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MA Thesis

*Social work and the Greek refugee "crisis":*

*A postcolonial approach*

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## Abstract

This thesis examines different social work practices in different contexts with the purpose of underlining the impact of colonial technologies embedded to dominant social work practices. It attempts to study colonialism, not only as a form of military rule but also as a discourse of white supremacy and male domination, and explores the emergence of social work as a profession and as an academic discipline in order to highlight its relations with the project of colonialism and the civilizing mission. Specifically, this thesis argues that social work is a “western invention” whose models have been enforced without exception in non-western countries and attempts to study the eurocentrism and hegemonic western thought of contemporary social work. Using the example of the emergence of social work in South Africa, it attempts to highlight the profession’s continued coloniality in postcolonial states and the fact that the origin of social work is connected with philanthropic work and maintaining social control over its working-class clients. An attempt is made to study the Greek refugee “crisis” as a neo-orientalistic discourse and the strengthening of EU’s external borders and racialized anti-immigrant policies as processes that established Europe as a “racial supra-state” while creating the non-European Other as illegal and potentially dangerous. Examples of racist and sexist practices from white social workers are used from social working in the UK and in Greece during the refugee “crisis”, specifically the case of a refugee shelter for unaccompanied minors through the social workers’ union’s reports. The claim that social work is an apolitical and neutral profession whose sole purpose is to “do good” is challenged through a Foucaultian analysis of service user’s resistance to racist and sexist practices that highlights power relations between white social workers and black clients. Specifically, the US welfare rights movement and the Greek evictions movement are studied as examples of service users’ resistance. Finally, the need to decolonize social work as proposed by postcolonial scholars is discussed, so it can work towards one of the profession’s aims, achieving social justice.

## Introduction

*“You are the intruder. You are untimely, you are out of place. A refugee tearing yourself from your own land, carrying your body, beliefs, your language and your desires, your habits and your affections, across to the strange subliminal spaces of unrecognizable worlds. Everything that happens in this raw, painful experience of disruption, dislocation, and disremembering paradoxically fuels the cruel but creative crucible of the postcolonial.”*

(Young, 2003:12-13)

*I would like to believe that Orientalism has had a place  
in the long and often interrupted road  
to human freedom.*

(Said, 2003:xxiii)

The year was 2011, 4 years before the 2015 refugee “crisis” that shaped the future of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Greece, and I was volunteering for the first time in a refugee shelter for families. The social worker responsible for the shelter had met with me and my friend whom I was volunteering with, had informed us of what our role and duties will be and was giving us helpful advice when she mentioned that, because the people we would be working with - the people living in the shelter - were “Orientals” (“Anatolites”), they were always late. She then proposed that it would be best to lie to them about the hour that each activity would start so that they would be forced to be on time. Today, when remembering this event, I cannot help but think of all the other reasons these people could have for being late; could it be that they were simply not interested in the activities we had planned for them? In the years to come, while working and volunteering with refugees and migrants, I witnessed similar generalizing assumptions expressed by people involved in the “refugee issue” (“prosfigiko”) concerning service users coming from a variety of countries. It is clear to me now that this kind of practicing social work, through

reproducing assumptions about service users, is rather the rule than the exception and that these kinds of assumptions are deeply rooted in racist narratives, formed long before refugees and migrants from countries of Africa and Asia have traveled to Greece and waiting to be awakened once our encounter here was made.

This thesis will examine different social work practices in different contexts and temporalities to underline the impact of colonial technologies and racist/sexist stereotypes embedded in dominant social work practices. My case studies are mainly drawn from the Greek refugee "crisis", where, as we will see, there are numerous examples of social workers imposing racist practices and of clients resisting them. Examples of the emergence of social work are also drawn from the case of South Africa and the UK. Through the case of South Africa, the profession's relation with colonialism and continued coloniality becomes apparent, while through the examples from the UK, power relations between white social workers and black clients are highlighted. This thesis explores the emergence of social work as a profession, the development of the academic discipline, and the "discourse" of social work to point out the relations between the development of the profession and colonialism. This short exploration into the history of social work is necessary in order to be able to answer the question of "how can social workers "do harm" on their clients?" This question may seem unusual as social worker's primary mission according to their code of ethics, according to the National Association of Social Workers (2017) is "to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty" and one of the main principles in social work is to "do no harm" and to care for "good practices". This thesis will attempt to answer the question of how social workers can perpetuate racism and sexism and under what circumstances do they actually "harm" the ones whose well-being they are supposed to enhance. In order to deconstruct the meaning and the impact of social workers' racism and sexism, this thesis will be using literature from antiracist and radical social work, focusing on racism and white supremacy perpetuated in social work practice (Dominelli, 1997). This thesis will also be using postcolonial theory in order to highlight the profession's continued coloniality, eurocentrism, and white supremacy in postcolonial settings (Mathebane, 2020). We will analyze the refugee "crisis" as the field where the Other, refugee, migrant, or illegal alien, is produced on the basis of

race and as a form of "radical alterity", while at the same time a European "us" is constructed (Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou, 2018). Social work's neutrality will be challenged through examples of clients resisting "bad practices", highlighting in this way the power relations existing in the relations between social workers and clients.

In the first chapter of this study, the terms colonialism, orientalism, neo-orientalism and postcolonialism will be explained, starting with colonialism that will be used in this study not only to describe a form of military rule but also as a discourse of domination that has affected the whole world. Orientalism, a term employed for the first time by Said (2003) as the ideology that made colonialism possible, is used to describe a set of beliefs, views, and descriptions about the "Orient", while neo-orientalism is used to describe present-day descriptions of refugees and migrants arriving in Europe, focusing on discourses of victimhood and trauma (Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou, 2016). Postcolonial theory will be the theoretical background of this essay that will focus on the effects of past colonialism on social work practice today, on the continued coloniality of the profession and on the need to "decolonize" social work as expressed by postcolonial scholars (Dittfeld, 2020). In the next chapter, we will discuss social works' different definitions, as well as definitions for those who constitute the "clients" or "service users". This chapter will focus on the criticism that social work, since its emergence, has always been concerned with gaining its status as a profession rather than advocating for social justice, as is mentioned in the profession's definition (Mathebane, 2020). The radical social work movement that developed in the 1970s will be discussed as the one to challenge the individualistic approach and casework methods of traditional social work and instead proposed techniques such as group work, awareness-raising, and values of community, equality, and empowerment (Orme, 1997). Specifically, we will discuss feminist analyses of the 1980s as attempts to raise consciousness and empower women while offering an analysis of women's oppression, identified as patriarchy (Orme, 1997).

This study goes on to explore colonialism and the civilizing mission, where the goal was to westernize and civilize the "uncivilized" Other, and some of the notorious European colonizers and missionaries that introduced notions of morality and hierarchy between the sexes to countries where gender was not the important social stratifier that it came to be (Ampofo, 2007). Postcolonial scholars note that the fact

that the world in which social work emerged as a field in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was distinctively colonial has received little attention in social work literature (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011), a fact that makes us wonder, in this chapter, about social work's "troubled past", its emergence as a profession in colonial settings, and its relation to the civilizing mission. Social work's western hegemonic discourse is put forward in the next chapter through the use of the case of South Africa. The emergence of the social work profession in South Africa can highlight the profession's role in maintaining the social control needed for the advancement of nation-states as well as the professions' continued coloniality (Mathebane, 2020). Other similar disciplines such as sociology and psychology that generally promote world view theories and approaches derived from contexts alien to the postcolonial reality are studied and specifically the normative standard of the middle-class, Caucasian male of European descent used to explain 'universal human phenomena' (Robinson, 1998).

In the following chapters, we will be focusing on examples mainly from the Greek refugee "crisis"; to begin with, a short history of Greece as an immigration country will be helpful, to highlight the repressive immigration policies and the negative representations of immigrants in the media that started in the 1990s and continued with the arrival of asylum seekers after the 2015 refugee "crisis" (Tsimouris, 2015). These policies align with European policies that seek to strengthen the EU's external borders, such as the Schengen agreement that we examine next in the chapter. This thesis approaches EU's external borders as sites of national, racial, and ethnic differentiation, a fact explained not only by Europe's geographical location but also its historical legacies, for example its colonial past (Verstraete, 2003). Social work as a conservative practice that mostly targets the family as the field for intervention is examined next, through Dominelli's (1997) antiracist social work theory. This theory teaches us that social work practice is racist when it does not question such stereotypes and reproduce Eurocentric assumptions that ignore the effects of structural racism. Using this theory, we will examine the case of unaccompanied minors in a refugee shelter in Greece and the social workers' western assumptions about them, as reported by the union of NGO workers based in Athens. In the last chapter, this thesis attempts to answer the question of whether social work is as apolitical and neutral as it claims to be, through the use of Foucault's theory on power and while using examples of clients resisting social work's racist practices to

highlight power relations between "professionals" and "clients". The examples of resistance used are the welfare rights movement that developed in the 1960s and 1970s in the US and developed an intersectional political analysis that combined race, class, and gender and the 2020 movement against evictions developed by migrants, refugees, and NGO workers in Greece who are still fighting for the right to housing and equal treatment. Finally, this thesis discusses decolonization as a demand of postcolonial social work scholars, specifically epistemic decolonization that asks professionals to move towards a kind of social work that advocates for social justice.

