

Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America

Rethinking Finnish Experiences
in Transnational Spaces

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AHEAD
Advanced Studies
in the Humanities
and Social Sciences

Finnish **Settler Colonialism** in North America

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Introduction: Finns and the Settler Colonial Worlds of North America

Janne Lahti and Rani-Henrik Andersson

Frank Aaltonen made a 40-acre homestead claim on Sugar Island, Michigan, in September 1915. In doing so, he joined the millions of settlers who had taken Indigenous lands through homesteading since the famous 1862 act that opened land for settlers in the continental United States.¹ Declaring himself a Finnish colonizer, Aaltonen wanted to advance United States settler colonialism on this northern island hugging the Canadian border. His method: promote and enable the arrival of Finns, who would capture lands and replace the Indigenous inhabitants. Aaltonen saw that Finnish settlers would put the land to proper use and build prosperous communities.² It was in considerably hotter climates in July 1903 that the Finnish journalist Eero Erkko had landed in Havana, Cuba. An exile from tsarist Russia and an outsider in the Caribbean, Erkko's mission was nevertheless much the same as Aaltonen's. He was in Cuba to make inroads for United States settler communities on the island by scouting suitable land for incoming Finns. Recently conquered from Spain, Cuba presented a plausible overseas extension for white settlement and futures for the US settler

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colonial empire. And in this process Finns would play a key role, Erkko envisioned.³ Aaltonen and Erkko, respectively, saw that Sugar Island and Cuba would provide the kind of fertile pastures the Finns deserved as colonizers in North America.

Little more than a decade ago Danish historian Pernille Ipsen and Swedish historian Gunlög Fur wrote how “histories of colonial dominion awaken in many Scandinavians hope that our ancestors did not participate in that soiled and sordid past, and a desire to believe that Scandinavian nations have always been defending the world’s diversely oppressed and colonised peoples.” Ipsen and Fur quickly remarked that history had proven that the “slate” was far from clean, as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden had been deeply involved in European expansion and colonialism.⁴ The above example of Aaltonen and Erkko suggests the same for Finns: revealing active Finnish engagement in the colonization of American spaces, of Finns embedded in the capture of other people’s lands and coveting an active role in the extension of US settler colonial empire on the continent and overseas. It puts Finnish presence in North America in a fresh perspective, as settlers, not just as immigrants. Settlers were made by conquest, not just by immigration. Settlers not only joined or integrated into someone else’s society but sought to displace previous residents, capture terrestrial spaces, and remake what they found as their own.⁵ Settlers functioned as a “supplanting society,” which means “a society that moves onto the land of another with the intention of making that land its own.”⁶ In the process, settlers sought to indigenize themselves, to hide their traces. Instead of just acknowledging their status as newcomers, they advanced claims over how they made this land and how the land made them, in essence seeking to prove their belonging and their right to the land.

Recently, there has been an increasing debate and an outpour of publications in Finland concerning colonialism and its manifestations and role in Finnish history.⁷ One key theme in this discussion that has not been examined involves the experiences of Finns in the context of North American settler colonialism. This work aims to start filling this gap, challenging traditional histories of Finnish migration, in which Finns have typically been viewed almost in isolation from the broader American context, not to mention colonialism. This book examines the diversity of roles, experiences, and narrations of and by Finns in the histories of North America by employing the settler colonial analytical framework. It takes as its premise that settler colonialism is both

a global historical process connecting peoples across national borders and a distinct analytical category.⁸

The chapters in this volume discuss how Finns reinvented their identities and acted as settlers, participated in the production of settler colonial narratives, benefitted and took advantage of settler colonial conquest and structures, and were impacted by and created settler colonial cultures, material practices, and modes of knowledge production. No other work inserts Finns into these kinds of discussions and circulations, as part of these multilayered structures, processes, and contemporary legacies of North American settler colonialism.

Finns were active in the transimperial processes of conquest, far-settlement, elimination of Natives, and capture of terrestrial spaces; in the characteristic processes of settler colonialism. They dispossessed Natives from their homelands and replaced them. They crossed national and imperial boundaries and acted as connectors and mobile transmitters of practices, ideas, and knowledge. In doing so, they were part of what historian James Belich has called “settler revolutions.” In the 19th century, growing populations, technological changes spurring steamships and railroads, and changing attitudes toward migration made far-settlement acceptable and created conditions for “explosive settlement.” These settler revolutions swept, for example, North America, Australia, Siberia, and Manchuria. They also fueled visions and aspirations of gaining settler living space for Europeans in various parts of Africa, including southern Africa and French Algeria. Yet, the Finnish-speaking subjects of the Swedish crown were also part of an earlier settler invasion in the 1600s, when the reach and scope of settler colonialism might have been more limited across North America, but where its forms of power already shaped encounters between peoples. Finns were also in a visible role in Russian Alaska in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.⁹

Erkko and Aaltonen highlight Finnish settlers’ purported connectivity with particular environments, meaning rural landscapes made up of forests, fields, and wilderness. This is a revealing characterization of Finnish settlers and of the *narrations and myths* surrounding them. It stresses settler colonialism targeting the land in a very concrete manner. Yet, Finns in North America did not share uniform experiences and neither does there exist some static or singular brand of Finnish settler colonial history that could easily be contrasted or compared with other settler groups, in North America or elsewhere.

The chapters in this volume apply multidisciplinary perspectives for exploring this diversity, the multiple levels of Finnish involvement and the multidirectional entanglements of Finns and settler colonialism in lived experience and discourses. Of course, the treatise here is by no means exhaustive, but instead highlights the broad repertoire of Finnish embeddedness and involvement in settler colonial processes, structures, and cultures. The authors do so by discussing settlement plans and communities, settler life writings, cartographic mappings, and fluid contested identities, as in the North American Sami movement. Or, when touching on travel, looted artefacts and repatriation, as in the case of Gustaf Nordenskiöld and the Mesa Verde, or scholarly discourses and fictive depictions of New Sweden and Finnish–Indigenous relations. All along, these chapters uncover connections and track exchanges, wherever they may lead. Their analysis understands connections, like historian Roland Wenzlhuemer notes, as an assemblage of multidirectional linkages arising from diverse and intricate human actions, manifesting multiple voices, engaging numerous sites, and traversing great distances.¹⁰ These kinds of connections are plural, diverse, intricate, and often uneven. They showcase the porousness of borders, shifting identities, and contingency of encounters. They are useful as the authors in this book seek to understand the experiences and representations of Finns in North American spatial projects, in territorial expansion and integration, forms of rule, and visions of power.

Tracking the Settler Colonial World

Often settler colonialism is seen as a special form of colonialism that centers on land. It is typically understood, as its key theorist, the anthropologist Patrick Wolfe, argues, as being preoccupied with replacement and access to territory, the land itself. The settlers are conquering the area in an effort to displace its former inhabitants and root their own community and culture in the area. Wolfe maintains that settler colonialism introduces “a zero-sum contest over land on which conflicting modes of production could not ultimately coexist.” He also argues that consequently settler colonialism is characterized by a “logic of elimination,” a sustained institutional tendency to eliminate the Natives through a variety of measures ranging from assimilation and cultural appropriation to genocidal violence. Wolfe furthermore emphasizes the permanence of settler colonialism, as “settlers

come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event” or a series of isolated events.¹¹ Arguably, settler colonialism shares ground with other forms of colonialism, but it goes beyond the rule of difference, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labor, and the coercive interference with local political and cultural structures that are so common in many colonial situations.

Principally, settler colonialism is a global historical phenomenon remaking spaces, recalibrating human relations, reinventing connections, and generating unequal power relations. It brings people together across national borders, in conflict, suppression, resistance, and mixing. Settler colonialism blurs the lines between “internal” and “external” so prevalent in national histories and problematizes the ostensibly “national” character of individual empires. As historians Sven Beckert, Antoinette Burton, Jürgen Osterhammel, and others have shown, the 19th-century world was an era of intense transnational and transimperial interconnectedness.¹² It was characterized by movement of peoples and global flows of information, ideas, and knowledge, as well as by imperial comparisons and intense, often violent, rivalries for cultural and military influence that operated on various scales from the local to the global. The transoceanic migrations, the telegraph, and the railroads, for instance, bound the world together in an unprecedented manner. They did so as British, French, German, Dutch, Japanese, and other empires scrambled for Africa, contested for Asia, extended informal influence over South America, and competed over whose explorers would first reach the most remote polar areas, most impenetrable deserts, and highest mountains. Settler colonialism was integral to the making of this competitive, integrated, and interlinked global order: the United States taking over the trans-Mississippi West, British colonists expanding exponentially in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, hundreds of thousands of Europeans imposing a settler society in French Algeria, Russian settler projects remaking the Caucasus and the Siberia, Japanese settler colonialism penetrating Korea and Manchuria, and the Germans initiating settler projects in the German–Polish borderlands and in southwest Africa.¹³

Despite these parallel trajectories of colonialism across the globe, perhaps no other national character was as deeply influenced as the American. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, a distinct “American character” that defined the United States as an exceptional nation was forged. Historians like Frederick Jackson Turner believed that

this special character derived from the westward expansion and the expanding frontier. Others argued that it was the uniquely American ideals of freedom, liberty, and the yeoman farmer, or the declaration of independence and other founding documents of the United States that formed the basis for this uniquely American experiment often described as American exceptionalism.¹⁴

These notions, however, mostly pertain to the United States. In Canada, the uniqueness may derive from the early fur trade that took the French and English to the west and the dependency on other staple products acquired from the vast Canadian wilderness. Maybe it is the 19th-century emergence of a Canada that is a distinctly French *and* English nation, or perhaps it is indeed the relationship to the wilderness that makes Canada special.¹⁵ Or maybe it is the revolution and the detachment from the British crown that makes the United States distinct, a truly American experiment, while Canada has remained an integral part of the British Commonwealth. These classic notions of identity and “American/Canadian character” have, of course, been changed by modern scholarship. Yet, some of these ideas still persist and one that carries through this volume is the quest to understand how Finns fit into the larger narrative and carve out their own version of the American dream and a unique Finnish American exceptionalism.¹⁶

Whatever the assumption or preference is, the unifying theme (force) is immigration and settler colonialism. Scholars may argue about the origins of the American or Canadian character, whether there is one or not, or their uniqueness, but undoubtedly it was the immigration experience that is common for the non-Native people of North America. Immigration does not follow single, easily explained patterns, nor is there a singular, uniform immigrant. In other words, some are preferred as settlers; others are excluded. The Chinese were excluded in the 1880s by a white settler society that did not want them but feared racial mixing and Asian takeover.¹⁷ Northern European immigrants were mostly welcomed in an effort to maintain the whiteness of the North American settler societies. Africans were taken to America against their will to work as slaves, and later their return to Africa was raised as freed Africans were seen as undesirables in a white settler project.¹⁸ Larger national, even transimperial immigration and settlement patterns, policies, and experiences can ultimately be brought down to individual level. What made people move, what pulled or pushed them to leave their homelands to seek an uncertain

future in North America or elsewhere? Indeed, individuals had as many reasons to come to America as there were people on the move. Within the North American settler experience, however, the common thread emerges from the contact and conflict with Native Americans, the capture of lands and of making them one's own. From the earliest contacts to the 21st century, settlers and their descendants have been involved in the colonizing of Indigenous peoples and dispossessing them from their homelands.

Whether knowingly or unknowingly, these individuals have been part of larger colonial processes, defined by manifest destiny, American exceptionalism, or settler colonial frameworks. In their quest for a better life, individuals may not have been interested in or aware of larger ideologies or transnational colonial processes. They may have never questioned their right to acquire "free land," yet they have played a crucial role in the development of the North American settler colonial experience. This book sets out to investigate through these settler colonial and transnational frameworks, where Finns belong in this larger North American narrative, and how Finnish society is connected to it through different threads, how Finns negotiated, benefited from, and had access to these settler colonial spaces. It also aims to highlight whether and how the long-held tradition to emphasize Finns as a different kind of immigrant is indeed more a myth than a reflection of reality. Furthermore, rather than merely exploring whether the idea of Finns as a different kind of immigrant is a myth, this book challenges it in many ways and offers an analysis of the ways in which this myth manifests itself, why it has been upheld to this day, and most importantly how it contributes to settler colonialism in North America and beyond.

Colonial Histories and Finns

Traditional histories examining immigration from Finland to North America have focused on the experiences of individuals and families, and more broadly on the history and experiences of certain Finnish communities and organizations.¹⁹ The approaches and perspectives of these studies have disconnected Finns from broader context of colonial conquest in North America. The traditional and stereotypical narrative proposes that Finns had an exceptional relationship with Indigenous peoples: Finns were compassionate toward the Natives, and

even similar to them, somehow naturally predisposed to sympathize with and understand the Natives. Finns, according to this myth, were something beyond the typical notion of benevolent colonizers, if they were colonizers at all.²⁰ Some elements of this stereotypical notion may carry historical basis, but, like other immigrants, Finns were actively involved in the settler colonial processes, and they played a role in the exploitation of nature and replacement of Indigenous peoples. This book tries, for its part, to decolonize the scholarship on Finnish migration histories, by exposing these foundational myths, by linking the Finnish experience to settler colonialism, and by treating the Finns as settler colonizers, as actively engaging the settler project.²¹

The reasons why historians working on Finnish immigration histories have until recently shied away from analysis of settler colonialism may derive from the general reluctance of approaching Finnish histories as colonial histories or to analyze past Finnish peoples in a colonial framing. As a global historical development, settler colonialism has not usually been associated with Finnish history, and to date hardly any scholars have approached Finnish history, whether its northward expansion or immigration, through the lens of settler colonialism.²² Perhaps they have not seen this relatively new field as an appropriate framing for the analysis of Finland's past. It is also possible that Finnish scholars have consciously rejected all colonial connotations in the national historiography. In this, they reflect a broader Nordic understanding of the past that shies away from colonial analysis, rejects it as improper and unsuited, and clings to notions of "exceptionalism" or "white innocence." These notions connote absence of colonial involvement in Nordic histories, meaning Nordics remain outside colonialism. Or, as Magdalena Naum and Jonas M. Nordin attest, they promote views that Nordic "participation in colonial politics was benign and their interactions with the peoples in Africa, Asia and America were gentler and based on collaboration rather than extortion and subjugation."²³ Scholars working on Nordic colonial histories have increasingly questioned this kind of thinking, exposing the rich and complex histories of Nordic colonial involvement around the world.²⁴ They have shown how Nordics actively initiated and participated in colonial projects on their own, in the European north and across the world. They have also shown how Nordic peoples acted and joined the colonial projects of other empires, how they were complicit, benefitted, and now inhabit colonial histories. They have also conducted

comparative studies across national boundaries in order to understand differences and similarities in the national histories of colonialism in the Nordic countries or between Nordic countries and the world.²⁵ Some have also investigated the Nordic experience and legacies in North America via the colonial lens.²⁶

In Finland, Leila Koivunen and Anna Rastas speak of an ongoing “colonial turn” in Finnish historical research, of a fundamental rethinking of national pasts.²⁷ And there certainly seems to be a burgeoning interest for grasping Finnish involvement in colonial ventures, ranging from the transatlantic slave trade and Caribbean slave economies to settler communities in Latin America, mining rushes in southern Africa, and involvement in King Leopold’s Congo.²⁸ Others have discussed colonialism in Finland, from the impact of colonial cultures in Finnish literature and thinking to the conquest of the Arctic north and the Sápmi, and the forced assimilation of Sami peoples.²⁹

All of this remains a contested history, and our book participates in the discussion by questioning the historical roles of Finns in the world and by linking Finland and Finns to the histories of global colonial empires. In this way, our book maps out a difficult and therefore often silenced part of Finnish history in which colonialism has played a significant function.

Finnish Settler America

This book offers a multidisciplinary perspective on understanding and problematizing Finns and North American settler colonialism. The book’s contributors include historians, area and cultural studies scholars, and literary and media scholars. Their chapters present a nuanced, multivocal, and multilayered picture of Finnishness in the settler colonial North America. The book is divided into three overlapping parts that follow the key trajectories of the settler colonialism experience: taking the land, constructing identities, and building narratives and legacies. They expose settler belonging and sense of place as result of contested connections, shifting networks, recalibrated meanings, and ongoing negotiations linking the past and the present. As settler colonialism has never ended in North America, the meaning and position of Finns in the settler colonial past and present remain pertinent, subject to reevaluation and contestation.

Part I: Taking the Land situates Finns in the historical processes of settler colonial land acquisition, knowledge production, and community building; as active participants in a system of power that contributed to the repression and displacement of Indigenous peoples. In [“Claims for Space: Unpacking Finnish Geohistorical Imaginations of the United States.”](#) Johanna Skurnik analyzes how, why, and what types of maps and geographical knowledge were used to document and position Finns in America. She shows how knowledge served to naturalize Finnish presence on the continent. Then Justin Gage presents a localized case study of Finnish land grabbing and claims for belonging in the Native spaces on Sugar Island, Michigan. Using digital methods, [“Finnish Americanism and Indigenous Land on Sugar Island, Michigan, 1915–1940”](#) investigates dreams of a farming utopia, contested land ownership, ethnic relations, and environmental changes. Taking another view of Finnish settler aspirations and thirst for land is [“Some Kind of Eldorado: Eero Erkkö and the Plan for a Finnish Settler Colony in Cuba, 1903–1905.”](#) Here Aleksi Huhta scrutinizes the rhetoric and the processes of colonial planning, as well as Finnish lives on this Caribbean island. Closing the first part is [“Finnish Utopian Communities, Historiographies, and Shapes of Settler Colonialism,”](#) where Johanna Leinonen charts Finnish migration histories and the significance of the term “utopian” in this literature. She demonstrates how the absence of a critical perspective in these writings has contributed to the idea of Finland as an “outsider” in the histories of colonialism.

Part II: Contested Identities realigns the discussion toward settler encounters and self-perceptions. These chapters expose shifting, multilayered identities and racialist thinking. Sirpa Salenius first dissects the representations of Finnish immigrants in literary fiction in [“Building a \(White\) Nation: Finns in James Kirke Paulding’s *Koningsmarke, the Long Finne* \(1823\).”](#) She looks at how the novel situates Finnish colonizers in early American society as embodiments of white innocence and benevolence. The next chapter, by Rani-Henrik Andersson and Rainer Smedman, builds on Justin Gage’s work in the first part. [“Socialist Visions of American Dreams: The Finnish Settler Lives of Oskari Tokoi and Frank Aaltonen”](#) provides a window to settler colonialism through the political activities and perceptions of two Finnish socialists. It looks at how Tokoi and Aaltonen built their identities through movement in transnational frameworks, their relationship to

land and Indigenous peoples, and understanding of settler rights. In [“Indigenous and Settler: The North American Sámi Movement.”](#) Erik Hieta probes blurred boundaries of settler and Indigenous identities and meanings, cultural practices, and ways of being in a modern colonial state. He demonstrates the fluidity of ongoing identity construction and how it draws from local and transnational sources spanning North America and Sápmi.

Part III: Settler Narratives and Legacies takes us to the realm of settler writing and memories, ethnic myths, and exploration. In [“Life Writing as a Settler Colonial Tool: Finnish Migrant-Settlers Claiming Place and Belonging.”](#) Samira Saramo exposes narrative strategies in Finnish migrant-settler works to better understand the notions of Finnish colonial complicity, exceptionalism, and belonging. Her discussion shows how family histories and autobiographical texts work in a settler colonial system. Also looking at how Finns claim a place in North America by emphasizing their “natural” connection to the environment is [“Finns and the Indigenous People in the Great Lakes Region: Playing with Settler Myths in Late 20th- and Early 21st-Century Finnish American Fiction.”](#) Here Roman Kushnir examines the persistent myth of a benevolence and a special relationship between Finnish settlers and the Indigenous peoples in recent literature. Lastly, Janne Lahti tackles settler colonial legacies and disconnects, the looting of Indigenous artefacts and questions of repatriation in [“Gustaf Nordenskiöld and the Mesa Verde: Settler Colonial Disconnects and Finnish Colonial Legacies.”](#) He studies Nordenskiöld’s narrations of Indigenous past and presents and local settlers, and his excavations and their relevance and repercussions in the present day.

Notes

- 1 On homesteads in North America, see Cannon, *Reopening the Frontier*; Frymer, *Building an American Empire*; Edwards, Friefeld, and Wingo, *Homesteading the Plains*.
- 2 See Chapters 2 and 6 in this book.
- 3 See Chapter 3 in this book.
- 4 Ipsen and Fur, "Introduction," 7. See also Naum and Nordin, "Introduction."
- 5 Our definitions of "settlers" draws on Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*; Mamdani, "When Does a Settler Become Native."
- 6 Supplanting society defined in Day, *Conquest*, 5–6.
- 7 See, for example, Merivirta, Koivunen, and Särkkä, *Finnish Colonial Encounters*; Kullaa, Lahti, and Lakomäki, *Kolonialismi Suomen rajaseuduilla*; Keskinen, "Intra-Nordic Differences"; Kullaa and Lahti, "Kolonialismi ja Suomi."
- 8 Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: Theoretical Overview*, especially 3–11; Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*; Lahti, "What Is Settler Colonialism"; Ostler and Shoemaker, "Settler Colonialism."
- 9 Ostler and Shoemaker, "Settler Colonialism." For more on Finns in Alaska see Engman, *Suureen itään*, 353–66; Oinas-Kukkonen, *Finnalaska*.
- 10 Wenzlhuemer, *Doing Global History*, especially 5–12, 19–22.
- 11 Wolfe, "Land, Labor, and Difference," especially 868; Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," especially 388. On settler colonialism as a structure, see also Kauanui, "Structure"; Tuck and Wang, "Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor"; Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, *Making Settler Colonial Space*; Coombes, *Rethinking Settler Colonialism*; Elkins and Pedersen, *Settler Colonialism*; Veracini, "Settler Colonialism: Career of a Concept"; Veracini, *The Settler Colonial Present*.
- 12 Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt*; Beckert, "American Danger"; Ballantyne and Burton, *Empires and the Reach of the Global*; Rosenberg, *World Connecting*; Hoganson and Sexton, *Crossing Empires*; Kramer, "Power and Connections"; Lahti, *American West and the World*.
- 13 On the settler colonial world, see, for example Belich, *Replenishing the Earth*; Fujikane and Okamura, *Asian Settler Colonialism*; Uchida, *Brokers of Empire*; Lu, *Making of Japanese Settler Colonialism*; Cavanagh and Veracini, *Routledge Handbook*; Castellanos, "Settler Colonialism in Latin America"; Barclay, "Settler Colonialism and French Algeria."
- 14 The quest to understand the American mind, exceptionalism, and special character were key issues for early American Studies scholars such as Vernon Louis Parrington, Henry Nash Smith, and Leo Marx. See Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*; Smith, *Virgin Land*; Marx, *Machine in the Garden*. The debate is still ongoing and for more recent scholarly works see, for example, Maddox, *Locating American Studies*; Deloria and Olson, *American Studies Guide*. For a Finnish perspective, see Andersson and Kekki, "Disciplinary Crossroads."
- 15 For the Staples theory and Laurentian thesis as explanation to the Canadian experience see, Innis, *Fur Trade in Canada*; Creighton, *Empire of the St. Lawrence*; Bonnett, *Emergence and Empire*.
- 16 For newer analysis see, for example, Fleegler, *Ellis Island Nation*; Parker, *Making Foreigners*; Fedorowich and Thompson, *Empire, Migration, and Identity*.

- 17 See, for example, Chang, *Pacific Connections*; Lahti, *American West and the World*; Lee, *At America's Gates*; Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*.
- 18 Miles, "Beyond a Boundary"; Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*.
- 19 Some works in this category include Kero, *Migration from Finland*; Kero, *Suomalaisina Pohjois-Amerikassa*; Roinila, *Finland-Swedes in Michigan*; Kostiainen, *Finns in the United States*; Kostiainen, *Finnish Identity in America*.
- 20 Huhta, *Toward a Red Melting Pot*, 389–94; Huhta, "Claiming Roots." See Chapters 2, 5, and 7 in this volume.
- 21 On decolonizing scholarship, see Kauanui, "Structure"; Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*; Wekker, *White Innocence*.
- 22 For exceptions, see Lahti, "Settler Colonial Eyes"; Kuokkanen, "Pohjoismainen asuttajakolonialismi."
- 23 Naum and Nordin, "Introduction," 4. See also Fur, "Colonialism and Swedish History"; Fur, "Colonial Fantasies." On white innocence in the Dutch colonial context, see Wekker, *White Innocence*.
- 24 Kjerland and Bertelsen, *Navigating Colonial Orders*; Fur and Hennessey, "Svensk kolonialism"; Kullaa and Lahti, "Kolonialismi ja Suomi"; Höglund and Burnett, "Nordic Colonialisms"; Gulløv et al., *Danmark og Kolonierne*; Loftsdóttir, *Crisis and Coloniality*.
- 25 Vuorela, "Colonial Complicity"; Höglund and Andersson Burnett, "Nordic Colonialisms"; Loftsdóttir and Jensen, *Whiteness and Postcolonialism*; Fur, *Colonialism in the Margins*; Lakomäki, Kylli, and Ylimaunu, "Drinking Colonialism."
- 26 Fur, "Colonial Fantasies"; Sverdljuk, Joranger, Jackson, and Kivisto, *Nordic Whiteness*; Hjorthén, *Cross-Border Commemorations*; Blanck and Hjorthén, *Swedish-American Borderlands*.
- 27 Koivunen and Rastas, "Suomalaisen historian tutkimuksen uusi käänne?"; Keskinen, "Intra-Nordic Differences."
- 28 Aaltonen and Sivonen, *Orjia ja isäntiä*; Särkkä, "Imperialists"; Särkkä, "Kolonialismin toiseus"; Aaltonen and Sivonen, *Kongon Akseli*; Hollsten and Tuori, "Avoin ja vapaa kaikille."
- 29 See, for example, Kullaa, Lahti and Lakomäki, *Kolonialismi Suomen rajaseuduilla*; Kortekangas, *Language, Citizenship, and Sámi Education*; Ranta and Kanninen, *Vastatuuleen*; Lakomäki, Aalto, and Kylli, "Näkymättömissä ja kuulumattomissa?"; Nyssönen, "Sami Counter-Narratives"; Lehtola, "Sámi Histories."

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PART I

Taking the Land

CHAPTER 1

Claims for Space

Unpacking Finnish Geohistorical Imaginations of the United States

Johanna Skurnik

Settler colonialism and European expansion resulted in the global remaking of spaces and the rearrangement of peoples, flora, and fauna across the world.¹ Numerous studies have already highlighted how cartographic framings generated knowledges that directed and depicted the socioecological dimensions of these colonial projects around the world.² Printed and manuscript geographical accounts and maps of colonized spaces produced by Europeans were the primary means of circulating and consolidating specific views of lands and peoples—in other words, shaping peoples’ mental images of the world and its spatial organization. The power of these colonial mappings rested in the claims for space that they made through their repeated arguments of corresponding with the world out there. In short, they claimed to represent the truth, as the world really was. In the colonial context, European mappings grounded the “extension of European power through space” and often functioned as tools of dispossessing Indigenous populations.³ This occurred as European maps and geographical knowledge

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often presented the lands explored, surveyed, and settled by Europeans as having been previously “unknown” and uninscribed, usually bypassing Indigenous sovereignty over the lands they occupied. Consequently, Western modes of mapping have been far from “innocent” or “objective.” In fact, they were part of the broader representational practices that contributed to the construction of specific geographies, including those that served settler colonial narratives and projects.

In this chapter I examine how, why, and what types of maps and geographical knowledge were utilized to document and position Finnish settlers in the United States. I link certain geographical writings and maps published at the end of the 19th century and during the first three decades of the 20th century to the questions of settler colonialism and ideas of whiteness. Firstly, I analyze the geographical writings of Akseli Rauanheimo (originally Järnefelt, later Järnefelt-Rauanheimo and finally Rauanheimo), a journalist and author of numerous books on Finnish Americans. Rauanheimo’s works held a significant role in positioning Finns in North America and popularizing the continent to Finnish audiences.⁴ Secondly, I examine maps that were produced in the early 1900s to showcase Finnish presence in the colony of New Sweden, established by the Swedish crown in 1638 on the banks of the Delaware River in the homelands of the Indigenous Lenapes. The maps of the Delaware colony were released to public circulation in books, magazines, and newspapers for the 1938 tercentenary celebrations of the New Sweden colony, and they served to legitimize and depict the Finnish past on the continent. Namely, they represented Finns as first-comers and pioneers in the colony. Through these two lenses I can question Finnish practices of constructing geohistorical knowledge of the North American space and how this knowledge was mobilized to naturalize Finnish presence on the continent.⁵

The central argument of the chapter is that the Finnish maps and the spread of Finnish (and Finnish American) geographical knowledge of North America formed part of the transnational social and material practices of settler colonialism. These materials had the potential to educate Finns about their roles as makers of the North American space and thus teach them about the meaning of European civilizing and modernizing practices in the world. While the Finnish writers mapped their place on the continent and positioned the roles of Finns in the developing American society, they produced writings that partook in

the marginalization of Native Americans, their ontologies of place and space and ideas about their territorial sovereignty.

