



Book Review of Hoegaerts, Josephine, Liimatainen, Tuire, Hekanaho, Laura and Peterson, Elizabeth (Eds.) 2022. *Finnishness, Whiteness and Coloniality*. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press. 373 pp.

BOOK REVIEW

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Finnishness, Whiteness and Coloniality addresses the important topic of coloniality and race in the construction of Finnishness, which has previously been underinvestigated in the Finnish context. The book is co-edited by Josephine Hoegaerts, Tuire Liimatainen, Laura Hekanaho and Elizabeth Peterson. The editors' backgrounds are in historical, cultural and language studies, and they have all conducted research on the construction of identities and boundaries focusing on different aspects, such as citizenship, ethnicity, gender and language attitudes. The interdisciplinary book discusses the relationship between Finnishness, race and coloniality from multiple perspectives and contexts, from history to the present, offering a comprehensive understanding of the three themes.

The book consists of an introduction written by the editors of the book, four different parts each containing three scientific chapters, and an afterword written by Suvi Keskinen. In the first part of the book entitled 'Imaginations of Finnishness', three chapters address how the imagined ethnic homogeneity of Finns has been constructed around whiteness in genetics, cultural heritage and historical myths. Aaro Tupasela problematizes how population genetics provide evidence for narrow definitions of Finnish nationhood and Finnish identity by, for example, excluding minorities from analysis (Chapter 1). Continuing on the reproduction of a limited view of Finnishness, Heidi Henriikka Mäkelä examines how photographs of the National Inventory of Living Heritage provide normative representations of Finns as white, heterosexual, middle-class and family-oriented (Chapter 2). In the final chapter of the first part, Saga Rosenström and Barbora Žiačková discuss the role of mythical historical images, in particular the Viking woman, in producing white femininity in the Nordic countries and in Finland (Chapter 3).

The second part of the book entitled 'Doing/Constructing Whiteness in Finland' discusses how Finnishness is constructed as whiteness in various everyday contexts, such as in schools, autobiographies, and social media. Marja Peltola and Ann Phoenix begin the second part by investigating young white Finns' talk about multiculturalism

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and show that their privileged position allows them to present themselves as tolerant and open-minded, while at the same time not having to face racialized structural inequalities (Chapter 4). By studying Finnish sexual autobiographies from the 1990s, Riikka Taavetti demonstrates how within the stories authors implicitly construct their white Finnishness by contrasting it to stereotypical descriptions of non-white others (Chapter 5). Finally, Jaanika Kingumets and Markku Sippola investigate how Estonian migrants use whiteness in Facebook group discussions to legitimize their position and to distance themselves from non-white migrants in Finnish society (Chapter 6).

The third part of the book entitled 'Representations of Belonging and Exclusion' shifts focus to the ways in which minoritized groups 'mobilize or resist narratives of whiteness' to negotiate their identities, place and belonging (p. 11). Taking the case of social media campaigns and activism of people with a Finnish background in Sweden, Tuire Liimatainen underlines the fluid and context-dependent nature of Finns' whiteness in contemporary Swedish society (Chapter 7). Jasmine Kelekay then shows how the territorial stigmatization of East Helsinki and the related racialized and class-based understandings are challenged and replaced in Afro-Finnish hip hop songs by constructing East Helsinki as an important place of pride and belonging (Chapter 8). Lastly, Riikka Tuori studies members of the Jewish congregations in Finland focusing on the interplay between Finnishness and Jewishness and the Jewish Finns' experiences of racism and antisemitism that intertwine with the interviewees' (non)whiteness (Chapter 9).

The fourth and final part of the book, entitled 'Imperialism and Colonization', delves deeper into 'the myth of Finnish white homogeneity as well as its colonial innocence' and addresses the processes and effects of colonization in Finland with a linguistic and socio-cultural focus (p. 12). This part begins with a chapter by Elizabeth Peterson, who focuses on how the appreciation of English language competence in Finland is connected to colonialism and class-based differences (Chapter 10). Rauna Kuokkanen then discusses settler colonialism in relation to the indigenous Sámi people in Finland addressing the continuing effects of colonialism and the structural injustices still present in contemporary Finland (Chapter 11). With a historical perspective, Ainur Elmgren investigates in the final chapter how Finns and Tatars have negotiated their identities in relation to the Mongol Empire, intellectualism and Finnishness from the 19th century onward (Chapter 12).

Lastly, in the afterword of the book, Suvi Keskinen discusses the last two decades of discussions and debates in Finland around the connection between Finnishness, whiteness and coloniality and how to move forward towards social change. Keskinen argues for the need to recognize the colonial and racial past and present of the definitions of Finnishness and to find new ways to change the present-day normative structures. In this regard, although the chapters of *Finnishness, Whiteness and Coloniality* present ways in which the meanings of Finnishness have changed and how normative whiteness and existing power relations are challenged, the perspective of the 'politics of hopeful solidarity' proposed by Keskinen (p. 350; see also Keskinen, Skaptadóttir & Toivanen 2019) gets relatively little attention in the book. This is understandable given the focus of the book, but hopefully the perspective of social change will become more evident in future studies concerning the book's three central themes.

The book has many merits. The chapters of the book work both independently and as a whole and highlight how Finnishness, whiteness and coloniality are linked not only

to each other but also to other positions and categories, such as class, gender, religion and the Nordic, and how the meanings associated with the themes depend on the specific context and the groups in comparison. Together, the chapters reveal the shifting nature of the politics of belonging in Finland and show how the meanings and requirements of belonging are both taken for granted and actively negotiated and resisted (Yuval-Davis 2006). The book's strength is also the combination of historical and contemporary perspectives, which highlights the changing but pervasive nature of whiteness in the construction of Finnishness. In this way, the book's approach sheds light on how whiteness, as the editors write, 'has an ability to shift and adapt to changing contexts and still hold on to its social power' (p. 9).

Overall, exploring Finnishness, whiteness and coloniality from the perspectives of various disciplines and methods shows the multifaceted nature of this relationship in Finnish society. At the same time, the decision to explore the interrelation of the three themes from many different perspectives using different methods (often with little detail on the analysis process) brought some unevenness to the book and prevented a deeper dive into the specific contexts introduced in the chapters. However, this decision is also the book's strength, as it demonstrates how deeply Finnishness, whiteness and coloniality cut through the Finnish society, and how the boundaries of belonging are (still) constructed in relation to (non)whiteness in numerous contexts in Finland.

To conclude, the book offers a broad description of how Finnishness, whiteness and coloniality are intertwined in various domains of Finnish society. It thoroughly discusses its three central themes and how these themes together create places of belonging for some while excluding others. In this way, the book also succeeds in making the often 'invisible marks of privilege more visible' in the Finnish context (Ahmed 2007: 149). The book is a welcome addition to the research field in Finland and offers thought-provoking insights to all who are interested in the subject regardless of their previous knowledge.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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