## 1. Methodology

### 1.1 Notes on methodologies

For the purpose of this thesis, a bibliographical study was followed, that focused on literature from Radical and Antiracist social work theory from the 80s and 90s that challenged social work's perpetuation of racism through the use of traditional, mainstream methods. This thesis uses various examples to support its arguments of NGO workers perpetuating racist practices and service users resisting them, but does not wish to present a situation on its whole and tries to stay away from generalizations. For example, this study uses examples of social working in a "multicultural" UK drawn from Dominelli's (1997) work on antiracist social work in the 1990s in order to highlight the power relations between white social workers and black clients but does not wish to present the migrant experience of living in the UK and keeps in mind the changes in social work theory and practice from when this work was published, until today. The same goes for the use of the US welfare rights movement that evolved in the 1970s, as an example of service users resisting social workers' unfair practices, where facts were drawn from Nadasen (2012) who is rethinking the movement and its importance on putting forward an intersectional political analysis that combined race, class, and gender that is still topical today. The examples used from Greece, for the purpose of this thesis, were taken from reports of the Athens based union of workers in NGOs, reporting on NGOs' arbitrariness concerning service users. I decided not to take interviews with service



users concerning their experiences from NGOs as it has been noted that in human rights and migrant studies the field is becoming saturated and migrants/refugees are now reluctant to participate in research. Instead, I chose to focus on reports published from the union of NGO workers that have kept a systematic record on the malpractices of NGO workers and administrations towards refugees/migrants. The refugee/migrant issue (“prosfigiko”) in Greece is a big field and numerous researches have been published since 2015 attempting to study it. The present thesis does not wish to present it in its whole but rather attempts to focus on moments of social worker’s arbitrariness and migrants/refugees’ resistance from contemporary social work practice in Greece, to try to connect them with a neo-Orientalistic discourse that accompanies the refugee “crisis”, to find trails of a colonial way of thought and argue for the need of social work as a profession to address it and move towards decolonization. Finally, examples from Africa are used to help explain social work’s continued coloniality through social control in previous colonies and specifically South Africa because of the particularity of settler colonialism that created a social work situated in racist apartheid. The literature on postcolonial Africa is significantly big and this study can only highlight a small part of it and in no way does it attempt to present an evolution of social work in Africa. This thesis wish is to study social work’s “mistakes” of the past and continued problematic aspects so that we, western academic students and social workers, can learn from them. The logic behind it is to “study up” and “do our homework” on the profession’s history, embedded in white supremacy and racism, and to explore ways to differentiate from it. Doing one’s homework is to “gather information to be an informed citizen capable of acting in a morally conscientious manner toward a particular category of persons who share the identity of fellow citizen” (Bolles, 2013). It is an important step in acknowledging white social workers’ responsibility on perpetuating racism, along with the duty to fight for and together with those historically marginalized.

For the purpose of this thesis I will be using the term "black" in the way Bryan does, as it "covers a great diversity of experience and refers to people from different countries, races and cultures - from the Caribbean, Africa and Asian sub-continent - who are united by a common experience of colonial domination, immigration to Britain, and racial oppression" (Bryan, 1992:169). I will also be using the term “of color” interchangeably with the word “black”, a term that, according to Mohanty

(1991:X) designates a political constituency, not a biological or a sociological one. It refers to “the colonized, neocolonized or decolonized countries (of Asia, Africa, and Latin America) whose economic and political structures have been deformed within the colonial process, and to black, Asian, Latino, and indigenous peoples in North America, Europe, and Australia.” Both terms intentionally foreground a history of colonization and contemporary relationships of structural dominance between first and third world peoples (Mohanty, 1991). In this thesis the terms “refugee” and “migrant” will be also used interchangeably, following the critique to the use of these two different categories to differentiate the experience of people on the move. The categories of “refugee” and economic “migrant”, of whom one is entitled to apply for international protection whereas the latter is left to the discretion of the countries of their residence and employment (Karatani, 2005), are not able to capture the complex migrant experiences. Moreover the use of these categories homogenizes and oversimplifies the experiences of the people they contain (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017). As a matter of fact someone forced to flee their country of residence due to fear of persecution and applying for asylum in a new country throughout the usually very long process that leads to recognition or refusal of his/her asylum claim does not cease to be a refugee, even though during and after that process one may be categorized as asylum seeker, failed asylum seeker or ‘illegal migrant’ (Crawley & Skleparis, 2017). Finally, the use of different categories to describe those on the move has become deeply politicized in the context of Europe’s migration “crisis” as is made obvious by the fact that the current EU regime turns some refugees into undocumented migrants or ‘illegal migrants’ in political and public discourse and may in that way shield EU Member States from their international legal obligations (Schuster, 2011).

## 1.2 Colonialism / Orientalism / Neo-Orientalism

In order to begin discussing social works involvement in colonialism and continued coloniality we first have to discuss the definitions that will be used for the purpose of this thesis. The term “colonialism” will be used in the example of Michael Yellow Bird (2008 : 282), who uses the term both as “the event of an alien people invading the territory inhabited by people of a different race and culture, to establish

political, social, spiritual, intellectual and economic domination over that territory and people”, and as “a set of beliefs used to legitimize or promote this system, especially the belief that the mores of the colonizer are superior to those of the colonized”. Besides colonialism, which, emphasized the material condition of the political rule of subjugated peoples by the old European colonial power, who were motivated by the desire for living space and the extraction of riches (Young, 2001), I will be using in this thesis the term “imperialism”, which differentiates from colonialism in that “imperialism was driven by ideology from the metropolitan center and concerned with the assertion and expansion of state power” (Young, 2001:16). In the period after World War II, imperialism started signifying an ideology and a system of economic domination identified with the United States of America (Young, 2001: 26-27).

The idea that colonialism operated not only as a form of military rule but also simultaneously as a discourse of domination was introduced by Edward Said in his book “Orientalism” in 1978 (Young, 2001:383). Said (2003) has identified as Orientalism the mental and philosophical structure that made colonialism possible and argued that: “besides settling and conquering, colonial governance worked equally importantly through producing statements, official views and descriptions about the Orient and its inhabitants.” (Said, 2003:3) Said uses in his book Michel Foucault's notion of a "discourse" and the idea that the development of discourse is an inseparable part of the formation of a discipline, and puts it into use in analyzing what he calls Orientalism as "an ideological production across different kinds of texts produced historically from a wide range of different institutions, disciplines and geographical areas" (Young, 2001:385). Said analyzes literary, historical, and philological texts in his work and detects the production of an essentialist and systematic knowledge about "the Other", a kind of knowledge that was reinforced by the colonial encounter and the widespread interest in the unusual, and exploited by the developing sciences of ethnology, comparative anatomy, philology, and history (Said, 2003:39-40). Orientalism is thus introduced as a system of knowledge about the Orient "by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, 2003:6). The Orient is almost a European invention, according to Said (2003), yet it is not merely

imaginative, the Orient is an integral part of European material civilization and culture and has helped to define Europe and the west as its contrasting image:

"Orientals or Arabs are thereafter shown to be gullible, "devoid of energy and initiative," much given to "fulsome flattery," intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; Orientals cannot walk on either a road or a pavement (their disordered minds fail to understand what the clever European grasps immediately, that roads and pavements are made for walking); Orientals are inveterate liars, they are "lethargic and suspicious," and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race." (Said, 2003: 38-39)

In his work, Said argued that colonization involved epistemic as well as physical violence while providing a critical reconsideration of colonialism not merely as a military and economic strategy of western capitalist societies, but also as "itself constituting and generated by a specific historical discourse of knowledge articulated with the operation of political power" (Young, 2001:383). What Said showed is that knowledge and truth production is connected to power. According to Young (2001:387), "academic knowledge is also a part of the apparatus of western power, and as Foucault puts it, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together." Orientalism influenced how anthropology, history, political science, and philology articulate their academic discourses as part of Area Studies, and together with the "crisis of representation" in cultural studies, highlighted the hegemonic role of western epistemology and the correlation between knowledge and power and put western epistemology in an apologetic and self-reflective position (Τσιμπιρίδου και Σταματόπουλος, 2008). Power relations between the researcher and the researched became central, as was the issue of speaking "for", "with" or "about" the "Other" as well as how to write about "the Other" without othering (Dittfeld, 2020). Young (2001:387) argues that "it was the fundamental argument repositioning academic knowledge from its claims to objectivity and autonomy that was at the basis of the impact that orientalism achieved in the academy." Said made a decisive contribution with respect to the problematics of language by moving the analysis of colonialism, imperialism, and the struggles against it to the question of discourse and introduced the idea of a colonial discourse (Young, 2001). Despite the importance of his work, it has been deemed problematic by a number of scholars and has been subjected to criticism, mostly concerning the use of homogenizing categories, such as the

categories of east and west, which is responsible for the downgrading of micro-practices, resistances, and for the lack of mention of the heterogeneity of the subjects, such as gender difference (Τσιμπιρίδου και Σταματόπουλος, 2008). Nevertheless, it was Said's critique in orientalism that founded postcolonial studies as "an academic discipline invested in the political commitment and the locational identification of its practitioners" (Young, 2001:383).

Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou (2016) use the term "neo-orientalism" in relation to the so-called refugee "crisis" of 2015 when images of refugees arriving at the coasts of Greece "filled the eyes of the entire world", and the movement of populations from Africa, the Middle East, or Asia into Europe was systematically connected to images of extreme poverty and underdevelopment. According to them: "This new kind of orientalism sits conveniently on old and well-rehearsed stereotypes that have embedded themselves in history and collective European consciousness. The image of a continuously troubled East, the stereotype of the fundamentalist, obscurantist Muslim Other in constant need of modernization, democratization, and international intervention, or simply the victim of economic underdevelopment who seeks a better life in paradise-Europe, are perfect examples of the relationship between rhetoric and the workings of power" (Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou, 2016). Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou follow in an excellent way Said's line of argument that the west and the Orient are not opposed to each other but rather they form a "complex symbolic space where modern political subjectivities are produced and performed in relation to some imagined forms of radical alterity." (2016). They argue that the very use of the term "crisis" is related to neo-orientalism, as it conveniently obscures the reasons behind the exodus of persons from their homelands and the role of the "western great powers" of capitalism and imperialism in the global political and economic order.