In making these arguments I develop the concept of *geohistorical imaginations*. This concept is grounded by geographer Doreen Massey's and others conceptualization of geographical imaginations, which refers to the fact that much of "geography" is in our, and was in past people's, minds. Investigating the development of geographical imaginations includes analyzing how geographies have been portrayed and geographical knowledges circulated by different groups of people.⁶ In the contexts of the present chapter, it is necessary to expand the concept to include a historical aspect, that is, to capture the geohistorical imaginations that emerged as Finns discussed their roles in the history of the colonization of North America and generated print materials to ground these imaginations. By theorizing the geohistorical imaginations that the maps and texts manifested, I show how representations of the historical and contemporary North American space influenced Finnish understandings of their roles in making the modern world.⁷ Thus the concept provides me with a useful tool to combine perspectives from migration studies, settler colonial studies, and the history of geographical knowledge. By analyzing the development of Finnish and Finnish American geohistorical imaginations via specific writings and mappings in the past, then, it is possible to identify moments of Finnish colonial complicity, or, as Mai Palmberg puts it, admissions of "mental complicity with the colonial power and colonial ideology."⁸

This chapter shows that Finnish mappings adhered to the colonial cartographic frame as they partook in the capture of the North American space. Acknowledging its significance for the way Finns positioned themselves in America is significant as currently scholars and activists seek to decolonize the geographies, geohistories, and cartographies that European colonization generated in North America and elsewhere. They aim to decenter "colonialism as the primary pivot around which ways of knowing and being-in-the-world are conceived, imagined, and lived."⁹ By analyzing how colonial epistemology has grounded Finnish geohistorical imaginations concerning their roles in the making of American society, I seek to add to the burgeoning field of research on how colonial relations of power have historically infiltrated the societal structures in the Nordic countries and shaped also Finns' world views and identities.¹⁰ In-depth historical understanding of how Finns' geographical thought about the world and their relation-

ship with specific spaces has developed and changed over time contributes to unpacking what historian Gunlög Fur characterizes as the “immensely complex and ambiguous” legacies of colonialism in the Nordic sphere.¹¹

Making Finns Visible

In 1899 a sequence of geohistorical texts focusing on Finnish Americans reached the hands of the public in the Grand Duchy of Finland. Authored by Akseli Rauanheimo (at the time still Järnefelt), the texts were published as a series of ten booklets as well as a bound book, entitled *Suomalaiset Amerikassa* (Finns in America). Upon publication, Rauanheimo’s book was advertised as the first concise work concerning Finnish Americans, and Rauanheimo himself characterized it as an attempt “to shed light on the conditions of the numerous Finns” across the Atlantic.¹² Commentators deemed it essential reading for anyone considering moving to North America and thus public libraries were urged to acquire the book.¹³ While the book quickly spurred discussions concerning the cultural and social life of Finnish Americans, it was also praised by subsequent visitors to North America for its accuracy.¹⁴

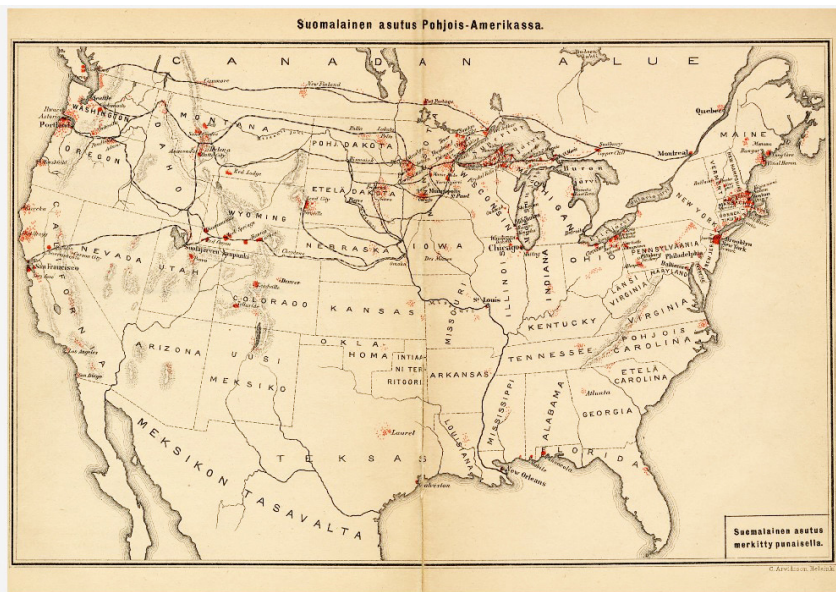
In this section I argue that *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, as well as Rauanheimo’s other writings, participated in the legitimization of European presence on the continent and contributed to the myth of the lands available for cultivation and civilization. This occurred as they implicitly and at times explicitly leaned on the European legal instrument known as the doctrine of discovery that constituted European land rights in the New World.¹⁵

Suomalaiset Amerikassa was the first of the many works that Rauanheimo published concerning Finns in North America. Rauanheimo’s expertise on the topic was grounded in his work as a journalist for the Finnish American newspapers in New York in the beginning of the 1890s, granting him access to a great variety of information on the US society and Finnish settlers. After working as the editor-in-chief for several newspapers in the Finnish region, he returned to North America in 1919, first to New York, where he worked as the director of the Suomi-bureau. In 1923 he became the first Finnish consul in Montreal, continuing as the consul-in-chief until 1932, and serving as Estonia’s consul in Canada in 1927–1932. He evolved into an active commenta-

tor on Finnish migration and Finnish–American relations as well as trying to set up a seamen’s mission in Canada.¹⁶ Arguably, his writings advanced public discussions of the economic and cultural geography of the continent in Finnish society. A common theme binding Rauanheimo’s writings together was his attempt to advance Finns’ visibility in American society.

In *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, Rauanheimo described the place of Finns in the United States and Canada, starting with a historical narrative of their arrivals in the early 17th century and proceeding to explain how Finns had come to occupy their current sites of dwelling and occupations in different parts of the continent. The publication was accompanied by numerous photographs and a map (Map 1.1) that enabled grasping Finnish presence on the continent at the time of the book’s publication, 1899. Judging by the map, Finns were present in southern Canada and every state of the United States except the Indian territory.¹⁷

The territorial divisions presented on the map reflected those in force in 1899 and the main body of the text centered on describing



Map 1.1: Rauanheimo’s *Suomalaiset Amerikassa* included a map, “Suomalainen asutus Pohjois-Amerikassa,” that showed where Finns lived in the United States and Canada.

one territory after another. The narrative informs the reader about the main historical developments of each region, with the focus being on the transformations that European settlement and the US state had brought about. Significantly, the geography that Rauanheimo constructed positioned Finns mainly as outsiders to the processes of removal and violence that the Indigenous populations had faced at the hands of the US government and other settlers. He narrated how Finns had been among the first to arrive on the continent as part of Sweden's colonial project and stressed that this primacy granted them a share of the American continent, which "the Indians had controlled ... as their vast hunting grounds."¹⁸ This characterization of Indigenous land use and the establishment of first permanent settlements referred to the legal doctrine of discovery where specific uses of land granted sovereignty over them. As Miller et al. have shown, Europeans utilized the doctrine to ground their actions in non-European countries and their domination of Indigenous populations.¹⁹ In Rauanheimo's narrative, following the logic granted by the doctrine, which at the turn of the 19th century was widely accepted and known, European settlements and cultivation of lands entitled claims to sovereignty, which the Indigenous peoples' ostensibly more mobile way of life did not.

For the most part, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa* presented the later emigrants as arriving in lands ready for cultivation and free of Indigenous presence. Thus, Rauanheimo made no direct connection between the lands utilized by the Finns and the disputes concerning land or the position of the Indigenous peoples more generally. This is most striking in the description of Finns in Minnesota as Rauanheimo made no reference to the violence between the Minnesota settlers and the Dakota Sioux during the US–Dakota War in 1862.²⁰ Indeed, any acknowledgment of the conflict only surfaces in the next chapter, concentrating further west, on Finns living in the part of the Dakota Territory that entered the union in 1899 as two separate states (North and South Dakota). Even here Rauanheimo separated the era of colonial violence from the period when Finns started to settle on these lands. He wrote:

The settlers have endured many hardships in battles against the Indians, but the war in 1862 vanquished the pride of the Sioux tribe and now it is safe to live there. There are still plenty of Indians, but they rarely have the courage to harass the whites. Now Dakota is ready to open up for cultivation.²¹

Indeed, Rauanheimo continued by explaining how the earliest Finns had settled in the area only in 1882 and that “there are many Finns in Dakota in many places. They have taken the lands without significant fortunes, so the beginning has been difficult.”²²

However, Rauanheimo also noted instances where violence had been part of the Finnish settlement process. For example, G. W. Planting from Kemijärvi, situated in the north of the Grand Duchy of Finland, made his way to Portland, Oregon, in 1877 and took up 80 acres of land 200 miles to the east of the city. However, “Indians were also living in the region, and they also wished to be the masters of the land. No wonder that skirmishes emerged.” Rauanheimo’s “skirmishes” likely refer to the Nez Perce War of 1877, and he notes that eventually the power of the army and settlers forced “the Indians to forfeit and settle for sharing their lands and back away.” Now—some twenty years later—everything was peaceful and “the old Indian fights have become sagas and adventures.”²³

This narrative practice of distancing what the Finns were now doing from the past era of violence, in which they ostensibly took no active part, is key to understanding the logic of Finnish settler colonial place-making. Gunlög Fur argues that 19th-century Swedish fiction writers utilized a similar argumentation in their discussion of Native American dispossession: no direct links were made between removals and emigration. Here, Fur stresses, the main question was whether the immigrants understood that they in fact were “tools in the politics of displacement, and sometimes one of ‘ethnic cleansing’ and how they handled that.”²⁴ Rauanheimo did not comment on the matter in any way, and, like other Finns who wrote about their travels in the United States, he presented the Indian removals as cruel administrative policies that contributed to the deterioration of the Native American cultures. These authors, including Rauanheimo, did not contemplate that Finnish presence on the continent might have contributed to the dispossession of the Indigenous populations.²⁵

Rauanheimo’s writings arguably gained a position to shape Finnish understandings about the North American continent. As the decades passed, Rauanheimo’s knowledge gained further prominence: by the beginning of the 1900s his expertise was already being used in the construction of information concerning North America for geography textbooks in Finnish schools.²⁶ Later, Rauanheimo’s influential position in constructing geographical knowledge about the United States

became visible for example via the coauthored chapter he contributed to the volume four of the popular Finnish publication on world geography entitled *Maapallo* (The Globe), edited by professor of geography Johan E. Rosberg and Viljo Tolvanen and published in 1927.²⁷

An important theme in Rauanheimo's later writings concerned the naming of places, and in particular the visibility of Finnish toponyms on the map of the United States. For example, in 1920 Rauanheimo published an article in *Kansan henki*, a Finnish American periodical based in Duluth, Minnesota. Rauanheimo's central argument was that Finnish toponyms should be preserved in order to mark the position of Finns in the "arena of nationalities" that he considered the United States to be. According to Rauanheimo, there were already regions, such as the site of early Finnish settlement at the mouth of the Delaware River where all the signs of Finns had disappeared. He stressed that "it was important to preserve the memory of the Finnish dwellings for the sake of Finland and the settlement history of America for the next generations."²⁸

One way to secure this was to add Finnish names on maps and thus inscribe them in the "official documents." When Finns were, according to Rauanheimo, "still the majority" in new settlements, it was logical to ensure that these sites would "acquire Finnish names on the maps."²⁹ Thereby, adding Finnish nomenclature on the US maps functioned as a means for expressing nationality in a transimperial space. According to Rauanheimo there should be absolutely no difficulty in placing Finnish names on the maps. Indeed, the maps already contained numerous toponyms deriving from the Native Americans, which Rauanheimo categorized as foreign as the Finnish toponyms:

There is no reason to fear that the American civil servant would not approve foreign toponyms. The American map is full of Indian names, most of which are so long and difficult to spell that you can hardly find more awkward names in the Finnish language.³⁰

Naming of places is intrinsically bound with questions of identity and collective memory, and in the history of colonialism it was at the core of the social production of places and spaces for the newcomers.³¹ In essence, Rauanheimo's arguments for the need to secure the "memories" of Finnish settlement history on official maps was one of the many material practices of settler colonialism that demonstrated the kind of

remaking of geographical spaces that European invasion caused. They indicate Rauanheimo's understanding of the power of naming and mappings in manifesting influence in the world. His desire to inscribe the North American space "officially" with Finnish nomenclature that is no "more awkward" than the Native American toponyms already present on the maps demonstrates how in his view Finns were entitled to be visible in the imagined nation of the United States on this fundamental, yet quotidian level. Rauanheimo's writings demonstrate how the discursive and material processes of knowledge production and spatial inscription contributed to the cultural politics of making claims over space. Indeed, the politics of spatial inscription is, as geographers Reuben Rose-Redwood, Derek Alderman, and Maoz Azaryahy summarize, central to the construction of "demarcated spatial identities," in this case those of Finns in North America.³²

The tireless promotion of Finnish visibility in North America related closely to Rauanheimo's general endeavor of establishing a place for the Finns in the history of colonization. Indeed, the toponyms and their preservation formed part of his broader mission of raising awareness of how Finns had contributed to the development of civilization in North America. For Rauanheimo the map of the United States, as he noted in a speech given at the World's Fair in Philadelphia in 1926, testified for the different roles and contributions that each nationality had made for America.³³ In his thinking and writing, Rauanheimo even played with the idea that Finns had inhabited North America before the Native Americans. Indeed, he was evidently impressed by the conjectures presented by a D. A. Robertson in the *Journal of American Geographical Society of New York* in 1874 that some of the prehistoric mounds in the Mississippi valley would have been built by ancestors of the "Finnish race." Although Rauanheimo was aware that no actual historical evidence for Robertson's claims existed, he utilized the idea rhetorically when formulating his arguments that "Finns were amongst [the] first when the white race from Europe started to inhabit America."³⁴ In sum, Finnish primacy among early white settlers had generated their rights for later settlement and entitled them to visibility. As we shall see in the next section, Rauanheimo's conceptualizations of the early American space became increasingly influential in the 1930s.

Commemorating Finnish Settlers of 1638

Akseli Rauanheimo's writings contributed to the growing public awareness of Finns' role in the history of the Delaware settlement. Indeed, the discussions concerning Finnish visibility on maps reached new heights in the context of the Delaware tercentenary in the 1930s. The position of Finns in the Swedish colony in Delaware has been historically important for the making of the Finnish American identity. In 1937 the US government invited Finland to participate in the celebrations alongside Sweden. Finns and Finnish Americans reacted enthusiastically to the invitation, not least because it enabled Finns to discard the long-circulating notions of Finns as foreigners in the United States. Moreover, for the Finns, the invitation proved that they were among the founding peoples of the United States and elevated their racial status.³⁵ Although Finns' roles in the planning or the execution of the commemoration were not as central as those of the Swedes, participating in the acts of commemoration marked the production and utilization of different types of materials ranging from stamps to monuments, books, and maps to communicate about Finnish history on the American continent.³⁶

In this section I argue that for Finns the maps that were produced to depict the history of the Delaware settlement were important tools for inscribing the early modern space and narrating Finnish roles in the colony of New Sweden. They enabled arguing for the "discoveries" that Finns had made and legitimized Finnish claims for the transformative power they had had in the building of the settler society. Indeed, they testify how the histories of the settlements in America have had meanings well beyond American history and have been utilized, as Adam Hjorthén has argued, by many groups "in the promotion of social, political, and commercial relations across national borders."³⁷ Furthermore, as the maps advanced claims over the North American space, they also became important tools for reifying ideas about peaceful cohabitation with the Delaware Lenapes. Doing so, these maps can be regarded as further testimonials of how the developing geohistorical imaginations were rooted in colonial perceptions of space and the "norming of space" by adhering to what philosopher Charles W. Mills has conceptualized as the racial contract. Indeed, the maps demarcated between "civil" and "wild" spaces which according to Mills was central to the racialized norming of space and European epistemology and ontology.³⁸

The maps published in both the Finnish and Finnish American newspapers ranged from copies of maps produced originally in the 17th century to those drawn in the 20th century to commemorate the first landings and the settlements that followed. The former included a map by Swedish surveyor Peter Lindström of New Sweden, and another made by the Dutch depicting New Holland.³⁹ Lindström's maps were also part of the official cartographic materials that the Swedes displayed at the Tercentenary Exhibition held in Philadelphia for three weeks in the summer of 1938.⁴⁰

Finnish journalists utilized these maps as historical documentation: the readers' attention was drawn to the toponyms that could be found on the maps. For example, an article published in *Kaiku*, a small newspaper based in Oulu, northern Finland, summarized how the existence of Finnish placenames testified to Finnish cultural influence in the Delaware colony:

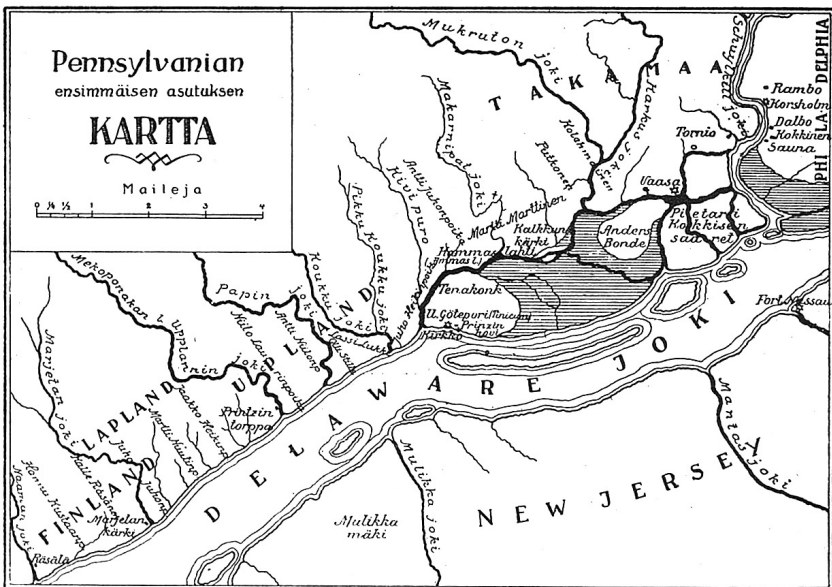
The settlers established Kristiina and two other small settlements, called Finland and Upland. In old Dutch maps, where today the metropolis of Philadelphia is, there is the word "saeno" – a small but telling evidence of the role of Finns as cultural pioneers in this area.⁴¹

At times, the maps of the Swedish and Dutch colonies were confused with each other. For example, in June 1938 *Helsingin Sanomat* published a map showing "New Netherland" and it was presented as "the map of the New Sweden colony" and the reader's attention was drawn to the familiar word "Sauno, which may well be a memory of a Finnish sauna."⁴²

In contrast to these maps, where the signs of Finnish presence were somewhat sporadic, the historical maps made in the 1930s filled the land with Finnish toponyms and information concerning their activities. For their makers and users these maps were tools to claim the historical space for Finns. They differed from the Swedish maps, such as historian Amandus Johnson's map of the Delaware settlement that represented the space mainly as Swedish, joined by the English and Dutch, but pinpointing the dwellings at "Finland," as well as presenting some Indigenous toponyms.⁴³ One of the Finnish maps, which was published in several newspapers in Finland, was entitled "The First Settlements of Pennsylvania" and it depicts a portion of the Delaware River. It highlights the presence of Finns in the Swedish settlements.

When it appeared in an article published in 1936 in *Suomen Kuvalehti*, its author, using the pen name Yrjänä, utilized it to argue that Finns should be included in the tercentenary celebrations, which they at the time were not (see Map 1.2).⁴⁴ Yrjänä’s thinking echoed those of Finnish Americans who had for years argued that Finns should be included in the celebrations. The official invitation to participate in the planning of the jubilee only came in 1937.⁴⁵ Yrjänä noted how “the placenames clearly show that Finns were in majority in the Swedish settlement.” Indeed, the map was filled with placenames recognizable to the ordinary Finn: “Finland,” “Lapland,” “Takamaa,” and “Mulikka mäki.”⁴⁶

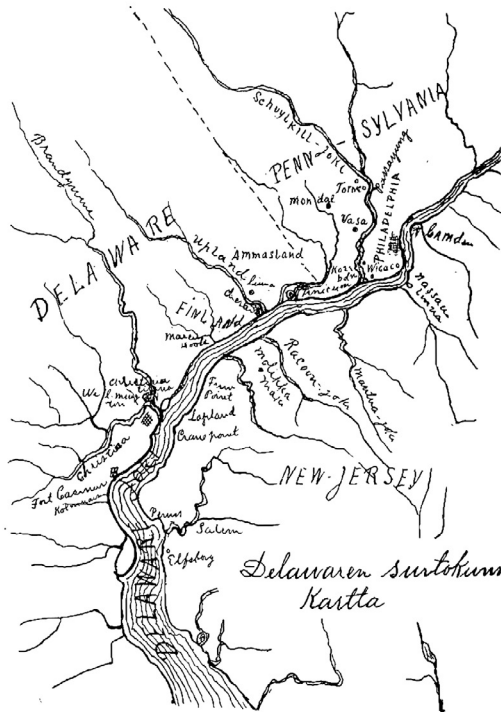
It is significant that the map in question was a copy of a map that had first been published in 1921 in Rauanheimos’s historical novel *Uuteen maailmaan* (Into the New World). The toponyms derived from Rauanheimos’s research on the history of Finns in the Swedish colony.⁴⁷ The map was likely authored by Rauanheimo himself. Rauanheimos’s archive, today part of the collections of the National Library of Finland, contains manuscript sketches of the map that would accompany the novel.⁴⁸ By printing this, Rauanheimos’s map, originally constructed



Map 1.2: Map showing the first settlements in Pennsylvania. *Suomen Kuvalehti*, no. 17 (1936).

for a novel alongside articles detailing the history of New Sweden, was transformed into a document and, as we have seen above, it was utilized to construct arguments about early Finnish presence in America. Furthermore, Rauanheimo's influence is visible in the contents of the articles that discussed Finnish involvement in the Swedish colony. Indeed, in addition to the novel, he published articles and other texts in Finnish in the 1920s that discussed the history of Finnish settlers in America.⁴⁹

One of the maps visualizing New Sweden in the Finnish press was a copy of a map that the self-taught historian Salomon Ilmonen had published already in 1919 in his book on the history of Finnish Americans (the book had a foreword by Rauanheimo).⁵⁰ The black and white map (Map 1.3) is titled "The Map of the Delaware Settlement." It shows the extent of the Delaware River and places the state names of Pennsyl-



Map 1.3: Map by Samuel Ilmonen showing the Delaware River Valley. It was originally published in his 1919 book but reproduced in 1938 in Finnish media, for instance in the periodical *Suomen Silta*.

vania, Delaware, and New Jersey in addition to the placenames such as Finland, Lapland, and Vasa. Ilmonen's style is somewhat hazy and not all details of the lettering are legible. In fact, the map resembles a draft rather than a polished map ready for publication.⁵¹

Neither of these maps explicitly noted the presence of Indigenous populations in the area, like Amandus Johnson's map from 1911 that included some Indigenous toponyms alongside European ones. In the Finnish maps the Indigenous toponyms were present, yet they were not demarcated as such. Instead, the Indigenous populations were described in the accompanying texts and the images that were published by the Finnish press. Consequently, on these maps the North American space was emptied from its existing inhabitants and their toponyms were taken from their context in a similar fashion as colonial mappings have been noted to do in Australia and Africa, for instance.⁵² However, when read together with the accompanying texts, two discourses emerged regarding the encounters between the Lenape, the Iroquois, and the Finns. Some articles sensationalized the Finns' voyage to the New World and noted that the rough voyage included fear of pirates and "facing the Indians."⁵³ A caricature was published in the newspaper *Pohjois-Savo* in 1938 depicting an imaginary scene of people from Rautalampi encountering the "feared" North American Indians and stating that the Finnish ancestors had come "from Rautalammi to establish the American empire."⁵⁴

Some of the articles, however, stressed the amiable relations that were formed and how Finns were able to maintain a more amicable relationship, especially with the Lenape, than, for example, the English.⁵⁵ As Aleksi Huhta has recently summarized, the narrative of Finnish–Native American friendship coincided with that of the Swedes and had already been constructed in the earlier Delaware histories, like Ilmonen's (1919).⁵⁶ Such anecdotes concerning the friendly relations also appeared in Rauanheimo's early writings. In *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, Rauanheimo narrated the beginning of Finnish settler presence in North America in 1638 through the lens of exceptionalism. He noted how the Swedish convoy that arrived on the Delaware River formed an "eternal friendship" with the Native Americans. They purchased the lands from the local inhabitants with their goods and "surveyor, lieutenant Kling made the maps and placed statues with the Queen's emblem." Significantly, he notes that the good relations with the Indigenous inhabitants continued, "which was peculiar as the

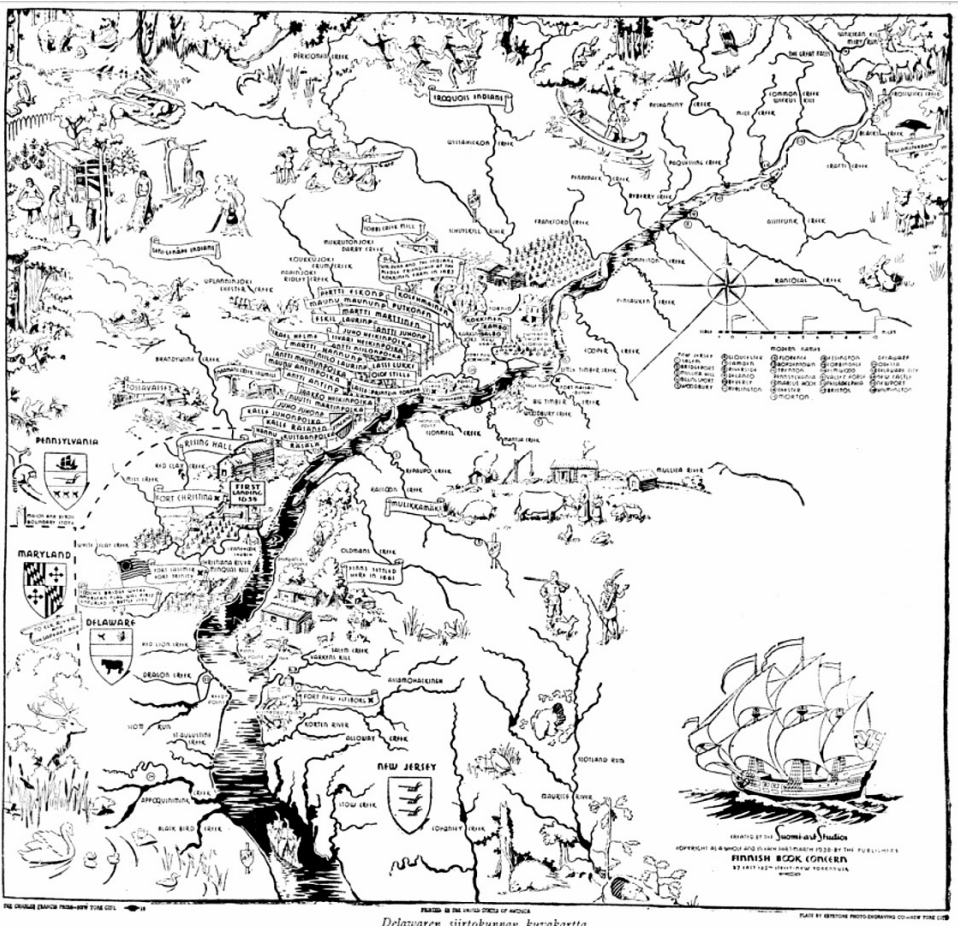
other settlements in America were almost continuously on the war-path” with them.⁵⁷

These ideas of friendship and honest deals with the Indigenous inhabitants formed the basis for Finnish notions of moral superiority and exceptionalism pertaining to their historic presence in America during the tercentenary celebrations. This contrasted with the Finnish awareness of the marginalized position of Native Americans in contemporary American society. Finnish literature and nonfiction publications included texts that noted the rights of Native Americans as the original owners of the land and their unfortunate fates in the face of European expansion.⁵⁸ For example, in the missionary publications disseminated in Finland by the Finnish Missionary Society, the Native Americans were positioned as the victims of the greedy non-Finnish settlers and the evils of colonialism. Native American presence was depicted on the highly popular missionary map of the world, published first in 1859, by inscribing “Indians” along the western half of North America.⁵⁹ Similarly, Native American marginalization was prominently documented in early 20th-century Finnish popular geography books. One of them was the already mentioned text on North America by Rauanheimo in the popular geography book *Maapallo*.⁶⁰ However, any empathy was countered with ideas of the Native Americans’ “heathenism” and the premise of Europeans (including Finns) civilizing the “wild” lands, an argument that was also part of the doctrine of discovery.⁶¹

The often-repeated narrative of friendly beginnings between the Finnish colonists and the Indigenous inhabitants, the Lenape, distanced Finns from processes of settler colonial replacement that occurred as Europeans captured land. In fact, in Finnish American imagination the friendly beginnings transformed into an idea of peaceful cohabitation that was presented on a pictorial map produced for the tercentenary celebrations. The map (Map 1.4), entitled “Delaware siirtokunnan kuvakartta” (“Pictorial map of the Delaware settlement”), was sold at the celebration and also printed in whole or partly in Finnish newspapers in 1938.⁶² The map exemplifies the widespread use of the frontier imagery.⁶³ It shows the Delaware valley filled with Finnish place names alongside images of the typical dwellings, animals, and people. Significantly, the map shows Native Americans in three ways. On the right side, one Native American is presented to converse with a Finn, as if they were making agreements about the uses of the land, at top

left scenes from the Lenape way of life are shown with people cooking and building. At the center top a group of Iroquois are shown dancing fiercely. Consequently, the map communicates an idea of somewhat peacefully shared land where everyone has their place. The Finns are portrayed as civilizing the land in every way and the map places information about significant dates, sites, and people.

As Huhta has argued, it was difficult for Finns to make claims for the Delaware colony as it was named New Sweden, not New Finland.⁶⁴



Map 1.4: The pictorial map of the Delaware settlement shows the numerous Finns cultivating the lands and living in harmony with the Lenapes. *Uusi Suomi*, May 20, 1938.

However, I argue that by generating cartographic narratives of Finnish activities in the North American space, as well as by naming the site the “first settlements of Pennsylvania,” Finns were able to effectively connect themselves to the landscapes and distance the colonization project from the Swedish crown. For the Finns, the making of the maps was part of a national project; however, simultaneously they were part of the broader Western epistemological and legal project that allowed conceptualizing the land as commodity that could be rationalized, owned, and turned into property. Adhering to the “first settlements” connected the map to the legal fiction of the doctrine of discovery that bypassed Indigenous relations to land and replaced them with a capitalist model of improvement and private property.⁶⁵

Arguably, the Finnish settlers participated in this project as they consented to the racialization of space as formulated by Mills: they benefitted from the power position that performing whiteness and civility obtained them. I do not claim that these processes were homogenous or that these materials would always have shaped the minds and mental images of different individuals in a similar manner. The Finnish geographical imaginations concerning North America existed in the plural as they were shaped by the individuals’ characteristics and being in the world.

Moreover, these representational practices endured and gained new lives later in another commemoration. For example, a slightly altered version of the pictorial jubilee map was utilized in the American Revolution Bicentennial in 1976. The map was now prominently entitled “The First Permanent Settlements on the Delaware.” It also included information about the birthplace of John Morton, whose role in the signing of the declaration of independence was highlighted. The right side of the map was appended with an extensive narrative of the Delaware colony, Finnish names in the area, Finnish contributions to the Americas, a discussion on the role of John Morton, and the historical events leading to the presidency of George Washington.⁶⁶ The continued use of the map almost 40 years later testifies to its significance as an effective material of the Finnish (American) geohistorical imaginations that were built during the first decades of the 20th century.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored how geographical texts and maps represented the historical roots of Finns in America and made them visible on the map of the United States, in essence to map a Finnish history in settler colonial North America and to carve Finns a place on the continent. My analysis shows how Finnish geohistorical imaginations developed through an engagement with the settler colonial cartographic frame as Finnish presence entangled with questions of colonial violence and land ownership in multifaceted ways. On the one hand, identifying the long Finnish roots as part of the *first white settlements* on the continent was crucial. Finns, whose own racial position was ambiguous, desired a place alongside other white European nationalities in order to claim roles in the building of the US society and in transforming the land from empty wilderness to cultivated civilized space. The mappings that were produced to celebrate the Delaware tercentenary are especially telling about this urge to establish a role for Finns in American whiteness. They narrated how Finns had partaken in transforming the lands into productive resources and captured the processes of making the space legible. Combined with materials that Akseli Rauanheimo generated concerning Finnish migrants' contributions to contemporary America, the message became clear. Finns had transformed the lands into civilized spaces and continued to influence this process. They had a legitimate role in the building of the settler society, past and present.

