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CHAPTER 11

All I See Is White

The Colonial Problem in Finland

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Abstract

The question of whiteness is inextricably linked to colonialism. This chapter considers common misconceptions of colonialism in Finland through a lens of the “Sámi problem.” These misbeliefs include: colonialism is (mostly) about the past and, thus, we can only talk about “coloniality” or legacies of colonialism; colonialism is only about colonies; and the concept of colonialism is confusing, difficult or too broad to have analytical value. All of these views are frequently applied both in general terms and specifically with regard to the Sámi people. The chapter examines the ways in which the “Sámi question” is a part and parcel of bona fide colonialism, not a “separate chapter” as is frequently suggested in the Finnish discourse of colonialism. The problem of colonialism vis-à-vis the Sámi is commonly framed in terms of “internal colonialism” and thus assumed and presented (if discussed at all) as distinct from other colonial and colonization processes. This chapter suggests that a more correct understanding could be arrived at through the concept and analysis of settler colonialism, which emphasizes structural injustice and the ongoing character of colonialism. In conclusion, the chapter discusses white privilege and considers the key ways in which it plays out in Finland vis-à-vis the Sámi.

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Keywords: Sámi people, concept of colonialism, internal colonialism, settler colonialism, white privilege, structural injustice

Introduction

White is the invisible color of not only normativity, but also domination, unmarked, unacknowledged and unexamined; the enabler of the status quo that effectively veils the structures of power and denies its own complicity. It problematizes the “other,” whoever that may be at a given time, and then either racializes or culturalizes this “problem.” In this way, the problem is located in and constructed in terms of cultural differences or other people’s cultural practices, not in racism, sexism, heteronormativity or homophobia of the dominant society. To remedy the problem, we promote cultural diversity or sensitivity training on an assumption that “with a little practice and the right information, we can all be innocent subjects, standing outside hierarchical social relations, who are not accountable for the past or implicated in the present” (Razack 1998: 9).

Culturalization frequently occurs with regard to Indigenous peoples. Rather than regarding them as existing societies with an ongoing history of political, social and legal systems of their own, they are seen merely as cultures to be recognized or celebrated in the name of diversity. Even when done unwittingly, it is not without serious consequences, as it renders Indigenous peoples into minorities and their rights as minority rights. The fundamental distinction between Indigenous and minority rights is that Indigenous peoples’ rights are premised on the right to self-determination and land and resource rights due to their status as “peoples” (Eide and Daes 2000; Schulte-Tenckhoff 2012).¹ Culturalization also performs a function similar to race biology and racial science by signifying the inferiority of the other. It is a practice that underpins “an important epistemological cornerstone of imperialism: the colonized possess a series of knowable characteristics and can be studied, known, and managed accordingly by the colonizers whose own complicity remains masked” (Razack 1998: 10).

From the position of whiteness, there are a number of problems in Finland, one of which is the “Sámi problem.”² The problem is not solved or diminished by the reality that at times the Sámi are viewed as the “white Indians” of Europe and met with deep suspicion by other Indigenous peoples due to their “white looks” (Kuokkanen 2006). Notwithstanding our light complexion and location in Europe, “the belly of the beast,” the Sámi as a people are not in the position of normativity or domination. One of the key privileges of whiteness is to be “non-raced,” meaning that the racial identity of “those who occupy positions of cultural dominance” remains invisible and thus establishes the taken-for-granted norm (Moore 2012). Like other Indigenous peoples, the Sámi are racialized (incorrectly) as an “ethnic minority.” The racialization of the Sámi

has a long history and runs deep in science which, for decades from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries, sought to prove the Sámi as part of the “Mongoloid race” and, hence, inferior on all counts (Broberg 1995; Isaksson 2001; Kyllingstad 2012; Schanche 2000).

In short, the Sámi are not and cannot be considered white, no matter how some individual Sámi may feel (see Dankertsen 2019). Scholars have described the discrepancy between personal identification and externally ascribed racial identity as “race discordance” (Pirtle and Brown 2016) and consider instances of “race refusal” where individuals refuse the identity to which they are attributed (Kowal and Paradies 2017).³ As an example, some light-skinned Indigenous people in Australia refuse a white identity because they consider themselves Indigenous. By doing so, they also refuse to disappear as Indigenous people and, consequently, this refusal becomes a political act (*ibid.*). At the same time, we need to recognize and acknowledge how the “white” Sámi (like other light-skinned Indigenous people) can and do benefit from some aspects of white privilege as they can pass as white and avoid being targets of racism on the basis of their skin color (*cf.* Dawkins 2012). Equally importantly, this does not mean the Sámi are free from racist attacks or state racism (see Åhrén 2001; Alajärvi 2015; Allard et al. 2015; Eira 2018; Satokangas 2020).⁴

