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## Learning About Others in Multiculturalist Social Service's Curriculum in Finland: Transnational Feminism, Anti-Racist Pedagogy, and Politics of Othering in the Curriculum

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**Learning about Others in Multiculturalist Social Service's  
Curriculum in Finland: Transnational Feminism, Anti-Racist  
Pedagogy, and Politics of Othering in the Curriculum**

By  
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Submitted to  
Minnesota State University, Mankato

In partial fulfillment of the degree of Master of Arts in Gender and Women's Studies  
Department

Committee Chair: Dr. Yalda Hamidi  
Committee Members: Dr. Karen Lybeck & Dr. Sarah Epplen

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Learning About Others in Multiculturalist Social Services Curriculum in Finland:  
Transnational Feminism, Anti-Racist Pedagogy, and Politics of Othering in the  
Curriculum

Jenni Lampinen

This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the  
student's committee.

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Advisor

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Committee Member

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## **Abstract**

Social work education aims to train competent professionals to answer the needs of changing populations and society. Education includes theoretical and practical components that offer the frames for social work at different levels of society; personal, interpersonal, institutional, and structural. Primarily, multicultural social work focuses on working with populations with diverse ethnic, cultural, and racial identities that often differ from the majority population. Multicultural social work can be seen as a bridge between minority communities and society.

This research was implemented using discourse analysis to examine the social services program's curriculum of one University of Applied Sciences in the Helsinki area. The study analyzed course descriptions and assigned class materials for four courses. Courses that were selected stated in their course descriptions that the content or intended learning outcomes include intercultural competencies through critical reflections of societal changes in multicultural Finland. This study focused on how othering manifests within the course materials and what notions of critical reflections are included in these courses by asking, "How is othering acknowledged in the social services undergraduate program's assigned class readings?" International and national social work guidelines emphasize the importance of critical reflections on society and self. This research shows that multiculturalism implemented within the curriculum still repeats notions of oppressive Western power dynamics and ignores the comprehensive critical reflections of societal structures and powers and how they impact an individual's values, which might also manifest in social work through professionals.

## **Introduction**

Social work education aims to respond to the needs of communities and individuals in globally changing societies. Social work professionals enter the field that constantly undergoes changes connected to societal and political modifications. This thesis project will focus on the curriculum of one of the social services undergraduate programs located in the Helsinki area, Finland. This research aims to analyze the curriculum and assigned course materials and focus on how othering as an exclusion process is included and displayed within the specific classes that state to have intercultural competencies. Feminist scholars have acknowledged the impact of identities and power structures connected to individuals' lives and experiences.

This research aims to analyze how othering is acknowledged in the social work undergraduate curriculum through transnational feminist lenses. First, I will provide a literature review focusing on multiculturalism, multicultural social work and intercultural competencies, and the role of critical reflections in social work. Following the literature review, I provide an analysis of discourse analysis as a method utilized in this research. After setting the theoretical frames and methodological base, I introduce the results of the discourse analysis and connect the findings to the theoretical framework that emerged from the literature review.

### **Structures of Social Work: A brief review of legislation and educational system**

Social work function in all dimensions of the welfare state, in individual encounters between professionals and clients, and in structural social work while



advocating for human rights and anti-discriminatory practices. In Finland, social work is guided by specific legislation related to the responsibilities of the state, municipalities, professionals, clients' rights, and the ethical dimensions of social work. The specific social work-related legislation is based on the Constitution of Finland and the Declaration of human rights since they have set the frames for human dignity.

The Social Welfare Act (2014) is the primary legislation that guides all social work and its aspects in Finland. In addition to setting the criteria for social work done within the social services, the Act (2014) states that social work should address the impact of structural inequalities on individuals' social problems. The understanding that transnational feminist scholars have about the impact of identities on individual and societal levels should be recognized in social services. This recognition is crucial to following the Social Welfare Act (2014) guidelines in the rapidly changing global society that also exists in Finland. The internationalization of the population must be recognized in education related to social work. This recognition is the key to creating curriculums that understand and identify the impacts of different identities and the structural factors that impact individuals' lives.

Other primary leading legislation related to multicultural social work are the Non-Discriminatory Act (2014) and The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (2010). The Non-Discriminatory Act state within the first article that the purpose of the law is to advocate and secure equality and prevent discrimination. The Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration highlights the importance of providing equal opportunities for immigrants to be active members of society. The Act (2010) also

highlights the interaction between society and immigrant communities and addresses society's responsibility for successful integration. Both laws are directly related to othering and to the structures and encounters where othering manifests towards cultural and ethnic Others.

Social work education is strictly guided by legislation, and the National Supervisory Authority secures professional titles for Welfare and Health. Social work education is divided between research universities and universities of applied sciences. Research universities provide combined undergraduate and graduate programs that approximately take five years to complete. Universities of Applied Sciences offer mainly undergraduate programs that take three and half years to complete. Because of the focus points and duration differences, graduates of research universities are social workers, and graduates of universities of applied sciences are social counselors. Social workers and counselors work within the same services; the focus points and responsibilities differ. Generally, social workers' focal point is more towards administration and financial aspects of social work, and social counselors work more closely with clients in everyday situations and contexts. (Studyinfo n.d.)

### **Transnational Feminism**

Transnational feminism is a complex and multi-level dimension in feminism, and it includes many different movements with particular focus points varying from postcolonial and post-socialist standpoints. Common to the different movements under

the umbrella of transnational feminism is the strong inclusion of intersectionality and local, national, and global power dynamics (Grewal and Kaplan 1994).

This research finds its place in transnational feminism since othering is highly impacted by power systems, ideologies, and other systems of power. Also, the call for critical self-reflection in social work (Lum 1992; Dominelli 1998) places itself within the frames of standpoint theory (Brooks 2007). Standpoint theory recognizes the impact of social and societal systems as a changing factory in individuals' life. It suggests that it should be acknowledged, especially in knowledge production, that everyone observes and sees the world and their reality from their own standpoints.

The reflections of our social and societal environments could be observed through politics of location (Rich 1986; Grewal and Kaplan 1994) that recognized the power dynamics impacting one's relationship with location from historical and geographical perspectives that incorporated inevitable notions of Western supremacy. From a methodologic aspect, this research also connects tightly to transnational feminism. Discourse analysis utilized in this research is studying the meaning behind language and how it links to different literary bodies of knowledge through theoretical frameworks (Powers 2001).

### **Anti-Racist Pedagogy**

Anti-racist pedagogy highlights the crucial role of education when challenging unequal power dynamics and institutional racism. Anti-racist pedagogies aim to challenge the Eurocentric and imperialistic standpoints that are unfortunately in common

in education and academia. Higher education institutions in Finland are predominantly white. Therefore, since academia is an essential part of knowledge production processes, there is a demand for anti-racist and anti-oppressive pedagogies that acknowledges the impacts of Western supremacy and imperialism.

Anti-racist pedagogies can be utilized in all aspects and fields of science and education. Advocacy of social justice and human rights are stated to create a base for the ethics and values of social work (Talentia 2017). These are also the focus points of anti-racist pedagogies. One example of anti-racist pedagogies is Critical Race Theory (CRT). Critical Race Theory (CRT) was created in the United States as a response to the racial inequalities of society. CRT aims to challenge the white supremacy that is still a notable factor in societies' political, educational, and legal structures and advocate for social justice, especially racial justice (Taylor 2009). Even though CRT is created in the United States and there are extensively different social structures in the United States and Finland, some aspects of CRT can also be utilized in Nordic contexts, especially in social work education. It can provide valuable insights for structural social work.

### **Structure**

This research is organized through several chapters. First, this research provides a literature review. In the literature review, I will examine the location of multicultural social work and multiculturalism in Finnish society. I will also briefly cover the role of intercultural competencies in social work education and provide an overview of scholarly

models of intercultural competence. Following multicultural social work, the literature review examines othering and white supremacy.

The next chapter covers the methodological aspects of this research. I will look into discourse analysis as a suitable method to utilize this research and locate myself and my identities and background in social work in this research.

After methodological notions, I will analyze the collected data through five theoretical themes that emerged from the literature review; othering, structural approach, discrimination/racism, critical reflections, and intercultural competence. These themes can be divided into dimensions where othering manifests (structures) and the practices of how othering manifests in societies (discrimination/racism). Critical reflections are called out as a tool to examine and acknowledge the politics of othering within society's structures as a crucial part of intercultural competencies.