Consequently, the mappings testified for Finns' claims for space in North America in a particular manner. They outsourced violence and distanced settler colonial conquest of Native American polities onto other Europeans. The Finns were innocent, and thus unlike other whites in the US. The geohistorical imaginations that were fueled by the maps and texts analyzed in this chapter presented the early settlers living in harmony with the Indigenous populations of the Delaware River and referred to the hostilities toward them mainly as horrors that other Europeans and later the American state had done. In these materials Finns were distanced from the social structures that legitimized the capture of lands and the destruction of the Indigenous cultures and being in the world, yet at the same time they presented Finns participating in the Western project of fixing the defective spaces that the Native Americans had been incapable of civilizing. Thus, I argue, the

maps and textual mappings exemplify how popular geohistories and geographies of Finns in North America consented to the spatial regime of Mills's racial contract. By placing these maps in the context of colonial practices of making ("civilizing") space, in this chapter I have demonstrated that they were not mere decoration, for they allowed Finns to map themselves onto the North American terrain and make claims for spaces of their own.

Notes

- 1 The research for this contribution has been carried out with the generous support of the Academy of Finland, grant number 331899.
- 2 For influential studies concerning the relationship between mapping, empires, colonization, and the making of space see e.g., Edney, *Mapping an Empire*; Burnett, *Masters of All They Surveyed*; Akerman, *Imperial Map*; Banivanua Mar and Edmonds, *Making Settler Colonial Space*; Blais, Deprest, and Singaravelou, *Territoires Impériaux*; Craib, "Cartography and Decolonization."
- 3 Sluyter, "Colonialism and Landscape," 410.
- 4 For clarity, I will use the surname that Akseli settled on, that is, Rauanheimo.
- 5 Existing research on the mappings analyzed in this chapter is marginal. See e.g., Kero, *Suureen länteen*, 20.
- 6 Massey, *Samanaikainen tila*. See also Massey, *For Space*; Gregory, *Geographical Imaginations*; Gregory, "Geographical Imagination."
- 7 Currently, scholars only utilize the concept of geohistorical imaginations sporadically. For example, Craib mentions it, but does not develop it; see Craib, "Nationalist Metaphysics."
- 8 Palmberg, "Nordic Colonial Mind," 78.
- 9 Rose-Redwood et al., "Decolonizing the Map," 152.
- 10 E.g., Merivirta, Koivunen, and Särkkä, *Finnish Colonial Encounters*; Lahti and Kullaa, "Suomi ja kolonialismi (Finland and Colonialism)."
- 11 Fur, "Colonial Fantasies," 13.
- 12 "Suomalaiset Amerikassa," 12–15; Järnefelt, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, 4.
- 13 Leppänen, "Siirtolaisuus ja nuorisoseurat," 109.
- 14 Hjelt, "Amerikansuomalaisia tervehtimässä"; "Suomalaisten seurakunta- ja raitiusharrastuksesta Amerikassa."
- 15 For the doctrine of discovery, see Miller et al., *Discovering Indigenous Lands*.
- 16 See copy of Rauanheimo's letter to the Finnish Missionary Society, May 8, 1926.
- 17 Järnefelt, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*. All translations from Finnish are mine.
- 18 Järnefelt, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, 7.
- 19 For a summary of how the definition and application of the doctrine has evolved from the 5th century, see Miller et al., *Discovering Indigenous Lands*, 3–15.
- 20 Järnefelt, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, 122–45.
- 21 Järnefelt, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, 146.
- 22 Järnefelt, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, 149.
- 23 Järnefelt, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, 220. See also Rauanheimo's description of violence during the expansion of the settlements in California in the 1840s and

- the early arrival of Finns in the 1850s, Järnefelt, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, 180–84. For the Nez Perce War see West, *Last Indian War*.
- 24 Fur, “Colonial Fantasies,” 24.
- 25 See, for example, Finnish feminist Alexandra Gripenberg’s comments about the position of the Indigenous population in her travel account published in Gripenberg, *Halfjär i Nya Werlden*, 154.
- 26 See Favorin, *Maantiето*.
- 27 Rauanheimo et al., “Ameriikan Yhdysvallat.”
- 28 Rauanheimo, “Suomalaiset paikannimet Amerikassa,” 6–7.
- 29 Rauanheimo, “Suomalaiset paikannimet Amerikassa,” 6–7.
- 30 Rauanheimo, “Suomalaiset paikannimet Amerikassa,” 6–7.
- 31 For a classic study on colonialism and making space, see Carter, *Road to Botany Bay*. See also Lewis and Wigen, *Myth of Continents*. For the North American context, see White and Findlay, *Power and Place*.
- 32 Rose-Redwood, Alderman, and Azaryahu, “Geographies,” 454.
- 33 “Philadelphians and Guests.”
- 34 Draft papers “Dr. D. A. Robertson” and “Finns in America.” See Robertson, “Pre-historic Inhabitants of the Mississippi Valley.”
- 35 Huhta, “Claiming Roots,” 149–53. See also Kostiaainen, “Delaware Colonists.”
- 36 For the Swedish commemoration of 1938 see Hjorthén, *Cross-Border Commemorations*.
- 37 Hjorthén, *Cross-Border Commemorations*, 3.
- 38 Mills, *Racial Contract*, 18, 41–53. See also Berglund’s recent study where she develops Mills’s theory of the racial contract in the context of Norwegian migrants in the United States: Berglund, “Norwegian Migration,” 18–19.
- 39 Yrjänä, “Juhlitaan, mutta kuka juhlii?”; “Delaware 1638–1938,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, June 28, 1938.
- 40 Björkblom, *New Sweden Historical Exhibit 1638–1938*, 10, 50–53.
- 41 “Uuden Ruotsin suomalaiset: Delawaren siirtokunnan 300-vuotisjuhlan johdosta,” *Kaiku*, June 28, 1938, 5.
- 42 “Delaware 1638–1938,” *Helsingin Sanomat*, June 28, 1938, 9.
- 43 See maps in Johnson, *Swedish Settlements*, 496; Johnson, *Den Första Svenska Kolonien i Amerika*, 209.
- 44 Yrjänä, “Juhlitaan, mutta kuka juhlii?” 609. This map also circulated in other papers; see “12 retkikuntaa lähti Suomi-Ruotsista asuttamaan Delaware-joen seutua 1600-luvulla,” *Pohjois-Savo*, July 3, 1938; *Delaware-Albumi*.
- 45 For the Finnish inclusion in the celebrations, see Engman, “Dragkampen.”
- 46 Yrjänä, “Juhlitaan, mutta kuka juhlii?” 609.
- 47 Järnefelt Rauanheimo, *Uuteen maailmaan*.
- 48 Coll. 181.15, Archive of Akseli Rauanheimo (Järnefelt), National Library of Finland.
- 49 Rauanheimo, “Rautalammin lahja Amerikalle”; Järnefelt-Rauanheimo, *Suomi ja Amerikka*, 9–15.
- 50 Ilmonen, *Amerikan suomalaisten historiaa I*, 16.
- 51 “Delaware 1638–1938,” *Suomen Silta*, 1938, 5. See also Oskari Nousiainen, “Delawaren suomalaiset Pietari Kalmin kuvaamina,” *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, July 2, 1938, 6. A further similar map of the colony of New Sweden, written in English,

- was published in Martti Kerkkonen, "Delaware-minnet och Finland," *Hufvudstadsbladet*, June 26, 1938, 3.
- 52 Ryan, *Cartographic Eye*; Etherington, *Mapping Colonial Conquest*.
- 53 "12 retkikuntaa lähti Suomi-Ruotsista," 5.
- 54 "Pohjois-Savon päivänpiirtoja n:o 747," *Pohjois-Savo*, February 22, 1938, 2.
- 55 E.g., "Uuden Ruotsin suomalaiset: Delawaren siirtokunnan 300-vuotisjuhlan johdosta," *Kaiku*, June 28, 1938, 5; Yrjö Rauanheimo, "Delaware-joella 300 vuotta sitten," *Ilta-Sanomat*, June 30, 1938.
- 56 Huhta, "Claiming Roots." For the persistence of the Swedish historical representations of the friendly relations with the Indigenous populations, see Hjorthén, *Cross-Border Commemorations*, especially Chapter 3 and 181–88.
- 57 Järnefelt, *Suomalaiset Amerikassa*, 9. See Järnefelt Rauanheimo, *Uuteen maailmaan*, 9, 180–81.
- 58 E.g. Campe, *Amerikan löytö*, 95–96, 152.
- 59 *Maailman kartta lähetys-toimesta*; *Ewankelinen lähetys*; *Selitys lähetys-toimen kartalle*.
- 60 Rauanheimo et al., "Ameriikan Yhdysvallat."
- 61 Miller et al., *Discovering Indigenous Lands*, 8.
- 62 See "Ikkuna 300 vuotta vanhaan menneisyyteen," *Uusi Suomi*, May 20, 1938. "Delaware-siirtokunnan historiaa kuvakartalla," *Helsingin Sanomat*, May 20, 1938. "Delaware-siirtokunnan historiaa kuvakartalla," *Uudenmaan Sanomat*, May 21, 1938; "Delaware-siirtokunnan historia kuvakarttana," *Peltomies*, May 25, 1938. "Unkarilainen suomalais-ruotsalaisen siirtolaislaivan kapteenina."
- 63 Kostiaainen, "Delaware Colonists," 33; Huhta, "Claiming Roots," 153–57.
- 64 Huhta, "Claiming Roots," 149–50.
- 65 E.g. Weaver, *Great Land Rush*; Miller et al., *Discovering Indigenous Lands*, 7.
- 66 *The First Permanent Settlements on the Delaware*, 1976, SMMA201301:69, The Maritime Museum of Finland, Kotka, Finland.

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CHAPTER 2

Finnish Americanism and Indigenous Land on Sugar Island, Michigan, 1915–1940

Justin Gage

In 1915, Finns began migrating to Sugar Island, Michigan, a nearly 50-square-mile island that sits in the St. Marys River along the US–Canadian border (Map 2.1).¹ Sugar Island had been home to Anishinaabe Ojibwe (Chippewa) peoples for thousands of years, but their lands had been persistently taken from them since the arrival of white Americans in the early 1800s. In the 20th century, dozens of Finnish families changed the island once again, continuing processes of settler colonialism. Finnish success on Sugar Island came at the expense of the Anishinaabe families there (which included transborder people of mixed Ojibwe, Ottawa, and European ancestry). With the help of federal and state programs, Finns accumulated a disproportionate amount of land in a short amount of time and used it for farming, logging, and other extractive industries, altering the ecosystems important for Anishinaabe subsistence.² With a developing economy, Finns seized the labor market, putting Anishinaabe workers at a significant disadvantage, further damaging Indigenous livelihoods and political power.

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When Finns first settled, Indigenous families still represented more than a third of the local population (which also included people of white American, British, and Canadian ancestry), giving them political sway. But, as more and more Finns arrived, Indigenous influence in the local government diminished. Finns retooled the local government to work for them, pushing for road construction that put money into their pockets. The new roads and a ferry connected Sugar Island with the surrounding Sault Ste. Marie region. By the late 1930s, Anishinaabe islanders had lost ground to the white settlers. In 1938, the Indigenous population held just 4% of Sugar Island's private acreage and 2% of its croplands, even though they represented at least 24% of the population (in 1940).³ On the other hand, Finnish-born Americans, who represented just 22% of Sugar Island's population, held nearly 30% of the island's private acreage and 35.5% of its croplands.

The ideas of the Sugar Island Finns about their settlement, on what it meant and what it should accomplish, reflected American notions of the frontier spirit and white exceptionalism. Although many Native-born white Americans believed that Finnish immigrants were racially inferior and suited for a lower-class, laboring existence in the United States, Finnish Americans themselves held a variety of visions of what their purpose in America should be, or what I call their own notions of "Finnish Americanism."⁴ Some Finns believed that their people possessed unique characteristics that gave them an exceptional role to play in American progress.



Map 2.1: Sugar Island, Michigan. Map by Justin Gage.

Among the Finns migrating to Sugar Island, there was the belief that they would prove their compatibility as white Americans and contribute to American progress by converting a wilderness into a developed settlement. Finnish-Americanism on Sugar Island supported and sustained 20th-century settler colonial replacement. The Sugar Island settlement was choreographed by Frank Aaltonen, who believed that the Finnish race, as he saw it, had “the blood of true pioneers.”⁵ He claimed that his countrymen had “never known of fear of the wilderness,” and they were “ready to tackle any obstacles in the forest.”⁶ Finnish immigrants, like Native-born white Americans, had the talent and an innate drive to conquer the land. Even though 600 people lived on Sugar Island when the Finns arrived, Aaltonen saw himself as an actual colonizer of a “wilderness.” In fact, when Aaltonen filled out his draft card in 1917, he listed his “Present Occupation” as “Farmer and Colonizer.”⁷

Even though millions of Americans were heading to cities during this era, Aaltonen was determined to create a farming colony for like-minded Finns, regardless of the desires and opinions of the local Anishinaabeg. For Aaltonen, the promise of America was tied to the land, but because of the predispositions of those already living on it, the land was not being put to proper use. Sugar Island would only benefit his community, he thought, if it became civilized through the clearing of forest, the expansion of agriculture, the construction of roads, and the creation of a ferry that would finally unite Sugar Island with the rest of the United States. By the 1930s, much of what he hoped had been accomplished.

Taking Indigenous Lands

Frank Aaltonen immigrated to the United States as a young man in 1905 and, like many Finns, decided to go to Michigan. Before his new life on Sugar Island, he worked in the mines for less than two years and then as a union organizer for the Western Federation of Miners from 1908 to 1913. Like millions of other white Americans who settled on western lands between 1862 and 1934, Frank Aaltonen got some free land from the US government.⁸ He made a 40-acre homestead claim on Sugar Island in September 1915, which may have made him the first Finnish resident in Sugar Island history. His brother Toivo claimed a 24-acre plot. The 1862 Homestead Act offered settlers up to 160 acres of free land if the settler resided on and made improvements to that

acreage for five years. Around 1.6 million families, almost all of them white, took advantage of the Homestead Act, which legally redistributed 246 million acres of lands formerly held by Native Americans to non-Natives (nearly 10% of all the land in the United States). After five years on their respective claims, the Aaltonen brothers were given their deeds. Toivo immediately sold his land to his brother. Four other Finnish families took advantage of the remaining homestead land on Sugar Island after the Aaltonens.⁹

This path to land ownership existed because of the 19th-century colonial policies of the US government, which were driven, in part, by settler demands for land. The acreage of Sugar Island became federal property after the Treaty of Washington in 1836 (although the ownership of the island was still being contested with Canada), which ceded nearly fourteen million acres of land (37% of what is now the state of Michigan) from Anishinaabe (Ojibwe and Ottawa) nations. Every Native American in those fourteen million acres were to lose their right to live there in 1841, a detail in the treaty that the US Congress added only after the treaty was agreed upon. The Anishinaabeg that remained without their own land deeds would be forced to relocate southwest to the Missouri River country. There would be no reservation on Sugar Island or in the region around Sault (pronounced “Soo”) Ste. Marie, Michigan, the closest center of trade to Sugar Island and what is now the second largest town in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.¹⁰

Ojibwes and Ottawas objected to this injustice, which the US government resolved with another injustice. The US government offered Ojibwes and Ottawas individually held allotments of land in and around the lands that they lost, just 40 acres for an individual and 80 acres for a family. The 1855 Treaty of Detroit, which was also fraudulently altered by the US government, set up this redistribution and reserved 2,600 acres on Sugar Island, but it also prevented allottees from having title to their land for ten years.¹¹ From the perspective of the US government, the treaty also dissolved tribal organizations among the Ojibwe and Ottawa Anishinaabeg, eliminating their relationship with Indian Affairs and the protections from the authority of the state of Michigan that came with it.¹²

Moreover, on Sugar Island and in the surrounding area, Anishinaabeg did not receive their allotments until 1872, a decade after most of the northern shoreline of the island had been settled by whites. But, even after the allotments were made, most Anishinaabeg did not live

on their allotments. Instead, they lived near the St. Marys River, where they could continue fishing to supplement their agriculture and foraging.¹³ The Homestead Act brought more white Americans onto Sugar Island and the population grew from 238 in 1870 to 544 in 1880. Still, the island remained a rural, sparsely populated place. When Finnish Americans began arriving in the late 1910s, the population consisted of just 620 people.¹⁴ But the arrival of Finnish settlers perpetuated the process of land loss for Sugar Island's Ojibwes.

The Coming of the Finns

In his own unpublished memoir, Frank Aaltonen recalled his first encounter with Sugar Island in the early summer of 1915, as a passenger on a steamer boat.¹⁵ Aaltonen noticed the island and asked another passenger about it. The man said, "oh, it's a good size island, some Indians there, but the land is rocky."¹⁶ The answer left Aaltonen unsatisfied, so he pulled out a soil map from his pocket (which he carried because he was already looking for some farmland). The map showed that there was some "good clay soil on the island," which convinced him to file for a homestead claim (and persuade his brother, Toivo, to do the same). Aaltonen toured Sugar Island and encountered swamps, mosquitoes, and flies, but he was also proud that he saw the promise of timber and farming. Aaltonen understood it as a place that he discovered.¹⁷

He also understood it as a perfect place for the "racial character" of the Finns.¹⁸ "The Finnish people have always been a forest people," Aaltonen wrote, "bent on clearing farms from wilderness." Not just "superior woodsmen," they were also "great fishermen and incomparable hunters." He believed that Finns had carried their innate drive and abilities to the New World, where for hundreds of years, whether in the Delaware River Valley or along the US–Canadian border, they had proved their worth. The "blood coursing" through their veins made them pioneers, Aaltonen reckoned. He desperately wanted to be a pioneer and believed that Sugar Island was a suitable stage for his "colony."¹⁹ The "scenic splendor" of the area's "natural setting" resembled Finland, with its "innumerable lakes rivers, and islands." He only needed to find Finns to settle there. He would create, he claimed, "a philanthropic land settlement project."²⁰

Although there were no Finns living on Sugar Island in 1915, there were hundreds living in Sault Ste. Marie and the rest of Chippewa

County.²¹ In 1900, there were already close to three hundred Finns in the county, but none on Sugar Island. There were also thousands of Finnish immigrants and their first-generation children living in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Most were miners, who faced dangerous and unhealthy work with little pay. Workers were fired if they did not vote for the mining companies' political candidates. Strikes were put down with violence.²² The large 1913–1914 Copper Strike, which Aaltonen had worked hard to help organize, had just failed. Aaltonen wrote that Finnish miners wondered, “weren't they in America – the Land of Liberty? Weren't they free men and women? Men ... commenced to think of an escape from such conditions.”²³ These miners were potential settlers.

Aaltonen called his Sugar Island vision a “back-to-the-land movement.” He thought that a Finn was not intended for the mines where he “can't have his freedom, which his mother taught him in his childhood.” Farming would give the miners “constructive work at peace” while paying them “better in the long run.” He trekked to the Upper Peninsula's mining communities to spread the promises of farming on Sugar Island. Reino and Gene Saari, sons of early Finnish-born settlers August and Kate Saari, remembered that Frank Aaltonen lured Finns to Sugar Island with “glorious stories” about “how wonderful it was on the island.”²⁴ Aaltonen told Nikolai Rekola from Iron River that the St. Marys River, which flows around Sugar Island, made the climate mild. He claimed that, if the growing season were “just a little longer,” you could even grow oranges and bananas.²⁵ Aaltonen paid for an advertisement in a Finnish-language newspaper that said the same.²⁶ “He was quite a salesman,” Rekola's son remembered. With the “intolerable” conditions at the mines in Michigan's Copper Country, Iron River, and around Chisholm, Minnesota, it was an easy sell. Aaltonen's zeal funneled Finns to Sugar Island. Sylvia Kuusisto Hokkanen, daughter of early settlers Frank and Ida Kuusisto, remembered that her miner father and others were “glad to get back to the land again.”²⁷

But how did Aaltonen finance this effort? And what was in it for him? Although he claimed in his unpublished memoirs that he wanted to create a “cooperative farming settlement,” Aaltonen clearly saw this also as a business venture.²⁸ In 1916, Aaltonen used the provisions of Michigan Act 74 (1913), which provided state funding to railroad companies so that they would give free or reduced-rate tickets to people who spent most of their time “securing actual settlers for unimproved farm lands” in Michigan.²⁹ Aaltonen was one of seven men who

received approval from the Michigan Railroad Commission for this benefit in 1916.³⁰ The state helped to fund Aaltonen's search for Finnish settlers, which he used to increase his own private wealth.

Aaltonen also started a land company, the Finnish Land Agency, in Sault Ste. Marie in 1916 with Hans Hormavirta (who was from Sault Ste. Marie). Aaltonen claimed in a July 1916 article in the Sault newspaper, which appears to be an advertisement for his company in disguise, that he was not a land speculator hoping for great profit. Instead, his Finnish Land Agency would "serve the settler and not skin him" and "bring honest settlers upon the lands of any honest man."³¹ The purpose of his company was "the colonization of the Finnish settlers upon the lands of Chippewa county." Aaltonen promised readers that the Finnish Land Agency would do its "little best in bringing the much-needed settlers upon the wild lands of this country, who will be able to make gardens out of the wilderness within a comparatively short time." He made no mention of Sugar Island's Anishinaabe residents.

Aaltonen also claimed that 30 to 40 settlers had purchased land on Sugar Island and were preparing to move, but there are no records of any such purchases. The first Finns to buy land on the island were Hans and Aino Hormavirta, his business partners, who paid \$100 for 100 acres in 1915.³² Just eight months later, in June 1916, Frank and his wife, Rauha Aaltonen, bought the same 100-acre stretch from the Hormavirtas for \$400. But, two months later, the Aaltonens sold that land to Thomas Korpi (or Rajakorpi) for \$500, giving them a nice profit. The Aaltonens' daughter, Kyllikki, recalled later in life that her parents came to Sugar Island to establish a home and get some farmland, but they clearly profited on real estate.³³

Two other Finnish families bought land on the island in 1916: Matti Tenhunen and Elias Laari, but neither resided there more than a few years. August Saari's family started their homestead claim in 1917. It was not until 1918 that the next Finns made a purchase. Seven came that year: Oscar Siivonen, Abel Waisanen, K. O. Saaristo, Victor Wainio, Oscar Maki, Lauri Karimo, and Jacob Niemistö. Only Korpi bought land from Aaltonen. Only Waisanen, Siivonen, Maki, and Karimo made a permanent home there. In 1919, Mauno Syrjala, Christian Johnson, and Frank Kuusisto purchased land. Kusti Karpinen claimed a homestead in 1919.

Land was accessible to the Finnish migrants. Not only was it available, it was also more affordable than land on the mainland, and, in

the case of the lucky homesteaders, it was free. Most of the Finns were impoverished, but even those who settled as tenants might afford to buy land after a few years of labor on the island or around Sault Ste. Marie. Although 15 Finnish-born settlers bought land on Sugar Island before 1920, we do not know exactly how many came and rented a place, either on Sugar Island or in Sault Ste. Marie, before they could buy land outright or get a mortgage. Most of the Finnish families relied on mortgages to purchase their properties and to construct houses.

Among those who arrived on Sugar Island without buying property were Robert Koski in 1917, Oskar Aho, Ilmari Kokkila, and David Lampi in 1918, and Henry Niskanen in 1919.³⁴ Aho and Niskanen bought land in 1921, Lampi in 1923, and Kokkila in 1926. Some of these men and their families, including some who purchased land, were transient residents, working elsewhere while they saved up. Aaltonen, for instance, spent much of his time in the early years in Sault Ste. Marie for business (he had an office and a residence there) while his wife, Rauha, lived on their island property. Aaltonen claimed that about 50 Finnish families worked on the island during his first two summers there, but there are no records of that many families acquiring or renting land.³⁵ Perhaps most of them decided not to return.

The Finnish Land Agency does not appear to have been a successful venture. In November 1918, Aaltonen's agency bought a plot for \$225.³⁶ Nearly a year later, Aaltonen doubled his money, selling that same plot to Finnish-born John Aro for \$500, but, strangely, those are the only two surviving Chippewa County land deeds that the Finnish Land Agency appears on.³⁷ Sometime before 1920, Aaltonen's partner, Hans Hormavirta, moved back across the border to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.³⁸ The Aaltonens, however, would continue buying and selling land as a family. Frank acted as an agent or intermediary for other Finns looking to buy land. Jack Koivisto, one of the Finnish-born settlers, remembered in his unpublished memoir that Aaltonen was a good agent for the Finns because he could speak English and had good verbal skills.³⁹

While it is not apparent how much Aaltonen profited in that role, Aaltonen kept urging Finns to settle, even sending letters to the editors of Finnish-language newspapers across the region to spread the word. Henry Niskanen and his family, who had immigrated from Finland in 1915, heard about Sugar Island in the newspaper *Työmies* (or *Working Man*) while living in Chicago.⁴⁰ John Keko and Frank Kuusisto had similar experiences.⁴¹ But Aaltonen was not the only Finnish pipeline

to Sugar Island. Oscar Maki first heard about Sugar Island from a realtor in Sault Ste. Marie.⁴²

The 1920 census shows 62 Finnish-born Sugar Islanders, eight of whom were single men (there were 149,824 Finnish-born people living in the United States in 1920, 30,096 in Michigan).⁴³ Each of them had lived elsewhere in the United States or Canada before coming to Sugar Island. There were 23 Finnish families (including those with American-born children), 101 total people of Finnish descent. Twenty-two Finns owned their own homes on the island (11 of which had mortgages). In 1920, the Finns made up 15% of the population; by 1930 they were 23%.⁴⁴

Over a 20-year period, Finnish-born Americans acquired a disproportionate amount of land on Sugar Island. Out of the 437 property owners on Sugar Island in 1938 (not including properties owned by businesses and governments), 98 of them were Finnish-born (22.4% of the 1940 population), but those 98 Finns owned 6,322 of the 21,581 acres inventoried, or 29.3% (Figure 2.1). This statistic is even more favorable for the Finns considering that at least 115 of the 437 property owners did not live on Sugar Island year-round. Land brought the Finns profit and political influence.

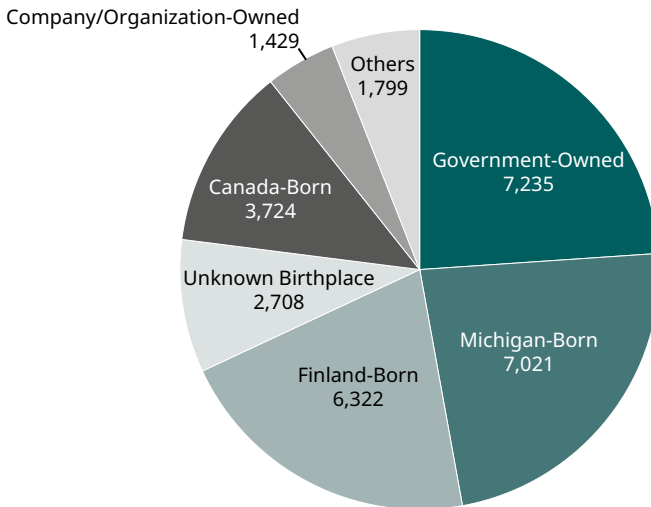
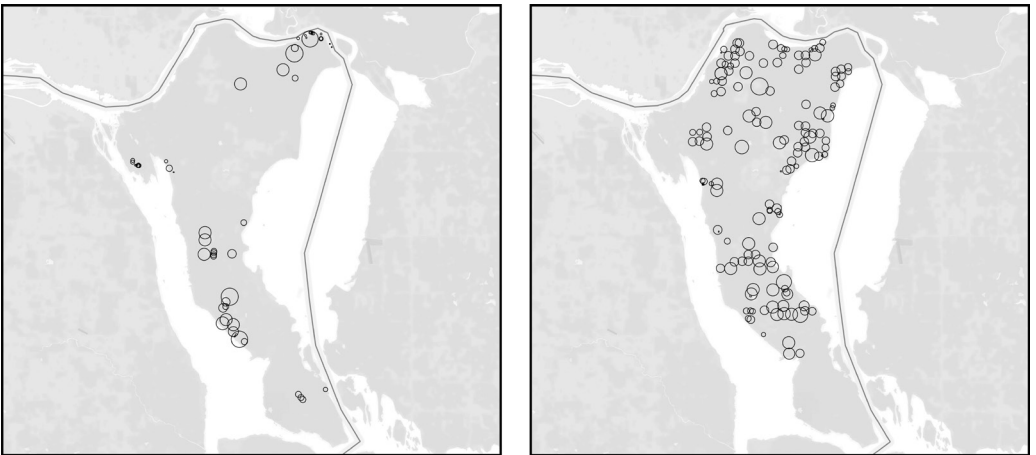


Figure 2.1: Total acreage of Sugar Island properties owned, sorted by birthplace of property owners (along with government lands and the properties of companies and organizations), 1938. Sources: “Works Progress Administration Property Survey”; US Census, 1920, 1930, 1940.

On the other hand, Anishinaabe families continued to lose acreage after Finnish settlement. Even though people of Indigenous ancestry made up 24% (169 out of 701) of the Sugar Island population (those identified as “Indian” on the 1940 census), people of Indigenous ancestry only owned 4% of Sugar Island’s individually held acreage in 1938 (this includes the 9.2 acres held by the Bay Mills Chippewa Community on the island; see Map 2.2). If you include government and business-owned properties, people of Indigenous ancestry only owned 3% of Sugar Island’s acreage. A 1938 Works Progress Administration inventory only lists 38 property owners of Indigenous ancestry. Although Finns were not entirely responsible for the disparity of Native-owned lands on Sugar Island, their intense acquisition of land in a 23-year period beginning in 1915 (and ramping up in 1920) contributed to this process. Most of the total number of deeds from these years between 1920 and 1939 have Finnish names on them (if you exclude the massive transfer of land from the former governor of Michigan Chase S. Osborn to the University of Michigan). At least 68 transactions involving Finns were made that contained acreage that was documented to have been in the hands of an Anishinaabe at some point after 1853. Astonishingly, Finns would come to own 770 acres, or 29%, of the original 2,700 acres allotted to the Anishinaabeg in 1873.



