

# Sámi Histories, Colonialism, and Finland

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*Abstract.* Public apologies, compensations, and repatriation policies have been forms of reconciliation processes by authorities in Nordic countries to recognize and take responsibility of possible injustices in Sámi histories. Support for reconciliation politics has not been unanimous, however. Some Finnish historians have been ready to reject totally the subjugation or colonialism towards the Sámi in the history of Finnish Lapland. The article analyzes the contexts for the reasoning and studies the special nature of Sámi-Finnish relations. More profound interpretations are encouraged to be done, examining colonial processes and structures to clarify what kind of social, linguistic, and cultural effects the asymmetrical power relations have had.

## Introduction

“Colonialism may be dead, yet it is everywhere to be seen.”

(Dirks 2010:93)

There has been a lot of discussion in recent decades about the colonialist past of Nordic states.<sup>1</sup> There will never be a consensus, but some notable representatives of the dominant populations have shown willingness to reach some kind of reconciliation with the past and build better relations that way. The first official apology to the Sámi in Nordic countries was presented by King Harald V of Norway at the opening of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament in 1997. According to him, the Norwegian state was founded on the territory of two peoples—Sámi and Norwegians—and because the history of the Sámi was closely intertwined with Norwegian history, he deplored the unfairness of the Norwegianization policy (Om samepolitikken 2000:11).<sup>2</sup>

In 1998, Sweden’s minister of agriculture apologized for the injustices against the Sámi on behalf of the state. The Norwegian state presented its apology in 2004, when it published an account of the effects of the Norwegianization policy. A

careful historical study was carried out to investigate the history of injustice (Minde 2003), which was followed by the apology by the state for “those gross injustices” that the minorities of the country had suffered. The state extended its apology to vagrants and Kvens, too. The Norwegian state has also granted compensations, which older Sámi could apply for forfeited schooling. Already in the first years, Kvens and Sámi sent thousands of applications, which were largely approved (Anttonen 2010:54–71). In all Nordic countries, the reconciliation theme has been evident when rituals with Sámi language, yoik music, and Sámi symbols have been included in Church services. In 2001, the bishop of Härnösand in Sweden apologized for the injustices the Church had caused to the Sámi. In 2012, also the bishop of Oulu Diocese publicly apologized for the Church’s misconduct towards the Sámi (Johnsen 2013:13; Niittyvuopio 2013:155–162).

Besides apologies and compensations, the idea of reconciliation has been reflected in the politics of repatriation—returning Sámi objects to the Sámiland—although it has been carried out mostly by universities or museums. From the beginning of the 1990s, there have been many shaman drums, skeletal collections, and jewels returned to Sámi

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museums. The repatriation policy is not only a question of recovering artifacts, but the aim is to return information related to Sámi histories and their cultural heritage in museums, archives, and collections outside the Sámi territory (Aronsson 2012; Harlin 2008; Lehtola 2005; Ojala 2009; Svestad 2013).

Moreover, reconciliation processes in general have been important signs of recognizing as least some misconduct in the relations of the majority and Sámi minority and, thus, taking responsibility of possible injustices in history. This requires but also enables more detailed investigation and documentation of historical events, as the research process on the Norwegianization policies has shown (Minde 2003:Note 1). However, support for reconciliation politics has not been unanimous at all in Nordic countries. In spite of the role of Scandinavian kingdoms and states in European and global expansion even overseas, attitudes to colonial past in Sweden, for instance, have been ambivalent. The most prevalent view has been an opinion that Scandinavian participation in colonial politics was benign, and their interactions with the encountered peoples in Africa, Asia, and America were gentler and based on collaboration rather than extortion and subjugation. The same is considered to apply to Sámi politics (Fur 2013:26; Naum and Nordin 2013:3–4).

Similar assumptions of “gentle colonialism” have been made also concerning the Mediterranean or Italian, Spanish and, to a lesser extent, Portuguese imperialism as a kind form of domination in contrast to northern European colonization (e.g., Del Boca 2005). The argumentations for the denial of indigenous rights by the imperial powers have been explored in depth in many contexts, especially in Australia (e.g., Banner 2005; Frost 1981).<sup>3</sup>

Finland has a slightly different situation from other Nordic countries, because it never had colonies overseas. Finns cannot take pride of great tales of exploration and exploitation, such as Viking raids, superpower era, or polar expeditions. When discussing colonialism, Finns usually refer to other European states and rarely even consider to possible colonialism inside the Nordic countries (e.g., Hokkanen and Särkkä 2008). Sociologist Vilho Harle (2000:18) has pointed out, however, that colonialism can also manifest itself as state internal control of indigenous peoples, for example.

The fact that Finns have usually been subject to superpowers, as have been the Sámi, has strengthened the notion of Finns about themselves as representatives of democracy and tolerance, who also treated the Sámi on an equal basis already in history. According to Nyssönen (2009:169–170), the way Finns see themselves is a nonimperialistic democracy, which did not

subjugate or mistreat others, the Sámi included. Consequently, Finns have also considered themselves pioneers in minority politics.<sup>4</sup>

It was characteristic of Finnish attitudes that when Sweden’s minister made his apology for the Sámi in 1998, his Finnish colleague, Minister of Justice Jussi Järvenpää, stated: “There are currently no issues that would require an apology.”<sup>5</sup> Suggestions of colonialism in Finland has been strongly rejected or nullified also in public debates, especially on the Internet,<sup>6</sup> when, for example. Sámi experiences in boarding schools have been discussed (Rasmus 2008)<sup>7</sup> or after the bishop of Oulu diocese had made his apology in 2012.<sup>8</sup>

There have been strong arguments also among Finnish historians in the 2000s emphasizing that the treatment of the Sámi in Finnish history was equal and fair. It seems to be valid that the historical relations of the Finns with the Sámi have been different from the relations of the Scandinavians to the Sámi, but there has even been argumentation entirely denying the colonialism. In this article, I study the contexts for this kind of reasoning and try to analyze the special character of Sámi-Finnish relations. At the same time, I will ponder how useful the concept of colonialism is for Sámi history studies.

