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Decolonising cultural policy: the cultural and linguistic rights of the Sámi in Finland

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In this article, the writer considers the current state of the cultural and linguistic rights of the Sámi, how they are supported by cultural policy and how decolonising cultural policy could contribute to the ongoing struggles of realising the self-determination and cultural rights of the Sámi. The article stipulates that concrete steps need to be taken for decolonising cultural policy in Finland specifically concerning the cultural and human rights of the Sámi. Cultural policy should be based on cultural rights, thus introducing decolonial practices in support of the Sámi culture and languages and into the culture policy and funding is imperative. The article suggests creating decolonial practices of research and policymaking rooted in intersectional and participatory methods that recognise the many forms of discrimination, not only the current-day colonialism or the effects of assimilation but also the intersections of an indigenous identity with other forms of discrimination. Furthermore, contributing to decolonisation should include research on the effects of colonisation on cultural rights, cultural policy and the distribution of funds for promoting the Sámi culture and languages in the Sámi communities and Finland.

KEYWORDS

cultural policy, cultural rights, decolonisation, colonialism, the Sámi

Introduction

The current societal and political climate in Finland and all over the world has become polarised. The concern over the progress in equity and equality is current. The concern over cultural policy and funding in Finland is current as this polarised political atmosphere and austerity measures are affecting cultural policy. The fear for the cultural and human rights of the marginalised is urgent as the demands for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are met with resistance. The most vulnerable, the colonised, marginalised, and discriminated bear the weight of that resistance. Tackling these issues of diversity, equity and inclusion signifies challenging the very structures of society and dismantling the systemic oppression that resides at all levels of society, also within arts and culture, cultural funding, and cultural policy.

In Finland, one of the most critical issues currently concerning minorities is the rights of the Sámi, human rights, and cultural and linguistic rights. The critical issue connecting all these rights is the right to self-determination, an integral part of cultural rights. As a

case study of the cultural and linguistic rights of the Sámi, this article aims to briefly describe the impacts of colonialism and assimilation as cultural colonisation and to discover through a literature review what previous research reveals about the steps taken by the Finnish government and the practices created by the Sámi themselves in preserving the Sámi languages and culture as well as the current issues and challenges in ensuring the cultural rights of the Sámi in Finland. This article considers cultural rights as human rights and their implications for cultural policy and proceeds to briefly describe Finnish cultural policy and funding as it pertains to the Sámi. In addition to considering the cultural and linguistic rights of the Sámi, and the significance of the self-determination of indigenous peoples, the goal is to recognise through interpretative policy analysis how these issues correlate with past and present colonialism, the influence of colonialism on cultural policy and what kind of practices should contribute to decolonising cultural policy.

In order to position these topics among the current discourse they are considered within the frameworks of cultural rights and Finnish cultural policy. As cultural rights are human rights (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010), no actual decolonisation can take place with current Finnish legislation and policy. In addition, discourse and research on colonialism in Finland are still rather new (Keskinen, 2019), even though research on the Sámi and Sámi histories is plenty. Perhaps due to the difficult and multiple aspects of colonialism and the difficulties of defining it in the Finnish context the field of study has been evaded by the academia (Kuokkanen, 2022: 294). Cultural colonisation of the Sámi is described to further elaborate on the current state of cultural and linguistic rights of the Sámi followed by practices of revitalising Sámi languages and ensuring self-determination considered here as decolonial practices in support of the Sámi. Research of decolonial methodology amplifying the Sámi knowledge is needed. The article concludes that decolonising both, cultural policy and the colonised Sámi Homeland should reach all these aspects with intersectional participatory practices to bring about social justice through legislation and cultural policy to ensure the cultural and human rights of the Sámi.

Cultural rights and cultural policy

The discussion on cultural rights became relevant within the discourse and demands for indigenous rights (Saukkonen, 2007: 22). Deeply intertwined with the right to self-determination, cultural rights can only function together with self-determination (Vrdoljak, 2008: 42). Furthermore, cultural rights were devised to ensure not only the economic and social aspects but also to protect from discrimination and to safeguard participation in the cultural life (Valoma, 2024: 24). However, cultural rights have been difficult to define and in search of an international consensus on cultural rights, the United Nations Human

