste 'myter' som ulogiske. I stedet for at være 'ulogiske', arbejder vores minder med et andet epistemologisk videnssystem. Hvad de i minderne gør (timi), hvad de tænker (anersaaq) og hvad de føler (tarneq) hænger sammen. Jeg valgte derfor at inddrage disse tre elementer i kunstværket *Inuit Dimensions*.

I værket opstillede jeg tre cirkler. Jeg kunne havde placeret timi, tarneq og anersaaq tilfældigt i de tre cirkler, men fordi jeg kendte til "The Cultural Iceberg", der illustrerer vores materielle kultur som toppen af isbjerget og immaterielle kultur nederst – forsvindende ned i havet til en uvis form og størrelse (Hall, 1972), valgte jeg at placere tarneq og anersaaq i de nederste cirkler. Tarneq og anersaaq repræsenterer således det, der ikke kan ses – vores immaterielle kultur.



Visualisering af Ikimalik Pikilak

Jeg inkluderede elementerne i *Inuit Dimensions* sammen med elementer fra en fortælling om en healing udført af en angakkoq. Fortællingen handler om angakkoq'en Maratsi, der blev tilkaldt, da en ung kvinde var ved at dø af en betændelsessygdom (Kreutzman, 2018, 85). Dækket af et skind fra en nanoq[10] lod han sig besætte af Nappaasilat[11]: en stor nanoq med blålig pels og bred hals, der har flere funktioner i kalaallit ontologi, og som gennem angakkoqs krop kan kurere mennesker for sygdom. I fortællingen rejser Maratsi sig op i Nappaasilats skikkelse som en stor nanoq, skærer kvindens betændte sår op og slikker såret rent. Derefter forvandles Maratsi igen til sin almindelige skikkelse og puster på såret, som efterfølgende lukker sig. Kvinden overlevede, og hendes fader giver Maratsi en gave som tak.

Fortællingen fokuserer på Maratsi som angakkoq og på, hvordan han opfører sig. Man ser ikke, at det er Nappaasilat, der træder ind som Maratsis sjæl og sind, og at det er grunden til at han opfører sig og udfører handlingerne som han gør. Desuden glemmer man helt at Maratsi og/med Nappaasilat ikke udfører opgaven alene: Den unge kvinde som helbredes i fortællingen, har en lige så vigtig rolle. Scenariet udspiller sig i krop, sind og sjæl hos dem begge to – eller rettere i kvindens krop, sind og sjæl og i Maratsis krop, men med Nappaasilats sjæl og sind. Maratsi lægger som angakkoq krop til og kanaliserer, så Nappaasilat kan udføre healingen og gøre den unge kvindes krop rask. Samtidig er hun bevidst om og mærker på kroppen, at hun bliver healet. Hun føler og tænker, at hun heales. At alle parter er engagerede i krop, sind og sjæl, har en forstærkende og gensidigt bekræftende effekt. De responderer og bekræfter hinandens oplevelse: det bliver én og den faktiske realitet.

Inuit Dimensions adresserer på den måde, hvordan vores minder, overleveret gennem mundtlige fortællinger, bygger på viden fra både timi, tarneq og arnersaaq. Man må derfor anerkende alle tre elementers betydning, for at forstå, at minderne ikke er ulogiske "myter", men faktisk udgør legitim viden.

2:3 Samrefleksion:

Denne del af udstillingsprocessen var defineret af, at vi påtog os ansvaret for hver vores del af udstillingen. Ikimalik for kunstværket og Gry for det kuraterede bibliotek, som skulle understøtte værkets agenda. Umiddelbart indtog Ikimalik under denne del funktionen som aktøren, der definerede udstillingens præmisser ud fra sine ønsker, erfaringer og praksis, og tillagde udstillingen sit værdimæssige indhold. Gry var derimod en implementerende aktør, hvis ansvar det var at etablere de praktiske og tekniske rammer (med andre ord: sørge for rengøring, maling, lån af bøger, udstillingsbemanding, promovering osv.).

Under denne del af processen indgår vi som to separate vidanspersoner, med hver vores individuelle vidensgrundlag (Ikimaliks oprindelige vidensforståelse og Grys vestlige/eurocentriske vidensforståelse), som vi udøver gennem forskellige metoder: Ikimalik gennem kunstproduktion og Gry gennem kuratering af biblioteket. Frem for at det ene syn inkorporeres det andet, bidrager de til forskellige indgange til forståelse af udstillingens tematikker. På den måde har vi indgået i et samarbejde, der postrefleksivt kan beskrives som et eksempel på det dekoloniale koncept "Two-Eyed Seeing" (Reid et al., 2021). I oprindelige forskningskontekster er konceptet blevet brugt som en metode til at behandle akademisk forskning fra forskellige perspektiver og forskellige videnssystemer med henblik på at "remedy, rather than reinforce, existing power relations; respect differences, instead of suppress them; and uphold, as opposed to diminish, their unique strengths" (Reid et al., p. 247).

Under denne del indgik vi i samtaler og delte refleksioner om sårbare emner, der knytter sig til vores positioner – bl.a. relateret til Ikimaliks opvækst, og hvordan hendes moderlige kalaallit arv gennem hendes barndom blev 'gatekept' af hendes danske far, der også er Grys morfar. I 'bedste mening'[12] blev Ikimalik opfordret til at tale dansk og til ikke at lægge for mange kræfter i sit Kalaallisut eller i kalaallit kultur, som blev fremhævet som et sprog og kultur uden fremtid i en globaliseret verden. Denne forestilling har været udbredt i dansk-kalaallit relationer og understøtter et eurocentrisk, kolonialt verdensbillede (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Shepherd, 2018). Gennem arbejdet med skabelsen af udstillingen åbnedes der således rum for samtale om vores familiære relation og om, hvordan Danmarks historiske og fortsatte kolonisering af inuit og Kalaallit Nunaat afspejler sig på mikroskala i vores familie. Vores samtale ledte til videre refleksion om kolonial skyld – især relateret til Grys manglende indsigt i, hvordan der i vores egen familie har foregået reproduktioner af koloniale strukturer. Selvom det ikke kan sammenlignes med kulturel undertrykkelse, vil vi her fremhæve, at det at repræsentere en koloniserende position også kan være svært at navigere konstruktivt i. Selvom vi finder ubehag og konfrontation nødvendigt i en dekolonial proces, kan kolonial skyld og skam også risikere at resultere i paralyse, der kommer til at understøtte

undvigelse i stedet for undersøgelse af problematiske strukturer. Vi har i vores samtaler fundet inspiration i det, som af Micheal Rothberg beskrives som: "the implicated subject", hvilket indebærer positioner, der:

[…] contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations (Rothberg, 2019, s. 1)

Med nuancering af positioner, der rækker ud over dikotomiske forståelser af "North-South", "dansk-kalaallit", "koloniserende og koloniseret" eller "victim og perpetrator", skabes således plads til relationelle forbindelser. På denne måde styrkedes vores forståelse af hinandens afsæt og processen faciliterede en større forståelse af det, som Gloria Anzaldúa beskriver som "Borderlands" (Anzalduá, 1987). Samtalerne om udstillingen har bidraget til en forståelse af grænsefladerne, kløfterne og de komplekse sammenfiltringer, der opstår mellem kulturer, der er tvunget sammen af koloniale og imperialistiske hensigter og historier.

DEL 3: UDSTILLINGEN ÅBNES

Ferniseringen for udstillingen *Inuit Dimensions* i rum46 foregik d. 26. september 2024 fra kl. 16:30 dansk tid / kl. 13:30 kalaallit tid. Når man trådte ind i rum46, mødtes man af stedets to sammenhængende, hvide lokaler med højt til loftet. Det første rum, man kom ind i, var lyst med store vinduespartier ud mod gaden. Her stod det kuraterede bibliotek med litteratur, der rammesatte indgangen til det næste rum, som var mindre og mørkere. På den ene væg i det mindre lokale vistes Ikimaliks video-kunstværk. Videoen kørte i et loop på 1.44 minutter, fulgt af et lydspor, der udgjorde et soundscape bestående af dybe, rolige havlyde.

Som det kan ses i stillbilledet fra videoværket, er Ikimaliks tegninger de primære motiver i videoen, der desuden indeholder visuelle effekter, skabt med hjælp fra filmskaber og visuel effekt-kunstneren Marc Fussing Rosbach. Tegningerne viser tre

Stillbillede fra Inuit Dimensions af Ikimalik Pikilak

cirkler i sølv, der hver især indeholder et af ordene: "BODY", "SPIRIT" og "MIND". De tre cirkler er hver ledsaget af en tegning af en nanoq og ordene: "TIMI", "TARNEQ" og "ARNERSAAQ". I videoværket ses tegningerne fra deres placering under havets overflade, få meter fra undersiden af et isbjerg. Mens motiverne er stilstående, bevæger det digitalt designede lys, skygge og bevægelser fra havet sig omkring dem. Lyset bringer løbende fokus til forskellige elementer af tegningerne, som videoen skrider frem, indtil loopet indtræffer.

rum46s frivillige havde forberedt et gratis måltid og velkomstdrikke til ferniseringen. Fra dørene åbnedes, begyndte folk at møde op. Venner, bekendte, fremmede – alle havde en interesse i enten Kalaallit Nunaat, rum46/den lokale kunstscene i Aarhus eller en personlig relation til Ikimalik og/eller Gry. Gæsterne gik rundt i udstillingen, beskuede værket og snakkede med hinanden, bladrede i bøger og spiste hjemmelavet græskarsuppe rundt omkring i lokalerne.

Fra sit hjem i Nuuk præsenterede Ikimalik værket i en live-transmitteret artist-talk kl. 17:00 dansk tid / 14:00 kalaallit tid. Efter artist-talk'en fik de besøgende mulighed for at stille en række spørgsmål direkte

til Ikimalik gennem online-forbindelsen, som hun besvarede uddybende. Efter ca. halvanden time med talk og spørgsmål lukkede vi ned for forbindelsen. Efterfølgende fortsatte åbningen uformelt, og flere besøgende opsøgte Gry for at stille yderligere spørgsmål, både relateret til udstillingen, men også mere overordnede spørgsmål om kalaallit kultur og om Ikimaliks praksis. Åbningen fortsatte til den ebbede ud omkring kl. 19:00 dansk tid / 16:00 kalaallit tid.

3.2 Vignet: Billeddokumentation fra ferniseringen

Fotos af Barbara Katzin

3:3 Samrefleksion:

Vores samarbejde op til og under ferniseringen var præget af gensidig tillid. Vi hvilede begge i, at den anden havde sine ansvarsområder under kontrol – Ikimalik forberedte artist talk, og Gry satte værk og bibliotek op i det fysiske lokale. Denne tryghed anser vi som grundlæggende for, at vi under ferniseringen, efter egen opfattelse, indgik som ligeværdige videnspersoner, på trods af vores forskellige positioner.

Som kunstneren bag udstillingen samt gennem sin position som inuk og kulturel aktør i Kalaallit Nunaat, indtog Ikimalik under ferniseringen den mest definerende rolle i forhold til at kommunikere udstillingens tematikker og agendaer. Især under artist-talken og de efterfølgende spørgsmål havde Ikimalik stor indflydelse på de besøgenes oplevelse af udstillingen. Samtidig havde Gry en fremtrædende rolle som vært for udstillingen samt gennem den etos, der følger med hendes position som akademisk forsker. Under denne del udøvede vi "Two-Eyed Seeing", hvor vores respektive viden bidrog til at belyse forskellige aspekter af tematikkerne omkring udstillingen: Ikimalik, med sin tilknytning til og viden om kalaallit-inuitiske ontologier og epistemologier samt sin affektive forståelse af dansk kolonialitet i Kalaallit Nunaat. Gry, med sin kunsthistoriske uddannelse præget af eurocentriske traditioner og sin forskning i kolonikritisk kunst fra Kalaallit Nunaat.

Under ferniseringen var det Gry, der kom til at snakke med flest og besvare flest spørgsmål. En del af de spørgsmål, der blev stillet til Gry i timerne efter forbindelsen til Ikimalik var lukket ned, drejede sig om et ønske om at tilegne sig mere viden om Danmarks koloniale historie i Kalaallit Nunaat – spørgsmål, som de besøgende måske følte sig flove over at stille direkte til Ikimalik, men som udstillingen antageligt fik de besøgende til reflektere videre over. Udstillingen udgjorde et rum, hvor de besøgende følte sig trygge nok til at stille spørgsmål til egen kolonihistorie. På denne måde er det vores overbevisning, at vores egen dekoloniale proces under udstillingsprocessen manifesterede sig i selve udstillingen og bidrog til, at udstillingens besøgende ligeledes udvidede deres indsigt i relationen mellem Kalaallit Nunaat og Danmark.

EFTERREFLEKSION

Vi, Ikimalik og Gry, har således gennemgået vores samarbejde omkring udstillingen *Inuit Dimensions* i rum46 med henblik på at belyse, hvordan vi gennem vores forskellige professionelle, kulturelle, etniske og koloniale positioner har reproduceret og udfordret asymmetriske, koloniale magthierarkier. Inspireret af dekoloniale kritikker af "North-South collaborations" har vi været særligt opmærksomme på, hvornår vi hver især indtog en beslutningstagende eller en mere implementerende rolle i processen. Som det forhåbentligt fremgår, har dette vist sig at være en kompleks øvelse.

I de første versioner af denne sammenfattede efterrefleksion forsøgte vi at kortlægge magtfordelingen udelukkende ud fra disse definitioner af magt og diskuterede, hvordan magtfordelingen kunne forstås som et udtryk for vores respektive koloniale positioner. Dette greb viste sig dog at være utilstrækkeligt, fordi det udelukkede de relationelle dimensioner af samarbejdet, som ikke lod sig indfange gennem en skelnen mellem beslutningstagende og implementerende roller. Denne begrænsning gjorde det tydeligt for os, at de relationelle dimensioner mellem vores positioner har været afgørende – både for udstillingens tilblivelse, for vores fælles vidensforøgelse og for, at den dekoloniale agenda kunne implementeres på tværs af processens tre dele.

Vores løbende samtaler om vores interne familierelation, såvel som vores samtaler om relationer mellem Kalaallit Nunaat og Danmark, har bidraget til, at vi har opbygget tillid til hinandens afsæt og har kunnet indgå som ligeværdige videnspersoner i samarbejdet. Gennemgangen har for os afdækket en form for 'tredje steder' (Arke 1995), hvorfra temaer om kolonialitet og relationer mellem forskellige koloniale positioner kunne behandles i en kontekst, der fremmede sårbarhed, tålmodighed, omsorg og tillid. Gennem proces-

sen har vi gensidigt formet vores relation såvel som udstillingens endelige form og formål. I forlængelse af Shawn Wilson's arbejde (2008) er vi postrefleksivt kommet frem til, at "relational accountability" har været grundstenen for den dekoloniale proces, som vi har indgået i, under vores samarbejde. Ved både at anerkende de hierarkiske magtrelationer, som vores positioner indebærer i forskellige kontekster, og samtidig fastholde kompleksiteten i disse positioner, har vi vist, hvordan relationalitet i samarbejdet kan bidrage til konstruktiv "border thinking" mellem aktører – uden nødvendigvis at udfordre deres forskellige epistemologiske afsæt. Det betyder ikke, at magt forsvinder, eller at uligheder kan opløses. Dog peger vi på, at samarbejder (som vores) udgør mulige steder for at anerkende kompleksitet uden at søge opløsning og i stedet opbygge relationel ansvarlighed, der kan forme både proces og erkendelse. Vi foreslår således en tilgang, hvor viden ikke "indhentes", men samskabes i relation og gensidighed, baseret på sårbarhed, ansvar og langsigtet forpligtelse. Hvor forestillingen om "magt" i "North-South"-kritikker ofte ligger i retten til at definere, kategorisere og repræsentere "den anden", har vi i vores samarbejde forskudt denne magt til at indlejre sig i relationelle processer: i det at lytte, stille spørgsmål, sætte grænser og forhandle gensidig betydning.

En oplagt forlængelse af denne refleksion vil være at undersøge samarbejdet, som det har udfoldet sig i processen omkring produktionen af denne artikel. En sådan refleksion har vi ikke mulighed for at udfolde her, men vi finder det interessant at slutte artiklen, som vi startede: At sætte spørgsmålstegn ved den proces, vi netop har afsluttet. Har vi i kraft af Grys rolle som beslutningstager, vedrørende hvordan teksten skulle sammenfattes, reproduceret et problematisk magtforhold, hvor Ikimaliks tanker, ideer og holdninger underkendes som 'empirisk data til analyse'? Eller har Ikimalik i kraft af sin mulighed for "refusal" og vores løbende feedback-proces haft den største andel af magt i forhold til beslutningstagning om artiklens endelige form? Eller måske stiller vi de forkerte spørgsmål, baseret på binære forestillinger om, *hvad magt er*. Uanset hvad, så tror vi på, at øvelsen i at stille spørgsmål til vores positioner bidrager til vores fortsatte aspiration om at udfordre koloniale strukturer og hierarkier, der endnu eksisterer i forholdet mellem Kalaallit Nunaat og Danmark.

Tak for at læse med.

Ikimalik og Gry

NOTES

[1] I denne artikel benytter vi lejlighedsvist ord på Kalaallisut, der er det talt sprog i Vest-Kalaallit Nunaat. Sproget i artiklen afspejler vores, Ikimalik og Grys fælles talte sprog. Vi indsætter danske oversættelser som noter.

[2] På dansk: Mor.

[3] Traditionel inuit-metode til at lave permanente kropsmarkeringer.

[4] Traditionelle inuit-kropsmarkeringer.

[5] På dansk: bedstemor.

[6] På dansk: moster.

[7] På dansk bedst oversat til shaman eller åndemaner – omend vi ikke finder denne oversættelse dækkende.

[8] På dansk bedst oversat til: Sila: "den fysiske verden" og Silap Aappaa: "sjæle-verdenen".

[9] På dansk bedst oversat til: Timi: krop, tarneq: sjæl, anersaaq: sind/åndedræt/hellige ånd.

[10] På dansk: isbjørn.

[11] På dansk bedst oversat til: "Åndebjørnen".

[12] I bedste mening' er en vending, der er blevet brugt fra dansk side til at retfærdiggøre koloniale indgreb i Kalaallit Nunaat. Når vi her markerer vendingen i anførselstegn, er det for at gøre opmærksom på, at vi som forfattere ikke anser vendingen som retfærdiggørende.

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Towards Decolonial Arctic Research Relations

Co-creating spaces for shared embodied experiences in a European research community

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ABSTRACT

This article is about ways of co-creating spaces of engagement that foster the development of decolonial research relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and practitioners. It uses the example of a specific European research community focused on the Arctic that is embedded in the history and lasting legacies of Nordic Colonialism. The article engages with academic practices that define these spaces of engagement, and we draw our empirical material from experiences in and observations from a joint workshop. We are interested in better understanding how relations are formed, and we place a focus on the body to take into consideration the varying histories and lived realities we carry when entering a workshop space. We highlight embodied and sensorial dimensions of our encounter to describe how we connect and communicate with and through our bodies. We suggest that this allowed us to co-create a space of engagement that enabled workshop participants to come together respectfully, considerate of various ways of knowing and being in this world, and reflective of their/our own positionalities.

KEY WORDS

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING, SPACES OF ENGAGEMENT, DECOLONIZING RESEARCH COMMUNITIES, TWO-EYED SEEING, EMBODIMENT, CO-CREATION

OPENING WORDS

Out of respect, and to express our gratitude to those who have used a place before us, we always ask for permission (gulahallat) when we first arrive, and make sure that we take care of the place in a sustainable way. As academics, keeping in mind that movement and embodiment are the focus of this piece of writing, we want to honor the people who, day in and day out, engage in hard physical labor – especially Indigenous Peoples who engage in activities that connect their livelihoods to nature, such as reindeer herding, fishing, farming, and hunting. We acknowledge the importance of their work and ask for acceptance for our attempt to reconstruct some of what is essential for surviving and maintaining a livelihood (birgejupmi) in our academic practice. We hope and believe that this article can contribute to more equitable and decolonial research relations within Indigenous research and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

This article is about ways of co-creating spaces of engagement that foster the development of decolonial working relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and practitioners. It uses the example of a specific European research community focused on the Arctic that exists within the history and legacies of Nordic colonialism and which we, the authors, have been a part of. The article reflects on academic practices experienced and observed in a workshop that took place in Vienna, Austria, in Spring 2023, while acknowledging and making transparent the relationship between scholarly research and colonialism/coloniality. The authors write from the position of two Indigenous researchers from Sápmi[2], Jan-Erik Henriksen and Nina Hermansen, and two non-Indigenous researchers from Germany[3], Nina Döring and Anne S. Chahine, who have worked together for years.

Our empirical material is based on a workshop series connected to the research project *DÁVGI: Co-creation for biocultural diversity in the Arctic*[4]. The series aimed at strengthening the CO-CREATE collaborative, a collective of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers from across the Arctic and Europe (Co-Create Arctic, 2024)[5]. The workshop in Vienna provided an opportunity for members of CO-CREATE to reflect on collaborative methods, shared research objectives, and strategies for communicating their work (Morin, 2023). All sessions during the four-day workshop centered around knowledge co-creation, including different ways of working together and relationship-building. The workshop was co-organized by a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous facilitators, who were also participants.