Map 2.2: Properties on Sugar Island owned by Native Americans (left) and Finnish-born Americans (right), 1938. Source: “Works Progress Administration Property Survey” 1938.

Finns bought land from Anishinaabeg directly. One academic source claimed that Frank Aaltonen “bought land cheaply from the Indians and was publicly criticized for it.”⁴⁵ Although that claim is made without a specific citation, it seems possible based on surviving land deeds. In 1919, for instance, Aaltonen paid Charlotte Shaganobe (or Shaganaba), a 70-year-old Ojibwe widow (who died the following year), \$400 for a 40-acre plot.⁴⁶ Four months after Aaltonen bought the plot, he sold it to another Finn for \$500. There is no evidence that Finns acquired Anishinaabe lands illegally or under the threat of violence, but Finnish settlement only furthered Anishinaabe land loss. In fact, it is likely that some Anishinaabe families were forced to sell acreage to Finns and other non-Natives because of the difficult economic circumstances created by Finnish settlement.

Making a Living

Once Finns arrived, there was plenty of work to be found, especially on their own land. In the early years, most settlers worked toward subsistence and finding wage work to build savings. Like other islanders, the Finns relied on fishing and hunting, particularly deer.⁴⁷ The settlers quickly learned that Sugar Island was not the garden that Aaltonen promised. Vegetables that worked well in cooler climates, like rutabagas, potatoes, carrots, and beets, were widely grown, as well as fruits suited for a short growing season, like tomatoes and watermelons. Many bought land that was wooded and rocky, so it had to be cleared before farming could become profitable. Aaltonen cleared his land and drained the marshlands with miles of ditches, often hiring help, sometimes as many as 18 men. He also started to build fences because he hoped to raise cattle.⁴⁸

Aaltonen and his wife received mortgages through the First National Bank in Sault Ste. Marie of \$2,000 in October 1919, \$800 in November 1919, \$450 in April 1920, \$1,000 in August 1920, and \$4,000 in November 1921 to pay for various properties. They had at least 800 acres on the island by 1926. Aaltonen claimed that he made 300 acres of “waste land” productive.⁴⁹ “For a Finn,” he wrote, “there is no achievement as satisfying as to be able to survey his own acres, cleared and tended by his own fingers.”⁵⁰

Most of the settlers cleared their lands as well, some built their homes (and saunas), and others bought homes. But before they could

start their farms in earnest they needed paid work to build capital. Aaltonen hoped to establish a cooperative enterprise, but the banks would not loan money to a cooperative without assets. With “no other way out,” Aaltonen claimed, he started his own lumber business to provide employment to the new Finnish arrivals. According to the 1920 census, 32 of the 54 adults were employed, but only four listed “lumber” as their industry.⁵¹ But once Aaltonen got his lumber business going he hired as many men as he could get for a time. Some of the lumber that buzzed through his sawmill were sold to cooperative wholesalers in Michigan. David Lampi cut trees with Aaltonen’s lumber outfit from 1923 to 1927, until he bought some land and started a farm of his own.⁵² Oscar Maki, who had been a logger in Canada before he came to Sugar Island, cut timber on his land, made railroad ties at his own sawmill, and sent some logs off to a veneer mill in Escanaba, Michigan.⁵³ Finns overwhelmingly harvested more timber on their properties than both the American-born and Canadian-born residents (Figure 2.2).

Finns also made a living off of the land in other ways, like harvesting ice during the winter, selling firewood, or exporting field stones to Sault Ste. Marie, but farming and raising livestock was the major industry. There were 100 farmers on Sugar Island in 1928, according to a newspaper report, and many of them were “milking cows and raising feed crops.”⁵⁴ By 1930, most Finns were farming to some extent.⁵⁵ Many fields were used for haying, as hay had become an important export before the Finnish migration. During the winter, when hay was in most demand, it was transported over the frozen lake.⁵⁶

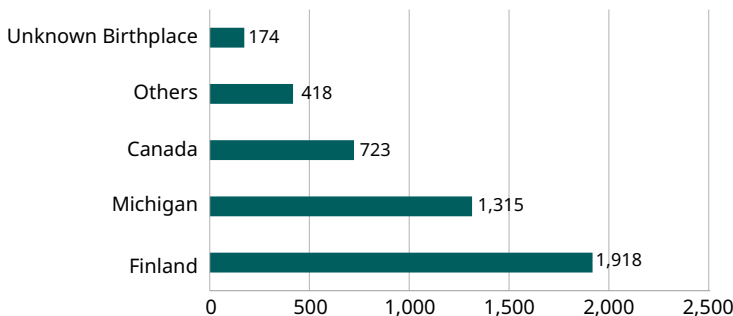


Figure 2.2: Total wooded acres used for logging on Sugar Island by birthplace of property owner, 1938. Source: “Works Progress Administration Property Survey” 1938.

Changing the Island’s Ecosystems

By 1938, Finnish residents owned more agricultural property than both the American-born and Canadian-born residents (1,606, or 35.5%, of the 4,520 acres of cropland were owned by Finns; see Figure 2.3). Most of the Finnish acreage under cultivation were lands recently cleared of trees and brush or recently drained wetlands. Once ready, Finnish farmers worked the land vigorously. By 1938 they owned nearly half of all the barns, a third of the stables, and nearly half of the warehouses on Sugar Island. Finns also fenced in their lands at a higher rate than both the American-born and Canadian-born residents (Figure 2.4).⁵⁷ This fencing suggests that Finns were more likely to have domesticated animals on their properties (dairy cows in particular). Finns also had

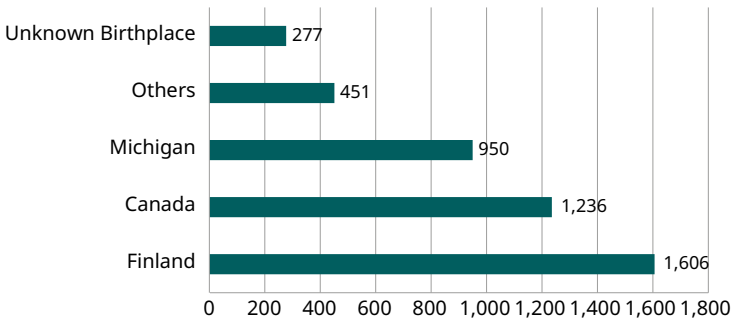


Figure 2.3: Total acreage of croplands on Sugar Island by birthplace of property owner, 1938. Source: “Works Progress Administration Property Survey” 1938.

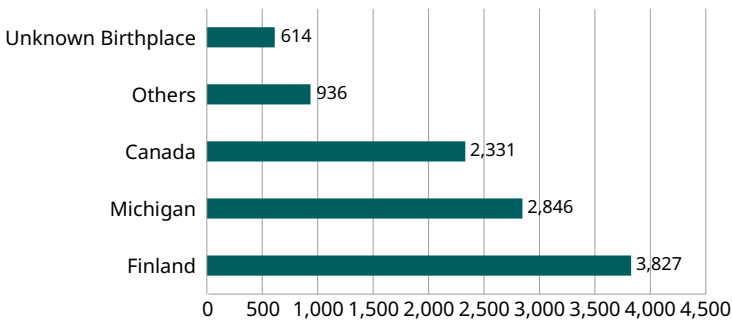


Figure 2.4: Total acreage of properties with fencing on Sugar Island by birthplace of property owner, 1938. Source: “Works Progress Administration Property Survey” 1938.

more fencing because they had more crops that needed to be protected from domestic and wild animals.

Wild animals also threatened farmers' livestock, so many supported wildlife bounty programs. Chippewa County had bounties for wild animals in effect in the late 1910s.⁵⁸ Farmers could also get compensation for losses of livestock caused by "wild dogs," which included what people suspected were wolves but were most often coyotes. Finns on Sugar Island undoubtedly supported and participated in the bounty program, which contributed to the diminishing wolf population on the island, permanently transforming the ecosystem.⁵⁹ According to an Anishinaabe man named John Andrews, white-tailed deer were not present on the island in 1900, but by 1950 they were very common, a sign of diminishing predators.

Deer populations also increase with the clearing of forests, which provides regrowth and grass and undergrowth proliferation for their consumption. While it is difficult to estimate how many acres of forest the Finnish settlers cleared on the island, they were using nearly 2,000 acres of land to harvest timber in 1938, which accounted for 41% of all timber acreage on the island. It can be assumed that logging was even more intensive on the island in the 1920s, though, before the Great Depression wrecked the housing industry. For the Finns, taking down trees was more than just the pursuit of profit. They saw it as a necessary process that would ensure their family's future. Felling trees not only provided fields to grow their food; it transformed their new piece of the world into something they thought they could manage.

Unfortunately, deforestation had an enormous impact on the ecosystems of northern Michigan.⁶⁰ The disappearance of forests was detrimental to the habitats of forest-dwelling animals. Tree loss and the consequences of industrial logging (including the transportation of fallen logs over land, which destroyed undergrowth and grassland) also led to extensive erosion. In turn, eroded soil and silt filled streams and rivers. Coupled with the transport of logs over waterways, aquatic habitats and fisheries were harmed. These changes affected both white and Indigenous residents on Sugar Island, but it was particularly damaging to Anishinaabe families who relied on the natural environment for subsistence. As opportunities for self-sufficiency diminished, reliance on the market economy for sustenance increased.

Damaging Native Livelihoods

Frank Aaltonen claimed that Sugar Island's economy had been anemic but "the coming of the Finns gave the old timers," as he called many of the existing inhabitants, "a new courage and a new hope."⁶¹ But Aaltonen's assessment of Sugar Island's economy was based on capitalist notions of production and profit, not through the lens of Indigenous livelihood.⁶² For Aaltonen, the ways Anishinaabeg lived were unproductive, which justified, in his mind, his plans to extract wealth from the land and to change the island's economy. Along the way, he ignored the negative impact "the coming of the Finns" had on Ojibwe.

Sugar Island Ojibwe, like other Anishinaabeg in the Sault Ste. Marie area, had long been acquainted with Euro-American capitalism. The patterns of seasonal subsistence that Anishinaabe families relied upon had been continually disrupted by white settlers who took and used the land and water in new and often damaging ways. With fewer acres and dwindling fisheries, Anishinaabe subsistence diminished. Many Anishinaabeg had to work as wage laborers in various industries. Some became commercial fishers, sailors, and lumbermen, and many hunted, trapped, and foraged and sold their production to settlers.⁶³

This had all been happening before the Finns arrived in 1917, but the Finnish settlers, along with the Great Depression, made work even harder to find, damaging Anishinaabe livelihoods. According to the census data, 25% of islanders (over the age of 16) who were employed in 1920 (56 out of 225) were listed as "Indian" (keeping in mind that census data does not always offer reliable information about the Indigenous ancestry of an individual). In 1930, that percentage dropped to 17% (29 of 168) and in 1940, it was just 7% (8 of 120).⁶⁴ The Depression reduced the total number of employed people on the island, but the Native population disproportionately lost work between 1920 and 1940. This suggests that there were more factors at work than the Depression in the reduction of Native employment. New Deal policies did discriminate against nonwhite Americans in their benefits, including work programs, but one can also assume that the increasing size of the Finnish work force negatively impacted the Anishinaabe population's ability to find work.

Finnish employment had the opposite trajectory of Anishinaabe employment. In 1920, people from Finnish families made up just 14% of the total employed population of the island, but just ten years later

they made up 30%. Incredibly, by 1940, those of Finnish descent made up 43% of the employed population, while those of Native descent made up just 7%. Most Anishinaabeg were wage laborers in the 1930s (22 of 29 listed as being employed in the 1930 census), doing “odd jobs,” most likely on farms or in the forests cutting timber. By 1940, only eight “Indians” were listed as being “employed for pay” on the census. There were two caretakers, a carpenter, a laborer, a dish washer, a storekeeper, and a truck driver. Not included among the “employed for pay” were the 55 Sugar Islanders who were working in “public emergency work” (for a Depression-era federal administration, like the WPA, meant to give the unemployed useful work). Twenty-seven of those 55 were Native. Only two were Finnish.⁶⁵

The dramatic shift in the island’s labor force wrought economic hardship on Anishinaabe families. In 1931, at least 11 of the 25 islanders who received money from the township’s “poor fund” were Ojibwes.⁶⁶ In 1939, a newspaper reported that Sugar Island’s Anishinaabeg lived in “great poverty and distress,” and they were trying to get money promised to them by the US government in the 1855 treaty.⁶⁷ While some Native Americans in the Upper Peninsula found work in the growing tourism industry, there were not as many opportunities on Sugar Island itself. On the mainland, some non-Natives tried to exploit both the labor and the Indigeneity of local Ojibwes. In 1936, a Sault Ste. Marie resident urged the Chamber of Commerce to hire “entire families of Indians” to walk that city’s streets “in typical Indian garb” to attract tourists.⁶⁸ It is not known how many, if any, Sugar Island Anishinaabeg contributed to such a proposal, but no one reported being in the tourism industry on the 1940 census.

To make things more difficult, the island’s Anishinaabe population was not engaged in large-scale farming, at least not as owners of that farm acreage. Of the 4,672 acres that were being farmed on Sugar Island in 1938, only 100 acres were owned by Indigenous people. Some Anishinaabeg harvested and processed maple syrup (a centuries-old practice, which is why the island was known as “Sugar Island”) and a growing number made and sold arts and crafts, especially baskets and snowshoes hand-woven with local grasses, but those were not reliable sources of income. In 1940, 26 Anishinaabe Sugar Islanders displayed their “Indian-Handicrafts” at an event at the Finnish Hall organized by Anishinaabeg and the Works Progress Administration.⁶⁹ A few years prior, the WPA had started a project meant to encourage Indian

handicrafts (baskets, snowshoes, bows and arrows, quillwork, lacrosse rackets, wooden items, and furniture) and help find a market for those products, but, even though it had success reviving production and paid the producers something for their labor, it did little to alleviate poverty.⁷⁰ Only a few Anishinaabeg appear to have been making a wage from arts and crafts in 1940 (three basket weavers and one wood carver were getting paid by the WPA).⁷¹ Others found work doing federal land conservation work during the Depression. In 1934–1935, for instance, Anishinaabeg from the island, Sault Ste. Marie, and Bay Mills were offered work in the Marquette National Forest, but, to qualify for the job, Indian Affairs had to determine the blood quantum of a man to be “at least half-blood” Indian.⁷²

The disparity of wealth between the residents of Finnish and Indigenous ancestry can also be seen in home ownership, home condition, and home construction. There were 309 homes on Sugar Island in 1938, according to the WPA inventory. Eighty-three homes were owned by Finnish Americans (81 had been born in Finland), or 27% of all homes (the Finnish-born represented 22.4% of the Sugar Island population). As Figure 2.5 demonstrates, Finnish islanders were particularly affluent in comparison to other islanders born in Michigan, Canada, and other parts of the world.

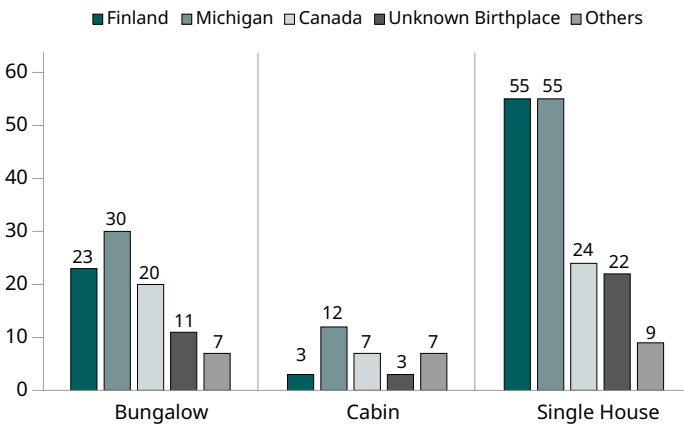


Figure 2.5: Number of single houses, bungalows, and cabins on Sugar Island, sorted by the birthplace of owner, 1938. Sources: “Works Progress Administration Property Survey” 1938; US Census, 1920, 1930, 1940.

People of Indigenous ancestry owned just 13.6% of the homes in 1938, even though they represented 24% of the population in 1940. Ojibwe-owned homes were also generally in poorer condition than homes owned by white islanders. Twenty-one percent of whites had houses in poor condition, compared to 32% for Ojibwes. Among whites, Finnish-owned homes were in the best condition (and newer, of course). Although the WPA inventory does not indicate the individual who built each home, it does indicate when the homes were built.⁷³ Fifty-four percent (22 of 41) of Ojibwe-owned homes were built after 1920, compared to 77% (63 of 82) of Finnish-owned homes (there is no date listed for one of the Anishinaabe homes and six of the Finnish homes).

Also important, in 1920, 18% of the heads of households (permanent residents) who owned their homes were Ojibwe, according to the census. It remained 18% in 1930 but dropped to 16% in 1940. Finns represented 23% of the heads of households who owned their homes in 1920, 36% in 1930, and 34% in 1940. (See Table 1.) Anishinaabeg rented their homes at a much higher rate than the Finns. In 1920, 32% of the heads of households who rented their homes on Sugar Island were Ojibwe. By 1930, the rate had decreased to 18%, but it skyrocketed to 44% by 1940. For the Finns, they represented just 2% of all renters in 1920, 3.5% in 1930, and 6% in 1940. (See Table 2.)⁷⁴

Table 2.1: Ethnicity of heads of households who owned their homes on Sugar Island as a percentage of all heads of households. Sources: US Census, 1920, 1930, 1940.

Ethnicity	1920	1930	1940
<i>Anishinaabe</i>	18%	18%	16%
<i>Finnish</i>	23%	36%	34%

Table 2.2: Ethnicity of heads of households who rented their homes as a percentage of all heads of households who rented their homes. Sources: US Census, 1920, 1930, 1940.

Ethnicity	1920	1930	1940
<i>Anishinaabe</i>	32%	18%	44%
<i>Finnish</i>	2%	3.5%	6%

Political Power and Aaltonen's Notions of Indigeneity

As a new citizen of Sugar Island, Aaltonen's initial concern was the infrastructure, especially the roads. He and the other Finns knew that roads had to be built on Sugar Island if their produce (and other products, like lumber) was going to make it to a market. Gene Saari remembers that when his family arrived in 1917 "there were no roads to speak of"; they "had to follow deer trails from one place to another." Man-powered transportation was the only practical means during much of the winter.⁷⁵ Some farmers used special skis made by brothers Lauri and August Karimo for carrying heavy loads (Lauri had represented Finland in the 1912 Olympics as a hurdler).⁷⁶

Road construction was the major political concern on Sugar Island until the 1930s. In August 1917, Aaltonen asked the Chippewa County Board of Supervisors to improve what is now called 7 Mile Road. He had spent \$75 of his own money to fix up the road, but the Sugar Island Township Board had refused to refund him with a tax rebate.⁷⁷ Aaltonen saw the reluctance in the community to spend money on roads as a political problem. The new Finnish settlers wanted roads to improve their economic output, but, according to Aaltonen, the old inhabitants did not want higher taxes.

Because Sugar Island was a township, its residents voted on most major issues, which gave Anishinaabe residents the most political power on the island. Many of the Finnish migrants, like Aaltonen, were naturalized US citizens, but not all, which meant they could not yet vote or run for office. Aaltonen knew that, in order to get roads built, he had to convince the Native swing vote. Especially important were the island's "old timers ... of various racial origin," as he called them, who were not sure that better transportation was necessary or worth the higher taxes. Aaltonen visited the homes of these old timers to convince them that the benefits of new roads, and even a ferry, outweighed the risk of higher taxes.⁷⁸

By the spring of 1918, Aaltonen had convinced enough people to elect him as township supervisor, which was comparable to a city mayor. Aaltonen's ability to persuade put Finnish-led priorities into actions. As the township supervisor, Aaltonen was also on the Chippewa County Board of Supervisors, which set the political agenda and expenditures of the county-at-large. Nevertheless, getting roads built

was still difficult. He had to convince the County Board to appropriate county funds for Sugar Island's road construction and maintenance, which he was able to do slowly. The first year he got just \$500 and \$500 the next. In 1920, the county provided \$2,500 to Sugar Island's road budget, which birthed a burgeoning road construction industry.

Finnish settlers, who were the main advocates for new and improved roads, took advantage of growing road expenditures. Locals became the overseers of three local road districts and local workers built the roads and drainage ditches, maintained the roads, and repaired them. Between 1920 and 1940, a total of 25 Finns worked in road construction, but plenty of other islanders made money working on the roads as well.⁷⁹ Oscar Aho and Charles Lahti became the first overseers of Road District No. 1 and No. 3 respectively in 1919. Aho then won the bid for a contract to build Baie de Wasai Road (for \$175.50) and LeCoy Road (with Waino Soini for \$625) in 1921. Eleven other Finns all received contracts that year as well.⁸⁰ That put a total of \$4,222.50 of public money into the pockets of Finnish American settlers in just one year. Furthermore, because these men were working on roads that usually connected directly to their respective properties, they were getting paid to make it easier to get their own crops, timber, and manufactured goods to a market. The construction also benefitted those who could provide materials for road construction.⁸¹ The gravel industry on the island, especially, was bolstered.⁸² Frank Aaltonen happened to be one of those who sold gravel to the township. He received \$19.50 for 13 loads of his gravel in 1929, for instance.⁸³ Because road construction put money into the pockets of the suppliers, contractors, and laborers alike (who were commonly Anishinaabeg and other non-Finnish residents), there were incentives for voters to keep construction funded.⁸⁴

Despite early successes with road funding, Aaltonen complained that he had to "win as many of the [Ojibwes] as possible" to his "good roads" campaign, year after year.⁸⁵ He claimed that those he called "pure" blood Ojibwes helped his side "in many a bitter fight." Those of French and Indigenous ancestry always opposed Aaltonen and road construction, he claimed, and "no trick was too low for them to play." Aaltonen's relationships with Ojibwes, along with his political strategies in dealing with them, were based on his racialized notions of Indigeneity. His worldview was shaped by racism. He was not pleased with his daughter's marriage to an Irish American, for instance, because he "did not feel that the racial mixture was desirable, but there was nothing I

could do.”⁸⁶ Aaltonen’s misconceptions about so-called racial mixing formed his understanding of his Indigenous neighbors. “There were several kinds of Indians,” he explained in his memoir. In the southern part of Sugar Island were the Anishinaabeg who were “on the whole ... honest Indians, friendly and peaceful and gave no trouble whatever” to the Finns.⁸⁷ These were Indians he considered “pure blood.” Another group were the “mixed breed” Indians, mixed with French-Canadian blood.” Aaltonen loathed them as “revengeful, vindictive, and dishonest” and “more like slum dwellers” than Indians. They were hostile to the Finns, according to Aaltonen, and always opposed their progress. Admitting that he never got close to them, Aaltonen guessed that they had a “peculiar psychological twist” caused by “their characterization as ‘half-breeds’” and their inability to belong to either white or Native society.⁸⁸

The third group of Native Americans on the island were of Scottish and Native descent.⁸⁹ Aaltonen noted that the McCoys were initially suspicious of the Finns, but gradually, and not “easily,” they warmed up. Aaltonen described them as having “little of the Indian influence,” meaning that they were “good folks ... good workers, lived in good houses and led decent family lives.”⁹⁰ He believed that they had a higher standard of living than the “real Indians or the French-Indian half-breeds.” Because Aaltonen saw them as superior, he treated them differently, and “made every effort to gain” their “friendship.”⁹¹

Aaltonen was not reelected as supervisor in 1923, perhaps, he claimed, because he missed the township nominations meeting because of bad weather. The road budget was reduced during the three years without a Finnish supervisor. In March 1926, Aaltonen ran again and initially lost 52 votes to 35, but in a bizarre, and mysterious, series of events, a recount found that Aaltonen actually won 90 to 35. Even though Aaltonen won again in 1927 and 1928, his elections were always close, indicating that the political atmosphere on the island (along with the road construction his allies were supporting) was contentious. Moreover, although most Finns supported the roads, they were not unified politically. Finnish men (women were not yet running for office on Sugar Island, although they were allowed to) ran for office on different party tickets, one led by Aaltonen and another led by Aaltonen’s opponent for supervisor (who was always a non-Finnish white man). Men of Indigenous ancestry appeared on both tickets, but never for township supervisor.

Aaltonen's administration oversaw 75 miles of road construction during his seven years in office, but those roads were not connected to the mainland and the city of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Only a ferry service would make Sugar Island "a part of the United States," according to Aaltonen.⁹² To fight for the funding of a ferry, Aaltonen became the Sugar Island Township representative on the Chippewa County Board of Supervisors. Years went by before the county approved a modest appropriation, but in 1927 a ferry was completed.⁹³ Aaltonen remembered that the island "turned out to celebrate" their "union" with the US, the "people were happy and their automobiles were rolling in all parts of the island." For an indication of how much Finns celebrated the automobile, and an indication of their general wealth in relation to other Sugar Islanders, 19 Finnish families owned a garage in 1938, nearly half of all the garages on the island. Just two Anishinaabeg owned a garage that same year.⁹⁴

In 1928, Aaltonen guided the last major road funding initiative until after WWII. A major township road bond was approved by voters, worth \$10,000. Thirteen of the 29 petitioners to initiate the special road bond election were Finnish Americans. Aaltonen's time on Sugar Island, however, was coming to an end. After holding the office of supervisor for seven nonconsecutive years, serving on numerous boards and committees, even doing minor tasks like compiling the list of dogs and their owners on the island, Aaltonen prepared to move his family to Fitchburg, Massachusetts, to work for a Finnish cooperative. In his memoirs, Aaltonen claims that he had done all he could on Sugar Island, "the new settlers were on their feet, owning substantial debt-free farms and no longer needed me."⁹⁵ He also admitted that his business "was not doing so well." He blamed it on his family doing too much for the other Finns who had followed him there, to make it "an inhabitable place." His resources were "strained," he remembered, and deed records do show that he had to foreclose on a number of properties that were under mortgage by First National Bank in Sault Ste. Marie in early 1926.⁹⁶ Aaltonen wrote that his lumber business was not making any money, especially as the economy worsened for America's lumber and agriculture industry (years before the infamous 1929 New York Stock Exchange crash).⁹⁷

In his memoir, Aaltonen does not mention other factors that probably had some bearing on his decision to leave. Unsurprisingly, Aaltonen was remembered by Jack Koivisto, a fellow settler, as being a

lousy farmer who “wanted to portray himself as a gentleman,” working behind his desk in his office in Sault Ste. Marie and hiring out farm laborers and foremen, rather than tending to his own land.⁹⁸ This was why, Koivisto claimed, Aaltonen’s farm “decayed.”

Also, politics continued to divide the Sugar Island community, which undoubtedly motivated Aaltonen’s exit. Elections were so close on Sugar Island in the 1920s that their results were often contested. A tense political atmosphere also pervaded the Finnish community. In 1928, Emil Hytinen assaulted Aaltonen after a Sugar Island Farmers’ Club meeting.⁹⁹ A newspaper report suggests Hytinen, who had political ambitions of his own, might have been upset with Aaltonen’s nomination for township supervisor. Hytinen was an experienced wrestler; Aaltonen was not.¹⁰⁰ Hytinen would soon lose his bid for reelection as justice of the peace, but only by nine votes. He would also go on to serve as a county sheriff for many years, so it seems many islanders did not fault Hytinen for his violent encounter with Aaltonen.¹⁰¹

Aaltonen would not seek the 1929 nomination for township supervisor as tensions with Hytinen continued.¹⁰² Hytinen was a conservative—he would go on to campaign for Republicans—and Aaltonen was a socialist, although he did not consider himself a radical. Finnish American communities across the United States and Canada experienced political divisions.¹⁰³ There is not much evidence, however, that Sugar Island’s Finnish families were strictly divided as “Red Finns” or “Church Finns” like other, larger, Finnish immigrant communities in the United States.¹⁰⁴ Still, the 1929 election on Sugar Island was especially controversial. A judge determined that 23 absentee ballots that favored Aaltonen’s candidates for the Progressive Party ticket were illegally cast because those 23 voters were in good health on election day. The judge overturned the election results, giving the victory to 11 township officers from the People’s Party ticket. Aaltonen and his party claimed that the absentee ballots had to be cast because bad road conditions “made it impossible for them to get to the polls.”¹⁰⁵

Political division on the island was apparent, but what about personal relations between the Finnish settlers and Anishinaabe residents? Late in his life, Gene Saari claimed that in the “old days” the Finns, Ojibwes, and the rest of Sugar Island associated with each other. “They were, by necessity, one group of people as a whole,” he remembered.¹⁰⁶ But, outside of settler recollections, it is difficult to know just how much Finnish and Anishinaabe neighbors interacted in meaningful

ways. Anecdotally, there are indications that Finns and Anishinaabeg had their conflicts. In 1938, for instance, three Ojibwe residents (two men and one woman) were found guilty of assaulting two Finnish-born men in their fifties. The newspaper accounts of the alleged attack are sparse, but, according to one of the Finnish men, he was hit in the back with a car crank while his friend was attacked.¹⁰⁷ The judge gave the Ojibwes 15-day jail sentences. There is no explanation in the report as to why the incident occurred, and there is evidence that the Anishinaabe family involved had friendships with Finns, but it is clear that relations between the Finnish settlers and the Anishinaabe residents were not always tranquil.¹⁰⁸ This 1938 incident, though, occurred more than 20 years after Finnish settlement began.

Other hints about Finnish and Anishinaabe relations come from a work of fiction. In 1929, Florence McClinchey, a white, part-time resident of Sugar Island, published a novel called *Joe Pete*, which was set on Sugar Island.¹⁰⁹ It tells the story of an Ojibwe boy, the title character, and his mother Mabel and the ways that white Sugar Islanders, especially some Finns, cheated and mistreated Anishinaabe residents, even violently, for profit, for pleasure, and to erase Indigenous ways of life. The main antagonist is Uno Jaakola, a brutish, greedy logger and land speculator. Mabel, Joe, and other Anishinaabeg struggle through poverty and the assaults on their culture. McClinchey, who claimed she became “friends with the Indians,” supposedly based her story on her real-life observations of Sugar Island and its personalities, although it is difficult to judge the measure of reality.¹¹⁰ Some have speculated that Jaakola is based on Frank Aaltonen. Aaltonen did leave the island the same year as the publication.¹¹¹

As complicated as Finnish-Anishinaabe relations may have been, people from both groups undoubtedly interacted in social gatherings. Surviving photographs show multiethnic gatherings including Anishinaabeg at Finn Hall, or the Farmers’ Hall, which was built in 1925. It hosted community meetings, music and dancing (perhaps the main purpose for its construction), theater, sports, political meetings (usually leftist), and other events.¹¹² Finnish Halls were established in every Finnish community in Michigan and typical in both the United States and Canada. Sugar Island’s Finn Hall became a common gathering place for all islanders for decades, it seems, although each community center (Wilwalk, Baie De Wasai, Payment) had their own venues for entertainment.