## Battle of the Past

The past of the Sámi has often been talked about as a history of colonialism, subjugation, and repression. It has been considered a reflection of unequal power relations, where the Sámi are the victims. In earlier Lappology or studies made by outsiders, the status of Lapps was interpreted sympathetically as subjugation of a weaker people by culturally stronger peoples. Being run over by a modern society was considered their regrettable but inescapable fate (for more information about the image of the Sámi as a people without prehistory in Norwegian archaeology, see Olsen [1986]). In order to resist this kind of discourse, an activist of early Sámi movement, Karin Stenberg in 1920, strongly criticized the Swedish state about “*colonial politics*” (Hirvonen 2008:79–80).

Change in the social status of the Sámi and new research methods from the 1970s resulted in new perspectives. Events in the Sámi past were now linked to the concepts of colonialism and even imperialism. The Sámi Council used the term colonialism already in 1959 to describe the special nature of the Sámi issue, and Swedish Sámi Erik Nilsson Mankok did the same in 1966 (Fur 2013:22). Colonialism was officially repudiated as an international practice at the United Nations General Assembly in 1960 (Lu 2011:261). After that, colonialism as a term became established in Scandinavian usage to signify economic, national,

and cultural imbalance between the Sámi and dominant populations (Otnes 1969:51).

In Finland the history professor Kyösti Julku, who created the basis for a new kind of interest in the history of Finnish Lapland and the Sámi, went as far as to speak of a history of Sámi genocide in 1968 (Julku 1968). In his work *Norge i Sameland* in 1972, the Norwegian Sámi friend, archaeologist, and ethnologist Gutorm Gjessing started mapping Norwegian colonialism all the way from the Iron Age, over a millennium ago (Gjessing 1973:34ff). Magnus Mörner, who also compared the experiences of the Sámi to Native Americans, was the first Swedish historian to describe the Swedish presence in Lapland as colonial domination (Fur 2013:22–23).

The radical Sámi movement, which emerged especially among educated young people from the end of the 1960s, compared the Sámi past with the fates of other repressed indigenous peoples, especially Indians. It demanded amendment for historical injustices also in the Nordic countries (Nyyssönen 2007:145). The Sámi movement adopted the concepts of colonialism and imperialism from left-wing discourse, as well as from North American human-rights movements and fourth-world politics. Even afterwards in Finland, they have been readily associated with left-wing or Marxist discourse because of some aggressive undertones in the postcolonial and Sámi research (see e.g., Helander and Kailo 1998:20; commented on by Lähteenmäki 2006:203–204).

Influences from indigenous peoples started to appear in the expression of the Finnish Sámi movement from mid-1970s. The earlier, perhaps idealized, comparison between the Sámi and North American Indians received new contents when many colonialism-related similarities between the peoples became apparent. They were concerning parallel historical experiences, for example, in education, the role of oral tradition in the conception of history, as well as the claims for indigenous rights and the need of a people to formulate their own standing points in modern society.

The viewpoint of Julku as well as the radical Sámi movement was close to the Lappologist conception that the Sámi of the past were helpless victims, this time as objects of cruel colonialistic machinery. Increasing research activity also by the Sámi themselves, however, resulted in a situation where the Sámi of the past were increasingly seen as subjects of their own history, who had their own significant role and strategies in the events (cf. Fur 2013:23). As the view of Sámi history has become richer in nuances, sharp contrasts have evened out. Generalising definitions of “colonialists” and “oppressed Lapps” may not be valid to describe the encounters in detailed manner.

As a result of this, some Finnish historians have been ready to argue that it is not reasonable to talk about colonialism in the context of Sámi history. Northern Finnish historian Jouko Vahtola (1991:336) commented claims of colonialism or Lapland’s conquest already in 1991: it was “idle speculation” and “immoral” to interpret past decisions from our perspective. In his opinion, the alleged colonialistic policy was a “product of its time,” which should not be criticised from the perspective of subsequent times, if they had not been criticised in their own time.

Another researcher of Lapland history in the 2000s, Maria Lähteenmäki (2006:202–205), dismissed the idea of Sámi subjugation or repression on the grounds that Finnish archival sources manifested no clear directives to authorities on colonialistic policies—such that reached legislation in Norway. She also stated that the Sámi were not treated as a distinct group, but also Finnish inhabitants in Lapland suffered equally from the potential encroachments of authorities.

The juridical-historical clarification effort on the land-ownership rights of the Sámi in 2000s, commissioned by the Finnish Ministry of Justice and a research group directed by Vahtola (2006:9), also came to the conclusion that the Sámi had not suffered any greater injustice than the rest of the population: “It can be said that the state has throughout history treated the inhabitants of Lapland equally as inhabitants of Lapland especially in its land policy, without ethnic discrimination.” The research group also concluded that the Sámi had never had the same character of ownership to the northern land as the state did.

In his doctoral dissertation, Matti Enbuske (2008) came to similar conclusions as Vahtola in his statement that there was no reason to talk about Lapland’s conquest or colonialism, because the colonization of Finns and the Sámi happened peacefully and in coexistence. Enbuske has even questioned colonization itself (i.e., the conception that Finns had moved to Sámi territory). In his opinion, documents prove that the settlement process was almost completely endogenic with the exception of the Kuusamo region: establishing new farms took place on former taxable lands of families. There was only a small number of new inhabitants coming to Lapland from elsewhere. According to Enbuske (2012: 222), “the highly prevalent view that Finnish peasant settlement spread and expressly invaded Lapland is therefore not based on fact.”

