CHAPTER 5

Capitalist Racism as "Occupational Hazard" and Personal Responsibility: Immigrant Entrepreneurship in Finland

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1 Introduction

In recent years, entrepreneurship has received political traction as a solution to the integration of newly arrived asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants in Finland. While acquiring employment was previously seen as the primary method of integration, the latest Entrepreneurship Strategy (2022, p. 30) emblematically claims entrepreneurship as the "natural way to integrate into Finnish society and get a job." Analysing fifteen semi-structured interviews with non-Finnish businessowners in the cities of Helsinki and Turku, Finland, this chapter problematizes the conceptualization of non-Finnish persons as *naturally* inclined to entrepreneurship, especially on the basis of cultural or ethnic traits. In practice, entrepreneurship is a low-paying and precarious trade, where differential access to employment opportunities often renders self-employment a necessity for newcomers.

This shift in the discourse of integration, from immigrants as employees to immigrants as employees *and* entrepreneurs, was first reflected in the Government Integration Programme of 2016. This shift occurred in the aftermath of the so-termed "refugee crisis" of 2015, when Finland received a record number of asylum applications. This produced renewed attention on racism in the labour market, which had been legally positioned as the primary means to integrate non-Finns, that can be ameliorated by business creation and entrepreneurial pursuit. Entrepreneurship, in this sense, presents an individualistic solution to a structural problem.

This does not, however, diverge from how immigrant integration has been devised more generally. As Kurki et al. (2018, p. 239) demonstrate, integration in Finland is largely presented as "an individualistic project that emphasizes self-discipline and continuous self-development" to produce a non-reliance on welfare mechanisms, where the employed and thus 'integrated self' is the desired end product. The 'integrated self' is similar to the 'entrepreneurial self' (Bröckling, 2015); both are subject to a process of 'continuous self-development'

in which they are made responsible for employability. These ideas align with broader trends in the neoliberal restructuring of the Finnish welfare state.

The economic crisis of the 1970s, driven by stagflation and a structural shift to post-industrialism, evoked a "crisis of the welfare state" in Finland (Yliaska, 2015, p. 440). Central characteristics of the Finnish welfare state, such as coordinated wage regulation, heavy taxation, universal public services, and wealth redistribution, were considered inefficiently equipped for the "'requirements of the era'" (Wuokko, 2019, p. 8). The post-WWII Fordist model proved too inflexible to adapt to emergent information technologies and evolving consumer market demands, which triggered significant socioeconomic changes that impacted the structure of work. Consequently, capitalism transitioned to a strategy of flexible accumulation, often termed neoliberalism (Harvey, 1990, p. 147).

Notably, the economic depression of the early 1990s in Finland shepherded neoliberal policies, which deregulated financial markets, restructured the labour market to boost flexibility and supply, shifted the burden of unemployment onto individuals, mandated employment for welfare access, and deemed health and social services as excessive public expenditure in need of privatization. While the crises of 1970s and 1990s resulted in high rates of poverty and unemployment, which would purportedly be offset by the measures listed before, empirical evidence instead demonstrates a consistent rise in inequality (Kokkonen et al., 2018, p. 42). Moreover, the Keynesian objective of full employment has largely been deprioritized, instead unemployment is now considered as an inevitable and even beneficial marker of a competitive economy (Kantola and Kananen, 2013, pp. 813–814). Entrepreneurship has advanced as a policy priority within such a context. It is not only a labor market status that is marked by flexibility and limited state intervention, but also an ideology that is compatible to neoliberal development (Tavares, 2018; Carmo et al., 2021).

In the context of Sweden, Hjerm (2004, p. 752) writes, "[I]mportantly, but not as explicitly discussed, entrepreneurship means that society can take its hands away from the problems of marginalization and segregation." The dismantlement of the Swedish welfare state was similarly precipitated by economic turmoil in the 1990s and worked to restructure the labor market, now marked by a high rate of unemployment (Neergaard, 2015, p. 143). Entrepreneurship is framed as a means of immigrant integration to remedy grim labor market outcomes, while in the same breath, it places the burden of financial and social security on the individual rather than the state (Hjerm, 2004, pp. 741–742). For example, in a study on the ethnic segmentation in the Swedish taxi industry, Slavnic and Urban (2018, p. 455) explore how the challenges faced by immigrant entrepreneurs—such as low wages, financial instability, long hours,

and exposure to threats and violence—raise concerns about integration in light of "an organizational structure that gives no real power to self-employed individuals."

As this chapter will demonstrate, while this dynamic takes shape in distinct ways across different contexts, its general form is also evident in Finland. Typical welfare measures such as unemployment benefits are rendered individual responsibility under entrepreneurship as a labor market status. Correspondingly, structural issues such as racism also become consigned to "the personal domain," or a matter of individual tolerance or lack thereof (Carmo et al., 2021, p. 28). While racism had been explained as an "occupational hazard" for business owners subject to processes of differentiation, this must be understood in specific relation to capitalist development in Finland, lest it be reduced to an interpersonal impulse (Ishaq et al., 2010, p. 377).

As Kundnani (2023, pp. 4–5) argues, structural racism is not the mere sum of prejudiced individuals within institutions but is actively mediated by capitalism's tendency to differentiate workers. While I will consider the concept of racial capitalism, I remain cautious about its theoretical premise as elaborated by Robinson (2000) and will instead focus on the term "capitalist racism" to more precisely describe how capitalism and racism are co-mediated. Particularly, such an approach would lend us a more nuanced analysis of how the promotion of entrepreneurship under neoliberal persuasion does not merely place the burden of (un)employability onto immigrants but also makes them responsible for the very structural racism that produces such abysmal prospects in the first place. Under neoliberalism, the traditional role of the Finnish state as a regulator of business, labour, and welfare is subordinated to the forces of the free market, which it now facilitates and insulates "from democratic pressures" (Slobodian, 2018, p. 4). Thus, instead of alleviatory measures, the state regularly "exercise[s] its right *not* to regulate labour recruitment practices" and instead perpetuates and sustains economic and racial disparities that enable a steady supply of cheap, flexible labour (Martin and Prokkola, 2017, p. 150).

While many Finnish immigrant entrepreneurship studies take a mixed embeddedness approach (Kloosterman et al., 1999), or how ethnic, migrant, or immigrant entrepreneurial activities are dually embedded in the structures and social networks of the community, city, or country in which they conduct business, they do not situate these structures and their development in relation to capitalism nor contend with how capitalist racism mediates this embeddedness (e.g. Yeasmin and Koivurova, 2019). Thus, ethnic, migrant, or immigrant entrepreneurship in Finland is portrayed in individualistic terms, where the success or failure of the business becomes located in the

individual entrepreneur's incapacity to access capital or in the lack of institutional awareness, rather than in the processes of racial differentiation that affect their abilities to do so. There then appears to be two forces at play: 1) institutional encouragement of entrepreneurship, and 2) institutional blockages to entrepreneurship. Taken at its appearance, this implies that if Finnish institutions were more primed to encounter a foreigner, then the experience of entrepreneurship would be better facilitated. However, an analysis of racism and capitalism together would problematize this further to showcase how entrepreneurship has not produced integration but rather the concentration of certain immigrants in low-margin sectors, or a deeper entrenchment of the racial division of labour.