This article reflects on the lessons we learned from co-organizing and participating in the workshop and it is an example of working across knowledge systems. Our collaboration on this article continues this practice. The writing process started after the workshop and continued for over 1.5 years with regular online meetings. Between meetings, we either worked on individual writing tasks, such as noting down personal stories and observations from Vienna, or engaged in joint reading. All thoughts and reflections were collected in a shared document and later used as a basis for drafting the article's overall argument. Guided by our interest in understanding how relations are formed in social academic spaces we focus on the different ways we embody them. This helps us consider the varying histories and lived realities we carry when entering a workshop space. By highlighting embodied and sensorial dimensions of our encounter, we aim to describe how we connect and communicate with and through our bodies when coming together. We argue that paying attention to dimensions of embodiment was crucial to our process of co-creating a space of engagement that enabled workshop participants to come together respectfully, considerate of varying ways of knowing and being in this world, and reflective of their/our own positionalities.

In the following we first touch upon how the legacies of colonialism and coloniality affect our research collaborations. We then use three empirical examples from the workshop in Vienna, to 1.) show how room was made for bodies with different histories and lived realities; 2.) discuss the importance of embodied and sensorial dimensions in Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaborations; 3.) reflect on the relevance of establishing such spaces against the backdrop of coloniality.

COLONIALISM, COLONIALITY, AND BLIND SPOTS IN SÁPMI AND GERMANY

Writing as two Indigenous researchers from the Norwegian side of Sápmi and two non-Indigenous researchers from Germany requires critical reflection on colonialism and coloniality, and how they shape our research collaboration. The Nordic countries have long positioned themselves as standing outside colonial history and the enduring structures of coloniality (Eriksen et al., 2024). The need to correct this misperception has gained greater awareness only recently (Keskinen et al., 2016), drawing increased attention to how the Sámi were incorporated into settler colonial states through harsh racist policies (Kuokkanen, 2020). State-led systematic assimilationist policies from the mid-1800s onward are often emphasized as the consolidation of colonization (Minde, 2003), with the establishment of residential schools and detrimental educational policy having been central.

In the context of Norwegian colonization, Henriksen and Hydle (2022) distinguish between the state-led assimilation of Sámi from the 18th century (referred to as *Norwegianization*) and the brief occupation of North Sámi territories in Northern Norway and Northern Finland by Nazi Germany during World War II. During the latter, most inhabitants were forced to evacuate and German troops burned down Finnmark and the northern part of Troms as part of their 'scorched earth' tactics to prevent the Soviet Union from taking advantage of their resources (Hayashi & Lingaas, 2024, Olsen, 2020Henriksen & Hydle, 2022). Even though the occupation by Nazi Germany was relatively short, its impacts were profound: The rebuilding of the North Sámi areas that had been completely destroyed was turned into a process of 'modernization' by the Norwegian authorities, forcefully integrating the Sámi as 'good Norwegians' into the new Norwegian welfare state (Bjørklund Ivar, 1985).

The histories and their present-day repercussions in both nation states that we, the authoring team, live in, are often blind spots in the minds of the governments and civil societies. With regard to the atrocities committed by Nazi Germany during World War II, Alice Hasters (2023) ascribes German commemorative culture the function of creating discontinuity. She argues that present-day German identities do not develop as a continuation of what once was, but are disconnected from past cruelties (2023, pp. 120–121). Even though the atrocities of Nazi Germany in Sápmi are not prioritized in German commemorative culture today, their legacies are with us as we establish and nurture our relations.

In Sápmi, the underlying philosophical, religious, political, and racial ideologies that enabled the policy of colonial expansion in support of European imperialism in the past have a persistent impact on the present, which can be conceptualized as coloniality (Mignolo, 2013; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Quijano, 2000, 2007). The Norwegian Truth and Reconciliation[6] process is often critiqued for a lack of attention directed "to the political and administrative decision-making behavior of the governing levels, where Norwegianization is still being reproduced" (Josefsen et al., 2024). For instance, the ongoing practice of disregarding Sámi reindeer herders' rights and experiences in state-led development of renewable energy projects has been termed *Green Colonialism* by Sámi scholars and activists (Amnesty International, 2025; Fjellheim, 2023). Another example concerns Sámi language education in Norway, where pupils living outside the officially designated administrative area for Sámi language experience significant obstacles to

having their right to Indigenous language learning fulfilled (Hermansen & Olsen, 2020).

These interconnected histories and present realities have been the backdrop of our coming together as a mixed team of researchers, in turn raising questions around the mechanics of co-creative and co-productive research.

WORKING TOGETHER AND DECOLONIAL THINKING

> On Sunday afternoon, I felt as if the meeting room provided us with a little cocoon to pause for a moment and re-focus on what we had all come to Vienna for. The warm brick walls, heavy blue curtains, and the spirit of the people, who had all chosen to be here to work on our program, gave the place a cozy feel. As a co-organizer of the workshop, I felt a wave of relief washing through me. Finally, the pieces of the puzzle were falling into place, as the group was shaping and finalizing the program together. (Nina Döring)

> I remember observing how stressed you were, Nina D. *mu gaibmi* (name sister), and I wanted to assure you that we are in it together, as we had agreed to be, which is central to Two-Eyed Seeing. The puzzle fell into place because you were willing to let it happen. You didn't force your way through. It was something about the dynamics that made it possible. Already on that Sunday, we arrived as whole people, going beyond formal titles when we introduced ourselves. I remember thinking that this is an Indigenous-friendly social space. The whole atmosphere was important. (Nina Hermansen)

These vignettes were written to reflect on our workshop in Vienna in 2023. We had first met in-person during a writing retreat in Alta, Norway, half a year earlier. Together with other researchers we came together to develop a policy recommendation for the European Commission in support of the agency of Arctic communities and the rights of Arctic Indigenous peoples in research (Herrmann et al., 2023)[7]. We had varying experiences working in collaborative research settings with Western paradigms and/or Indigenous protocols in the Arctic and how different research norms and settings can influence the fabric of such collaborations. After the writing retreat we stayed in regular contact through various engagements.[8]

Jan Erik Henriksen (he/him) is a Sámi-speaking Professor of Social Work at UiT, The Arctic University of Norway, working on traditional Indigenous knowledges, decolonization, reconciliation, green social work, and One Health. Henriksen is the leader of the Indigenous Voices (IVO) research group. Nina Hermansen (she/her) is a member of the IVO group and a Sámi Associate Professor at the Department of Child Welfare and Social Work at UiT. She is from Alta, Norway, and has been involved in different projects in Sápmi, such as "Birth Stories", revitalizing Sámi language among young adults, and decolonizing methodology. Nina N. Döring (she/her) has a German background and works as a Research Group Leader at the Research Institute for Sustainability | at GFZ[9] (RIFS) in Germany. She is particularly interested in how academic institutions and funding structures in Germany need to change to better support just and equitable research practices and relations. Anne S. Chahine (she/her) positions herself as East German-German[10] and works as a Research Associate at RIFS, focusing on multimodal, collaborative, arts-based, and decolonial approaches to knowledge-making. Both Nina D. and Anne are significantly motivated by their first-hand experience of questionable – and at times exploitative – research practices in Arctic contexts during their graduate and PhD studies.

For us, decolonial approaches encompass 'decolonial thinking' and how this can be put into practice (Graugaard, 2020; Walsh, 2018). Decolonization is not a one-off event but an ongoing, unfinished, and utopian project in which the colonial structures that perpetuate inequalities and injustices must be addressed and dismantled (Coulthard, 2014; Gray et

al., 2013; Spivak & Harasym, 1990) both at the institutional and individual level (Kuokkanen, 2023). In terms of methodological frameworks decolonial approaches involve making visible unjust political and epistemological systems and hierarchies (Henriksen et al., 2019), disconnecting from them and opening up spaces for other ways of thinking (Brattland et al., 2018; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018). This is relevant as we share a history in which Indigenous peoples have been confronted with colonialism's precursor and ally: science and research. In an article on improving research relationships in the Arctic, Elle Merete Omma recounts a Sámi joke about how "a reindeer herding family in the late 70s and early 80s used to consist of a mother, a father, their children AND a social scientist" (Doering et al., 2022, p. 1). This story continues with research results rarely being returned to the communities, or being misused as 'experts truths' to undermine Sámi land rights in court (see e.g., Fjellheim, 2020; Tyler et al., 2021). In consequence, our work builds on scholars who have advocated for equitable and sustainable research relations in the Arctic (see e.g., Buschman, 2022; Fisher & Doering, 2023; Graugaard, 2021; Ikaarvik, 2021; Kuokkanen, 2019; Vold et al. 2014) and beyond (see e.g., Battiste, 2016; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Todd, 2016, Wilson, 2008). Specifically, we would like to acknowledge the work of scholars and practitioners that find new ways of working together, such as collaboration (Chin, 2016; Criado & Estalella, 2018; Rappaport, 2008), co-creation and co-production (Doering et al., 2022; Ikaarvik, 2021; Yua et al., 2022), and the Two-Eyed Seeing approach (Bartlett et al., 2012; Peltier, 2018; Reid et al., 2021).

The concepts of co-creation and collaboration refer to the use of collaborative processes for knowledge creation (e.g., Ikaarvik, 2021; Yua et al., 2022), and both motivate and shape our joint work. Co-creation aims to contribute to societal change via action-oriented research, and can be considered "one approach to moving research out of the ivory towers and closer to the real world" (Greenhalgh et al., 2016, p. 421). Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall's Two-Eyed Seeing approach has been central for us. Rooted in Indigenous Knowledge systems, it is a guiding principle for bringing together Indigenous and Western ways of knowing in order to better understand and address complex issues (Bartlett et al., 2012; Reid et al., 2021). In this context, relationality is especially relevant, taking into consideration our interdependency with nature, community, and spirit (Peltier, 2018).

In this article, decolonial thinking and doing translates to examples of how we moved through a physical space together, using our bodies as sensorial devices. While knowledge co-creation and collaboration were the purpose for our coming together, Two-Eyed Seeing was used as a methodological lens to initiate and reflect on relations within our setting in Vienna.

MAKING ROOM FOR DIFFERENT BODIES

We take inspiration from other mixed research teams working within the frame of decolonial research approaches (e.g., Fisher & Doering, 2023; Jensen & Chahine, 2022; Jones & Jenkins, 2008; Svalastog et al., 2021) and understand the practice of introducing ourselves to be what Michif-settler scholar Max Liboiron (2021) call an "ethics and obligation with each other" (2021, p. 4). Our bodies have different histories in relation to the colonial project and can bring different perspectives to the table. They become representatives, figures of speech, and metaphors of all that came before us. As Mignolo and Walsh (2018) suggest, "modernity/(de)coloniality [is a] shared project" (2018, p. 4) and concerns us all, as there is no outside position in the colonial matrix of power that continues to shape our common world. This, in turn, requires thinking about how we physically come together in a shared space."

In our workshop, we used circular seating arrangements for adjusting to each other. The circle is a fundamental concept in Indigenous knowledge systems (Harris LaDonna et al., 2011; Janelle, 2003) and is often used in restorative justice (Henriksen & Hydle, 2021, Lauridsen, 2020; Zehr Howard, 2015;). Talking or peace-making circles are usually led by one or two facilitators who invite participants to explore preju-

dices, feelings, and concerns related to challenging situations. They may use a 'talking piece' (a small, dedicated object) as a moderation device. Only the person holding the talking piece speaks, while the others listen. Each plenary sequence starts with exercises of reflection and is closed with participants sharing what they take from the session.

> When we arrived at the university that Monday morning, we were in a good mood, laughing and talking about what we had observed on the walk over from the hotel. We continued our conversations while preparing for our session, fixing coffee and snacks, and rearranging the chairs in the small seminar room, moving them into a circle. Jan Erik, as our Elder, did a welcome ceremony with us, followed by some bodily exercises in the circle, stretching our hands toward each other, up in the air. That morning, we shared stories by bringing a physical item, stories about our previous experiences. Mine was an artistic postcard from a project about midwives and birth stories in the north of Sápmi, and how it all started for me with an Indigenous student exchange, in Aotearoa New Zealand, back in the day. Then we started to work together – to co-create together – while facing each other in a circle (Nina Hermansen).

What can we learn about relations through the way our bodies are positioned toward each other? What does it say about power dynamics between us as research partners? How can we become 'comfortable in our chairs', sitting in the circle? In a talking circle, we are all equal. No one is in front, no one behind. In her work, Sara Ahmed (e.g., 2006, 2007, 2014a, 2014b) uses chair arrangements in social gatherings as a metaphor for describing processes of becoming unseated. She analyses how spaces are oriented around certain bodies, and how the categories that one fails to inhabit become sources of discomfort (Ahmed, 2014a). This seating metaphor is helpful for reflecting on comfort and discomfort when coming together as a group, highlighting an affective state that is socially constructed and deeply embedded in political contexts (Ahmed, 2014b). Comfort entails a feeling of belonging, of not being a stranger: My body is not 'out of place'. It entails being part of the 'we', and not 'the other': My presence does not threaten the well-being of the 'we'. Achieving comfort requires mechanisms for being together, structures that enable the creation of a community, and that can cross the boundaries of the dichotomies of Indigenous–non-Indigenous and Sápmi–Europe. In our workshop sessions, the circular seating arrangement supported our ability to turn toward one another, share stories, listen, laugh, and gradually become 'comfortable in our seats'.

SHARING EMBODIED EXPERIENCES

A focus on balance and connection between body and psyche is common in family therapeutic and social constructive approaches (Jensen Per et al., 2019; Ulleberg & Jensen, 2017), as violations and traumas are often stored in our bodies as muscle memory (Batacharya & Wong, 2018; Pink, 2011; Snijders et al., 2020). Thommessen and Neumann suggest that 'helpers', such as meeting facilitators or social workers, must know their own preconceptions if they are to be able to assist others in vulnerable situations. They must reflect on how the professional caregiver is positioned in relation to others, and how they are influenced by their interactions, based on feelings, attitudes, and expectations (2019, pp. 14–16). Building on feminist theories (Harding Sandra, 1998; Haraway, 1988) and phenomenology (Zahavi Dan, 2018), they highlight that knowledge is not something outside the researcher, but something we produce as socially situated human beings. Our body is central here, and can be understood as a sensorial tool for experiencing and understanding the world around us (Merleau-Ponty Maurice, 1995).

> Having to move my body felt different from how I usually converse with colleagues; it is a different kind of connection. During the stretching exercise, for example, there was a push and pull between bodies moving through the narrow space of the hallway, trying not to bump into each other, respecting different levels of comfort, but also

> wanting to use this moment to connect, maybe to signal: I am here with you. I am here with you in this hallway, in this workshop, in this space of exchange and learning. And I appreciate you being here (Anne S. Chahine).

While using the body is common practice in the realm of social work and family therapy for mediating conflict and working through trauma, our adaptation of these practices explored how the body becomes relevant when applying a Two-Eyed Seeing approach. We considered it important to first build a relation to ourselves and then to other participants in the room. Building on the work of Thommessen and Neumann (2019), we chose various activities, such as stretching, power-walking, and communicative exercises, to center our senses and connect the mind with the body. Every workshop session started with strengthening the learning community (Dysthe Olga, 2001) and invited participants to engage in an active process of reflection. However, keeping the self-determination of each attendee in mind, this could also translate to staying silent and occupying an observing role. We also built on the importance of laughter, ending each session with a joyful physical exercise, such as 'the rocket' that invites everyone to 'take off' by raising their arms in the air above their heads and making a whooshing sound. This let us engage in play, enabling us to conclude sessions in a joyful manner and motivate ourselves to engage in the next session.

Our experiences showed us that embodied learning is not only effective in the realm of social work, but also for bringing together teams consisting of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. Avoiding the separation of body and mind, we challenged the colonial project, as it allowed us to connect to ourselves, as well as the environment and people around us (Leon & Nadeau, 2018). Power relations shift when we *feel* and *sense* with more than one body. During the workshop, we took into account the conceptual positionalities of attendees as well as their physical presence and embodied experience. Through this approach, various opportunities were created by, and for participants to foster the building and strengthening of relationships. Almost all attendees were actively involved in preparing and hosting sessions, creating opportunities to co-shape the format and content of the workshop.

ESTABLISHING SPACES FOR DIALOGUE AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Our aim is to create spaces of engagement that enable us to be in proximity, to sit and walk alongside each other, to laugh with one another, to activate our reflexivity, and to build connections between different ways of thinking. If human thought is dialogical, knowledge production is inherently dialogical as well. Marshall's Two-Eyed Seeing approach reflects this. As a practice of co-learning, its strength lies in bringing together different perspectives for solving wicked problems. This leads back to the co-creation of social spaces toward decolonial research relations in a European Arctic research community. As Henri Lefebvre (1991) reminds us, space is never neutral; and in consequence, persisting colonial structures shape social spaces (see e.g., Mbembe, 2001; Said, 2003). When working together, physically being with each other in a seminar room in the heart of central Europe at the University in Vienna, we wished to co-create spaces of engagement that take these aspects into consideration. We understood the workshop as a miniature of the world that surrounds us, and an attempt to put theories into practice.

Here, we draw inspiration from Cree scholar Willi Ermine's (2007) concept of an 'ethical space' that "offers itself as the theatre for cross-cultural conversation in pursuit of ethically engaging diversity" (2007, p. 202); that is, a space that enables participants to remove themselves from the cages that occupy their minds. This is important, Ermine argues, given the massive influence of Western thought as an 'undercurrent' affecting Indigenous-Western relations (2007, p. 198). For Ermine, creating such a space allows shifting an "asymmetrical social order to a partnership model" (2007, p. 203), where people work at eye-level and are

reflective of their biases. For Margaret Kovach, an Indigenous scholar of Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux ancestry, Ermine's idea of an ethical space, as well as Marshall's Two-Eyed Seeing approach, can be understood as a 'shared space–liminal space theorizing approach'. This approach "focuses on how differing worldviews might coexist together in a non-assimilative, respectful manner" (Kovach, 2021, p. 190), and is not necessarily about the "colonial power dynamic between Indigeneity and Eurocentrism, as it exists within contemporary zones of contact" (Kovach, 2021, p. 189). We would like to broaden this perspective and argue that creating ethical spaces that allow sensing with diverse eyes and bodies aligns with a decolonial framework. Such practices can help participants actively address power asymmetries, reflect on their biases, and open up other ways of thinking, relating, sensing, and perceiving (Brattland et al., 2018; Mignolo & Walsh, 2018; Reid et al., 2021). This comes back to dissolving norms of what is considered knowledge, who gets to speak, who gets to listen, and whose bodies get to shape these spaces.

Central to the fabric of the workshop in Vienna was the back and forth between physical and conceptual activities, allowing plans to spontaneously give way to the group's preferences. We did not just 'do' or 'think'; we oscillated between these two stages, slowly dissolving hierarchies and distributing responsibilities. Flexibility was an engrained part of the design. We practiced what Walsh describes as "thought-actions-reflections-actions that give shape, movement, meaning and form to decoloniality" (Walsh, 2018, p. 17). The physical and digital social academic spaces that we established – in Vienna and with other activities before and since – can be considered other ways of being together, striving to embody diverse ways of knowing for building and strengthening our relations.

CONCLUSION

Our reflections in this article have necessitated thoughtful consideration, and we continue to interpret our experiences, communicate our insights to others, and intend to further refine our thoughts and practices in the future. We suggest that engaging with dimensions of embodiment in social academic spaces is central to establishing decolonial research relations. Based on our experience in a specific Arctic research community, we argue that European academia – with its blind spots regarding colonial histories and presents – needs spaces of engagement that bring together people without disregarding or trying to streamline different ways of knowing and being. These spaces should instead acknowledge and celebrate such differences as strengths and as a fertile basis for addressing the complex challenges we face locally and globally. Their co-creation can be understood as decolonial practice – one that experiments with alternative ways of thinking and doing. In our collaborative effort to work toward more ethical and equitable research relations within European Arctic research, we found that placing a focus on sensorial dimensions in a workshop setting opened up possibilities for building deeper understanding and connection across diverse ways of knowing and being in this world.

While the aspiration to co-create was our motivation for co-developing a space of engagement, the Two-Eyed Seeing approach was a methodological lens for us to think and work through the intricacies of collaborating in a mixed research team. What becomes apparent is the complexity of different elements coming together to make the establishment of such spaces possible. Caring for and deepening research relations across knowledge systems requires a long horizon, constantly reaffirming and negotiating our relationships over time. In such long-term commitment, we have found that a central aspect of working together is to arrive as a 'whole person', thinking beyond academic achievements and titles.

CLOSING WORDS

We seek to leave a place in the same or better condition than it was upon arrival. We also say goodbye by expressing the wish that those who stay and those who leave do so in good health. We hope that we have adhered to holistic health principles during this visit. Báze dearvan (stay in good health).

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[2] Sápmi is the name of the traditional homeland of the Sámi, the Indigenous People of Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden.

[3] Germany is a nation state in Central Europe.

[4] The DÁVGI project was a collaboration between the Research Institute for Sustainability | at GFZ, Sámiráđđi Saami Council, and Ecologic Institute, and was funded by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) through a grant from the European Environment Initiative (EURENI).