The question of whiteness is inextricably linked to colonialism. In this chapter, I consider common misconceptions of colonialism in Finland through a lens of the “Sámi problem.” These misbeliefs include: colonialism is (mostly) about the past and, thus, we can only talk about “coloniality” or legacies of colonialism; colonialism is only about colonies; and that the concept of colonialism is confusing, difficult or too broad to have analytical value.⁵ All of these views are frequently applied both in general terms and specifically with regard to the Sámi people. The overarching goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how the “Sámi question” is part and parcel of bona fide colonialism, not a “separate chapter” as is frequently suggested in the Finnish discourse of colonialism. The Sámi, like other Indigenous peoples, “have been subject to similar processes of territorial conquest and colonization as overseas colonies” (*cf.* Kymlicka 2001: 123). The problem of colonialism vis-à-vis the Sámi is regularly framed in terms of “internal colonialism” and thus assumed and presented (if discussed at all) as distinct from other colonial and colonization processes. Whether this is done in order to avoid addressing one’s own messy backyard or because of scholarly sloppiness, it is incorrect to suggest—whether explicitly or implicitly through the omission of the Sámi from the discussion altogether—that the “Sámi question” is somehow divorced or different from standard discussions of colonialism. As this chapter shows, there is no “internal colonialism” that is separate from colonialism proper. At the end of the chapter, I return to the question of white privilege and consider key ways in which it plays out in Finland vis-à-vis the Sámi.

Colonization, Finland and the Scramble for Sápmi

While it is true that colonialism is a multifaceted and challenging concept, it cannot be a justification for academics to evade or dismiss it. Given its complexity, it might be useful to consider colonialism as a foundational concept that encompasses many distinct (yet often intersecting) processes and structures at multiple levels and spheres. Failing to acknowledge the complexity of the concept distorts the underlying character of colonialism which, at best, distorts the reality and, at worst, erases the experiences—sometimes very traumatic and violent—of the colonized.

Obviously, there are many ways to approach the complexity of the concept. In the classroom, I begin to unpack colonialism with the help of a chart that shows how “colonialism” at the most general level consists of two main strands, classic colonialism and settler colonialism, and, in addition, is closely linked to imperialism and capitalism. Both colonialism and imperialism pivot on control and subjugation of other peoples and territories and are driven by capitalist interests. As economic enterprises, they both historically drove the development of capitalism. To establish a crude distinction between colonialism and imperialism, the former is about exploitation and occupation of remote or overseas territories and peoples (colonization), and the latter is about global geopolitics and political and economic control of other regions. Volumes have been written about the complex relationships between colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, and there is no unanimity on definitions of the terms or what specifically distinguishes one from the others (see e.g. Cesaire 1972; Lenin 1948; Said 1993; Wallerstein 1974; Young 2015).

In Finland, the focus has been almost exclusively on so-called classic colonialism, even though it is usually discussed without the prefix “classic”—which most likely explains at least in part the conflation of classic colonialism with the entire colonial project.⁶ Classic colonialism signifies a relation of external domination by a minority over a native majority population, governed from a distant imperial center. Typically, it refers to the establishment of colonies in the name of exploiting the region’s natural and human resources (slavery) for the accumulation of wealth and prosperity in the imperial centre located in Europe. In most cases, colonies were located in distant regions from Europe, separated from the colonial centre by an ocean (the Americas, Asia and Africa). The question of geographical separation of the colonies became critical during the formal decolonization era in the postwar years, when the United Nations began deliberating self-determination of peoples in colonized territories. Two major competing doctrines were debated. The Belgian thesis advocated self-determination for all colonized peoples, including Indigenous peoples in the United States. In opposition to the Belgian thesis, the blue water thesis favored a more limited approach, arguing that only territories that are separated from the colonizing country by “blue water” (or “salt

water,” i.e. sea) are eligible for decolonization, which in this context implied formal political independence (Anaya 1996; Lâm 2000). Alas, the blue water thesis prevailed, which likely explains at least partly the excessive focus on colonies when discussing colonialism in general and, specifically, whether or not a country such as Finland engaged in colonialism in Africa, Russia or Asia, for example.

Classic colonialism started in the 16th century out of the crisis of mercantilism in Europe and when Latin America was divided between Spain and Portugal after the crusades. The second phase of colonialism began at the end of the 19th century, when European empires began competing over acquiring colonies. Called the age of New Imperialism, the period from 1870 to 1914 saw events such as the Berlin Conference in 1884–85, where the rules of colonial expansion in Africa were agreed upon between European countries, followed by the subsequent Scramble for Africa. Colonialism was advanced also by a range of state institutions, most centrally the church and education system. The colonization process and subjugation of peoples outside Europe was justified in a number of ways, one being the “White man’s burden,” according to which it was the duty and responsibility of the European “superior race” to bring civilization, culture and religion to the rest of the world and, in this way, to save the “dark races” from themselves and their primitive habits (cf. Kipling 1899). Missionaries traveled around the globe preaching God’s word, from Latin America and Africa to the Arctic, often with disastrous consequences of eradicating existing religions, languages and social and cultural practices (Deloria 1969; Jennings 2010; Pakenham 1991).