Rights Council (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2019) took upon to investigate and define a list of cultural rights (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010). Cultural rights are human rights as the independent expert of OHCHR found that many human rights mechanisms are already included either directly or indirectly in the cultural rights they defined (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010). Though scholars at large seem to agree with the OHCHR's findings (e.g., Renteln, 2006; Koivunen and Marsio, 2007; Caust, 2019; Jonathan, 2018), cultural rights appear to be neglected and underdeveloped as human rights (see (Symonides, 1998; Koivunen and Marsio, 2007; Balta Portolés and Dragičević Šešić, 2017)). Furthermore, as cultural rights are difficult to define and apply across diverse cultures and cultural expressions, there is no one clear set of laws worldwide to determine cultural rights but rather different countries have developed particular interpretations of cultural rights (Koivunen and Marsio, 2007: 20). In addition to difficulties of defining, cultural rights may be considered human rights from the Western perspective but come at odds with human rights particularly considering harmful cultural customs such as female genital mutilation (Renteln, 2006: 325; Nyangweso, 2016). Despite the challenges, cultural rights still offer a solid opportunity to advocate indigenous self-determination (Robbins and Stamatopoulou, 2004: 426).

Cultural rights have also become prominent within cultural policy domains of current though the implementation still appears implicit (Balta Portolés and Dragičević Šešić, 2017: 163; Jonathan, 2018: 2). In Finland, the implementation of cultural rights has been to protect minority cultures (Saukkonen, 2010: 56). However, rather than an explicit policy instrument, cultural rights have been incorporated into the values and ethics of Finnish cultural policy (Saukkonen, 2007: 22). Indeed, cultural rights are considered within multiple national and international conventions, declarations and agreements as part of the cultural policy framework and as such can be considered as value-based policy instruments. (Valoma, 2024: 25, 51). The Ministry of Education and Culture states in its strategy until 2025 that cultural policy should be based on the understanding of cultural rights (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017: 13). Cultural rights appear to be mainly considered as parts of the existing legislation ensuring the rights of the Sámi. As a national minority, the linguistic rights of the Sámi stem from the Finnish Constitution (17.3 §) and form the Sámi Language Act (1992, renewed 2003). Under the Constitution, the Sámi have linguistic and cultural autonomy in the Sámi Homeland. Still, the Sámi languages in Finland are classified as endangered (Arola, 2021: 9; Endangered Languages Project, 2019). Apart from the legislation to protect the Sámi languages and education in the Sámi Homeland, the government has not been able to mend the damage done through colonisation and assimilation. Thus, the cultural rights, and policies especially preserving the languages and culture of Finland's and the EU's only indigenous peoples, the Sámi, are still lacking. Furthermore,

beyond the legislation protecting the Sámi, the Ministry of Education and Culture has no policies to ensure cultural rights *per se*. Nonetheless, practices and policies to protect the current culture and education of the Sámi languages can be done. Some of them await only the passing of the parliament, such as the Sámi Parliament Act and The Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention No. 169 (ILO 169). Acknowledging and taking responsibility for the colonial past and present and passing the acts and conventions in question would be vital in the process of decolonising the Sámi Homeland. What kind of implications ratifying these conventions would have on cultural policy remains to be seen.

Though the Sámi are one the most researched indigenous peoples, research on cultural policy and funding regarding the Sámi culture is still scarce. This could reflect the political climate and the lack of interest among the researchers and policymakers. Funding as a key instrument of Finnish cultural policy (Jakonen and Sokka, 2022: 249) also calls for examination considering the Sámi culture. The Ministry of Education and Culture supports the Sámi with a yearly state fund appointed to the Sámi Parliament to maintain and develop the Sámi languages, arts and culture. Arts Promotion Centre Finland has a regional arts council in Lapland but nothing to support the Sámi arts and culture *per se*. Outside the cultural policy domain, the ELY centres in Finland are responsible for promoting culture and creative economy, and Lapland's ELY centre website is also available in North Sámi. However, these subsidies and services are for all residing in Lapland with an economic emphasis, and not explicitly directed towards supporting the Sámi languages and culture. As the funding of arts and culture is divided between multiple policy domains (Jakonen and Sokka, 2022), reliable data on funds directed at the Sámi are difficult to obtain. In addition, *statistics on race, ethnicity, or other minority status are not collected in Finland, and subsequently, there is no adequate data on funding of the Sámi arts and culture.*

Though there are monetary policy mechanisms in place, *research conducted by the Sámi Parliament in Norway on the cultural funding throughout the Sámi Homeland concludes there is no overall picture of the funding of Sámi arts and culture because the Nordic funding structures are not obligated to report how much of the funding is allocated to the Sámi* (Utsi et al., 2022: 8). *Kultur-Sápmi, commissioned by the Sámi Council and compiled by the 2020 Sámi Think Tank confirms that to support the Sámi culture, infrastructure and funding must be organised and strengthened* (Utsi et al., 2022: 8). *In addition, the need for cross-border funding in the Sámi Homeland is important* (Sokka et al., 2022: 145). Nevertheless, the Sámi Council in Norway is the only funder to accept applications from the whole of the Sámi Homeland, including Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia, supporting Sámi culture and revitalisation projects (Sokka et al., 2022: 114). *This data stipulates that further research, informed policymaking and funding are vital for the survival of the Sámi languages and culture.*