The state of the Finnish labour market has not changed since 2015. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment reported that in December 2023, the number of unemployed foreign job seekers in Finland surpassed 44,000, the highest figure ever recorded (Laitinen, 2024). Accordingly, entrepreneurship is put forth as a remedy for the shortcomings of a discriminatory and racist labour market, which does not easily permit the integration of immigrants. Analysing fifteen semi-structured interviews through a critical engagement with capitalism and racism studies, this chapter will subject to scrutiny the assumption that entrepreneurship resolves the systemic errors of the labour market. The chapter will be structured as follows. First, a brief overview of the Finnish context is provided. Second, the theoretical framework of capitalist racism, under the broader theme of racial capitalism, will be explored in direct relation to immigrant entrepreneurship in Finland. Third, methodological processes and concerns are offered before a detailed analysis of the empirical material is put forth.

2 From Welfare Provision to Market Facilitation: Finland in Context

The Finnish welfare state developed later than its Nordic counterparts due to the country's delayed industrialization, which only acquired momentum in the mid-20th century (Jäntti and Vartiainen, 2009). Unlike Sweden, which established robust welfare provisions alongside early industrial expansion, Finland remained largely agrarian until after WWII (Kettunen, 2019, p. 226). Finnish employers, especially manufacturers, resisted collective agreements with trade unions until WWII, while Sweden, Denmark, and Norway had high unionization rates by the 1930s (Kettunen, 2001, p. 230). Finland, by contrast, experienced more economic and political volatility, namely the civil (or class) war in 1918 followed by the Winter War and the Continuation War in 1939 and

1941 respectively. The postwar period saw the consolidation of a Nordic welfare model, but its foundation was always more precarious, as it had to balance late-industrial development with external economic pressures.

The dismantlement of welfare in Finland started with the deregulation of financial markets in the 1980s, precipitated by the economic crises of the 1970s, interpreted as an indictment of Keynesian policies (Outinen, 2017, pp. 398–400). In Sweden, the previously agreed-upon approach to capital-labour relations (spirit of Saltsjöbaden) fell apart in the wake of this seismic shift in "market forces", which repoliticized the role of labour-market organizations (Kettunen, 2001, p. 246). On the other hand, national consensus in Finland was reaffirmed not only by conservative parties and employer federations but also the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Confederation of Finnish Unions (SAK), in which practical solutions to enhance competition, fiscal discipline, and labour flexibility were considered a "rational" response to capital flight (Outinen, 2017, p. 401). Notably, the economic depression of the early 1990s in Finland lent legitimacy to retrenchment policies.

Furthermore, Finland's membership in the European Union and the European Monetary Union, of which it is the "most integrationist of the Nordic states," had made its welfare policies more susceptible to external shocks (Jokela, 2015, p. 27 & p. 30). In comparison to Sweden, which retained its own currency and thus greater monetary flexibility, the adoption of the euro in Finland has limited its ability to devalue or float its currency in response to economic turmoil. Instead, internal devaluation, in the form of wage suppression, surfaces as a key policy tool (Dølvik and Oldervoll, 2019, p. 217). Crucially, Finnish competition policy has worked to reduce the cost of labour since 2015; "excessive labour cost growth" in Finnish industries was located as a partial reason for their "subpar export performance" after the Eurocrisis (Kaitila, 2018, p. 3). Both Sweden and Finland, however, are still constrained by what is now a globalized capitalism: even Sweden, with an older welfare state, has faced pressures within the European Union to adhere to the neoliberal framework of fiscal austerity and market competition albeit with more autonomy (Jensen and Davidsen, 2015, p. 195).

To better understand globalized capitalism, it is important to consider since the 1960s, the rise of information technology has been a key force that has modified the structure of work internationally. As digital technologies advanced, the nature of production and the capital-labour relations co-constituted with the former have fundamentally altered in Finland, which has led to more decentralized and flexible work arrangements (Koskinen, 2022, p. 25). Information technology has facilitated the outsourcing of jobs and the fragmentation of

work across borders, enabling companies to tap into global labour markets for cheaper, more efficient production: "Advances in technology—in transport, communications, information and data processing and organization—rendered geographical distances irrelevant and made possible the movement of plant to labour, while ensuring centralized control of production" (Sivanandan, 1979, p. 113). These shifts have also eroded traditional labour protections, as work becomes more splintered and less regulated.

In Finland, non-standard employment—including agency work, fixed-term contracts, part-time jobs, project-based positions, and self-employment—accounted for 31 percent of all jobs in 2015 and has steadily increased since 2000 (Ojala et al., 2021, p. 97). Moreover, the global interconnectedness fostered by information technology means that national economies are increasingly subsumed into transnational flows of capital and labour, which makes it difficult for any single nation-state to regulate or control these processes (Patnaik, 2020, p. 40). The nation-state, once able to exert capital control with protectionist policies and shield labour with welfare provisions, now finds its regulatory power diminished. Instead, the nation-state assumes a neoliberal direction and works to facilitate the market, which in Finland has not meant a complete dissolution of the Nordic welfare model. Rather, the welfare state has been able to maintain its form, but tripartite negotiation and consensus policy have been repurposed to fulfil market-driven priorities instead (Wuokko, 2019).

A clear example of this development can be discerned in relation to Nokia, whose technological success was buttressed by *public* research and development (R&D) and venture capital, the outcomes of which were *privately* captured (Ornston, 2014, p. 468). The Finnish state made a series of concessions for Nokia, such as the 2010 university reform, and effectively created a scenario where state priorities became synonymous with market needs (Lindén, 2021, pp. 31–32). These capitulations, ultimately, did not prevent Nokia's later decision to shift operations to China. However, Nokia's failure to adapt in the face of changing technological trends—such as the rise of smartphones—coupled with bureaucratic inefficiencies inevitably spelled its collapse (Pajarinen & Rouvinen, 2013, p. 6). Nokia's decline underlines the limitations of a state model that is heavily embedded with corporate interests, in which "the public sector socializes risks, while rewards are privatized" (Mazzucato, 2013). Despite these shortcomings, however, globalized capital leaves little room for alternative approaches and requires state compliance with its imperatives of competition, fiscal discipline, and labour flexibility (Ferguson, 2016, p. 51).