The Scramble for Sápmi, its territories and resources began in earnest during the first phase of global colonialism. In the 16th century, the surrounding kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark and Novgorod (Russia) started more systematically competing over the control of the Sámi territory, which had been vied for by its neighbors for its land and resources (initially mainly furs) already in the early Middle Ages. Sápmi became a war zone between the Nordic kingdoms and the Czar state of Novgorod in the 13th to 14th centuries, and in 1326 Denmark and Novgorod agreed to unilaterally (without consulting the Sámi) expropriate a “common tax area” where both kingdoms were “allowed” to collect taxes from the Sámi in the form of furs (Solbakk 1994).⁷

In addition to extracting wealth from Sápmi to the crown, taxation was seen as the main means of claiming ownership over a certain Sámi territory. The Sámi *siidas* (autonomous communities) were levied taxes, some *siidas* bearing the brunt of double or even triple taxation, which greatly impoverished some individuals and communities. The multiple taxation continued until the 1751 Strömstad Peace Accord between Denmark and Sweden, when one of the oldest political borders in Europe was imposed (Bergsland 2004; Müller-Wille and Aikio 2005). The conflict in and competition over Sápmi further intensified in the 19th century, resulting in new border closures with devastating

consequences to many Sámi families and *siidas*, including forced migration and loss of livelihood (see Lehtola 2002).

Another central means of colonization of Sápmi occurred through the institution of Christianity, as establishing missions was viewed as an effective way to consolidate nation-building. The earliest churches were built on the coastal areas as early as the 13th century and in the 14th century the Danish-Norwegian crown passed a decree granting smaller fees for criminal charges for Christianized Sámi. The Christian influence among the Sámi remained limited until the 17th century, when the competition over Sápmi by surrounding kingdoms was at its peak (Solbakk 2000).

Sometimes the debate in Finland revolves around the question of the colonial agent—can we discuss colonialism if it was not practiced by a nation-state? Can Finland be implicated in colonialism before acquiring independence in 1917? Notwithstanding the close connection between the nation-state and colonialism, colonialism was practiced also by others, particularly by trading companies (the most well known globally being the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada and the East India Company in Southeast Asia). Countless Finns participated and were complicit in the colonial enterprise, including conquest and war, trade, and the establishment of colonies and missions. Some scholars emphasize how Finns cannot take solace with the fact that Finland was not a colonial power, given how the country is firmly part of and has greatly benefited from the Western, capitalist economic order. Simply put, Finland did not need colonies in order to reap the rewards of the colonial system (Keskinen 2019; Kujala 2019).

In the age of New Imperialism, Finland (at the time, the Grand Duchy of the Russian Empire) did not formally participate in the Scramble for Africa. This is often cited in public discourse as evidence that there was no colonialism in Finland (in addition to citing the history of Finland as “colonized,” first by the Kingdom of Sweden, and later by the Russian Empire). Scholars and others have suggested that due to the absence of colonies, Finnish colonialism has been informal. Yet, there was a prevailing dream of acquiring a colony in Africa, notably in the Ovambo region in Northern Namibia, where Finnish missionaries were particularly active since the establishment of the first missions in the 1870s (Löytty 2006; Mäkinen 2015; Raiskio 1997).

In the 19th century, Finnish missionaries operated both in Africa and Sápmi, converting and civilizing heathens who were not considered fully human. In Sápmi, this implied eradicating the Sámi “religion” (which in fact was a land-centered worldview with its specific practices of living in good relation with the non-human world), stealing or burning Sámi drums and convicting Sámi *noaidis* or spiritual leaders (e.g. Solbakk 2002).⁸ 19th-century Europe also witnessed the rise of romantic nationalism, an ideology that grew out of imperialism that sought to consolidate the nation under one “race,” culture and language, and bolstered claims of primacy and racial superiority. In establishing the unity of language, culture and ethnicity of a nation, “foreign elements” of

the nation were to be eliminated. A potent tool in this regard was the education system, which, for example in Norway, was seen as “the battlefield and teachers as frontline soldiers” (Niemi 1997: 268).⁹ The Sámi were to be assimilated into the majority society “in language, culture, and in their overall view of themselves” (Todal 1999: 127; see also Lehtola 1994; Minde 2005).

Even though Finland never had formal colonies, there is a fairly common view that the northernmost part of Finland—the Sámi territory and the region of Lapland more broadly—has been and still is a colony (e.g. Kojo 1981; Tamminen 2020). Historically, the concept of Lapland has been highly indeterminate and applied inconsistently to refer to the Sámi territory or the administrative area that was part of larger region (Paasi 1986). Also 18th- and 19th-century geography textbooks both in Finland and Sweden displayed an ambiguous relationship between Lapland and Finland. As an example, a well-known 1794 Swedish textbook suggests that Finland ends at the southern border of Lapland (Isaksson 2001: 190). Today, Lapland denotes the northernmost (and by far largest) region of Finland. Yet, prior to 1809, it did not belong to Finland administratively and it received a provincial status in Finnish cartography only in the 1910s (Paasi 1986).

