



Book Review of Keskinen, Suvi. 2022. *Mobilising the Racialised ‘others’: Postethnic Activism, Neoliberalisation and Racial Politics*. London: Routledge. 164 pp.

AMANY SELIM 

BOOK REVIEW

HUP HELSINKI
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

In *Mobilising the Racialised Others*, Suvi Keskinen, professor at the University of Helsinki, offers a crucial examination of postethnic activism within the Nordic context, shedding light on its articulation in a region often characterized by self-perceptions of egalitarianism and innocence from colonial history. What makes this book a particularly valuable contribution to debates on diversity in the Nordic countries is that it crystallizes the efforts of racialized activists in challenging those national self-perceptions by carving out a space for themselves to belong through the production of subversive discourses and bringing forward alternative ways of coexistence. Unlike previous migrant generations that mainly mobilized on the basis of their ethnic and national belonging, postethnic activism bypasses ethnicity and takes experiences of racialization and otherization as a point of departure for mobilization.

The book discusses the rise and constitution of postethnic activism against a backdrop of ‘Racial Nordicism’ and the neoliberalization of the welfare state. Accordingly, the book asks several questions, including most importantly: (1) how ‘communities of belonging’ are created within postethnic activism, on the basis of what philosophy, and using which tactics for organizing and achieving visibility; (2) how postethnic activists navigate and resist neoliberal rationalities in doing their work; and (3) how their social imaginaries for equality and belonging defy Nordic nationalism. My review is structured around how these three questions are answered throughout the book.

One of the key concepts Keskinen introduces in her book is ‘Racial Nordicism’, which addresses the specificities of the Nordic region. In Chapter 2, she builds on existing approaches to colonial legacy to explain the Nordic context and accentuate its differences. She uses various examples to document the active participation of Nordic nations in colonialism, including the suppression of Indigenous populations, land dispossession, scientific racism, and the slave trade. Keskinen also reveals how the welfare model has a dark history, enabling governments to implement sterilization programs under the guise of ensuring good quality citizens. Recently, these models have retreated in favor of more privatization, which has not only unmasked the wealth

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:

Amany Selim

Independent researcher,
Ph.D. in sociology,
Department of Sociology,
University of Bergen,
Norway

[amany.moussa.selim@
gmail.com](mailto:amany.moussa.selim@gmail.com)

KEYWORDS:

Activism; Mobilization;
Race; Colonialism

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Selim, A. 2025. Book
Review of Keskinen,
Suvi. 2022. *Mobilising
the Racialised ‘others’:
Postethnic Activism,
Neoliberalisation and Racial
Politics*. London: Routledge.
164 pp. *Nordic Journal of
Migration Research*, 15(2):
9, pp. 1–3. DOI: [https://doi.
org/10.33134/njmr.910](https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.910)

inequalities that are based on racial and class divisions but also further entrenched them. Additionally, she highlights how the Nordic countries' reputation for gender equality contributes to a sense of superiority over the East. Consequently, non-white immigrants are often viewed with suspicion, seen as embodying patriarchal norms that are foreign to the Nordic countries, which pride themselves on gender equality. Keskinen argues that these notions of innocence and egalitarianism influence how diversity and racism are addressed today, perpetuating false perceptions of equality and color blindness that mask racial inequalities.

In Chapter 3, Keskinen presents her ethnographic methodology and advocates for a translocal approach to activism, emphasizing the study of activism within urban settings rather than through cross-national comparisons. The book adopts an embedded approach, situating activism within its immediate socio-political contexts. This approach aligns with emerging trends in social movements and diaspora mobilization studies, prioritizing nuanced understanding over generalized comparisons.

In Chapter 4, Keskinen turns to the question of how communities of belonging are built, categorizing postethnic activism into five main forms: anti-racist feminism and queer of color activism, activism in marginalized urban neighborhoods, groups formed around the black experience and African heritage, Muslim groups addressing racism and Islamophobia, and persons-of-color activism. Each of these communities coalesce over a specific concern, whether it is exposing the embodied entanglement of experiences of racial, gendered, sexualized, and class-based power hierarchies, or promoting a place-based identity by combating the stigmatization and marginalization of their localities. The endeavor of these communities extends beyond establishing spaces of safety and belonging; it also entails challenging the status quo and shedding light on their struggles within the Nordic societies.