[5] The CO-CREATE collaborative developed out of the workshop series Ethics and Methods in Transformative Arctic Research (Research Institute for Sustainability, 2020), and its first instalment was organized by RIFS and the Helmholtz-Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) in 2020.

[6] The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was appointed by the Norwegian parliament in 2018 to examine the Norwegianization policy and injustice against the Sámi people, Kven people and Forest Finns, and was submitted to the Norwegian parliament in 2023.

[7] The writing retreat received funding from EU-PolarNet 2, the Sámiráđđi Saami Council, The Arctic University of Norway, and the University of Oulu.

[8] For example, we co-hosted the panel Sharing and Caring: Arctic Indigenous Knowledges

[9] GFZ Helmholtz Centre for Geosciences.

[10] Anne S. Chahine's lived experiences before and after the fall of the Berlin wall have shaped the way she approaches her work, providing sensibility towards the effect that unequal relations of power, biases, and preconceived narratives can have.

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100 Days of Acknowledging Land

The Medicine Wheel in A/r/tographic Fieldwork

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we, a mixed circle of Indigenous and settler educators/artists/researchers, explore how sustained land acknowledgement practices might deepen relational engagement with place and support ongoing Indigenous feminist work of Indigenizing and decolonizing postsecondary education. Framed by the Medicine Wheel and guided by a/r/tographic practices, we undertook a 100-day inquiry into personal and embodied relationships with specific elements of land: temperature, wind, light, language, earth, and change. Through daily artmaking and writing, we engaged land as teacher, story-holder, relative, curriculum, and pedagogy. Seeking to disrupt perfunctory land acknowledgements, this research foregrounds our sustained, site-specific, research that engages the Medicine Wheel to help position us with the land. Drawing on cyclical and reflective analyses from Medicine Wheel teachings, we consider how acts of noticing, reciprocity, and artistic expression might foster more accountable relationships with land, self, and community, through learning the animacy of the land. The Medicine Wheel disrupts a continuance of educational practice taught only from colonial worldviews. Its sacred knowledge and healing potential rekindle relationship and invite shifts toward collectivist styles of thinking rather than static individualist positionings.

KEY WORDS

A/R/TOGRAPHY, INDIGENIZING EDUCATION, LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, RELATIONAL METHODOLOGIES

INTRODUCTION

We are a circle of six artists/researchers/teachers and friends, of various mixes of Indigenous and colonial ancestry working in university faculties of social work and education in western Canada. Each are committed to honouring the territories in which we are located and to be mindful of our shared responsibilities and relationships to/with the land. Collectively, we undertook an a/r/tographic research project beginning on winter solstice, 2023. A/r/tographic research involves investigating while generating movements and meaning within and between practices. In the current project, we engaged in 100 days of acknowledging land which consisted of encounters with various land elements. We endeavored to begin decolonizing our teaching practices by creating opportunity for ourselves to persistently notice and respond to relational entanglements in the very land where we most wanted our work to materialize and have influence. Through years of postsecondary teaching, we have found that although official land and territorial acknowledgements are frequently offered in university settings as well as in our courses, both Indigenous and settler students do not always feel personal connections to them. Drawing from Indigenous authors across Turtle Island (i.e. Simpson [Mississauga Nishnaabeg], 2014; Styres [Haudenosaunee], 2011) who argue for the importance of *actual land* in educational practice, we invited the land as both curriculum and pedagogy.

To position ourselves in relation to land, to guide reflections and organize our a/r/tographic fieldwork, we draw on the Medicine Wheel, a conceptual framework used in many Indigenous communities on Turtle Island. Each author selected one of six directions through which to invite the land to relationally position them. These directions correspond to elemental forces and teachings that offer insight into how land-attuned, artful practices might support more relational and decolonizing approaches to postsecondary education. Through sustained, site-specific, interdisciplinary inquiry, we hope our contribution to this issue ignites conversations about Indigenous pedagogies, unsettles colonial ontological and pedagogical frameworks, and offers opportunity for deeper relations to land, self, and community.

MEDICINE WHEEL

Medicine Wheels are used as conceptual frameworks for everyday teachings in many Indigenous communities. Potawatami scholar Wall-Kimmerer explains that Indigenous knowledge is based on observation and experimentation like Western science but includes spiritual relationships and explanations: "Traditional knowledge brings together the seen and the unseen, whereas Western science says that if we can't measure something, it doesn't exist" (Kimmerer, in L. Toninio, 2016, n.p.). The directions of the Medicine Wheel are comprised of interacting components that emphasize interrelated cycles, and balance between them. Access is opened to intergenerational relations as well as relations beyond human experience, encompassing the spiritual (Menard, 2024), and more-than-human world (Kimmerer, 2013). As a result, learning and repositioning within each aspect of the Medicine Wheel carry both ethical and sacred dimensions. Mashford-Pringle (Algonquin) and Shawanda (Odawa Kwe) (2023) describe conducting and analyzing research within Medicine Wheel theoretical frameworks as a way of departing from Western worldviews.

Some Indigenous groups emphasize four Medicine Wheel quadrants (East, South, West, North), represented by distinct and sacred colours: yellow, red, black/blue, white. The sections of the Medicine Wheel have also been used for teaching four guiding ethical principles: reciprocity, responsibility, relationship, respect; four sacred plant medicines: tobacco, cedar, sage, sweetgrass; four stages of life: childhood, youth, adulthood, elderhood; four sacred animals: eagle, coyote, bear, deer; four parts of selves: physical, mental, emotional, spiritual; four elements: air, earth, water, fire (Bopp et al., 1984). Other Indigenous groups emphasize seven directions to the Medicine Wheel including up, down, and inward to self. For all, the Medicine Wheel offers ways of living. Ojibwe Elder

Pitawanakwat (2006) writes that harmony, balance, and respect for all parts of the Medicine Wheel are needed to sustain life.

While we respectfully note we cannot claim to understand all Medicine Wheel teachings, nor reduce them to our own experience, nor conflate them with Western ways of doing research, we value them as honouring and upholding Indigenous knowledges deeply embedded in land. According to Wenger-Nabigon (2010), working with Cree Medicine Wheel concepts conveys "wisdom traditions of cultures with tens of thousands of years of knowledge evolution embedded within the traditional ways of life and worldviews" (p. 150). She argues that this work provides potential for establishing balance between people and environment and restoring cultural ways of knowing in a world desperately needing relations of balance and interconnectedness. As artists/researchers/teachers, we consider Medicine Wheel contributions to decolonization by using Indigenous knowledges in postsecondary teaching and research. Mashford-Pringle and Shawanda (2023), Verwoord, Mitchell (Wet'sewet'en Carrier), and Machadeo (2011), and Graham (Thunderchild First Nation) and Stamler (2010), also advocate use of the Medicine Wheel in research, as a decolonizing theory and methodology.

While decolonizing and Indigenizing are often linked in educational discourse, they are not necessarily interchangeable. *Decolonizing* calls for unsettling dominant power structures and colonial assumptions about knowledge, linear progress, and human-nature relations. Alternatively, *Indigenizing* centers Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being, including relationality, reciprocity, responsibility, and land-based learning as vital sources of pedagogy and knowledge production. Smith (Māori iwi Ngāti Awa / Ngāti Porou) (1999) maintains that Eurocentric/Western systems tend to uphold hierarchies of knowledge, marginalizing non-Western epistemologies. The methodological undertaking of this paper uses a Medicine Wheel framework and a/r/tographic fieldwork to prioritize interconnection, cyclicality, and sacred values deeply embedded across many Indigenous feminist worldviews. Through these priorities, we contribute to this journal issue not only by challenging colonial paradigms, but by co-creating practices that honour Indigenous teachings and shift how knowledge is generated, embodied, and shared.

Dumbrill and Green (Haisla/Tsmishian/Kemano) (2008) argue that using models for Indigenous knowledge in Social Work helps disrupt a continuance of courses taught from Eurocentric worldviews or perspectives that perpetuate colonization of Indigenous peoples. Leddy (Métis) and Miller (2023) also argue for decolonial literacy—involving supporting and engaging Indigenizing education, specifically through place/land-based education using the Medicine Wheel's holistic framework. Working with land as teacher and Medicine Wheel as guide for research and understanding, we aim to contribute to subverting current colonial archives of knowledge.

When we write about land in this article, we consider it broadly. Simpson (2014) describes aki (land) as including all aspects of creation: "landforms, elements, plants, animals, spirits, sounds, thoughts, feelings, energies and all of the emergent systems, ecologies and networks that connect these elements" (p. 15). In this research we focus on elements of temperature, wind, body change, light, language, and earth flora. Each of us has engaged with land elements in both artmaking and writing. We are strongly influenced by Pitawanakwat's (2006) descriptions of an Anishinabe Medicine Wheel with seven sacred directions. We explain these directions and relate their teachings as we share a portion of learning in a/r/tographic fieldwork with the land and how the Medicine Wheel afforded our understandings of/in/with particular lands.

A/R/TOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

As artists/researchers/teachers, we are familiar with a relational form of research called a/r/tography. This interdisciplinary research practice inquires in the world through rich cycles of research, teaching, learning, and artmaking (Irwin, 2004). It searches for emerging interconnections that might create additional meanings. Rather than transferring meaning

between artmaking, research, and teaching, a/r/tography finds new connections to offer sustenance and balance or spur new conversations and awareness of alternative trajectories of movement in one's life and work.

For 100 days—not all of which were consecutive—we each acknowledged our chosen aspect of land and shared these acknowledgements on Padlet (a free collaborative online platform). Choosing a 100-day timeframe was intentional. Sustained duration allowed us to move beyond novelty or performativity and into deeper rhythms of noticing, listening, and repositioning. The passage of time revealed shifts in our attention, emotion, and relation with the land. As Kimmerer (2013) reminds, practices rooted in repetition, like gratitude and stewardship, are not outcomes, but ongoing relationships. The 100-day arc offered time to recenter our often-vulnerable bodies with the land's knowledge systems and to endure through discomfort, weather, and daily life, while making space for gradual emergence of transformation and insight. In this way, temporality itself became a pedagogy, one that asked us to attend again—and again. A/r/tography relates well with Medicine Wheel practice because both are grounded in relations. In addition, a/r/tography's interest in embodied, wholistic living, including realms of the spiritual (Irwin, 2006) which are vital in Indigenous knowledges (Leddy & Miller, 2023), aligns with Medicine Wheel practice.

In the next sections, we share our initial positioning with land elements, including our journal entries (indented and dated) written as part of our land acknowledging practices.

EAST: MICHELE SORENSEN (TEMPERATURE)

In daily land acknowledgements, Sorensen focused on local temperature—the measure of hot or cold at a consistent time each day. In response, she knitted rows of coloured yarn correlating with a chosen range of temperatures:

> In this research, I take inspiration from artist, Leah Dorian (Métis) (2013) who suggests art and healing are linked. Dorian describes art as acts of restoring Indigenous cultural beliefs and values...I'm curious how artmaking and attending to land as a teacher might disrupt land acknowledgement and, in turn, "reconciliation"—moving the term from definition into action. I begin by knitting temperature changes. 10 balls of yarn in assorted colours: I assign each to a 10-degree increment of temperature: White yarn for temperatures 0 C to -10 C. Blue yarn: -11 C to -20 C. I use the highest temperature of each day to provide consistency to my practice (M. Sorensen, journal notes, 12.21.23)
>
> Today, if I did not have to go outside, I wouldn't. I drove to the hospital, then shuffled through snow to the door to get the 7th radiation treatment. Now that snow and cold have arrived it is an increasingly difficult daily trek. After today, 9 more treatments (M. Sorensen, journal notes, 01.10.24).

While teachings of the East invite emotional awareness and presence, we now journey to the South, aligned with summer, and the heart. South invites consideration of love, movement, and reciprocity—qualities manifested by the wind in Valerie Triggs's inquiry.

Figure 1

SOUTH: VALERIE TRIGGS (WIND)

> In my 100 days of land acknowledgement, I plan to practice inhabiting and responding to the invisible—the wind and its qualities. I want to read about wind, honour it as part of land, make a wind rug responding to wind speed and direction. I have read that in some Indigenous traditions, wind is considered a person, acting with intelligence and having idiosyncrasies (Simpson, 2014). In creating a wind rug, I use coloured fabric strips to map the homes of the wind—the places/directions from which they come. I will use longer strips when wind is stronger than 35km/hr. Today wind is from the northwest at 12 km/hr—for which I'll use dark blue (V. Triggs, journal notes, 12.21.23).

From the vitality and generosity of the South, we move to the West, a place of maturity and vision. The West offers space for reflection and integration of heart and mind. In the following section, Shannon Leddy explores change and community, through artistic expression and poetic acknowledgement.

WEST: SHANNON LEDDY (CHANGE)

Leddy's land acknowledgements involved daily poems, drawings, or paintings responding to land in two radically different locations: Northern Denmark and Metro Vancouver. She considered the physical realm of her lived experience, focusing on healing its disconnects, and the importance of both letting-go and growing-together in community with self, others, and the land.

Figure 2

> As the date of our departure to Denmark looms, I am both excited and wistful. Although I am an uninvited guest on xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), sel̓íl̓witulh (Tsleil-Waututh), and sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish) territory, I have grown to understand what it means to be a good guest here. As a Métis woman, I feel I belong in Canada. In Denmark, I am a stranger on a strange land, with much to learn (S. Leddy, journal notes, 01.05.24).

While the West teaches about harvest and transition, the North brings winter's stillness, where wisdom, memory, and reflection reside. In this quieter space, Rita Irwin attends to light as both metaphor and teacher, engaging the layered teachings of darkness and illumination in poetry.

NORTH: RITA IRWIN (LIGHT)

Irwin began her practice with photography—investigating reflections of light, light's relation to colour, and the feeling/sensation of 'lightness' in light. She inquired into the stillness that learning from light requires.

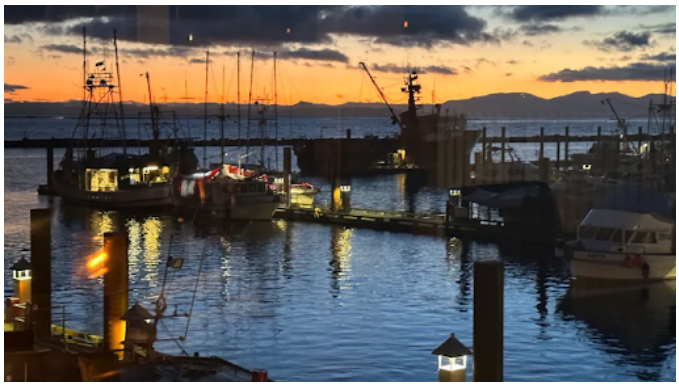

Figure 3

> The maximum duality of light across the world exists today with winter solstice in the northern hemisphere. For me, I'm beginning my day as the sun rises in northern Alberta, on my husband's farm. I will arrive back in Vancouver after the sun has gone down on the west coast. I feel blessed to be on these lands both here and there. As I prepare to leave this farmland, I want to acknowledge that these are the ancestral lands of the Treaty 7 people representing five First Nations: Siksika (Blackfoot), Kainai (Blood), Piikani (Peigan), Stoney-Nakoda, and Tsuut'ina (Sarcee) peoples. When I return to Vancouver, I'll be living and working on the unceded, ancestral, and traditional territories of the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilw̓ətaɬ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. I am indebted to their stewardship of these lands for millennia (R. L. Irwin, journal notes, 12.21.23).

Gradually, Irwin turned her daily practice to exploring the work of Indigenous poets who teach about light in terms of relation and reverence for land. She looked to poetry that is attuned to stories and learning around the light of built fires, at daybreaks, or on moon-lit nights.

Irwin quotes Sigo (2020):

> Native people of the Northwest had no choice but to live in relation to poetry (…). We had to learn to identify and convert the individual elements of earth into forms of protection and sustenance, a so-called lifestyle (p. 171).

Arising from the stillness of North, the Up direction brings us to sky, to spirit, to breath. Language becomes the thread through which relation to land is spoken and sung. Nicole Rallis reflects on this direction in daily Hul'qumi'num word practice, for listening and speaking with land.

UP: NICOLE RALLIS (LANGUAGE)

> 12.21.23. I live on Vancouver Island, BC. My home is geographically located in the central region of Vancouver Island and is home to ten First Nations near Shawnigan Lake. Shawnigan is an anglicized adaptation of the Hul'q'umi'num word Showe'luqun. The lake is the shared unceded territory of the Malahat (MÁLEXEŁ), Quw'utsun and W̱SÁNEĆ Nations who have peacefully gathered along its shorelines for millennia.
>
> For this project, I decided to engage with the land through Indigenous language, seeking to decolonize my knowledge of the places I walk daily. Hul'qumi'num and SENĆOŦEN are the two traditional languages spoken where I live, but Hul'qumi'num is more widely spoken across multiple Indigenous communities in Cowichan today. To learn more about the language, I used FirstVoices—an online interactive language learning platform that collaborates with Elders, youth, and speakers to create and share language resources

like words, phrases, songs, and stories. My practice involved not only learning a new word each day but also creating word art for each. I also recorded myself speaking the word as a living, breathing practice that honours the vitality of the land and the peoples from which the language emerged. By visually and audibly engaging with the Hul'qumi'num language, I strive to develop a deeper connection with the land and with the culture that continues to steward and sustain it (N. Rallis, journal notes, 12.21.23).

Figure 4

From the air and language of Up, we now turn to Down, toward soil, fungi, and unseen webs of relation beneath our feet. Ching-Chiu Lin's journey reminds us that learning with the land begins with attending to the overlooked, the cyclical, and the deeply interconnected.

DOWN: CHING-CHIU LIN (EARTH)

I began my 100 days of land acknowledgment by walking in the woods in Fall, 2023 without focus or direction. I was looking for clues, hoping the land might offer me guidance. I became obsessed with searching for mushrooms, different colors, and types. I took photos of mushrooms every day for a month, amazed by their beauty: extensions of the earth. During this period of exploration, an Indigenous colleague introduced me to the book Sand Talks by Tyson Yunkaporta (Wik Mungkan, Australia), who examines how contemporary life diverges from patterns of creation. He asks, "How does this[divergence] affect us? How can we do things differently?"

I find I am newly aware of the importance of looking for connective relations amidst acknowledging the land's abundant diversity (C. Lin, journal notes, 12.21.23).

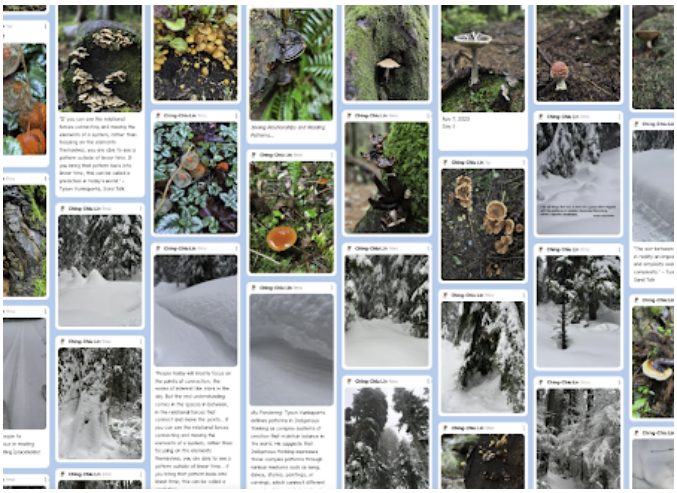

Figure 5

MEDICINE WHEEL ANALYSIS IN A/R/TOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK:

We now draw from Mashford-Pringle and Shawanda (2023) to use the Medicine Wheel as a framework to interrogate our initial positionings, to inquire into our expanding relation to learning with land. As they note, a linear or conventional model of analysis is premised on activities leading directly to outcomes. Instead, the Medicine Wheel "takes a circular approach to broaden the scope and to capture outcomes and elicit responses that are often overlooked" (p. 5). It helps researchers make sense, bring order, and enable "an in-depth analysis of data, people, and their symbolic and physical interactions" (p. 5). As a decolonizing analysis tool (Verniest, [Cree] 2019), it also provides a visual space in which to circulate variables or think one category/theme through another.

While some researchers use the Medicine Wheel for building identity, Verniest (2019) claims that it can be used as an analytical tool to illustrate Social Work

clients' locations, states of being, and their roles and forms of action, These capacities for aiding introspection and evaluation are significant in our inquiry of engaging daily practices of acknowledging land to find how we might feel more responsibly connected to land and others.

The seventh dimension of the Anishinaabe Medicine Wheel is the Centre—the fire of Self, connected to all other sacred, interrelated, and interconnected teachings—as well as to our collective of colleagues. Before visiting this concept of self in our conclusion, our next sections return to the Medicine Wheel to analyze our 100 days of positioning acknowledgements.

EAST: SORENSEN (KNITTING TEMPERATURE)

East is the direction to which we turn to greet the new day. Manitowabi (Anishinaabe) (2018) explains that East also represents childhood, springtime, and opportunity for new beginnings and renewal. Renewal is important for Sorensen, as she struggles with breast cancer chemotherapy, radiation treatments, and their side-effects. Amid daily recording and responding to temperature during a cold winter, she looks forward to Spring, hoping for physical healing and future restoration. In teaching a Social Work course about working with Indigenous populations during her 100-day practice, Sorensen noticed healing was an important emphasis in her curriculum, pedagogy, daily class discussions, and in student-responses.