Knowledge Production, Colonialism and Whitewashing in Research

Colonialism is premised on the persistent reproduction of mutually exclusive hierarchies in which the dominant group maintains its superiority (Balandier 1966; Osterhammel 1997). Science and scholarly disciplines have greatly contributed in establishing these hierarchies. Early philosophers created theories and deliberately advanced culturally specific assumptions about other than Western social, political and cultural institutions such as property, land ownership and society and, thus, legitimized colonial expansion and control. Particularly John Locke’s views of property, political society and uncultivated land being open to acquisition played a pivotal role in justifying the takeover of Indigenous territories. Locke’s arguments were taken up by Emeric de Vattel, who argued that agriculture and political society with laws (as understood and practiced by European imperial powers) were a precondition for sovereignty and nationhood in international law (see Tully 1993).

With regard to academic disciplines, particularly anthropology and geography have long been criticized for being handmaidens of colonialism. In his seminal *Custer Died for Your Sins*, late Vine Deloria, Jr. lambasted anthropologists for their objectification of Native American societies, employing them as living laboratories to advance academic careers and contributing to detrimental policy and decision-making and the loss of Native American identity (Deloria 1969). Anthropology’s problematic legacy as the study of the other and their primitive societies, often in the service of colonial endeavors, has

been widely debated since (e.g. Biolsi and Zimmerman 1997; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1973; Kuper 1988; Trinh 1989). Geography's complicity in colonialism is perhaps most evident in its practices of mapping and surveying, through which colonial relations of space were established and naturalized, but also providing methods for practices of exploration and colonization (Heffernan 2003; Hudson 1977; Morrissey 2003).

In spite of growing recognition and critical reflection, scientific concepts and theories continue to reflect Eurocentric biases, exclusions and practices of dispossession, thus impacting contemporary research and knowledge production (Said 1978). On the whole, the function and complicity of disciplines and their knowledge production in advancing and legitimizing the colonial project is well established in critical scholarship, but is still not adequately discussed in undergraduate education (for Finland, see Hakala, Hakola and Laakso 2018).¹⁰ Although significant headway has been made by Indigenous studies¹¹ and other fields critical of colonizing research and science, glaring gaps of understanding and methodological flaws remain related to Indigenous peoples in research (e.g. George, Tauri and MacDonald 2020; Smith 1999).

With regard to research involving the Sámi people, there are some major concerns that seem common in Finland and other Nordic countries. First is a version of culturalization of Indigenous peoples. There is a tendency, even in major international, collaborative research initiatives, to “whitewash” the constitutionally recognized status of Indigenous peoples and to conflate Indigenous peoples with “local communities” and/or “stakeholders.” This is an approach that neglects and erases central legal and political differences between Indigenous peoples on the one hand and “local communities” or stakeholders on the other. It deliberately ignores that Indigenous peoples are self-determining polities with regard to their own affairs, including knowledge production (Kukutai and Taylor 2016; Latulippe and Klenk 2020). Indigenous peoples are rights holders with constitutionally protected status and rights *as* Indigenous peoples, most notably the right to self-determination. Further, the whitewashing approach neglects to acknowledge that “local communities” typically have a very different access to institutions, power, policy and decision-making, as well as resources, than Indigenous peoples do.¹² As a whole, their concerns, needs and voices are heard much more readily—and differently—than those of Indigenous peoples. An excerpt from a recent statement by the Sámi Council at an Arctic Council meeting illustrates this well:

We regard that the local knowledge holders have well-developed mechanisms to impact policies and decision-making in their respective countries, we regard that the local-knowledge perspective are [sic] well taken care of in their respective countries. There are farmers unions, with local structures that unite the farmers holding local knowledge, there is the Fishermen's Association, and whom are they representing if not the local fishermen through local chapters that can impact the national

level board that lobby the government. There are forest workers' associations and national hunter and fishers' organisations. Saami people will never achieve a majority in these organisations, except from in some small local chapters—maybe. These organisations are regarded as quite influential on National policies, in a way no Saami association have been so far. (Sámiráđđi 2018)

The second problem relates to choosing to close their eyes to colonialism and proceed as if it does not exist. Whether this oversight is due to the complexity of the colonialism or something else, such proverbial burying one's head in the sand—ignoring and refusing to think about a problem or avoiding an issue by pretending it does not exist—is slack scholarship, which surprisingly often is not called into question in public. Whatever the reason for the omission, not examining colonial relations and assuming a level playing field free of structures of power results in either misleading or unsound analysis and research results—and an issue that should also be of concern to the funding agencies. Arguing that there is a level playing field for Indigenous peoples and “local communities” and/or “other stakeholders” is an example of the discursive practices of whiteness and a move to innocence (discussed below) that conflates various experiences and historical realities of colonization (Moore 2012; Tuck and Yang 2012).

Internal Colonialism or Settler Colonialism?