### 1.3 Postcolonialism

The temporal era of colonialism is usually considered to have ended when British, French, Belgian, Spanish, Dutch and Portuguese colonizers had retreated from their geographical colonial territories after the long, violent and complicated process of decolonization that took place in former colonies of Africa, Southeast Asia, Latin

America and the Caribbean after 1945 (Dittfeld, 2020, Springhall, 2001). Nevertheless, colonial practices and power relations continue in subtle, insidious, and racialized forms throughout the world (Dittfeld, 2020). Postcolonial studies, for which the publication of *Orientalism* was a milestone as was noted above, pointed out the essentialist and homogenizing nature of academic disciplines studying local cultures and showed that the encounter between “the west” and “the east” was determinative for all the previously colonized areas (Τσιμπιρίδου, 2008). The notions of “translation”, “hybridity”, “dislocation”, and “mimicry”, seemed to serve better the purpose of comprehending what has happened in those areas of the world after the colonial encounter than the notions of “assimilation” or “rejection” (Τσιμπιρίδου, 2008). Since the early 1980s postcolonialism has developed a body of writing that attempts to shift the dominant ways in which the relations between western and non-western people are viewed (Young, 2003), and has been concerned with the elaboration of theoretical structures that challenge the previous dominant western ways of seeing things (Young, 2003).

Young (2003) argues that postcolonial critique and the historical basis of its theoretical formulations is the product of resistance to colonialism and imperialism and that it signals a kind of politics and activism that continues in a new way the anti-colonial struggles of the past. The national liberation movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that developed in former colonies and the political and cultural consequences of the success of those movements, which enabled a radical challenge to the structures of the systems on which such domination was based, led to the development of postcolonial critique. Postcolonial critique, first of all, supports the argument that the nations of the three non-western continents, Africa, Asia, and Latin America are in a situation of subordination and a position of economic inequality to Europe and North America, and claims the right of African, Asian, and Latin American peoples to resources and the same material and cultural well-being (Young, 2003). Postcolonialism is about recovering the history, agency and resistance of peoples subjugated by colonization and assumes, as Mohanty (2003:191) suggests, “understanding colonialism like we understand race, class, gender, nation, and sexuality, not just in terms of static, embodied categories but in terms of histories and experiences that are fundamentally interwoven into our lives.”

The use of the term postcolonialism in this thesis, on the one hand, refers to the fact that our present is affected by past colonialism (Askeland and Payne, 2006). The main idea here is that colonialism has affected the world culture so that even countries that were not involved in the European colonialism of the 19th century may be seen as part of the western colonial experience because they inherited western and postcolonial attitudes towards poorer and less powerful cultures. As Askeland and Payne (2006) argue, "postcolonialism is not only limited to former colonies, but describes identities, attitudes and practices that affect a much broader catchment area." Such practices manifest themselves between majority and minority groups all around the world, meaning that "oppressed peoples dealing with westerners inevitably have social relationships that reflect their awareness of past oppression, and western people's relationships often reflect less awareness of the significance of their past as rulers" (Askeland and Payne, 2006). This lack of awareness concerning one nation's past is also mentioned in postcolonial bibliography as "colonial amnesia". Yellow Bird (2008:282) uses the term as "the inability (or unwillingness) of the colonizer to recall the past oppression that they have perpetuated on the colonized" and notes that this is generally due to a long history of covering up or minimizing such events but can also be a strategy to prevent the public accounting of crimes and unfair treatment.

On the other hand, the "post" of postcolonial is not merely a historical marker but includes and pays tribute to any form of resistance to colonialism (Young, 2001). In this sense: "The postcolonial commemorates not the colonial but the triumph over it" (Young, 2001:60). It attacks the narration of the history of colonialism and at the same time calls for "an activist engagement with positive political positions and new forms of political identity in the same way as Marxism or feminism" (Young, 2001:60). Specifically, postcolonialism can be largely identified with the goals and practices of so called "third world feminisms"; postcolonialism's relation to feminism extends from methodology and politics, to the attention which it gives to the personal and the subjective and its active engagement with the dynamics of political practice" (Young, 2001:64). In the same way as "third world feminisms", postcolonialism is committed towards political ideals of a transnational social justice and has consistently focused on the significance of memory and re-writing, re-claiming history and on the need for decolonization (Mohanty, 1991). Postcolonialism will be used in this thesis in the way that Sethi (2011: 26-27) suggests: "as a philosophy,

rather than just an academic discipline, that seeks to encourage radical politics and engagement with popular struggles, which includes the study of the history of colonialism as a reminder of anti-imperialist politics." and as a way to remind us that "our struggle is also the struggle of memory against forgetting" (hooks, 2015:21).

#### 1.4 "Social Work" and its "Clients": Feminist perspectives

Finding a clear definition of social work is not an easy task. According to Jones, social work can be described as that activity undertaken by those employed as social workers by state social service departments or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Unfortunately, this is an unsatisfactory definition as it captures nothing of the history of social work (Jones, 1998). Social work is better described as a diverse and shifting activity undertaken by various kinds of welfare workers, some of whom are employed by local social service departments or voluntary and charitable agencies or NGOs (Jones, 1998). Social work practice is characterized by diversity and consists of "a spectrum of activities along a wide continuum, with counseling and support at one end and statutory powers to remove liberties at the other" (Jones, 1998:34). For some "clients", social work brings comfort at times of need. For others, it is an activity to be avoided because of the threat it poses to their liberty and autonomy (Jones, 1998). The word "clients" will be used in this thesis as a generic term to refer to "all who do or who might use social work services" (Sharlow, 1998:26). It will be used interchangeably with the word "service users" and "beneficiaries". According to Sharlow (1998), all terms are problematic in that they all carry implications about how people should be treated in everyday discourse. A more recent definition of social work was adopted by the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW), which states that: "Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities, and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing" (cited in Mathebane, 2020). This definition can be characterized as problematic too, as social work has



received a lot of criticism regarding its failure to engage with issues of ideology, power relations, oppression, and the need for decolonization that are considered necessary if social work is to achieve social justice for its clients (Mathebane, 2020). Critics have noted that social work, since its emergence, has always been concerned with gaining its status as a profession rather than being a project advocating for social justice (Mathebane, 2020). Dominelli (1997) attributes this level of complacency to social work's lack of capacity to finance its autonomous development and the resultant dependency on state funding. As another argument against the neutrality of NGOs' action, Timmer (2010) argues that the data that organizations gather are not value-free but are always collected with humanitarian imperatives, and NGOs are restricted by external pressures that dictate how they should work. She researches the manner in which well-meaning organizations, responding to constraints imposed by external forces, employ several discursive strategies such as overemphasizing narratives of extreme poverty and discrimination, to draw awareness to the "Roma problem", thus constructing them as "needy subjects."

This process described above is very similar to how NGOs operating in Greece have focused on "the refugee" as the main subject "in need", through the use of imagery portraying refugees solely as victims, of war, of violence, of trafficking, etc. and will be helpful to have in mind for the purpose of this thesis in "deconstructing" NGOs' supposed neutrality. Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou (2016), as was mentioned before, use the term neo-orientalism to refer to these narratives of victimhood and vulnerability accompanying the arrival of refugees. Humanitarian NGOs are the majority of NGOs in Greece, together with environmental NGOs. Their role is to advocate for refugees and migrants' human rights, including health and education, and assist asylum seekers through legal support and housing. During the refugee "crisis", the public debate that followed the Syrian popular uprisings in 2011, the subsequent civil war, and the rise of the Islamic State, which led to large numbers of refugees making their way to Europe, including Greece (Abdelhady and Fristedt Malmberg, 2018), a significant number of unemployed Greeks found jobs in NGOs that were created or arrived in the country after the summer of 2015, with the goal to assist at the rescue and reception of refugees. This led to a kind of "professionalization" of social work in Greece, a profession that previously was performed mostly in regions in need of humanitarian intervention outside Greece

(Σιμόγλου, 2018). The Greek refugee “crisis” of 2015, a term used to describe the period when a large number of refugees were arriving in Greece, was a period that put forward humanitarian challenges and found the country in many ways inadequate in infrastructures and resources (Νακασιάν, 2016).

There have been many changes in the language and practices of social work since the profession's emersion, and social work practice differentiates depending on the actor/organization, the donors funding its work, the worker, and the country in which he/she practices social work. Social work is a diverse activity, as was mentioned before, whose study would be impossible to exhaust in this thesis, that attempts a rough postcolonial reading regarding connections between colonialism and social work. Indeed, there are critiques that social workers still hesitate to question how inequality and oppression systematically disadvantage women, migrants, minority ethnic groups and others, while acting as if the primary causes of clients' problems are located in their behaviour, morality and deficient family relationships (Jones, 1998). That being said, one cannot deny the presence of critical impulses within social work, particularly the influence of feminist and anti-racist perspectives since the mid-1970s that shaped the theory of social work as we know it today. Critical and radical views about the function of social work in society are located in a variety of different intellectual traditions, notably feminism and anti-racism (Sharlow, 1998), and can be concentrated in what is known as “radical social work” or “critical social work”. The radical social work movement that developed in the 1970s came with attempts to rationalize and reorganize social work’s practices, skills, and approaches, a milestone for which was the development of the systems approach, which helped social workers address systemic oppression and inequality (Parton and Marshall, 1998). At the same time, the individualistic approach and casework methods of traditional social work came under challenge from the radical social work movement (Langan, 1992). Attention to both the condition of being a woman and the conditions that women experience has been a feature of feminist analyses of social work since the 1970s (Orme, 1997). Feminist social work or women-centered practice had emerged alongside the development of radical social work and has provided a focus on women's socio-economic conditions, the fact that they have lower earnings than men and therefore constitute the poorest in society for example, that contribute to women becoming dependent upon social services and has challenged the traditional

caring roles given to them, children carers or other caring roles, based on gendered stereotypes (Orme, 1997). Feminist analyses of the 1980s attempt to raise consciousness, empower and give women control of their lives, while offering an analysis of women's oppression identified as patriarchy (Orme, 1997). During the 1990s, under the influence of postmodernism, the separate and cohesive category of women has been reframed by feminists who argue that "to avoid essentialist notions of femininity and denying class, cultural and other differences, diversities within the category 'woman' have to be accepted" (Hudson, 1992:220-221). In recent years, feminists have developed a wider, non-oppressive, anti-discriminatory form of social work theory and practice, moving beyond some of the limitations of both the traditional and the radical social work models (Langan, 1992). Feminist social work became increasingly critical of radical social work's narrow class and gender frameworks and introduced a new approach that recognizes the complexity and diversity of the manifold oppressions that affect the lives of most women and most social work clients (Langan, 1992). This new approach towards anti-discriminatory social work has taken shape out of a growing recognition of the specificities of oppression, according to gender, race, class, age, disability, and sexual orientation and emphasized the diversity and the validity of each person's experience (Langan, 1992).