Dumbrill and Green (2008) argue that teachings from the East invite examining where one comes from, "who has been included and excluded from the space we occupy, who is defined as Other, and who has the power to so define" (p. 498), a process described as decolonizing education.

> Looking more closely at temperature, I suggest, will allow me to move into another realm of knowing what it means to 'acknowledge' where I am on Treaty 4 territory (M. Sorensen, journal notes, 12.21.23).

East invites learning to be present, absorbed in the moment, as a child. Being present is a gift that must be practiced. Bopp, Bopp, Brown and Lane (Yankton Sioux/Chickasaw) (1985) argue that accepting this gift and its opportunity to learn, involves becoming present: merging one's being with an undertaking at hand, becoming completely absorbed.

Bopp et al. maintain that East involves learning to love as a child loves—unconditionally. It also involves accepting gifts of trust, uncritical acceptance of others—and warmth—an important gift for Sorensen. Temperatures between -20°C and -39°C offered many occasions for longing for and accepting the gift of warmth.

Figure 6

One cannot learn, however, from the East alone. Bopp et al. (1985) emphasize the journey to the South to learn of sacrifice, sensitivity to others' feelings, and love that expects nothing in return.

SOUTH: TRIGGS (WEAVING WIND)

"From the south", Kimmerer (2013) writes, "comes the green that covers the world in spring, carried on the warm winds" (p. 209). Summer in Potawatomi is "the time of plenty, and also time for our tribal gathering, for powwows and ceremony" (p. 380). Pitawanakwat (2006), describes this as a time of continued nurturance for all creation.

South represents summer fullness of youth, physical strength and vigor (Bopp et al., 1985). It teaches the heart's beats: generosity, sensitivity to others' feelings, loyalty, compassion, kindness, and love. This is a different love than the unconditional love taught by the East. Bopp et al. explain that love to be developed here is capacity for love of one person for another, as well as for passionate involvement in the world—training the senses to notice and respond to land. This love does not seek to control, possess or own:

> The Wind: An Unruly Living, by Bendik-Keymer (2018) engages wind to circumvent ideas of self-possession or possession of others. Bendik-Keymer asks what kind of living he might live if he took the wind as a rule of living. The wind, he claims, does not rule—it is un-ruly. It's a relative—one that airs things, exposes us and reveals our vulnerability.
>
> To relate to things, like the wind, he writes about getting to know winds like people. Not just knowing about them but being with them (V. Triggs, journal notes, 01.10.24).

Learning love from the South is grounded in reciprocity and in the recognition that there are no experts in healing journeys toward healthy relationships. As Verniest (2019) notes in counselling contexts, what matters is learning to express feelings openly in non-harmful ways to others, and to allow space for grieving through the release of tears.

After preparing body and spirit for relationship and healing change, more teaching is found when turning from South to West where learning involves becoming accountable to community through merging of heart/mind.

WEST: LEDDY (DRAWING CHANGE)

West brings teachings of adulthood. As mentioned in the first reflection on the 'West', Leddy's 100-day practice of acknowledging Mother Earth focuses on responding to land through drawing, painting, and poetry. West is the place for letting go of disconnections between body and mind (Leddy & Miller, 2023); the place "where the sun sets, day cools, frogs awaken…" (p. 102). In this direction, it is time for harvest. The West offers the harvest of self-acceptance—loving ourselves as both spiritual and physical beings.

Bopp et al. (1985) claim the greatest gift of the West is "vision". Teachings from West reveal where we have come from as children and youth, the cycle of life, and fuller understandings of ourselves as physical beings in a material world. Mashford-Pringle and Shawanda (2023) associate West with bodily knowing in figuring things out. Bopp et al. (1985) describe visionings involving an inner eye, or spiritual vision. Dumbrill and Green (2008) argue that educators can learn from teachings of the West to put ideas into action; radical action is needed to make space for other ways of knowing. During 100 days of acknowledging land, Leddy embarks on several new trajectories. After leaving Vancouver and arriving in Denmark, she writes:

> The cold is deep, the wind sharp and fierce. For the next three months, I will live in this small town 500 metres from Kattegat, 25 kilometres from the top of Denmark. The town is a 20-minute walk away, and we have no car. Although I spent half my life in Saskatchewan, I'd forgotten what it was to live with winter (S. Leddy, journal notes, 01.11.24).

Bopp et al. (1985) describe the West as a place of sacrifice where we might learn "the mystery of sacrifice is that there is no sacrifice" (p. 58). By letting go of youth and making peace with aging, our lives, and deaths, we have opportunity to learn the power of

change and healing. Through learning acceptance of change, we prepare ourselves for entering the spirit world.

> The late dawn of the new year
> creeps into our room
> we are earthlings
> tucked into the warmth
> of one another
>
> On the sills of the window
> in the next room
> we keep our Mother's children
> Teachers from the land
> needing our care and attention
> reminding us of what is important
>
> This new year
> there will be art and love and life
> there will be death and injustice and war
> all of it lived
> on the only place we have to call home
> (S. Leddy, journal notes, 01.20.24).

Pitawanakwat (2006) argues it is important to consider teachings from the West about freedom in change and acceptance, before fully enjoying the Northern direction.

NORTH: IRWIN (LISTENING TO LIGHT)

North offers rest, a time to slow down (Manitowabi, 2018, Pitawanakwat, 2006), a time to learn. This is time to honour and listen to Elders' oral stories that offer ways of understanding oneself in relation to the world. Stories are integral parts of Indigenous life. For some Nations, winter is traditional storytelling season. Through daily expressions of gratitude and acknowledgements of light as it increased after winter solstice, Irwin writes she learned from First Nations' poets that:

> Light begins with a story (R. L. Irwin, journal notes, 02.02.24).

Sigo (2020) argues that "[Poetry's] restlessness and need for flexibility are two of its greatest strengths" (p. 173). These attributes are important teachings in the opportunities that North as a place of wisdom and courage offers for reflecting and learning from mistakes, considering the web of interrelatedness between individuals, communities, and Mother Earth, and for actioning renewed visions (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Mashford-Pringle & Shawana, 2023). Wisdom is gained through gifts of perseverance, synthesis, speculation, and ability to interpret hidden meanings. In her 100-day practice, Irwin acknowledges the wisdom of Indigenous Elders wisdom of the land, and the importance of stillness for reflecting.

Bopp et al. (1985) argue that North's winter wisdom involves both memory and detachment. Memory can engage the care and nurturing of the physical body that has carried one through many other cycles of teaching Pitawanakwat, 2006) and can activate contemplation of one's connections to circles of life, healing, ancestors, original teachings, and stories. Teachings from North emphasize light and warmth of fire. However, the closer to the end of a journey, Bopp et al. (1985) suggest, the more there is opportunity to stand somewhat apart, experiencing oneself as a small but sacred part of a very large process.

Irwin writes about light's reflection. On a window at night she experiences:

> Light invites more than what is first seen (R. L. Irwin, journal notes, 12.26.23).
>
> The trickster of light. Our front entry door looking outside. I can see outside but if others were outside, they could not see inside. Here, late at night, the ghost of light reflected (R. L. Irwin, journal notes, 01.07.23).

North teachings initiate wisdom that Bopp et al.

(1985) describe as the beginning of detachment. Detaching begins from a sense of connection with everything else. Perhaps this is the wisdom of Indigenous poets as argued by Sigo:

> Native people of the Northwest had no choice but to live in relation to poetry from the very outset of creation. We had to learn to identify and convert the individual elements of earth into forms of protection and sustenance, a so-called lifestyle (2020, p. 171)

UP: RALLIS (BREATHING LAND)

Languages of Indigenous peoples evolved within ecosystems of land, water, and sky (Absolon, [Anishinaabe] 2019). Words for each Medicine Wheel direction are "linked to geographic features and the sun's path" (p. 79) in each Nation and location (Leddy & Miller, 2023). The Up direction offers teaching on the importance of the words we speak into the air. Rallis writes:

> Each day, as I set out on my walk, I carried the intention of honouring land and its original stewards through paying deep attention. The act of walking itself is a meditation and a way to physically connect with the landscape. As I traversed train tracks along the lake, forests, and public shorelines, I reflected on the history and stories embedded in these places. Learning a new hul'qumi'num word each day served as a bridge to these stories, offering a glimpse into the worldview and traditional Indigenous Knowledge systems of the communities who have lived here and breathed these words for millennia (N. Rallis, journal notes, 02.04.24).

While all can learn from Medicine Wheel teachings, honouring and learning Indigenous languages of Turtle Island offers insights beyond what is available to those who know only English. Simpson (2014) argues that "in order to foster expertise within Nishinaabeg intelligence, we need people engaged with land as curriculum and engaged in our languages for decades, not weeks" (p. 23). Rallis has taken these encouragements seriously in her days of acknowledging land.

DOWN: LIN (DISCERNING EARTH)

Ching-Chiu Lin began 100 days of acknowledging land by photographing the diversity and beauty of mushrooms observed during daily walks. For over 30 days she followed only mushrooms. Kimmerer (2013) describes how interaction is critical for fungi in harsh or stressful times and when resources are scarce. A network of threads, fungi work symbiotically with algae, blurring distinctions between individuals and community, teaching the intricate ways in which life is organized.

While focused on plants rather than fungi, Peltier (in Peterson & Friedrich, 2022) argue that closely observing and appreciating plants is part of the wisdom of land literacy, which recognizes one's belonging to a particular place and aligns with Indigenous ecological perspectives, such as the Medicine Wheel.

> 01.15.24. As winter arrived, I began cross-country skiing, immersing myself in landscapes and attending to intricate patterns formed by the snow. The varying shapes, layers, and textures of snowflakes, fine powder that whispered under my skis to the dense, packed layers that crunched beneath my weight, invited me to ponder Yunkaporta's suggestion:
>
> "Look beyond the things and focus on the connections between them…look beyond the connections and see the patterns they make" (2020, p. 77) (C. Lin, journal notes, 01.15.24).
>
> This reflective journey through snow-covered terrain deepened my appreciation of the sophisticated relationships and patterns connecting all elements of the natural world.
>
> It was through observing mushrooms, however, that I began to understand Yunkaporta's thinking:

> If you can see the relational forces connecting and moving the elements of a system, rather than focusing on the elements themselves, you are able to see a pattern outside of linear time. If you bring that pattern back into linear time, this can be called a prediction in today's world (Yunkaporta 2020, pp.79-80).

> I wanted to see these "relational forces" in mushrooms (C. Lin, journal notes, 04.11.24).

Down invites observations of how land continues to sustain and perpetuate life through entangled webs of multiple pulses and temporalities.

ACTS OF RECIPROCAL RELATING IN A/R/TOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK

A/r/tographic fieldwork accommodates circulations of human-nonhuman encounters. It engages relational processing of feeling affected by land, recognizing existences in particular places, and re-invigorating or making visible that existence in one's response. Before concluding with the Medicine Wheel's seventh direction which teaches the emergence of the relational self, we pause to consider several additional methods of artistic embodiment that emerged in this inquiry and helped invigorate our learning: description, metaphor, anthropomorphism, and factual inquiry.

Throughout our inquiry, description was a significant response to land. We described in words and sounds, as well as through directing our bodies to align, draw near, lean in, listen—echoing land shapes and retracing forces and elements through the movement of eyes, spine, hands, cameras, paintbrush, or knitting needles—to show as much as to tell. Not for explanation but for attunement: replacing anesthetic dullness creeping unnoticed into our repetitive routines. Leggo (in Triggs, et al., 2014) describes intimacy through the body, such as learning to breathe light, hear light, taste light—and know its language. Kimmerer (2013) explains description as a form of love, and Tsing (2015) advocates revitalizing both description and imagination, especially when attending to what has previously been ignored. For example,

> Silvery white ice crystals cling to the rough snarls of bark (V. Triggs, journal notes, 01.24.24).

Another action of rapport with land involved metaphor, which connects new teachings with previous experience. Metaphors open opportunities for changing relations with land.

> Mushrooms are extensions of the earth (C. Lin, journal notes, 03.03.24).

> Learning a new hul'qumi'num word each day served as a bridge to stories embedded in this place (N. Rallis, journal notes, 02.20.24).

Kimmerer (2013) quotes Russel who explains metaphor as a sign of deeper truth and thus, close to sacrament. The world speaks to Kimmerer in metaphor.

We also became aware of our use of anthropomorphism, a leap beyond metaphor to connect human and more-than-human more intensely.

> The trees call out: "Stay awhile" (R. L. Irwin, journal notes, 01.15.24).

> The late dawn of the new year creeps into our room (S. Leddy, journal notes, 01.20.24).

Stengers (in Myers, 2015) argues that anthropomorphism can "induce empirically felt variations in what can be seen and known" (p. 44). Anthropomorphism involves more-than-humans displaying human traits and capable of human behaviour. Our relationship is changed as we become aware of the land having capacity and impulse to grant us its teaching. For a moment, wind screeches through window-frame gaps but in another moment it can also do otherwise. Kimmerer advocates this use of language: "It is human perception that makes the world a gift… The stories we choose to shape our behaviours have adaptive consequences" (2013, p. 30).

Lastly, factual interest about land can also interrelate spirit, emotions, and intellect. Kimmerer (2013) ex-

plains how appreciation of land is enriched by knowing more about its processes and many ways to exist. Sorensen draws on facts:

> The temperature continues to be extremely cold. With windchill, it is -48°C (M. Sorensen, journal notes, 01.03.24).

Others find information from traditional Indigenous ecological knowledge, localized to places, awakening one to the presence of what is already known, yet cannot be fully known:

> This morning, I walked to Garry Point named after Nicholas Garry, deputy governor of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1882-1835. The Coastal Salish peoples fished, dug for clams, and gathered berries here. I am filled with gratitude for the stewardship of these lands by the Musqueam people (R. L. Irwin, journal notes, 12.29.23).

The Medicine Wheel in a/r/tographic field research brings inquiry into intimacy with animate world, for many, a deeply spiritual pursuit, regularly acknowledging all that came before us and all that is more than us.

Description, metaphor, anthropomorphism, and factual inquiry may all be part of learning what Kimmerer describes as the language of animacy: "the language that let us speak of what wells up all around us" (p. 55). Beginning to learn a grammar of wonder and reciprocity may have inspired the profound gratitude that spontaneously emerged within our practices. Gratitude is described by Kimmerer as of highest priority in ancient protocols whenever people gathered. Giving thanks for land reminds us of our dependent interrelation, an action that blurs boundaries of our knowing.

CENTRE: ALL (RELATIONAL POSITIONING)

Through gratitude and the directions of the Medicine Wheel, tinder is gathered, and thoughts and practices are brought forward to rekindle the flames of the Medicine Wheel Centre. Pitawanakwat (2006) explains we all carry a fire within and are responsible for maintaining its embers and sparks. The self is this fire, but the fire is not only for self; it is an opportunity for reciprocity, a gift for revitalizing the land. This fire is sustained not by internal drive, agency, or potential for self-realization, but by decolonizing forces of resilience and relation that offer balance and interconnection. The Medicine Wheel helps visualize and share land teachings of interconnections and dependencies involved in sustaining a fire. We conclude by reflecting on the fueling of this fire of self through becoming *with* land and with one another. The Medicine Wheel has iteratively brought us through six directions of land, to re-positioning our selves, in relation. Decolonizing includes community, self, and land, not individual existences.

As educators, we recognize the need for poetic reflection, and embodied, responsive engagement with land, within educational practice. The relational and sustained nature of this a/r/tographic fieldwork invites us, and others, to land acknowledgements that are pedagogical, artful practice, rather than performative acts. For classrooms, this means making space for long-term, embodied engagements with land, language, and local histories. Each of our 100-day practices offers entry points for learning with land: through movement, craft, language-learning, poetry, photography, observation, drawing, and storytelling. We offer our acknowledgement research to this special journal issue, to inspire educators in resisting extractive forms of learning and creating land-attuned practices in ways that respect local Indigenous knowledge systems.

Maintaining the flame of Self requires positioning and repositioning in openness to land's teaching while offering our gift of generating tinder for more relational selves. We have found the Medicine Wheel serves as an ever-giving guide in this lifelong journey. Bopp et al. (1985) suggest it would take more than a thousand lifetimes to engage fully with the abundance of land gifts embedded in the Medicine Wheel and this, we feel, is part of the ongoing lifetime work of decolonizing.

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Listening Across the Black Diaspora

A Conversation with Tina Campt on Black Archives, Imaginaries, and Contemporary Art

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ABSTRACT

This interview with black feminist scholar Tina Campt explores her method of "listening" to images—from vernacular photography to contemporary art—as a way of attuning to their affective impact. The interview takes its starting point in the contemporary art exhibition Transmissions (2024) at Skånes Konstförening, which explored the resonance of Campt's method in the Nordic region. Campt goes on to discuss the centrality of photography in the current Black Archives movements in Europe, drawing comparisons with earlier efforts to reclaim Black histories in Germany. Furthermore, the interview highlights Campt's ongoing engagement with Black visuality as she considers the strategies Black artists use to confront anti-Black violence and care for their viewers under shifting political conditions.

> [H]ow exactly do we listen to images? We listen by feeling. We listen by attending to what I call 'felt sound'—sound that resonates in and as vibration. We listen by feeling the vibrations that emanate from images we think are silent, but which I argue are anything but. It is a listening that attends to how these vibrations solicit both subtle and powerful responses in and from us.
>
> —Tina Campt, A Black Gaze

Tina Campt's writings on Black visuality offer urgent and capacious theorizations of embodied encounters with images, ranging from vernacular photography to contemporary art.[1] Campt's scholarship has focused on Black communities in Germany, the UK, the US and South Africa but her insights resonate broadly across the African diaspora. In *Image Matters*, Campt (2012) extends analyses of Black family photographs beyond these images' visual properties to their tactility and musicality to consider their emotional impact. Expanding this approach in *Listening to Images*, Campt (2017, p. 28) pays careful attention to the "quiet frequencies" of identification and ethnographic photographs in which Black subjects perform futures unconstrained by coloniality. As she writes:

> Some see the realization of such a future in the form of acts and actions. They see it in the political movements and acts of resistance […]. But I believe we must not only look but also listen for it in other, less likely places. I locate it in the everyday imaging practices of black communities past, present, and future (Campt, 2017, p. 17).

In this way, listening becomes the means to access subtle liberatory practices not immediately apparent in the visual register. Campt's latest book, *A Black Gaze* (2021), highlights contemporary artworks that compel viewers to undertake the emotional labor of positioning themselves in relation to anti-Black violence. Here, too, she attunes to the "sonic frequencies" of Black visuality:

> 'Frequency' is the term I use to account for the impression images leave on us, their impact, and how they move us. [...] I'm interested in the frequency of images made by Black communities because I believe that the physical and emotional labor required to see these images gives us profound insights into the everyday experiences of Black folks as racialized subjects (Campt, 2021, p. 78).

Campt's practice of listening to images inspired the exhibition *Transmissions* (Appiah & Flink, 2024) at Skånes konstförening in Malmö, Sweden.[2] *Transmissions* took as its point of departure Black Archives Sweden's collection of family photographs that display the everyday sociality of Afro-Swedes (*Fig. 1*).[3] In response to this archive, *Transmissions* gathered works by ten contemporary artists who, through a variety of speculative and multisensorial approaches, engage with visualizing, imagining, preserving, and affirming the Black cultural archive. Throughout the exhibition, these artists draw from and articulate the complex and entangled histories and lived experiences that constitute the African diaspora and continue to shape Blackness in the 21st century.

Fig. 1. Black Archives Sweden. Installation of family photographs in *Transmissions*, 2024. Photo: Lena Bergendahl. Courtesy of Skånes konstförening and Black Archives Sweden.

We spoke with Campt during her visit to Malmö in November 2024 for the symposium *Transmissions,* organized as an extension of the exhibition. Her keynote lecture at the symposium, "Listening to Artists Listening to Archives," explored her ongoing research on how Black contemporary artists engage with and repurpose archival vernacular images, creating new ways of visualizing and understanding Blackness, through what she describes as a triangulated *correspondence* between artist, archive, and researcher (*Fig. 5*). We met Campt at Malmö Konsthall, just a few hours before her compelling keynote, and our conversation unfolded as follows:

Nina Cramer (NC): *Can you share how your dialogue with Black Archives Sweden and the curators of* Transmissions*, Tawanda Appiah and Ulrika Flink, came about?*

Tina Campt (TC): I find that a lot of Black diasporic work comes by meeting someone who introduces you to someone, who introduces you to someone, and all of a sudden, you're learning about all these different things. I had met the organizers of Black Archives Amsterdam and learned of Black Archives Sweden through them. I got to meet the Black Archives Sweden organizers the last time I was here. And I had kept in contact with Tawanda Appiah after I had written an essay for his show *FLIGHT* (Appiah, 2023). They said they were curating this show, *Transmissions,* that

it was inspired by my work, and asked if I would be interested in coming.