Returning to the concept of colonialism as a foundational concept that encompasses many distinct though often overlapping forms, I have above considered the ways in which classic colonialism operated globally and in Finland through very similar processes. Settler colonialism, another main form of colonialism, has thus far received limited attention vis-à-vis the Sámi people either in Finland or the other Nordic countries.¹³ Instead of discussing settler colonialism, colonialism in the Sámi context is typically talked about in terms of “internal colonialism” and, as such, is separated from colonialism writ large.

Internal colonialism was first discussed by early Marxist thinkers to refer to the unequal economic relations within a state. Somewhat later, it was adopted by civil rights leaders to raise questions about the segregation and deprivation of African Americans in the United States (Hicks 2004). Among the first to theorize internal colonialism in relation to classic colonialism was Cherokee anthropologist Robert K. Thomas, who argued that internal colonialism might be

less observable, but has to a large degree the same kind of effects [as classic colonialism]. One people still specifically administers another, but by institutional relationships that are pulled out of one economic level, one community, and place in another one, although the one

community may be part of the general overall society in which the subordinate community also exists. (Thomas 1966/1967: 38)

The concept of internal colonialism was also employed early on to discuss circumstances in Latin America (González Casanova 1963). In Canada, it was used by the Québécois and Indigenous leadership in the 1970s (Hicks 2004). For example, the Dene nation in the Northwest Territories was considered an internal colony (Watkins 1977).

The idea of internal colonialism has been criticized for reasons similar to diversity and multiculturalism approaches that culturalize Indigenous peoples. Internal colonialism theory overlooks the historical and present-day reality of Indigenous peoples as distinct peoples or nations with a right to self-determination and reduces them as a single ethnic, racial or cultural minority within the national borders (see, e.g., Kymlicka 2001). It portrays the states as multicultural nations that need to address *only* their legacies of racism, not their colonial histories and the colonial presence built in the structures and policies of the state.¹⁴ Through these structures and policies, Indigenous peoples are constructed as minorities “with no prior claim to nation or territory” that would transcend the states’ existence, right claims or unilateral imposition of sovereignty (Byrd 2011: 126).

Therefore, to examine the Indigenous experience through the lens of internal colonialism provides not only a limited but also inaccurate analysis. Although there are scholars who continue to rely on it (in the context of Sápmi, see Minnerup and Solberg 2011), in the field of Indigenous studies it has been largely replaced by the much more robust and nuanced analysis of settler colonialism. The theory and framework of settler colonialism better accounts for the contemporaneity of colonialism and the complexity of the interlocking structures and relations of power—racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity—that intersect and are mutually constructed and reinforcing.

In the settler colonial situation, the dominant group settles and unilaterally imposes its sovereignty over another jurisdiction. Obtaining the land for the purposes of establishing a new society invariably requires the elimination of Indigenous peoples and their societies through a variety of means, including extermination, assimilation, the elimination of Indigenous political and legal orders, and treaty-making (Veracini 2010; Wolfe 2006). The logic of elimination implies that Indigenous peoples are eliminated *as* Indigenous, through which their claims to their territories are extinguished. Settler colonialism is also characterized by a simultaneous and persistent drive to naturalize its ongoing existence and domesticate settlers as native. Through this naturalization, the settler colonial system becomes the taken-for-granted and self-evident background and reality for settler existence and their political and legal structures (Rifkin 2013).

The elimination of Indigenous peoples varies from outright warfare and genocide to more subtle means of assimilation through legislation and policies.

In Canada, for instance, the registration provisions of the Indian Act carefully delineate and radically restrict who counts as “legal Indian,” eventually amounting to legislating Indigenous people out of existence (e.g. Palmater 2014). The elimination of Indigenous political and legal orders has occurred through banning or replacing Indigenous institutions and practices by Western ones, and categorizing them as “culture” (the most well-known examples from North America include the Potlatch and Sun Dance). Settlers came to stay, imposing their sovereignties and jurisdictions over existing ones. In Sápmi, the new property and administrative regime slowly eradicated the *siida* system, the traditional local Sámi governance structure, as the settlement rapidly increased in the 18th century. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, Sámi rights and ownership were no longer upheld or recognized in official state documents, although Sámi in Finland paid taxes for their territories until 1924 (Korpijaakko 1989).

Third, treaty-making between the Crown and Indigenous nations has been a way of dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their territories and resources. Not all Indigenous peoples have negotiated and signed treaties, but in places such as present-day Canada, the United States and New Zealand, it was a common practice and, in some countries, continues today (the modern treaty or the comprehensive land claim process in Canada, the treaty process in Australia). Many historic treaties are characterized by a deep ambivalence in terms of their scope, meaning and interpretation. For Indigenous peoples, treaties typically represent sacred covenants signed between two sovereigns to share the land and resources. Many Indigenous nations signed treaties, understanding them to be peace and friendship agreements that would not change ownership or control of their traditional territories. Many describe treaties in kinship terms, emphasizing the bond of established relationships that require periodic renewal (Johnson 2007; Venne 1997). For the Crown and settlers, rather than binding agreements according to international law, treaties were commonly regarded as contracts through which Indigenous peoples surrendered their rights to their territories in exchange for reservations, annuities, goods and promises of education and health care (RCAP 1996).