The views of Finnish historians have been criticized by Sámi scholars (Kuokkanen 2006: 2–3; Kuokkanen and Bulmer 2006:211; Lehtola 1996:16), but also by other scholars studying issues of Lapland (e.g., Pääkkönen 2008:267). Similarly, the cultural historian Marja Tuominen

has rejected the criticism that “European postcolonial theory had purposefully and forcefully been adapted to northern historical research” (Tuominen 2010:336–337). It is clear, however, that the concepts of colonialism and subjugation, which have perhaps sometimes been considered unproblematic in the Sámi debate, require a more accurate definition and more intricate approach.

The dispute is also related to the current suggestion of ratifying the ILO 169 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, which Norway ratified already in 1990 but Finland hasn’t done so yet, despite criticism of the UN. The struggle for resolving the rights to the use of the lands in Sámi areas has raised a debate in which especially local Finns have challenged Sámi interpretations on Lapland history. Also Finnish historians from Lapland, such as Enbuske or Lähteenmäki, have participated in this struggle with their studies. The concept of “contested histories” has got new meanings: in the same manner as Sámi research in 1980s and 1990s contested with the earlier Finnish interpretations of Lapland history, now the views of Sámi researchers have been challenged by Finnish researchers (see Pääkkönen [2008:261–283]; about contested histories see Haebich [2005]).

## Sámi Land Colonialism

According to the general definition, colonialism means the

establishment, exploitation, maintenance, acquisition, and expansion of colonies in one territory by people from another territory. It is a set of unequal relationships between the colonial power and the colony and often between the colonists and the indigenous population.<sup>9</sup>

Essential for colonialism is that the fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers in pursuit of interests that are often defined in a distant “center.” Rejecting cultural compromises with the colonized population, the colonizers are convinced of their own superiority and their ordained mandate to rule (Osterhammel 2005:16).

It is clear that that the territories originally inhabited by the Sámi came to the possession of the Nordic countries as a result of a long intervention from the 16th to 18th century, caused by the competition between the kingdoms, and the goal was the exploitation and maintenance of these territories by supplanting the Sámi acquisition. Louise Sebro (2008:84) has stated that the mission work, for instance, was a consequence of and not a reason for colonialism. By including the Sámi in Christianity, their subjection to the king was underlined.

Especially from the beginning of the 17th century in Sweden, the expansion of Swedish

rule in Sámi land was solidified with three strategies: Christian missionizing, social control, and colonization, which guaranteed the possession of the Sámi lands. All this entailed substituting Sámi systems, such as converting them from their traditional religion and replacing the Lapp village or *siida* systems, with Nordic administration and settlement. This was a long process (Hansen and Olsen 2004:234–353; Lundmark 1998).

The benefits of the *siida* system were protected till mid-17th century with a special Lapland border, which officially prevented settlement from spreading to the territory of Sámi villages. However, the settlement decrees in 1673 and 1692 issued by the Crown, or by an external power from the Sámi perspective, broke the principle of the Lapland border and settlement became free (Enbuske 2006:70–88). Even the Sámi started to change into settlers, some of them in the hope of a better life, but the change was largely forced: a new settler received significant benefits, such as long tax exemption, while the life of the hunting population was not supported but rather rendered more difficult (Onnela 1995:111–112).

This was still apparent in the way the Inari Sámi changed into settlers in the 19th century. According to Tarja Nahkiaisaja (2006:88–90), the people of Inari seemed to have been reluctant to become settlers with fixed dwellings. The legislation that promoted settlement, diminishing pastures, and the actions of authorities, however, resulted in a situation where the Sámi were guided or forced to become farmers. The Sámi discovered that they regularly lost disputes over fishing waters in courts, because in the new society it was only possible to get right of possession over their fishing waters and meadows by establishing a new farm—with farm-ownership documents, that is. Usage from time immemorial was no longer sufficient justification for continuing use of their traditional territories (Nahkiaisaja 2006:88–90).

Thus, the way the original lifestyle of the hunting population, based on seasonal migration, changed into settlement is fully consistent with the characteristics of colonialism. The fact that the Sámi even had a significant role as settlers in Kemi lappmark or later Finnish Lapland, as examples from the 18th-century Sodankylä (Onnela 1995:110–113) and 19th-century Inari indicate (Nahkiaisaja 1995; T. Lehtola 1996:176–178), does not change this conclusion.

The change was clearly directed from the authorities, who sometimes almost blindly emphasized the importance of settlement over hunting livelihoods and reindeer husbandry. They saw that changing over to settlement was the only correct means to efficiently exploit Lapland, but they also argued that this was “for good” of the Lapps, which already presupposed the definition of the

needs of the Sámi (see Lehtola 2012:34). It reflects the “unequal relationships,” as well as the fact that “the fundamental decisions affecting the lives of the colonized people are made and implemented by the colonial rulers.”

The thought of cultural hierarchies and the progressive nature of colonialism is essential for colonial structures. It was compliant with this rhetoric to see the proselytism of the Sámi as “educational work,” which had no alternatives: it represented the only possible direction of progress from the perspective of the state and the Church. The expansive drive of the state was presented (and has been subsequently presented) in a way that before the arrival of states there was neither “permanent settlement” nor “organized society” in the north. This has also been obvious in the colonial vocabularies, calling an indigenous territory “uninhabited,” which turns to “settlement” only the colonization of the “more advanced cultural form” (Pääkkönen 2008:132–140).

The economic utilization of northern resources proceeded hand in hand with national interests. In the Swedish superpower era, the control over the Sámi people guaranteed the mining industry and other assets, such as fur, game, and natural resources, which were pivotal to the state’s administration and expansion (Naum and Nordin 2013:8). Efficiency required particular economic strategies, such as exploitation of the North with little regard to local agency.