NC: *The curators of* Transmissions *write in their curatorial statement: "In this exhibition, listening is used as a tool in digging up narratives, dreams, and moments of joy and disseminating them across time and space" (Appiah & Flink 2024, n.p.). This provides an indication of how your work inspired this exhibition. Having just toured the exhibition this afternoon, what were your initial impressions of the works and their approach to practices of listening?*

TC: I was impressed by how the artists do two things at once. Because they are activating a sonic dimension in terms of trying to facilitate listening as a practice of encountering art in the same way that I'm wanting to make that part of our daily practice. But it's also about listening to archives, which I think is even more challenging when you're talking about visual archives, and specifically the family archive, the photographic archive that the Black Archives Sweden group is disseminating. There's a way that we take for granted what it means to look at photographs, especially family photographs. They're so familiar that we bring our own stories to them.

What I appreciated about what the artists were doing in *Transmissions* is that they were layering different narratives. They were overlapping narratives between family and broader diasporic histories, and between the diasporic histories and the histories of the nations and states that they were

related to. I just felt wonderfully stimulated to sit in all those different layers. To sit in the layers of Linda Lamignan bringing together the Norwegian and the Nigerian oil histories as part of their own history while we were listening to their family member recounting something (*Fig. 2*). I loved that experience. And that was present in a number of different pieces, of trying to get us to attend to these different fragments and the ways in which these fragments, when you layer them, can take you in all sorts of different directions.

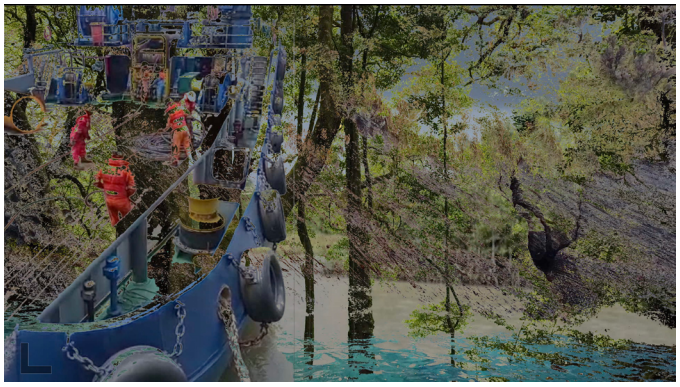

Fig. 2. Linda Lamignan. *Toru Torubiri Biri (Eye Sea Water)* (still), 2023. Video, 05:40 mins, loop. 3D lizard by Kristoffer Amundsen. Courtesey of Linda Lamignan, Geoffrey Ogoba and Seidougha Ogoba. Displayed in *Transmissions* with the sound work *Two Tongues (Abede)*, 2023.

There was a thread that went through the works from the moment you walked into the sonic environment outside the actual gallery, on the landing. You're wrapped up in this very industrial sound that is representative of this very industrial space. And then you walk into this beautiful, beautiful poem [by Makda Embaie inspired by James Barnor's photographs] that you have to listen to while you're reading it in another language. Then you encounter the individual histories and photographs that people donated—people who said, "I want to be included in this." And when you move from room to room, you get wrapped up in a series of imaginative visual tapestries that are not 1:1.

The other thing I really appreciated is that there were no narratives. There was no narration. There was no single story and there was no single timeline. All the artists were mashing things together. Even in the brief video of James Barnor (*Fig. 3*). He's 93, and he's going through photographs that he made decades ago. The film isn't telling the story of James Barnor; it's James Barnor looking back at these complicated histories.

So I really loved the extent to which they were so successful in activating all of our senses and doing that in a way that made us actively have to witness the merging of a number of different histories. And in doing so they challenged us to think about the idea of the archive differently. Because each one of those pieces, I think, was asking us to think about the archive not as fact, but as a source of imagination. Each of the artists took the archive as a source of imagination. It was their fantasy and, at the same time, their grounding. It was where they wanted to go and where they came from. It was this beautiful speculative journey that all of the artists were taking us on.

Fig. 3. James Barnor. *The Album* (still), 2019. Video, 14:13 mins. Produced by Galerie Clémentine de la Féronnière. © James Barnor/Courtesy of Galerie Clémentine de la Féronnière, Skånes konstförening and Black Archives Sweden.

Qwin Werle (QW): *In 2022, we had the opportunity to attend your lecture in Copenhagen, where you shared insights on your work on Black presence in white cube spaces. Reflecting on that visit, and now during your stay in Sweden, how has your engagement with Nordic contexts shaped your understanding of Blackness here, particularly in relation to your earlier work on Black Germans? Perhaps, the ways they are similar and different or any other things you have noticed or been curious about?*

TC: [*sighs*] I've been thinking a lot about that. [*laughter*] I was thinking a lot about the differences and similarities of Black European movements that are trying to reclaim a certain visibility within their national context. One of the things I was really struck by is that there's Black Archives Sweden, Black Archives Amsterdam. We didn't have a Black Archives movement in Germany back in the day. But a lot of it did start with *Farbe bekennen* (Ayim et al., 1986), and what does it mean to write your own history—not just claim it, but to literally write it, to do your own research. And the Black Archives movements now are doing that through photography. When I was doing this work back then, I was not working with photography in any way, shape, or form, and photographs meant kind of nothing to me. But to start with photography, to me, is a really radical premise.

And maybe that's just the time we're in, where visual culture has a different salience now in a social media-based world. I was doing that work before the internet! [*laughter*] I was doing that work before email! Before cell phones! Things have changed. A photograph back then was a physical thing, it wasn't digital. Now it makes sense that photographs, or even visual culture itself, can be the mode of connection and circulation, whereas the work we were doing back then was literally trying to find people in archives, trying to find proof, trying to find just a mention of blackness. So it's incredibly enlightening to me to think about how the point of departure has shifted in time.

QW: *We've noticed in your research that you've shifted from vernacular photography to contemporary art. What has driven this evolution in your practice?*

TC: The transition to contemporary art was actually very interesting because I was writing about vernacular photography; first family photos, then studio photography. Then I came to identification photography. The transition for me was watching what artists do with vernacular photos, family photos, all sorts of identification photos, and the way that they could get us to see something different in them. Santu Mofokeng's *The Black Photo Album* (1997) was profoundly influential to me because these were the kinds of photographs I had been looking at for a long time in my previous book *Image Matters* (Campt, 2012), but what he did with them was to tell a story of an entire era. And then Maria Bacigalupo's installation of these thrown-away identity photographs, cut-outs, the fact that she could bring those quite literally out of a trash can and put them on the walls of a gallery to get us to see the history of Uganda through them, was incredible. So that was a transition for me, from looking at the photographs themselves to looking at *what artists do* with photographs. That just led me on a journey of wanting to look at more and more contemporary art.

The work of contemporary Black artists that I was most drawn to was work that made me see the stakes of what it means to live as a Black person right now. They were doing it in a way that wasn't about sentences. As an academic, my superpower is words. I can make a beautiful sentence and try to make that as powerful as possible, but I was just struck by how artists were saying the same things that I was trying to say in really powerful ways, albeit without words. I was really captivated by the response their work solicited from me and from other people. Just watching people look at art was a big part of it. I would have these very intense responses, and I would look around, and there would be all these other people who were crying

or doing weird things in the middle of a powerful show where I would wonder, "Why are you giggling? Oh, that's how you deal with your discomfort." But that was just another example of how powerful the work was. So I started writing about how the work of artists was affecting me, what it was helping me to understand, how it was making me see blackness differently, and how it was challenging others to see themselves in relationship to Black life, or anti-Blackness in particular.

So that was my transition from trying to write about photographs in relationship to the histories that I knew, that I had written, to writing about how artists were using those photographs and the power of their art. It was kind of a natural arc.

Fig. 5. Jenn Nkiru. *Rebirth is Necessary* (still), 2017. Courtesy of the artist.

QW: *In* A Black Gaze *(Campt, 2021), you write: "Black artists are choosing to look after, care for, and reclaim an uncomfortable Black visual archive"(p.8). What does that look like—particularly the aspect of looking after and caring for?*

TC: Well, I think that the fundamental thing about being a Black artist is on what terms you choose to engage or inhabit the negativity of Black visuality. Do you distance yourself from that? Does it become part of your work? Is it something you're responding to? Is it something you're trying to challenge? And on what terms? The artists that I am interested in do not shy away from engaging or confronting that negative imagery. And at the same time, they are very conscientious about not giving it the power it *can* have over Black people.

So when I talk about caring for, I'm talking about how they address and incorporate this negativity in ways that takes care of a Black spectator that seeks to avoid injuring or re-injuring us. They are trying to confront the world with what it means to constantly be assaulted by Black death in popular media and anti-Black violence. The artists that I'm interested in are not trying to reproduce that violence. They're not trying to retraumatize us. But they're also not trying to say that we're not traumatized and that this is not traumatizing. They're saying, "You need to look at this and you need to position yourself in relationship to it."

The artwork I'm describing sets up a number of different points of entry that you can choose to take or not, but the one thing you can't do is to ignore the stakes and the dynamics of Blackness they are presenting. So those multiple points of entry really enable us to go to the heart of the matter and at the same time to inhabit the vestibule. And that's the moment of care I'm talking about. What does it mean to set up a situation where you can be part of the scene but not be injured by it?

Fig. 4. Tina Campt's keynote at the symposium *Transmissions*, 30 November 2024. Photo: Loc Vo. Courtesy of Black Archives Sweden.

QW: *In my research, I look at visual strategies that*

we can think of as experimental, avant-garde or surrealist, e.g. abrupt jump cuts, nonlinearity, juxtaposition, in works that blur the lines between fiction and reality and weave fantastical and surreal elements into the Black quotidian. There is an overlap with your research in A Black Gaze *(e.g. with your engagement with Arthur Jafa, Kahlil Joseph, Jenn Nkiru). Is this something you have thought about and why these surrealist or experimental formal methods are so effective at inducing a Black gaze or what you call the "affective labor of juxtaposition" (Campt, 2021, p. 102)?*

TC: Well, I think there's two things in play here. First, there's the surrealist—or, I would use the language of my friend Ekow Eshun (2022) and say the "fantastic." The fantastic is something that jostles us out of the real and, in doing so, makes us uncomfortable enough to see things differently and opens up possibilities for living otherwise. It's a sort of wedge that leads us to recognize, "That doesn't quite make sense to me, that is not my reality. Therefore, I have to do a fundamental readjustment in how I can exist under different terms of engagement." At the same time, it's a recognition that makes one incredibly uncomfortable and disoriented, which opens us up to being able to see other possibilities. So when you're talking about blackness in the contemporary moment, the effect is to create a state of hyper-attentiveness whereby people are sensing their relationship to reality differently.

In Jenn Nkiru's work (*Fig. 5*), you have a different relationship to Blackness where she presents blackness as a state of extraordinary possibility. In Kahlil's work, he's able to get us to think about Black death differently. In some of his pieces Black death, while tragic, is also a resurrection, it's going to a better place; it's caretaking. So in *Until the Quiet Comes* (2012)—that movie is so, so beautiful, but it's about Black death and Black people's ability to overcome and actually take leave from this world in a way where the last thing you're doing is saying, "I love you. I'm going to a better place. I wish you well and I still love you."

Here again it's a recognition that, "Wait a minute, this is not reality." And, at the same time, it gives me a different relationship to reality, and it gives me the possibility of seeing it differently. So there is a kind of liberatory practice that these modalities open up for us. And at the same time, they are not outside of this world. That's another thing that's really important. It's not Afrofuturism. We're still very much anchored in the real. It's just the real looking radically different.

NC: *The impact of these kinds of affective encounters with artworks and images is a consistent topic in your scholarship and you've previously written about affects like discomfort and Black radical joy. What affects are you occupied with currently?*

TC: Right now, the big one is grief. The new book that I'm working on is called *Art in the Time of Sorrow,* and it's about contemporary art and grief. It emerges from my own experience grappling with a lot of grief and a lot of loss over the course of the last few years, where I found that writing about art helped me to process my grief in really important ways. What's interesting is that writing the book is helping me see grief differently and see its constituent parts or the different affects that become grief. Because grief itself isn't necessarily an affect, it contains all these other affects within it. People talk about the stages of grief and my experience was, is, that I would love those stages. I had one. It was rage. Just ongoing, blind rage. So I'm trying to think about how that manifested in me and why it was manifesting in the way in which it did. I'm thinking about how one works through these feelings to get to another place.

The twin pandemics of COVID and anti-Black violence, which ran parallel to each other the entire time, have left us collectively traumatized and very few people are willing to talk about it. And two forms of Black grief ran parallel to these two pandemics—the grief for the many people we lost

to COVID and the grief for the many people we lost to anti-Black violence. And now, in the wake of the pandemic, people are really relieved to not be in a bunker, but nobody wants to look back on all that grief and all that trauma. But I think it's still affecting us really profoundly. So that's why it's important to me to write about my own grief particularly given the fact that some of us are entering a new phase of trauma—right wing trauma.

As we continue to think with Campt's work on the affective impact of images, the conversation we have shared here serves as a reminder of the importance of situating our encounters with images in relation to shifting conditions of coloniality, anti-Blackness, and fascism. This interview has explored a method of listening to Black diasporic archives—not only as a form of historical recovery, but also as a practice of imagination and radical possibility—and offered a glimpse into the myriad ways Black contemporary artists invite audiences to engage with the complexities of Black life in the Nordic region and beyond.

NOTES

[1] Tina Campt is currently Roger S. Berlind '52 Professor of Humanities at Princeton University where she holds a joint appointment between the Department of Art and Archeology and the Lewis Center for the Arts.

[2] The exhibition *Transmissions,* curated by Tawanda Appiah and Ulrika Flink in collaboration with Black Archives Sweden, was shown at Skånes konstförening in Malmö, Sweden from November 16, 2024-January 19, 2025. *Transmissions* displayed the work of Ikram Abdulkadir, James Barnor, Theresa Traore Dahlberg, Nolan Oswald Dennis, Lydia Östberg Diakité, Makda Embaie, Manju Jatta, Linda Lamignan, Eric Magassa, and Luvuyo Equiano Nyawose. Explore further here: https://skaneskonst.se/en/transmissions/.

[3] Black Archives Sweden's *Family Archive* (2021-) is an ongoing project inviting submissions from the Afro-Swedish public to amplify and reclaim the visibility of Afro-Swedes and Black people in Sweden, whose presence is often overlooked and erased in official archives. Learn more here: https://www.blackarchivessweden.com/submit/family-archive/.

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Decolonizing Truth: Lessons from Palestine

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ESSAY

This essay reflects on the notions of objectivity and truth. Taking Palestine as an urgent political call and a precondition for a decolonial future, it argues that in the context of genocidal violence and the systematic distortion of reality, objectivity and truth cannot be dismissed merely as tools of oppression. Instead, approaching them as counter-narratives grounded in embodied experiences that have been violently erased by colonial apparatuses of knowledge production, this essay reclaims truth as situated and from below and as a potential vehicle of justice and epistemic resistance.

> When we speak of these horrors, inherent to Zionist ideology, we are perceived at best as passionate and at worst, angry and hateful. But in reality, we are simply reliable narrators. I say we are reliable narrators not because we are Palestinians. It is not on an identitarian basis that we must claim the authority to narrate. Rather it is because history tells us that those who have oppressed, who have monopolized and institutionalized violence, will not tell the truth, let alone hold themselves accountable.
>
> Mohammed El-Kurd,
> Perfect Victims (2025, pp. 157-158)

I want to begin this text by saying: there are no words to speak about Gaza. As I write this short piece, I find myself writing, rewriting, erasing, stuck with the question: How can one epistemologically translate, discursively or affectively, one of the greatest dystopias of our time? How could words ever do justice to what is most unjust around us? At the same time, I am thinking about the consequences of speaking about Gaza: the censorship within academia, the loss of our colleagues, both physically and metaphorically. The ongoing epistemicide, not only in Gaza, but across the universities globally. The epistemicide and epistemic oppression that resides in the refusal to speak, to recognise, to register something as self-evident and fundamental as truth. It is in this context that I decided to write this piece and reflect on the notions of objectivity and truth. Concepts central to epistemics, to history, to everyday life, that we have been so violently deprived of, and which, once again, has come to the forefront of our current, cruel (academic) realities.

CRUEL OBJECTIVITY

I am writing this in June 2025, after nearly twenty months of witnessing a live-streamed genocide in Gaza. Twenty months of unimaginable suffering, mass killings, deliberate starvation, and the systematic destruction of hospitals, schools, universities, and civilian infrastructure. Twenty months during which Western academic institutions have continued to insist that academia should not take a stance and must remain "neutral". Cloaked in the language of political neutrality, universities across Europe and the US, most of which maintain institutional ties with Israeli universities that promote and sustain the genocidal economy (Wind, 2024), label the genocide in Gaza "too political" to engage with.

Within this landscape, not only are political critiques of settler colonialism and Zionism deemed unacceptable, but even simpler factual references to the current situation in Gaza are dismissed as antisemitic, untrue, or mere opinions. Meanwhile, Palestinians continue to be massively murdered, displaced, maimed, starved, and dehumanized in dominant discourse, opposition to the genocidal Israeli politics, to war crimes and crimes against humanity are reduced to a matter of personal conviction and a mere opinion. In parallel, the expression of solidarity with any lawful and democratic claim according to international law for justice and freedom in Palestine is systematically framed as antisemitic and brutally censored (Pervez, 2025; Zisakou et al., 2025). Academics who speak out in support of Palestine are threatened, placed on leave, or dismissed altogether (Fúnez-Flores, 2024; Ivasiuc, 2025; Kassamali, 2025). Within this academic environment, shaped and sustained by (the coloniality of) a neutrality, silence is framed as academic virtue. Refusing to take a political, epistemological, or ethical stance on genocide, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, occupation, subjuga-

tion, and the dispossession of Palestine is not seen as complicity, but as the recommended and morally endorsed, "neutral" intellectual position. In academic apparatuses where ignorance has been historically deployed as a strategic tool of (re)producing colonial knowledge, as Ann Laura Stoler (2016) has pointed out, silence, self-censorship, individualism, and lack of political engagement are gold. In this way, objectivity and neutrality are constructed not only through what is said, but also through what is not said, and silence and erasure produce their normalising effects (Butler, 2004). Under this ongoing silencing the repression of pro-Palestinian protests in our campuses, the harassment and intimidation of critical academics who do not refuse to take a stance, and the institutional sanctions against expressions of solidarity are normalized, being portrayed not as acts of violence or censorship, but as responses to antisemitism, dangerous politicization, and even terrorism. According to this violent distorted version of what's actually happening, speaking out against the genocide constitutes the problem and not the genocide itself.

In this apparatus of surveillance, truth and objectivity in their colonial construction are so blatantly distorted as related to power shaping a new neofascist regime of (post-)truth according to which objectivity is only needed when it serves the white, Zionist agenda. Rather than reflecting truth, objectivity is shaped by those who, through access to power, position themselves as the subjects of reason and knowledge. This positioning is, of course, neither new nor ahistorical and does not occur in a vacuum but traces back to Enlightenment, when white, masculinist, western-centric epistemologies normalised the occupation of invisible privileges, masking inequality under claims of universal equality (Mahmood, 2009). By relying on unmarked gendered, racialised, and classed privileges, the concept of objectivity has historically functioned to delegitimise certain bodies as incapable of reason or knowledge and to refuse certain embodied realities, lived experiences and truths as partial, specific, and less objective. This dynamic is especially visible today as neoconservative (far) right politics selectively reject even the most "objective" domains, such as historical scholarship, empirical sciences, statistical data, and legal principles along with the rulings of international courts, whenever these support equality, human rights, social justice, and the Palestinian struggle against occupation, apartheid, and genocide. Although white-centred institutions of meritocracy, which produce "high" and supposedly objective theory, teach us that knowledge is rooted in observation, facts, and evidence, the neo-fascist realities we are witnessing, both within and beyond academia, expose how so-called objectivity is often detached from verifiable facts, material conditions, and the lived experiences of marginalised, non-normative subjects. This applies even when such realities are recorded, documented, and thus "proven". Relying instead on affective narratives tied to white supremacy, neo-fascist politics undermine the legitimacy of evidence, material experience, legal principles, and historical truths when they challenge their exclusionary ideals and their version of what should count as truth. Under this Orwellian regime of post-truth a blatantly distorted reality is constructed as objective representation.

In this political moment, despite a growing, rather independent, academic movement in solidarity with the Palestinian struggle, most institutional academic spaces and networks, including those that identify as critical or decolonial, have to a great extent, failed us. While theoretical and conceptual frameworks are inherently limited in their ability to grasp the scale of destruction in Gaza, a particular silence has settled over self-proclaimed critical academic spaces (Pervez, 2025; Zisakou et al., 2025). As colonial discourses on "neutrality" unapologetically render Palestine the exception to free speech and academic freedom (Fúnez-Flores, 2024) – though free speech has never been truly free, always conditioned by interlocking systems of oppression – many institutional "decolonial" spaces have often remained silent. Instead, we witness the language of decolonisation increasingly deployed as a tick-box exercise and an empty signifier stripped of its radical political edge, repurposed as an epistemological self-justification for epistemic whiteness. This version of normative institutionally

assimilated "decolonisation" avoids confronting the ongoing genocide in Gaza, marginalises Palestine, and refuses to acknowledge it as a site of colonial violence. Through a whitewashed, co-opted, sanitised version of decolonisation, institutional often "critical", and "decolonial" forums remain silent, avoiding the naming or denouncing of genocide (Ivasiuc, 2025; Zisakou et al., 2025). Conferences, events, and workshops on decolonisation often fail to mention Gaza at all, or when they do, through a rather tokenistic approach, they frame Palestine as a neutral, depoliticised object of academic inquiry. Even as decolonisation is invoked in abstract terms, Palestine is erased from acknowledgements, as if decolonisation was a static archive of the distant past, rather than a confrontation with the colonial present (Fúnez-Flores, 2024). As Hanna Al-Taher and Anna-Esther Younes (2024) warn, these same institutions will, in time, claim they were always on the right side of history, transforming Palestine into yet another white archive of objective knowledge: an object of detached, scientific observation, stripped of its political urgency and struggle.