One of the key insights of settler colonial theory is the ongoing character of colonialism. Because settler colonialism entails permanent settlement, it is a structure rather than a historical event or epoch. As an enduring structure, settler colonialism is foundational to the existence of settler states. Put differently, settler states owe their existence for—and depend on—settler colonialism. Indigenous peoples continue to live and experience settler colonialism in the present day. In the words of Anishinaabekwe Leanne Simpson:

I certainly do not experience [settler colonialism] as a historical incident that has unfortunate consequences for the present. I experience it as a gendered structure and a series of complex and overlapping processes that work together as a cohort to maintain the structure. The structure is

one of perpetual disappearance of Indigenous bodies for perpetual territorial acquisition, to use Patrick Wolfe's phrase. (Simpson 2017: 45)¹⁵

I have considered the nature of settler colonialism in Finland in detail elsewhere (Kuokkanen 2020a; Kuokkanen 2020b), but the point that needs to be emphasized here is that given settler colonialism's continuing presence, it is incorrect and inadequate to restrict our analysis only to various *legacies* of colonialism in contemporary societies or Indigenous-state relations. As elsewhere, the appropriation of lands in Sápmi continues unabated in the interest—whether environmental, energy or otherwise—of the mainstream society, while Sámi concerns are routinely sidelined and their rights claims constructed as marginal or “special interest” (Aikio 2012; Lawrence 2014).

Guilt and Responsibility for Structural Injustice

One of the concerns that frequently arise when discussing colonialism in Finland, perhaps particularly vis-à-vis the Sámi people, is holding the majority population in general or Finns in particular responsible for past injustices in which they played no role (e.g. Juuso 2018: 249). Even if it is agreed that there *was* colonialism in Finland in the past, “we” (i.e. Finns today) cannot be held accountable for it. By no means, defensiveness or denial of responsibility for and complicity in colonialism is common world over, and very much a function of colonialism. At the affective level, settler colonialism operates through certain emotions (anger, denial, guilt) that support historic and contemporary settler colonial narratives of benevolent actors (institutional or individual) improving the lives of the colonized. Settler denial refers to practices of refusing to recognize or admit the existence of structural oppression and white people's connection to these structures (Grey and James 2016; Nagy 2012). Settler denial is premised on what scholars have called the race to innocence or settler moves to innocence; strategies through which one can claim to be unimplicated in the subordination of others and, thus, absolved from responsibility and accountability (Razack and Fellows 1998; Tuck and Yang 2012). Further, deflecting one's own involvement in colonialism becomes a self-perpetuating cycle that enables the closing of eyes from the colonial circumstances that facilitate ongoing structural injustice.

Understanding structural injustice in this context is critical. The concept of structural injustice was developed by political theorist Iris Marion Young, who in her book *Responsibility for Justice* distinguished between a “social connection model of responsibility” for structural injustice and a “liability model” of responsibility. The latter refers to common practices of assigning responsibility which focus on locating “who dunnit”: “for a person to be held responsible for a harm, we must be able to say that he or she caused it” (Young 2011: 95). For structural injustice, however, such tracing is not possible. While locating

individuals who contribute to structural processes can be done, it is not feasible to determine how an individual or a collective agent “has directly produced harm to other specific individuals” (Young 2011: 96).

Young’s social connection model of responsibility advances the idea of a shared responsibility of individuals for participating in structures that are unjust. She notes, “The social connection model of responsibility says that individuals bear responsibility for structural injustice because they contribute by their actions to the processes that produce unjust outcomes” (Young 2011: 105). Young discusses the ways in which the term “responsible” is used in ordinary language. On the one hand, somebody is considered responsible according to the liability model (the paradigmatic use): “to be responsible is to be guilty or at fault for having caused a harm and without valid excuses” (Young 2011: 104).

We also hold people responsible “by virtue of their social roles or positions” as, say, a teacher, politician or doctor, or “we appeal to our responsibilities as citizens” (Young 2011: 104). In the latter meaning, Young argues, “finding someone responsible does not imply finding at fault or liable for a past wrong; rather, it refers to agents’ carrying out activities in a morally appropriate way and seeing to it that certain outcomes obtain” (Young 2011: 104). It is this latter usage of the term which the social connection model of responsibility draws on. What is more, the social connection model is first and foremost forward-looking (unlike the liability model that is backward-looking). Thus, with regard to structural injustice, one is responsible through having “an obligation to join with others who share that responsibility in order to transform the structural processes to make their outcomes less unjust” (Young 2011: 96).