To tie everything all together, I will conclude this thesis by emphasizing the importance and relevance of social work education development in rapidly changing global societies. Lastly, I will connect all aspects of this research to promote anti-oppressive social justice and human rights.

## Literature Review

### Multicultural society in Finland

Multiculturalism has several definitions that hold different meanings depending on the contextual approach. Multiculturalism has been traditionally defined as a mindset of accepting cultural and ethnic diversity at a societal level. The definition of multiculturalism includes assumptions of integration of cultures into a common social structure and values that the West historically defines as “neutral” and “universal.” (Ahmed 2000, 95-111.)

Multicultural society and multicultural development have a long history in Finland. It does not mean that Finland has had a culturally or ethnically homogenous population before the increase in immigration, even when it is often considered that way. The image of a homogenous Finnish population still impacts how multicultural Finnish society is accepted and tolerated among people. The idea of a culturally and ethnically homogenous population has been popular among nationalist narratives of the development of modern nation-states. (Lepola 2000, 20-23.) Vuorela (2009) points out the long history of cultural minorities of Sámi<sup>1</sup> and Roma<sup>2</sup> communities in Finland,

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<sup>1</sup> Sámi populations are only indigenous populations within the area of European Union. There are approximately 10 000 Sámi in Finland. The rights and status of Sámi was written into the Finnish constitution in the 1990's. Sámi populations have their own specific culture and language. (Saamelaiskäräjät n.d.)

<sup>2</sup> Roma population is one of the cultural minorities in Finland within their own culture and language. Roma communities have resided in Finland over 500 years and approximately there are 10,000 to 12,000 Romas residing in Finland. Roma communities are Finnish citizens, and they enjoy full civil rights. The development of welfare state after the Second World War and first anti-discriminatory legislation in the 1970's improved the living conditions of Roma communities. Still, Roma populations have been

which are good examples of how Finland has been multicultural before global migration multiplied. Multiculturalism has not originated from a vacuum, and historical periods have significantly impacted today's multiculturalism.

In Europe, Nordic countries have been making an effort to distance themselves from the colonial history of Europe. Maj Palmberg (2009, 49) disclaimed the separation: "The idea gained a foothold that these were friendly nations, not exploiters." However, traditions that are seen as part of the Nordic culture have connections to colonialism, and therefore Nordic countries have been described as "colonial complicity" (Mulinari 2009, 22). Vuorela explains "colonial complicity" as:

Complicity in its dictionary meaning refers to a 'participation in a crime.' The postcolonial literature mostly uses it with reference to participation in the hegemonic discourses, involvement in the promotion of universal thinking, and practices of domination. Complicity is an important notion for those of us who are not quite situated in the centre; always wanting to get closer, our responses to the invitation give us a complicit position that we rarely even recognize. It also resembles a 'tacit' acceptance of hegemonic discourses, since if we want to be accepted by the centres it is only possible, or so we think, on their terms.

Accepting the 'latest' school of thought, theory, authority is simply just one of the ways in which knowledge is pursued. (Vuorela 2009, 33).

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marginalized for centuries and their socioeconomical position in the society is often lower than on average. (Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2004.)

As Vuorela (2009, 32) states, complicity as a partner of the crime, the Nordic countries fit this description well when the racist history of the Nordic countries is examined. The Nordic countries did actually cooperate in colonial activities in Africa and Asia. The Nordic countries benefitted economically from the triangular slave trade in the 1700 century by participating in trade. Missionary work done by the Nordic Lutheran churches also aimed to extend the beliefs about Western and Christian superiority. Whiteness was linked to this idea of Western superiority since the Nordic nations have been ethnically homogenous. (Palmberg 2009.) The colonial mindset, mentioned by Vuorela (2009, 33), means that the Nordic countries have had the colonial mindset that can be seen through outrageously racist colonial imaginary in school educational materials and, for example, commercials (Garner 2014, 408; Palmberg 2009, 50-51).

Vuorela (2009, 33) points out that one of Finland's forms of "colonial complicity" has been internal colonialism and the support to the colonial projects and acceptance that Finland has displayed to the colonial oppressors. Vuorela (2009) explains internal colonialism through how Sámi and Roma communities have been racially targeted and excluded from the majority population. Sámi communities are considered Native Finns, and Roma communities have resided in Finland for centuries. Internal colonialism also means the legacy Finland has with a colonial mindset. Finland has accepted Western domination constructed by accepting oppressors' knowledge as a universal truth (Vuorela 2009, 33-34).

The discussion about multiculturalism in Finland has been tightly linked to immigration, but these two are not always connected. According to Lepola (2000, 209),



multicultural societal development mainly started in the 1990s due to increased immigration and migration. Immigration policies and immigration have been seen as a base for multicultural development in Finnish society (Lepola 2000). The intersection of multiculturalism and immigration has impacted the multicultural development in Finland.

Multiculturalism has been seen as a competency to live or work at the intersection of two or more cultures. This intersection of cultures includes direct power structures between the cultures, and often it leads to minority cultures merging with the dominant one instead of existing contiguously. Finnish immigration policies aim to integrate immigrant communities into Finnish society, but multicultural social work has also highlighted the integration of immigrant clients into Finnish society (Pekkanen 2014; Yliselä 2014). These policies have been tried to be accomplished without adjusting institutional services, for example, social services, to specifically respond to the needs of the culturally diversified population of Finland. This approach has focused on setting the responsibility of integration to the immigrant populations. (Lepola 2000.)

### **Multiculturalism in Social Work**

Social work practice has faced new challenges in a globalizing world—multicultural social work focuses on clients with minority identities and integration into society. Multicultural social work focuses on issues of social integration, social solidarity, social justice, and immigration (Williams, Soydan, and Johnson 1998, xi).

Sara Ahmed (2000) provides insights about multiculturalism and how multiculturalism and cultural diversity often will not actually recognize the distinction of

identities and the historical impact of colonialism. As mentioned earlier, Ahmed's (2000) notions about multiculturalism are seen more as tolerating ethnic and cultural differences. This type of multiculturalism will strengthen the status of "a stranger" among the population that differs from the majority of the population because it maintains the power dynamics that enforce white supremacy by treating racial, ethnic, and cultural others as strangers that are tolerated in the society through the idealistic idea of true multiculturalism. (Ahmed 2000.)

Ahmed (2000) provides arguments about multiculturalism within nations with critical insights into cultural differences and differentiation. Multiculturalism includes notions about cultural and ethnic differences between populations. Those cultural and ethnic differences inevitably include an assumption of differences between "us" and "them." Therefore, this division enforces the erasure of the differences that will not blend in with "us." Multiculturalism still provides a way of how cultural and ethnic "others" fit into the nations constructed around the idea of "us." (Ahmed 2000, 95-96.) Ahmed's perceptions of multiculturalism as a disguise for differentiating racial, ethnic, and cultural identities can link to corporate multiculturalism.

The anti-racist approach of multiculturalism that focuses on advocating social justice differs from corporate multiculturalism. Corporate multiculturalism serves the ideology of multiculturalism on the surface level. Bryant (2010) makes notions about the reasoning behind the multicultural development of institutions to connect more on the interest towards institution's reputation as an advocate of diversity, inclusion, and equality than genuinely *servicing* as an advocate for social justice and human rights. Bryant

(2010, 255) also discusses how this approach is more likely to reinforce the racialized power inequalities between the majority and minority populations.

### **Intercultural Competencies in Social Work**

The multicultural aspect of social work education in Europe has not been able to respond to the demands of increased migration, but the need for high-quality multicultural social work has been recognized in the past years (Poutanen 2007; Aaltonen et al. 2008; Riitaoja et al. 2021). Poutanen et al. and Riitaoja et al. provide social work education development as a solution to how social work can respond to the needs of clients with culturally diverse backgrounds. Cultural and ethnic minority groups face different economic, political, and social challenges compared to the majority population. Especially psychosocial needs may differ significantly from the dominant group because of the minority position and its connection to structural and institutional oppression and discrimination. Social work scholars have adapted current theories and practices to acknowledge the minority position and how those practices serve these specific client populations. (Lum 1992.)