This has also contributed to an ideological shift in which 'entrepreneurs' and 'small businesses' are now heralded as the impetus of the Finnish economy, despite the reality that they often face precarious conditions and are not the backbone of economic growth empirically. Large companies in Finland have a significantly higher rate of productivity and contribute substantially to the value of total exports and imports (TEM, 2022, pp. 12, 37). Historically, small businesses in Finland have been resistant to state regulation of capital-labour relations: "The benefits that trade unions could acquire for their members often came at a particularly high cost for small companies, which had fewer resources to comply with them" (Jensen-Eriksen, 2024, p. 12). In the conditions specific to industrial capitalism, employer federations in Finland conceded to the January Engagement and thus tripartite negotiation as a means to stabilize labour unrest and revive mass production, which in turn supported the welfare state. However, under global capitalism, where production is increasingly fragmented and capital is highly mobile, the preoccupations of small business have been usurped by corporations and the nation-state as in the interest of a competitive economy. This is best reflected in the Proposal for an Entrepreneurship Strategy under the Sipilä cabinet, where "the legal right to conclude agreements that deviate from the provisions of collective agreements" is first presented as beneficial to the small business, before it is to be applicable to all enterprises for the sake of "linear business growth" (TEM, 2018, pp. 94–96).

The rhetoric of 'think small first' does not serve to undermine the parasitic relationship between corporations and small businesses but rather takes aim at state intervention in capital-labour relations (Waterhouse, 2017). What is of particular importance is that the corporation's shape has transformed as well: "Spinning off their financing, distribution, advertising, human resources, and customer service functions to the lowest bidder, many of the world's biggest businesses are today little more than coordinators of a massive network of nodes" (ibid.). This dissemination of corporate power facilitates a new dynamic in which capital flows extend beyond national borders, and the threat of capital flight is omnipresent. In this dynamic, the Finnish state increasingly seeks to cheapen the cost of labour to remain attractive in the competition-driven global market. Entrepreneurship aligns seamlessly with the new globalized economic order, in which it conjures the "continual 'adjustment' of labour," a process that disproportionately affects non-white, non-EU/EAA workers who are structurally positioned to bear the brunt of economic precarity (Sotiropoulos, Milios, & Lapatsioras, 2013, p. 192). This new economic landscape, with its emphasis on entrepreneurship and welfare retrenchment, also

intersects with deeper issues of capitalist racism and immigration. This will be covered in the next section.

3 Capitalist Racism, Immigration, and Entrepreneurship

The term 'racial capitalism' is best associated with Cedric Robinson (1983) and his seminal work, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, the republication of which in 2000 has been the subject of academic debate and praise. Robinson argues that capitalism did not mark a sharp departure from or a negation of feudalism but instead represents an extension of feudal racial hierarchies and social relations into the economic and political systems of the modern world. He contends that racialism is an endogenous feature of Western civilization, which runs "deep in the bowels of Europe," and accordingly "the development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions" (Robinson, 2000, p. 60 & p. 3).

In this work, Robinson (2000, p. 317) takes critical aim at Western Marxism, which he considers as "insufficiently radical to expose and root out the racialist order that contaminates its analytic and philosophic applications." Instead, he transposes a Black radical tradition, defined dubiously around "one Black collective identity" (ibid.). What is peculiar is that, while Robinson draws from W. E. B. Du Bois and C. L. R. James as examples of this tradition, he fails to account for their serious commitment to "working-class solidarity across the colour-line for human emancipation" (Satgar, 2019, p. 12). Furthermore, the relationship of capitalism, racism, and slavery has been a serious consideration for not only Marx, for example in his work on the American Civil War, but also for *Black* and Third World figures such as Amilcar Cabral, Henry Haywood, Claudia Jones, and Walter Rodney who found in Marxism a theory of liberation. These figures do not appear in Robinson's text, whose radical contribution is not accounted for in the Black tradition. While he attributes the term 'racial capitalism' to the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, he neither engages with the historical specificities from which that term was developed and leveraged.

In the South African tradition (SAT) of racial capitalism, Levenson and Paret (2023, p. 3407) note, it was "never argued that all capitalism is racial, but rather, that capitalism assumes a racial guise under specific conditions." The task, instead, becomes "to reveal the conditions under which capitalism becomes racial" (ibid., p. 3406). Importantly, SAT considers racism as firmly rooted in exploitation or economic reasons first, until it matures into "'a serious problem

on its own'" (ibid., p. 3409). To say that capitalist development in Finland from its inception assumed a racial guise is an overestimation; the relationship of capitalism and racism did not develop similarly in Finland as it did in South Africa or the United States. This historical purview is outside the scope of this study, but I will focus my attention on racism as it relates to Finland in the contemporary moment: globalized capitalism. I will opt to use the term 'capitalist racism,' largely to distinguish it from Robinson's theorization, which instead showcases the inextricability of capitalism and racism in accordance to SAT.

Categories produced by racism are not inherently meaningful, lest we also incorporate the processes by which these categories become productive: "[T]hese categories of difference obscure the processes of differential value making that sort humanity into various designations of value and valuelessness because such categories come into being after the value making and merely describe (and thus reify) the effects of the process" (Melamed, 2011, p. xiv). To shift attention to the process as opposed to the effect, and ultimately to reconnect racism to material conditions, it is pertinent to include an analysis of capitalism. What 'unifies' these processes of differential value formation, in this particular historical conjecture, is the capitalist social whole in which these processes become "a source of capital's power" and in which alternative practices become difficult to imagine (Mau, 2019, p. 26; McNally and Ferguson, 2015). More succinctly, as Kundnani (2023, p. 262) writes, "capitalism generates the structure in structural racism" or capitalist racism. This dynamic is grossly unacknowledged and often fiercely contested in Finland (Puuronen, 2011).

The Finnish state's embrace of entrepreneurship as a solution to immigrant integration and labour market exclusion must be understood in the broader implications wrought by globalized capitalism and its reconfigurations of labour relations nationally. As the previous section outlined, the Finnish welfare state emerged late compared to its Nordic counterparts and has since been reshaped by global economic pressures following the emergence of information technology. The structural transformations brought about by these forces—the flexibilization of labour, the fragmentation of production, and the state's reorientation toward market facilitation—have not only eroded traditional labour protections but have also fundamentally altered the conditions under which immigrant workers participate in the Finnish economy. The shifting role of the nation-state thus reinforces a hierarchy of labour underpinned by racism, where non-white, non-EU/EEA workers are disproportionately positioned in precarious forms of self-employment, serving as the buffer or as 'interchangeable items' for an economy increasingly structured around global capital flows (Rodríguez, 2018, p. 15). Rather than a means of genuine economic inclusion or even prosperity, entrepreneurship is deployed as a

mechanism to absorb the instability and precarity generated by the disintegration of traditional employment relations (Tavares, 2018).