This kind of overtaking was argued for in the ideas of cultural hierarchies as a means of justifying the possession of the land and water. It was usually not, however, written in documents or instructions for Lapland authorities to repress the Sámi people. Thus, ideological development to justify state interests was a parallel process with colonialistic activity, whether it was related to proselytism, mercantilistic economics, or national interests. The basis of colonialism was always an ethnocentric notion of the superiority of “our” society, which entailed and included the idea of cultural hierarchies (M. Aikio 1989:21, 58–59, 312; Naum and Nordin 2013:10–12; Said 1978:90). The connection of expert descriptions and Sámi research with colonialistic practices has been studied to some extent (e.g., Hansen 1992; Lehtola 2012; Rautio Helander 2008).

Enbuske (2012) has criticised the postcolonial and indigenous research in Sámi issues to be unhistorical and overly theoretical:

Theories of European colonial power were transferred to Lapland and used for creating perspectives on the past of the victimized population, which did not necessarily have anything to do with the actual historical development of Lapland, however. Theoretical scrutiny began to produce its own history.

In his opinion, the conclusions of other scientific disciplines about the past should be based on the research results of history, so that they would not be constructed on the basis of today (Enbuske 2012:216–219).

Enbuske is correct in that the starting points applied to the history of indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand, or the United States, for example, cannot necessarily be “imported” without problems. The often repeated comparison between the Sámi and indigenous peoples elsewhere is overly simplistic in the respect that they have major differences in their backgrounds. On the other hand, even though the histories can be different by contexts and details, the structures of colonial performing and subjugation seem to be quite similar everywhere.

Finnish researchers of Lapland’s history have been perhaps too afraid of basic theoretical questions, which would be appropriate for thoroughly discerning the structures of past societies. As Marja Tuominen (2010: 336–337) has pointed out, historians studying settlement history and land usage do not necessarily perceive colonialistic structures, because their scrutiny is not trained to see them. Analysing colonial power relations also requires methods from sociology and cultural history. Historical development is surely too multifaceted to be fully explained by a single theoretical perspective, as Paul Courtney (2009:181) states, but totally ignoring the colonial perspective may restrict understanding the complexity of the relations between local conditions and outside influences.

Sometimes the idea of colonialism is replaced by the “colonisation of mind,” which is a postcolonial concept for describing the impacts of education, for instance, to indigenous people. (Hirvonen 2008:34–35; Tuominen 2010:337). Enbuske (2012: 217) has approved this term, considering it “attitudes, views, and mental constriction.” This way, he says, it is possible to unfasten the “mental cultural colonization” from imperialistic histories that belong to other contexts than those of the Sámi people. This is a way of a population historian to dissociate himself from the issue of power relations and restrict the Sámi history to concern only experiences caused by negative attitudes and views. In the postcolonial discourse, the colonization of the mind is a more diverse concept for analyzing, for example, how the colonial structures are replacing the indigenous ways of land use, social order, and knowledge systems, and how the indigenous peoples are taught to approve this development as something natural through “institutional forgetting” (JanMohamed and Lloyd 1990:6–7).

Similarly, there have been suggestions in all Nordic countries to interpret the annexation of Sámi land only as integration process or internal

colonization. Daniel Lindmark has noted, however, that this is based on an idea of the Sámi country as an inherently Swedish territory, and this opinion already contains a colonial undertone (Lindmark 2004, cited by Fur 2013:27). Among Finnish historians, Mauno Hiltunen (2007:108–109) has suggested to differentiate the colonialist subjugation from national integration policies. Pääkkönen has commented: “The separation is undoubtedly useful, but it makes you ask, if this kind of integration policy represent is just the form of universalism that the indigenous peoples resist” (Pääkkönen 2008:267).

The argument that the Sámi were not treated as a separate group “any worse” and that they did not suffer any greater injustice than the local Finns attempts to blur the ethnic conditions of the Sámi territory. Lapland’s Finns were certainly considered as peripheral as the Sámi from the perspective of the central government. They were Finnish speaking, however, like the governmental system and the rest of the Finnish society, which the local Finns had grown into. The Sámi, on the contrary, spoke a different language and represented a different culture and way of life, and meddling in them clearly signified outsider intervention.

Valkonen (2008:25) states:

Nobody can deny that the Sámi have been considered a different people and group compared to other populations, and that the traditional Sámi social patterns, cultures and languages have largely yielded to Nordic states. The values, which the construction of Nordic societies and related administrative decisions have been based on, have been values of Nordic majority populations.

When the Sámi were being “socialized” to the Finnish society, it happened in Finnish and with Finnish values—on terms of a completely foreign culture and central government.

## Special Nature of Finns?

Finland’s special position relative to colonialism among other Nordic countries has been referred to in many contexts when, for example, the colonialism debate has been said to concern “Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and (to some extent) Finland” (Fur 2013:20). Finns themselves think that the Finnish policy towards the Sámi has never been as strict and intolerant as in Norway and Sweden. It is true that that there are great differences between the minority policies of Nordic countries.

In the 1840s, Norway started a conscious assimilation policy, Norwegianization, towards Kvens and the Sámi, and it extended to legislation and official activities. It resulted in colonialistic actions on many levels, such as language and economic policies (Minde 2003). One illustrative

process was the Norwegianization of place names in the whole Sámi territory, and a dedicated agency was established for that purpose. This was important for remodelling the mental landscape of Northern Norway (Rautio Helander 2008, 2009, 2014). The problems caused to the Sámi and Kvens by this almost century-long policy have been analyzed in many studies.