## 2. Social work's troubled past

### 2.1 Colonialism, Gender and the Civilizing Mission

In the 19th century, the division between the rest and the west was made by colonial and imperial rule and was legitimized by anthropological theories, the basis of which was the concept of race, which portrayed the peoples of the colonized world as inferior, childlike, or feminine, incapable of looking after themselves and requiring the paternal rule of the west for their own best interests (Young, 2003). The policy of French imperial expansion was justified by the invention of the "mission civilisatrice", known as the civilizing mission, a concept that other imperial powers quickly adopted, whose task was to bring the benefits of French culture, religion, and language to the "uncivilized" races of the earth (Young, 2001). The civilizing mission was central to French imperial ideology because of the French colonial doctrine of assimilation, which remained the basis of French colonial policy right up to the

twentieth century (Young, 2001). Indeed, French colonies were administratively and conceptually treated as a part of mainland France; they offered the best educational and cultural facilities while demanding that the colonized subjects renounce their own culture and religion to benefit from them (Young, 2001). Together with cultural and educational imperialism, other colonial powers such as the Americans, Italians, and Portuguese followed the French system of assimilation (Young, 2001). The example of British colonialism in Africa as a cultural enterprise was inseparable from the rise of biomedicine as science (Comaroff, 1993). The ascendance of comparative anatomy and biology, as Comaroff (1993) argues, came together with the use of anatomical scales that presented the African man below the European man in the racial hierarchy and as the “link” between man and animal. The black body became associated with degradation, contagion, and disease, and the colonial intervention was justified by “the healing mission”, a rhetoric used by the first generation of British evangelists in South Africa who made use of the theme of Africa as a savage and suffering continent, a “dark” continent (Comaroff, 1993). As Comaroff (1993) argues, the metaphors of healing justified this “humane imperialism”, making it a heroic response rather than an enterprise of political and economic self-interest. Even if colonized populations were free of disease, colonial powers and specifically churchmen argued that it was the black men’s spiritual “suffering” that was at issue. As Comaroff (1993) notes: “This was a function of their lack of self-determination, their filthy habits, and their brazen nakedness. The unclothed heathen body posed an especially acute threat to the fragile colonial order and became something of an obsession with the evangelists”. Such observations confirmed established beliefs about “the condition” of Africa and were continually reinforced by the “evidence” collected in the natural laboratory. Livingstone, a Christian missionary, asserted, at one point, “that conditions such as inflammation of the bowels, rheumatism, and heart disease seemed to decline among the Tswana with the adoption of decent European dress”, which reveals the cultural logic behind the civilizing mission and also gives insight, as Comaroff (1993) notes, into the image of Africa relayed to a large and diverse reading public in Britain.

Missionaries like Cuvier “focused on the exotic simian qualities of the reproductive organs of black women, legitimating as medical inquiry their barely suppressed fascination with such torrid eroticism” (Comaroff, 1993). The black

woman served as an icon of sexually transmitted illness in the late 19th century European imagination and Africa was reduced to the body of a black female yielding herself to white male discovery (Comaroff, 1993). The introduction of western notions of a hierarchy of men's and women's roles between work and home, between public and domestic or private sphere, in the previous colonies, included societies where gender was not the important social stratifier that it came to be after the incursion of colonial rule (Ampofo, 2007). According to Ampofo (2007), British colonial rule in Ghana included the task to "contain men and women on terms unfamiliar to them, imposing western notions of household organization and gender on local conceptualizations, and to instill new (...) notions of housewifery." Under colonial rule women's role was undermined, for example women were not recognized as chiefs or as members of the native councils and courts and the change from traditional to modern farming systems enhanced men's prestige at the expense of women's (Ampofo, 2007). The colonial emphasis was on male education, while female education was "often geared toward domestic training (for example, subjects such as home management and cookery) or the caring sectors, such as nursing and teaching. The colonial officials, by superimposing Victorian notions of appropriate gender roles and relations, introduced relations in which men were perceived as and trained to be "breadwinners," while women were expected to "support" men" (Ampofo, 2007).

Both in the French and the British example of "humane imperialism", the civilizing of those "uncivilized" came together with a pervasive western philosophy about health and contagion, matter and morality and so forth (Comaroff, 1993). The colonial project can be described as a form of moral training during which "the colonizer might inculcate habits in the colonized, treat him/her violently if need be, speak to him/her as a child, reprimand or congratulate him/her" (Mbembe cited in Ahmed, 2010:129). Colonial education consisted of teaching the natives "good habits" and created a new "class of persons" through the process of "mimicry", as the imperative to make the colonialized "like us" in matters of taste, opinion, morals, and intellect. Through this process of mimicry, a hybrid subject is produced: "almost the same but not quite, almost the same but not white" (Bhabha cited in Ahmed, 2010:129). Sarah Ahmed writes about the case of Indian migrants in contemporary UK, noting that, through a similar process with what Bhabha describes as mimicry,

they are supposed to become: "Indian in blood and color, but English in taste in opinions in morals and an intellect" (2010:129). She explores the relationship between histories of empire and the promise of happiness, with specific reference to the British Asian experience, and considers how the British empire in the nineteenth century was not only a historical reality but also an ideal, which participated in its justification as a moral project. The imperial mission was believed to have the goal of maximizing happiness, and the civilizing mission can be redescribed as a happiness mission (Ahmed, 2010). Ahmed (2010) reminds us that in order for this to be possible, and for happiness to become a mission, the colonized other must first be deemed unhappy and concludes that for contemporary migrants "to become British is to accept empire as the gift of happiness which might involve an implicit injunction to forget or not to remember the violence of colonial rule" (Ahmed, 2010:132).

The world in which social work started to emerge as a field of its own in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was distinctively colonial, a fact that has received little attention in social work literature (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011). The colonial project, as was mentioned above, despite its oppressive and exploitative character, also contained idealism and the "duty" to improve the situation of the colonized (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011), which Christian European colonial powers used as a justification for invading. The formation of social work was linked with processes such as the civilizing mission and colonial philanthropy, not only in the former colonies of Africa or Asia but also in Europe and North America, as is suggested by the examination of particular colonial histories (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011). The origins of social work as a profession in Australia, for example, are grounded in early British ideological foundations of charity, individuality, the society's wellbeing through social hygiene, and later political ideologies of white nationalism and supremacy (Harms Smith, 2020). Africa's different welfare systems are the result of the colonization of Africa by numerous European powers: there are Belgian, British, French, German, and, to a lesser extent, Italian, as well as Portuguese welfare systems (Noyoo and Kleibl, 2020). Social work as a discipline in the South African context of racist apartheid was a product and instrument of colonial and apartheid history. In this context of legislated racist 'separate development', which engineered racial hierarchies, social workers delivered different services to different 'racial' categories (Harms Smith, 2020).

Harms Smith (2020:115) notes that not only “the foundational ideologies of social work reside in the European project of expansion of colonial power, racist capitalism and coloniality and its history grounded in social engineering and white supremacy” but, also, that this process “continued through policies of neoliberalisation of social work with emphasis on individual responsibility, the importance of the free market as a template for solving social problems, and minimal state intervention or protection of the vulnerable.” Ranta Tyrkko (2011), in her article on the importance of postcolonial analysis in understanding social work and its practices argues that direct colonization was just one of the many possible modes of colonial relations and that the civilizing mission was linked with religion, its actors seeing civilizing as the equivalent of spreading Christianity, promoting discipline and their own middle-class values as the means for a morally pure life (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011). Ranta- Tyrkko (2011) argues that social work’s relationship to colonial activities, such as the civilizing mission, remain largely unexplored to the extent that it seems silenced. This is obvious by the fact that European countries with a colonial history or countries that were outsiders but in many ways complicit to colonialism through the acceptance of the hegemonic worldview of colonialism, have not yet gone through a process of critiquing colonialism and its subtle legacies in everyday encounters and environments including those of social work (Ranta-Tyrkkö, 2011).

## 2.2 Social control and continued coloniality: The case of S. Africa

The birth and development of social work as a discipline in colonial contexts had Eurocentric and western foundations, with "knowledge and discourse formalized in institutions perpetuating the colonial power matrix of racism, inferiorisation and destruction of indigenous cultures and structures of helping" (Harms Smith, 2020). Social work and other similar disciplines such as sociology and psychology generally promote and impose world view theories and approaches derived from contexts in many ways alien to the postcolonial reality (Noyoo and Kleibl, 2020). The hegemonic forms of practice of these disciplines globally are still from the west and they seem to reinforce themselves in different parts of the world. This means that western theories, constructs, methodologies, and knowledge systems, are still being applied in the parts of the world that were formerly colonized by western powers without much

adaptation (Noyoo and Kleibl, 2020). Robinson (1998:73) has written on the inadequacies of western psychology, which has been using a model of white middle-class personality as 'the standard against which others must measure up'. Indeed, the conventionally accepted paradigms and discoveries of western psychology demonstrate that psychological literature has been based on observations primarily on Europeans, predominantly male and overwhelmingly middle class (Robinson, 1998). Despite the diversity of the various schools of western psychology, they all seem to have in common an assumption of the superiority of European races over non-European races (Robinson, 1998). White psychologists, in order to explain 'universal human phenomena', established a normative standard on a model of the middle-class, Caucasian male of European descent, against which all other cultural groups were to be measured; "the more one approximates this model in appearance, values, and behaviour, the more 'normal' one is considered to be", which inevitably leads to non-Europeans being deviant, since "what is measured as normal or abnormal is always in comparison to how closely a specific thought or behaviour corresponds to that of white people" (Robinson, 1998:79).