With the dissolution of corporate power into networks of nodes and the state's shift from regulator to facilitator of market imperatives, immigrant labour becomes a key site for maintaining labour market flexibility and suppressing wage growth (Pal Singh and Grover, 2018). This is simultaneous to concerted attacks on the labour market protections of Finnish workers. But even this orientation appears fruitless, provided "the systemic need to expel living labour from the production process" is at the heart of capital's inner movement and with it "the systematic proliferation of human need itself, unmet and denied"—which led Frederic Jameson to remark "*Capital* is simply a book about unemployment" (Best, 2024, p. 50 & p. 46). This arrangement benefits domestic employers, who gain access to a cheap and disposable workforce from which to compel the so-termed 'native' workforce into similar conditions, and also transnational capital, which relies on the continued flexibilization of labor markets to maintain competitiveness (Lillie and Sippola, 2011, p. 150). Ultimately, the sorting of immigrants into precarious self-employment on racial terms exposes how migration is not simply a demographic phenomenon but a structurally embedded process within contemporary capitalism: one that reinforces racial hierarchies and serves the broader imperatives of market-driven governance (Ziadah and Hanieh, 2023).

Accordingly, as a response to the 8,000 asylum applications received, various labour market organizations released a statement in September 2015 that condemned racism of all forms but especially in relation to the workplace, emphasizing that "Finland will need a new labour force in the future, also from abroad" ("Labour market organisations condemn racism," 2015). This statement, which was published on the Ministry of Finance website, effectively confirmed what had been common knowledge for years before: the Finnish labour market discriminates and sorts candidates through an "ethnic hierarchy" that prioritizes Finnish persons and persons from countries incorporated in the European Union (EU) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Heikkilä, 2005; Ahmad, 2020).

A year later, in 2016, saw the "From Immigrant to Entrepreneur Tour" in different asylum reception centres across the country. While asylum seekers can only seek gainful employment, or a salaried relationship with an employer, and cannot work as entrepreneurs, this does not foreclose that they cannot already be primed for an entrepreneurial career upon acquiring a residence permit. Organized by the Confederation of Finnish Industries, the Employment and Economic Development Office, the Finnish Enterprise Agencies, and the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, the event

suggested entrepreneurship as a "natural path to Finnish working life" ("'From Immigrant to Entrepreneur'", 2016). Asylum seekers become refugees, once granted asylum. Accordingly, around the same time, the Finnish Immigration Service and the Ministry of Interior financially sponsored the work of Startup Refugees as well. Established in 2015, also in response to the record number of asylum applications received, Startup Refugees provides employment and entrepreneurship support to asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants in order to facilitate the fastest possible route to integration. Thus, at all stages of mobility, from immigrant to asylum seeker and refugee, Finland now encourages entrepreneurship.

According to Finnish policy, entrepreneurship will attract skilled labour, create employment and prosperity, increase investment and productivity, and integrate refugees and immigrants. Of the 277,000 self-employed persons in Finland, 191,000 are self-employed without employees (Statistics Finland, 2021). Out of the 443,731 companies in Finland, 95 percent employ less than 10 persons ("Entrepreneurship in Finland," 2024). Forty-four percent of entrepreneurs report earnings of less than 2,000 euros, whereas the average salary in Finland is approximately 3,500 euros per month ("Many entrepreneurs earning under 2K," 2022).

In a survey conducted specifically on immigrant entrepreneurs by the Federation of Finnish Enterprises, there is a corresponding overrepresentation of micro enterprises (92 percent) and single person businesses (48 percent) (Keisala-Kaseja et al., 2018). More than half of the respondents reported an annual turnover of 30,000 euros or less, and 29 percent reported earnings of less than 10,000 euros. Fornaro (2018) demonstrates an inverse relationship between labour market conditions and the foreign resident share of new entrepreneurs. As in, immigrant entrepreneurship is seemingly a necessity measure to prevent unemployment, as opposed to a freely chosen pursuit for innovation or a "natural" path.

Moreover, immigrants tend to initiate business operations in low-margin sectors, often due to limited access to financial capital. In general, immigrant entrepreneurs demonstrate lesser earnings than Finnish entrepreneurs; this is a direct result of their overconcentration in the service sector (Fornaro, 2018, p. 11). While the Entrepreneurship Strategy praises the capacity of entrepreneurship to attract skilled labour and increase productivity, it reaches an impasse in relation to immigrant entrepreneurship, where low-waged, low-productivity job creation is praised and even naturalized. The strategy writes, "Companies with an immigrant background have created a relatively large number of low productivity and low wage jobs" (Yrittäjyysstrategia, 2022, p. 30). It even argues

that "[i]mmigrants in business are happy to employ other immigrants" to said "low-productivity and low wage jobs" (ibid).

The term "immigrant" cannot properly elaborate neither the class differences nor the processes of racism that produce "differential exposure to precarious working and living conditions," while it remains attached to some groups over others (Martin & Prokkola, 2017, p. 145): "'Racial' meanings can be implicitly conveyed as the unspoken subtext in terms such as 'ethnicity,' 'immigrant,' or 'refugee.' The association of these categories with 'non-white' and 'non-Western origins' has been identified by many scholars" (Leinonen & Toivanen, 2014, p. 153). For example, Heikkilä and Yeasmin (2021, pp. 192–193) compared the labour market situation of German and Somali workers. German workers were concentrated in managerial and professional jobs, whereas Somali workers were located in service and sales positions. Thus, in this strategy, "immigrant" appears as a stand-in for non-white persons from the Global South as opposed to intra-EU persons, who are in better labour market positions.

In fact, Forsander (2003, p. 68) showcases how nationality is a critical factor in immigrant labour market integration in Finland, where "labour market status of refugees and of those who immigrated from developing countries was shown to be weakest." Additionally, Finnish employers were shown to undervalue educational credentials acquired abroad. Indeed, fixed-term and part-time employment are more common among immigrant workers (Statistics Finland, 2015). Furthermore, Könönen (2017, p. 62) writes how immigration law strongly determines labour market composition and structure in Finland, where "restrictions target low-paid work" and "a faster and less burdensome bureaucratic process" is in place for managerial positions and skilled work. Wide (2023, p. 917) connects this to the flexibilization of the labour market as a result of neoliberal reform in Finland, where conditional and temporary work residency permits often confine the applicant to a specific sector: "[S]omeone who obtains a work permit for private domestic work can only apply for other jobs as a domestic worker under that permit." Effectively, Finnish immigration law buttresses the national and ultimately racial division of labour, where non-white, Global South persons have come to constitute a cheap labour force. Accordingly, as Jones et al. (2014, p. 515) argue, "[T]he over-exposure of immigrants to problematic forms of self-employment needs to be traced back to previous labour market discrimination against them as employees."