There are also clues gleaned from society write-ups in the Sault newspaper that the Finns may have, more often than not, socialized among themselves (either on their own accord or as the non-Finns wanted it).¹¹³ Some American-born residents were undoubtedly suspicious of the political ideologies of the Finnish residents. Finns throughout the US experienced discrimination because of their beliefs, particularly in the interwar years.¹¹⁴ Aaltonen's activities as a labor organizer earned him an FBI file and even surveillance of his movements in 1918, after he had settled on Sugar Island.¹¹⁵ There were plenty Finnish socialists on Sugar Island and more than a few communists. In 1938, the Upper Peninsula Veterans of Foreign Wars Council declared that Sugar Island had one of the two most active units of the American Communist Party in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.¹¹⁶

Conclusion

By the end of the 1930s, there were new efforts to attract tourists and summer residents to Sugar Island. There were several resorts and shoreline developments planned and a Sugar Island Chamber of Commerce had been formed. The new ferry was making a difference. Frank Aaltonen anticipated the promise of summer tourism. He claimed that he knew Sugar Island would become “a playground for thousands of people” as soon as some roads were built.¹¹⁷ Although “thousands” was an overestimate, many more summer homes were built along the shoreline in the years after the ferry arrived. Tourists and summer residents became an important market for the island's farmers and gardeners. John Orasmaa operated “Hay Point Shores,” where tourists could lodge, get “excellent home cooking,” and experience a Finnish sauna.¹¹⁸

Anishinaabe residents were used to attract tourists; in a 1941 advertisement Sugar Island called itself the “Last, Best Land of Hiawatha with its friendly Ojibways.”¹¹⁹ They were promoting the island's natural setting, its “rolling landscapes,” “good fishing,” and its unique claim to be the “forest home of 300 Ojibway Indians.” Anishinaabeg were portrayed as being a part of the wilderness, and, like the rest of Sugar Island's natural environment, they were surviving the changes wrought by settler progress.

In 1938, Frank Aaltonen gave a speech at an event celebrating the 300th anniversary of the New Sweden Colony (Delaware River Settlement), which involved Finnish settlers. Finnish Americans across

You Must See
SUGAR ISLAND
The Last, Best Land of Hiawatha
with its friendly Ojibways

An island gem, 20 miles long, with rolling landscapes, good roads, and miles of big sugar maples.

Sugar Island is the forest home of 300 Ojibway Indians. Their WPA Indian Arts and Crafts Project at Willwalk attracts crowds of vacationists. No charge, visitors welcome.

Good fishing, too, northern and walleyed pike, jumbo perch, muskellunge.

Several cabin groups. Farmhouse rooms available with dining facilities overlooking the river and lovely Lake George. Boats and guides.

Frequent ferry service from nearby Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

See Page 75 for Sugar Island Ferry Schedule

E. E. PETERMAN & SONS ——— **SOO, MICH.**
Tel. 2427

Figure 2.6: Sugar Island advertisement, in 1941's *The Lure Book of Michigan's Upper Peninsula*, published by the Upper Peninsula Development Bureau of Michigan.

the country celebrated the tercentenary, as it gave them claim among the earliest of European colonizers. Aaltonen told the crowd that he, like “every Finn,” had the “inner urge” to “build something” in the “wilderness.”¹²⁰ Ignoring the truth of his failings as a farmer, he claimed that he had “carved an American farm out of the wilderness and made 300 acres of American waste land in northern Michigan productive and capable of sustaining human life.” There was no mention of Indigenous people in his speech and no mention of his Anishinaabe neighbors.

Although it is uncertain how many acres of forest were cleared by Finnish settlers or the exact length of fencing they constructed, the Finns worked to change the island’s rolling landscape to make it suitable for farming. These changes included the construction of roads, the mileage of which increased dramatically because of the political influence of the Finnish settlers. Frank Aaltonen thought that Sugar Island’s Anishinaabe population was indifferent about the changes the Finns were making to the island. The Anishinaabeg “felt,” Aaltonen wrote in

his memoir, that the “schools, roads, and bridges ... were a good thing for the country, but they and their ancestors had gotten along without those things for centuries and they could get along without them.”¹²¹

His contradictory opinion, that “the Indians” thought that change was “good” but unnecessary, mirrors the misguided ideology of 19th-century white settlers who thought that their contributions to the so-called wilderness were undeniably beneficial, even moral, and Native American resistance to those things came from ignorance and tradition, not a rational understanding. According to Aaltonen, the Anishinaabeg were only interested in something “more immediate and direct,” whether or not the Finns “would bring ‘some work’ to the island.” He thought they “were perfectly willing to forget tomorrow if they could get something to eat today.”¹²²

Sugar Island Anishinaabeg lost additional lands, lost political power, and experienced assaults on their livelihoods. But, even though Anishinaabe islanders knew what they had lost and what they were losing, they remained committed to making tomorrow better, not forgetting it, as Aaltonen claimed. Even though most of their lands had been lost, Sugar Island Ojibwes began organizing in the 1930s to preserve their sovereignty and expose the injustices of US colonialism. Sault-area Ojibwes, which included those on Sugar Island, had been living without any protections from the US government, without any of their lands held collectively as a protected reservation, and without tribal recognition from the US government. In 1937, the US government finally recognized the Indians living in eastern Upper Peninsula as part of the Bay Mills Indian Community (a reservation was established at Bay Mills west of Sault Ste. Marie and 9.2 acres was reserved on Sugar Island), while in the 1950s a committee was formed to represent Sugar Island Anishinaabeg in a discussion with the Office of Indian Affairs.¹²³ Because the Sugar Island and Sault Ste. Marie Anishinaabeg were so distant from Bay Mills, and because Bay Mills had not provided services to the Sugar Islanders, they formed the “Original Bands of Chippewa Indians and Their Heirs” in December 1953. This began their 20-year fight for federal recognition as a tribe separate from the Bay Mills Indian Community. The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, which includes Sugar Island Ojibwes, was granted federal tribe status in 1972 and a constitution was adopted in 1975.¹²⁴ There are now 44,000 members of the expansive and active Sault Tribe.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was supported by the Kone Foundation Grant for the HUMANA-project.
- 2 Anishinaabeg is the plural form of Anishinaabe. The Anishinaabeg are a group of culturally and linguistically related Indigenous peoples from the Great Lakes region that includes Ojibwe (Chippewa), Ottawa (Odawa), Potawatomi, Nipissing, and Mississauga people. Sugar Island Anishinaabeg are largely of Ojibwe ancestry and Ojibwe-Ottawa ancestry.
- 3 “Works Progress Administration Property Survey”; US Census, 1940. This study uses data from the Works Progress Administration’s Rural Property Inventory, property records, and the US census. During the Great Depression, the Work Progress Administration (a massive New Deal federal program) in cooperation with the Michigan State Tax Commission, conducted a property survey, employing 2,000 surveyors, appraisers, and engineers. The Michigan State Tax Commission realized that they did not have much data on the rural property in the state, potentially leaving tax revenue unassessed. The project was massive, there were over 1,200 townships to be surveyed, and it took several years (1935–1942) to complete. Surveyors noted the buildings on properties (giving details on their size in square feet, the year they were built, the type, the type of exterior and interior materials, their condition, even a drawing of the floor plan and more), what crops were being grown, what trees were growing and if they were being harvested, what the land looked like (swamps, lakes, ridges, etc.), and if the property had fences, silos, barns, access to roads and communication, or even a school district. There are 828 properties included in the inventory of the Sugar Island Township (in Chippewa County). Each property is detailed on the front and back of an 8×10-inch sheet. Some surviving surveys can be found at the Michigan State Archives or sporadically in county archives. The Sugar Island survey was preserved by the Sugar Island Township and can be accessed at the Chippewa County Historical Society. For more, see Westphal, Alban and Ries, “Accuracy.”
- 4 For the history of Finnish immigration to North America and Michigan, see Holmio, *History of the Finns in Michigan*; Kaunonen, *Finns in Michigan*; Kostiainen, *Finns in the United States*; Wargelin, *Americanization of the Finns*.
- 5 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 25.
- 6 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 25.
- 7 “Frank Adolph Aaltonen Draft Registration Card.”
- 8 Aaltonen was born in Hämeenlinna, Finland on September 23, 1886 (he lists 1884 on his First World War draft card, 1886 in his résumé and memoir). His wife, Rauha, whom he married in 1906 in Michigan, was born in Laukaa, Finland, and was a dressmaker. See “Frank Aaltonen Personal Experience Record”; “Kyllikki Aaltonen Mullarkey Questionnaire.”
- 9 Hans Hormavirta’s application for an 80-acre homestead on Sugar Island was denied in 1916. The 80 acres were given to Edward Bouley, of Anishinaabe ancestry, instead, see *Proceedings of the Public Domain Commission*, 661.
- 10 A reservation was created for the Bay Mills Indian Community, which at the time included Sault Ste. Marie and Sugar Island Chippewas, after the 1934 Indian Reorganization Act. See Cleland, *Place of the Pike*.

- 11 For information on the Detroit Treaty and forged Ojibwe signatures, see Bellfy, *Three Fires Unity*, 131–33.
- 12 Federal recognition was not restored to the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe, which includes Sugar Islanders, until 1972. The tribe fought for years to have their treaty rights restored.
- 13 Cleland, *Place of the Pike*, 37.
- 14 At least 24 of those 620 residents were Ojibwe men and women who were alive in 1872. At least two of them were alive during both the 1855 and 1836 treaty processes; see 1920 US Census.
- 15 Aaltonen wrote his memoir in 1938–1939 for the author Louis Adamic, who was using Aaltonen as a Finnish source for his book on American immigrants, *From Many Lands* (1940). Because Aaltonen’s memoir verges on exaggeration and self-aggrandizement, it should be read with a critical eye. Perhaps because of Aaltonen’s enthusiasm for the Finnish people, Adamic portrays Finnish Americans in a favorable light in *From Many Lands*, “one of his most favorable of any of the immigrant groups he has researched,” according to an Adamic biographer. See Shiffman, *Rooting Multiculturalism*, 72.
- 16 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 24.
- 17 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 24.
- 18 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 25.
- 19 Aaltonen was aware of the negative ideas Americans had about the imagined Finnish racial characteristics. Leading American racial theorists believed Finns belonged in a lesser racial category, unlike Scandinavians, because they were corrupted by “Mongolian,” eastern Asian blood. See Kivisto and Leinonen, “Representing Race.”
- 20 “Frank Aaltonen Personal Experience Record.”
- 21 Holmio, *History of the Finns in Michigan*, 155–61.
- 22 Holmio, *History of the Finns in Michigan*, 273–303; Saramo, “Capitalism as Death.”
- 23 *Evening News* (Sault Sainte Marie, MI), July 15, 1916.
- 24 *Evening News* (Sault Sainte Marie, MI), November 11, 1981.
- 25 *Upper Peninsula Today*, Summer 1983, 15; Swanson, *Sokeri Saari*, 3.
- 26 Swanson, *Sokeri Saari*, 4.
- 27 *Upper Peninsula Today*, Summer 1983, 15.
- 28 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 24.
- 29 *Acts of the Legislature of the State of Michigan*, 108.
- 30 *Annual Report of the Michigan Railroad Commission*, 11.
- 31 *Evening News* (Sault Sainte Marie, MI), July 15, 1916.
- 32 Chippewa County Warranty Deed 00082-00541, October 11, 1915.
- 33 Kyllikki Aaltonen Mullarkey Questionnaire, May 19, 1997, Swanson Files.
- 34 Swanson, *Sokeri Saari*, 3.
- 35 Frank Aaltonen Memoir, 28.
- 36 Chippewa County Warranty Deed 00086-00514, November 7, 1918.
- 37 Chippewa County Warranty Deed 00094-00068, October 1, 1919.
- 38 Hormavirtas’s name does not appear on the 1919 sale deed to John Aro.
- 39 Koivisto, “Sokerisaaren suomalaisten historiaa.”
- 40 Arbic, *Sugar Island Sampler*, 89; *Työmies* (Hancock, Michigan).
- 41 Swanson, *Sokeri Saari*, 3.

- 42 “Sylvia Maki Hovey and Impi Maki Curlis Questionnaire.”
- 43 US Census, 1920.
- 44 US Census, 1930.
- 45 Holmio, *History of the Finns*, 157.
- 46 “Chippewa County Warranty Deed 00085-00035.” Charlotte’s son Frank still owned five acres on the island by 1938.
- 47 *Evening News* (Sault Sainte Marie, MI), November 11, 1981.
- 48 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 28.
- 49 “Aaltonen Speech.”
- 50 “Aaltonen Speech.”
- 51 US Census, 1920.
- 52 “Siiri Lampi Kangas Questionnaire.”
- 53 “Sylvia Maki Hovey and Impi Maki Curlis Questionnaire.”
- 54 *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), September 9, 1928.
- 55 US Census, 1930.
- 56 Arbic, *Sugar Island Sampler*, 48.
- 57 The 1938 WPA inventory also noted the properties that were fenced, or had fencing somewhere, and the type of fencing that was used.
- 58 Swanson, *Sokeri Saari*, 10.
- 59 A survey in 1949–1950 found that wolves were rarely seen on Sugar Island, although coyotes were still common. Pruitt, Jr., “Mammals of the Chase S. Obsorn Preserve.” Michigan state hunting regulations also expanded in the 1920s and many Anishinaabeg argued that they violated their treaty rights.
- 60 Nadelhoffer, Hogg and Hazlett, *Changing Environment*, 23–24.
- 61 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 26.
- 62 For a discussion on Ojibwe livelihood, labor, work, and economies, see Norrgard, *Seasons of Change*, 9.
- 63 Norrgard, *Seasons of Change*.
- 64 US Census, 1920, 1930, 1940.
- 65 US Census, 1920, 1930, 1940.
- 66 “Treasurer Records.”
- 67 *Escanaba Daily Press* (Escanaba, MI), May 19, 1939, and May 28, 1939. This effort had been ongoing since at least 1916; see *The L’Anse Sentinel* (L’Anse, MI), January 8, 1916.
- 68 *The Evening News* (Sault Ste. Marie, MI), November 11, 1936.
- 69 “Indian-Handicraft Flyer.”
- 70 *The Evening News* (Sault Ste. Marie, MI), December 5, 1938, and December 1, 1939; *Ironwood Daily Globe* (Ironwood, MI), December 7, 1938.
- 71 US Census, 1940. Two others seemed to have been paid something by the WPA to do their basket weaving.
- 72 *Ironwood Times* (Ironwood, MI), November 30, 1934.
- 73 For some of those older homes, it seems that their construction dates are estimates (which is why many of the homes are listed as being built in 1900 or 1910); see “Works Progress Administration Property Survey.”
- 74 US Census, 1920, 1930, 1940. Of the 13 adults boarding in 1920, three were Finnish, but none were Ojibwe. Of the 16 adults boarding in 1930, two were Finnish and zero were Ojibwe. In 1940, six of the 12 boarders were Finnish and just one was Ojibwe.

- 75 *Evening News* (Sault Sainte Marie, MI), November 11, 1981.
- 76 “Aili Huhtala Allen Questionnaire.”
- 77 Swanson, *Sokeri Saari*, 5.
- 78 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 29.
- 79 US Census 1920, 1930, 1940; Arbic, *Sugar Island Sampler*, 85–89.
- 80 Swanson, *Sokeri Saari*, 8–9; General Records, 1918–1929.
- 81 Clerk Account Books, 1917–1922, 1923–1933; Andersson, Flavin, and Kekki, “Sugar Island Finns.”
- 82 Arbic, *Sugar Island Sampler*, 53–54.
- 83 General Records, 1918–1929.
- 84 Clerk Account Books, 1917–1922, 1923–1933.
- 85 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 29.
- 86 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 11.
- 87 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 27.
- 88 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 27. Aaltonen may have been placing the Cadreau, Gurnoe, Corbins, and Frechette families on Sugar Island in this group.
- 89 US census records in 1910, 1920, and 1930 identify most of the large McCoy family as “white,” but census takers (enumerators) often determined the “race” of individuals themselves (until 1960). In 1940, however, most of the McCoyes are listed as “Indian.”
- 90 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 27. Aaltonen thought a McCoy married a Cree woman in the early 19th century and had several sons, but it also seems that there was intermarriage with local Anishinaabeg as well.
- 91 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 27.
- 92 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 29.
- 93 *Lansing State Journal* (Lansing, MI), April 17, 1925.
- 94 “Works Progress Administration Property Survey.”
- 95 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 30.
- 96 Chippewa County, Michigan, Deed Database.
- 97 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 31.
- 98 Koivisto, “Sokerisaaren suomalaisten historiaa.”
- 99 *Ironwood Daily Globe* (Ironwood, MI), March 30, 1928.
- 100 *Evening News* (Sault Sainte Marie, MI), July 31, 1929.
- 101 Swanson, *Sokeri Saari*, 26.
- 102 General Records, 1918–1929, 401. In 1929, Hytinen nearly came to blows with members of the township election board, which included Aaltonen, after Hytinen was accused of not being a naturalized citizen, thus not eligible to vote. Hytinen had voted in prior elections and was elected highway commissioner in 1922 and justice of the peace in 1926, so it is not clear why the issue came up in 1929.
- 103 For a succinct overview of Michigan Finnish labor and political groups and their ideologies, see Kaunonen, *Finns in Michigan*, 75–86.
- 104 Kivisto, “Decline of the Finnish-American Left,” 67.
- 105 *Ironwood Daily Globe* (Ironwood, MI), September 14, 1929.
- 106 *Upper Peninsula Today*. Summer 1983, 16.
- 107 *Evening News* (Sault Sainte Marie, MI), November 3, 1938.
- 108 *Evening News* (Sault Sainte Marie, MI), May 20, 1939.
- 109 McClinchey, *Joe Pete*.

- 110 *The Michigan Daily* (Ann Arbor, MI), November 24, 1929.
- 111 Arbic, *Sugar Island Sampler*, 93–94; Andersson, Flavin and Kekki, “Sugar Island Finns.”
- 112 Arbic, *Sugar Island Sampler*, 91; Kaunonen, *Finns in Michigan*, 67–69; Koivisto, “Sokerisaaren suomalaisten historiaa.”
- 113 The Sugar Island township records contain Prohibition-era applications for private businesses like pool halls, dance halls, and a “soft drink emporium” that required government permission (liquor could not be served by the glass on Sugar Island until 1941). Applicants had to provide five personal references. In the two applications submitted by Finns (Frank Kuusisto and Jack Koivisto), both for a dance hall (Finn Hall), every reference was a Finnish man. In the three applications made by non-Finns, two by a prominent French-Canadian named Ambrose Thibert and one by the prominent Angus McCoy of Indigenous and Scottish descent, only one Finnish reference was listed, Emil Hytinen; see Township Correspondence, Sugar Island Township Records, stored by the Chippewa County Historical Society; Swanson, *Sokeri Saari*, 36. In the late 1930s, a meeting of the “Galloping Gals” club at the home of Angus and Mary McCoy saw the attendance of 18 white and Indigenous women, but not a single Finn was there; see *The Evening News* (Sault Ste. Marie, MI), October 5, 1939. There was not a single Finn elected among the all-white Sugar Island Homemakers Club officers in 1940 either; see *The Evening News* (Sault Ste. Marie, MI), April 19, 1940. Similarly, the only Finnish member of the all-white Sugar Island Homemakers’ Club in 1939 was Emma Hytinen, the wife of Emil; see *The Evening News* (Sault Ste. Marie, MI), October 18, 1939, December 9, 1939, April 19, 1940.
- 114 The Ku Klux Klan terrorized Finns accused of being leftists in small communities in the eastern Upper Peninsula in the mid-1920s; see Kaunonen, *Finns in Michigan*, 79.
- 115 “Frank Aaltonen, FBI Investigative Case Files.”
- 116 *The Evening News* (Sault Ste. Marie, MI), December 15, 1938.
- 117 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 30.
- 118 *The Evening News* (Sault Ste. Marie, MI), August 19, 1937.
- 119 *Lure Book of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula*. Sugar Island also put out a tourism “folder” in 1941 according to the *Detroit Free Press*, which also called the island “an outstanding attraction,” with “pure Ojibway” residents; see *Detroit Free Press*, July 13, 1941.
- 120 “Aaltonen Speech.” Aaltonen believed that the Finns at the New Sweden Colony were the “truest pioneers ever to land on the shores of these United States.”
- 121 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 26.
- 122 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” 26.
- 123 *The Evening News* (Sault Ste. Marie, MI), September 23, 1953; *Petoskey News-Review* (Petoskey, MI), February 14, 1959.
- 124 “Story of Our People: The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians,” Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, <https://www.saulttribe.com/history-a-culture/story-of-our-people>.

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CHAPTER 3

“Some Kind of Eldorado”

Eero Erkko and the Plan for a Finnish Settler Colony in Cuba, 1903–1905

Aleksi Huhta

In April 1904, a father of a conscription-aged young man in northern Finland penned a letter to Eero Erkko, an exiled Finnish journalist living in Brooklyn, New York. The father explained in the letter how his son had decided to flee Finland with his friend to escape drafting to the Russian Imperial Army. To help his son find a suitable place of emigration, the father asked Erkko about opportunities in Cuba. Was Cuba really “some kind of ‘Eldorado,’” as Erkko had insinuated in a recent newspaper article? If reality did meet the image, the letter writer continued, young Finnish men would unhesitatingly head to “the Far West, where a dictatorship like ours would not be tolerated.”¹

Why did Eero Erkko entice Finnish political refugees and young men fleeing Russian conscription to emigrate to Cuba? Studies of Finnish immigration to Cuba have been scant, with Ritva Jarva’s 1971 well-researched article on Finnish settlements in Itabo (in Matanzas province) and Omaja (in Oriente) still the most authoritative account.² To understand why Erkko promoted Cuba in the early 1900s—and

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why he considered the island suitable for Finnish settlement—we must place his trajectory within the broader geopolitical context of the turn-of-the-century Caribbean. The Spanish-American War of 1898 had extended the United States’ imperial power beyond the North American continent. Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines were annexed as US territories, while Cuba was given formal independence after a period of American military occupation (1899–1902). In practice, however, the United States retained a firm control over Cuban politics and economy; the Cuban constitution even included an appendix—the so-called Platt Amendment—which allowed the United States to militarily intervene in Cuba to protect “life, property, and individual liberty.” In the economic sphere, US dominance was most evident in sugar production, Cuba’s primary export industry. American companies bought vast tracts of land, especially in the eastern provinces, cleared land for sugarcane plantations, and built colossal mills to process the cane.³ In the early 1900s, proponents of Cuba’s unification with the United States saw immigration as a way to “Americanize” Cuba in preparation for its eventual annexation. Americans congregated in Havana and other commercial centers, but they also began to establish their own settlements and towns in rural Cuba, especially in the two easternmost provinces (Oriente and Camagüey) and the Isle of Pines.⁴ Eero Erkko’s idea of a Finnish colony in Cuba emerged in this context of expanding US imperialism in the Caribbean, and its practical realization was entirely dependent on American capital.

Yet the story of Erkko’s attempt to build a Finnish colony in Cuba also illustrates the diversity the actors who built “American” imperial presence in the Caribbean—as well as the diversity of interests that these actors possessed.⁵ The plan to settle a tract of Cuban land with Finnish settlers was born out of interactions between Finnish political activists, two American land companies and a Cuban real estate agent, Cesar Marrero González, whose active part in the plan has been largely ignored in previous studies. Thus, the case of planned Finnish settlement in Cuba also sheds light on Cuban participation in the building of “American” power in the island.⁶ The ultimate failure of his settlement plan also helps to appreciate the limits of American power.

In exploring the rhetoric and realities of Erkko’s Cuba plan, this chapter draws mainly on Erkko’s private correspondence and newspaper articles published in Finnish and Finnish-American newspapers. The chapter first examines Erkko’s vision of a Finnish settler colony in

Cuba within the context of his political thinking and the broader ideological currents on which it drew on. The chapter will then probe how Erkko attempted to make his vision a reality: the negotiations with other activists, business partners, American landholding companies, and prospective emigrants. The chapter closes with a brief look at the lives of the Finnish emigrants who followed Erkko's call and migrated to the Cuba Real Estate Association's farming colony of "Chicago," near Itabo in the western Matanzas province.

Dreams of a Finnish Deposit in the Tropics

On July 3, 1903, Finnish journalist and political activist Eero Erkko stepped on board the SS *New York* in New York City harbor. The ship's port of destination was Havana, where the steamer was set to arrive after a four-day journey. On board, Erkko had time to collect his thoughts about his Caribbean trip's objectives and to put some ideas down in his diary. He queried to himself why emigrants from Finland were so poor at choosing good places of settlement. Even though the Finns seemingly had the same opportunities as other nationalities to select fertile and resource-rich settling grounds, they appeared to orient themselves toward cold and arid sections of the globe. Erkko's recent visit with Finnish immigrant farmers in New Hampshire had left him thoroughly unimpressed. Finns there had purchased degraded farming lands from Americans who were only too eager to rid themselves of the derelict property. On the North American continent, Finnish immigrants were seemingly out of good options to establish themselves. "Do Finns have to either remain mining and factory workers, toiling to enrich American tycoons," Erkko wondered, "or plough lands in the North that are hard to cultivate and have been abandoned by others?"⁷ Erkko suggested a change in the geography of the emigrants' settlement patterns. Instead of crowding the north of America, Finns should perhaps seek to settle in "richer, warmer regions," where nature would be less unforgiving. Finnish immigrants to America should "go to the countryside" and attach themselves to land that was of quality superior to the soil they left behind in Finland. The new land should endow them with a livelihood with moderate labor and ample free time for intellectual development. "It is thus from the more southern regions where Finns should look for farming lands for themselves,"

Erkko concluded. Two days after putting down these thoughts, Erkko had the chance to inspect one such potential destination: Cuba.⁸

Erkko's visit to Cuba had a specific motivation related to his political activism in Finland. Erkko had earned the ire of the Russian authorities in Finland as the outspoken editor of the *Päivälehti* (Daily Paper), the main organ of the liberal nationalist Young Finns. He had also edited an underground newspaper, which advocated resistance against Russification, and organized campaigns to undermine Russian military conscription in Finland.⁹ In May 1903, the Russian authorities deported Erkko from Finland as part of a larger wave of expulsions (Figure 3.1). The leadership of the Finnish resistance activists suggested that Erkko travel to America to organize Finnish immigrants there for the nationalist struggle in Finland. Erkko left for the United States in June 1903, while his wife and three sons followed in August. In New York, Erkko established a Finnish-language publishing house and a nationalist newspaper (*Amerikan Kaiku*, or *The American Echo*), organized a nationalist organization for Finns in North America (the Finnish National League), and tried to incorporate a Finnish immigrant bank, which could have offered financial services for the activist underground in Finland.¹⁰ Erkko's decision to visit Cuba in early July 1903, mere weeks after his arrival to New York, was closely tied with this political aspect of his mission in America. Since 1899, Finnish nationalist activists had searched for a place of settlement for Finnish emigrants who fled Russification in Finland. When plans for a settler colony in Canada fell through, activists began to eye alternative regions in the Americas.¹¹ "Now you go look for a place, which resembles Finland, where we can all congregate when it will be our turn," an activist friend who stayed in Finland wrote to Erkko after the latter's expulsion.¹²

In July 1903, Erkko traveled to Havana to investigate whether Cuba would suit the needs of Finnish political refugees and other emigrants in need of settlement. During the week he spent in Havana, Erkko was chaperoned by a local real estate agent, Cesar Marrero González. Marrero took his Finnish companion first on a sightseeing tour of Havana, where Erkko could witness some of the architectural symbols of Cuba's newly won independence: the presidential palace, the two houses of Congress, and a customs office at the city harbor. Marrero took Erkko also to his villa in upscale Vedado, a leafy garden neighborhood inhabited by Havana's business and political elite. They also paid a visit to the



Figure 3.1: Eero Erkko with his wife Maissi Erkko boarding a train after Eero had received his deportation order. The Russian authorities deported Eero Erkko from Finland in May 1903. The Erkko family spent their years of exile (1903–1905) in Brooklyn, New York. Source: Finnish Heritage Agency/Finna.fi, Image HK19730524:1. Released under CC BY 4.0.

villa of Florentin Mantilla, a Spanish immigrant who owned a major cigar factory, where Black maids served the guests with sugary pastries and German beer.¹³ After touring Havana with Marrero, Erkko met Mr. Willick, the German-born chief engineer of the Cuban-American Land and Fruit Company. Erkko, Willick, and Marrero spent three days inspecting Cuban agriculture around Havana. They investigated American and German immigrant farms, a large sugar plantation, and a tobacco-growing area in the southern outskirts of the city. They also visited the Cuban government’s agricultural experiment station in Santiago de las Vegas, where the station’s director presented “excellent plantations” of pineapples, bananas, oranges, and other crops.¹⁴

Erkko's weeklong stay in Havana left him thoroughly impressed with Cuba's potential as a place of Finnish agricultural settlement. In a letter to a friend, composed on his fourth day in Havana, Erkko recorded his first impressions of the island and the opportunities it offered. Contrary to common beliefs, the Cuban climate was not overtly hot and humid, not even during the warmest summer months. Daytime temperatures did not rise above those in the northern United States (around 25–33 Celsius), while Havana nights could be even cooler than nights in New York.¹⁵ Erkko was also impressed with Cuba's soil. The island soil was so fertile that almost any plant could be cultivated in it: not only sugarcane, tobacco, and coffee but also pineapples, oranges, bananas, cotton, and other potentially profitable export crops.¹⁶ Indeed, Erkko was particularly enthusiastic about fruit growing. Because Cuba had good transportation connections to ports on the US east coast and a longer growing season than the continental United States, the island had vast potential as an exporter of fruits and vegetables to the United States, especially during the winter months.¹⁷ Moreover, Erkko surmised that fruit and vegetable growing were sufficiently easy endeavors to suit the kinds of Finnish settlers he had in mind. According to Erkko, Cuba would best accommodate the exiled middle- to upper-class officials and professionals, who had some capital but little or no experience in agriculture. The Finnish colony in Cuba could also accommodate perhaps a thousand young men fleeing Russian conscription, who had no capital but who could sell their labor to an American landholding company. After accruing some savings from their wages, they, too, could purchase a few acres of land and become independent farmers.¹⁸