According to Gray, Coats, and Yellow (2008:30) social work is "a modernist western invention which has a history of silencing marginal voices and importing, into diverse cultural contexts across the world, western thinking primarily from the UK and the USA". In social work's international discourse today the transfer of knowledge has been mainly from the west to everywhere else, as the supremacy of the English language, dominant North American and European expertise, and the economic privilege of western academics allowing them to travel and transport their ideas across the world, contributed to the dominance of western social work values, theories, concepts, and methods (Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird, 2008). Most social workers today are educated at mainstream modern universities where programs are delivered by western experts in the English language; in other words, "the dominant social work model of education largely socializes students into western norms, values and ways of thinking" (Gray et. al., 2013). Gray, Coats and Yellow (2008:30) refer to the globalization of knowledge and western culture as a new form of colonialism and suggest that this technology transfer is the consequence of colonializing, westernizing, and globalizing forces, reminding us that "there is a fundamental 'izing' – a domination – as certain destructive western values are imposed from the top down".



To take for example the contemporary social work practice in Africa, it is largely based on Euro-North American cultural traditions and, as illuminated by Mathebane (2020), situated in western modernism which serves to maintain and perpetuate coloniality. Mathebane attempts a dialectical-historical investigation of forces and events that shaped social work in Africa and suggests that the profession of social work is a modern invention that was produced within the dynamics of the modern capitalist system as a direct response to social challenges of the modern era with a prime object of maintaining social order and sustaining coloniality. Specifically, he suggests that western social work is a colonial instrument that takes the form of a helping profession that institutionalizes the subjection of Africans "through the systematic destruction of indigenous ways of solving problems and their replacement with alien and vaunted Euro-North American systems of psychosocial care" (Mathebane, 2020). He refers to the process in which the inherent African system of psychosocial care was muted and put in a position of devaluation since the arrival of western cultural thought, which he connects to a general marginalization of alternative knowledges that exist in the global South, including colonial suppression and epistemicides, the killing of indigenous knowledges (Mathebane, 2020). Mathebane argues that the profession of social work seems to have merely served to maintain the status quo and its hegemonic discourses and insists that the hidden nature of social work is that of a system of colonial social control rather than a liberating enterprise as presumed by its founding forefathers. Colonization disrupted traditional forms of social relations and, as was mentioned in the previous chapters, in the case of South Africa, produced a kind of social work practice characterized by discrimination and the development of racist welfare policies that favored white people (Mathebane, 2020). The development of social work in South Africa mirrored the liberal and Afrikaner<sup>1</sup> nationalist agendas and arose from philanthropic initiatives. Poverty as a social phenomenon was dealt with differently between 'black' and 'white' groups: "white' poverty was the primary focus of the state and concerns around the health and wellbeing of communities developed around the 'sanitation syndrome' with claims that 'black' inhabitants spread infection leading to their removals and subsequent racial segregation" (Smith cited in Mathebane, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> Ethnic group in Southern Africa descended from predominantly Dutch settlers.

Similar to the South African experience of developing a colonial social work, the origin of social work in Europe is generally connected with philanthropic work and maintaining social control. A British woman known as Mary Carpenter, who is considered to be one of the founding forefathers of social work, developed philanthropic work, which together with British laws stigmatizing poor people, created a kind of social work that was based on individualistic ideology, which found the explanation for poverty in the character of the individual client rather than in social or economic structures (Mathebane, 2020). Contemporary analysis of Mary Carpenter's work and the work of other founding social workers who were also "women driven by middle-class anxieties about urbanity and colonialism" (Mathebane, 2020) characterizes it as philanthropic liberalism situated within the broader scope of modern capitalism (Smith cited in Mathebane, 2020). Social work's clients today, "whether they are old or young, black or white, able-bodied or with a special need, are most likely to be poor and most likely to be drawn from those sections of the population which enjoy the least status, security, and power" (Jones, 1998). Marxist scholars have pointed out that this class specificity of social work is of great importance as it is one of the distinguishing features of social work and is a common factor through its historical development (Jones, 1998). Social work not only is a class-specific activity, but since its origins, it has been "one of the many strategies developed and deployed, by the ruling class and the state for intervening in the lives of working people." and in this sense, it has to be considered as one of the agencies of class control and regulation (Sharlow, 1998:30). Working-class families are, even today, much more likely to become the target of official intervention, in a similar way that black families and families of color are more likely to become a target of over-intervention because they are subject to more intensive social policing through the intervention of social workers, health visitors, and teachers (Hudson, 1992).

As was argued in this chapter, social work as a profession and academic discipline originated as voluntary philanthropic work, initiated by European women from the middle and upper classes served to maintain social order by targeting the working class, and in the case of former colonies, to maintain the colonial status quo (Mathebane, 2020). The emergence of social work coincided with the formation of modern western nation-states, making it in a way a particular manifestation of the development of the modern (Parton and Marshall, 1998). Contrary to the profession's

promises of social change, empowerment, and liberation of people, an examination of the history of social work reveals how it became a 'handmaiden' of the nation-state (Dominelli cited in Mathebane, 2020) and how its' functions were tied to the cultural, social, economic and political realities of the context of western modernity. Through a brief revisit of the profession's history in the case of Africa, and specifically the case of South Africa, this study attempted to highlight social work's hegemonic practices and devaluation of Indigenous knowledges and, in the next chapters, will focus on contemporary social work practices in Greece, during what became known as the refugee "crisis".

### 3. Social working during the Greek refugee "crisis"

#### 3.1 The Greek refugee "crisis" and EU's racialized policies

Before beginning to discuss the Greek refugee "crisis", a very short account of Greece as an immigration country is necessary, as is recorded by Tsimouris (2015). Since the early 90s, Greece had already been transformed from a migration to an immigration country, following the collapse of the communist regime in Albania and the immigration flows from post-communist countries. Tsimouris (2015) notes that "by the mid-1990s the number of immigrants in Greece had reached one million, about 10% of the indigenous population", however, there was an absence of any long-term vision policies, vis-à-vis immigration, which was accompanied with negative representations and the criminalization of immigrants in the media. Immigration policies were preventative, authoritarian, and repressive and viewed immigrants' presence as a temporary phenomenon and as a problem. Restrictive policies are also detected in the strict implementation of the "jus sanguinis principle" in the procedures of provision of citizenship, a principle of nationality law by which citizenship is determined by the parents' nationality (Tsimouris, 2015). As a consequence of this principle, a large number of the so-called second generation was deprived of Greek citizenship (Tsimouris, 2015). During the 2009-2018 economic crisis, Greece witnessed a continuing rise of xenophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric, predicated on the construction of migrants and asylum seekers as threats to the local peoples' economic security (Voutira, 2013). New regimes of control and policing were

established in the form of walls, fences, concentration camps, checkpoints, and digital controls and 'inner city' controls in ports, airports, stations, and at immigrant sites, also known as the 'sweep up' actions by police, were multiplied (Tsimouris, 2015). Together with media discourses criminalizing immigration, anti-immigrant policies have transformed "the most precarious subjects, those deprived of ethnic, cultural, legal and other symbolic credentials of national purity" into scapegoats (Tsimouris, 2015). This, however, as Tsimouris (2015) notes, is not a Greek peculiarity.

Verstraete (2003) argues that "the EU's 'geopolitics of mobility' was grounded in the concept of free movement through a European space without internal frontiers by subjects firmly located in national territory and identity, and in white property ownership." Indeed, the Schengen Agreement, signed in 1985, implemented the abolition of national border controls and allowed the free movement of goods and citizens in a European space. However, this freedom of mobility for some citizens, tourists, business people, according to Verstraete (2003), could only be made possible through the organized exclusion of others, forced to move around as illegal 'aliens', migrants, or refugees. The Schengen Agreement abolished internal borders while simultaneously reinforcing EU external borders to distinguish between Europeans and non-Europeans. It set out to harmonize immigration and asylum policies and to implement strict immigration policies of preventive nature, creating, in this way, what became known as 'fortress Europe' (Andrijasevic, 2003). With the production of a Europe without 'internal frontiers' came the tightening up of checks for immigrants and refugees at the 'external borders' (Verstraete, 2003). This reinforcement of external borders transforms migrants and refugees into non-European 'others', into people that cannot enter European space other than illegally, as criminals. In addition, the EU was able to keep up the image of a homogeneous space without internal frontiers while simultaneously decreasing the power of the individual asylum seeker, as is evident by the fact that if an asylum seeker's claim for asylum is rejected by one state, he or she is automatically denied access to the whole Union, and he or she cannot enter other states to try again except illegally (Verstraete, 2003). As far as women from non-EU countries are concerned, they are mostly allowed into Europe within the frame of family reunion, which makes them dependent on a male-regulated private sphere (Verstraete, 2003): "Women refugees who now flee to Europe because they are persecuted on the basis of gender and sexuality (through, for example, genital

mutilation, forced marriages, rape or state-imposed population control) have less chance of being given asylum here because their cases are seen to belong to the private sphere, in which no state can interfere, while asylum is considered a right endowed in response to persecution within the – implicitly male – public sphere of war and politics" (Bhabha cited in Verstraete, 2003:231).