*Lapp skall vara lapp* thinking has been considered a special form of Swedish Sámi policy. It contained a two-part idea that reindeer herding Sámi represented the “true” and “original” Sámi culture that had to be protected and secluded from the effects of civilisation, while other Sámi groups were considered settlers or Swedish. Studies have established that the influence of stereotypical views extended to legislation, in the case of Sámi education and reindeer husbandry, for example (Evjen 1997; Lantto 2005:205–208; Lundmark 1998:97–104; Pusch 2000).

Finland never officially adopted a similar straightforward administrative mode written in legislation and official practices. According to Jukka Nyysönen (2009:268–169), Finnish Sámi policy has been variable and at times even invisible to the extent that it is hard to describe. This does not, however, justify hasty conclusions that the Sámi were not subjugated or discriminated. Instead, it is appropriate to delve deeper into the nature of the relationship between the Sámi and the Finns. It differs from the relations between the Scandinavians and the Sámi at many points.

The relations between the Sámi and the Finns go back to a common Finno-Ugric background and Finno-Samic parent language that was spoken from the Lake Ladoga region to regions north of the Baltic Sea, perhaps till the Bronze Age. Researchers agree that the Sámi ethnicity was born from the contrast to agricultural population, but there is disagreement of the point in time (see A. Aikio 2012; Carpelan 1994; Sammallahti 1995). The breakup of the language connection was caused by a change in livelihoods and the way of life. The Baltic Finn population on the southwest and east coast of Finland adopted strong western influences, such as agriculture. The coastal population started to orient themselves increasingly towards the west, while the inland population retained their hunting-based way of life. The difference between livelihoods shaped the population to different directions, and differentiation between ways of life caused linguistic changes, and eventually the groups no longer understood each other’s language (A. Aikio 2012; Carpelan 1994; Sammallahti 1995).

It seems that the Finnish population utilized mostly the same natural resources or ecological niches as the Sámi. This was a difference compared to Scandinavians, who seem to have treated the Sámi as special group already quite early,

as specialists in fur trapping and later reindeer husbandry, for example. It is no coincidence that specifically Finnish settlement quickly propagated far to the north after the 14th century, while settlement in Sweden was almost stalled at the same time scale. Finnish settlement had its own long-distance utilization areas extending to Sámi territory, and this network created a basis for advancing settlement as generations passed (S. Aikio 1992:116–131). The Lapland decrees, which came into force at the end of the 17th century, also began to have effect—to the surprise of authorities—specifically in Kemi Lapland, where the Lapland village system collapsed quickly under the pressure of Finnish colonization. After that, also fennicized Sámi families participated in the expansion of settlement (Enbuske 2008:154–170).

The frontier that developed quite early between the Finns and the Sámi was different from the one between the Scandinavians and the Sámi. Still in the 19th and 20th centuries, for example, it manifested itself in several bidirectional influences, which were related to dwelling, reindeer husbandry, clothing as well as language. The local Finnish language, for example, was quite idiosyncratic because it assimilated many words and structures from the Sámi language. Contrary to Scandinavian languages, there is a quite large reindeer-herding vocabulary in the language of Northern Finland (see Lehtola 1997:34–44).

The many languages and many cultures of northern territories gave a special character to the encounters between the Sámi and the Finns. The frontier zone, however, kept moving to the north all the time and became fennicized. Becoming settlers often entailed a change in culture for the Sámi. They took the Finnish name of the farm as their surname, adopted Finnish clothing and customs, and began to speak Finnish to their children. Sámi identity began to be a disgrace. Consequently, inhabitants of the Finnish village system tried to hide their Sámi roots, so that even their children did not know them (Lehtola 1997:44–49).

Contrary to Scandinavians, Finnish settlers started small-scale reindeer husbandry in the Kuusamo and Kuolajärvi regions (Kortessalmi 2007:29–109). Reindeer husbandry became a livelihood of both the Sámi and the Finns, contrary to Norway and Sweden, where it has become an exclusive Sámi privilege. Large-scale, nomadic reindeer husbandry was purely a Sámi invention, however, while reindeer-husbandry legislation at the end of the 19th century in Finland started to develop specifically on the basis of Finnish-style small-scale reindeer husbandry (Näkkäläjärv and Pennanen 2000:82).

Such profound differences between the relations of Scandinavians and Finns to the Sámi had many kinds of consequences. In Scandinavia,

the Sámi were considered a clearly separate group with its own special position, as enterprisers in certain livelihoods, for example. The downside was their segregation from the rest of the population, which acquired characteristics of isolation in the age of racial theories and eventually led to assimilation policies (Lundmark 1998:14–17). Also Finns did see the Sámi as a different people, but they were not given a special group status, although they spoke a different language and represented a different culture. Competing over the same resources made Finns wary of emphasizing the distinctiveness of the Sámi (see Lehtola 2012:22–31).

Finns also had different relations to racial theories compared to the Scandinavian model but not because of their own will. Similarly to the Sámi, Finns were categorized as representatives of a lower race in European racial theories. When the hopes of Finns for a stronger national status under Russian rule grew, Finns started to construct a stricter racial border towards the Sámi. Due to the European categorization, however, Finns could never fully adopt the racial theories, and so the history of Finnish racial studies from the 1910s to the 1930s remained quite modest (Isaksson 2000). Finns did have their own theory of hierarchies, however: Fenno-Ugric linguistics and ethnology, which found distinct differences and hierarchies in the culture of the Finns and the Sámi (Lehtola 2012:178–195).