Writing these reflections in a rather critical tone, I feel the necessity to clarify that my intention here is not to assign political blame to specific scholars individually, but rather to address silence and silencing on Palestine as a structural issue in academia. In this sense, I want to acknowledge how precarity, insecurity, overwork, anxiety, stress, and burnout are material and affective conditions we experience that shape our silences. These are the consequences of neoliberal academic politics and the effects of an ongoing debilitation, especially for early-career and precariously employed, racialised academics navigating colonial institutions in the Global North (Mohamed, 2024). Thus, the challenge we face, especially as precarious scholars, is double: not only how to speak and resist the erasure of a genocide, but also how to survive in systems that drain and wear us out, while rewarding our detachment and punishing our solidarity.

And so, amidst despair and frustration, anxiety and exhaustion, caught between resistance and compliance, passivity and action, numbed by the current sociopolitical climate and its management by academic institutions, I want to reflect on truth and objectivity, not only as instruments of epistemic oppression, but also as liminal spaces and potential vehicles of epistemic resistance. While frustration has permeated both political and academic circles, this mourning is not, as Judith Butler (2004) reminds us, a solitary act, but a collective one. Grief, as a political act and form of dependency, is not a return to the self, but a disorientation that opens us to others. However, as we (un) learn from queer critique (Cvetkovich, 2012; Halberstam, 2011; Muñoz, 2006), it is precisely within this collective failure, depression, insecurity, trauma, and vulnerability that hope becomes possible. It is there where we forge ties, come closer, and build our communities, in the cracks of structurally complicit academic spaces and in fleeting moments of collective solidarity.

And so, drawing on our shared vulnerability and affect, on pain, anger, outrage, disgust, horror, and grief, Palestine emerges not only as a political struggle, but also as an epistemic method of relationality and resistance that decentres the dilemma between the self and the other. A decolonial method that in the current reality becomes our epistemic and political anticolonial compass (Ivasiuc, 2025; Kabel, 2024) in destabilising, resituating, and even queering objectivity as a mode of creating counter-archives of truth. Not truth as the white neutrality that abjectifies Palestinian bodies rendering them disposable and ungrievable, as either victims or terrorists, but as a reimagination and reinscription of what has been delegitimised, because it refuses to serve whiteness and colonial power. A truth from below, spoken and recorded by those whose lives have been rendered impossible and unimaginable by dominant narratives of truth.

OBJECTIVITIES FROM BELOW

The questioning of objectivity and truth has long been central to critical theories. Critical race, decolonial, indigenous, poststructuralist, feminist, and

queer epistemologies have long before problematised the concepts of objectivity, impartiality, and truth, as reproduced within positivist, empiricist, and depoliticised academic frameworks. According to this critique, objectivity, despite being framed as neutral, rational, and disembodied, is discursively and affectively produced, shaped by unquestioned colonial and white-centred notions of belonging.

However, the brutal epistemological and epistemic normalisation of the genocide and the regularisation of censorship, silencing, and (police) violence in the name of neutrality and (academic) freedom of speech, which I tried to describe above, compels us to reflect further on this framing. Although, notions of objectivity and truth have historically served as conceptual frameworks for the production of colonial and heteropatriarchal knowledge, positioning racialised and feminised others as purportedly irrational and overemotional, in the current political framework the situation looks different. Simply put, in a context where blatant lies are presented as facts, objectivity and truth cannot only be dismissed as mere colonial constructs or systems of oppression. The violent distortion of lived experiences and material realities of the Palestinian people, political activists and academics, has made the need to reclaim, redefine, and renegotiate concepts such as objectivity and truth even more urgent.

Thus, while acknowledging the deep entanglement of objectivity and truth with structures of domination, I want to argue, by taking Palestine as both an urgent theoretical and political call and an analytical method, for the necessity of revisiting and reconceptualising these concepts as part of a broader anti-colonial struggle for justice. Palestine, as an embodied reality and a materiality that can no longer be negated or refused, becomes an analytical tool to mobilise and decolonise objectivity and truth in the way Donna Haraway (1997) envisions objectivity as a practice of seeing from below: a partial, situated, and embodied perspective that disrupts the epistemic violence of normative homogenised objectivity as proximity to whiteness and foregrounds the affective, material, and lived experiences of marginalised and racialised communities. In this sense, Palestine exposes entrenched power dynamics and unsettles the white archives of "impartial" knowledge. Rather than conforming to dominant discourses of erasure and silencing, Palestine forces us to reclaim objectivity as accountable, situated, and embodied. It asserts an urgent claim to a counter-archive of truth, one that registers the cruelty of the present, resists its erasure, and gestures toward a decolonial future that refuses the realism and cruel pragmatism of white neutrality as we experience it today.

Drawing on truth, as a genealogy of power relations through which knowledge is produced (Foucault, 1978), reimagining objectivity through Palestine rejects truth as universal, static, or decontextualised. Instead, it is a constant reminder that truth is not a neutral reflection of reality, but a site of conflict where what counts as knowledge is always entangled with structures of domination and resistance. In this way, truth as a contested and political terrain, shaped through situated power relations, epistemic struggles, and embodied positionalities becomes an assemblage, always partial and entangled, seeking to uncover what has been erased and silenced.

In this (un)making of truth, forming epistemic resistances and coalitions that expose the power relations played out in the history of objective truth's production is crucial. Under the current racist, white-supremacist, Zionist politics, which are simultaneously anti-feminist, anti-queer, and anti-trans, Palestine becomes a meeting point for coalitional politics and a collective claim to liberation. It becomes a collective refusal to be silenced, assimilated, or coopted, recognising that the oppression of some is the oppression of all and that none of us are free until all of us are free. This coalitional work demands that we mobilise the tools available to us, including concepts such as objectivity and truth, while remaining critically attuned to their histories, limitations, and the risks of being disciplined by them.

For this reason, taking Palestine as an epistemic re-

sistance and a method of narrating truth, our focus is on the marginal, the unrecognized, and the unregistered, aiming to restore its objectivity through redefining, resignifying and reregistering the concept from below. Instead of rejecting the idea of objectivity entirely, we reclaim it beyond the white-centred, logocentric, detached high theories established as universal knowledge, arguing for vulnerable, low, and weak objectivities as embodied, situated, feminist practices; objectivities that are simultaneously black, queer, trans, disabled, old, poor, not in essentialist or identitarian terms, but as alternative modalities of knowledge, as subjugated knowledges (Foucault, 1980), and as modes of imagining and building future worlds where marginalised material realities and lived experiences are being seen, heard, and recognised as truths because they matter; worlds in which we can breathe and coexist because we create and share our own objectivities beyond the normative violence of interlocking systems of oppression.

Through these lenses, Palestine, as a material reality that can no longer be negated or refused, becomes both the vision and the necessary precondition for an alternative decolonial future rooted in liberation and justice. Palestine as a method of narrating truth reminds us that decolonial theories are not metaphors or empty conceptual containers, but praxis; that decolonisation is not an abstract gesture, but an urgent, embodied demand, inseparable from the material conditions of liberation struggles. In this urgent present, Palestine emerges as a poetic, world-making horizon for imagining the future differently. Poetic, not in contrast to materiality and practice, and practice not as a quick, result-oriented, neoliberal demand for productivity, but as a continuous, generative process and an ongoing making-future that opens up a space of potentiality. A modality of dreaming, resisting, and materialising a collective future that, while fully recognising the brutality of the here-and-now, refuses the entrenched realism of dispossession, occupation, and subjugation, the violence of borders and the tyranny of nation-states as the only imaginable order. And this future, woven through our togethernesses and born of our truths and our struggles draws nearer; a fragile and vulnerable horizon, yet unmistakably real and true, even within the dystopian here-and-now.

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Inuit for Palæstina

AF KLAUDIA PETERSEN

Studerende ved Arktiske studier på Københavns Universitet og Inuk-kvinde fra Nunarput

ESSAY

Dette er et uddrag fra Petersens tale til den antiracistiske demonstration for Palæstina på Blågårds Plads, mandag den 19. april 2025.

Mit navn er Klaudia, og jeg er Inuk fra Nunarput – det, man i dag kolonialistisk kalder "Grønland". Tak for at have den tillid til mig, og det er mig en ære at kunne sige et par ord i dag.

Én af de ting som Europa sælger sig selv på, er at det er "moderne". Men sandheden er noget andet, som handler om magt.

For hvordan er det moderne at ødelægge eksisterende velfungerende veje og infrastruktur i Palæstina? Og bagefter udstille folk i vestlige medier, som om de skulle være primitive? Hvordan er det moderne, når man springer universiteter i luften i Palæstina?

Vi, Inuit, får at vide fra "verdens bedste kolonimagt", at de "bare" passer på os, indtil vi tager en uddannelse og selv kan varetage deres job. Det siger de, imens de er medskyldige i at veluddannede folk i Palæstina myrdes af de våben, som Danmark også tjener penge på.

Og mange Inuit har købt ideen om, at Inuit skal forblive hos den "fredelige danske kolonimagt". Men var det fredeligt, da den danske stat påtvang spiraler på unge piger? 12,-13,-14-årige piger fik at vide fra deres danske lærer, at de skulle gå ned til den danske læge. Pigerne vidste ikke, hvad det handlede om, og deres forældre fik heller ikke noget at vide - og de måtte i øvrigt heller ikke snakke om det (Jensen et. al., 2025). Flere tusinde kvinder og piger fik påtvunget spiraler, og 143 af dem har lagt sag an mod den danske stat (Greve Møller, 2024).

Spiralprogrammet var planlagt og tiltænkt at reducere udgifterne til en "umoderne" befolkning, der var i vækst - og alt det, imens Danmark tjente stort på "det hvide guld" (kryolit)(Bryant, 2025). Kulminebyen Qullissat blev tvangslukket i 1972. Ifølge danske myndigheder var byen ikke rentabel længere, og dens befolkning blev spredt ud over kysten. Men Qullissat var en by kendt for politisk opvågning; En by, hvor man kom med ytringer, som handlede om at være herre i eget hus. Og nu beskrives det i historiebøgerne, at folk bare har forladt byen (Rud, 2017, s. 264).

Nunarput har været "et tag-selv-bord" (Vaaben, 2020) af børn for Danmark. Min egen oldetante mistede sit eneste barn til et dansk par, som ønskede sig et barn. Min oldetantes hånd blev fastholdt og tvunget til at underskrive adoptionspapirerne, og fordi hun blev ved med at opsøge parret, som har fået hendes datter i sin kamp for at få sit barn tilbage, fik parret godkendt at afbryde deres arbejdskontrakt, og de forlod Nunarput med min oldetantes barn i armene (Dahlin, 2019). Strukturen fortsætter… I november 2024 fik en Inuk-kvinde bosat i Danmark tvangsfjernet sit barn af en dansk kommune, blot to timer efter fødslen. Kommunen mente, at hun trak for meget på sin Inuithed, og fordi barnet skulle vokse op i Danmark, var det bedst at barnet blev opdraget hos danske forældre (Mansø & Bøttcher, 2025). Inuk-barnet ser nu sin biologiske mor én time om ugen.

Jeg er blevet opfostret med ideen om, at Danmark beskytter os mod det "farlige Mellemøsten", og opbygget frygtbaseret foragt mod muslimer - men jeg ser nu, hvem der er den farlige: Den der dræber børn, bomber hospitaler og udsletter familier, og det er ikke palæstinensere.

Vi kalder os selv Inuit, og det inkluderer alle, når vi bruger det i vores eget sprog: Inuttut. For alle mennesker kaldes Inuit. Når vi siger, at "alle folk her står for medmenneskelighed", så siger vi "Inuit maaniittut tamarmik inuppalaassuuseq tunaartaraat".

Colonizer, can't you hear me? Can't you see me? Can't you feel for me?

What do you see?
What can you see?
Do you see an - evil demon, primitive wild, animal barbar?

What can I do?
How can I live?
Can I exist? Being myself, with human rights? not be otherized.

Please wake up! To see that I am just like you. Please wake up! To know that I have dreams like you. Please wake up! To see that I am human too!

Kære Palæstina, jeg ser den kvinde der klamrer sig til et oliventræ, som er blevet destrueret af besættelsen, jeg ser den militærbil bag hende, der nemt kunne have skudt hende, som de gør med så mange, jeg ser sorgen i hendes øjne, der er oprindeligheden i hende, der ser livet omkring hende som værende større end hende selv.

Viva viva viva Palæstina

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Henriette Berthelsen

Henriette Berthelsen er Inuk, født i Grønland og bosat i Danmark. Hun er uddannet sygeplejerske, psyko-familieterapeut og stifter af flere inuitforeninger.

Nipangeqqussanngilarma

Sivisuallaartumimmi nipangersimareersimavunga.

Taamaalioraluaruit iluaqutaanavianngilaq

Ullumikkumi ilisimaarilersimavara

Kinaanera qanoq nalutiginerit, nunannilu qanoq ittunik aqqusaagaqarsimanersunga.

Oqaluttuunniartuaannarparma

Ingerlaqqittariaqartunga tamakkulu utikulukkunnaaqqullugit

Ilumut paasisaqavissimanngilatit uanga nunanni susoqarsimaneranik

Atuaqatigiinngilagut illit qallunaaqqani atuaravit, Apartheidimisut

Inuit qanoq ittunik atugaqarsimanersut paasisimanngisaannarpat

Anaanaga illiaarsissimavoq aperineqaqqaanngivilluni

Tamatuminnga artorsaateqarnerujussuani pillugu ikiorserneqarsimanngisaannarpoq

Uanga amerlasooriarlunga spiralilerneqartarsimavunga, angajoqqaakka apereqqaarnagit

Uagut inuiaqatikkalu amerlavallaaleqinagatta

Qallunaat atuarfianni atuartitaavunga, oqaatsikka atorlugit oqamineruma isatsittarlunga

Aqqaneq marluinnarnik ukioqarlunga Danmarkiliartitaavunga, qallunaanngortitaaniassagama

Tamannali ajornarsimavoq

Isikkukkut takuneqarsinnaavoq Inuttut isikkoqartunga – uummatigalu Inuup uummatigaa

Kisianni ilungersortuarpusi qallunaanngortinniarlunga, oqaluuttuarpassingalu Inuttut inuuneq naleqanngitsuusoq kukkunerusorlu

Naggataatigullumi kukkusatut naleqanngitsutullu misigisimalerpunga.

Tamannali piviusup ilaminiinnannguaraa.

Kisiannili tamanna qanoq isumaqarnersoq paasisinnaagunanngilat

Ataqqineqannginneq anniaatinillu katsorsarneqannginneq qanoq innersoq paasisinnaanngilat.

Oqartarpusimi tamakkua saqqummiussorunnaartariaqarikka

Ingerlaqqitariartungalu nutaamik

Sumik pisoqarsimanngitsuusaartillugu

Pisariaqartippara paasissagimma

Tusaassagimma, isummakka tusarnaassagitit

Oqaatsikkalu ataqqillugillu akuerissagitit

Upperissagimma, oqaluttuakkami piviusuupput

Inooqqaaramali oqaluttuutilerpassinga naleqanngitsunga kukkusaasungalu

Inuugama, Inuttullu isikkoqarama

Paasisinnaaviuk qanoq innersoq taamatut pisaalluni nammineq nunagisami?

Nunanniit aallarussaanikuuvunga suli aqqaneq marlunnik ukioqalernanga, qallunaanngorsagaaniassagamaa

Ilaquttakka, nunaqarfiga nunagalu qimallugit

Suliarsili iluatsinngilaq - qallunaanngunngilangami

Kisianni oqaluttuutuarpassinga Inuttut naleqanngitsuusunga – uanga nammineq nunanni

Anaanaga illiaarsippoq, aperineqallannguarnani. Uangalu spiralilersorteqattaarpunga angajoqqaakka akuersiteqqaallannguarnagit

Tassami amerlavallaaleqqajaaleratta

Akissarsiakinnerutitaajuarpunga, Inuugama

Qaqortumik amillit atugarissaarnerutinneqarnerannik misigititaajuarpunga, mattussaasarpungalu periarfissanut, illit uanga nunanni uanniit atugarissarneruniassagavit

Uagullu pissaaneqarpallaalinnginniassagatta.

Kinaasunga nalullugu sinnerlugu aalajangiiuarputit

Ilikkarusunngilarma aamma tusarnaarusunngilarma

Qasseriarlutit oqarfigisarparma oqaluttuakka eqqunngitsuunerarlugit.

Illillu eqqortoq suunersoq nalunnginnertaarlugu.

Qinnuigissanngilarma nipangeqqullunga

TRANSLATION OF THE POEM TO DANISH

Du skal ikke bede mig holde min mund

Jeg har gjort det i alt for mange år

Det hjælper ikke, og jeg har fået en indsigt.

Hvor lidt du ved hvem jeg er, og hvad jeg har gået igennem i mit land.

Du bliver ved med at fortælle mig

at jeg skal videre og holde op med at snakke om de her ting

Du har virkelig ikke forstået, hvad der er foregået i mit land

Du gik i parallelklassen i den danske klasse under ”Apartheid”

Du har virkelig ikke forstået, hvad mit folk har gået igennem.

Min mor fik fjernet sin livmoder, uden at blive spurgt

hun fik aldrig behandlet sit kæmpetraume

Jeg fik mange spiraler uden, at mine forældre blev spurgt

Vi – mit folk – skulle jo endelig ikke blive for mange

Jeg gik i en dansk folkeskole og fik en lussing hvis jeg sagde noget på mit sprog

Jeg blev sendt til Danmark, da jeg kun var 12 år, for at jeg skulle gøres til en dansker, men det mislykkedes.

Det kunne ikke lade sig gøre.

Jeg lignede en Inuk, og mit hjerte var en Inuks

Men I fortsatte med at gøre jeres bedste for, at jeg skulle gøres til en dansker, og gjorde jeres bedste for at fortælle mig, at det at være en Inuk var værdiløst og forkert,

så jeg til sidst følte mig helt forkert og værdiløs.

Det er toppen af isbjerget.

Jeg tror ikke du forstår, hvad det betyder.

Hvad det betyder ikke at få det anerkendt og få det healet?

For I siger at jeg må holde op med at tage de ting frem

og komme videre – og starte en konstruktiv proces?

som om der ikke er sket noget.

Jeg har brug for at du forstår mig

at du hører mig – lytter til mig.

Og respekterer og accepterer, hvad jeg siger.

Tager mig alvorligt. For tingene er sket.

Du skal ikke bede mig om at holde min mund

Siden jeg blev født, har I fortalt mig, at jeg er forkert og værdiløs

Fordi jeg er en Inuk, og ser ud som en Inuk

Ved du overhovedet, hvad det betyder at blive behandlet på den måde i mit eget land?

Jeg blev fjernet fra mit hjem for at blive gjort til dansker siden jeg var 11-12 år.

Min familie, min bygd og mit land

Projektet mislykkedes, jeg blev ikke en dansker

men I fortsatte med at fortælle mig, at jeg er forkert og mindre værd – som Inuk – i mit eget land.

Min mor fik fjernet sin livmoder uden sit samtykke, jeg fik sat spiraler i uden mine forældres samtykke

For vi var ved at blive for mange

Jeg fik og får stadig mindre i løn, fordi jeg er Inuk

Jeg er udsat for White privillige og blacklistening, så du kan have det nemmere i mit land,

så vi ikke får for meget magt

Du tager beslutninger på mine vegne uden at kende mig

– du vil ikke kende mig – du lytter ikke til mig

og mange gange siger du, at det jeg fortæller, er forkert. At du ved bedre.

Du skal ikke bede mig holde min mund.

Aka Hansen

Filminstruktør, forfatter, debattør og aktivist, uddannet fra filmskolen Super16 i København i 2018.