EU's external borders are sites of national, racial, and ethnic differentiation, a fact explained not only by Europe's geographical location but also its historical legacies, for example its colonial past, and internal politics, such as the emergence of the extreme right wing in many EU countries (Verstraete, 2003). The Schengen countries have not only built strong external barriers, but internal measures have been taken as well to guarantee that only EU residents enjoy unlimited mobility: "systematic controls at land frontiers have been displaced and relocated inland in the form of random spot-checks in the vicinity of the border on the one hand and arbitrary stop-and-search checks in the streets on the other. Both forms of control mostly consist of a quick visual check to see whether the traveller or pedestrian looks 'okay'" (Verstraete, 2003:230). Here, "okay" can be a synonym for "European", or in the words of Ahmed (2000), "the most privileged white masculine body" who is "at home" wherever in the world it is. In contrast, the bodies of immigrants are seen as a potential danger, as "strangers" and as the outsiders in a nation space. The stranger here is not someone that cannot be recognized; he or she is already recognized through techniques for differentiating between the familiar and strange (Ahmed, 2000). Ahmed (2000) has examined how nations become imagined through the recognition of strangers and on how nations define themselves against strange cultures by finding means of keeping strangers out. This is evident in the case of the strengthening of EU external borders, the construction of immigrants as the ultimate violent strangers and the belonging through estrangement, which is central to Said's theory of Orientalism. According to Said (cited in Ahmed, 2000:99): "Orientalism creates an imaginary geographical divide based on the binarism of Occident/Orient. In this sense, the creation of a space of belonging (the 'we' that remains unspoken, or is spoken only through the claiming of the right to speak) requires that which is strange in order to be". The Orient, in other words, creates an idea of Europe, "a notion collectively identifying us against the non-Europeans" (Ahmed, 2000:99), by embodying that which the Occident is not.

Race remains an organizing theme of public discourses and perceptions of the "other" in Greece and elsewhere. The way in which race as a political category is socially, historically, and economically constructed leads us to the concept of racialization that Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou (2018) have employed in their work. Racialization refers "to those "dynamic and dialectical processes of categorization and meaning construction in which specific meanings are ascribed to real or fictitious somatic features" (Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou, 2018). Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou (2018) comment on the racialized character of national and EU policies concerning immigration and on racialized perceptions of migrants that are produced "both within every day banal contexts of cultural racism, and through policy narratives and categories such as illegality and deportability". They too argue that, as was mentioned previously in this chapter, "the current complex European border regime reveals the role of the EU as a "racial supra-state" (Green cited in Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou). An examination of racialized geographies points to a firm connection between racialization and colonial histories of the past on the one hand and current asymmetrical structures of power between states on the other. As Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou (2018) argue: "The meshwork of culture, race, civilization, progress, modernity, religion, gender and ethnicity is (...) a postcolonial technology that permeates state-citizen relations, policy narratives and casual sociality. It is a technology that aims at managing difference; sometimes by transforming difference into forms of "radical and incommensurable alterity" and at other times by hegemonically commanding the conditions of the "Other's" integration."

The construction of EU external borders creates a hierarchy between the EU states and non-EU states and illuminates this racialized geography of power: "the EU external borders are relational spaces upon which is inscribed the materialization of power relations between the EU and non-EU countries" (Andrijasevic, 2003:252). It is essential to keep in mind that "there is a growing interconnection between reinforced external barriers and internal constraints such as discrimination in the labor market, segregation in housing, political marginalization and racism in everyday life" (Alund cited in Verstraete, 2003:230). Here, an exploration of the narrative of migration as a crisis and the "invasion syndrome" are important, common topics in mass media and European political circles (Andrijasevic, 2003). In recent years European media had increasingly featured migration in terms of crisis and emergency, with the highpoint

being the 2015 refugee "crisis", when large numbers of refugees, mostly from Syria and Afghanistan, made their way to Europe, following the Syrian civil war and the ongoing war in Afghanistan (Abdelhady and Fristedt Malmberg, 2018). The "crisis" approach tends to portray migration as "a flood that endangers the stability, security and wealth of the western European states" and is very similar to what Andrijasevic (2003) refers to as the 'invasion syndrome', present in the representation of migrants in the media, which include, for example, photographs of arrivals and crossings of masses of people that stir up fears of invasion and encourage the idea of migration as a crisis in need of containment. Andrijasevic (2003:254) notes that "in the press, the visual rendering of border-crossings are highly gendered"; there is a prevalent absence of women from visual depictions of border-crossing that comes with a portrayal of male migrants as central characters. Migrant women, in this way, are "figured not as protagonists but as characters endowed with little or no agency" and are visible only when portrayed as "war refugees and/or as victims of trafficking" (Andrijasevic, 2003:256). There is a growing literature concerning the highly gendered representation of trafficking by institutions and Non-Governmental Organizations that reproduce stereotypical narratives of femininity, masculinity, victimization, and criminality (Andrijasevic, 2003). These representations tend to attach the figure of migrant women in a fixed identity of vulnerability, while avoid criticizing the role of states in managing migration and in exposing women to the violence of trafficking (Αθανασίου και Τσιμουρής, 2013).

### 3.2 Antiracist social work: from the UK to a Greek refugee shelter

In this chapter we will examine social work as a conservative welfare practice, with family as the major backdrop against which intervention occurs (Dominelli, 1994:34) and the nuclear, middle class, heterosexual family as the norm against which other families are measured (Robinson, 1998). We will also examine social work's relation with racism through examples of Dominelli's anti-racist social work theory from the UK and will be taking a closer look social worker's bad practices at a refugee shelter for unaccompanied minors during the Greek refugee "crisis". Social work is generally considered a conservative welfare practice, with

overwhelming attention given to family life and parenting.<sup>2</sup> Social work theory teaches us that "the family, as the raw material of practice, provides the major backdrop against which social work intervention occurs" (Dominelli, 1994:34). As the basic social unit, family was considered the critical institution that influenced character and morality since the creation of social work, and problems of poverty, crime, alcoholism, and so forth were not to be sought in social structural arrangements but in poor and inadequate parenting (Jones, 1998).

In contemporary Britain negative stereotypes are pervasive, along with myths and stereotypes about the reality of black women and men's lives. According to Bryan (1992), social work practice is racist when it does not question such stereotypes and reproduce Eurocentric assumptions that ignore the effects of structural racism upon the choices that black women and men make about their parenting relationships. Dominelli (1997), on her work on Antiracist social work, reveals that black children in the UK are more likely to end up in care than white children and that white social workers working with black clients in the contemporary UK are perceived as "child snatchers"<sup>3</sup> (Wilson cited in Dominelli, 1997). Although social workers' intervention, in general, compels white families to stay together, in the case of black families, it forces them apart, in a similar way in which the UK immigration system persists in

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<sup>2</sup> This may include social workers taking on the role of "good" parents with the clients as "children" (Jones, 1998) which reminds us of the relationship of the colonizer with the colonized, where the first one acts as a parent, reprimanding or congratulating the second, who is seen as the child, incapable of looking after himself/herself. (Young, 2003, Mbembe 2001)

<sup>3</sup> Fortiera and Hon-Sing Wong, on their research on the lineage of the social work profession in Canada within settler colonialism, argue that it was a foundational component to the creation, expansion, and adaptation of the settler state, one of the main responsibilities of social work being to aid in the dispossession and extraction of Indigenous peoples from their territories and communities. (Fortier and Hon-Sing Wong, 2018) During the Sixties Scoop, one of the most notorious cases of extraction in Canada's colonial history, that took place from the 1950s to the 1980s, social workers in Canada's Children's Aid Societies removed approximately 20,000 Indigenous children from their families and communities and placed them in white middle-class settler families on the grounds of children's needs for "protection" from neglect and parents' needs for intervention. (Fortier and Hon-Sing Wong, 2018) A similar process took place in Australia between the 1910s and the 1970s, where the generations of children removed under racist policies that left a legacy of trauma and loss that continues to affect Indigenous communities today, became known as "the Stolen Generations." (Dittfeld, 2020)



dividing black families, denying them in this way their right to family hood (Dominelli, 1997). White social workers problematize black families by "classifying their relationships, expressions of concern for each other and child-care methods as inferior to white ones, and label them inadequate and inappropriate" (Dominelli, 1997:94). There is a dominance of pathology models of the black family functioning in British social work, which is evident in social work texts that paint "crude cultural stereotypes of black families", and in social worker's negative perceptions of black families which lead them to develop a "rescue mentality" towards them (Robinson, 1998:84). According to Robinson (1998), black families are judged against a "norm" which presents a myth of the normal family as nuclear, middle class and heterosexual and are thus seen as strange, different and inferior.

Social workers in the UK rely on Eurocentric theory that devalues the strength of Asian families as well; the traditional Asian household is considered responsible for several problems that Asians face in the context of British society, and young Asian people, particularly young Asian women, are believed to be "torn between two cultures" and are expected to rebel against their parents' traditional customs such as arranged marriages (Parmar cited in Robinson, 1998). Robinson (1998:84) notes that implicit in this idea of "culture conflict" is "the assumption that the values of British family are modern and superior while the Asian culture is in some way backward and inferior." On her work, Ahmed (2010) comments on the increasing pressure put on migrants to "integrate" and the problematic nature of the term, which calls for migrants to leave their culture behind and embrace a common, already given, and in many ways superior culture. Multicultural happiness demands that migrants stop holding on to difference, to what keeps them apart and that they stop reading their exclusion as a sign of the ongoing nature of racism by simply "getting over it" (Ahmed, 2010). Social workers judge people according to dominant stereotypes and they accept common-sense definitions of those having access to welfare services. They reproduce myths which are firmly embedded in racist ideology, for example: "that black people are in Britain on a temporary basis; black people are born overseas; and black people abuse welfare provisions by using them when they are not entitled to" (Dominelli, 1997:27-28). In this way black people are constructed as "worthless" and "welfare abusers" (Dominelli, 1997:25), Asian girls as "caught between two

cultures”, West Indian parents as over-ambitious for their children and over-disciplinarian in their child-rearing (Triseliotis cited in Dominelli, 1997), and so on.