Popular accounts of Eero Erkko's plan of a Finnish colony in Cuba have sometimes claimed that Erkko had magnanimous plans of a military colony for up to 100,000 Finnish settlers, complete with its own railways and a steamship connection with Finland.¹⁹ In fact, Erkko's plans were more moderate. In a letter to his older brother, Erkko denied that he was in the process of establishing a New Finland in the tropics. Distraught by his more conservative elder brother's insinuation that he was attracting Finns away from their homeland, Erkko exclaimed: "I have no intention of enticing Finns to Cuba!" Instead, Erkko saw Cuba as one potential place of settlement for either those Finns who were forced to emigrate as political refugees or those who had already left Finland for America. For these overseas Finns, Cuba offered the best available place to practice agriculture as independent

farmers. Moreover, in Cuba, Finns had a better chance than anywhere else in the Americas to preserve their language and culture at least for three generations, which was as long as one could expect Finnish traditions to survive in foreign lands. "In this day and age," Erkkö noted, "one does not establish new states amidst foreign peoples like in the age of Old Testament." He did not believe "in any 'Finnish national body' outside Finland." While the replanting of Finns was thus an unrealistic goal, Erkkö still believed it was possible to establish smaller Finnish societies to preserve the Finnish culture outside Finland. These kinds of small societies were especially important at a time when the culture and languages of Finland were under threat from Russification. Overseas colonies of Finns could serve as "deposits of Finnish nationality," where the culture could be saved and later "withdrawn" when times in Finland were more promising. The national culture preserved in these overseas colonies could rejuvenate and reinvigorate Finland after Russification, helping to eradicate the parts of Finnish culture that had disappeared or become "rotten." Thus, Erkkö did not see his Cuban colony as a New Finland but as a kind of offshore deposit of Finnishness in the Caribbean.²⁰

Erkkö's belief that Cuba offered the best available place to deposit Finnishness built on his conceptions of civilizational and racial hierarchies. Erkkö shared the common turn-of-the-century cultural belief system that categorized world peoples into races on different levels of civilizational development. Less powerful and less developed peoples faced always the threat of disappearance when they confronted a more powerful or more developed nationality. The highly developed Anglo-American culture threatened to assimilate Finnish immigrants in only two generations. When Erkkö had visited Finnish immigrant communities in Massachusetts after his arrival in the US in June 1903, he had been disappointed in the "low cultural level" of his overseas compatriots. The Massachusetts Finns seemed content in their dependency on low-paid wage work and appeared to waste their earnings on alcohol and other vices. Even more troubling, the antisocial behavior of the Finnish immigrant workers threatened the reputation of the whole nationality. "After the Chinese and the Italians, Finns have the worst reputation here and receive the hardest work with lowest pay," Erkkö lamented.²¹ Erkkö's fear over "his" nationality's low position in global racial and civilizational hierarchies was widely shared also among other contemporary East European nationalists.²²

While Finns faced assimilationist pressure from a more developed culture in the United States, Erkkö did not fear similar threat from the part of Cubans. Erkkö's observations of Cubans were heavily influenced by religious and racial stereotypes about Catholics, "Latin peoples," and Africans. While his older brother expressed alarm that the Cuban environment would render Finnish workers lethargic, reducing them in a few generations "to the level of the local people or even lower," Eero was more optimistic about the more advanced Finns' capability to ward off assimilation in Cuba. Cubans, "like all Latin peoples," were "incapable of national development" and would thus present no danger for the preservation of Finnishness, at least for three generations.²³ Spanish colonial exploitation explained part of Cuban lack of development, but the "origin of the people" also contributed to their "laziness."²⁴ Cubans' lack of initiative required that more industrious people come and make use of the island's riches. Erkkö wrote his brother that Cuba had a chance of becoming a "real paradise," but only if "capable people from the northern lands move there."²⁵ It should be noted, however, that Erkkö's conception of Cuban inferiority was not a static collection of received stereotypes impervious to change. In one letter to his wife from Havana, Erkkö marveled the seeming equality of races in Cuba: "It is delightful to see the freedom and equality, which is evident here between the whites and the negroes. [E]specially the latter have gone up in my valuation, because you can see [negroes who are] as fine and civilized as the whites."²⁶ Erkkö's liberal sympathies for the Cuban independence struggle could also temper his view of Cubans' race-based inferiority. In one article, Erkkö gave credit to Havana's "republican government" for its "vigorous" and "serious" efforts to develop the island's economy and education.²⁷

But while Erkkö expressed some admiration of Cuban republicanism and egalitarianism, he attributed most of the credit on the island's development to Americans. In an article for *Young Finland*, Erkkö touted the industrious Americans for cleaning the island of filth and many diseases, as well as of developing its infrastructure, industries, and government institutions. Erkkö conceded that American business interests had played a part in the US intervention in the Spanish–Cuban war in 1898, but these interests had not dictated American policy toward Cuba. It was to "the credit of the United States" that Americans did not "usurp the island as their colony" even though they had significant economic interests there. Instead, after making

major improvements to the island's derelict infrastructure and corrupt institutions, Americans left Cuba to be governed by the Cubans themselves.²⁸ Erkkö's sympathetic account of American benevolent colonialism can be read as an indirect criticism of Russia, but he was undoubtedly sincere in his belief in the benevolence of American power in Cuba. Erkkö's correspondence and published articles clearly demonstrate that his view of Cuba's society and economy was based largely on contemporary American journalism and prospectuses of American companies doing business in Cuba. In a letter to his wife onboard his Havana-bound steamer, Erkkö told that he had spent most of his time on the ship smoking and reading English-language literature on Cuba and the West Indies.²⁹ Erkkö believed that his idea of a "deposit of Finnish nationality" could be best realized under the protection of American power in Cuba. However, when Erkkö entered actual negotiations with Americans on Cuba, he found his vision very difficult to execute in practice.

Negotiating Colonization

Turning ideas about a Finnish settler colony in Cuba into reality required political determination and economic capital. Unfortunately for Erkkö, these were in short supply among Finnish nationalist activists in 1903. Deportations had caused financial ruin and political demoralization among the activists. Moreover, there was no consensus as to how the activists should view the so-called emigration question. The more conservative activists, led by Leo Mechelin, opposed any efforts to "encourage" emigration, and stood thus resolutely against any funding of colonization plans outside Finland. In October 1903, Arvid Neovius, one of the leading resistance activists, informed Erkkö that opposition to colony ideas was too strong among older activists to warrant any major maneuvering on the matter.³⁰ Moreover, even the younger, more radical activists who supported the idea of a Finnish emigrant colony were divided over its preferred location. Konni Zilliacus, the most vocal advocate of the colony idea, was skeptical of Erkkö's Cuban plan. Having himself lived in Costa Rica in 1889–1890, Zilliacus allowed that the Caribbean climate was in many ways favorable for a Finnish settlement, but he doubted if there existed capital for such a venture. Cuba might well accommodate a few of the wealthier Finnish exiles, but it was more difficult to settle thousands of conscription-

aged men with lesser means there. Zilliacus had since 1899 worked for a Finnish colony in Canada, and he told Erkkö that he still preferred the Dominion to other potential colony sites.³¹ The energetic and well-connected Zilliacus's lack of enthusiasm over Cuba was a major setback for Erkkö's plan.

Erkkö found a more willing associate in New York. Axel Hornborg was a Finnish businessman who had emigrated to the United States in 1882 and who headed the New York agency of the Finland Steamship Company, the dominant company in the Finnish emigration business. Hornborg saw his mission in assisting immigrants to go beyond his role as a shipping company agent. In a 1901 letter to the US Industrial Office, Hornborg noted that he had long been "interested in locating Scandinavians advantageously." For Hornborg, this meant guiding Finns and Scandinavians away from cities to productive agricultural areas in "the Central and Southern States, where the cost of a house is very little and the winters do not demand very much clothing." He owned an 8,000-acre tract of land in Tennessee, where he guided Finnish and Scandinavian immigrants to cultivate grapes and tobacco.³² He also owned another tract of land in Alaska, where he planned to establish a Finnish agricultural colony and a guano plant. The colony site on the Kenai Peninsula had yet to acquire its first settlers, but it already boasted a name befitting of Axel Hornborg's grandiose visions: "Port Axel."³³ Hornborg's imagination and experience were instrumental as Erkkö began to sketch his plan for a Finnish "deposit" on the Caribbean. August Edwards, the editor of the *Amerikan Sanomat* (American Dispatches) in Ashtabula, Ohio, apparently also collaborated with Erkkö and Hornborg in attracting Finnish immigrants to Cuba.³⁴

When Hornborg met Erkkö in New York in June 1903, he put Erkkö in touch with a landholding company operating in Cuba. The Cuban-American Land and Fruit Company, incorporated in New Jersey in early 1903 with a capital stock of \$5 million, was in the process of purchasing a large tract of land in the eastern Oriente province. It planned to subdivide the land into smaller plots, plant the land with fruits and vegetables, and sell the plots to farmers from North America. The company president, Alexander J. Milliken, explained to Erkkö that the company preferred American investors and farmers, but that it was also willing to do business with Finns. Erkkö also talked about Cuba with a fellow newspaperman, the American journalist Edwin Warren Guyol, who had edited the Havana newspaper *La Lucha's* English sec-

tion before the Spanish-American War. Guyol had been "one of the influences behind the United States' entry into the war," Erkkko wrote to a comrade in Stockholm. The company offered to send Erkkko to Havana with Guyol to investigate the island's suitability for Finnish settlers; when Guyol had to cancel his trip, Erkkko made the trip to Havana alone.³⁵ After Erkkko's return from Cuba, he and Hornborg entered a contract with the Cuban-American Land and Fruit Company. The company agreed to sell them 5,000 acres of ready-planted fruit and vegetable farming land for \$120 per acre, with an option for further acquisitions later. For a commission of \$10 per acre, the Finns promised to "use their best effort to secure sales of [the company's] land."³⁶ Unfortunately for Erkkko and Hornborg, however, the Cuban-American Land and Fruit Company turned out to be one of the less successful American business ventures in the island. For unclear reasons, the company dissolved in 1904, a mere year after its incorporation.³⁷

Erkkko and Hornborg did not abandon their Cuban plan, however, but sought out a new business partner: the real estate agent Cesar Marrero González, whom Erkkko had met in Havana. Marrero had been active in securing Erkkko's partnership already in Havana. When Marrero had come to bid his farewell to his Finnish guest in the Havana harbor, he had indiscreetly slipped Erkkko an envelope and asked that he keep it a secret from the German engineer, Mr. Willick, who worked for the Cuban-American Land and Fruit Company. The envelope included a note with contact information to Marrero's private office, and offers of land in different parts of Cuba, sold by companies other than the one Willick represented.³⁸ The note suggested that Marrero could offer Erkkko better land on better terms than the company Willick represented. When Erkkko's business with the Cuban-American Land and Fruit Company folded, he took up Marrero's offer.

In April 1904, two friends of Erkkko, Jussi Canth and Karl Brofeldt, both recently deported from Finland, traveled to Cuba to explore the country's potential for agriculture.³⁹ When Erkkko wrote the Cuban agent Marrero about his two friends' visit, Marrero promised he would help them the best he could. "Well, you know that in Cuba, they will find plenty suitable tracts for any farming," Marrero wrote in his reply.⁴⁰ When Canth and Brofeldt arrived in Havana on April 20, they discussed land business with Marrero, before heading off on an investigative tour of the island. After ten days' travel, they returned to Havana, where they again met with Marrero. "Among other places,

they went to 'Itabo,'" Marrero reported to Erkkö, where Canth and Brofeldt had taken a liking to the estates of Santa Clara and La Puente. "I'm disposed to do all my best in order that they might get the land on the most favorable terms!"⁴¹

Marrero wrote and dispatched to Erkkö a description of the Itabo estates. The description was full of praise for these "very superior lands and forests unequaled for all kinds of cultivation," peppering his sales pitch with frequent superlatives and multiple exclamation points, mixing Spanish punctuation with American English colloquialisms: "¡This is the great business in Cuba to-day!"⁴² Marrero promised that Erkkö would receive a substantial share of the profit made from land sales, and urged Erkkö to do his utmost in "sending many people – purchasers and investors" to Cuba. Yet, to avoid the stereotype of a duplicitous land agent, Marrero was careful not to appear too profit-oriented. He referred frequently to his friendship with Erkkö, and assured Erkkö of their friendship's intimacy: "Now, please, remember that you have a serious, good and sincere friend, willing to serve you, all the time."⁴³ Although Canth and Brofeldt eventually abandoned their idea of moving to Cuba, Erkkö's involvement with Cuba continued through Marrero, who urged Erkkö to send more people to Cuba.⁴⁴

The Itabo estates were the property of the Cuban Real Estate Association, a landholding company incorporated in 1902 in South Dakota. The company's business model was similar to many other US-based land companies in Cuba: to subdivide land into lots, sell them to immigrants from North America, and have the settlers grow fruits and vegetables for export to the US.⁴⁵ The Cuban Real Estate Association began to advertise its land in local newspapers in New England and the South in June 1903. It also published pamphlets advertising its property (Figure 3.2).⁴⁶ Erkkö's newly founded Brooklyn newspaper *Amerikan Kaiku*, along with August Edwards' *Amerikan Sanomat* in Ashtabula, Ohio, became the outlet for the company's marketing toward Finnish Americans. In March 1904, Erkkö wrote an article for the newspaper on "Cuban fruit lands", in which he attempted to reply to the many inquiries he had received about Cuba. Erkkö instructed prospective buyers to contact Axel Hornborg's office in New York, which was set to begin the selling of lands in Cuba.⁴⁷ During the spring, Hornborg's advertisements about Cuban "fruit lands" began to appear in the *Amerikan Kaiku*.⁴⁸ Erkkö penned articles on Cuba also for *Nuori Suomi* (Young Finland), a liberal literary publication, which Erkkö had

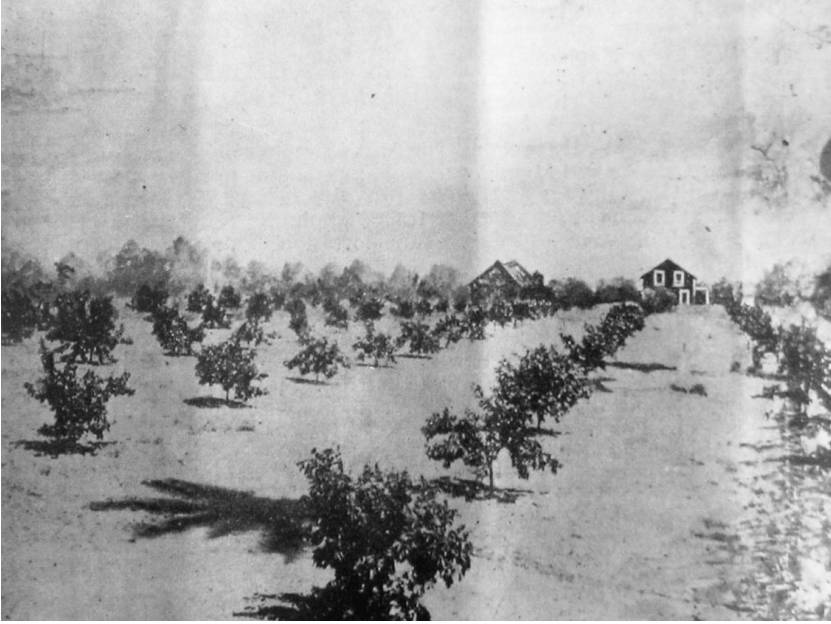


Figure 3.2: A two-year-old orange grove in the Chicago colony in Itabo, as depicted in a land company prospectus. Images like this were common in the promotional materials of the American land companies as they tried to attract settlers to Cuba. Images of developing plantations created an impression of the colonies' growing potential. Source: *The Chicago Colony, Itabo, Province of Matanzas, Island of Cuba: Seventy-Two Hours from New York* (Cuba Real Estate Association, 1908), 8.

helped to found in 1891.⁴⁹ In April 1904, a Swedish-language Helsinki newspaper also published an article on Cuba by Erkko.⁵⁰

The increasing political divisions among Finnish immigrants in the United States probably lessened the appeal of Erkko's promotion of Cuba as a place of settlement. Although Erkko came to the United States with the purpose of unifying the quarrelsome immigrant community, his attempts at establishing a common nationalist front among American Finns largely failed.⁵¹ Working-class Finns remained especially aloof from Erkko, seeing Erkko as a representative of Finland's bourgeoisie.⁵² This distrust deflated the appeal of Erkko's promotion of Cuba. One socialist later reminisced about how he had been intrigued by Finnish-American newspapers' articles on Cuba, but had become

angered when he learned that Erkko was behind the settlement project.⁵³

Developments in Finland and Russia in 1904–1905 worked to direct Erkko’s gaze away from the Western Hemisphere. Following Russian military misfortunes in the Russo-Japanese War, the tsarist regime sought to placate opposition in Finland by relaxing some of the police state measures adopted earlier, allowing the return of deported activists in early 1905.⁵⁴ Erkko followed these developments intently in his Brooklyn exile. Financial difficulties, tiredness with internecine squabbles among Finnish immigrants, and exhaustion with life as an alien in the US had built in him a desire to return to Finland. In early 1905, Erkko sold his printing business in Brooklyn and left the US with his family.⁵⁵

Erkko did not completely lose interest in Cuba even after his return to Finland. In October 1905, Axel Hornborg sent Erkko a certificate of shares in a new land company that sought business opportunities in eastern Cuba. The East Cuba Colonization Company, incorporated in Maine in August 1905 with a capital stock of \$100,000, was a subsidiary of the Cuba Eastern Railroad Company and the powerful banking conglomerate Knickerbocker.⁵⁶ Hornborg encouraged Erkko to promote the company in Finland, but Erkko’s involvement with the company remained apparently non-existent.⁵⁷ Erkko received Hornborg’s letter at a time when Finland was experiencing the upheavals of the Russian Revolution and the Great Strike of late 1905. Himself heavily involved in the events, Erkko presumably did not find time to act on Hornborg’s suggestion; Erkko’s correspondence gives no trace of his involvement with the East Cuban Colonization Company beyond his holding of shares. Hornborg died unexpectedly in December 1905, but some of his associates continued their involvement in the Cuban endeavor into 1906. Their plans eventually crumbled with the broader collapse of the Knickerbocker businesses in Cuba.⁵⁸ Erkko’s shares in the company—nominally worth \$3,000—proved worthless.

Finn Settlers of Chicago, Cuba

Eero Erkko never visited the “colony” in Itabo he had helped to establish; his July 1903 trip to Cuba did not take him east of Havana. In his promotion of the “Chicago” colony, then, Erkko relied on information provided to him by Cesar Marrero Gonzalez and the Cuba Real Estate

Association. Despite Erkkö never venturing to Itabo, some of his readers did. Erkkö apparently received several inquiries about emigration to Cuba from Finland and from Finnish immigrants in North America.⁵⁹ During the spring of 1904, Erkkö exchanged letters with Adam Aleksander Karr (Karjalainen) (1854–1919), an owner of a hotel in Rocklin, California. Erkkö had met Karr in Rocklin in August 1903, when Erkkö had been on his lecture tour on the west coast. Karr had apparently agreed to become an agent for Erkkö's new newspaper.⁶⁰ Karr had been born into a landowning peasant family in Juuka, a rural municipality in Northern Karelia, and worked as a seaman before his emigration to the US in 1902. He had first visited Cuba in 1876 on a ship he worked on, and been already then enthralled with the island. When Karr had read Erkkö's article on Cuba in the *Amerikan Kaiku*, the text "rekindled" in him an "old dream" of settling as a farmer in Cuba. Fellow Finns in Rocklin warned him about Cuba's diseases and hot climate, but Erkkö encouraged Karr to make the journey. "I am almost certain that you will never regret your having migrated to Cuba," Karr later recalled Erkkö writing him.⁶¹

In May, Karr left California for Cuba with Juho Miettinen, a fellow Finnish immigrant from Rocklin. Karr and Miettinen had emigrated together from Juuka to Rocklin in 1902. In Havana, Karr met with Cesar Marrero, who showed Karr "several descriptions of different lands." Marrero assured Erkkö that he would introduce Karr with "good & cheap land for his purpose."⁶² After the meeting with Marrero in Havana, Karr and Miettinen headed to the same tract of land in Itabo, which Canth and Brofeldt had visited earlier. Unlike Canth and Brofeldt, however, Karr and Miettinen decided to stay in Itabo. They both bought 20-acre lots from the Cuba Real Estate Association, and Karr at least became an agent for the company.⁶³ In 1904, Karr wrote four letters for Erkkö's *Amerikan Kaiku*, where he urged Finns who wanted land in Cuba to contact him.⁶⁴ As early as his second letter, Karr stated that he had received so many letters of inquiry that he found it impossible to reply them all individually.⁶⁵ Not all who wrote inquiries ended up moving to Itabo. One Finnish immigrant later recounted how his "Cuban fever" had receded after receiving an unimpressive reply to his inquiry for more details about Itabo.⁶⁶ Some Finns who did go to visit Itabo did not stay long. In September 1904, Erkkö recounted in his newspaper a cautionary anecdote about "citizen Otto Rastas" from Michigan, who had gone to Itabo without sufficient financial

means and had returned disillusioned. Erkkö warned against going to Cuba without the capital to buy a farm and to cover the start-up costs.⁶⁷ Few prospective Finnish immigrants to Cuba, most of whom were working-class men, had the necessary capital. A Wisconsin Finn who inquired Erkkö whether \$300 sufficed to establish oneself as a farmer in Cuba was probably not an outlier.⁶⁸

By 1907, around 12 Finnish immigrant families had established themselves in Itabo, constituting perhaps a half of the Chicago colony's population.⁶⁹ Even these Finnish immigrants who stayed in Itabo experienced severe difficulties in establishing a farm. Contrary to Erkkö's assumptions about the easiness of fruit growing, the farming of citrus fruit required much skill and capital. The trees took at least five years to produce fruit after plantation, during which time the farmer had to rely on savings or alternative sources of income. Both Erkkö and Karr did warn against going to Itabo without sufficient funds, but they still underestimated the capital needed to cover the start-up and living expenses.⁷⁰ This was a common shortcoming of American land agents in Cuba. One American commentator noted that, since honesty went against the agents' interests, they shut their "eyes to the disadvantages which pertain to farming in Cuba" and expended their "eloquence solely on the roseate aspects of the situation." This resulted in many American immigrants coming to Cuba with "insufficient money to make a fair start."⁷¹ The Finnish immigrants' lack of English and Spanish skills was apparently also a factor in their misfortunes.⁷²

Still, the Finnish immigrants who stayed in Itabo found strategies to survive. Some Itabo Finns began to farm vegetables like cabbages, tomatoes, and potatoes, which took less time to grow than fruit trees.⁷³ Since sugar had long formed the backbone of local economy in Matanzas—in the early 19th century, the province had been "the ground zero of the Cuban sugar boom"⁷⁴—it made sense for Itabo Finns to orient their agriculture to that direction. An American journalist who visited Itabo in 1907 noted how "Finn settlers" experimented with sugarcane by planting small quantities of cane and selling it to a sugar mill in Perico, some 40 kilometers south of Itabo.⁷⁵ However, the soil in the Chicago colony was not apparently well suited for extensive sugarcane planting.⁷⁶ Itabo Finns immersed themselves in local economy also in other ways: they raised chicken, fished, hunted, and herded cattle. Two Finnish families in Itabo, the Karrs and the Huovinens, established general stores to sell groceries and tools to Cubans and Americans.⁷⁷

Since wages in Cuba were low, some Itabo men traveled to the United States or Latin America for seasonal wage work. Eemeli Huovinen, who had come to Itabo from Leadville, Colorado, traveled for work to the US, while Peter Niskanen, who had moved to Itabo in 1905, earned wages in the construction of the Panama Canal and the Pan-American Highway in Brazil.⁷⁸

Despite these many difficulties, many Finnish settlers in Itabo found settler life in Cuba at least tolerable. An American journalist who visited Itabo in the summer of 1906, amid a heavy rain season, could "not but be amazed at the splendid courage and cheerfulness of the people living in Itabo," who, despite the many disadvantages, "never lost their spirit."⁷⁹ This kind of optimism for future was common in many American colonies in rural Cuba in the early 1900s. The colonies were often marketed as places where settlers could still live out the Jeffersonian ideal of yeomen farmers on the frontier. Land companies touted community cooperation, individual hard work, and the appreciation of agriculture as the colonies' principal ideals. Progressive era populism added to the appeal of cooperative farm life as a rebuke to corporate-controlled industrial capitalism.⁸⁰ The American settlers' firm belief that Cuba would be annexed with the United States—a belief strengthened during the second US occupation of Cuba in 1906–1909—was for many an added source of optimism.⁸¹ While Finnish researchers have tended to view Itabo as an experiment grounded in a specifically Finnish utopianist tradition,⁸² the Chicago colony's ideological foundations were much more widely shared in the American communities of early 20th-century Cuba.

Indeed, considering that Erkkö envisioned Cuba as a "deposit" for Finnish culture, it is ironic that the immigrant experience in Itabo probably strengthened the Finnish-American settlers' identification as *Americans*. It was common that Cubans referred to all settlers who had come from North America as Americans, despite their ethnic or national background.⁸³ This appears to have also been the case in Itabo. Väinö Hoover, a Finnish-American engineer entrepreneur who spent his childhood in Itabo, remembered how a group of Cuban men referred to his mother as *americano muy malo*, when she had defended herself from harassment.⁸⁴ Life in the company-controlled colony also strengthened identification as Americans. The children of Finnish settlers received education in the land company's English-language private school, which had an American teacher. An American journalist

who visited the school in 1907 was particularly impressed with two “flaxen-haired little Finn girls [who] showed wonderful progress in reading.”⁸⁵ The English-language education gave the Finnish children in Itabo a good grounding in the American school system. Peter Niskanen, the Itabo Finn who stayed in Cuba the longest, sent two of his children to continue their education in the United States.⁸⁶

Yet, despite their strong attachment to the American colony of Chicago, the Itabo Finns did not live apart from the surrounding Cuban society. Since white American and European immigrants made up less than 5% of the population of Martí, the municipality that included Itabo, it was difficult to live a secluded settler existence.⁸⁷ The Finnish immigrant who succeeded best in Itabo, Peter Niskanen, exemplified well this dependency on local society. After earning enough savings by working on the construction of Panama Canal and the Pan-American Highway, Niskanen returned to Itabo in early 1914 with his wife, Hilda Niskanen, and their daughter and son. The family began to grow oranges, grapefruit, and sugarcane. The timing of their return was opportune, as the First World War greatly increased the demand of Cuban sugar on world markets. As a major sugarcane planter, Niskanen entered the social class of *colonos*, the major suppliers of sugarcane for sugar mills, who formed the middle class of the Cuban sugar-powered economy. The Neska family found also business opportunities in Cuba’s burgeoning tourist industry. They raised chicken, and delivered the fowl and eggs to hotels in Cárdenas. To better fit the esteemed status of *colono*, Niskanen Hispanicized his name to Pedro Neska, and began to refer to his estate as a “*colonia*.” The family also hired domestic servants: they employed a Chinese cook and an Afro-Cuban maid. The family’s economic fortunes apparently suffered from the plummeting of Cuban sugar prices in the early 1920s, but the Neskas did not leave the island. The Neska sons left Cuba for Florida only after the revolution in 1959; the daughter Alma Neska-Garcia followed in 1975.⁸⁸

Conclusion

In 2016, migration sociologist Ismo Söderling visited Itabo to look for clues on the locality’s Finnish past. He was surprised by how little even presumably well-informed locals knew of the region’s Finnish settler history. The staff at a local history museum appeared perplexed about

Itabo Finns, and visits to school and municipal archives paid few dividends. Oral history failed to fill the apparent gap in the archival record. When Söderling interviewed one of Itabo's oldest residents, Señor Chichi, the octogenarian could offer little help: "Oh, there were people from different countries here, but they were all Cubans. There was no distinct talk about the Finns."⁸⁹

Söderling's difficulties in finding information about Itabo's Finnish past point to a key conclusion of this chapter: there was little particularly "Finnish" about the Chicago colony in Itabo. Previous studies of Finns in Cuba have preoccupied themselves with Erkkö's involvement in the settlement project, but Erkkö's ideas on Cuba must be put into a wider context of empire-building in the Caribbean. The idea of encouraging Finnish settlement in Cuba becomes less curious when it is placed alongside the many similar contemporaneous plans working for Cuba's Americanization or whitening. Since this chapter has mostly relied on source material formed by Erkkö, it has not been possible to fully examine the thinking and activities of the many other people who were involved in the plan of a Finnish settlement in Cuba. Future studies should shed more light on the role and motivations of these other actors. Yet, even Erkkö's correspondence illustrates well the diversity of the cast of characters who had an interest in the plan. These actors included Finns and Americans, but also Cubans (Cesar Marrero) and Canadians (Robert Leeder). In other words, the planning of Finnish settlements in Cuba was not all that Finnish an endeavor, but neither was it a case of overbearing American hegemony. Rather, the case points at the heterogeneous dynamics of agency in the making of "American" power in the Caribbean.

Notes

- 1 J. F. Kerttula to E. Erkkö, April 16, 1904, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection. On Eero Erkkö's press and political career, see Zetterberg, *Eero Erkkö*.
- 2 Jarva, "Cuba - 'Paradise' for Finns." See also Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 73-79; Lähteenmäki, *Colonia Finlandesa*, 51-58; Koivukangas, *Kaukomaiden kaipuu*, 241-45; Olin, Ärans medalj.
- 3 Pérez, *Cuba under the Platt Amendment*; Ayala, *American Sugar Kingdom*.
- 4 Jenks, *Our Cuban Colony*, 141-74; Deere, "Here Come the Yankees!"; Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*.
- 5 On transimperial and global histories of the US, see Hopkins, *American Empire*; Hoganson and Sexton, *Crossing Empires*.