Cultural colonisation of the Sámi

For perhaps a wider understanding of the current situation of the Sámi cultural rights, the colonial past of Finland and its implications to cultural policies must be carefully examined and acknowledged. Until recently, the discourse on colonialism in Finland has been to either belittle Finland's role in colonialism or to downright contest the Sámi histories of colonial rule and assimilation. Though research on Finnish colonialism and decolonising is sparse, recent studies and publications such as *Sámi Research in Transition: Knowledge, Politics and Social Change* (Lehtola, 2021) offer valuable insight into the past and present of colonial and decolonial practices in Finland. Nevertheless, Finnish colonialism has mostly been discussed in the context of Nordic colonialism. Though colonialism in the Nordic countries has many similarities it also has its distinct features within all Nordic countries, thus describing it as one homogenous practice would be insufficient (Spangenberg et al., 2015; Keskinen, 2019; McGuire, 2022). Finland as the historical subordinate to Sweden and Russia has yet difficulties in owning its colonial past (Keskinen, 2019: 164; McGuire, 2022) as the colonisation of the Sámi Homeland began well before the Finnish nation-state was created (Spangenberg et al., 2015; Keskinen, 2019). In addition, the previous discourse has concentrated on "colonial complicity" (Keskinen, 2019: 164), that Finland was neither in the colonial centre of Europe nor a mere victim (Kuokkanen, 2022: 294). Though later venturing into anti-racist and anti-imperialist activities, Finland has yet to be able to acknowledge its colonial and racist past (Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012: 2). These complexities do not absolve but rather highlight Finland's part in the colonisation and assimilation of the Sámi shedding some light on the complexities of Finland's colonial past and present and its implications to the formation of Finnish cultural policy.

Finnish cultural policy began to take shape in the 19th century by establishing national institutions to strengthen the national identity (Sokka et al., 2022: 49) The creation of these national institutions dating to cultural colonialism, still state-funded today (Valoma, 2024: 29) resulted in excluding the already existing Sámi culture and languages (Capdeville, 2017: 12). Policies originating from colonial power structures are intertwined with intricate assumptions, norms and interests of economic and political gain (Frenander, 2008). These colonial values and norms are rooted also in cultural policies (Canyürek, 2022: 42) subsequently maintaining systemic inequality within the structures of decision- and policymaking. These policies irreversibly affected the Sámi and their indigenous culture resulting in generations losing their native languages.

Although colonialism in Finland was not written in official policies such as the Norwegianisation in Norway (Spangenberg et al., 2015: 23), the effects of this were still the same. Finnish colonialism has conveniently been described as "colonisation of the mind" and "persuasive colonialism" which refers to the

assimilation and socialisation of the Sámi resulting in “institutional forgetting” (Spangen et al., 2015: 26). Lehtola continues to describe this “institutional forgetting” as adopting the Sámi part of the dominant society by assimilating through language, culture, and education which subsequently justified the overtaking of lands and water, affecting the indigenous heritage and way of life such as reindeer husbandry, hunting, fishing rights, and moreover enabling the government mining in the Sámi Homeland (2015: 26).

As colonialism is the idea of superiority (Mulcahy, 2019: 230), cultural hierarchies are essential in signifying the supremacy of the dominant culture over the minority and indigenous cultures (Spangen et al., 2015: 26). These were manifested within the policies supporting the national institutions and within the means of assimilation. To justify the colonisation, discrimination and subsequently assimilation, the coloniser must be a unified we and the colonised the object. Colonialism operates exactly by objectifying, dehumanising and othering the colonised. Othering within the context of Finnish colonialism takes the forms of racism, systemic discrimination, and assimilation. Othering expands from systemic and governmental policies to popular culture as it strives to dehumanise and humiliate the object. Subsequently, through epistemicide, the knowledges of the oppressed are marginalised and lost (Bennett, 2007; Näkkäljärvi, 2017). Indeed, colonialism manifests itself in “the denial of one group’s capacity to produce knowledge of their own, by extension, is a denial of their membership to the genus of rational beings” (Masaka, 2018: 288). This is the essence of colonialism, othering and epistemicide. The cultural colonisation and assimilation of the Sámi are essentially epistemicide, the destruction and marginalisation of the indigenous Sámi knowledge, languages, and culture.