As noted in the previous section, non-standard employment has steadily increased since 2000. Light entrepreneurship, in which workers invoice clients through intermediary platforms, represents a particularly precarious form of employment that lacks legal protections. One in four light entrepreneurs are

of foreign origin (Sten-Gahmberg and Riekhoff, 2024, p. 7). Reports from the Finnish National Bureau of Investigation have documented multiple cases in which foreign workers were misclassified as light entrepreneurs without their knowledge, allowing employers to evade labour protections while reducing wage costs ("Police suspect human trafficking", 2023). While the subcontracting firms that facilitated their employment were held legally liable, the companies under which the victims worked were not. What is of concern here is that the exploitation of cheap, non-Finnish labour is not met with punitive enforcement. Rather, punitive enforcement is politicized, where crime control "may jeopardize the effective functioning of capitalism since both employers and consumers benefit from cheap labour" – an entirely "[un]feasible option in a neoliberal ideology of de-regulation and privatization" (Ollus, 2016, p. 75).

4 Methodology

Initially, this study aimed to explore how racism shaped the process of entrepreneurship for non-white, non-Finnish persons. Helsinki and Turku were chosen as sites of the study, because each city hosts a sizeable population of foreign language speakers, Finland's official category for non-Finnish persons. Qualitative, semi-structured interviews acted as the primary method of data collection. Fifteen interviews, consisting of Afghan, Indian, Japanese, Malaysian, Mexican, Nigerian, Pakistani, Senegalese, Somali, and Vietnamese business owners, were conducted from November 2021 to February 2022. Interviews typically lasted between 45 minutes to an hour and a half, and based on the preferences and availability of the participants, took place either in person or virtually. To recruit participants, I utilized my personal networks, contacted community-based organizations such as the Finland-Somalia Association and the Finnish-Thai Association, and employed snowball sampling.

Participants were made aware of the study's purpose, confidentiality procedures, and their right to withdraw at any point. Interviews were conducted in English, then transcribed verbatim. All identifiable information was removed, and pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality and privacy. Data was then entered into NVivo for analysis after pseudonymization. Because the study focuses on processes of race and racism, I collected special categories of personal data related to ethnic identity and religious beliefs. As a result, I underwent mandatory ethical review by the Ethics Committee for Human Sciences at the University of Turku and received institutional approval of the study. Special categories of personal data can only be processed with the

explicit consent of the participant, which I expressly stated in initial outreach and in the interview. All 15 participants provided explicit consent. An ethical concern that arises with ethnicity related data collection is the potential reification of ethnicity or race as biological constructs. To avoid this reification, the research does not put forth ethnic or racial categories as "taken-for-granted, natural, or neutral" but considers them in direct relation to social processes and structures that engender such categorizations in the first place (Salway et al., 2009, p. 2).

To analyse the interview data, I employed thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves six phases: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 594) later developed reflexive thematic analysis, which provided a flexible yet rigorous framework for identifying patterns of meaning within the participants' accounts as well as researcher subjectivity: "Themes do not passively emerge from either data or coding; they are not 'in' the data, waiting to be identified and retrieved by the researcher. Themes are creative and interpretive stories about the data, produced at the intersection of the researcher's theoretical assumptions, their analytic resources and skill, and the data themselves." My initial coding was informed by literature on racial discrimination, which largely frames racism as an interpersonal phenomenon that manifests as explicit bias, microaggressions, or exclusionary practices (Kundnani, 2023, p. 174). Where structure or system is concerned, it is not rigorously considered in relation to capitalism, but rather as an abstract force. Accordingly, my first set of codes reflected this perspective, capturing instances where participants described racist encounters with customers or employees in different institutions that they encountered. However, as the coding process progressed, it became evident that participants often downplayed these interpersonal forms of racism, instead highlighting systemic barriers as more consequential.

Yet, even within participants discussions of systemic racism, the focus remained on the cumulative effects of individual actions rather than the structural imperatives that produce and reproduce racial inequality. Many recognized that something larger was at play—an unfair system that perpetuated their exclusion—but could not articulate more specifically its characteristics. I, too, as a researcher, initially found myself grappling with the same limitation. It was only through deeper engagement with literature on the history of the Finnish welfare state and its retrenchment, the fragmentation of work and the promotion of entrepreneurship, the nation-state in the wake of globalization, and the relationship of capitalism and racism that I could begin to name what

was otherwise felt but not fully grasped: that capitalism does not randomly or sporadically intersect with racial inequality, but actively structures and sustains it. This framing is not incidental and reflects how capitalism presents itself, through the appearance of individual agency and market neutrality, while concealing the ways in which racial differentiation is embedded in its very logic of accumulation.

I iteratively moved between the data and my theoretical framework, allowing insights from participants' narratives to reshape my analytical categories. As coding progressed, I grouped related codes into broader themes, such as "entrepreneurship as necessity," "interpersonal vs. systemic racism," and "capitalist racism as personal responsibility." Reflexivity was central to this process; I continuously examined how my theoretical assumptions influenced the identification and interpretation of themes, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' lived realities. This approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how capitalism and racism co-mediated the experience of immigrant entrepreneurship, moving beyond surface-level descriptions to interrogate the deeper structures at play. This was especially the case in the final theme, "the case of Hamza," which exclusively concerns one participant's experience as a refugee-turned-entrepreneur. His story laid bare how state policies that claim to promote integration instead operate as mechanisms of economic coercion, which made an analysis of capitalism not just relevant but necessary. Without it, the structural conditions that shape immigrant entrepreneurship would remain obscured, appearing as mere individual hardship rather than as part of a broader system of labour discipline and exploitation on racial terms.

While the study relies on the narratives provided by interviewees, it does not treat them as transparent windows into reality. Following Bourdieu (1999) and Ågotnes et al. (2019, p. 210), I recognize that interview accounts are not simply "true" or objective representations of reality but are shaped by ideological framings, power relations, and social positions, and thus an overreliance on taking respondents' narratives at face value is dissuaded. Rather, accounts must always be situated within broader structures that shape what can be said, how it is said, and what remains unsaid (Ågotnes et al., 2019, pp. 209–210). This necessitates a methodological approach that oscillates between individual experience and structural analysis, including researcher subjectivity, which neatly fit into reflexive thematic analysis. Thus, while participants often framed their entrepreneurial struggles through narratives that emphasized personal resilience and hard work, I considered how these narratives were themselves shaped by neoliberal capitalist discourses that prioritize individual solutions over structural change. This back-and-forth movement between subjective

accounts and structural conditions ensured that the analysis did not reproduce an individualized understanding of entrepreneurship but instead located these experiences within the material and ideological constraints imposed by capitalism and systemic racism.