- 6 On Cuban “middlemen’s” agency in building US power in Cuba, see McGillivray, *Blazing Cane*, 63–85.
- 7 For similar comments by Frank Aaltonen, see Chapters 2 and 6 in this volume.
- 8 Diary of Eero Erkko, entry on July 5, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 9 Zetterberg, *Eero Erkko*, 290, 313.
- 10 On the Erkko family’s years in the United States (1903–1905), see Zetterberg, *Eero Erkko*, 327–64; Hänninen, *Tulisydän*, 117–49.
- 11 Lähteenmäki, *Colonia Finlandesa*, 25–58.
- 12 Tekla Hultin to E. Erkko, May 18, 1903, box d:4, Eero Erkko’s private collection.
- 13 Ferrer, *Cuba*, 198.
- 14 Diary of Eero Erkko, July 12–13, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 15 E. Erkko to Juhani Aho, July 10, 1903, mf 196712, Juhani Aho’s collection.
- 16 E. Erkko to J. Aho, July 10, 1903, mf 196712, Juhani Aho’s collection.
- 17 Erkko, “Muistelmia Kuban matkalta,” 120–21.
- 18 E. Erkko to M. Erkko, July 6, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection; E. Erkko to J. H. Erkko, July 29, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen Collection.
- 19 Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 73.
- 20 E. Erkko to J. H. Erkko, September 24, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 21 Diary of E. Erkko, entry on July 5, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 22 Zahra, *The Great Departure*, 70–79.
- 23 J. H. Erkko to E. Erkko, August 23, 1903 and 29 August 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 24 Erkko, “Muistelmia Kuban matkalta,” 128.
- 25 E. Erkko to J. H. Erkko, July 29, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 26 E. Erkko to M. Erkko, July 8, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 27 Erkko, “Muistelmia Kuban matkalta,” 129.
- 28 Erkko, “Muistelmia Kuban matkalta,” 114.
- 29 E. Erkko to M. Erkko, July 6, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 30 Arvid Neovius to E. Erkko, October 22, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 31 Konni Zilliacus to E. Erkko, September 13, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 32 *Reports of the Industrial Commission on Immigration*, 510.
- 33 Olin, *Alaska*, 220–34.
- 34 Aug. Edwards, “Haluatteko mennä Cubaan?” *AK*, August 4, 1904; Storm, “Ponnistus siirtola.”
- 35 E. Erkko to L. Mechelin, August 15, 1903, box 10, Leo Mechelin’s collection; diary of E. Erkko, entry on July 3, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 36 Agreement between the Cuban-American Land & Fruit Co. and Axel G. Hornborg, July 29, 1903, folder fe:1, box f1, Eero Erkko’s private collection.
- 37 Smythe, *Obsolete American Securities and Corporations*, 281.
- 38 Diary of E. Erkko, entry on July 14, 1903, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection; Cesar Marrero’s undated note in box da:4, Eero Erkko’s private collection.
- 39 [Eero Erkko], untitled, *AK* April 14, 1904.
- 40 Cesar Marrero González to E. Erkko, April 19, 1904, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
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- 42 C. Marrero to E. Erkko, undated, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 43 C. Marrero to E. Erkko, May 16, 1904, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.

- 44 C. Marrero to E. Erkko, June 16, 1904, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 45 *Sixth Biennial Report*, 67; "The 'Chicago' Colony at Itabo."
- 46 See, e.g., *The Meriden Weekly Republican*, June 18, 1903; *Groton Times*, June 19, 1903; *The Ocala Evening Star*, June 23, 1903; *Chattanooga Press*, September 11, 1903.
- 47 Eero Erkko. "Kuban hedelmämaista," *Amerikan Kaiku* (hereafter *AK*), March 17, 1904.
- 48 See, e.g., *AK*, March 24, 1904.
- 49 Erkko, "Kuban matkalla"; Erkko, "Muistelmia Kuban matkalta," 108–29.
- 50 Eero Erkko, "Cubas fruktfarmer," *Helsingfors-Posten*, April 9, 1904. The article had appeared originally in late 1903 in the almanac of Axel Hornborg's Finland Steamship Company's agency in New York.
- 51 Zetterberg, *Eero Erkko*, 340–58.
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- 53 Storm, "Ponnistus siirtola."
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- 55 Zetterberg, *Eero Erkko*, 365–438.
- 56 "New Corporations."
- 57 A. Hornborg to E. Erkko, October 17, 1904; certification of ownership of stocks in the East Cuba Colonization Company, September 6, 1905, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 58 Olin, *Ärans medalj*, 75–77.
- 59 In a March 1904 article (*AK*, March 17, 1904), Erkko claimed to have received these inquiries "almost daily," but his archived correspondence retains only few of these. See Hjalmar Öhman to E. Erkko, April 5, 1904, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection; Kaarlo Onas to E. Erkko, January 24, 1904, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection; J. F. Kerttula to E. Erkko, April 16, 1904, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 60 A. A. Karr to E. Erkko, February 24, 1910, box d:4, Eero Erkko's private collection; list of agents of *Amerikan Kaiku*, undated, box u:2, Eero Erkko's public service collection.
- 61 A. A. Kar, "Itabo, Cuba." *AK*, December 29, 1904.
- 62 C. Marrero to E. Erkko, May 16, 1904, box 33, Eino Parmanen collection.
- 63 A. A. Kar to E. Erkko, February 24, 1910, box da:4, Eero Erkko's private collection.
- 64 A. A. Kar, "Itabo, Cuba." *AK*, June 16, 1904; July 14, 1904; July 28, 1904; December 29, 1904. See also [A. A. Karr], "Suomalaiset Kuban saarella," *Helsingin Sanomat*, March 22, 1910.
- 65 A. A. Kar, "Itabo, Cuba." *AK*, July 14, 1904.
- 66 M. Storm, "Ponnistus siirtola. Omaja, Cuba." *TM*, December 19, 1907.
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- 69 V. Keskinen, "Voipiko suomalainen viihtyä Kuubassa." *Raivaaja*, March 12, 1907; [A. A. Karr], "Suomalaiset Kuban saarella," *HS*, March 22, 1910. In total, the Chicago colony had around 20 settler families in 1907. See "The 'Chicago' Colony at Itabo," 14.

- 70 [Eero Erkkö], *AK*, September 1, 1904; A. A. Kar, "Itabo, Cuba," *AK*, July 14, 1903. Karr suggested that newcomers should have at least \$500 but preferably \$1,000 to cover their expenses before their farms started to produce profit.
- 71 Forbes-Lindsay, *Cuba and Her People To-Day*, 242, 244.
- 72 A. A. Karr to E. Erkkö, February 24, 1910, box da:4, Eero Erkkö's private collection.
- 73 "Chicago' Colony at Itabo," 14; A. A. Kar to E. Erkkö, February 24, 1910, box da:4, Eero Erkkö's private collection.
- 74 Ferrer, *Cuba*, 94.
- 75 "Chicago' Colony at Itabo," 14.
- 76 A. A. Kar to E. Erkkö, February 24, 1910, box da:4, Eero Erkkö's private collection.
- 77 A. A. Kar to E. Erkkö, February 24, 1910, box da:4, Eero Erkkö's public service collection. In an apparent reference to Karr's store, an American visitor to Itabo noted that one settler family had opened a store "selling goods to Cubans in the neighborhood." See "Notes of a Visit to Itabo," 17.
- 78 Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 77–79.
- 79 "Notes of a Visit to Itabo," 16–17.
- 80 Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*, 148.
- 81 Deere, "Here Come the Yankees!"; Neagle, *America's Forgotten Colony*.
- 82 Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 73–79; Koivukangas, *Kaukomaiden kaipuu*, 241–43; Söderling, "Irtileikattuja sormia ja avaruusmatkailua."
- 83 Deere, "Here Come the Yankees!" 744.
- 84 Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 78.
- 85 "Chicago' Colony at Itabo," 14.
- 86 Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 79.
- 87 *Censo de la República de Cuba 1907*, 214–15.
- 88 Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 79. On Neska as a *colono*, see the letterhead in Peter Neska to the Embassy of Finland in Washington, DC, September 3, 1927, folder 5, box fbg:8, Papers of the Embassy of Finland in Washington.
- 89 Söderling, "Irtileikattuja sormia ja avaruusmatkailua," 48. Helped by a local journalist, Jesse Aquilar, Söderling did eventually find land records concerning the Neska Saastamoinen family.

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- Eino Parmanen collection, the National Archive of Finland, Helsinki.
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CHAPTER 4

Finnish Utopian Communities, Historiographies, and Shapes of Settler Colonialism

Johanna Leinonen

My goal in this chapter is to critically examine historical scholarship dealing with the histories of migration from Finland. In particular, I look at those studies that discuss migrant communities labeled as “utopian” by Finnish scholars. Recent scholarship has pointed out how Finnish utopian communities, and migration from Finland more broadly,¹ are rarely examined in the context of colonialism. Only in recent years have scholars started to treat settlements of Finnish migrants as an example of a system of power that contributed to the repression and genocide of Indigenous peoples.² Through a close reading of several historical studies on Finnish migration, I demonstrate how the absence of a critical perspective on utopian settlements contributes to the idea of Finland as an “outsider” in the histories of colonialism.

Scholars such as Gloria Wekker have employed the concept of “white innocence” to describe the logic through which many European societies detach themselves from the histories of colonialism. Central to the logic of white innocence is the denial of the importance of race

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and racism in contemporary Europe, which, in turn, hides from view how white Europeans have benefitted from racialized hierarchies originating from the colonial era.³ For example, Suvi Keskinen shows in her recent article how the participation of the Nordic countries in colonial projects is brushed aside or altogether denied.⁴ This is still often true, despite recent scholarly contributions examining the histories of such participation and the continuing impact of colonial hierarchies and discourses on Nordic societies.⁵ In 2009, scholars inspired by postcolonial studies introduced the concept of “colonial complicity” to highlight how Finland and the other Nordic countries were connected to the histories of colonialism through economic, political, and cultural ties, as well as through practices of knowledge production.⁶ Moreover, as Keskinen notes, colonial complicity “highlights the seductiveness of being included in hegemonic notions of Eurocentric modernity and the material benefits it promises for countries located at the margins of Europe.”⁷

Finnish migrants aspiring to establish utopian settlements abroad clearly benefitted materially from the settler colonial world order that provided them with access to land outside of Europe. Thus, the concept of colonial complicity does not fully manage to describe the very concrete ways Finns participated in the settler colonial initiatives, because the purpose of the utopian settlements was to naturalize European presence in regions that were often previously inhabited and utilized by Indigenous peoples. As I will show in this chapter, utopian ideas underpinning the settler colonial project are deeply embedded in the modernist thinking, characterized by ideas of progress and linear notions of time. Modernity refers to the Eurocentric way of understanding the world, formed since the 17th century, where Europe epitomized rationality, civilization, and superiority, and countries that were the targets of colonial projects represented tradition, nature, and inferiority.⁸ As Anibal Quijano puts it, “modernity was ... colonial from its point of departure.”⁹ Central to my point of view is the decolonial scholars’ argument that the interlinked notions of coloniality/modernity are not just about Western understandings of the world order where Europeans assumed the right to take over lands in the name of civilization but also about knowledge production.¹⁰ As Lucy Mayblin and Joe Turner have recently pointed out, writing about the impact of modernity in knowledge production in academia, the modernist way of thinking reaches migration studies, where Mayblin and

Turner observe “sanctioned ignorance of histories of colonialism, and of the wide-ranging debates around the legacies of colonialism in the present.”¹¹

This, I argue, also applies to research on Finnish migrants’ utopian settlements. As scholars frame utopias as expressions of humans’ desire for improvement and finding greater meaning in life, the establishment of the utopian settlements ends up being depoliticized and detached from the history of settler colonialism. It is as if these settlements existed outside the processes of conquest and replacement. Thus, in addition to highlighting the settler colonial context of these settlements, my goal in this chapter is to discuss how the modernist way of thinking about utopias is a key element in studies published on Finnish utopian settlements abroad. Ultimately, my study underlines that the understanding of Finnish migration history and the experiences of Finnish migrants *in situ* is incomplete without considering the context of colonialism. As migration historians focus on the hardships and perseverance of Finnish migrants in the utopian settlements, their ideologies and charismatic leaders, the settler colonial structures and hierarchies, and the way these crucially molded the economic, social, and political realities in which Finnish migrants lived are largely left unexplored. The settlements labeled as utopian provide a particularly fruitful context for studying these issues, as they are a concrete example of Finns’ participation in settler colonial projects.

The discussion in this chapter proceeds as follows. I will first illustrate on a broader level how the utopian settlements of Finnish migrants in the late 19th and 20th centuries have been discussed in publications on migration from Finland. I show that the authors present the utopian communities as exceptional cases, as curiosities in the history of Finnish migration, and by doing so they simultaneously obscure how Finnish migration patterns and forms of settlement are embedded in the histories of colonialism. Second, I will discuss how these historical studies described Finnish settlers’ encounters with nature on the one hand and with Indigenous and other ethnic groups on the other hand. I show that, while the colonial mindset was visible in the ways Finnish settlers approached these contacts, as explained in the historical sources, the existing scholarship largely leaves this mindset untouched. Finally, I explore the implications of the scholars’ tendency to frame the utopian settlements as failures, arguing that the

failure narrative plays into the continuing depoliticization of the Finnish utopian settlements.

This chapter is historiographical, i.e., my main sources are studies by historians and scholars in related fields either specifically on Finnish utopian settlements or, more generally, on migration of Finns to areas outside of Europe. The studies I examined were published between 1936 and 2020.¹² In these publications, the utopian settlements were usually discussed in a separate section or a chapter within the larger narrative of Finnish migration. While most of the publications were academic, some publications were authored by lay historians. In my analysis, my primary goal was to understand how the Finnish utopian settlements were framed and contextualized by the authors. I paid attention to the ways in which the writers discussed the justifications for taking possession of lands and establishing settlements in the destination countries. In the studies that I examined, the concept of utopian settlements refers to usually short-lived communities founded by Finnish migrants based on an articulated ideal, such as nationalism, socialism, and vegetarianism. These communities were scattered in different parts of the world in the period spanning from the late 18th century to the late 20th century.¹³ Teuvo Peltoniemi, for example, lists 18 Finnish utopian settlements, founded between 1792 (New Jerusalem in Sierra Leone) and 1977 (Emmaus in Finland).¹⁴ A majority (11) of these settlements listed by Peltoniemi were located in North and South America and the Caribbean; the rest were founded in Australia, France, Israel, Russia/the Soviet Union, and Sierra Leone. Jouni Korki-asaari, on the other hand, includes 13 Finnish settlements in his overview of utopian settlements. These were located in North and South America, the Caribbean, Australia, and Russia/the Soviet Union and founded between 1868 (Amur, Russia) and 1930 (Villa Vásquez in the Dominican Republic).¹⁵ The number of settlers in each colony tended to be quite small, usually only tens or hundreds of settlers.¹⁶ Many continued to other migration destinations, especially to North America, if (and usually when) the utopian settlement turned out to be unsuccessful. Numerically speaking, thus, the settlements labeled as utopian represented only a small part of the history of Finnish migration abroad. Additionally, it is quite difficult, often impossible, to make a clear distinction between “regular” and utopian migration, as I will later discuss.¹⁷ Regardless, the histories of utopian settlements have continued to pique the interest of scholars and the wider public alike, as I bring

out in the concluding section. In the following pages, I primarily draw examples from studies on the Finnish settlement of Sointula in British Columbia, Canada, but I also discuss publications on Finnish settlements in South America and the Caribbean.

Utopian Communities as Expressions of Modernity and Coloniality

Scholars writing about Finnish utopian settlements often start their discussion by referring to Thomas More's *Utopia*, originally published in 1516.¹⁸ Historian Teuvo Peltoniemi notes in the preface of *Kohti parempaa maailmaa* (Towards a Better World), after pointing to *Utopia*, that the "common thread" in the utopian thinking is the "pursuit of human perfection."¹⁹ The fact that the flipside of this high pursuit was the disavowal and removal of the Indigenous presence is usually left untouched by Peltoniemi and most other migration historians.

Utopian settlements are often cast as a return to an idealized version of the past, to a purer time, or they are represented as a creation of a future-oriented utopia, the purpose of which is to build a truly egalitarian society. Historians Pertti Grönholm and Heli Paalumäki note that both nostalgic longing and utopian thinking are concepts that describe the experience of time in modern Europe. Modernity is imbued with ideas of progress and time advancing linearly. Grönholm and Paalumäki also point out that, although embedded in the European notions of modernity, nostalgia and utopia also challenge the linear notions of the passage of time.²⁰ While it is typical to associate nostalgia with a longing for the past and utopias with dreams about the future, this distinction is partially artificial, because, for example, utopian narratives often contain ideas about a return to a nostalgic past.²¹ In addition, both nostalgia and utopia were born out of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs in modern society, for example in the contemporaneous social, political, or economic conditions. Thus, nostalgia and utopian dreaming have been conceptualized as expressions of people's desire for a better life in a temporally and/or spatially removed space.²²

Recently, scholars specializing in utopianism have started to highlight how utopian thinking is entangled with the histories of colonialism, and, consequently, with the concept of modernity, as European ideas of progress and civilization were spread around the world

through colonial expansion and mercantile ventures.²³ In other words, the histories of utopianism, modernity, and coloniality are inextricably intertwined. For instance, Lyman Tower Sargent, political scientist specialized in utopian studies, argues that “the whole process of colonial settlement can be seen as a type of utopianism.”²⁴ Karl Hardy, in turn, points out that utopianism and the utopian narrative “both prefigured and sustain the condition of white supremacy and settler colonialism.”²⁵ What is crucial in their arguments is that utopian ideas and narratives, dating back to More’s *Utopia*, rationalize the settler colonial project and naturalize the presence of white settlers in the colonized countries as the racially superior “civilizers” and “modernizers.” Indeed, Hardy goes on to argue that More’s *Utopia* is a “profoundly settler colonial text” that, in fact, produced a blueprint for the colonization of the “New World.” While the settler colonial project cannot, of course, be attributed simply to the creation of utopian narratives, *Utopia* introduced discourses justifying colonialism, for example “the emergent valourization of labour and instrumental rationalization of land-as-resource, as well as the (proto)racialization of human difference.”²⁶ Hardy also points to the tendency of Western scholars to disregard *Utopia*’s connection to settler colonialism in their analyses.²⁷ Eve Darian-Smith argues that the very reason why the settler colonial context of utopianism is ignored in research is that both utopian narratives and the scholarly tradition of studying them are thoroughly impregnated with “modernist thinking.”²⁸ If Peltoniemi sees that the Finnish utopian settlements sought “human perfection,” it is evident that he also associates these settlements with the modern project of advancing progress and civilization. Indeed, he starts the introductory chapter of *Kohti parempaa maailmaa* by stating that “Both utopia and change, migration, are basic categories of human life.”²⁹ While he writes in a universalistic way by referring to the “humankind,” the modernist way of thinking about humans’ “natural” need to aspire for progress is visible in this quote and throughout the book.

Historian Leila Koivunen and anthropologist Anna Rastas have recently pointed out that before the 2010s it was rare for historians to discuss Finland’s relationship with colonialism. As noted above, this also applies to studies focusing on migration from Finland to countries outside of Europe. Koivunen and Rastas attribute this dismissal to the concept of “Finnish exceptionalism,” according to which Finland or Finns had nothing to do with colonialism simply because the country

did not possess any colonies.³⁰ Indeed, historians describing utopian settlements typically focus on their charismatic leaders, as well as the settlements' political, social, and economic histories.³¹ For instance, studies on Sointula have often focused on Matti Kurikka, one of the founders of Sointula in British Columbia.³² The broader context in which the establishment of these various communities—i.e., the fact that the colonial rulers were selling land to settlers by dispossessing, displacing, and even murdering local habitants, including various Indigenous groups—is left out. The histories of the settlements are, thus, detached from the system of power that proved to be “dystopias”³³ for the Indigenous inhabitants.

Against this background, it is interesting that, in some of the studies dealing with the histories of Finnish utopian settlements, the word colony (*siirtomaa*) is specifically mentioned as the motive for establishing the settlements. For example, the word is mentioned in both historian Olavi Lähteenmäki's examination of the establishment of “New Finland” (Uusi Suomi) in Argentina in the early 20th century and migration historian Olavi Koivukangas's sweeping study of Finns in Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and Latin America. Lähteenmäki writes that migrants were enthusiastic about the prospects in Argentina because they “saw that Finland had now acquired a sort of ‘colony,’ an Eldorado filled with abundant opportunities.”³⁴ The “lure of the virgin land” was, thus, pulling migrants to the distant land.³⁵ In the second quote, the idea of the new colonies as uninhabited “blank slates” is visible, a motif that I will come back to in the next section. Even in cases where the destination regions are referred to as “colonies,” the scholars still usually fail to situate Finnish migrations as taking place in the framework of colonialism that established a system of racial hierarchy, the purpose of which was to naturalize the European presence in the colonized countries. Instead, the “right” of Finns to acquire lands in faraway countries is taken for granted.

The primary reason why certain migrant settlements were labeled as “utopian”—in contrast to other settlements of Finnish migrants—was that many of them had a charismatic leader. For example, Kurikka in Sointula in Canada and Toivo Uusikallio in Penedo in Brazil advertised their utopian dream of starting a new society in a distant location because of an ideology that they believed in. Peltoniemi makes a distinction between “regular” and utopian migrations by highlighting the ideological foundations of the utopian settlements and the settlers'

desire to go far away from the hustle and bustle of rapidly industrializing European societies:

Migration researchers usually employ the concepts of the “push of the country of departure” and the “pull of the country of destination.” In utopian migration, these were unimportant. The reason for migration was in the minds of those who left, in the ideals themselves, and not in the country or the journey’s destination. . . . Migration itself was important, to depart as far away as possible . . . to islands or jungles.³⁶

Thus, in addition to being led by charismatic men, Peltoniemi emphasizes the centrality of the temporal and spatial detachment from the present reality in utopian migration. Even the destination country was not so important, as long as the destination was distant and preferably in an isolated location where the settlers could start “from fresh.” Following the settler colonial mindset, these faraway places were presented as being up for grabs for the Finnish settlers.

Many scholars of Finnish migration dissociate utopian settlements from “regular” migration by portraying them as “curiosities,” as particularly fascinating but short-lasting periods of Finnish migration. For example, in his book *Suomalaiset maailmalla* (Finns in the World), which provides a cursory overview of Finnish migration in a global frame, historian Jouni Korkiasaari writes in a chapter dedicated to utopian migration that, while only a fraction of Finnish migrants lived in utopian settlements, “because of their [the settlements’] special character, they have been all the more fascinating to both contemporary people and the future generations.”³⁷ However, the tendency to treat Finns’ utopian settlements as curiosities in the history of Finnish migration fundamentally depoliticizes their existence.

Interestingly, scholars have noted that one of the ideologies behind the establishment of utopian societies was Finnish nationalism.³⁸ Most utopian settlements were founded in the 19th and early 20th centuries, when the advancement of capitalism, industrialization, and technology created a fertile ground for utopian dreaming.³⁹ Many Finnish colonies were, indeed, founded as alternatives for the modern, industrializing society. Utopian socialist movements were common in this era, not only in Finland but in many other European countries, especially France. In Finland, additionally, the country’s position as the Grand Duchy of Russia and, in particular, the czarist Russification campaign

in the early 20th century, contributed to the nationalist movement and pushed some people, such as Matti Kurikka, to dream about starting a Finnish nationalist settlement abroad, based on socialist principles. Indeed, in 1900, writing from Australia, where he had initiated a failed utopian experiment before Sointula, Kurikka aspired to “plant the seed of betterment ... for the joy of humanity and for *the glory of Finland*.”⁴⁰

However, scholars usually present the desire to start colonies based on nationalist ideas in a matter-of-fact way, without contemplating the broader (moral) implications of conquering new lands outside of Finland’s borders in a nationalist pursuit, even though this provides a clear example of the colonial mindset.⁴¹ Furthermore, Peltoniemi discusses the establishment of environmentally motivated communities in Finland in the 1970s (e.g., Emmaus in Jokioinen) in the same context as the Finnish utopian settlements founded outside of Europe.⁴² While the Emmaus community may have shared some ideals with the utopian settlements based on vegetarianism and the “back to nature” idealism, Peltoniemi’s framing ends up providing a confounding example of the erasure of the settler colonial context of utopian settlements founded outside of Europe.

Settler Colonial Realities in Utopian Settlements

While utopian and nostalgic narratives have been interpreted as criticisms of modernity and the visions of progress ingrained in it, the idea of white, Western migrants as modern settlers bringing civilization to an “empty land, a ‘blank slate’ or a veritable ‘no place’” still provided the justification for the actual processes of settling utopias.⁴³ This was the case even when the primary motive was to “return to nature.” Studies on utopian settlements bring forth how Finnish settlers aspired to “tame” nature and establish farms often in rather challenging environments. This was the case both in the utopian community created by Kurikka and his collaborators in British Columbia and in the Finnish utopian settlements in South America. In the case of the latter, Peltoniemi has explained the rising interest in the utopian settlements with the concept of “tropical fever” (*tropiikkikuume*). He writes that the spread of tropical fever in Finland in the 1920s resulted in several attempts to found utopian settlements in the Southern Hemisphere.⁴⁴ The concept of tropical fever draws attention to the yearning for an exoticized, faraway place, detached from the vicissitudes of everyday

life in the industrializing Europe. At the same time, the concept can be seen as part of the tropicalist discourse (closely related to Edward Said's orientalism), where the areas of the world labeled as "tropical" are construed as the opposite of the modern West, as culturally and environmentally "other." The imagery regarding the tropics (*tropiikki*) is imbued with visions of empty wilderness, available but in need of taming by the white settlers.⁴⁵ As Marjo Kaartinen points out, the concept of the tropics does not solely refer to a geographical or climatic zone in the Southern Hemisphere but to an imagined space that contains elements of both desire and fear.⁴⁶ The "othering" of the tropics as the polar opposite of the modern West also works as a justification for the colonial endeavors.⁴⁷

In the books analyzed for this chapter the motif of the geographical spaces waiting to be civilized by Western settlers is present, but the colonial discourse that justifies these civilizing missions is left untouched. However, as historian Laura Hollsten and gender studies scholar Salla Tuori note, the "colonial world order and geography" are clearly visible in many of the primary sources originating from the time of the founding of the utopian settlements.⁴⁸ Because of this, there are glimpses of the colonial discourses in the historical studies as well. However, scholars writing about the utopian communities usually do not make that connection explicit. As Hollsten and Tuori point out, what is central, then, is the "intentional or unintentional forgetting" of colonialism as the scene in which Finns approached nature in the utopian settlements.⁴⁹

This "forgetting" is interesting, because the publications analyzed for this chapter often discussed at length how Finnish migrants settling in remote areas faced enormous challenges when trying to tame nature for the purposes of settlement. Finnish settlers aspired to make nature an object of colonization—in narratives produced by settlers, nature and landscapes were aestheticized and exoticized but, at the same time, the settlers tried to master nature, take control over it.⁵⁰ Recent scholarship has brought forward the connection between the colonial mindset and the settlers' way of approaching nature. Historian Liisa-Maija Korhonen explains in her study of *Colonia Finlandesa* in Argentina how the Finnish settlers sought to "colonize the 'empty land' and cultivate the 'virgin' nature but also civilize the 'uncivilized' region through their actions."⁵¹ In addition, American studies scholar Mikko Saikku notes in his article on the environmental experiences of

Finnish migrants in Sointula that, while nature was praised by Kurikka and the other Finnish settlers, for example, for its “healing powers ... as opposed to the hectic and alienated life in big, dirty cities,”⁵² Finns’ goal was still to “conquer and dominate nature” with “male strength.”⁵³

In other words, while utopias have been considered by scholars as critiques toward the modern industrializing society, the task of conquering nature in the spirit of the modern settler colonialist was still part and parcel of the Finnish utopian settlements. For example, scholars have brought forward how the settlers in Sointula, most of whom had no prior experience in working as lumberjacks, were unequipped to deal with the forests found on Malcom Island (where Sointula is located).⁵⁴ Saikku explains how the Finnish tradition of clearing forest through slash-and-burn agriculture proved to be ineffective against the magnificent trees found in the Pacific Northwest of Canada.⁵⁵ A. B. Mäkelä, one of the founders of Sointula, along with Kurikka, acknowledged the challenges brought by the “terrible giant trees, ... impenetrable thicket” in his writings in *Aika*, the newspaper published in Sointula. Regardless, he still believed in the capabilities of people to conquer nature: “It is characteristic for the great nature to make our previous grandeur insignificant. It will first push the proud humans on the ground, before slowly putting them back on their feet, distilling them with its own greatness.”⁵⁶ Mäkelä’s quote works as an example of the settler colonial thinking where humans will, eventually, be able to bring civilization to colonies, including their nature.

Thus, coloniality is clearly present in the narratives of Finnish settlers through their efforts to control and subdue nature, but also in the ways in which the racial hierarchies encountered *in situ* are discussed.⁵⁷ Moreover, Finns were integrated into the colonial way of understanding racial hierarchies already before migration, and contributed to racialization themselves through their narratives and everyday practices.⁵⁸ Modernity, tied up as it is with the histories of colonialism, racism, and slavery, has “deeply racialized implications,” as Eve Darian-Smith points out.⁵⁹ Racialization is fundamental in the establishment and maintenance of settler colonial societies—European whiteness becomes naturalized as normative in the settler societies through the processes of racialization.⁶⁰ The Indigenous presence becomes attributed with notions of “bygone, primitive, or pre-modern – as indicative of anti-utopia.” Such narratives regarding Indigenous groups play into the justification of the elimination of Indigeneity “via dislocation

(forced removal from traditional lands), annihilation (murder), and assimilation (strategies for bringing the Indigenous “up” or “forward” to the level of the European standard ...).⁶¹

In the books I analyzed, the presence of Indigenous groups is rarely discussed and if they are mentioned it is only in passing. Scholars studying primary sources produced by Finnish settlers have also occasionally noted the infrequency in which the sources bring up Finns’ encounters with Indigenous groups or other local residents.⁶² It appears as if Finns encountered a “blank slate” and an “empty land” when founding their utopian settlements. However, Indigenous peoples were not entirely absent from the analyzed texts. Peltoniemi argues that, in the case of the Finnish utopian settlements, the settlers seeking to go back to the idealized past took “the Polynesian islands or Indians, the ‘innocent brothers’ as models.”⁶³ Indeed, a common motif in settler colonial narratives was the character of the “noble savage,” who was seen as being “closer to nature and, therefore, somehow purer, simpler, and better than the supposedly civilized.”⁶⁴ While exoticized narratives about *sauvages nobles* influenced philosophy and literature produced during the Age of Enlightenment,⁶⁵ these idealized images did not obviously prevent the genocidal project of removing the Indigenous presence from the colonized regions.