ARTWORK

AT VÆRE RESPEKTERET I NUTIDEN OG FREMTIDEN

(Digt fra Manifesti, 2024)

De siger vi skal stoppe med at romantisere fortiden

At vort folk ikke var særlig romantiske

De var hedenske

Barbariske tilmed

Vi skal stoppe med at romantisere fortiden fordi vort folk angiveligt dræbte hinanden

Bloddrab

Hævntørstige, drabelige folk

De siger at kvinderne var underlagt strenge tabuer omkring menstruation

Tabuer for sex

Og fødsler

Jeg siger det giver ingen mening

Det virker dybt ulogisk

Jeg synes det lyder romantisk at være kvinde i fortiden

Det gad jeg vildt godt at prøve

Jeg siger vi skal romantisere fortiden fordi vi respekterede mennesker og dyr

Jorden

Planterne, vinden og vandet

Jeg romantiserer vort folk og fortællingerne og synet og respekten på alle

Og især respekten for kvinder

Jeg vil have lov til at romantisere fortiden fordi det lyder enormt romantisk at respektere livet og efterlivet

Jeg vil kræve min ret til at romantisere præcis den bæredygtige levevis vort folk havde

I pagt med og under Sila

Jeg romantiserer livet som et matriarkalsk folk

Det har jeg både lov og ret til

Så det vil jeg insistere på

At være en respekteret kvinde

Det vil jeg insistere på at være i nutiden og fremtiden

Sådan som kvinderne var i fortiden

Camilla Sejberg

Kriminolog og kunstner
med grønlandsk baggrund

ARTWORK


TOO MUCH INJUSTICE
TO FIT ON ONE SIGN
C. Sejberg
2025♡


C.Sejberg
2025♡

Sweden and Its Colonial and Racial Entanglements

BY ANDERS RIEL MÜLLER

/YEONJUN SONG

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IN REVIEW

Decolonial Sweden
Edited by Michael McEachrane, Louis Faye
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Routledge, 2025, $39,99

REVIEW

Decolonial Sweden is an anthology edited by Michael McEachrane and Louis Faye. According to the editors, it serves as a kind of follow-up to the 2001 anthology *Sverige och de Andra: Postkoloniala perspektiv [Sweden and the Others: Postcolonial Perspectives]*. The editors situate the book within the evolution of post- and decolonial studies in Swedish academia and political activism—a "decolonial turn"—which shifts the emphasis from:

> …notions of racial difference, identity, culture, representation, discourse, and narrative [to] a socio-political emphasis on racial conditions, social and international power relations, social and global justice, the global economy, climate change, and ecological destruction (p. 1).

This is a long and comprehensive book that spans numerous topics and theories, making it impossible to present it in full depth in a short review. Consequently, my summary cannot do full justice to the complexity and richness of each chapter or of the book as a whole.

The book is structured around three sections that each aim at challenging one of three dominant assumptions about Sweden:

1. Sweden is not implicated in the histories and legacies of European colonialism.
2. Race is not relevant to Swedish society or its global position.
3. Sweden is a progressively egalitarian welfare state that champions human rights, equality, and non-discrimination—non-racist and/or anti-racist, anti-colonial, and in solidarity with the Global South.

These assumptions frame the book's three sections.

SECTION I: SWEDEN'S COLONIAL ENTANGLEMENTS

The first section includes four contributions that explore Sweden's direct and indirect involvement in European colonialism. Håkan Thörn discusses Sweden's colonial engagements in Sápmi and the centrality of Sámi resistance in environmental political activism since the 1950s. Thörn highlights the contentious relationship to both the Swedish state and Swedish environmental organizations. Carla Lanyon-Garrido et al. present collaborative work between researchers and a Sámi sijda to build a decolonial Sámi understanding of landscapes and human–nature relations. This chapter highlights the ethical challenges of co-producing knowledge with Indigenous communities and the epistemological clashes that may arise.

Göran Collste shifts the focus to the Caribbean, examining whether Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Reparation Commission's inclusion of Sweden in its reparations demands is justified. Although a relatively minor colonial player, Sweden's complicity is evident through its acquisition of Saint Barthelemy in 1784, which operated as a free port for ships carrying enslaved Africans. Collste further argues that Sweden benefited not only from direct colonial possessions but also through its integration into the global colonial economy and should therefore engage constructively with CARICOM's demands.

In the final chapter of this section, comprising an email correspondence, several of the section's contributors reflect collectively on the continued denial of Sweden's colonial past and the importance of building decolonial Black and Sámi consciousness.

SECTION II: THE SWEDISH WELFARE STATE AND RACIAL POLITICS

The second section turns to the Swedish welfare state. Michael McEachrane traces its historical trajectory as a "racial social democracy," shaped by white supremacy from its explicit racist forms to its post-WWII racial politics. Inspired by the works of Charles W. Mills's conceptualization of white supremacy as a global socio-political system of race, the chapter

traces how the Swedish nation-state, and later the welfare state, has fundamentally been shaped within this system of white supremacy from its de jure or explicit racist forms to the de facto racial politics post-WWII. Paula Mulinari and Anders Neergaard explore the relationship between capitalism and racism in Sweden, analyzing labor market stratification and racial capitalism within male-dominated trade unions in Sweden.

Sarah Hamed and Beth Maina Ahlberg interrogate the Swedish health care system in chapter 8. They argue that Sweden's exceptionalist image obscures and denies racism within health care systems and practices, through arguments of neutrality and objectivity. The authors reflect on decolonization as an active, institutional promotion of anti-racism among health care staff, acknowledgement of Sweden's colonial history and complicity, and offers different pathways for decolonizing health care in Sweden.

Again, the final chapter of section comprises an email conversation between some of the section contributors, Domino Kai, Minoo Alinia, and Maribel Morey, in which they engage with and discuss ten decolonial propositions set forth by McEachrane.

SECTION III: SWEDEN'S GLOBAL COLONIALITY

The third section explores Sweden's global entanglements. Klas Rönnbäck and Oskar Broberg investigate the neo-colonial ventures of Swedish capital through the case of LAMCO in Liberia, illustrating racialized hierarchies in the global economy. Alf Hornborg critiques the ideology of progress linked to technological advancement and economic growth, proposing a decolonial economics rooted in a holistic understanding of humanity's role in the biosphere.

Maria Eriksson Baaz and Paula Mählck analyze structural racism in Swedish development assistance, highlighting white savior narratives and unequal economic privileges between Swedish and local staff. Seema Arora-Jonsson and Arvid Stiernström critique Sweden's 'green transition,' arguing that it perpetuates colonial exploitation of Sámi lands under the guise of sustainability. Yet again, the section concludes with an email correspondence, offering further reflections, this time on global ecological emergencies and their colonial origins.

I hope this summary conveys the breadth and scope of the book and how it illustrates the omnipresence of colonial legacies in contemporary Sweden. The book also demonstrates that decolonization is an immense endeavor with no simple answers or single method. This complexity may also be its limitation, as I found it difficult to tie the many chapters into a coherent whole. The email conversations that conclude each section may have been intended to do so, but rather than unifying the chapters, the conversations moved in new and other directions. While intellectually stimulating, they left me with a sense of unresolved reflection.

This unresolved feeling may stem from what I consider the book's greatest weakness: the limited theoretical and conceptual engagement with postcolonial and decolonial frameworks. The 'decolonial turn' that anchors the book is never fully unfolded or explored. How does it depart from the postcolonial? This is a missed opportunity, especially given the contributors' extensive experience in these fields. It would have been valuable to understand how their intellectual journeys have been shaped by this turn. For instance, the final email conversations seem like missed opportunities for the contributors to really reflect on how the chapters contribute to decolonial insights, which would have deepened the understanding of what precisely decolonial approaches add beyond the postcolonial.

Despite this, the book is a smorgasbord of insightful contributions. Each chapter stands on its own, but their collective impact is even greater. I recommend this book to anyone interested in Sweden's colonial past and present. Its breadth makes it a valuable resource for teaching across a wide range of subjects and disciplines.

Ph.d.-omtale: Ny formidabel, feministisk urfolksforskning

AV KJERSTIN UHRE

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IN REVIEW

Resisting unfinished colonial business in southern Sápmi Struggles over knowledges, worldviews and values

Ph.d. avhandling av Eva Maria Fjellheim (2024). Sámi dutkamiid guovddáš (Senter for samiske studier) ved UiT, Norges arktiske universitet, Tromsø.

Urfolk over hele verden kjemper mot kapitalistiske ekspansjoner og kolonisering – nå grønn – som, skapt av et behov for klimavennlig energi, forsterker klimaendringenes ødeleggelse av livsverdener og landskaper. I august 2024 forsvarte Eva Maria Fjellheim sin doktorgradsavhandling *Resisting unfinished colonial business in southern Sápmi: Struggles over knowledges, worldviews and values* ved UiT Norges Arktiske Universitet. Avhandlingen løfter fram sørsamiske verdikamper og bidrar på formidabelt vis til dokumenteringen av samiske tilnærminger til avkolonisering i en skandinavisk kontekst. Avhandlingen introduserer perspektiver på statens «strategiske ignoranse» i konsultasjoner og rettsprosesser i den norske delen av *Åarjel Saepmie*. Gjennom en metodikk som mobiliserer solidaritet og omsorg, følger Fjellheim de tre reinbeitedistriktene Gåebrien Sïjte, Jillen Njaarke Sïjte og Fovsen Njaarke Sïjte i kontroverser som finner sted i og rundt akademia, byråkratier og domstoler.

Avhandlingen bygger på ett bokkapittel og to artikler, alle publisert i anerkjente fagfellevurderte kanaler. Tekstene demonstrerer politisk engasjert forskning av høy kvalitet. Kappen er elegant disponert i seks kapitler og analyserer tydelig og kraftfullt sørsamiske reindriftsutøvernes kamp om kunnskaper, verdensbilder og verdier. Fjellheims forskning presenterer og vever den sammen forskjellige historier, øyeblikk og situasjoner som kan forstås som «etnografiske fragmenter» (Tsing, 2011) av bredere samiske kamper mot nordisk-samisk (grønn) kolonialisme.

KAMP OM KUNNSKAPER, VERDENSBILDER OG VERDIER

I Skandinavia er kolonialismen et ufullført prosjekt. *Unfinished Colonial Business* i tittelen trekker fram historiske linjer fra tidligere former for kolonisering til måten nåtidens grønne energiomstilling gjennomføres ved å fortrenge Samisk reindrift.

Kapittelet «Through our stories we resist» tar for seg akademias svik mot sørsamene som vises gjennom den lange historien om tap av beiteland, og hvordan møter med rasistisk og uetisk forskning rammet Fjellheims slekt i Gåabrien Sïjte – reindriftsdistriktet som familien hennes har forsvart i fem generasjoner.

Artikkelen «You can kill us with dialogue» omhandler konsesjonsprosessen rundt Øyfellet vindkraftprosjekt i Vaapste/ Vefsn kommune i Nordland fylke, som industrialiserer landskapene i Jillen Njaarke Sïjtes vinterbeiteområde.

'Dialoger' utforskes som omstridte rom, fulle av det Fjellheim beskriver som eksempler på epistemisk miskommunikasjon og bruk av strategisk ignoranse for å så tvil om reindriftssamiske kunnskapsutsagn. Fjellheim viser hvordan Jillen Njaarkes arbeid bestrider strukturene, innholdet og avgjørelsene i disse såkalte 'dialogene'.

Artikkelen «Wind energy on trial in Saepmie» omhandler konflikten rundt Roan og Storheia vindkraftverk på Fovsen Njaarke/ Fosenhalvøya. Fjellheim følger Fovsen Njaarke Sïjte gjennom to rettsaker, den siste i Høyesterett. Fjellheim kaller sin tilnærming en 'rettsetnografi'.

I kappen utvikler Fjellheim sin avkoloniserende tilnærming og oppsummerer forskningsspørsmålene. Hun spør: Hvordan de epistemiske kontroversene hun studerer er viklet inn i nordisk-samisk (grønn) kolonialisme. Hvordan utfordrer og motstår sørsamiske reindriftssamfunn og kunnskapsholdere koloniale antagelser om samisk reindrift og dens landskap? Hva slags epistemiske kontroverser ligger til grunn for de konkurrerende fortellingene og sannhetskravene? Fjellheim er også opptatt av hvordan hennes studie kan bidra til avkolonialiserende læring i kamper om samiske reindriftslandskap. Kapittelet løfter perspektiver på (auto)etnografi og forskningsetikk som vektlegger forskningsutmattelse, men også omsorg, og diskusjoner om aktivisme som en del av forskningen. Etter en oppsummering og diskusjon av de tre fagfellevurderte tekstene utforsker kappen utfordringer og muligheter i (forskning på) framtidige kamper om samiske reindriftslandskap.

AVKOLONISERENDE METODIKK

Viktigheten av relasjonell ansvarlighet i forskningspraksis går som en rød tråd gjennom avhandlingen. Fjellheim presenterer seg selv i henhold til en sørsamisk protokoll og deler sin tilhørighet til 'Sijte' (samfunn), 'laahkoe' (slekt) og 'maadtoe' (opphav). Ved å fortelle om sine relasjoner til livet i det samiske landskapet kommer hun leseren generøst i møte. Fjellheim illustrerer sin sørsamiske forankring gjennom en tegning av det sørsamiske teltet, 'låavtege', som rommer 'Sijte', 'laahkoe', og 'maadtoe' organisert rundt et ildsted. Inspirert av Porsanger (2011) bruker hun 'válddahagat', den nordsamiske benevnelsen for en grunnkonstruksjon av tre y-formede staur som låses i en pyramideform som stabiliserer konstruksjonen for det man vil bygge. De tre staurene i 'låavtegees' sirkulære form representerer det å være, å kunne, og å verdsette. Forskerens fotspor er tegnet inn som en mindre sirkel mellom det epistemologiske hjemmet, 'låavtege', og forskningsaktivitetene.

Autoetnografisk skriving tillater Fjellheim å vende tilbake til motstand, refleksivitet og situasjon, og til å gjøre sitt beste for å bidra til kollektivt velbefinnende, som er en viktig del av Fjellheims avkoloniserende metodikk. Hun søker bevist feltsteder og kilder til informasjon som minimerer behovet for forskningsdeltagelse fra lokalbefolkning, reineiere og aktivister, og bygger en posisjon som går over fra deltagelse til et fokus på relasjonell ansvarlighet. Empirien er dermed samlet fra mange feltsteder: momenter med politisk mobilisering, konsultasjoner og dialoger med statlige og bedriftsaktører, juridiske prosesser og dokumenter, samt hennes egen levde erfaring i det sørsamiske landskapet og familiens møter med norsk kolonisering og dens fortellinger i fem generasjoner.

(GRØNN) KOLONIALISME

Norge har som mål å være i front både når det gjelder bærekraft og urfolksrettigheter. Samtidig blir reindriftslandskapene kontinuerlig omdisponert til annen bruk. Konsultasjoner og dialog skal sikre at alle berørte i en sak blir hørt, men å innkalle noen til en dialog åpner ikke nødvendigvis for å endre standpunkt. Samisk reindrift er eksponert for klimaendringene og lider under klimatiltakene. Samtidig blir reindriften beskylt for stå i veien for det grønne skiftet og annen utvikling. Narrativet om sameksistens mellom reindriften og ulike industrielle landskapsinngrep er nødvendig for staten, prosjekteiere og utbyggere. Energiselskapet Fosen Vind hevdet at reindriftsutøvere har en plikt til å tilpasse seg samfunnets behov, slik det framgår av ekspropriasjonsloven. Fovsen Njarke Sijtes vitne hevdet derimot at samiske reindriftsutøvere har en plikt til å beskytte landskapet og ta vare på det (Fjellheim 2023a).

Reinens trekkleier, årstidsbeiter og reindriftens drivleier er lovbeskyttet. Hvis utbyggere kan påvise at sameksistens er mulig, kan de hevde at naturinngrepene ikke bryter mot reindriftsutøvernes rettigheter til å utøve sin kultur. Fjellheims funn viser *strategisk ignoranse* av kunnskap som ikke passer inn i myndighetenes agenda, påvirker beslutningsprosesser. Ved å bruke Blasers (2009) begrep 'worlding practices', analyserer Fjellheim konkurrerende påstander om sannhet – som bevis, som forsøk på å skape tvil. Maktasymmetrier i kunnskap og beslutningstaking favoriserte kapitalistiske og (grønne) koloniserende interesser.

Norges Høyesterett avgjorde i 2021 enstemmig at Roan og Storheia på Fosen – Europas største landbaserte vindenergianlegg – bryter med menneskerettighetene til reindriftssamene i Fovsen Njaarke Sijte. Retten argumenterte for at deres rettigheter i henhold til ICCPR, artikkel 27 ble krenket. Regjeringen unnlot å agere i to år, inntil tretten unge menneskerettighetsforkjempere okkuperte Olje- og Energidepartementet og utløste massive og langvarige protester mot at regjeringen ikke rettet seg etter en Høyesterettsavgjørelse.

EN VIKTIG FORSKERSTEMME

Denne forskningen representerer en banebrytende, intim og kompromissløs analyse av kontinuiteter, brudd og innovasjoner i samisk engasjement og motstand mot norsk kolonisering og asymmetriske maktforhold. Beherskelsen av samiske akademiske tekster, avkoloniserende teori og metodologi er mer enn imponerende. Hennes bruk av slik litteratur er målrettet, og hun utdyper og bidrar selvstendig til eksisterende analyser. Hun viderefører i vesentlig grad allerede banebrytende arbeid om samiske epistemologier og landskapsrelasjoner. Den engasjerte, avkoloniserende metodikken er unik og gjennomtenkt utformet i forhold til samfunnets sosiale relasjoner, rom og forståelser – spesielt tilpasset med raffinement og omsorg for sørsamiske livsverdener. Hennes komparative erfaringer fra andre urfolkskontekster er vevd inn i hennes samlede arbeid og gir ytterligere dybde. Samlet sett framhever kappen sentrale temaer fra de tre publikasjonene på måter som i betydelig grad utvider disse tekstene. Engasjementet med teori demonstrerer dyp langsiktig dedikasjon. Dybden i forståelsen av settingen og detaljene er solid politisk antropologi.

Skandinavia er ikke i stand til å beskytte reinbeitelandene gjennom de styringsstrukturene som eksisterer i dag. Kapasiteten til å leve på ulike måter minker i takt med at natur bygges ned. Hele livsverdener er i ferd med å forsvinne. Fjellheim avstår fra å ta en nøytral posisjon i forskning som omhandler brudd på menneskerettigheter, og agerer i spennet mellom aktivisme, solidaritet og akademisk arbeid.

NOTES

[1] Ph.d.-omtalen bygger på bedømmelsesudvalgets rapport. I 2023 ble Fjellheim hedret med Emma Goldman Awards for sine fremragende prestasjoner og bidrag til feministisk forskning knyttet til maktforhold mellom urfolk og myndigheter

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Navigating the Homonational Boundaries of Queerness in Sweden

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IN REVIEW

Boundaries of Queerness. Homonationalism and Racial Politics in Sweden

Katharina Kehl

Bristol University Press. 2024.

180 pages. 85.99 GBP

With *Boundaries of Queerness. Homonationalism and Racial Politics in Sweden* (2024), Katharina Kehl offers a timely and thought-provoking analysis of how LGBTQ-friendliness is mobilised as a boundary-making tool in contemporary Sweden. At just 180 pages, the book presents a rich and conceptually ambitious analysis highlighting the entanglements of race, sexuality, and nation in liberal democratic politics, which complicate notions around Swedish exceptionalism. With a clear normative commitment to social justice and a careful engagement with existing theoretical debates, Kehl (2024: 7) moves the discussion on homonationalism forward by focusing less on what it *is* and more on what it *does*.

QUEER BELONGING IN THE NATION

Kehl's central thesis is that LGBTQ rights discourses in Sweden – often framed through a national self-understanding of exceptional progressiveness – are used as 'boundary markers' (2), delineating the "right kind of queer" while marginalizing others.

Kehl offers a dynamic understanding of how norms of queerness are co-constituted through racialization, geopolitics, and gender in Sweden through three empirical case studies: the controversial "Pride Järva" organized by Swedish right-wing populists; the use of rainbow flags alongside Swedish military symbols in promotional campaigns; and the Instagram narratives of racialized queer activists in Sweden. These case studies illustrate how queer visibility, pride, and belonging are never neutral, but are instead always shaped by broader regimes of inclusion and exclusion. Importantly, Kehl does not shy away from asking difficult questions: When queerness is framed through national pride and security, whose queerness is being protected and whose is being erased?

Drawing on the concept of homonationalism as developed by Jasbir K. Puar (2007), Kehl is attentive to how racialized subjects, especially those read as Muslim, are positioned within or excluded from, the boundaries of national belonging. By reorienting the analytical lens to examine *what homonationalism does*, rather than merely diagnosing it, Kehl follows Puar's (2017) proposition of carefully translating homonational tendencies to a new locality. With this, Kehl adds to the growing literature of homonationalism in Scandinavia and specifically Sweden (e.g., Lagerman, 2024; Liinason, 2023). Rather than an analysis of national politics, Kehl draws out homonationalism on different scales of being positioned within Swedish society.

BOUNDARY MAKING AND BINARIES

One of the most compelling aspects of the book is its sustained theoretical attention to questions of belonging and (un)intelligibility. In the tension between potentially wanting to be recognised, while simultaneously being rendered unintelligible through the workings of racialisation, Kehl asks: "Now, finding yourself to be fundamentally unintelligible within a certain context, a community of belonging, a process of boundary making – is that the experience of ultimate violence, or ultimate freedom?" (2024: 42). Throughout the different chapters of the book, Kehl sensibly demonstrates that the answer to this question hinges on the intersecting positionalities of those navigating this exact tension.