As I analysed the data, I was mindful of the concepts described by Whittle and Reissner (2024) in their conceptualization of the 'epistemological leap.' They define this as the inferential process through which researchers transition from the analysed data to claims about phenomena beyond the interview situation. In this study, the epistemological leap falls under the 'power effect' mode, where participants' responses are understood as illuminative of prevailing ideologies and social structures, especially those rooted in capitalism and racism. However, this power effect is not unidirectional or deterministic. Participants are not passive recipients of these ideologies or structures; rather, they negotiate and respond to these structures in diverse ways that sometimes exceed or subvert them, and other times comply with their limitations. This dynamic allowed me to see the ways in which immigrant entrepreneurs navigate the structures of capitalism and racism, finding agency within or against the constraints imposed on them.

5 Analysis

5.1 *Entrepreneurship as Choice or Necessity*

A majority of interviewees presented a linear trajectory from service work to self-employment. Halima, a Somali healthcare contractor, worked as a nurse; Dike, a Nigerian restaurant owner, worked as a cleaner; and Mamadou, a Senegalese restaurant owner, worked as a cook. There are more examples, but entrepreneurship for many was a choice made in pursuit of autonomy and class mobility. Former experiences in the service industry, where they felt devalued or not cared for, led to self-employment. For others, job insecurity in skilled work such as the university, led to the same decision. Usman, who is developing a food delivery service, came to Finland as a student from Pakistan. He is now a doctoral researcher but is stressed by a difficult and intense labour market, and continues to work as a food delivery driver on the weekends to fund his company that will purportedly act as an ethical alternative to Foodora and Wolt:

> The drivers, their interest is money. My interest is that drivers would have like a secure job. Because Wolt and Foodora have already exploited the situation among the drivers because they are giving them money rather

> than giving them benefits, because they [the drivers] keep their mind on the money. We are building a company where we would offer like more secure employment.

Similarly, Bilal, a Pakistani cleaning service owner, is also a doctoral researcher but unfunded. He opened his business after gigs as a newspaper delivery person, where he worked shifts from 2AM to 6AM, and as a cleaner:

> I felt that it was better to have your own business at least, then you can have that sort of freedom that whenever or whatever you want to do. So that was the main motivation to start my own company. Because in cleaning companies, they also try to try to manipulate I would say the workers.

While many "chose" entrepreneurship, it does not appear to be an entirely independent decision but one shaped by structural factors, either a direct consequence of a lack of employment opportunities in the labour market or exploitative and stressful conditions in the employment that was secured. Lan, a Vietnamese grocery store owner, also arrived in Finland as a student:

> I don't think there are many opportunity or possibility to do what we really want to do. I used to be a student here, but I know so many students who will come to Finland for study. After their study, there are so narrow opportunities. They don't have a lot of opportunity or they don't have any choice. I think a career, it's very difficult for a foreigner to find a decent job, like an office job to do something related to what you study. Very difficult. Most of the time, people have to go on kind of like cleaning, like do all kind of blue-collar work. *Or if you don't want to do that kind of job, you have to open your own company*.

Tómas, a Mexican, self-employed graphic designer, was extensively trained in his line of work back in Mexico but experienced two years of unemployment. His education and work experience did not translate as recognized qualifications in the Finnish labour market:

> So I think one thing that I believe but I cannot prove it, but I'm pretty sure that when they see that your degree is from a Latin country or like other countries that are not in the European Union or USA, Canada and Japan, something like that. Then they really like don't pay attention to your CV or your profile.

Tomás' experience with the TE office was also less than favourable, when he could not secure employment in graphic design. The TE employee repeatedly suggested work in the food industry as an option to him, based on temporary gigs he had undertaken at different restaurants to make money.

> But it's not my expertise. I don't want to become a restaurant owner. It's not my job. I want to be a designer. And she was like, 'Why? You should just get a job there.' I was like shocked. They are supposed to help you with your career, but they just want to get rid of you. She didn't move or blink. She was like, 'The restaurant work, isn't it easy?' And I was like, 'No, it's horrible!'

Even the work of entrepreneurship appears to be bifurcated along class lines, which is especially evident in the two residence permits possible for entrepreneurial work: entrepreneurship resident permit or startup residence permit. Umar, an Indonesian technology marketing company owner, lives in Finland under the latter permit and described the difference as such:

> A startup residence permit needs this validation from Business Finland. They'll give you this letter saying, 'This business is a good business. It's scalable, and the founders are good. They can execute this.' So this letter really helped us in many of the processes, including this, like making a bank account. So the difference between a startup and a normal traditional business is usually it's like software based, something scalable. So if I'm a hairdresser or I open a restaurant, I cannot be a startup residence permit person. I have to go in the traditional entrepreneur one.

5.2 *Experiences of Racism: Interpersonal to Structural*

At the interpersonal level, interviewees recounted various experiences of 'underestimation,' a form of everyday racism identified by Essed (1991, p. 20) in which non-white people are seen as "less intelligent and less competent." Dike recounted how a customer demanded to speak to the 'Finnish owner':

> A lady came. She came and said, 'Hey, can I speak to your manager?' She says, 'I want to speak to the owner now.' And I said, 'You are talking to the owner now.' Then she looked from head to toe, 'I mean the Finnish owner.' I looked at her and switched to Finnish: 'There is no Finnish owner.' You mean an African person is not good enough to own a restaurant? So it has to be owned by a Finnish person!

Similarly, Halima described instances in which she was met with surprise for her business acumen and intelligence:

> When they see you, for example me as a smart woman, they say, 'Yeah, I didn't know that Somalis were like, well educated.' They have a different imagination, you know? I just say, 'Well, we have, we have so many educated and successful ones.'

Additionally, interviewees whose businesses have a social media presence recounted racist comments left by anonymous persons. Lan, for example, received an Instagram comment from an anonymous user: "Who wants to eat that ching-chang food?" Zeinab, a Somali, self-employed DEI consultant, describes how the contact form on her business website is regularly used to leave comments that she sees as 'hate speech':

> [T]here had been some hate speech unfortunately that people will make the effort to send me. I will get some emails that are not so nice, but that is part of my work. Dealing with a hard topic like diversity, inclusion, race stuff, some people can get really mad and they see this as a threat, so they make this type of comments.