Cultural competency, just like social work, has many definitions depending on the approach. Originated from multicultural social work, cultural competency means implementing cultural awareness and ethnic sensitivity to the work with culturally diverse clients (Lum 2013; Nadan 2014). Garran and Rozas (2013) expand the definition of cultural competency by focusing not only on ethnic identity but also on other identities, “The general practice of cultural competence has concerned itself with the

accumulation of information about particular norms, behaviors, and practices that exist within a particular cultural group, which should not be limited to ethnicity but rather any social group (e.g., people with disabilities, people who identify as queer, people with different economic backgrounds)” (p. 100). Highlighting the importance of identities as factors in shaping individuals’ life have been widely recognized in feminist theory with the lead of Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term *intersectionality* (Crenshaw 1989). Collins and Bilge (2016, 88-113) have defined intersectionality as the interconnectedness of different identities such as race, gender, class, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, and ability. Intersectionality examines the privileges and oppression of identities in the context of society and the social construction of identities. (See also Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2019.) Understanding the impact of intersectionality and identities in social work ties together two central values of social work; advocating social justice and human dignity (Garran & Rozas 2013, 102). Advocacy of social justice and human rights links to the leading concepts of anti-racist multiculturalism, as mentioned earlier by Bryant (2010).

Garran and Rozas (2013) also provide essential acknowledgments about power structures in society. In the context of ethnic diversity and observing societal power structures, scholars argue that whiteness and white privilege need to be acknowledged, and self-reflection of social work professionals and their own identities is needed (Nylund 2006; Abrams & Gibson 2007; Garran & Rozas 2013; Kolivoski, Weaver, & Constance-Huggins 2014).

White supremacy and oppression have had a significant impact on societies across the globe. The long colonial history of European colonizers and centuries of slavery that followed the imperialistic crusades of Europeans in the United States and around the world set the tone for the forced white supremacy (Middleton, Roediger, and Shaffer 2016). The social construction of race identities created a hierarchical race system that led to genocides, oppression, and power inequalities that continue to this day. (Kendall 2013.) Because of the long history of global white supremacy, scholars argue that white people struggle to recognize the impact of white supremacy on societal structures because of their privilege. Therefore, whiteness has been and is structurally invisible. This has also led to realities where societal racism is seen as normal. (Ladson-Billings 2009; Taylor 2009; Kendall 2013.)

### **The Role of White Supremacy in Othering**

Normalization of whiteness is highly connected to the othering process. Mäkinen (2017) explains how the othering process culminates around excluding the racial or cultural others from society and, at the same time, protecting own placement inside society. In the classical piece of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Paulo Freire discusses the relationship between oppressor and oppressed in society. Freire's arguments about the relationship between oppressor and oppressed focused on power structures and how the oppressed are treated as racial and cultural others. His insights into the liberation of the oppressed have been utilized in social work education in the context of

intercultural competencies that try to respond to the demands of multicultural social work (Nylund 2006).

Also, Freire (1970), like Dominelli (1998), highlights the importance of observing the relationship between oppressed, oppressor, and society and argues that the liberation of oppressed groups demands that oppressors reflect their placement and power in society (Freire 1970, 33-35). One of the ways how the othering process is manifested in societies, mentioned by Audre Lorde (1984), is the opposition of human differences. The opposition created by Western dominance and oppression represents some identities and characteristics as good/bad or superior/inferior. The othering process also includes dehumanizing the “other” who is seen as evil and inferior. (Lorde 1984, 114.) Also, Mäkinen (2017) notes the dehumanization of the racialized and cultural others, but she also brings the socioeconomic factor to this aspect of othering. She explains how those who are welcomed into society and who are not considered as others are closely connected to the stereotypes and beliefs about the moral capacity and economic value of minority groups (Mäkinen 2017).

I drew a connection from Collins and Jun’s (2017) arguments about the normalization of whiteness and seeing the white race as a superior identity to Sara Farris’s (2017) discussion about the othering process targeting especially Muslims in different western European countries. Also, Lorde’s notions of dehumanization of “others” (Lorde 1984, 114) connect to the analysis of Sara Farris (2017) about the dehumanization and exclusion of Muslims in Europe.

According to Farris (2017, 4, 22), anti-Muslim rhetoric has become dominant anti-other rhetoric. Anti-Muslim rhetoric segregates “us,” meaning white, European, Christian, and civilized, from “them,” meaning non-white, non-Western, non-Christian, and uncivilized. Picturing other than Western cultures as uncivilized, patriarchal, misogynist, and homophobic others represents the blatant racist stereotypes of the cultural “others.” (Farris 2017, 4, 8, 109.) Also, Sara Ahmed (2000) has made similar perceptions of the othering process of certain bodies. She argues that some bodies are seen as strangers and treated differently. She explains how white bodies are seen as whole subjects, but then other bodies are marginalized (Ahmed 2000, 52, 141-145). (See Lorde 1984.)

### **Intercultural Competency Models**

Scholars have developed different cultural competence models for social work. These models primarily locate cultural competence around awareness, knowledge, and skills (Spitzberg and Changnon 2009). The various dimensions of cultural competence provide a comprehensive approach to observing and reflecting on cross-cultural society and understanding other cultural frameworks (Lum 2013). Doman Lum (2013) has called the connection between intercultural competence and social work as a culturally competent practice. Lum (2013, 2) argues that intercultural competence is a dialogical process in social work that happens with intersections of intercultural communication in cross-cultural environments.

The awareness dimension consists of social workers’ demand to reflect on their own ethnic identity and cultural background. This approach sets the base for cultural

competence practice in social work. The second dimension is knowledge-based, and it includes facts and guidelines about other cultures and how to interact with others. This approach focuses more on providing information about the differences between cultures than demanding the social worker's own critical reflections. The last dimension of culturally competent practice is skills. With this dimension, the knowledge gained by social workers is transformed into actual interaction skills of how to work with culturally diverse client populations. (Lum 2013, 3.)

Doman Lum (1992) has also recognized the importance of critical self- and societal reflection in multicultural social work. Also, Lena Dominelli (1998) has concluded that only focusing on a knowledge-based approach to intercultural competencies has not responded to inequalities that racial and ethnic minorities face in society, which is one of the essential components of multicultural social work. Lum (1992, 35-36) explores the relationship between social work, society, and ethnic minorities and points out that social work that identifies only with the dominant culture of a society cannot respond to the needs of oppressed minorities. He points out that the core values of social work are based on Judeo-Christian principles. Lum adds that social workers are responsible for improving the agency's policies and legislation, developing effective services, preventing discrimination, and advocating for cultural diversity.

Lum (1992, 222-224) points out the importance of macro-level interventions in social work within the last chapters of his book. Macro-level focus in social work promotes social justice by challenging institutional structures of society that cause oppression. The macro-level focus in social work connects to the central values of social



work. Those values were stated to be equal human dignity, social justice, and anti-discrimination (Talentia 2017; National Association of Social Workers, n.d; International Federation of Social Workers, n.d). Lum (1992) does not exclude the importance of a knowledge-based approach but adds self-examination of one's racial attitudes and values as an equally important part.

Dominelli (2010) provides insights related to Lum's (1992) views about the importance of engaging social work at all levels of society, avoiding focusing on only the individual level. She emphasizes focusing on oppression through societal lenses that observe the impact of social, political, cultural, and economic contextualization on structural and individual levels (Dominelli 2010, 151-152).

Within these notions of connecting societal and structural approaches to the intercultural competencies of social work, we can draw a connection to the critiques of intercultural competencies. The knowledge-based intercultural competencies are not a constructive approach to acknowledging how intercultural competencies are socially constructed within societal power structures and dynamics (Nadan 2014). Yochay Nadan (2014) focuses on the unequal power dynamics between people from different countries in the context of social work. The essentialist approach to intercultural competencies is problematic in social work because it focuses on the cultural 'other' and divides the mainstream culture and "other" cultures, highlighting their differences. Nadan highlights the historical impact of the North-South division. He states that social work practice and education should include anti-racist and postcolonial perspectives to shift away from the division between cultural mainstream and "other." (Nadan 2014, 80.)

Following Nadan's critiques of the essentialist approach to intercultural competencies, Dominelli (1998) made the same notions almost two decades earlier. Dominelli (1998, 40) argues that "we are all racialized now." She points out that social work resources and services exclude racialized groups because racializing some groups but not all promotes the process of "othering" ethnic minorities. "Othering" racial minorities include the idea of normality of mainstream identities and labeling minority identities as non-valid and not accepted. Related to the "othering" process, Dominelli also points out how in social work, professionals must understand the role of the racial identity of all races in social, political, economic, and cultural contexts at micro-and macro levels of society and how these structures promote racist rejection of minority identities through "othering" process. (Dominelli 1998, 43.)