## Finnish Colonialism

In their history, Finns have been in a minority position and subjugated, at first under Sweden and then under Russia (1809–1917), which influenced the Sámi views of some Finnish intellectuals. An important fennophile, Elias Lönnrot, after travelling to Lapland in 1842, criticized Finnish authorities for repressive actions towards the Sámi. Lönnrot thought this was inappropriate for a nation that was itself in a minority position in the Russian empire (Kylli 2008:388). Now and then, some authorities followed the ideas of Lönnrot. Some Finnish Church bishops felt it important to emphasize the status of the Sámi language partly on biblical grounds, but also as part of Finland's national issue, since they considered the status of the Finnish language in Russia to be comparable to the status of minority languages in Finland (Mustakallio 2009:78–79).

However, the prevalent way of thinking emphasized the small Finnish-people's unity, which did not permit special group privileges. In their attempt to utilize the economic resources of northern territories, especially from the 1890s onwards, authorities took possession of the Sámi territories through a similar process as in Norway, where the

nation-building project of Norway was in close relation to the Norwegianization policy (Lehtola 2012:58–81; Rautio Helander 2008:81–83).

In Finland, it took place through new decrees, land surveys, development of traffic connections, and reinforcement of administration. The development resulted in gradual dismantling of local structures. Previously the “special geography” of Finland’s northern parts had been oriented mainly to the north or the coast of the Arctic Sea both in traffic and family connections. Now it was increasingly being integrated to the southern direction with the new traffic network and roads. The policy of one livelihood and one dwelling place was one of the self-evident ideals of the Finnish society to replace the traditional livelihood system based on seasonal migration and large-scale use of nature. The primary status of agriculture tied the settler to one place and decreased secondary livelihoods and consequently seasonal migration. Agriculture was centered in villages, and the growth in their population was considered an indicator of progress, although the vulnerable arctic region could support only a limited number of people.

The road brought new population and gathered population by the roadsides the same way as rivers had attracted settlement to their banks before. At the same time, it also made Lapland dependent on the southern direction, which had been almost meaningless to it before. The development of the road network meant great progress, making Lapland more equal with the rest of Finland and improving the standard of living, but it was also a basis for the more efficient exploitation of Lapland’s natural resources, but the use of nature also became more imbalanced. Roads and the Finnish settlement emerging along them sliced through reindeer pastures and unbroken usufructuary areas, where the delicate seasonal-migration systems suffered. The road also improved the operation of Finnish authorities and institutions, such as the postal service, police, health service, and border guard—and they all spoke Finnish (Lehtola 2012:58–81).

This was a form of modern “persuasive colonialism” that Finland has implemented in Sámi area. Contrary to Norway, using the Sámi language was never officially forbidden, and developing it was possible in principle. In practice, however, Finns dictated in a colonial and fatherly manner what was good for the Sámi. Despite many initiatives, the Finnish state did nothing to arrange teaching in the Sámi language, nor were the initiatives to secure the special privileges of the Sámi put into effect (Lehtola 2012:453–457).

According to Nyysönen (2009), Finland has had a special kind of Sámi politics when compared to Norway and Sweden, based on the controversial idea of equality. Finnish authorities

have emphasized that when the Sámi would be given the same prerequisites for wellbeing and rising standard of living as everyone else, there is no need for special treatment or privileges (Nyysönen 2009:168–169). The downside of equal treatment was, however, that the starting points and values of the Finnish society were applied to the Sámi. The traditions and practices of Sámi culture, which were remarkably different from their Finnish counterparts, were ignored. The minority’s own language, cultural heritages, and social systems received no protection. Finnish colonialism was therefore not a history of apparent repression or subjugation; it was a governing practice based on silencing (Kortelainen 1968:14; Lehtola 2012:453–457).

In the 1920s, vicar of Inari and Sámi friend Tuomo Itkonen defined it as “master thinking,” where the Finns determined what is good for the Sámi (Itkonen 1929). It is important for research to clarify its structures the same way as the manifestations of visible colonialism. At the same time, it is possible to find the debate and objections that were presented against this policy already at that time. This is how a researcher can break the idea of the naturalness and inevitability of progress, which the authorities invoked at that time and some researchers have invoked later. Analyzing them is not useless speculation afterwards, as Vahtola assumed, but deliberation of why certain choices out of many alternatives won and others lost.

## Diverse Colonialisms

When discussing the colonial histories of the Sámi, one obvious problem is the search for easy answers, either-or solutions. Inadequate definitions of colonialism can hinder the researcher from seeing the diversities in many levels. There is good reason to abandon the idea of a unidirectional tidal force, which leaves behind clearly discernible repressors and repressed, high-handed decision makers, and helpless victims. There were very dissimilar actors on both sides with their own goals and strategies. Their relations should be analyzed on several levels to uncover different power relationships.

When considering the Sámi policies, both in governments and in the Church, it is obvious that there have always been various tendencies. One way, in modern terms, was the “culturally sensitive” line, which strove to defend and emphasize the language and culture of the minority. Already in the 17th-century Church, for instance, there was discussion about the importance of the native language in internalizing Christian spirituality. This resulted in the training of Sámi-speaking priests and the creation of Sámi literature. Also the



catechist system (i.e., circulating Sámi-speaking teachers) was suitable and flexible to the conditions in Lapland and worked well in Finnish Sámi territories for 200 years (Henrysson 1993).

The usual method was, however, the compulsory teaching of a foreign language, when the Sámi child had to learn the language of his or her teacher in order to be able to follow the education. This was the more-pronounced line that belittled and repressed the minority or made excuses for the superiority of the dominant culture. Between these opposite policies, there were many kinds of versions and implementations that could be based on diverse intentions. Inside the Norwegianization policy, for instance, there were proponents of active colonialism as well as understanding colonialism, which both could have, however, the purpose of guiding the Sámi into the Norwegian language and culture (Lehtola 2002:194–196).