Interviewees that have been integrated into the start-up ecosystem in both cities, such as Maria 01 in Helsinki and Business Turku, approached the question of racism differently. Madhavan, an Indian telecommunications company owner, considered differentiation as an intrinsic quality of human nature:

> I don't think Indians are treated differently in Finland. See, feeling racism or feeling racist is a personal perception. See, you say something. The way I take it is different, the way a Finn takes it is different. A Somali might take it as different. The Iranian or Kurdish will take it as different. It comes from our background. I have been exposed to such kind of inequality, discrimination, casteism, or you call it what you want. I have been exposed to every kind of grouping. So I think it's part of life. It's human nature. Human cannot see everything as one, they'll find a reason to group things together.

Umar remarks that racism is too easily used to categorize bad experiences in the business creation process:

> I think sometimes people are also quick to label any bad experiences with that racism label, even though it may not be related to that. So, an

> example would be, I'm a business, I'm trying to get Finnish clients, but why do no Finnish people want to buy my service? If you take the racism angle, you will instantly jump to 'It's because I'm a foreigner.' But when you take a step back, and really analyse the business situation, maybe your solution might not be the best fit. One really difficult question that I got asked is, someone asked me in an event, 'Why would I trust my Finnish brand with two non-Finnish people who doesn't speak Finnish?' It's a fair question, and it's a question which you need to have the answer for, because if they were to ask me to make content in Finnish, like me as a person, I wouldn't be able to do it.

While different interpretations of interpersonal accounts of racism and discrimination were offered, there was a broader consensus among interviewees that structural racism was of greater consequence for their material reality. Usman describes how discrimination from 'the upper level' determines whether he can attain secure or insecure employment:

> The discrimination is not on the lower level. Discrimination is always on the upper level. You cannot apply for a permanent job, you apply for lower level contracts because that is what you'll get. When you are applying for the permanent positions, you can feel that there is discrimination. The situation is like that.

Likewise, Tomás considers the detrimental effects of bureaucratic racism on a person's ability to work effectively:

> I don't think the racism and discrimination, it's from people to people. It's more like the bureaucratic processes. And that's a problem already, because if you don't have time or money to pay the rent or you don't have the basic needs covered, then it's going to be really hard that you are even like mentally stable to do a good job. Racism and discrimination, I think it's more structural than the individual to individual.

This is shared by Halima, for whom interpersonal racism fades in comparison to racist systems that threaten career and thus livelihood:

> You know, that's the worst thing because the hate speech is something that stupid people just say you know out there, but you can see, the people who are like behind the doors, you know, tries to block other people's, you know, careers and everything. And that's I think that's the worst thing.

Ultimately, while interpersonal racism has caused frustration in interviewees, the institutions, structures, and systems through which different interviewees mediated business ownership were considered materially decisive and thus significant. Dike describes Finland, rather than one person, as "corrupt" and as a country that forces foreigners into precarious cycles of debt and stress:

> So you can just imagine if somebody … maybe the whole family is working depending on the business … and you're told to go on social support … you know people are used to getting their hard earned money. You still kept them in debt, cause they still have to pay the things they owe. So it's not easy at all … it's really hard to have a business in this country.

5.3 *Capitalist Racism as Personal Responsibility*

Numerous interviewees recounted what they termed as differential treatment from various institutions that interfered either in the official registration of the business or within day-to-day operations, which would directly impede in profit creation. Furthermore, the existing infrastructure was criticized for its lack of accommodation of the English language, such as in customs.

Lan regularly imports products from different Asian countries to sell in her store. For each import, she is required to pay a tax online, but this has proven difficult since the relevant website is offered only in Finnish or Swedish.

> Before you buy imported products, you have to go the government website and make the custom clearance. You have to pay tax on the website. And that website doesn't have English. It only has Finnish or Swedish. And it's so difficult, it's very difficult for me at the beginning trying to look in and try to pay everything by myself. I even called the officer and she said, 'Yeah, I don't think you can do this because we don't have English.' Yeah. Like everything, simply designed not for foreigner. Just for the people who are born and raised here.

For Abdul, a Pakistani grocery store owner, customs complications have resulted in the confiscation and disposal of imported products. He explains that customs officers approach products from countries like India with more suspicion, and the process is non-negotiable and costly.

> They ask too much questions if you order from another country. India for example. They make it difficult. If a little bit, something is missing, they object and they send it back or throw it away. We say check it again, they say no. We stopped buying it from India, even though it is cheaper. Yeah,

> you never know when they reject it, what's going on. We have lost a lot of money. Buying from Holland is easier.

On the other hand, for Dike, it was food safety inspectors that caused a delayed opening and loss of income. Dike claims that food safety inspectors in Finland expect uncleanliness from foreign restaurants and recounts an experience where his restaurant was shut down for two days after a bad inspection score that he believes occurred on problematic rationale.

> Inspectors … like when they go to a foreign restaurant before even getting in there and they see the reality that … wow, this is not what they are expecting … the place is clean, it is neat and everything. They try to find all kinds of excuses to give us a hard time. Anyways, this one time, two came and they gave us a bad score. They wanted our spices to be in IKEA bags and not the bags they come in. So it took us two days, they came again, we passed. Well if you don't do this, in Finland, we can shut down … you know, they threaten people. And you know, each time they come, you have to pay. So that's a way of getting money from you as well and it's not cheap.

Apart from untransparent assessments or processes in customs and food safety, banks posed the most significant problem for nearly half of the interviewees. Every business requires a business ID to process income and transactions, which are applied for at a bank of one's choice. However, if a bank rejects your application for a business ID or a loan, the institution is not legally required to tell you why. This is illustrated in Halima's case:

> Nordea called me. Probably the customer service. She said we found something. And sorry, we cannot take you as a client. I was like "I'm interested to know. What did you find?" They didn't tell me what they did find.

Abdul, Bilal, Dike, Tomás, Lan, Mamadou, and Usman all experienced difficulties acquiring a business ID. However, the process was better facilitated if they had a Finnish contact or a Finnish partner that could act as a mediator between the institution and the business owner. For Halima, it would not be until her advisor, a Finnish man, intervened and called Nordea on her behalf that the bank became interested in Halima as a client. Lan, Tomás, and Mamadou were married to Finnish partners that resulted in a permanent residency status or even citizenship, which then made easier the process to acquire a business ID.

Kiyomi, a Japanese restaurant owner, describes how she leverages her Finnish partner "as a fortune cookie" in the face of a bureaucracy that makes her anxious:

> The registration like anything related to bureaucracy, I always ask my partner to do. Everything goes so faster, although everybody speaks English in this country. Also like, I'm going to get more respect if I show up with my white husband and just I am trusted more. People will treat me better in the hospital or like official institutions. So it's like so sad. But I bring my husband as a fortune cookie or what you call it.