The findings from the literature shows that scholars have regognized the importance of critical reflections as crucial part of intercultural competencies in culturally competent social work. These critical reflections should incorporate overview on systemic forces and their development and impact through history. The highlighted importance of critical societal reflections and how Othering is manifesting through out the structures led the research question to form around the acknowledgement of Othering within the curriculum and the assigned class readings. Acknowledgement of politics of Othering include the demand for critical structural reflections that are also demanded within the guidelines of social work as mentioned in this literature review.

## **Methodology**

This qualitative research project focused on higher education of social work and social services through transnational feminist lenses. I examined how othering as a concept and process is acknowledged in social service's undergraduate curriculum. The higher education institution that was the focus of this research is located in the Helsinki area, Finland. The theoretical framework discussed in the literature review consists of reflections on the multicultural aspects of Finnish society. It, therefore, explains the importance of multicultural competency of all social work professionals regardless the specialization area of social work and creates the framework for the analysis.

The focus of this research was Diaconia University of Applied Sciences (DIAK). DIAK is one of the three universities of applied sciences providing social services undergraduate program in Helsinki metropolia area. This specific higher education institution had included the information about the assigned class readings and class descriptions with learning outcomes on their website, and therefore the information was publicly available. The availability of the assigned class materials became one of the main reasons to focus on this specific institution. I am alumni of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences and originally planned to focus on their curriculum since I have had experience in that program. Metropolia provided only descriptions of their classes in their website but assigned class readings were not available. Metropolia also denied my research permit request to conduct this research on their materials appealing on scheduling issues.

### **Data Collection**

The data collection was conducted with critical discourse analysis of the assigned class readings of the specific core classes for social work majors that are required for all social services undergraduate students. The data collection was limited to the mandatory core classes of this specific bachelor's degree program. I limited the classes focused on this research to those core classes that included multicultural components and critical reflections of self or society since this research aims to analyze what multicultural components all social services students will learn in communal core classes. Some of the core classes did not implicate any multicultural components and therefore they were excluded from the data collection. The discourse analysis focuses on the language and the representation of the key research concepts covered and how they embody society's power relationships and structures (Powers 2001, 29; Yates 2004, 233-245). Utilizing discourse analysis was suitable for this research because of the societal and structural focus. Execution of discourse analysis in a research setting focusing on the educational institution as a knowledge producer was appropriate since educational institutions are a crucial part of society's power- and knowledge-production systems.

Discourse analysis can be placed in the postmodern epistemology of feminist research practices that emphasize the notions of how science creates knowledge and power structures instead of only representing and preserving them (Powers 2001, 33; Yates 2004, 245). Conducting discourse analysis focusing on educational materials connects to these notions of knowledge production and how academic texts and their language are part of training the social work professionals and, consequently, their competencies and

proficiency. In addition, discourse analysis provides a tool to examine how notions of multiculturalism and othering are recognized in the class materials and aims to respond to the following research question:

1. How is othering acknowledged in the social services undergraduate program's assigned class readings?

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis of the assigned class readings included books, research publications, and legislation. The analysis aimed to view and reflect how othering is conducted within texts that include multicultural components. These texts were analyzed with specific themes identified in the literature review. In order to identify how othering is addressed in the curriculum, the following terms were investigated: othering, structures, racism, discrimination, critical reflections, and intercultural competencies. In this case, the language analysis used in assigned class readings was necessary since the othering process also manifests in language and word choices. The analysis also focused on reflecting on how the elements of the texts met the learning outcome criteria associated with intercultural competencies mentioned in class descriptions.

I used these themes as a theoretical framework while coding the assigned class readings from the mandatory core classes. Five codes that emerged from the literature review themes were not strictly limited only to the word itself since most literature was in English and the assigned class materials were in Finnish. The bilingual dimension of the

research led me to focus mainly on the meaning behind the sentences where these codes were found. This also meant acknowledging the broader context of the sentences.

The first table demonstrates the organization of courses, the content of the courses, and finally, the number of assigned course materials that included books, legislations, and one website.

**Table 1.** Assigned Course Materials

Course	Content	Assigned materials
Course A.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• History, current state and the future of the profession</li> <li>• Ethics in social work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Juujärvi, Soile, Myyry, Liisa, and Pessa, Kaija. 2007. <i>Eettinen herkkyyks ammatillisessa toiminnassa</i>. Sanoma Pro Oy.</li> <li>• Talentia. 2017. <i>Work, Values, and Ethics: Ethical Guidelines for Social Welfare Professionals</i>. Talentia Union of Professional Social Workers.</li> <li>• Särkelä, Antti. 2001. <i>Välittäminen ammattina</i>. Vastapaino.</li> <li>• Act on the Status and Rights of Social Welfare Clients</li> </ul>
Course B.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of the Finnish welfare state – the societal changes</li> <li>• Welfare services and differences in welfare in the Finnish society</li> <li>• Basis of social policies and legislation</li> <li>• Rights of clients in the social service system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kestilä, Laura &amp; Karvonen, Sakari. 2019. <i>Suomalaisten hyvinvointi 2018</i>. Terveysten ja hyvinvoinnin laitos.</li> <li>• Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Website</li> </ul>

Course C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underprivileged client populations</li> <li>• Generational marginalization</li> <li>• Structures and societal processes in marginalization</li> <li>• Human rights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Saari, Juho, Eskelinen, Niko, &amp; Björklund, Liisa. 2020. <i>Raskas perintö: Ylisukupolvinen huon-osaisuus Suomessa</i>. Gaudeamus.</li> <li>• Niemelä, Mikko &amp; Saari, Juho. 2013. <i>Huono-osaisten hyvinvointi Suomessa. (Teemakirja 10)</i>. Kelan tutkimusosasto.</li> </ul>
Course D.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity and minorities</li> <li>• Global migration and its impacts on an individual's life</li> <li>• Immigration legislation and policies</li> <li>• Equality and inclusion in professional social work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helldan, Iida. 2018. <i>Tienhaaroja ja umpikujia. Maahanmuuttaja-asiakkaat neuvonta- ja ohjaustyössä</i>. Suomen Pakolaisapu.</li> <li>• Keskinen, Suvi, Vuori, Jaana, &amp; Hirsiaho, Anu. 2012. <i>Monikulttuurisuuden sukupuoli: Kansalaisuus ja erot hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa</i>. University Press: Tampere.</li> <li>• Saukkonen, Pasi. 2020. <i>Vimmainen maailma. Kirjoituksia muuttoliikkeestä, monikulttuurisuudesta ja nationalismista</i>. Siirtolaisuusinstituutti: Turku.</li> <li>• Weiste-Paakkanen, Anneli, Lämsä, Riika, &amp; Kuusio, Hannamaria. 2018. <i>Suomen Romaniväestön osallisuus ja hyvinvointi: Romanien hyvinvointitutkimus Roosan perustulokset 2017-2018. THL Raportteja 15</i>. Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos.</li> <li>• Non-Discrimination Act</li> <li>• Aliens Act</li> <li>• Act on the Reception of Persons Applying for International Protection and on the Identification of and Assistance to Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings</li> <li>• Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration</li> </ul>

The first course, course A, that was being analyzed provided overviews of social work history and development within a Finnish welfare state, reflections on the current state of social work, and insights about the future development of social work and the welfare state. Ethics and professional, ethical growth were also the main focus areas. All the books used in course A focused on ethics. This course was chosen to be one of the focus courses in this research because of the statements about reflections on the current state of social work and insights into the future and the development of social work. Global immigration and migration have shaped the traditionally homogenous Finnish population to become more culturally and ethnically diverse (Lepola 2000). The recent development of global migration has impacted the state of social work in Finland, and therefore, it was suitable to consider this introductory course to be relevant for this analysis.

The next course in this research, course B, focused on the social service system, clients' rights secured by legislation, and changes in the Finnish welfare system impacted by local, national, and global development. Many aspects of this course overlap with course A about the social service system and its position in the Finnish welfare state. The assigned materials of this specific class included only one book about marginalization in Finland and an overview of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health website.

Course C stated its core content is social work with adults and youth. The main focus area of this course is marginalization, unprivileged communities, and the impact of societal structures on marginalization development. The intended learning outcomes related to this course state that students should be able to reflect on structures' impact on



marginalization as a phenomenon and the causes behind marginalization. Several studies show that residents in Finland with immigrant backgrounds or cultural minority positions have lower socioeconomic status than residents in Finland on average (Tilastokeskus 2015). Therefore, it was relevant to include this course in this research to analyze how the structural impact is acknowledged behind marginalization, especially when it manifests further among minorities. The assigned course materials included two books, one of them stating directly that cultural and ethnic minorities are intentionally excluded from that publication because of the lack of knowledge of the researchers about marginalization in this context.