The impacts of colonialism are most apparent regarding culture (Paquette et al., 2017: 270). Yet, the colonialism of today continues to thrive not only in cultural discrimination but in the inequalities of wellbeing, socioeconomic means, and the south and north as it resides within the political, educational, and cultural systems (Czyzewski, 2011: 4; Dirks, 2020: 92–93). Though this more often describes the situation as seen in the global south, it accurately depicts the disparities between the north and south in Finland as well. The educational, social, and economic status and possibilities of the Sámi are unequal to the majority. The government has not been able to sustain and support the linguistic, cultural, and human rights of the Sámi. Cultural policy and institutions in Finland were the building blocks of a new nation (Sokka et al., 2022: 49). This national hegemony could not endure the cultural other, the Sámi, thus the policies of culture and education were created with national conformity in mind. Sámi histories, art and culture were then systematically erased from the canon of Finnish art and history. Rewriting those histories and amplifying the voices and research of the Sámi beyond the Western understanding of arts and

culture is imperative. These practices have already been adopted within museums in the form of repatriating collections of Sámi artefacts. However, including the Sámi histories accurately in the narratives of the museums and beyond is equally important. The recognition of colonising the Sámi Homeland and the assimilation of the Sámi is crucial. Instead of outright contesting the Sámi histories, scholarly research should avoid amplifying the perspectives and purposes of the white majority, thus supporting, and enabling indigenous peoples both as active agents and researchers (Spangen et al., 2015: 31).

Decolonial practices

Revitalising the Sámi languages and culture

“Colonialism may be dead, yet it is everywhere to be seen.” (Dirks, 2020: 93). In the context of Finland and the Sámi, it is important to be aware of the ongoing colonial conventions and to regard the process of dismantling those conventions as decolonial rather than post-colonial. Post-colonial as a term suggests an era after colonialism and thus denies or minimises the colonial presence (Keskinen et al., 2021: 50). In Finland the colonial presence persists in the Sámi Homeland and matters concerning the Sámi rights while decolonial practices recognise those colonial structures in place and strive to demolish the inequalities.

Through colonising the Lapland and Sámi Homeland and assimilating the Sámi people, Finland among other Nordic countries almost obliterated an entire family of languages. As a cultural right, the right to language combines all cultural rights. Language encases information and communication, expression and creation, identity and belonging to a community with shared values, development of a specific world vision and the pursuit of specific ways of life, education, and training, access to contribution and participation in cultural life and cultural practices and access to and enjoyment of heritage (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2010). From the 17th century to the 1970s teaching or speaking in Sámi in schools was forbidden (Joonas, 2018: 111). Researchers further describe the assimilation and the influences the government and church had on the Sámi families as traumatising and resulting in generations losing their native languages and subsequently their culture (Joonas, 2018: 111; Aikio-Puoskari, 2018: 3) leading to epistemicide, the killing of the Sámi knowledge. The killing of other forms of knowledge and knowledge production is essential to colonialism. Killing knowledge and subsequently, the culture, and languages of the Sámi was and is colonialism in action.

Preserving the Sámi knowledge, culture and languages is essential in revitalising and safeguarding the indigenous culture, communities and way of life. As Wiesner states in their article on

the rights of indigenous peoples: “Membership of a group is of fundamental importance to individuals, to their pursuit of self-realisation, a key human need.” (2011: 124). This signifies that being a member of an indigenous culture and having a mother tongue that reflects that culture is essential in growing and maintaining a strong indigenous identity. Language is at the heart of that identity. A child denied a common language with their community and ancestors detach the child from the culture and community and in effect traditions such as Yoik and the Sámi folklore are lost (Valoma, 2023). However, since the 1960s with the rise of Sámi activism people across the Sámi Homeland have rigorously fought for the right to their own language and mother-tongue-medium education (Hirvonen, 2008). But only as recently as 1992 was a language act protecting the Sámi languages passed and renewed in 2003 (Ministry of Justice, 2003). In October 2021 the government appointed a Truth and Reconciliation Commission concerning the Sámi People in cooperation with the Sámi Parliament. Apologies by the government and church have been made, and in the spirit of reconciliation, repatriation, the return of Sámi heritage objects to the Sámi Homeland has been successfully executed (Spangen et al., 2015: 22). Even though the damages of epistemicide, linguicide and assimilation cannot be fully remedied, strides in the right direction have been taken by the government, but particularly through considerable efforts by the Sámi communities.