Chapter 5 explores the diverse philosophies adopted by these communities, spanning from the politics of social justice to the politics of survival and the politics of revolutionary love. These philosophies embody distinct values and principles that postethnic activists strive to cultivate within their communities, such as fostering critical thinking, promoting healing and self-care, and nurturing affective bonds among members. The chapter also discusses the tactics through which these envisioned communities are created. While some activists and groups opt for autonomous modes of organization, limiting membership to individuals directly affected by the targeted issues, others adopt a more inclusive approach, welcoming all allies regardless of background. However, those embracing inclusivity often grapple with the delicate task of negotiating power dynamics between majority and minority perspectives.

Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the neoliberal realities that shape the work of anti-racist activism and urban activism, respectively. Chapter 6 examines the cultural and digital work of Black activists and activists of color, highlighting how they utilize online spaces to advance their work while enjoying autonomy in pursuing projects aligned with their convictions. However, freelancing in the cultural and digital sector comes with precarity, as this line of work is characterized by short-term projects and a lack of stability. The experiences shared in this chapter also unveil the tokenism prevalent in major media outlets, where diversity is exploited to present a facade of inclusivity, masking underlying hierarchical structures. Additionally, activists face the commodification of difference, where their social media fame is used to advertise products. While such opportunities may offer resources, they also risk emptying activists' work of its radical potential.

Chapter 7 explores how urban activism responds to the neoliberal shift in integration and employment policies in Nordic countries. Recently, Nordic countries have adopted

labor activation programs that shift responsibility for unemployment to individuals and outsource welfare responsibilities to non-governmental organizations (NGOs), exacerbating the marginalization of disadvantaged neighborhoods. The chapter examines the effects of these policies and the countermeasures taken by urban activists. Essentially, it highlights various forms of activism, for example, cultural initiatives such as local magazines and poetry nights, and resistance to gentrification, which bolster grassroots democracy and collective action. Kensinen also engages with the debate on 'NGOization', often seen as de-politicizing owing to its alignment with neoliberal governance. However, she argues that activists can secure funding while maintaining their independence and integrity. By emphasizing the experiences of activists transitioning to NGOs, Kensinen shows how this shift provides essential resources for empowering marginalized youth. Her analysis adds nuance to the view of NGOization, demonstrating activists' ability to navigate its neoliberal complexities effectively.

Chapter 8 makes a sharp break with previous chapters, inviting readers to explore how postethnic activists raise political questions based on their reinterpretations of history and imaginations for the future. Kensinen documents several initiatives where activists connect the present to historical contexts, highlighting continuities with current racism and racialized injustices. These range from accentuating the Nordic nations' complicity in colonialism to indicating the underlying racialized and classed basis of the pension system. By centering questions of race by drawing on historical contexts, activists highlight societal faults that need correction to create a better future. Other initiatives in the chapter present future-oriented perspectives, envisioning a world without borders and racism to challenge the accepted normality of the current social order.

In the concluding chapter, Kensinen summarizes the key arguments of the book, emphasizing the reductiveness of identity-based categorizations that postethnic activism challenges and the diversity it encapsulates. The book critically engages with texts from feminist scholarship and race studies in theorizing post-ethnic activism and foregrounding its analyses. While fruitful, I argue that incorporating literature on social movements would have further enriched the discussion, particularly regarding mobilization and strategies for social change. Engaging with studies on active citizenship would have also added to the discussion of the Nordic context, offering a more holistic approach to making sense of postethnic activism in such context. This book is essential for academics specializing in nationalism, diversity, and migration, especially those interested in the dynamics of race in the Nordic region.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

Amany Selim  orcid.org/0000-0002-3440-5861

Independant researcher, Ph.D. in sociology, Department of Sociology, University of Bergen, Norway

Selim
Nordic Journal of
Migration Research
DOI: 10.33134/njmr.910

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Selim, A. 2025. Book Review of Keskinen, Suvi. 2022. *Mobilising the Racialised 'others': Postethnic Activism, Neoliberalisation and Racial Politics*. London: Routledge. 164 pp. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 15(2): 9, pp. 1–3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/njmr.910>

Submitted: 05 August 2024

Accepted: 05 August 2024

Published: 15 January 2025

COPYRIGHT:

© 2025 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons NonCommercial-NoDerivatives Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits unrestricted distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited, the material is not used for commercial purposes and is not altered in any way. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Nordic Journal of Migration Research is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Helsinki University Press.