The metaphors of 'boundaries' and 'borders' allow Kehl to analyse how processes of racialized exclusion operate even within discourses of inclusion. However, they also introduce certain tensions of their own. While Kehl explicitly acknowledges the instability of boundary-making practices (8), one might question whether the continued reliance on metaphors of boundaries and borders inadvertently reifies the binaries the book seeks to unsettle. As Kehl herself notes, "boundary making and belonging are frequently more complex, ambivalent and contested than the obvious either-or binaries it promotes" (36). At the same time, the book occasionally revisits binary frameworks, for instance, when asking "on which side of the imagined boundary we will be placed" (32)? These are moments where the analysis could have benefited from a more nuanced departure from binary frameworks.

ETHICAL REFLEXIVITY AND METHODOLOGICAL LIMITS

Methodologically, the book is marked by ethical sensitivity and a thoughtful feminist and queer positionality. Kehl is transparent about the challenges of researching marginalized communities without appropriating their voices. This leads to a reliance on public, digital narratives, particularly Instagram posts shared by racialized LGBTQ activists, instead of direct interviews. While this approach avoids the pitfalls of extractive research, it also means that the book occasionally lacks the depth of first-hand, dialogic engagement. Kehl's decision not to 'give voice to' others aligns with postcolonial critiques of representation, but it also raises difficult questions about how knowledge is produced and circulated in academic settings. Also in this book, "it seems there is no easy way to solve the question of knowledge production in relation to racialized and Othered minorities" (Khawaja, 2023: 183).

A TIMELY AND THOUGHTFUL CONTRIBUTION

Despite these limitations, *Boundaries of Queerness* is an important and generative book. Its conceptual rigor, ethical care, and political urgency make it a valuable resource for scholars in queer studies, international relations, political science, and critical race theory. Kehl's insistence that we must critically interrogate the conditions under which queerness becomes legible or illegible, and for whom, is a necessary intervention in ongoing debates about inclusion, citizenship, and recognition. Kehl presents compelling empirical material and analyses it with great theoretical depth. For scholars and students looking to understand how sexuality, race, and nationalism intersect in the making of modern Europe, *Boundaries of Queerness* will offer important insights.

In a moment when LGBTQ rights are both weaponized by the far-right and under attack globally, *also* in Scandinavia (Alm & Engebretsen Lund, 2022), Kehl's analysis offers a crucial reminder: visibility is not always liberation, and rights do not guarantee freedom for all. Therefore, Kehl concludes: "Carving out liveable queer lives for ourselves in this situation might require, if nothing else, an acute awareness of the many ambiguities and contingencies that undermine *any* absolute claim to coherence of such attempts at delineating belonging." (Kehl, 2024: 137)

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End Academic Complicity Now!

BY FEMINISTS AGAINST GENOCIDE

DEBATE

PREAMBLE

We issue this statement to support ongoing efforts to demand that universities – a sector we inhabit – act on their social responsibility to do their part in stopping Israel's genocide in Gaza and the oppression and dispossession of the Palestinian people. For over two years, students, staff, and activists inside and beyond academia have protested the State of Israel's current onslaught through petitions, open letters, statements, public meetings, demonstrations, walk-outs, strikes, encampments, and building occupations, urging universities to end collaborations with Israeli institutions and use boycott as a form of political pressure. We aim to contribute to these efforts because universities, through their partnerships and resources, are complicit in Israel's atrocities and must take responsibility as institutions of knowledge and wield their power to oppose its genocide in Gaza and the unchecked expansion of the ethnic cleansing directed against Palestinians.

We, the authors of this statement, write from within Western European universities, which are deeply implicated in the roles that European countries and institutions play in sustaining Israel's atrocities, systemic oppression, and dispossession of the Palestinian people. We also write in solidarity with feminists from the global South(s) and Europe's East, who continue to wage their own context-specific struggles against neo-imperial discursive, material, and political violence, and whose solidarities with the Palestinian people highlight the crucial importance of multidirectional de/anticolonial movements. This situatedness is also reflected in this statement, which does not claim to represent varied academic contexts worldwide. We have chosen to write this feminist statement as a way to build mobilization across different feminist academic communities. We envision it as a resource for continued organising within universities – pushing governing bodies to cut ties with Israeli institutions, demanding an end to the genocide in Gaza, creating systemic support for Palestinian students and scholars, and sustaining pressure against Israeli violence in its many systemic forms. Making this situatedness explicit is important, as it clarifies both the position from which we speak and the limits of our statement. At the same time, we invite all, world-wide, academic staff, educators, students, activists, and civil society members to support it by signing, and to use it – or a contextually adapted version – in their efforts at their own universities.

FEMINIST RESPONSIBILITY

> From Angela Davis we understand that justice is indivisible; we learn this lesson time and again from Black, Indigenous, Arab, and most crucially, Palestinian feminists, who know that 'Palestine is a Feminist Issue'
>
> (Gender Studies Departments in Solidarity with Palestinian Feminist Collective, n.d.)

As continuously demonstrated by the work of Palestinian scholars and activists in Palestine and diaspora over decades: Palestine is a feminist issue. As Palestinian journalist Mariam Barghouti reminds: "A feminist who is not also anti-colonial, anti-racist and in opposition to the various forms of injustice is selectively and oppressively serving the interests of a single segment of the global community" (Barghouti, 2017).

Feminism, at its core, demands justice, liberation, and an end to all systems of oppression for all peoples. Just as intersectional feminist and queer scholarship has long interrogated and challenged interconnected systems of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism, classism, (settler)colonialism, antisemitism, anti-Muslim racism, state violence, and imperialism, it must also oppose Israel's settler colonial project and its practices of choking Palestinian life, and the intensifying ethnic cleansing in the West Bank at this time as well as the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Since October 2023, the Israeli state has launched one of the deadliest assaults in recent history, killing over 64.656 and injuring over 163.503 Palestinians, and displacing more than 2.1 million people (OCHA, 2025). But the number of killed Palestinian people

may be much higher according to The Lancet, which already in June 2024 suggested that the killing in Gaza could claim many more lives than the official reports indicate, with an estimate of 186.000 Palestinians killed by Israel by the end of the onslaught (Khatib et al., 2024). Another study published in The Lancet suggests that the number of direct deaths in Gaza has been underreported by 41% (Jamaluddine et al., 2023). For almost two years, entire families have been obliterated by relentless bombardment, traumatising the entire population of Gaza and beyond. The environmental destruction in Gaza is unparalleled, as Israel has been systematically targeting agricultural farmlands, infrastructure, water sources, and turning cities into rubble, thereby compounding the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the displacement of Palestinians (Forensic Architecture, 2024). Israel is also systematically targeting the education sector in Gaza. By May 2024, all universities in Gaza had been destroyed or damaged (MEE, 2024). As of September 2025, total of 179 public schools was destroyed, and 118 public schools and 100 UNRWA schools were bombed and vandalised. Israel killed 17.935 school students, 1.301 university students, and 232 university staff, and injured 2.791 university students, 3.193 schoolteachers, and 1.446 university staff (https://gazaeducationsector.palestine-studies.org).

More than crimes against humanity, this is a genocide as well as a continuation of over 75 years of settler colonialism, apartheid and impunity – of 75 years of physically, psychologically, legally and militarily violent dispossession, occupation, and unequal laws that are designed to suffocate all aspects of Palestinian life and the right to political self-determination. This violence manifests through discriminatory laws, the fragmentation and walling off of communities, regulating and proscribing travel, ruthless attacks and expulsions from homes, sexualised violence, illegal occupation of Palestinian land, and the systematic use of administrative detention to imprison without knowledge of the allegation or expectation of a trial. These forms of Zionist-settler-colonialism are deeply rooted in European colonialism. In addition, the current genocide in Gaza is a continuation of the Nakba of 1948, when over 750.000 Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their land to maximize the territorial control of the new state of Israel. According to Ilan Pappé, this was one of the largest forced migrations in modern history, a "premeditated and systematic act of ethnic cleansing carried out by Zionist forces" (Pappe, 2006).

In January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found strong plausibility that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, and in May 2025 renowned genocide scholars, such as Raz Segal and colleagues from the Netherlands, US, UK, Australia, Croatia and Canada unanimously concluded that Israel's military operations in Gaza meet the legal threshold of genocide (Van Laarhoven et al., 2025). In August 2025 the International Association of Genocide Scholars declared that Israel's policies and actions in Gaza constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity and meet the legal definition of genocide (IAGS, 2025). These were followed in September 2025 by a report by the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel, concluding that Israel has committed four of the five genocidal acts defined by the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (OHCHR, 2025).

Humanitarian bodies such as Amnesty International, The Center for Constitutional Rights (US), the UN special rapporteur on the occupied Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese, and Human Rights Watch have all corroborated that there is sufficient evidence that Israel's onslaught in Gaza since 7 October 2023 amounts to genocide. While these reports are important, as feminists we need to remain critical of these institutions' entanglement in the global power structures and their failure to stop the Israeli occupation, the expansion of settlements, and the genocide in Gaza.

Today, Israel continues to occupy the West Bank and aggressively expand settlements in clear violation of international law. Despite repeated calls by the In-

ternational Court of Justice and the United Nations to halt these actions (UN, 2022a, 2022b; ICJ 2024), the Israeli state proceeds with absolute impunity, systematically shielded and buttressed in varying degrees by Western powers. While at the July Emergency Conference in Bogota 30 countries from mostly the Global South devised actionable diplomatic, legal and economic measures to put pressure on Israel to stop the genocide in Gaza and to prevent transfer of weapons to Israel (The Hague Group, 2025), most of the Western European countries limited their newly awakened capacity to question Israeli actions to words of condemnation at the most (UK Government, 2025). Despite the International Criminal Court's issuing of arrest warrants for multiple Israeli government officials (ICC, 2024), most notably Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant, no arrests have been made. The charge against the so-called Western community that they continue to lack the political will to stop this genocide is legitimate. Based on this well-supported impunity, the State of Israel has since been emboldened to expand its ground offensive in Gaza City, and in recent months, to intensify military interventions in Lebanon, Syria, Qatar, and Iran, and to intercept boats and kidnap crews of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition and of Global Sumud Flotilla.

Meanwhile, in Gaza, the humanitarian situation continues to worsen into a horrific situation for those who remain (UN, 2025). Israel deliberately denies food, water, fuel, and medical supplies to over two million people, plunging them into catastrophic conditions. Hospitals have been bombed, and medical care has collapsed. Accessing scarce humanitarian aid has become a deadly risk, as widely reported in media covering the massacres of Palestinians trying to reach food distribution sites run by the Israeli and US-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) (Trew & Hall, 2025). Man-made famine, mass starvation and malnutrition are spreading across Gaza, killing more than 360 people by August 2025 ("Israeli-induced starvation", 2025) despite trucks loaded with supplies waiting to enter, prompting over 100 humanitarian organisations urgently to call for action (Gritten, 2025; Oxfam, 2025; Tantesh & Graham-Harrison, 2025). This weaponization of basic needs is part of a systematic strategy to render Palestinian life unliveable – another manifestation of genocidal intent.

SCHOLASTICIDE, SOPHICIDE, AND REPROCIDE

> Education is the practice of liberation.
>
> (Palestinian Feminist Collective, n.d.b)

A central part of Israel's genocide in Gaza is what Karma Nabulsi called scholasticide. As scholars at Birzeit University explain, in Palestine scholasticide takes place as "the systematic destruction by Israeli forces of centres of education" (Right to Education Campaign, 2009). In the past two years, Israel has damaged 95.2% of schools and cut off from education 720,000 students (Sobh et. al., 2025a). Gaza's university presidents describe this as "a systematic and deliberate attempt to eliminate our universities, their infrastructure, faculty, and students" (Sobh et. al., 2025b). Scholasticide in Palestine forms part of a broader sophicide, "the deliberate annihilation of Indigenous knowledge traditions … through the systematic murder of mentors, teachers, researchers, scholars, academics, writers, librarians, archivists, spiritual leaders, historiographers, creatives, poets, interns, lecturers, professors, staff, and lab technicians" (Palestinian Feminist Collective, n.d.-b) and the destruction of schools, libraries, and archives. These attacks are reinforced by censorship, intimidation, and repression that erase Palestinian histories and intellectual memory and extend to the West Bank, where the IOF has repeatedly stormed Palestinian universities, including Birzeit University, invaded 23 times since 2022 (Birzeit University Council, 2024).

In the Palestinian context, reproduction is both a counterforce to genocide and an act of resistance that carries knowledge, culture, and identity. Palestinian feminists have shown that reproductive rights are directly targeted by Israeli occupation and form a cen-

tral part of the ongoing processes of ethnic cleansing and of genocide in Gaza. As the Palestinian Feminist Collective asserts, Israel is committing reproductive genocide: policies and practices that undermine the capacity of communities under occupation, siege, settler colonialism, and imperial warfare to nourish life and future generations. This includes gendered and sexual violence against women, men, and children, collective punishment and mass incarceration, psychological warfare, and forced conditions of unlivability (Palestinian Feminist Collective, n.d.c). As reproductive justice scholars argue, these forms of violence structure life under Israeli occupation and siege and are an integral part of the ongoing genocide in Gaza (Shoman, 2025). The Institute for Palestinian Studies calls this practice reprocide.

Scholasticide, sophicide, and reprocide are feminist issues as they expose how systems of colonial violence target education, knowledge, and reproduction as interconnected sites of life-making. These attacks reveal the entanglement of gendered, racialised, and colonial power relations, making clear that struggles against genocide in Palestine resonate across diverse feminist analyses of oppression and resistance.

NO PRIDE IN GENOCIDE AND SETTLER-COLONIALISM

> We, Palestinian queers, position our movement for liberation alongside anticolonial and anti-racist movements globally, and we stand firmly in objection to any attempt to hijack our movements, or exploit our bodies.
>
> (Queers in Palestine, n.d.)

As alQaws reminds us, "[q]ueer liberation is fundamentally tied to the dreams of Palestinian liberation: self-determination, dignity, and the end of all systems of oppression" (alQaws, 2021). This affinity has been visible in anti-genocide and pro-Palestinian protests across campuses and beyond, where queer, feminist, and anticolonial struggles come together to confront Israel's violence and demand accountability. Organisations such as alQaws and Queers in Palestine emphasise that while homophobia and transphobia persist, they cannot be separated from Israel's colonial violence, which seeks to erase both Palestinian life and queer existence.

Israeli soldiers' use of rainbow flags on the ruins of Gazan homes and land, alongside boasts of sexual violence, shows how queer symbols are weaponised to mask atrocities. As Nada Elia (2023) points out, pinkwashing fragments Palestinian society internally, erases queer Palestinian cultural identity and history, and silences the long-standing work of groups like alQaws, Aswat, and PQBDS. Israeli government is spending millions of euros for self-promotion as a queer-friendly state conceals its own pervasive homophobia while exploiting queer struggles as tools of colonial domination. The IOF's longstanding practice of using personal information, including details of sexuality and gender, for blackmailing and extortion targets queer Palestinians in particular. The strategy of pinkwashing is used to legitimise genocide and occupation while silencing queer Palestinian voices. As alQaws (2020) argues, this is a form of colonial violence that weaponizes queer experience against Palestinian communities, erases the history and contributions of queer Palestinians, and seeks to fragment Palestinian society. In reality, pinkwashing operates as a weapon of settler colonialism, advancing Israel's project of elimination of all Palestinians, including queers.

Palestinian queer existence and struggle reveal how the fight against genocide, settler colonialism, and occupation is inseparable from struggles against heteropatriarchy, transphobia, racism, ablism, and imperial domination – and why solidarity across queer, feminist, and decolonial movements is essential.

UNIVERSITIES MUST NOT BE COMPLICIT

> I witnessed unspeakable things. The scenes I witnessed defy all words; no language could ever encompass these horrors, but I will try my best to

> describe what I saw. As we moved from one place to another, I saw the bodies of martyrs piled in the streets, getting mauled by animals. I saw entire families getting buried in empty lands along the roads. I heard the cries of children, the weeping of widows, and the despairing howls of men. I saw the tears of paramedics, doctors, journalists, police officers, and rescue workers. I heard the whimpers of the wounded, still buried under the rubble of their own homes, trapped for hours, awaiting their fate with nobody being able to dig them out. Their cries still haunt me at night, and I find myself wishing I could go back to them, sit by them, and console them – even if only with words. I saw beautiful ancient sites turned into ruins, and I saw the schools, universities, institutions, and training centers that shaped me as a person razed to the ground.
>
> (Institute for Women´s Studies BU, n.d.)

Universities claim to develop socially impactful research and to be grounded in principles of academic freedom. Yet as the genocide unfolds, many institutions remain silent or assert "neutrality" – a stance that, in the face of atrocity, amounts to complicity. Simultaneously, some have actively repressed dissent: cancelling events, presenting distorted framings of activists in the media, censoring speech, dismantling student encampments, and calling the police on their own protesting students and staff.

Both public and private universities, through their dependence on governmental funding and regulations, are public institutions that have a responsibility to align with human rights legislation. This also means, following the ICJ's rulings, taking measures to prevent genocide in Gaza. For universities, this means using their symbolic, cultural, and economic power to put pressure on the elected governments of their nations to take action to stop the genocide, and to stop universities' institutional collaboration with Israel. Instead, many European universities betray these commitments as they are deeply entangled with the Israeli education-military-security establishment, either directly or tangentially, thereby supporting and even funding Israeli military projects ("Dutch universities linked", 2025), the weapons industry, and apartheid politics. As European Scholars for Human Rights (2024) argued: "Israeli universities are an inextricable element of the military research and development complex, developing weapons and surveillance technologies to be tested in the occupied Palestinian territories, in close collaboration with all major Israeli weapons manufacturers. Furthermore, Palestinian students are systematically targeted and oppressed within Israeli higher education institutions".

Universities' lack of action is not a break from tradition – it is a continuation of it. Western universities have long been complicit in colonial violence: generating knowledge that justified European empire, erasing Indigenous peoples, and legitimizing transatlantic slavery. Today, by maintaining ties with Israeli universities, companies, and institutions complicit in state violence, and by suppressing pro-Palestinian voices that are naming and opposing their subjugation, universities are once again choosing to be on the wrong side of history. Universities and we as scholars have a responsibility! Our institutions are embedded in systems of power, and we must reckon with their historical and present-day entanglements with violence, oppression, and colonialism. As Dennis Hogan (2024) asks: "How can business as usual not cease when business as usual is so murderous?". The answer is: we must act now by ending our collaborations with Israeli institutions, putting pressure on our national governments, and by standing in solidarity with the Palestinian people. As Western European universities rightly condemned the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine and many cut ties with Russian institutions – which is crucial considering the ongoing legacy of Russian genocidal violence against Ukrainians (Finkel, 2022) – they should also act against the genocide in Gaza and ethnic cleansing of Palestine. As feminist scholars we must work to challenge all forms of oppression, imperialism, colonialism, and dispossession. As Pratt et al. (2025, 229) argue:

The unconditional support of Western states and their allies for the genocidal war on Palestinians, which coincides with the rise of far-right movements in Europe and other parts of the world, makes it imperative for feminists to recognize and act on the interconnectedness of these oppressive systems.

As scholars, students, and staff, we must demand that our universities live up to their social and institutional responsibility and exercise their power. Across the world universities such as University of the Western Cape, Ghent University, Trinity College Dublin and Queen's University Belfast have committed to full boycott, sanctions and divestment of Israeli institutions (Academics for Palestine, n.d.). This proves that European Universities' full divestment from Israeli institutions is not only possible – it is necessary and achievable.

Universities must not remain silent. We all must act!

OUR DEMANDS TO UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH INSTITUTIONS

We reaffirm our ethical and feminist obligation to stand against the Israeli state's apartheid, occupation, and genocide. We call on all university staff, students, and institutional leadership to take the following actions:

1. **End institutional collaborations with Israeli universities, institutions, and companies complicit in occupation and violence by joining the academic boycott, in line with the Palestinian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (PACBI). This is not a boycott of individuals, but of Israeli institutions.**

2. **Use your symbolic, cultural, and economic power to actively advocate for an immediate end to the genocide in Gaza and to the settler colonial occupation of Palestinian land.**

3. **Support the rebuilding of the Palestinian education system in Gaza.**

4. **Support Palestinian researchers and students with research grants and scholarships.**

5. **Uphold the right to protest by supporting and protecting colleagues and students who face censorship, discipline, or retaliation for speaking out on and for Palestine.**

We call on the academic community to reject complicity and take a principled stand. Where university governments fail, we must speak and act.

HOW TO USE THIS STATEMENT

We encourage you to actively circulate this statement within your academic communities. Bring it to your institutes, departments, faculties, and university governing bodies such as department heads, deans, rectors, university boards and councils and your staff or student representatives and request their response to the statement's demands. Use the statement to mobilise collective action within your institutions. Use it as a starting point for discussion or debate. If your institution refuses to endorse the statement or fulfil its demands, we urge you to document their refusal and the reasoning behind it. Finally, help amplify its reach by sharing it widely, through email, social media, and your professional and academic networks.

SIGNATURES

We invite all, world-wide, scholars, university staff, educators, students, activists, and civil society members to sign this letter, and we encourage signatories to share its content and demands with their university leadership, institutes, and departments, and governing bodies to ask them to sign as well. The statement can be signed by individuals, institutes, and universities. The list of first signatories is in alphabetical order.

FEMINISTS AGAINST GENOCIDE

NONE OF US IS FREE UNTIL
ALL OF US ARE FREE.

You can sign the statement here:
Click here to sign the statement

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