Rautio Helander (2009, 2013) has shown special strategies of “toponymic subjugation” and “toponymic silence” in the Norwegianization of Sámi placenames. Similarly, Minde (2003:166–168) has analysed multifaceted phases, motives, and content of Sámi policy in institutional and political frames of Norway. In order to reach the necessary precision to reveal the complex processes, there is also a need to develop traditional methods of historians into the fields of social and cultural studies, especially social anthropological approaches.

To find various strategies and structures in implementing colonial ideologies benefits from the concept of colonialism as an analytical tool. Nordic Sámi histories have often been discussed from the basis of similar frameworks and notions, but it is important to see their differences as well. There have always been different national and local contexts inside of the Nordic countries, from cultural traditions of different Sámi groups to national Sámi policies in each country. National and global trends, for instance, have influenced and been absorbed and adapted in multiple ways among the Sámi, depending on their implementation or usefulness and applicability in local context.

Not only were the forms of colonialism multifaceted, the Sámi people and societies also have many kinds of diversities that can be essential for understanding the differences on many levels (Porsanger 2007; Valkonen 2009:104–136). The Sámi have quite diverse linguistic and cultural groups, which have been partly shaped by natural conditions, but they have also been influenced by superpower politics already by the 16th century. For example, the border of Teusina Treaty in 1595 between the east and the west started to change the Kola Sámi culture in quite different direction from the western Sámi groups (Goldin 2004:307–308). Demarcations, or border

closings, in the 19th and 20th centuries made the Sámi citizens of different Nordic countries, whose lives were subsequently influenced by national cultures (Aarseth 1989).

Thus, in addition to the common features of Sámi groups, national borders may be strong elements in differing them. In Finland, there have been three to four groups having various kinds of relations with each other, and also their relationship to Finnish influences, administrative structures, and modernization have been different. The thinness of sources, usually created by outsiders, may limit the possibility to examine in detail how the Sámi in each community considered the “outside world” in various ways. It is clear, however, that the attitude towards the expansion of the Finnish society, for example, cannot be approached as a purely positive or negative development. The same community could include Sámi who had a positive or even enthusiastic attitude towards Finnish influences, and others who were not or did not want to be in much contact with them (see Asp 1966:58–61; Lehtola 2012:449–452). A researcher may easily mistake either reaction for the opinion of the whole community.

The same concerns the concept of Sámi modernization, which should be interpreted in multiple levels. It has often been associated with a somewhat mystified contrast between the old and the new. Tradition has consequently meant something “immemorial,” “genuine,” or “authentic,” while modernity has referred to something that is strange to Sámi culture. Sámi history, however, reflects well that the Sámi people have—in the words of Philip J. Deloria (2004:6–7) (Dakota)—“engaged the same forces of modernization that were making majorities reevaluate their own expectations of themselves and their society.” Already early in the history, there have been many Sámi—more than we have been led to believe—leaping quickly into modernity, “not because they adopted political and legal tools from whites or because of acculturation or assimilation, but because of their own will and interest” (Deloria 2004:6–7, 231).

Apart from majority–minority relations, it would be important to discern Sámi people’s “own histories” as well as open the past of families, kins, villages, and regions. There are power relations also in Sámi communities to analyze. When linking with various theoretical starting points, the themes of colonialism can unearth internal Sámi community criticism as well. Feminist approaches, for instance, have problematized traditional interpretations of strong Sámi women and the equality of the Sámi society, which the Sámi themselves have emphasized (Pääkkönen 2008:268).

This way, the conceptualization of colonialism and sociohistorical processes also helps researchers participate in international discussion.

Apart from Nordic countries, European and global scientific communities are interested in both the Sámi history in Nordic context and also in the interpretations that concern colonialistic structures and processes in general, implementations of general social trends on the local level, or the production of knowledge both in colonial circumstances and in scientific conceptualization.

For example in European history research, there has been a return of colonial studies that, in the words of some researchers, have been “rehabilitated and liberated from their Marxist stamp” (Hokkanen and Särkkä 2008:190). These new imperial histories strive to create a deeper picture of the multilevel nature and diversity of colonialism without black-and-white preconceptions. Jean and John Comaroff point out that colonialism has thoroughly changed the lives of the colonized and the colonialists, as well as the conception of the world. In other words, it penetrated western thinking and culture in a profound and complex manner. This is why it is an especially interesting field of study: it attempts to examine the perspective of power centers, for example, from a critical and understanding point of view at the same time and tries to raise “the colonized” into subjects in their own histories (Hokkanen and Särkkä 2008:190–191).

It is important to remember, however, that often in this kind of historiography, the perspectives of the “center” again become more strongly emphasized than the needs of the colonized or indigenous peoples. This is often due to issues with the sources, but perhaps even more to the fact that research is made most of all in the “centers,” which means that the interests of the majorities are reflected in the field of study. Similar criticism has also been directed at postcolonial research (Storfjell 2011). This is why it is especially essential to emphasize the perspective of indigenous peoples both as actors in and researchers of history. This also presumes postcolonial and indigenous studies to develop their perspectives and methodologies.

When discussing the usefulness of the colonialism concept, the goal is a more diverse and profound view of the Sámi past, so that the interpretations could match their own view of their past. It is important from the Sámi perspective to uncover their own histories and bring them to public discussion. As Tuominen (2011:64) puts it, historical studies are always multiple struggles of remembering, being identified and recognized, and silence means lack of recognition, which prevents discussing and dismantling traumatic experiences in public. Poddar et al. (2008:2–3) note that the irretrievability of the past may be redeemed or reconciled through the consequences of recognition; “The past matters because we owe it recognition.”

## Conclusions

One context for the current dispute has been the political process of ratification of the ILO 169 Convention in Sámi area, which has made historians from Lapland to challenge Sámi representations on Lapland’s history. This can be reflected in the opinions of the concept colonialism to be unhistorical theorizing or some kind of accusation at the actors in history. Similarly to other Nordic countries, also the national pride of democratic past has raised rejective reactions to ideas that would seem to compare Finnish or other Nordic histories to colonial atrocities and even genocides overseas by other more-violent imperial powers.