Usman also uses a similar strategy to avoid discrimination but with his Finnish business partner, who serves as the outward face of the business:

> One of my business partner is a Finnish guy here in Finland, and he's someone who is responsible for contacting restaurants. Because if I was to go, I know that from stuff already, people in restaurants will not appreciate me doing business with them. For the front face, we have the Finnish guy who is for the contracts and stuff like that.

Some interviewees faced little difficulty and even received institutional support. Parth, an Indian environmental consultancy owner, had a contact with a Nordea employee that facilitated the process of his business ID. Umar was able to secure a letter of guarantee from Business Finland that his business was "good" and "scalable." Others like Bilal, who have all of "two Finnish friends," official processes are made more difficult:

> I would say that opening a business can be easy in Finland, but to run or to keep it running might be a problem or some issue. If I am from Pakistan or some other non-European country, and if I would like to have some Finnish partner, it's very difficult unless you have some Finnish friend or some Finnish acquaintance.

Bilal has had to rely on light entrepreneurship for his cleaning service, because the business ID application proved too complicated and strenuous. These services take a commission for each payment processed, and many report millions of euros in revenue. For example, OP Bank offers such a service via its subsidiary Pivo Wallet Oy, and the OP-Suomi Small Cap Fund is a shareholder of Eezy PLC, which also provides the same service. As in, banks that render inaccessible the process of a business ID for non-Finnish persons profit from the services fledgling business owners turn to as a solution. Official processes

required to open or continue a business can be difficult to manoeuvre, either instructions are in Finnish or the assessment process is not transparent. Instead of structural support, most interviewees have had to rely on individual networks to circumvent these processes. In the absence of a Finnish colleague, contact, or partner, a secure residency status, or a capable network, the experience of entrepreneurship is entirely untenable. This is especially illustrative in Hamza's case.

5.4 *A Death-Dealing "Occupational Hazard": the Case of Hamza*

Hamza arrived in Finland as an unaccompanied minor and asylum seeker from Iran. Once he received his refugee travel document, he began studies and took temporary work as a food delivery driver to make ends meet. He currently works as a sales associate in a department store and opened his current business for extra money, a clothes' alteration service that he operates in his apartment. His aspirations are related to his work but not entirely. He wishes to be a model in the future, but feels limited because of his position as a refugee and the type of work people expect a refugee to take:

> Before coming to Finland, before, I like modelling very much. So I like modelling, but Finnish people, they say it's not for me. And I think it's refugee people here, they work in restaurants. Cleaners, taxi drivers. And working in service jobs. And I don't like some people saying to me, 'Do that, don't do that. You can get that, you cannot get that.' For me, it's difficult.

Similar to other interviewees, Hamza explained that he faced difficulty with his business ID and ultimately could not open a business account. Hamza shared that his personal bank account activity is monitored to see how he uses his funds, and that he too uses light entrepreneurship services for his business transactions. He sees this a consequence of his lack of Finnish citizenship, which he cautiously wishes to acquire:

> I'm paying all my bills. Sometimes I pay the bill twice, just in case. And they call and say so, but I tell them to keep it for next month. In Finland, when you try to apply for a passport, you can't have unpaid bills, taxes. No police station visits. Metro fees. Nothing.

Most of Hamza's income from both his contracted work and self-employment are sent as remittances to his family in Iran or to his relative that recently arrived in Finland as an asylum seeker, which often leaves him with no money:

> I need money. Because my father, my sister, and my mother, they need money, I send money into Iran. And my relative's come. He didn't even have clothes. They are thinking in Finland, the money, there is a lot. Only me, I know. Here, it is very, very hard. Why, why me? For me, now it's difficult, before it's difficult.

Hamza is now responsible for the relative that has arrived, also as an unaccompanied minor from Iran. Hamza regularly checks in on him at the reception centre to which he was sent, but this was received with contempt from the staff, who would not answer Hamza's questions on his relative's wellbeing. One personnel even said: "If you want your relative to have a good home, go to another country. Why does he have to be here?"

Hamza wished to expand his business, and in return his income so as to support his family, but struggled to find regular clientele. His friend, who was also a refugee, used to help him with his business' social media until his passing:

> I don't know how to get customers through Instagram or Facebook. But I had a friend who was helping me. My friend. Yeah, he's killed himself. It was too hard for him. He was also from Iran. He didn't have a Finnish permit and all the time, six years, refugee, refugee, refugee. Cannot speak Finnish, cannot take work, cannot go to school. Sometimes before, I wanted to finish my life too. This life here, I don't like it.

Hamza's case is not elaborated for shock value, and many of the details have been significantly altered to avoid identification. Rather, his case seriously places under scrutiny the productive capacity of entrepreneurship. Policy continues to represent self-employment as a positive, even empowering, experience. For many non-white persons who undertake business creation, they are confined to the service industry and regularly encounter an unyielding bureaucracy that impedes more than it supports.

6 Conclusion

The chapter explored how entrepreneurship has emerged as a key component in the integration of immigrants in Finland, particularly following the refugee "crisis" of 2015. While entrepreneurship is framed as a path to integration, this is often a response to the limitations of the Finnish labour market,

which remains discriminatory and segregated along racial and ethnic lines. Already from 2006 to 2014, there was a 92 percent rise in the number of non-Finnish self-employed persons (Fornaro, 2018, p. 7). The rise of immigrant entrepreneurship is therefore not a natural inclination of non-Finnish individuals but a structural necessity due to limited employment opportunities, as showcased by the interviewees. The ideology of entrepreneurship, intertwined with neoliberal policies, individualizes systemic issues like racism and labour market discrimination.

Finland's neoliberal reforms, especially after the economic crises of the 1970s and 1990s, reshaped the labour market by promoting flexible accumulation and reducing labour costs. Entrepreneurship, particularly among immigrants, has grown within this context as a form of precarious employment. Immigrant entrepreneurs often face significant challenges, such as limited access to capital and discriminatory institutional practices. These conditions perpetuate a racialized division of labour, where immigrants, especially non-white persons from the Global South, are overrepresented in low-wage, low-productivity jobs, only reinforced by Finnish policies on competition and immigration. Immigration laws often confine immigrants to specific sectors, and light entrepreneurship—a form of self-employment facilitated by invoice service platforms —further marginalizes immigrant workers. These structural conditions are exacerbated by Finland's broader capitalist development, where the integration of immigrants through entrepreneurship ultimately benefits capitalist interests by providing cheap labour.

The chapter calls for a critical analysis that connects capitalism and racism, arguing that the current focus on individual entrepreneurial success overlooks the systemic forces that create and sustain racial and economic inequalities. By situating immigrant entrepreneurship within the broader context of Finland's capitalist and neoliberal policies, the chapter challenges the notion that entrepreneurship can serve as a solution to the problems of labour market discrimination and structural racism.

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