Therefore, there is no room for settler denial or moves to innocence when it comes to taking responsibility for colonialism. As Young so clearly demonstrates, the question is not holding individuals or collectives liable for actions, past or present, to which they have not directly contributed. Rather, it is a question of holding everyone accountable for the structures of injustice they participate in and/or benefit from directly or indirectly. What follows from this accountability is having responsibility and obligation to “do something” about those unjust structures, which in our case at hand is settler colonialism. As an example, nobody is holding today’s teachers responsible for the boarding schools and the discrimination, racism and assimilation practices that took place in those schools. Teachers have, however, a shared obligation to ensure they include the Sámi people—their history, society, culture—as part and parcel of their teaching and do their own homework so they do not relay incorrect, outdated or stereotypical information to their students. Shared responsibility can further take the form of advocating or supporting Sámi language teaching, increased funding for Sámi textbooks and addressing systemic inequalities in terms of access to education to one’s mother tongue, to mention a few examples.

Yet, education or information alone is not enough to change the situation, unless people become aware of the overtly or covertly racist, discriminatory or

disrespectful attitudes and values within themselves and in others. The most challenging task, however, is to recognize and become aware of one's own privilege.

In 1988, American feminist scholar Peggy McIntosh coined the term “white privilege” and identified 46 ways in which white privilege affected her daily life without her being particularly aware of it. McIntosh writes that white privilege and the identification of its different manifestations has been an elusive project that is difficult to put into words. There is great pressure to avoid and deny the existence of white privilege because recognizing it requires letting go of one's belief that societal advancement can be attributed solely to an individual's own capabilities. Another reason why white privilege is such a challenging topic is that people who belong to the dominant group have not been taught to see the different forms of subjugation and discrimination (racism, sexism, heteronormativity and homophobia). As a white woman who belongs to the dominant group, McIntosh states that she cannot see herself as a racist person, because she has been taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness and not in the invisible system that grants dominance at birth to the group of people she represents (McIntosh 1988).

McIntosh's list includes a number of ways in which white privilege creates inequality that are applicable to the Sámi people as well. Listed below are ten items from McIntosh's 46-point list. They highlight the inequality that may exist between a Sámi person and a Finnish person. While an average Finnish person would be, in most cases, able to answer “yes” to the following statements, the statements most likely would not hold true for a Sámi person. I have quoted the statements freely from McIntosh's list of 46 privileges, replacing her term “race” with “ethnic background.”

- (1) I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my ethnic background most of the time.
- (2) I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my ethnic background widely represented.
- (3) I can be sure that when I send my children to school, their study materials will reflect their reality, history, and society—in their own mother tongue.
- (4) I am never asked to speak for all the people of my ethnic group.
- (5) I can criticize our government, its policies, and its behavior without my words being labeled as whining or anger that is “typical” of my ethnic background.
- (6) I can go home from meetings of organizations feeling somewhat connected to them, rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, or unheard.
- (7) I can choose to be ignorant about the power and views of other ethnic groups.
- (8) I can worry about racism without being regarded as self-seeking.

- (9) I can take a job without having my co-workers suspect that I got it because of positive discrimination.
- (10) I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my ethnic background. (McIntosh 1988)

According to McIntosh, disapproving of or condemning inequitable and discriminatory social structures is not enough to change them. It will take more than changing the attitudes of white people to end racism. McIntosh writes that, in the United States, “white” skin color opens many doors regardless of whether we accept the fact that societal structures grant dominance to certain groups of people. Individual actions may alleviate these problems, but they do not solve them. Solving these problems requires a redesign of societal structures, which in turn necessitates seeing the monumental but invisible scale and influence of institutions and systems (McIntosh 1988). The same goes for the inequality and racism faced by the Sámi people on both the structural and the individual level.

Disapproval is not enough to change the situation. Decolonization is a process that takes place in various ways and on many levels, from dismantling inequitable and discriminatory societal structures to the decolonization of the mind. Rebuilding and reclamation are also forms of decolonization. Decolonization does not mean a return to the time prior to colonialism, since that is not possible. Rather, it means becoming aware of and acknowledging colonial power relations both on an institutional and individual level, and most importantly, considering ways and taking action to decolonize them. Yet, a certain degree of creative revitalization is one of the key forms of decolonization for Indigenous peoples, including in areas of societal structures and social systems. The decolonization cannot, however, be placed solely on the shoulders of Indigenous peoples. It is a job that belongs to everyone, to which various reconciliation processes so clearly attest. It is everyone’s responsibility to recognize both their individual power and the workings of institutional power, and to participate in dismantling inequitable systems, attitudes, viewpoints and values together.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined questions of whiteness and colonialism in Finland vis-à-vis the Sámi people. With the chapter, I have sought to participate in current discussions—public and academic—pertaining to the character of colonialism in Finland and argued that there are some misconceptions that stand in the way of our analysis and understanding. With regard to the Sámi, these include views according to which colonialism is a thing of the past, the colonization of Sápmi is somehow separate from “official” colonialism and that the best way to understand it is “internal colonialism.” I have demonstrated