Dominelli’s (1997) work on an antiracist social work calls for social workers to acknowledge how they are too complicit in perpetuating racism, and to combat racism in their everyday practice. Racism is discussed here as a social construct and as a set of economic, political, and ideological practices through which a dominant group exercises hegemony over subordinate groups. British racism, specifically, is about “the construction of social relationships on the basis of an assumed inferiority of non-Anglo-Saxon ethnic minority groups, and, flowing from this, their exploitation and oppression” (Dominelli, 1997:19). In the Greek case, racism “is made of ethnic purity, quasi-biological continuity with a glorious antiquity, Orthodoxy in the form of religious absolutism and an ambivalent European identification” (Herzfeld cited in Tsimouris, 2012). According to Tsimouris (2012), genuine intercultural dialogue is being blocked in Greece by a domestic hegemonic discourse that incorporates ethno-biological and mono-religious understandings of national ‘we-ness’ that is strongly embedded in education and in popular imagination. Nationalism and ethnocentrism backed up by the state apparatuses and the educational institutions result in cementing the boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ rather than creating a space for intercultural dialogue (Tsimouris, 2012).

As was mentioned in the previous chapters, in 2015 and 2016, approximately one million asylum seekers, mostly from Syria and Afghanistan, crossed from Turkey to Greece in the hope of continuing their journeys towards European countries, such as Germany or Sweden (Kirtsoglou, 2018). From those some reached their destinations but many lost their lives while trying. Some are now detained in Greece and over two million are unable to leave Turkey as a result of the EU-Turkey deal of March 2016 (Kirtsoglou, 2018). Hyndman (2000) examines how refugees are represented in humanitarian circles: mostly as helpless and in need of outsiders to care for them. They are seen as “messy,” and in need of ordering, and social workers are thought to bring such order through “exercises of counting, calculating and coding refugees,” even ordering refugees by numbers such as “headcounts” (Hyndman, 2000). These methods of “knowing” and representing refugees, contradict the idea of

refugee self-management and community development<sup>4</sup> that most NGOs advocate for and severely curtail refugee rights and participation (Hyndman. 2000). In the same way that, before 2015, migrants were perceived “as dangerous, potentially prone to criminal activity, as unhealthy and possibly contagious, and as religious and cultural misfits that will never “assimilate” in Greek society” (Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou, 2018), refugees, after 2015, were also accompanied by stereotypically negative discourses. Their countries of origin, like those of migrants, are imagined as “poor” and “destitute”, and their cultures are frequently judged as “backwards”, “inferior” or in need of modernization (Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou, 2018). The majority of Greeks see refugees as foreigners, and as culturally different. Barker notes on “culturalist” and “racist” discourses against immigrants that a “new racism” is hidden “inside apparently innocent language about culture” (Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou, 2018). According to him “the “incommensurable racial difference” of immigrant populations forms the basis of new “racist paradigms” in Europe, whereby biological differences between races, that once formed the backbone of racism, are now increasingly expressed in terms of cultural incompatibility” (Tsimouris and Kirtsoglou, 2018). To answer the question of whether Greek social workers also reproduce “culturalist” and “racist” discourses against migrants and refugees, an examination of complaints published by NGO workers unions can be useful; NGO workers’ unions have, amongst other functions, that of reporting bad practices by Greek NGOs. These include sexist and racist practices by social workers or NGO’s administrations against migrants and refugees. One union reports that by implementing one single mechanism to “manage beneficiaries”, Greek NGOs do not consider the different cultural backgrounds of the beneficiaries (ΣΒΕΜΚΟ, 2020). In one case of shelter for unaccompanied minors, run by a Greek NGO, the union reports that an environment is built where social workers face narrations and cultural practices of the children that they do not want or do not have the time to comprehend. Instead they naturally reach

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<sup>4</sup> Hyndman argues that community development approaches are based on the false premise that refugee camps, that have multiplied in Greece in the period 2015-2020, are communities, whereas they are closer to institutions that temporarily contain displaced people, and manifest as colonies where refugees enjoy lesser legal status and severe restrictions in comparison to any citizens of any community. (Hyndman, 2000)

assumptions such as “the children are badly behaved”, “they are manipulative”, “they want always to have it their way” (ΣBEMKO, 2020). Children who “misbehave” are easily “diagnosed” as needing psychiatric help and are even subject to involuntary hospitalization. In several cases, the police have been called by social workers, and the threat of calling the police has been used as a way to force children to behave to shelters’ rules (ΣBEMKO, 2020).

Dominelli (1997) on her work on anti-racist social work, proposes anti-racism as more than just a statement but as a state of mind, a political commitment and, more importantly, as taking action. Its importance lies in recognizing the significance of indirect or unintentional racism, the subtle racism of the majority, and finding the interconnections between institutionalized racism and personal behavior. The structural basis of racism needs to be understood by social workers that need to actively engage in antiracist social work, as well as the fact that they can be both perpetrators and beneficiaries of racism.<sup>5</sup> White social workers reinforce racism during service delivery in subtle ways, not only through overtly racist practices but also through the use of racism as a form of social control, and the perpetuation of universalistic treatment of all client groups while ignoring the difference in the experiences and needs. Dominelli (1997) notes that social work’s failure to challenge its own racism can be attributed to its structural determinants; its allegedly apolitical professional stance and its emphasis on social control at the expense of care.

### 3.3 Service user’s resistances: the welfare rights movement and the evictions movement

Social work is in no way an apolitical activity that can ignore power relations between social workers and their clients, and “the white social worker-black client relationship does not exist in a social vacuum unrestrained by social, political and

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<sup>5</sup> White people are beneficiaries of racist social relations, whether or not they engage directly in racist behavior (Lorde cited in Dominelli, 1997:15) Specifically, white social workers enjoy privileges because they live in a racist society, as social work is founded on whiteness as “an unjustified, normalized racial privilege that white peoples are socialized to remain oblivious about” (Davis & Gentlewarrior cited in Dittfeld, 2020)

economic forces, although white practitioners operate as if it did” (Dominelli, 1997:49). In addition, a practice that does not counter women's oppression cannot be good practice, in the same way that good social work must be antiracist (McNay, 1992). Besides race, the homogenizing tendencies that characterize social work practice ignore the effects of other social positions such as gender, class, age, able-bodiedness, and sexuality. For example, the attention on women clients is usually focused on their responsibility to care for children and men, and working-class people, who are the majority of social work's clients, are forced to mimic white middle-class lifestyles without having access to similar resources (Wilson cited in Sharlow, 1998). In this part of the thesis, I will be using a Foucaultian analysis of power to examine power relations between social workers and their clients by examining client's resistance to social work practices and power's connection to the production of knowledge. We will be focusing on two examples of resistance to social work practices, the 1960s welfare movement in the US, and on the 2020 movement against evictions in Greece, created by migrants that refused to leave the houses given to them by NGOs. Kirtsoglou notes that it is important to record all those bigger and smaller acts of resistance. According to her, this kind of counter-archive of the minutiae of disobedience is not about redemption, or the romantization of some revolutionary aesthetic, but “it is about the conscious efforts of refugees to resist their reduction to bare life, to exist as social actors and to challenge hierarchies” (Kirtsoglou, 2018).

This chapter will explore the idea that unequal power relations are the basis of social injustice, in other words, that “the relationship between men and women, between races, between different social classes, and between helping professionals and their clients are all variations of unequal power relations in society” (Loewenstein cited in McNay, 1992:55). McNay (1992:56) defines the concept of ‘power relations’ that exist “where relations are so structured that one person or group of people benefits at the expense of another person or group of people, then the people who benefit can be said to have greater power in those relations.” Here, “power can manifest at an individual, family, group, community or societal level and can take material and emotional forms” (McNay, 1992:56). The study of power relations can expose values that characterize mainstream social work theory and practice and can reveal assumptions which are often implicit in social work practice, such as, as was

discussed in the previous chapter, that fact that western orthodox theory of the family often assumes middle-class, nuclear family norms (McNay, 1992). To begin with, the use of "systems theory", a tool of radical social work theory, can reveal how values on the broader society interact with social institutions, like the family (McNay, 1997). Systems theory when applied to societies, "explains how any society must have some degree of coordination and integration among its constituent elements or social institutions, and attempts to demonstrate how the central value system of society is reinforced through the institutions" (McNay, 1997:57). McNay argues that power is manifested at different levels and connected within different structures of society and that systems theory can link these different levels through the notion of the interdependence of systems. By contrast, the casework approach, a tactic still followed by a large number of social workers when dealing with clients, has been criticized as problematic in terms of locating the "problem" within the individual client and ignoring the social context of social work and the significance of institutional and structural racism (Dominelli, 1997). As a result of this approach, racist policies or policies that disadvantage migrants or refugees are not being challenged by social workers and NGO staff but rather taken as given. In addition, NGOs are idealized as organizations through which people help others for reasons other than profit, as organizations that are simply interested in "doing good" (Fisher, 1997). NGOs are described as part of a voluntary, nonprofit, independent or "third" sector that is separate from the state and the market, thus creating the assumption that these organizations are part of a segment of society that is separate from politics (Fisher, 1997). When politics, however, is taken to refer to power-structured relationships maintained by techniques of control, then politics is not confined to institutions but pervades every aspect of life. (Fisher, 1997)

Social workers enjoy power from their role in distributing scarce welfare resources, their legal power as practitioners, and their personal power over their relationship with their clients (Dominelli, 1997). To examine power relations between social workers and their clients and power's connection to the production of knowledge, in this part of the thesis, we will be using a Foucaultian analysis of power. Foucault analyses power less as a confrontation between two adversaries and more in relation to government, with government used here not only to refer to political structures or to the management of states but with very broad meaning which it had in

the sixteenth century: “government (...) designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed: the government of children, of souls, of communities, of families, of the such. It did not only cover the legitimately constituted forms of political or economic subjection, but also modes of action, more or less considered and calculated which were destined to act upon the possibilities of action of others. To govern, in this sense, is to structure the possible field of action of others” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:221). Therefore the exercise of power is defined as a mode of action upon the actions of others. In order to understand what power relations are about, Foucault proposes to investigate the forms of resistance and attempts made to dissociate these relations (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:211). This is based to the assumption that “at the heart of power relations and as a permanent condition of their existence there is an insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy on the part of the principles of freedom, that there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible fight” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:225). He proposes, in other words, to use the different forms of resistance against different forms of power “as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application and the methods used” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983:211).