Finally, the last course analyzed in this research, course D, focused directly on multicultural social work, global migration, minority position in Finland, and human rights. One of the learning outcomes states directly that students should know how to act to reduce racism at individual and structural levels and develop a human-rights-based approach to social work. This course consisted of several books and legislation as assigned materials, including notions of immigration and national minorities in Finland.

### **Positionality**

One of the essential learning outcomes in social work and social work education is reflexivity (Talentia 2017). Also, feminist research practices emphasize the importance of positionality in research and knowledge production. Positionality considers the researcher's standpoint, and it rejects the traditional idea of positivist, value-neutral research (Brooks & Hesse-Biber 2007, 13-15). Postmodern feminist scholars have argued

that acknowledging and reflecting on researchers' connection to the research topic is crucial. Reflexivity is a way for the researcher to examine their position in the context of their research topic and their biases that might impact the research results. (Hesse-Biber 2014, 3; Leavy & Harris 2019,103.)

Connecting from the arguments of postmodern feminist scholars around positionality and reflexivity, as a white researcher, I must be aware of how my identities and the privilege I hold have impacted my experiences. The researcher's ability to practice strong reflexivity in qualitative research is crucial since qualitative research aims to understand how reality is experienced and represented (Brooks & Hesse-Biber 2007, 16-17). Since identities always impact the standpoint of our life, it is essential to locate my identities in this research in the context of the research topic. Research that focuses on multicultural social work demands reflections on the identities of the researcher.

Identifying as a white, European transnational feminist, I have spent time reflecting on my location within the feminist movement and also within the perspective of my geographical location. Following Adrienne Rich's (1986) notions on politics of location, I have been reflecting on my privileged identities and this research topic. I wish to address what Rich (1986) is demanding from white Western feminists to acknowledge; recognition and exploration of whiteness and the privilege that comes within. Without critical reflections of whiteness, there is a danger of reinforcing unequal power dynamics and maintaining them; white supremacy. Without reflections and recognition of the meaning behind white Western skin, there is no possibility of changing the discourse of

white supremacy that thrives on the demonization of ideological, cultural, and ethnical others (Rich 1986, 220).

Before my graduate studies in the United States, I lived my entire life in Finland, identified as a white middle-class woman without any specific religious identity. Eventhough I am not a Christian, I did participate Christian traditions since it is the main religion in Finland and many cultural traditions are connected to Christianity. Many of my identities come with great privilege that I have had to learn how to reflect their impact on my experiences and standpoint. I consider myself a suitable researcher on this topic because I pursued my undergraduate degree in a similar institution in the Helsinki area in social services. I share the privileged racial, cultural, and national identities of most social-services program students in Finland. Therefore, I have experienced the importance of critical reflections on identities and societal structures in social work, which inspired me to focus on how othering manifests in the social work field.

During and after my studies in Finland, I also worked in the social services for the survivors of domestic violence. During my employment I witnessed different work styles and situations with ethnically diverse clients, some of which stuck with me and inspired me to do this research. These situations that stayed in my mind related to victimization of Muslim women in domestic violence cases when women with no Muslim identity were seen as survivors. It was weekly, if not daily, when crisis workers discussed about the clients' situations and saw Muslim women as victims of domestic violence and their religion. In contrast, women without Muslim identity, were not observed through their religious identity at all. One of the most shocking situations I witnessed was when one of

the employees used openly racist language about people of color during daily employee meetings. Even though I did not witness openly racist language towards clients, there is a possibility that these attitudes will impact on client's experiences with the services.

Normalization of othering and racist language at the social services can be used as an example of why it would be important and meaningful to incorporate critical reflections throughout social-services education to ensure that social-service professionals have the ability to critically self-reflect as it is demanded in social-services programs' learning outcomes and national and international social work guidelines.

## **Findings and Discussion**

Following the literature review and the scholarly discussion around multicultural social work and the importance of intercultural competencies in social work, this chapter provides the results of the analysis described above. Current scholarly literature provides many insights into how the discussion about multiculturalism and multicultural development often connects to immigrants even when multiculturalism is not a new phenomenon only related to global migration. The discussion about immigration has centered around the problem-focused approach to the impacts of multiculturalism. The problem-focused approach to multiculturalism is not a unique phenomenon only in Finland, but the same notions can be seen around Europe.

The results of the data analysis and the discussion of these results are organized by the themes that emerged from the examination of the existing literature around multiculturalism and othering in social work: othering, structures, racism, discrimination, critical reflections, and intercultural competencies. These results display the achievable level of the understanding of intercultural competencies that can be attained by students throughout the core curriculum of their social-services education as found in the existing materials. Five themes that emerged from the literature review were intersecting with each other frequently though out the analysis, and locating the findings specifically under one theme did not limit them to also connecting to other themes. Table 2 represents the themes and the general notions of the content of these themes. The order of these themes can be explained through the connections between themes. Othering manifests itself through structures that include power systems that relate to privilege and oppression.

Othering that manifests through structures is also realized in racial discrimination that happen across of the levels of societies. In the context of social work, critical reflections of self and society are crucial to recognize to understand how societal and personal values, opinion, and attitudes impact on the experiences of professionals and also clients. This recognition is necessary to attain intercultural competency, even though critical reflections are still often overlooked in social work education and practice. (See Lum 1992, Dominelli 1998, Nadan 2014.)

**Table 2.** Themes

<b>Othering</b>	Notions of how othering processes function within societies; what it means, how it can be acknowledged.
<b>Structural focus</b>	Notions of structural forces as part of the power systems that create and maintain privilege and oppression.
<b>Racism/Discrimination</b>	Notions of discrimination against cultural minority groups.
<b>Critical reflections</b>	Notions of critical reflections of society and self. The “missing” dimension of intercultural competencies.
<b>Intercultural competencies</b>	Notions of traditional aspects of intercultural competence models. Includes knowledge, skills, and awareness dimensions. The dimensions focus on treating cultural others as objects.

## **Othering**

As found in the literature review the othering process is a societal phenomenon with differing aspects manifested at various levels of society. The central contextual aspect of othering is built within the representation of some identity characteristics in dual and oppositional categories such as us/them, good/bad, or superior/inferior.

Dehumanization and demonization of the cultural or ethnic Others are also consequential aspects of othering. Dehumanization and demonization of others are forms of racism.

Othering manifests in all levels of society through structures, attitudes, and norms. (Lorde 1984; Lentin 2015; Mäkinen 2017.)

Within the publications analyzed in this research, the othering process and how it manifests was acknowledged in some texts. Still, some of these same texts can be seen participating in othering processes as well. Othering was found in discussions related to or about Islamic and Muslim communities. Dehumanization and demonization of Others are central aspects of othering, and in Europe, these often are linked to the demonization of Muslims (Farris 2017).

A text where othering could be found within the language was a publication that provided articles about multiculturalism and nationalism written by one of the leading scholars in Finland from the field of multicultural social sciences. Saukkonen's (2020) article focuses on ethnic profiling in air travel and ethnically diverse bodies in his publication. Saukkonen ponders his own identities and states "Olen valkoihoinen keski-ikäinen ja keskiluokkainen pulliainen, joita on lentokentällä kolmetoista tusinassa.

Harvinaisempi tapaus terroristien ja lentokonekaappareiden ammattikunnassa.” (*I am a white, middle-aged, and middle-class person. There are several others like me in the airport. Quite rare among terrorists and plane hijackers.*) (p. 67). In this sentence, the author repeats the racist stereotypes of “terrorist-looking” people and separates their identities (white, middle-class) from those who look *like a terrorist*. In addition, this author also reflects that the experience at the airport would have been different if he were from the Middle East or Northern Africa or if he looked Arab. There is no denying that airport security practices ethnic profiling and targets Muslim-looking people. What makes the author’s reflections and thought process problematic here is that he is not addressing at any point the racist and problematic notions of *who looks like a terrorist*. He also does not address how that connects to discrimination against Muslims and how terrorism should not be labeled something that is typically only in the context of people from the Middle East or North Africa (or Muslim communities in general). This repetition of the racist narrative of a Muslim terrorist is part of the demonization of Islam explained by Farris (2017). Farris states how anti-Islamic rhetoric has become the primary anti-Other rhetoric in Europe. This example drawn from the article written by Saukkonen (2020) is a good example of how othering can be displayed within the language of an article written in an apparently neutral tone and by a scholar whose focus is on the multicultural development of Finnish society in past decades.