The legal status of the Sámi languages in Finland is protected (Joonaa, 2018: 120). However, the problems occur in implementation and practice (Capdeville, 2017; Joonaa, 2018). Many studies on the language rights of the Sámi appear to be focused on children and education (Hirvonen, 2008; Hammine, 2016; Laihi, 2017; Aikio-Puoskari, 2018; Joonaa, 2018) revealing the vulnerable situation of the Sámi languages and culture. The language and culture will inevitably die if not passed on to new generations. The studies indicate that 70% of Sámi children under the age of ten live outside the Sámi Homeland (Hammine, 2016; Aikio-Puoskari, 2018) and as many as 75% of Sámi children are born outside the Sámi Homeland (Joonaa, 2018: 2). Living in other parts of Finland poses a problem as the Sámi Language Act (1992; 2003) protects language education mainly in the Sámi Homeland (Capdeville, 2017: 17; Hammine, 2016: 9; Joonaa, 2018: 120). This is the result of the Sámi Language Act not obliging the districts outside the Sámi Homeland to offer Sámi education (Hammine, 2016: 12). Research reveals that education in other parts of Finland is offered, but not comprehensively, and after primary school, there is almost no further education offered in Sámi outside the Sámi Homeland (Hammine, 2016: 12; Capdeville, 2017: 19; Joonaa, p. 2018: 119).

Practices in revitalising the language inside the indigenous communities by the indigenous peoples have proven to be fruitful (Laihi, 2017; Aikio-Puoskari, 2018; Joonaa, 2018). Research indicates that language nests are one of the most effective practices for both revitalising and nurturing the Sámi

languages (Aikio-Puoskari, 2018: 4; Arola, 2021: 9; Capdeville, 2017: 19; Laihi, 2017). 12 language nests are operating to this date (Aikio-Puoskari, 2018: 4; Sámediggi, 2022). These language nests are subsidised on a year-to-year basis by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Arola, 2021: 14; Sámediggi, 2022). The language nest method was initially used by the Māori. In Finland, the method was first introduced in Sevettijärvi from where it quickly spread to Inari, Rovaniemi, Oulu, and beyond (Aikio-Puoskari, 2018: 4). A study of the Sámi language nests describes how the revitalisation of a language within new generations is imperative for the continuity of the culture itself (Laihi, 2017: 21). Even adults have been found to benefit from the language nests as they are finally being introduced to the language of their parents or grandparents (Capdeville, 2017: 19).

However, the survival of an endangered language needs more than revitalisation inside the communities. Governmental, monetary and legislative support is imperative for the language to survive beyond the language nests and primary schools, also outside the Sámi Homeland. *Sámi Barometer* offers some perspective from the adult Sámi speakers from both the Sámi Homeland and Finland (Arola, 2021). Results of the study indicate that the language rights of the Sámi are not actualised (Arola, 2021: 67). The study continues to clarify this to be the result of poor or no services in Sámi in healthcare, daycare, and schools. *Sámi Barometer* (Arola, 2021) findings confirm those of previous literature on governmental shortcomings in providing education in Sámi (Hirvonen, 2008; Hammine, 2016; Laihi, 2017; Aikio-Puoskari, 2018; Joonaa, 2018). These governmental shortcomings in maintaining and supporting the Sámi social services and cultural rights are the effects of past and present policies based on colonial practices.

Ensuring the self-determination of the Sámi

Vital to colonialism is the denial of self-determination. Moreover, the self-determination of indigenous people and cultural rights can function only together (Vrdoljak, 2008: 42). Wiessner elaborates that self-determination is imperative for an indigenous people’s willingness to preserve their distinct language and culture (2011: 122). Self-determination is also vital for the mental health of indigenous peoples (Lawson-Te Aho and Liu, 2010). In general, although not enough studied, the Indigenous have more mental health issues than the white majority (Sørly et al., 2021: 1283). The Finnish Prime Minister’s Office stated in a study from 2017 that there are on average more mental health issues and suicides in the indigenous areas compared to the rest of Finland (Koivurova et al., 2017: 14). The poor or nonexciting healthcare services in Sámi languages reported in the *Sámi Barometer* (Arola, 2021) add to the problem. Denial of self-determination in addition to poor services in Sámi languages and increased health problems add to the mental distress. Thus, the self-determination of the

Sámi is a much wider issue and intertwined with the inequalities of wellbeing, healthcare, socioeconomic status and politics as well as cultural, linguistic, and human rights.