While discussing resistance to these forms of power, it is important to note what Jones suggests, that from the point of view of the clients, the history of social work has been marked by suspicion and hostility (Jones, 1998). Indeed, service users have complained of the moralizing and interfering nature of social work or the unsuitability of the social workers' responses to their difficulties; in a lot of cases where clients face difficulties associated with lack of material resources, the social workers reinterpret the problem as one of attitude, character or parenting skills (Jones, 1998). To discuss forms of resistance in white social work's hegemonic practices, in this part of the thesis, I will be using two out of numerous examples of service users resisting racist practices by white social workers; the first one is the US welfare rights movement and the second, a more contemporary one, the movement against evictions that developed in Greece in 2020. The first example of service users resisting social work practices is the welfare rights movement developed in the 1960s and 1970s in the US, together with other social and political movements of the time, such as the civil rights movement, and had a lasting effect on the country (Nadasen, 2012). The

welfare rights movement was "an interracial protest movement of poor women who demanded reform of welfare policy, greater respect and dignity, and financial support" and led to the creation of a distinctive, feminist, antiracist politics rooted in the experiences of poor women of color (Nadasen, 2012). It advocated simultaneously for women's rights, economic justice, and black women's empowerment, and its members challenged stereotypes and developed an intersectional political analysis that combined race, class, and gender (Nadasen, 2012). On black women's relationships with social workers, Bryan notes that they have been characterized with antagonisms as black and migrant women had to deal with white social workers sexism along with their usual racism;

"Whether we are single parents, homeless young women or the parents of children in care, we are constantly confronted with racist, classist or culturally biased judgements about our lives. The social background of most social workers and the training they receive give them no real understanding of our different family structures, cultural values and codes of behaviour. It is so much easier for them to rely on loose assumptions and loaded stereotypes of us than to try seriously to address the root cause of our problems. These assumptions become the justification for everything from secret files and surveillance to direct intervention of the most destructive kind" (Bryan et al. cited in Jones, 1998:39).

There are numerous examples of beneficiaries resisting racist practices from NGOs, as is clear by examining reports of groups of migrants and refugees and solidarity groups in the case of Greece. In Greece, the majority of the NGOs are part of housing projects for refugees and provide apartments or rooms in hotels to beneficiaries. A movement developed in 2020 in Greece, after the government decided to evict all recognized refugees by June 2020, with a law that stated that all recognized refugees must leave their houses after 30 days of their recognition (Διεθνής Αμνηστία, 2020). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expressed its concerns over the eviction of more than 9,000 recognized refugees from camps, hotels and apartments ordered by the Greek government and implemented by NGOs with a statement which among others noted: "Forcing people to leave their accommodation without a safety net and measures to ensure their self-reliance may push many into poverty and homelessness. Most of the affected refugees do not have regular income, many are families with school-aged children, single



parents, survivors of violence, and others with specific needs. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and measures to reduce its spread create additional challenges by limiting people's ability to move and find work or accommodation." (Keep Talking Greece, 2020). Refugees and migrants protested against this racist law that is forcing them into homelessness and poverty by marching together with antiracist groups and migrant unions (Τα Νέα, 2020). In isolated incidents, migrants and refugees resisted NGO workers and social workers that were forcing them to leave their apartments, as is brought to light by reports from antiracist and solidarity groups (Κίνηση απελάστε το ρατσισμό, 2020).

In this part of the thesis, I have argued that it is through the clients' complaints, suspicion and resistance to social works' practices that power relations can be detected, and that these responses on behalf of clients can be seen as forms of resistance to mainstream racist/sexist social work. In an attempt to define what these forms of resistance have in common, we can say that not only are these struggles antiauthority struggles, but they are also an opposition to the effects of power, which are linked with knowledge competence and qualification, they are struggles against the privilege of knowledge (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). Foucault's theory has taught us that power does not only express in a negative way, through the mode of censorship, exclusion, blockage, and repression, but it can be a productive power, one that produces effects at the level of desire and also at the level of knowledge: "What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (Gordon, 1980:119). We are discussing here about social work theory as a discipline that produces knowledge, and that is involved in creating a "regime of truth". "Truth" is to be understood "as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements" and is linked with systems of power that produce and sustain it (Gordon, 1980:133). "Truth" is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it, and the university is one of them. Social work theory produced in western universities produces, in its turn, a kind of truth about "service users" by categorizing the individuals and imposing specific characteristics on them, and this, according to Foucault, is a form of power that turns individuals into subjects (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1983). Foucault, in his work, makes a special

mention to the emergence of philanthropy and social work in the early nineteenth century, linking it to the production of a new form of knowledge: "people appear who make it their business to involve themselves in other people's lives, health, nutrition, housing; then, out of this confused set of functions there emerge certain personages, institutions, forms of knowledge: public hygiene, inspectors, social workers, psychologists. And we are now seeing a whole proliferation of different categories of social work" (Gordon, 1980:62).

## Conclusion

This study attempted to explore the underlying racial prejudices of western social work linked to its failure to address the challenges of decolonization within itself. It uses postcolonial theory to shift the focus to the colonial origin and continued coloniality of the social work profession and practice. It attempts to challenge the internationalization of social work and its hegemonic forms of practice, which are from the west and are reinforced in different parts of the world. Instead of focusing on cultural competence, a term criticized for promoting 'othering' (Harrison and Turner, 2011), critics argue that social workers should develop a critical consciousness of inequality and social justice. If social work is to reclaim its social justice and human rights basis, then there is an urgent need for the profession to decolonize and organize alongside service users and broader social movements advocating for social justice (Teloni, 2020). In the previous chapters, I argued that social work's foundational ideologies reside in white supremacy and racism and its history grounded in the European project of expansion of colonial power (Harms Smith, 2020). Decolonization, the geopolitical retreat of European control of colonized states, has far from achieved decoloniality – of power, of being, and of knowledge (Harms Smith, 2020). Coloniality of knowledge describes the epistemic subjugation of indigenous knowledge and culture, in other words, the process of epistemicide, which was mentioned in the previous chapters and is close to what Fanon referred to as the colonization of the mind (Harms Smith, 2020). Fanon describes the colonization of the mind as the process of colonial destruction of language, culture, and history of colonized peoples because, as he argues: "colonialism is not satisfied merely with

hiding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Fanon cited in Harms Smith, 2020). Decolonization for Fanon is a historical and collective process that involves profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures and can only be engaged through active withdrawal of consent and resistance to structures of psychic and social domination (Mohanty, 2003). Its success lies in a "whole social structure being changed from the bottom up' and it being "willed, called for, demanded" by the colonized (Fanon cited in Mohanty, 2003:7-8). The end result of decolonization is the creation of new men and women and is fundamental to a radical transformative project (Mohanty, 2003). The failure of social work as a profession to address ongoing complexities and structural dynamics of coloniality has led to the emergence of a movement for epistemic decoloniality (Harms Smith, 2020). Epistemic decolonization of social work "requires social work students, practitioners, and academics to engage with taken-for-granted neutrality of Whiteness or eurocentrism by identifying and challenging the dominant us rather than the racialized them" (Dittfeld, 2020). Postcolonial theory argues that "the intellectual and cultural traditions developed outside the west constitute a body of knowledge that can be deployed to great effect against the political and cultural hegemony of the west" and it is designed to undo the ideological heritage of colonialism not only in the previous colonies but also in the west itself (Young, 2001). Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (cited in Young, 2001:65) describes the process of "decolonizing the mind" and "moving the center" which presupposes "the decentering of the intellectual sovereignty and dominance of Europe, the critique of eurocentrism, that is, challenging the limits of western ethnocentricity and the assumption that the white male western point of view is the norm and the true". The decentering, dislocation, or displacement of western knowledge includes academic knowledge and social work theory and involves exploring its links to colonialism and racism (Young, 2001).

This essay has focused on criticisms of the universalism of western models and the fact that western models of social work have been exported to other cultures and nations that "has led some writers to conclude that the profession has been a partner in intellectual, cultural and corporate colonization" (Gray, Coates and Yellow Bird, 2008:2). It has attempted to answer to questions like: "how can social workers,

that are dedicated to enhancing their clients' well-being, be racist?", that had already formed in my mind years ago when I first started working with refugees and migrants. It is clear to me now that this kind of social work practice through reproducing assumptions for service users based on their ethnicity is racist and can do more harm than good in populations of migrants arriving in Greece. At this point, I have to note that since 2015 there have been numerous trainings, seminars, and working groups for people working with migrants and refugees, with the purpose of familiarizing professionals with working with a multicultural clientele and ameliorating the kind of services they provide. The "accusations" made in the previous chapters of social work having a history embedded in racism and of social workers enforcing racist practices, do not cancel the fact that some excellent professionals are working at this moment with refugees and migrants with respect to the ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and identity of every person. This short revisit of the "troubled" past of the profession did not have the purpose of pointing fingers at "bad" social workers, but rather to teach us, the new generations living with and working with migrants, to avoid the mistakes of the past. That has been a central idea of this thesis; that only through revisiting the past and exploring social works' history of racism can one move towards social justice for everyone.

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