Within the first pages of Saukkonen’s (2020) publication, he provides a brief overview of the recent multicultural development in Finland. Here othering manifests in word choices with negative connotations such as “muuttoliikeshokki” (*migration shock*),



“muuttopaine” (*migration pressure*), or “hallitsematon maahanmuutto” (*uncontrollable immigration*) (p. 8-9). Using terms with negative connotations like *shock* or *pressure* links to the demonization of Others and how immigrants and refugees are pictured as threats to national security and to a homogenous culture of host countries. The word *uncontrollable* also has a negative interpretation connecting to power. Having *control* often connects to having the power to have control, but *uncontrollable* includes notions of being powerless. Highlighting the negative impacts or possibilities of the negative impacts of migration and multiculturalism repeats the discriminatory dimension of othering where reality is divided between dualities such as good/bad or inferior/superior. (See Lorde 1984.)

There were also several points within the analyzed publications where othering was acknowledged and processed more comprehensively. Publications from Course A focused mainly on ethical theories since ethics and moral questions are essential for social work. Publication by Juujärvi, Myyry, and Pessa (2007) focused on ethical theories defined the concept of Other, stating, “Toiseus tarkoittaa yhteenkuulumattomuuden, vierauden ja toissijaisuuden tuntemusta, jolla on perusta ihmisen identiteetissä” (*Othering includes experiences of not belonging, alienation, and being secondary, that is based on human identities*) (p. 201). Acknowledging the interaction between othering processes and identities is crucial. This same publication also connects oppression and marginalization into othering processes asking the following question “Kansainvälisessä kirjallisuudessa sorron kohteena olevina ryhminä pidetään etnisiä vähemmistöjä, homoseksuaaleja, vammaisia, työttömiä, köyhiä, vanhuksia ja naisia. Voimme asettaa

kysymyksen myös toisinpäin: ovatko syntyperältään suomalaiset ja evankelisluterilaiseen kirkkoon kuuluvat, heteroseksuaalit, terveet, pysyvässä työsuhteessa olevat, optiomiljönäärit ja muut rikkaat sekä miehet taloudellisen, poliittisen ja kulttuurisen vallanytimessä?” (*In international literature ethnic and sexual minorities, disabled people, the unemployed, poor, elderly, and women are considered to be oppressed groups. Therefore, we can ask question: are healthy, heterosexual, and wealthy men who are Finnish through birth and identify as evangelical Lutheran, the ones with economical, political, and cultural power?*) (p. 202). These sentences provide more information about recognizing othering processes and power dynamics in Finnish society, but still, recognition of the impact of Western imperialism is ignored. The Finnish national identity has developed around whiteness, middle-classness, and Christianity. Finland’s history as colonial complicit with other imperial Western powers has connected Finland to imperialism and therefore, also, the societal power developed within these frames that were and are emphasizing white and Western supremacy. (Palmberg 2009; Vuorela 2009.) Discussion about identities, oppression, and marginalization Western dominance as a historical fact cannot be ignored. Nadan (2014) has demanded postcolonial perspectives to be acknowledged within identity politics in social work since the mainstream narrative still repeats normalization of Western dominance and supremacy that maintains oppressive power systems globally.

Following Nadan’s (2014) notions of highlighting the otherness and historical normalization of Western supremacy, Juujärvi, Myyry, and Pessa (2007) explain “Hallitsevan ryhmän käyttäytyminen ja arvot kuvataan normaaleiksi, kun taas sorretti

ryhmä edustaa poikkeavuutta. Tietoisena strategisena valintana sorto tarkoittaa sitä, että hallitsevan ryhmän jäsenet tekevät päätöksiä, jotka sulkevat tietyiltä yksilöiltä ja ryhmiltä käyttöä resursseja ja valtaa.” (*The behavior and values of the dominating group are described as normal, and on the other hand, the marginalized group represents abnormality. Marginalization of others as strategic choice manifests with the lack of access to resources and power in society.*) (p. 204). To get a more comprehensive understanding of othering as a process and how it connects to power, there is a demand to reflect on traditionally dominating and marginalized groups in a historical and critical context and how normalization and othering manifest within social structures like Nadan (2014) suggests. The normalization of traditionally dominant groups and the politics of othering manifests through out the structures of society and therefore demands focus on structures such as social and health care services.

### **Structures**

Societal structures have a crucial role in multicultural development in societies. As found in the literature review, different social structures, including the politics of othering through out the societal structures of institutions and welfare state systems such as social and health services, are guided through national and international legislation and declarations. The formation of these structures and structural dimensions (societal values and norms that are displayed within the structures) are often stated to be universal. Still, these statements exclude historical notions of the global Western oppression of the Global South. The idea of the Western ruling standpoint as the universal and truthful standpoint to all societal structures is extremely problematic without further reflections

on oppression, violence, and beliefs of Western superiority (See Freire 1970; Nadan 2014).

In social work, the importance of structures and structural impact on everyday life is acknowledged in ethical and professional guidelines as one of the dimensions of social work (Garran and Rozas 2013; The Social Welfare Act 2014; Talentia 2017). Within the texts analyzed in this study, the importance of structural social work and the ability to reflect social structures and their inclusive and discriminatory aspects and power dynamics were mentioned in several publications, but practical guidelines seemed to be missing.

One alarming finding from the analysis of the texts was that the historical or current ideological power systems and how they impact societies' structures were not mentioned. For example, Juujärvi, Myyry and Pessa (2007) only mentioned capitalism briefly by stating "Esimerkiksi kapitalistista markkinataloutta tukeva ideologia sisältää uskomuksen, että jokainen ihminen on 'oman onnensa seppä'" (*For example capitalism includes beliefs of 'everyone being the artisan of their own fortune'.*) (p. 204). This type of notion regarding capitalism ignores the impact of other ideologies and power dynamics that create and maintain privilege and oppression that cause the marginalization of individuals and communities. This belief of an individual's responsibility alone reinforces inequalities and othering. In a way, it places individuals in a vacuum where social and societal surroundings would not impact them, even though many theories argue against this (See Brooks 2017). Accordingly, recognizing capitalism only as an economic system that includes demand for individual responsibility for everyone's

placement within the society would cross out the need for structural social work since, according to how capitalism is defined within the publication presented above, structural forces will not impact individuals.

There were some notions about the role of structures and structural social work within the assigned course materials analyzed in this study. However, even these notions bypass the demand for critical reflections of the society that is still called for in the intended learning outcomes of some of the courses through the following statement “[Students] are familiar with phenomena related to poverty and underprivileged individuals as well as structures and processes causing marginalization.” The marginalization phenomenon is placed within structural social work since social structures take part in marginalizing processes. The concern here is *how* students will become familiar with structures and processes of marginalization if they are not discussed within the course materials that state that students will learn to recognize and reflect on these phenomena. The exclusion of naming how the distribution of capitalism and, for example, imperialism are related to marginalization will reinforce unequal power dynamics within the individual, institutional, and structural aspects of societies locally, nationally, and globally.

There were brief mentions of the role of employment in marginalization, but what became of the structural obstacles to the employment of ethnically or culturally different people? Helldan (2018) stated, “Työnantajien ennakkoluulot vaikeuttavat monien etnisiin vähemmistöihin kuuluvien nuorten työllistymistä” (*Biased attitudes complicate the employment of young people with ethnic minority identities.*) (p. 10). The economic value

of Others is related to employment, and according to Mäkinen (2017) socioeconomic status of minority groups is often incorporated into othering processes. This sentence provides an example of a structural obstacle related to minority groups and their placement in the margins of society through othering, even though it is not called by its real name, racism. Another structural issue associated with this sentence is the avoidance of naming racism as racism. Two quotes presented within the last two paragraphs show how contradictory these reflections are about marginalization from employment. The first text introduces a capitalistic system by highlighting the individual's own responsibility for integration or marginalization, while the other texts provide insights into structural obstacles (racism) related to employment and, therefore, integration or marginalization.

Regarding structures and processes causing marginalization, these were mainly reflected through the homogenous approach to the Finnish population. There were few awareness-based notions of structural difficulties among ethnic and cultural minorities about their experienced discrimination, and Helldan (2018) even states “Tässä oppaassa esitetyt haasteet, joita monet maahan muuttaneet asiakkaat kohtaavat, niin oleskeluoikeuksiin kuin kotoutumisen vaiheisiin liittyen, eivät ole millään tavalla sidoksissa kulttuuriin. Ne perustuvat ennemmänkin lakeihin ja säädöksiin, yhteiskunnan rakenteisiin sekä asiakkaiden tietotaitoihin ja osaamiseen.” (*The obstacles related to residency and social integration examined in this guidebook are not associated with the culture by any means. These obstacles connect more to the legislation, society's structures, and the knowledge-based capabilities of the clients.*) (p. 69). This statement

can be read to acknowledge the structural barriers in multicultural social work. Still, this acknowledgment does not further reflect on the structures related to these obstacles.