In Finland in addition to the existing legislation self-determination could be achieved by renewing the Sámi Parliament Act. Previous literature agrees that the renewal of the Sámi Parliament Act would in effect give the Sámi themselves the right to determine who is Sámi, can enrol as a voter, and thus have a say in Sámi Homeland matters (Joona, 2018: 112; Saijets, 2022). Literature agrees on the Sámi Parliament's main functions as to execute the tasks appointed by the Constitution, meaning self-governing issues related to the Sámi languages and culture and the preservation and development of Sámi culture and heritage (Nuorgam, 2022; Laihi, 2017: 114; Sámediggi, 2022). Generally the literature also agrees on the indigenous peoples' right to self-determination (Vrdoljak, 2008; Wiessner, 2011; Alakorva and Valkonen, 2022). In Finland, some disagree, usually political or economic actors, and it has been argued that this is fuelled by political agendas of control and ownership of lands and businesses in the Sámi Homeland (Alakorva and Valkonen, 2022; Saijets, 2022). Consequently, this describes continued colonialism as the power relations in the Sámi Parliament seem to uphold the colonial structures rather than pursue its dismantling (McGuire, 2022: 7). The implications of this continued colonialism to the mental health and wellbeing of the Sámi people as well as the future of the Sámi culture and languages are distressing. Previous research indicates that great results in revitalising have been done in Norway (Aikio-Puoskari, 2018) and these procedures should be considered in Finland as well. Norway's example of creating Sámi language centres and projects across the national borders has strengthened and revitalised the Sámi languages across the Sámi Homeland (Aikio-Puoskari, 2018: 5).

The debate on self-determination of the Sámi is current and has generated a lot of writing, some academic but also opinion pieces influenced by both sides of the debate (Valoma, 2023). Passionate statements should be carefully reviewed through legislation as well as international cultural and human rights conventions as the UN Human Rights Council has found Finland to be violating the Sámi rights (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2019). Ratifying the *ILO 169* would be the first step in mending this, something Norway, for example, did already in 1990 (Valoma, 2023). *ILO 169* is at the heart of self-determination and culture as it is aimed to give the indigenous peoples the opportunity to maintain and further develop their own culture and it obliges the government to take action to endorse this work (Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in Norway, 2020). However, with the current political climate in Finland, the issue of the Sámi cultural and human rights continues to be polarised.

The core of both, the *ILO 169* and The Sámi Parliament Act is identifying and acknowledging the equal rights of the indigenous peoples and mending the damage done through colonisation and assimilation. The *ILO 169* is pending on issues of land ownership

and land use rights with arguments that the current legislation already recognise the rights of the Sámi (Spangon et al., 2015: 25; Valoma, 2023). Lehtola describes researchers contesting the history of Finland as colonising the Sámi Homeland as it is legally a part of Finland, but the characteristics of colonialism are clear (2015: 25). The Finnish influence seeks to exclude the Sámi themselves from taking part or being active agents in matters concerning their rights, culture, and heritage. The Finnish influence aims to maintain control over the Sámi Parliament with agendas of control and ownership of lands and businesses in the Sámi Homeland, and as such, deny the Sámi Parliament's autonomy and the very task and objective to self-govern the Sámi languages and culture (Alakorva and Valkonen, 2022; Saijets, 2022).

Renewal of the Sámi Parliament Act has made it to the Constitutional Law Committee three times, and on all occasions, it has been voted against. The latest was just before the parliamentary election of spring 2023. The since-elected government has claimed committed to seeing the renewal through until the Constitutional Law Committee again postponed the Act in response to the Supreme Administrative Court's decision that the Sámi Parliament election needs to be renewed. These tactics of delaying and preventing the Act from going before the Finnish parliament only reveal the continued colonialism in Finland. Finally, as the autonomy of the Sámi Parliament continues to be hampered by Finnish control, it begs the question, how can the Sámi Parliament fulfill its cultural autonomy and ensure the preservation and development of the Sámi culture and languages?

Decolonising cultural policy

In addition to the decolonial practices described regarding specifically the Sámi, decolonising cultural policy, the power structures behind arts and culture, are needed. The most powerful and devastating forms of the colonial rule regarding the cultural and linguistic rights of the Sámi are as described assimilation, epistemicide and linguicide. These processes of decolonising discriminatory histories and policies call for recognising those oppressed and centring their knowledge. This can be achieved through for instance research committed to participatory and intersectional methodology and participatory practices in policy- and decision-making.

“In short, a decolonisation project involves being aware of how we live our lives and how our thoughts, beliefs, and interactions with others are shaped by systems that create universal norms, by erasing, delegitimising, or marginalising other knowledges and forms of knowing.” (Nathani Wane, 2009: 171).