how global colonial processes correspond to those in Sápmi and the Sámi have undergone colonization and territorial dispossession comparable to overseas colonies and other Indigenous peoples. This chapter has also argued that the conceptual framework of internal colonialism is inaccurate and misleading in analyzing the predicament of the Sámi people. Instead, we need to perceive and examine colonialism in Sápmi through an analytic of settler colonialism which underscores the ways in which colonialism is an ongoing structure of dispossession in society, seeking to displace Indigenous peoples and remove access to their lands. Part of this ongoing structure is embedded in more or less taken-for-granted frameworks of knowledge production and the ways in which key concepts and theories produce and reproduce colonial hierarchies, biases and exclusions. I have concluded the chapter with a discussion on structural injustice and a forward-looking conception of responsibility developed by Young, which she calls the social connection model. This form of responsibility holds everyone participating in or benefiting from the structures of injustice accountable and having an obligation to “do something” about the unjust structures in society. There are obviously countless approaches of taking responsibility. One of the ways is examining one’s privilege, which begins with the recognition and acknowledgment of its existence in one’s life. The chapter closes with a look at the list of white privilege by McIntosh and highlighting of statements that demonstrate the substance of inequality and racism that Sámi may experience in everyday social settings. Importantly, while individual action may mitigate these problems, taking responsibility for structural injustice is a collective effort.

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Notes

- ¹ In international law, all peoples have the right to self-determination. Since the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007, international law recognizes this right belonging to Indigenous peoples as well.
- ² On the Sámi problem of the Finnish state, see Lehtola 2016 and Pääkkönen 2008.
- ³ The concept of “race” is used as a social phenomenon and construction, not a biological fact.

- ⁴ A recent example of extreme racism, a song inciting the slaughter of Sámi, was uploaded on Soundcloud by someone in Sweden calling themselves Anti-Sámi Front (Marakatt 2020).
- ⁵ These points are present and debated, for example, in an excellent recent discussion on colonialism and Finland by four Finnish scholars in Yle radio program Kulttuuriykkönen on July 31, 2020, titled “Saamelaiset, Ambomaa ja suomalainen kolonialismi – onko Suomi menettämässä viattomuutensa?” prompted by the racial reckoning following the killing of George Floyd by a police officer in the United States in May 2020. By using the radio program as a starting point for this chapter is not so much to criticize it—because of the depth and scope of the discussion, I made it required listening for my students—as it is to engage in and continue the most recent scholarly debate about colonialism in Finland, which I think is critically important especially at this time of the beginning of the reconciliation process (see Kuokkanen 2020b).
- ⁶ Most prominently, the recent authoritative, award-winning monograph on colonialism in the Finnish language by Kujala (2019) focuses solely on classic colonialism and does not discuss the colonization of Indigenous peoples.
- ⁷ The earliest written documentation of the taxation of the Sámi goes back to the 9th century. At different times, different groups such as chiefs from Hålogaland (on the present-day Norwegian coast) and Birkals from Sweden-Finland either plundered, traded with and levied taxes on highly valued furs in Sámi siidas. In the period of the 1250s to the 1450s, Sámi siidas were also frequently raided by troops known as čudít from Russia and Carelia, who were particularly feared for their violence.
- ⁸ By placing the term “religion” in quotation marks I want to draw attention to the fact that what is commonly referred to as Sámi religion, mythology or spirituality is in fact an inseparable part of a relational worldview in which the land is a physical and spiritual entity of which humans are one part. The Sámi *noaidi* communicated with the spirit and natural worlds also with the help of the *goavddis*, a drum depicting the Sámi cosmos on its surface. The Sámi cosmos consists of a complex, multi-layered order of different realms and spheres inhabited by humans, animals, ancestors, spirits, deities and guardians, all of whom traditionally have had specific roles and functions in the Sámi cosmic order. As *noaidis* were among the most important members of the community, they were the first ones to be exterminated among the Sámi by church and state representatives (see Kuokkanen 2007).
- ⁹ On the Sámi boarding school experiences in Finland, see Kuokkanen 2003 and Rasmus 2006.
- ¹⁰ This is based on my own and my colleagues’ experiences as university teachers of undergraduate courses in a range of universities. In my own experience from Finland and Canada, students regularly either express surprise of or criticism toward the lack of critical education about the history of their disciplines in social sciences and humanities.

- ¹¹ Indigenous Studies emerged as a distinct field first in the United States in the early 1970s (see Champagne and Stauss 2002).
- ¹² For analyses of power relations among stakeholders, see Banerjee 2000, Parsons 2008 and Rockloff and Lockie 2006.
- ¹³ Notable exceptions include Kuokkanen 2017, Magga 2018 and Ranta and Kanninen 2019.
- ¹⁴ As an example of this see, for example, Omi and Winant 1994.
- ¹⁵ Fanon (1967) was first to examine the constitutive element of gender in the colonial conquest, identifying the strategy of targeting women as a central means in the consolidation of colonial control (see also McClintock 1995 and Smith 2005).

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