Following the earlier reflections about the role of racism in the employment of cultural and ethnic Others, one of the courses stated in their intended learning outcomes, “[Students] know how to act to reduce and prevent racism and discrimination.” How will students learn to reduce and prevent racism if racism is shrouded as *biases* or *attitudes* in texts? Understanding racism also demands critical reflections on whiteness, white supremacy, and Western-based oppressive power systems (Nylund 2006; Kolivoski, Weaver, and Constance-Huggins 2014). Reduction and prevention of racism demand using the actual name of the phenomenon in order to observe where it appears and reflect on it further in individual and structural dimensions.

### **Racism/Discrimination**

Racism and discrimination are often addressed within each other. The literature review shows that racism can be defined through notions of beliefs of superiority and inferiority among human races, and often the images of ethnically and culturally homogenous nations are promoted. Often racism is explained through discriminatory actions, attitudes, or behavior, but racism manifests in all levels of societies. Traditionally racism as an ideology is often exemplified by overt, government sanctioned racial oppression, such as the Nazi regime in Germany or, for example, the Jim Crow era in the U.S. (Lentin 2015.)

In social work, studies show that experiences of discrimination are manifested in the marginalization of clients. These discriminatory experiences are reproduced across all levels of society and by social work professionals in all sectors. Discriminatory practices in social work may better be named as institutional racism. Within the analyzed publications, discrimination is experienced and reposted by immigrants and other cultural minorities, such as the national minority group of Roma people. Something that was common between publications was minimizing language when topics were related to racial discrimination.

In Saukkonen's (2020) publication that was also focused on earlier, the author used language that repeatedly minimized the notions of racism, "Joitain kohdellaan myös syrjivästi tai rumasti heidän syntyperänsä, uskontonsa, tai ihonvärinsä vuoksi." (*Some people are treated in discriminatory and horrid ways because of their geographical origin, religion, or the color of their skin*) (p. 77). These "horrid discriminatory" actions displayed in this sentence are racism, and to prevent racism, we should be able to name racism for what it is in the context where it is discussed. It is clear that if someone has been discriminated against because of their origin, religion, or race, it is racism. This sentence shows how racism is often minimized as bad behavior without calling out the actions as racist. Another example is "... somalialaiset kohtaavat Suomessa syrjintää ja jopa rasismia..." (*... Somalis face discrimination in Finland and even racism...*) (p. 73). This sentence continues minimizing racism and, in a way, separates it from the discrimination against Somali populations. The assumption here is that Somalis experience discrimination and racism. Still, it ignores the fact that if Somalis are



discriminated against because they or their families immigrated from Somalia, it is racial discrimination. Therefore, it should be called out as racism.

A crucial aspect of developing anti-racist institutions is to critically reflect on institutions' values and norms and reflect on how those values and norms manifest. Weiste-Paakkanen, Lämsä, and Kuusio (2018) focus exclusively on the wellbeing and experiences of Roma people in social and health care services. The results of this nationwide research report examining the marginalization of Roma people and the differences in health between Roma communities and the majority of Finns. Overall, the results displayed that on average Roma people reported more unsatisfactory levels in all aspects of health than did other Finns. Roma people reported more discriminatory acts by health care professionals and also the overall health issues of Roma were more severe. This provides surface-level information on the consequences of marginalization that has taken place in Finland for decades, even centuries, against Roma populations. Weiste-Paakkanen, et al. pointed out from the report that Roma people face discrimination by authorities and institutions in Finland. The study also reported discrimination within social services. The notion was that there were no mentions of *who* was discriminating. When talking about discrimination in social services, the targets of discrimination must be recognized, as well as the role of the discriminators, that is social service providers. These results show that it is the social work professionals, social workers, and social counselors who are discriminating against Roma populations.

Similarly to what was found in the *Structures* section of this chapter, texts from the course materials are in contradictions with the intended learning outcome, “[Students]

know how to act to reduce and prevent racism and discrimination.” Internal reflections of our roles in institutional racism are uncomfortable and challenging. But it is mandatory and necessary if we genuinely want to reduce and prevent racism, promote anti-racist approaches in social work, and advocate for social justice and human rights.

Structural social work demands social work professionals to promote and advocate for equitable and inclusive opportunities for populations. It also highlights the importance of social security, calls out to reflect societal power systems, and demands advocacy for social justice. If social work as a societal institution is racist, how can the guidelines we have set for ourselves be achieved? Reflections of attitudes, especially racist ones, might be undesirable and uncomfortable, but they are demanded within social work. (See Lum 1992.) In Finland, the demand to reflect on racism and racist attitudes connect to whiteness since it is the dominant racial identity of people in Finland. Scholars have identified the struggles in racial reflections through the normalization of whiteness (Taylor 2009; Kendal 2013; Mäkinen 2017.) Within the field of social work, since most professionals are part of the racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural majority population of Finland, we must understand the reports of institutional racism related to our work and reflections on our whiteness, including power systems and power dynamics through historical, political, social, and ideological perspectives.

### **Critical Reflections**

Critical reflections in social work are emphasized in learning outcomes of curricula and on social work ethical guidelines. Like found and stated in the literature

review, social work professionals should have the competence to reflect their own position in social work, society's politics, policies, and legislation, and the institutions and organizations linked to social work and social services. Some of the courses analyzed in the research highlighted the ability to reflect critically on clients' positions within the welfare system, societal processes that cause marginalization, or reflect on challenges related to minority positions in society.

Within the publications, there were several demands to reflect the actions, values, and what seems "normal" to the professionals. Text written by Särkelä (2011) also mentioned the difficulty of these societal reflections because of the individual focus in social work with the following argument, "Koska sosiaalisessa auttamistyössä yhteiskunnalliset ja toimintarakenteisiin liittyvät ongelmat tulevat näkyviksi pääasiallisesti yksilöllisten ongelmien kautta, niiden näkeminen voi olla vaikeaa. Ei ole kovinkaan helppo tehdä näkyviksi yksilöllisten ongelmien takana olevia ongelmia tuottavia ja ylläpitäviä rakenteita." (*Because in social work, structural obstacles and problems often manifest through individual experiences, it is challenging to see the structural forces behind the individual problems that maintain and reinforce these obstacles.*) (p. 16). This sentence explains the invisibility of oppressive structures and why structural social work is often challenging to put into practice. Like many scholars have argued, recognition of oppressive structures is difficult due to the normalization of the power inequities and Western supremacy (white supremacy), and the failure of structural recognition leads seeing only the individual level (Ladson-Billings 2009; Taylor 2009; Kendall 2013; Nadan 2014). In multicultural societies, this is often one of

the pathways of othering and seeing minorities as “unfit” to the Finnish society. This process, as mentioned, ignores the structural obstacles of integration.

Even though within the social work guidelines, structural social work and reflections are emphasized, most of the analyzed publications excluded the structural approach from their content. For example, from the same publication as the previous example, Särkelä (2011) stated while explaining the causes behind marginalization and the division of wealth, “Erityisen keskeiseksi tämä pohdinta on noussut keskustelussa globalisaatiosta ja mailmankaupan vapauttamisesta. Köyhät köyhtyvät ja rikkaat rikastuvat globalisaation myötä, vai onko sittenkin mahdollista ohjata kansainvälistymistä siten, että yhä kasvava rikkaus jaettaisiin tasaisemmin kaikkien onneksi.” (*The discussion about globalization and free global markets is pivotal in this reflection process. The poor become poorer and the wealthy get wealthier due to globalization, or is it still possible to manage the globalization in a way that would benefit everyone more equally?* (p. 95).

These sentences may seem to ignore the role of global capitalism in the unequal distribution of wealth and set it purely on globalization. Globalization as a term includes migration and multiculturalism, and it seems to be suitable in the context of maintaining oppressive power systems (like capitalism) to set the responsibility of unequal distribution of wealth to globalization and, therefore, migration instead of capitalism. Through lenses of social work, sentences like these are problematic since they seem to be reflecting on the causes of marginalization, but the language excludes the reflections of the ruling economic system.