The understanding of a decolonial cultural policy is essentially intertwined with the knowledge base of the cultural policy domain (Lettau and Canyürek, 2024: 13). Cultural policy is instrumental in

legitimising diverse cultural expressions, it has the power to either normalise or prohibit diversity (Saukkonen and Pyykkönen, 2008: 50), depending on the knowledge base. Thus, centring diverse and indigenous knowledge is pivotal to decolonial practice. The colonial rule strives to centre the white Western knowledge and knowledge production. These centres decentre other centres HKW–Haus der Kulturen der Welt, 2018. Thus, decolonial practices should strive to decentre white Western knowledge and amplify the knowledge, knowledge production, and research of BIPOC academics, artists, and activists contributing to cultural policymaking. Only by creating space and methods for other forms of knowledge and of existing can we truly decolonise and dismantle the white Western colonial rule.

Among academic writing, where the research on othering or the colonised has been and perhaps still is vibrant, ways of writing without othering have been studied. These participatory methods against othering, although concerning writing, are universal, easily applied to any vocation, and can help in recognising shrouded but harmful ways of oppression and colonial practices that persist. The methods are narration, dialogue, and reflexivity (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012, p. 306). In narrative methods, the oppressed are described within the context of their life, reality, relationships, and inequalities yielding a more accurate and diverse description of who they are. Dialogue as a method then allows for a multitude of voices and as such is more representative of the oppressed. Reflexivity on the other hand seeks to reveal the writers'/researchers' position within their privileges and power structures (Krumer-Nevo and Sidi, 2012, p. 306). In essence, these participatory methods amplify the voices of the colonised and oppressed and centre other than white Western knowledge. For the Sámi these methods should signify a shift from being the subject of research into active agents in consolidating the knowledgebase of cultural rights and cultural policy. Research contributing to decolonisation would include research and reporting systems in cultural funding and distribution for promoting the Sámi languages in the Sámi communities and all over Finland. Centring the Sámi knowledge, research and social movements are vital in decolonial practices. Furthermore, research on polarisation from a cultural point of view is needed. What are the effects of polarisation on the cultural rights and cultural heritage of the Sámi? Also, investigating equity and equality within arts and culture institutions and among funders is paramount in creating a decolonial cultural policy.

Mulcahy' then describes two variations of post-colonial cultural policy, one strongly opposing the culture of the colonial power and the other idolising, perhaps even exoticising the indigenous culture and heritage (2019: 253–254). Both of which lack the intersections of an assimilated indigenous identity within the globalised and white Western cultural realities and institutions. Thus, there is no easy way to decolonise cultural policy, it is a challenge not easily addressed (Mulcahy, 2019: 254). Colonialism is not fixed but rather changes according to the needs of the dominant culture (Spangen et al., 2015: 31). The colonial practices are as varied as the colonisers. Even in the Nordics, colonialism and the assimilation of Sámi have been conducted in various forms and suggests more research is needed

to understand Finnish colonialism (Spangen et al., 2015; Keskinen, 2019). In the case of the Sámi, it is also important to recognise the diversity of the communities, there is no one language or culture but many (Spangen et al., 2015: 30; Normann, 2021: 80). And the intersections of an indigenous identity are just as varied as the community itself. The cultural hegemony of the white majority reveals the intersections of cultural discrimination (Belfiore et al., 2023:164). Thus, there is no one correct method or practice of decolonising but rather a multidisciplinary approach is required rendering a much wider perspective including economic, cultural, and psychological aspects. For instance, whether heteronormativity and homophobia are products of colonialism and Christianisation within indigenous communities or inherent to that culture determines how to tackle said discrimination. All the interlocking aspects together with the indigenous identity must be factored in when considering a decolonial cultural policy.

“Intersectionality foregrounds the multiple intersecting manifestations, mechanisms, and adjoining socio-political processes of settler colonialism, including land dispossession and repossession, patriarchy, ableism, heteronormativity, capital accumulation, and white supremacy” (Dhamoon (2015): 33).

As such, intersectionality as a framework for decolonising should expose the many forms of discrimination, not only current-day colonialism and the effects of assimilation on the Sámi, epistemicide and linguicide but the intersections of an indigenous identity with other forms of discrimination within the Finnish society.

“Building participatory, democratic interpretive communities across differences of experience, expertise, and resources has been the hallmark of intersectional projects” (Collins et al. (2021): 692).