The concept of colonialism, however, is not a fixed thesis meant as a general explanation of all historical events. On the contrary, it draws the researchers’ attention to the mechanisms that make up the basis for the development of relations between the Sámi and the Finns, for example. Colonialistic processes were often not based on people’s purposefully negative intentions, but there was usually a quite logical underlying way of thinking, which originated from the values of the dominant culture.

Thus, it seems that denying colonialism is based on a similar generalization and exaggerated conclusions as the earlier notions of the Sámi as victims of history. In public and also among the researchers, there occur stereotypical understandings of the concept of colonialism. This is illustrated by simplified ideas of Nordic or Finnish colonialism manifesting itself as documented orders in archival sources or as oppressors with swords in their hands. If the concepts are not more closely defined, the term colonialism is linked with diverse ideas and connotations that become the basis of discussion and argument.

More than outright violence, Nordic Sámi policies have been characterized by structural injustice on many different levels from governmental actions to local relations, also among the Sámi themselves. Examining colonial processes and structures strives to clarify what social, linguistic and cultural effects the asymmetrical power relations have. The role of mentalities and representations is essential, but they often have also practical implementations, when authorities, for example, adopted certain kinds of views of the Sámi.

Instead of denying colonialism, a more profound analysis can also shift the focus of research and even liberate thinking. If we see colonialism as a “part of the very fabric of the North European societies” (Naum and Nordin 2013:5), the encounters of two or many cultures, possible collisions and interactions create also new kinds of phenomena, which shape societies in new ways. Colonialism also brings about response and resistance, which

may significantly influence the self-image and strategies of communities.

## Endnotes

1. In addition to the references in this article, see Palme (2013), Leinonen (2012), and NIFCA (2006). The latter reference review tens of Nordic artists who revisited Nordic colonial histories by combining visual exhibitions with workshops, conferences, hearings, and happenings in the locations of Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and the Sámi area of Finland.

2. “King Apologizes For Minority Repression.” *Chicago Tribune*, October 8, 1997. See [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-10-08/news/9710080098\\_1\\_sami-parliament-herd-reindeer-norwegian](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1997-10-08/news/9710080098_1_sami-parliament-herd-reindeer-norwegian).

3. For these references, I thank the anonymous referee of *Arctic Anthropology*.

4. This has indeed been characteristic of Scandinavians also, as Fur (2013:26) points out: “Seemingly untainted by colonialism’s heritage, the Scandinavian countries throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty first successfully maintained positions as champions of minority rights and mediators in global politics.”

5. “Järventaus: Suomella ei tarvetta anteeksipyyntöön saamelaisilta.” *Turun Sanomat* August 14, 1998. [http://haku.verkkouutiset.fi/arkisto/Arkisto\\_1998/14.elokuu/JARV3198.HTM](http://haku.verkkouutiset.fi/arkisto/Arkisto_1998/14.elokuu/JARV3198.HTM). Also his colleague Tuija Brax, as the minister of justify in 2008, stated: “As a political act the apology (by state) would be inadequate, because we don’t have guarantee about things getting better.” She referred to the open case of ILO 169 ratification and the question of land claims.

6. For example, “Puheenaihe: Saamelaisilla on syy korottaa äänensä—Kurja kohtelu on totta” and comments in <http://www.aamulehti.fi/Kotimaa/1194715988026/artikkeli/puheenaihe+saamelaisilla+on+syy+korottaa+aanensa+kurja+kohtelu+on+totta.html>.

7. “Suomi tuli Saamenmaahan -filmin herättämiä tunteja. Pitäisikö saamelaisilta pyytää anteeksi?” *Yleisradio* January 26, 2011 [http://yle.fi/elavaarkisto/artikkelit/pitaisiko\\_saamelaisilta\\_pyytaa\\_anteeksi\\_52079.html#media=52084](http://yle.fi/elavaarkisto/artikkelit/pitaisiko_saamelaisilta_pyytaa_anteeksi_52079.html#media=52084).

8. See the following: “Piispa pyysi saamelaisilta anteeksi.” *Kaleva* December 4, 2012 in [http://yle.fi/uutiset/piispa\\_pyysi\\_saamelaisilta\\_anteeksi/5054393](http://yle.fi/uutiset/piispa_pyysi_saamelaisilta_anteeksi/5054393). Accessed January 11th, 2014; Klemetti Näkkäljärvi: “Brysselistä Inariin.” A blog text 5. 2. 2012. [http://klemetti.blogspot.fi/2012/02/brysselista-](http://klemetti.blogspot.fi/2012/02/brysselista-inariin.html)

[inariin.html](http://www.kotimaa24.fi/artikkeli/saamelaiskarajien-puheenjohtaja-salmen-anteeksipyynto-ei-riita/). See also “Saamelaiskarajien puheenjohtaja: “Salmen anteeksipyyntö ei riitä.” <http://www.kotimaa24.fi/artikkeli/saamelaiskarajien-puheenjohtaja-salmen-anteeksipyynto-ei-riita/>; “Saamelaiset odottavat yhä anteeksipyyntöä.” *Lapin Kansa* February 12, 2012. [http://www.lapinkansa.fi/Mielipide/1194721982769/artikkeli/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=LKA\\_newssite%2FAMLayout&cid=1194596826928&pagename=LKAWrapper](http://www.lapinkansa.fi/Mielipide/1194721982769/artikkeli/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=LKA_newssite%2FAMLayout&cid=1194596826928&pagename=LKAWrapper). Accessed January 11, 2014.

9. Wikipedia: “Colonialism.” Accessed September 2014.

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