Another example of how the ruling power systems are ignored from the texts is the demonization of Islam and xenophobia that is manifesting around Europe (see Farris 2017). Publication written by Keskinen, Vuori, and Hirsiaho (2012) focused on gender through multiculturalism and nationality. Within one article, the publication brought up the demonization of Muslim men and the victimization of Muslim women in domestic violence cases. Reflections of this article focused on the differences in how abusive perpetrators and victims are seen differently depending on their ethnic, cultural, and religious identities. Within the same article, the author noted how the limited definition of nationality sometimes expands to vague western identity and excludes Others, often targeting Muslims and immigrants or refugees from the Global South. This idea of western identity includes notions of whiteness, middle-classness, and Christianity (Farris 2017). Even though the author reflects on the differences in attitudes towards perpetrators and victims of domestic abuse in the context of the demonization of Islam, there are no reflections on the causes and processes behind the exclusion of Islam in the West. Reflections on the demonization of Muslims or the victimization of Muslim women demand the acknowledgment of present-day imperialism led by the United States that connects closely to the war on terrorism as a response to the radical Islamic terrorist attack in 2001 (Abu-Ludhog 2002).

Reflections of the global power systems, such as capitalism and imperialism, would be crucial in the process of social work professionals reflecting on their and society's values, norms, and policies and understanding the multi-level dimensions

behind them. These missing reflections of the power systems are seen as missing parts of intercultural competencies.

### **Intercultural Competencies**

As determined earlier in the literature review intercultural competencies are crucial in social work because of the different standpoints of ethnic and cultural minority groups. Intercultural competence models aim to provide frameworks for professionals to work comprehensively with culturally and ethnically diverse client populations. As introduced in the literature review, intercultural competencies locate on four different dimensions; knowledge, awareness, skills, and critical reflection (Lum 2013; Dominelli 2010).

It seemed that the analyzed materials that texts primarily provided awareness-based competence. The main focus of materials was to provide awareness of minority positions in a societal context, mostly through possible or experienced challenges of integrating minorities. The content of analyzed publications varies from the marginalization of Roma communities to immigrant integration. Knowledge and skills aspects were also included within the materials through legislation, guidelines, and information on challenges around immigration status and legislation. Overall, publications had different elements in their focus areas around multicultural clients, such as domestic violence or parenting.

Course A focused on ethics theories and guidelines utilized in social work. Within the materials of course A, there were mentions of critical reflections. Or at least the

essential importance of reflection was incorporated into the texts. Also, in course D, which focuses on multicultural social work, one publication provided observations of identities and culture through feminist lenses. Even within the materials that can be seen as delivering all aspects of intercultural competencies, notions of critical reflections were vague, and they did not mention any further reflections of global power systems and their impact on how values and norms develop. Through intended learning outcomes, reflections of professionals' attitudes and what they see as normal were highlighted. Still, there were no further notions of how values and norms develop and what impacts on that development.

Analyzed data showed that there were multiple ways how five themes emerged from the literature review connected and intersected with each other. The most concerning notion was how comprehensive critical reflections about the structures and power systems were missing in all of the assigned class readings. Excluding acknowledgement of power systems is related to the politics of Othering and how they manifest within the society. Recognition of structural impact on Othering and racial discrimination is a key perspective to structural social work that aims to decrease disparities between minority and majority populations.

## Conclusion

I was in the middle of my writing process when Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 2022. After the initial shock, I understood that this war in the middle of Europe would increase migration in Europe when people were escaping from Ukraine to survive. Soon I noticed how media coverage and political statements showed a different response to Ukrainian refugees escaping from war to other European countries than when non-European refugees sought safety in Europe. Ukrainians were warmly welcomed throughout train stations and airports. Conversely the rapidly increased migration in 2015 due to war in Syria, mostly from Middle-Eastern countries, prompted many European countries to develop legislation and policies making immigration more difficult. This is one of the most visible examples of how othering manifests. Dehumanization and demonization of especially Muslims are related to these differences between the reactions to escaping refugees and immigration.

As I dug deeper into the literature on the politics of othering in the first chapter, it was evident that othering is linked to power dynamics and global politics. Multicultural social work has been seen as a gatekeeper to integrating ethnic and cultural minorities into society. Traditionally, social services in Finland have followed principles of universality where social services are set to automatically serve all client populations equally, as opposed to equitably and from the same baseline without acknowledging the impact of different identities, histories, and lived experiences. This has set the responsibility of integration on the minority communities by ignoring structural oppression that causes obstacles to specific populations and their integration and equal



opportunities in the society. Still, social work education has not incorporated these notions into its curriculum.

Following up on the literature review in the methodology chapter, I introduced data collection and data analysis procedures, and my own position in the context of this research. As a graduate of the social services undergraduate program myself, I noticed the questions and observations that I had during my undergraduate studies and internships, I couldn't find answers in my classes. I started to find answers during my graduate studies in the U.S. when I studied and discussed about identity politics and transnational feminism in my graduate classes. It was eye-opening to analyze the language through transnational feminist lenses that recognized global systems of oppression and privilege within the analyzed class readings. Utilization of discourse analysis through the five main themes, 1. **Othering**, 2. **Structures**, 3. **Racism/Discrimination**, 4. **Critical reflections**, and 5. **Intercultural competencies**, that emerged from the current literature about social work and politics made it possible to analyze and reflect curriculum with transnational and anti-racist lenses.

Most intercultural competencies found in the curricula focused on knowledge, awareness, and skills, as intercultural competencies, excluding critical reflections from the competencies, as the review of pivotal literature shows is common in the field of social services. Still, analyzed texts were calling out the importance of critical reflections emphasized in international and national social work guidelines, but further observations and in-depth content about critical reflections were missing. Although some articles and books acknowledged that there are systemic powers connected to the individual level of

society, these power systems such as imperialism and capitalism were not mentioned and explained comprehensively. Missing notions, especially Western imperialism that has throughout history set the tone for Western superiority that Western countries have ruthlessly taken advantage of through exploitation of the countries of the Global South. What I found most alarming was the language analyzed from the collection of articles written by Saukkonen (2020) as one of the leading scholars of multiculturalism in Finland. It presented itself as an example of how seemingly neutral language will reinforce othering and help maintain unequal power systems.

Reflecting on my own experiences in undergraduate studies, the results of my analysis were more promising than I expected. There were more notions on multicultural social work in the curriculum of Diaconia University of Applied Sciences and they even included one course focusing only to multicultural social work to their core courses. During my studies in Metropolia from 2017 to 2020, no courses on multicultural social work were offered.

Even though there were notions of othering within the assigned class readings analyzed in this research, especially within the class readings of course D, still some racist stereotypes were implemented as a normal part of the texts without any further reflections or analysis of the power dynamics behind the formation of values, norms, oppression, and privilege. Furthermore, intended learning outcomes stated structural reflections as one of the learning outcomes of analyzed courses and therefore in depth notions of structural social work and minority position within the society should be incorporated more comprehensively. These structural reflections would target politics of

othering that often manifests as racism and discrimination. Positively some assigned course readings covered brief notions of structural social work and minority positions within the society but truly comprehensive reflections of the impact of structures on Othering were not found. Therefore, I argue that the current state of the curriculum will not provide comprehensive competencies for students to critically reflect on and analyze structures and their impact on society, communities, and individuals.

There is no simple answer to how to better incorporate broad critical reflections and structural social work into the social service's curriculum. I suggest incorporating theory and practices about critical self-reflections as part of all core classes in social services curriculum. Incorporating self-reflections that acknowledge the impact of different identities will lead to reflections of the societal structures. In a welfare state like Finland, identity politics focus mostly on class identity and the differing experiences related to wealth and poverty, in constantly changing and developing multicultural society as Finland is in 2022, the focus on identity politics should be extended to cover more comprehensively different identities such as ethnicity, nationality, and religious identity. Also, within higher education, there should be acknowledgement of systemic powers, such as capitalism and Western imperialism, that have shaped the societal development of Finland, and furthermore, the development of welfare state and social work.

There is a need for more comprehensive political change in Finnish society overall, where globalization and multiculturalism would be recognized as a normal state of current societal development rather than a problematic phenomenon that would

disappear if countries make stricter and more oppressive immigration and integration policies, which result in marginalizing minorities even further. Resistance to the politics of othering demands uncomfortable reflections, studies, and discussions about privilege and oppression. There is especially a need to reflect Western superiority that connects the racist legacy of colonialism, followed by modern imperialism. Anti-racist, multicultural social work needs all professionals to participate in these changes in the social environment that will truly advocate for social justice and human rights.

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