The recognition of intersectional indigenous identities should be reflected in the policies made, as research indicates encouraging results in social inclusion by actively involving minorities throughout the processes of policymaking, budgeting and decision-making (Vella and Xuereb (2021): 40–41).

Thus, including the Sámi as active agents in knowledge production, policymaking and research are vital to decolonising cultural policy.

Perhaps an “intersectional cultural policy” (Belfiore, et al. (2023): 166).

Could recognise and consider the intersections of the Sámi communities, cultural policies stemming from Finnish colonialism, and systemic discrimination and create an equitable cultural policy in line with legislation and social justice. Understanding the many forms of discrimination and their distinct mechanisms, manifestations, and intersections within colonial practices is pivotal.

“It is important to challenge exclusionary and discriminatory attitudes and to make the values of inclusiveness and solidarity a priority in cultural policy.” (Vella and Xuereb (2021), p. 41).

Conclusion

“A post-colonial cultural policy must build on the grounds of ethics (and ethos).” (Paquette et al., 2017: 269). The colonial past and present of Finland should not be a matter of debate. The negative effects of assimilation, epistemicide and linguicide are evident in the Sámi communities today. As previous research has demonstrated, the work of advancing, developing, and protecting the Sámi culture and languages has been and is being done inside the Sámi communities (Hirvonen, 2008; Laihi, 2017; Aikio-Puoskari, 2018; Joona, 2018). However, the governmental actions in endorsing the Sámi culture and languages need to be examined more. How to build new and truly functional practices of decolonising on top of the existing legislation, demands for cultural rights, and a colonial past Finland is yet to come to terms with? The international human rights demands or the discriminatory legislation cannot be overlooked. Decolonisation means taking responsibility for the colonial past and subsequently dismantling all the structures still discriminating against the Sámi.

Meanwhile, cultural policy with DEI initiatives has been embraced by the cultural sector. However, the implementation, monitoring, and analysis should be well-laid and transparent. In addition to existing DEI initiatives, decolonising cultural policy would benefit not only the colonised Sámi but all those discriminated against as it aims for equity. Moreover, the colonised, and the indigenous must be supported as active agents. Participatory intersectional practices have proven to be fruitful as they recognise the intersections of identity and discrimination. Measures of investing in the education and revitalisation of Sámi languages and culture and mending the legislation in line with the cultural and human rights appointed by the UN are vital. As the colonial past and present of Finland are unique, the measures in decolonising should reflect that. Moreover, further research into Finnish colonialism is needed as the field of study is rather recent.

Moreover, the implementation of policies governing and supporting Sámi culture needs to be further investigated and widened to include all of Finland, and the self-determination of the Sámi ensured. Research also revealed that apart from the Sámi Council in Norway, and Sámi Parliament in Finland, there are no explicit subsidies for Sámi culture and languages. Good practices and revitalisation methods such as the Sámi language centres can be found in Norway (Aikio-Puoskari, 2018). Furthermore, education in Sámi languages should be offered and improved in all of Finland (Hirvonen, 2008; Hammine, 2016; Capdeville, 2017; Laihi, 2017; Aikio-Puoskari, 2018; Joona, 2018). Research in cultural funding and distribution for promoting the Sámi languages in the Sámi

communities and all over Finland is needed. As cultural policy should be based on cultural rights, taking the Sámi culture and languages as an integral part of the culture policy and funding is imperative. The structures of policymaking and state funding call for examining the effects of policies concerning the preservation of Sámi culture and languages. The yearly state grant to the Sámi Parliament for maintaining and developing Sámi art, culture and languages appears as a mere token without the autonomy affirmed. Asking the difficult questions of how current state funding and cultural policies contribute to the continuing struggles of the Sámi in preserving their culture is imperative. And even beyond the Sámi struggles, how does the Western canon of art dictate the policies and whose art and culture are recognised, valued and funded? (Valoma, 2024: 76).

To conclude, concrete steps are to be taken for decolonising cultural policy in Finland specifically concerning the rights of the Sámi, such as securing the cultural and linguistic rights and ensuring self-determination by new legislation, support and funding Sámi research and education and arts and culture. Furthermore, facilitating the Sámi as active agents in further research and knowledge production is paramount. In addition, an investigation of decolonial practices for cultural policy that recognises the intersections of various identities, and the many forms of discrimination is needed. In other words, Finland needs to create an intersectional decolonial cultural policy.

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LV participated in the design, interpretation of the studies and analysis of the data and review of the manuscript.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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refer to research by BIPOC academics and information provided by social movements and activists to challenge the white Western narrative of knowledge production. This article contains

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