In the case of Sointula, historical works rarely refer to the Indigenous presence in British Columbia, possibly because, by the time Sointula was founded, the dispossession of Native lands had already continued for centuries. While Peltoniemi says that Malcolm Island was “almost uninhabited apart from four families of Indians,”⁶⁶ other sources state that the island did not have permanent settlement at the time of the Finns’ arrival. Saikku writes that the island was a seasonal site for the Kwakwa’ka’wakw until the Europeans’ arrival.⁶⁷ More specifically, Malcolm Island was in the territory of the ‘Namgis First Nation, and in the contemporary sources, written for example by A. B. Mäkelä and Matti Halminen, there are numerous references to the ‘Namgis residing in Alert Bay on Cormorant Island near the Malcolm Island. The most detailed description in the scholarly texts about the interactions between Finnish settlers and the ‘Namgis can be found in Saikku’s article. He quotes, for example, several articles published by Mäkelä in *Aika*, describing how the initial prejudices regarding “those gloomy-looking men speaking in mysterious tongues” turned to Mäkelä’s admiration of these “complete natural socialists.” Mäkelä

wrote in 1904 that the Indigenous neighbors “had turned into ‘everyday guests’ of the community and were welcome to attend the communal dinners at Sointula.”⁶⁸ There are, indeed, references in some of the studies from different utopian settlements about Finnish settlers being critical toward the way Indigenous groups were treated by the ruling settlers.⁶⁹ This highlights Finland’s ambivalent relationship with colonialism: while Finnish settlers benefitted from the settler colonial world order that gave them the right to take over lands in the “New World,” Finns still often continued to place themselves as outsiders in the colonial endeavors.⁷⁰

Even if the relationships with the ‘Namgis were as neighborly as Saikku describes, the fact remains that the Indigenous peoples’ living areas were dwindling due to Europeans’ increasing penetration into their territories, as did their possibilities for maintaining established livelihoods and lifestyles. You can find examples in the primary sources, as well as in Saikku’s article, about how members of the Indigenous groups carved out a living through participating in the local capitalist enterprises, such as commercial fishing. In lay historian Halminen’s history of Sointula, published as early as 1936, one can find an extract where he acknowledges the ‘Namgis presence on Malcolm Island prior to Finns’ arrival, but predicts that only Finns will have continuing existence there:

[A]n island, where only the nearby Nimpkish [anglicized form of the ‘Namgis] tribe has for centuries carved their big canoes from cedarwood, first with stone axes and later with white man’s working tools, where young, tall, slender cedar trees and their bark have earlier provided useful material to Indians to make baskets, bed bases and wigwams’ dirt floors etc. ... From there, Indians have also taken the fine cedarwood needed to carve their handsome totem poles. ... Kalevan Kansa (the Nation of Kaleva) was thus not the first one to settle in Malcolm Island, but only a Finn has left a permanent mark there.⁷¹

In a similar vein, author Kalevi Kalemaa writes in Matti Kurikka’s biography about the relationship between Finns and ‘Namgis as follows:

Matti Kurikka made Indians take him by boat from Alert Bay to Malcolm Island and found it as ideal for the location of the colony. ... There was a small Indian tribe living in the other end of the island, using the

name Na-na-tla-ka-gu of the island, meaning To lay on one's back, waiting for the wind to settle. Kurikka christened the place as Malkosaari and decided to purchase the ownership of the colony.⁷²

As neighborly as Finns' and 'Namgis's relationship might have been, in this excerpt the power of the settler over the Indigenous group is evident: not only does Kurikka expect members of the 'Namgis to provide him transportation to Malcolm Island but he also assumes as his right to rename the island (to "christen" it), thereby erasing the original Native name.

Of course, Finnish settlers also encountered other ethnic groups in their areas of settlement. The arrival of Finns in the utopian settlements took place within the racist settler colonial project, where white Europeans were preferred, and their settlement was supported by the local administrators.⁷³ Historian J. Donald Wilson specifically highlights how the local newspapers in British Columbia considered Finnish migrants desirable. He cites several newspapers published around the time of Sointula's establishment that supported Finns' settlement plans. Finns were described as "very desirable emigrants" and "an excellent class of people"—one newspaper even goes on to state that "we could not, outside of Great Britain and Ireland, get a more desirable lot of settlers."⁷⁴ Also, Lähteenmäki, writing about Finns in Argentina, cites at length newspaper articles that favored Finnish migrants' arrival in the country:

Already months before the arrival of Finns in Argentina, the biggest newspapers *La Nación* and *La Prensa* had published praising stories about Finnish migrants whom they expected to come. According to *La Nación*, the arrival of Finns was an event with a great meaning. ... Even more admiring tone can be found in *La Prensa* ...: "This [Finnish migration] is a new and important ingredient, that is now coming to our country, because Finns are physically one of the most beautiful nations in Europe, they are at high moral level, possess vigilant intelligence ..."⁷⁵

Not citing any original sources, Peltoniemi writes about the Finnish settlement in the Dominican Republic in a similar manner: "Villa Vásquez was going to be an example for other migrants. Light skinned migrants from the faraway North were valued. Artturi Sonni, who later became the leading figure in the community, noted that they

were wanted to replace the ‘Dominican population that was found to be unenterprising, reluctant and weak.’”⁷⁶ Historian Eevaleena Melkas briefly notes how the establishment of Villa Vásquez in the Dominican Republic took place in the context of racist migration policies favoring European migrants.⁷⁷ However, she also writes, reiterating the racist vocabulary of the early 20th century, how “Finns were seen as representing one of the purest white races in Europe” whose presence would “remedy the imbalance prevalent in the island caused by black Haitians. ... [A]ttracting Finnish migrants to the country was deemed important [for] their white, pure Aryan race and civilization.”⁷⁸ When these descriptions are presented without proper contextualization in the racist ideology underpinning the settler colonial projects and the increasingly restrictive migration policies in North America, the racial hierarchies become naturalized as the “neutral” setting in which Finns realized their migration and settlement plans.

Furthermore, considering that Finns’ status as “white” migrants in North America was occasionally questioned, as the pseudoscientific racial theories of the era categorized Finns as racially other, related to Mongolians,⁷⁹ it becomes all the more curious how the descriptions of Finnish settlements lack critical reference to the racial hierarchies originating from colonialism and slavery. This is interesting when one observes from glimpses in the historical publications that Finns were often quite aware of the local racial hierarchies and their own position within these hierarchies. For example, in his article about Sointula, Wilson cites Kurikka’s letter to his daughter in April 1901: “There is an attempt being made here ... to exclude the Chinese and Japanese from the labour market. If that happens, Finnish immigrants will have lots of work.”⁸⁰ Thus, Kurikka was aware of the racist policies geared toward Asian origin migrants in North America and that Finns could potentially benefit from these policies. However, the ways in which Finns both adopted racist vocabularies and practices of the era and were targets of such racialized categorizations remain, by and large, unaddressed in the studies that I examined.

Utopias as Failures

Even though Finnish utopian settlers benefitted in many ways from European colonial exploits, it is clear from the historical studies that the settlers faced various hardships in the colonies. Most utopian set-

tlements lasted only for a short time, a couple of years, before collapsing, often due to economic difficulties and internal disputes. Indeed, the impression that the reader gets from the publications that I studied for this chapter is that the utopias were doomed from the start because the settlers were ill-equipped to deal with the conditions found in the remote destination areas. The challenging conditions aggravated social tensions in the settlements. In most cases, the Finnish settlements did not, however, entirely disappear despite the collapse of the utopian enterprises; while their communities may have fallen apart, many settlers still decided to stay in place, eking out livelihood in any way they could. Many Finnish settlers in South America were found to be destitute later in the 20th century and some received financial assistance from Finland. For instance, the situation of Finnish migrants in Colonia Finlandesa in Argentina became more widely known in Finland in the 1970s, thanks to the Finnish Seamen's Mission in Buenos Aires that started to organize relief work with organizations in Finland. Later the state of Finland also financially assisted the impoverished residents of Colonia Finlandesa, as most of the migrants were still Finnish citizens.⁸¹ Thus, as Hollsten and Tuori point out, if the criterion for qualifying as settler colonialism is gaining economic and political power in the country of destination, then the Finnish utopian settlements hardly filled this qualification.⁸² However, as noted before, without the settler colonial project, Finns would not have been able to migrate to these areas in the first place, to take the lands and try to make them their own, even if they failed eventually. Moreover, Finns who did stay in the colonies "adapted to the local settler colonial regimes."⁸³

The history books studied here largely deemed the utopian settlements as failures. For example, migration historian Reino Kero bluntly describes Sointula as a "miserably failed dream."⁸⁴ According to Karl Hardy, the reason for utopias usually ending as failures lies in the weaknesses of the humankind: "It seems impossible to construct a unified 'we,' without stepping outside of history and neglecting the realities of difference. Utopia, or more accurately, eutopia (the good place) for some appears to be inescapably dystopian, or, minimally, less-than-eutopia, for others."⁸⁵ Thus, as utopias are about "social dreaming,"⁸⁶ this social experiment inevitably brings along frictions, as forming a community is about including some while excluding others. In the case of settler societies, the utopian settlements occasionally turned out to be dystopias for the settlers.

Finnish utopian settlements were labeled as utopian because of a presence of a charismatic leader and being based on an expressed ideology, or a mixture of ideologies. However, individual migrants within the utopian societies may have had various motives for moving to the colony. Many joined the utopias simply to improve their lot in life. This begs the question: how different were the utopian settlements, in the end, from “regular” migration? Are they called utopias *because* they failed?⁸⁷ If the colonies had been successful, it is unlikely that scholars would treat them as fascinating curiosities in the history of Finnish migration. Moreover, it may well be that the figure of a failed and impoverished utopian migrant does not fit the idea of a settler colonizer ruling over colonized lands and peoples. At the same time, the narrative of failure may further prevent scholars from making the explicit connection between Finnish utopian settlements and settler colonialism.

Scholars have still tried to carve out a deeper meaning for the Finnish utopian settlements. Peltoniemi, for example, writes in the concluding chapter of his book as follows:

Even though the Finnish utopian communities failed in their experiments, it does not matter that much. ... [T]he communities fell apart after filling their purpose. ... Utopian communities ... are signs of humans’ desire for something higher. ... Members of utopian communities recognize that they are part of the humankind and the process of change that everyone can influence a little if they want to. Utopian societies ... emphasize humans’ possibilities to make a difference.⁸⁸

Thus, according to Peltoniemi, the Finnish utopian settlements were expressions of human desire for a higher meaning, and since they managed to fulfill that desire, however imperfectly, the fact that the experiments failed was less important. Peltoniemi’s text is a good example of modernist thinking, imbued with ideas of hope, progress, and human improvement, where utopias have been considered as examples of human’s ambition toward something greater.⁸⁹ What is apparent in Peltoniemi’s statement is the erasure of the Indigenous perspective: the establishment of the European utopian settlements certainly meant immensely much for the Indigenous peoples. Thus, Peltoniemi’s text ends up normalizing the racialized hierarchy where the experiences of Indigenous groups were deemed insignificant, barely worth a mention.

Conclusion

In recent years, postcolonial and decolonial scholars have pointed to the serious limitations in the concept of utopia because of its roots in modernist thinking. There have been calls to decolonize (or indigenize) utopias “according to the terms and imaginings of what specific indigenous communities envisage their future to be.”⁹⁰ To decolonize utopia means destabilizing and rearticulating the basic tenets of the current utopian narratives, tied as they are to coloniality and modernity. As Hardy notes, “a meaningful attending to Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies – on their terms, as fully-human subjects – requires the fundamental displacement of utopian studies discourses.”⁹¹

This chapter has shown that the modernist way of thinking about utopia penetrates Finnish studies on utopian settlements. Because a critical perspective on the embeddedness of Finnish migration in the histories of colonialism is missing, the depoliticized approach to utopian settlements lives on. This can be seen, for example, in stories about these settlements that appear in the Finnish media in regular intervals.⁹² The utopian settlements continue to fascinate journalists and readers alike, but the settler colonial context remains unmentioned. In addition, one can occasionally find news about Westerners’ new plans of starting utopian settlements, harking back to the earlier settler colonial narratives.⁹³ Hardy uses the concept of *settler ecotopianism* to refer to the ways in which Westerners continue to appropriate Indigenous cultures to “escape from the alienation experienced by the urban industrial white settler society.”⁹⁴ As such dreams of an escape do not attempt to decolonize utopian narratives, they end up “contributing to the naturalization, perpetuation, and otherwise sustainment of white supremacist settler colonialism.”⁹⁵

The studies analyzed in this chapter have provided crucial information about the histories of Finnish utopian settlements in various locations. Like all literature, they are products of their own times and reflect the epistemologies of the field during the time of publication. Today, within the calls for decolonizing knowledge production in academia, it is important to rethink Finnish migration history from a perspective that questions the earlier ways of producing knowledge.

Notes

- 1 Koivunen and Rastas, “Suomalaisen historian tutkimuksen uusi käänne?”
- 2 Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences”; Hollsten and Tuori, “Avoin ja vapaa kaikille”; Korhonen, “Tulinen Amerikan kiihko.”
- 3 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 16–18.
- 4 Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences.”
- 5 E.g., Loftsdóttir and Jensen, *Whiteness and Postcolonialism*; Lahti and Kullaa, “Kolonialismi ja Suomi.”
- 6 Vuorela, “Colonial Complicity.”
- 7 Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences,” 164.
- 8 Mayblin and Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism*, 26–34.
- 9 Quijano, “Coloniality of Power,” 548.
- 10 Quijano, “Coloniality of Power”; Bhambra, *Rethinking Modernity*; Mignolo, “DELINKING.”
- 11 Mayblin and Turner, *Migration Studies and Colonialism*, 3.
- 12 The publications that I reviewed for this chapter include: Eklund, *Builders of Canada*; Fish, *Dreams of Freedom*; Halminen, *Sointula*; Hollsten and Tuori, “Avoin ja vapaa kaikille”; Kalemaa, *Matti Kurikka: Legenda jo eläessään*; Kero, *Suomalaisina Pohjois-Amerikassa*; Kero, *Suureen Länteen*; Koivukangas, *Kaukomaiden kaipuu*; Kolehmainen, “Harmony Island”; Korhonen, “Tulinen Amerikan kiihko”; Korkiasaari, *Suomalaiset maailmalla*; Lindström, “Utopia for Women?”; Lähteenmäki, *Colonia Finlandesa*; Melkas, *Kaikkoavat paratiisit*; Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*; Raivio, *Kanadan suomalaisten historia*; Saikku, “Utopians and Utilitarians”; Salo, “The Kalevan Kansa Colonization Company”; Wilson, “Never Believe What You Have Never Doubted.”
- 13 Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 13.
- 14 Peltoniemi has, indeed, included one settlement in Finland in his list of Finnish utopian settlements. I will briefly discuss this point later in this chapter.
- 15 When compared to Peltoniemi’s listing, Korkiasaari leaves out Sierra Leone (1792), the Red Deer initiative in Alberta, Canada (1899), Paradiso in French Riviera (1925), Jad Hashmona in Israel (1971), and Emmaus in Finland (1977). Korkiasaari, *Suomalaiset maailmalla*, 53–72.
- 16 The largest group listed as utopian was Finnish migrants moving to the Soviet Union from Finland and North America in the 1930s. Approximately 15,000 migrated from Finland and several thousands (6,000–8,000) from the United States or Canada. This migration has been studied extensively, e.g., by Auvo Kostiaainen (see, e.g., Kostiaainen, *Loikkaarit*). Scholars note that while migrants had various motives for moving to the Soviet Union, many followed the utopian ideal of building a socialist paradise (e.g., Korkiasaari, *Suomalaiset maailmalla*, 71).
- 17 Korkiasaari, *Suomalaiset maailmalla*, 53.
- 18 E.g., Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 9; Koivukangas, *Kaukomaiden kaipuu*, 241. Peltoniemi’s book continues to be the most frequently cited study on the topic.
- 19 “Utopia-ajattelun punainen lanka on inhimillisen täydellisyyden tavoittelu.” Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 9.
- 20 Grönholm and Paalumäki, “Nostalgian ja utopian risteyksessä.”

- 21 Sargent, *Utopianism*, 21.
- 22 Cf. Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia*.
- 23 Darian-Smith, "Decolonising Utopia," 169–71.
- 24 Sargent, "Colonial and Postcolonial Utopias," 202.
- 25 Hardy, "Unsettling Hope," 1.
- 26 Hardy, "Unsettling Hope," 12; see also Vieira, "The Concept of Utopia."
- 27 Hardy, "Unsettling Hope," 81.
- 28 Darian-Smith, "Decolonising Utopia," 169.
- 29 "Sekä utopia että muutos, siirtolaisuus, ovat ihmiselämän peruskategorioita." Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 11.
- 30 Koivunen and Rastas, "Suomalaisen historian tutkimuksen uusi käänne," 428–29.
- 31 For a brief review of research on Sointula, see Saikku, "Utopians and Utilitarians," 4. See also Hollsten and Tuori, "Avoim ja vapaa kaikille," 495.
- 32 E.g., Wilson, "Never Believe What You Have Never Doubted"; Wilson, "Matti Kurikka: Finnish-Canadian Intellectual"; Kalemaa, *Matti Kurikka*; Lindström, "Utopia for Women?"; Heimo et al. "Matti Kurikka."
- 33 Sargent argues that while settler colonies produced "dystopias" for Indigenous groups, "the cultures being destroyed were given a utopian hue." See Sargent, *Utopianism*, 51–53. However, Hardy criticizes Sargent's use of the term dystopia because, by doing so, he defers "Indigenous concerns via the consignment of Indigenous peoples to the past, or [rejects] contemporary Indigeneity as inauthentic on the very basis of their experience of colonialism." See Hardy, "Unsettling Hope," 141–45.
- 34 "(U)udisasukkaiksi lähtevät katsoivat Suomen nyt saaneen eräänlaisen 'siirtomaan', yltäkylläisten mahdollisuuksien eldoradon." Lähtenmäki, *Colonia Finlandesa*, 161.
- 35 "Voimme kai tässä yhteydessä puhua neitseellisen maan vetovoimasta." Lähtenmäki, *Colonia Finlandesa*, 161.
- 36 "Siirtolaisuustutkimus askaroi yleensä käsiteparilla 'lähtömaan työntö' ja 'kohdemaan veto'. Utopiasiiirtolaisuuden osalta ne eivät ole kovin tärkeitä. Muuton syy oli lähtijöiden mielessä, aatteessa sinänsä, ei niinkään maassa eikä matkan päässä. ... Tärkeää oli ... nimenomaan siirtolaisuus, lähtö mahdollisimman kauas ... saarille tai viidakkoihin." Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 216–17.
- 37 "Erikoislaatuisuutensa vuoksi ne ovat kuitenkin kiehtoneet sitäkin enemmän sekä aikalaisiaan että jälkipolvia." Korkiasaari, *Suomalaiset maailmalla*, 53.
- 38 For Kurikka's nationalism, see, e.g., Wilson, "Matti Kurikka," 56. Peltoniemi categorizes, e.g., the Itabo community in Cuba, the New Finland initiative in Red Deer, Alberta, Canada, and Colonia Finlandesa in Misiones, Argentina as settlements founded on nationalist ideals. Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 13. On the plans of founding "New Finland" in Red Deer, see, e.g., Pedersen, "Wherever Two or Three Are Gathered."
- 39 Fingerroos, *Karjala utopiana*, 25; Grönholm and Paalumäki, "Nostalgian ja utopian risteyksessä," 9–10.
- 40 Quoted in Wilson, "Never Believe What You Have Never Doubted," 132. Wilson cites Salo, "The Kalevan Kansa Colonization Company," 249. Italics added by

- Wilson. It is unclear who originally translated Kurikka's letter from Finnish to English.
- 41 See, e.g., Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 12–13; Lähtenmäki, *Colonia Finlandesa*, 80–86; Koivukangas, *Kaukomaiden kaipuu*, 241–50.
- 42 Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 204–14.
- 43 Hardy, "Unsettling Hope," 57.
- 44 Peltoniemi *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 12–13.
- 45 Sysser, "Unelmointia keinotekoisessa luonnossa."
- 46 Kaartinen, *Neekerikammo*.
- 47 Sysser, "Unelmointia keinotekoisessa luonnossa."
- 48 Hollsten and Tuori, "Avoin ja vapaa kaikille," 499.
- 49 Hollsten and Tuori, "Avoin ja vapaa kaikille," 499.
- 50 Korhonen, "Tulinen Amerikan kiihko," 517.
- 51 Korhonen, "Tulinen Amerikan kiihko," 516.
- 52 Saikku, "Utopians and Utilitarians," 12.
- 53 Saikku, "Utopians and Utilitarians," 12.
- 54 E.g., Raivio, *Kanadan suomalaisten historia*, 390.
- 55 Saikku, "Utopians and Utilitarians," 16.
- 56 "Se juuri on suuren luonnon tunnusmerkki, että se lyö mitättömäksi kaikki entiset suuruutemme. Itsensä ylpeän ihmisen se iskee ihan maata vasten ensinnä, kunnes taas vähitellen hänet kohottaa jaloilleen, vuodattaen häneen omaa suuruuttaan." McKela, "Koti-juttuja Sointulasta."
- 57 Korhonen, "Tulinen Amerikan kiihko," 520.
- 58 Hollsten and Tuori, "Avoin ja vapaa kaikille," 497–98.
- 59 Darian-Smith, "Decolonising Utopia," 170.
- 60 Hardy, "Unsettling Hope," 5.
- 61 Hardy, "Unsettling Hope," 18.
- 62 E.g., Hollsten and Tuori, "Avoin ja vapaa kaikille," 502. One must note that in the earlier studies on Finnish utopian settlements, published before the 2000s, it was not uncommon to refer to local groups with labels that reproduced racist vocabulary of the era; for example, Koivukangas referred to local "mestizo" groups as "half-blooded" (*puoliverinen*). For instance, in one of few instances in which he described Finns' relationships with other groups in the area, he noted that "Finns exercised free social life with mestizo and other half-blooded women, but they were considered as untrustworthy as housekeepers." ("Suomalaiset harrastivat tosin vapaata yhdyselämää mestitsien ja muiden puoliveristen naisten kanssa, mutta heidät katsottiin taloudenhoitajina epäluotettaviksi.") Koivukangas, *Kaukomaiden kaipuu*, 256–57.
- 63 "Esikuvia on haettu Polynesian saarilta tai intiaanien, 'viattomien veljien' parista." Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 217.
- 64 Sargent, *Utopianism*, 53.
- 65 Lahtinen, "Matkoja mahdolliseen," 218.
- 66 "Se oli lähes asumaton lukuunottamatta neljää perhekkuntaa intiaaneja." Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 43. Also Kalevi Kalemaa states that there was "a small Indian tribe" living on Malcolm Island. See Kalemaa, *Matti Kurikka*, 152.
- 67 Saikku, "Utopians and Utilitarians," 14.

- 68 Citations, originally published in *Aika* in 1903–1904 and translated into English, can be found in Saikku, “Utopians and Utilitarians,” 14–15.
- 69 Saikku, “Utopians and Utilitarians,” 25; Hollsten and Tuori, “Avoin ja vapaa kaikille,” 498.
- 70 Kuortti, Lehtonen and Löytty, *Kolonialismin jäljet*; Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences,” 167; Hollsten and Tuori, “Avoin ja vapaa kaikille,” 498.
- 71 “[S]aari, missä vaan läheisen Nimpkish-heimon intiaanit ovat vuosisatoja kovertaneet seetripuusta suuret kanoottinsa ensin kivikirveillä ja myöhemmin valkea miehen työaseilla, missä nuoret, pitkät, solakat seetrit ja niiden kuoret ovat ennen muinoin olleet käytännöllistä tarveainetta intiaanien korien tekoon, vuoteitten alustoiksi ja wigvamien maalattioitten peitteiksi y.m. ... Sieltä ovat intiaanit myöskin saaneet Alert Bayhin pystyttämänsä komeat totem-patsaat, niiden veistämiseen tarvittavat jalot seetrit. ... Kalevan Kansa ei siis ollut ensimmäinen, joka Malkosaarelle tuli kotiansa perustamaan, mutta ainoastaan suomalainen on sinne pysyväisen jälkensä jättänyt.” Halminen, *Sointula*, 23, 25.
- 72 “Alert Bay’sta Kurikka soudatti itsensä intiaaneilla Malcolm Islandiin ja totesi sen ihanteelliseksi siirtolan paikaksi. ... Saaren toisessa päässä asui pieni intiaaniheimo, joka käytti saaresta nimitystä Na-na-tla-ka-gu eli Maata selällään ja odottaa tuulen tyyntymistä. Kurikka risti paikan Malkosaareksi ja päätti hankkia sen siirtolan omistuksen.” Kalemaa, *Matti Kurikka*, 152.
- 73 Hollsten and Tuori, “Avoin ja vapaa kaikille,” 497–98.
- 74 Wilson, “Never Believe What You Have Never Doubted,” 136.
- 75 “Jo kuukausia ennen suomalaisten tuloa Argentiinaan suurimmissa sanomalehdissä La Naciónissa ja La Prensassa oli esiintynyt ylistävät kirjoitukset odotettavissa olevista suomalaissiirtolaisista. La Naciónin mukaan suomalaisten tulo oli todella suurimerkityksellinen tapahtuma. ... Vieläkin ihannoivampi sävy oli ollut La Prensan julkaisemassa kirjoituksessa ...: ‘Tämä on uusi ja tärkeä aines, joka täten tulee maahamme, sillä suomalaiset ovat fyysisesti eräs Euroopan kauneimmista kansoista, ovat korkealla moraalaisella tasolla, omistavat valppaan älyn.’” Lähteenmäki, *Colonia Finlandesa*, 170. Italics added.
- 76 “Villa Väsquezista piti tehdä esimerkki muille siirtolaisille. Kaukaa pohjolasta tulleita vaaleaihoisia siirtolaisia pidettiin arvossa. Siirtolan johtohahmoksi myöhemmin nousut Artturi Sonni katsoi, että heidät tahdottiin maahan ‘aloitkevyyttömäksi, haluttomaksi ja heikoksi osoittautuneen dominiikaniväestön sijalle.” Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 143.
- 77 Melkas, *Kaikkoavat paratiisit*, 42.
- 78 “Heidän katsottiin edustavan yhtä Euroopan puhtaimmista valkoisista roduista ja olevan ratkaisu siirtolaisuuden ongelmaan, minkä tavoitteena oli korjata saarella vallitseva mustien haittilaisten aiheuttama epätasapaino. ... [S]uomalaisten siirtolaisten saamista pidettiin tärkeänä ja ... korostettiin näiden valkoista puhdasta arjalaista rotua ja sivistystä.” Melkas, *Kaikkoavat paratiisit*, 208, 210.
- 79 Kivisto and Leinonen, “Representing Race.” See also Huhta, “Toward a Red Melting Pot.”
- 80 Wilson, “Never Believe What You Have Never Doubted,” 137.
- 81 Koivukangas, *Kaukomaiden kaipuu*, 266–67.
- 82 Hollsten and Tuori, “Avoin ja vapaa kaikille,” 505.
- 83 Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences,” 170.

- 84 “Sointula oli surkeasti epäonnistunut haave.” Kero, *Suomalaisina Pohjois-Amerikassa*, 79.
- 85 Hardy, “Unsettling Hope,” 8–9.
- 86 Sargent, *Utopianism*, 5.
- 87 Janne Lahti posed this question to me at a seminar dedicated to this book on April 20, 2021, and I would like to thank him for this thought.
- 88 “Vaikka suomalaisten ihanneyhteisöt epäonnistuivat kokeiluissaan, sillä ei ole suurta merkitystä. ... [Y]hteisöt hajosivat kun ne olivat täyttäneet oman tehtävänsä. ... Utopiayhteisöt ... ovat merkkejä ihmisen pyrkimyksestä korkeampaan. ... Utopiayhteisön jäsen tunnustaa olevansa osana ihmiskuntaa ja muutosprosessia, johon jokainen pystyy halutessaan hitusen vaikuttamaan. Utopiayhteiskunnat ... korostavat ihmisen vaikuttamismahdollisuuksia.” Peltoniemi, *Kohti parempaa maailmaa*, 221.
- 89 Lahtinen, “Matkoja mahdolliseen,” 188.
- 90 Darian-Smith, “Decolonising Utopia,” 177.
- 91 Hardy, “Unsettling Hope,” 162.
- 92 Fogelholm and Landström, “Kalevan kansan luvattu saari”; Kokko, “Pieni Suomi viidakossa”; Fogelholm, “Penedon kadotetun paratiisin pelasti turismi”; *Yle Areena*, “Suomalaisten utopiayhteisöjen historiaa”; Fogelholm, “Argentiinan aarniometsissä mureni jopa suomalainen sisu”; Fogelholm, “Kalifornian suomalaisutopia kaatui osaamattomuuteen ja pula-aikaan”; Lyytinen, “Sosialismia, Jumalan sanaa ja alastomuutta”; Vainio and Siniauer, “Sen piti olla paratiisi”.
- 93 Lyytinen, “Toivo lähti nudistiksi Brasiliaan.”
- 94 Hardy, “Unsettling Hope,” 13.
- 95 Hardy, “Unsettling Hope,” 114. See also Higgins, “Lifestyle Migration and Settler Colonialism.”

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PART II

Contested Identities

CHAPTER 5

Building a (White) Nation

Finns in James Kirke Paulding's *Koningsmarke, the Long Finne* (1823)

Sirpa Salenius

James Kirke Paulding's (1778–1860) historical novel *Koningsmarke, the Long Finne: A Story of the New World* (1823) came out in the 1820s, when the United States was witnessing the publication of works that were consciously aspiring to create uniquely American literature. Paulding, according to scholar Daniel A. Wells, was “the young nation’s most uncompromising devotee of cultural independence before [Ralph Waldo] Emerson,” shaping the ways in which Americans perceived their past. And *Koningsmarke*, Wells notes, was “the only American novel set in the seventeenth-century Delaware colony of New Sweden.”¹ It was subsequently published in London, in October 1823, where according to an American newspaper “the favorable opinion formed of its merits on this side of the Atlantic” was confirmed, which sounds like a rather lame commendation for Paulding’s debut novel.²

Never highly popular, Paulding nonetheless contributed to American literature by writing essays, short stories, poetry, and novels. James

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Fenimore Cooper, whom Paulding greatly admired, was another author among the first in America to use topics and themes that directly pertained to the new nation and its history. Paulding's direct references to Cooper's *The Pioneers* (1823) in *Koningsmarke* acknowledge the romanticized historical tales created around the character Natty Bumppo as a pioneer in a new form of American literature in which the frontier and Native American experience were centralized. Other authors who created works in the context of American national narrative that took the form of the frontier settlement romance included Lydia Maria Child, who wrote such novels as *Hobomok* (1824) and *The Christian Indian; or, The Times of the First Settlers* (1825), and Catherine Maria Sedgwick, whose novel *Hope Leslie* (1827) appeared around the same time. These stories celebrated the heroism of whites and depicted wars with Native Americans as a uniquely American experience. They popularized an idea of Native American wars as competition between cultures rather than viewing them as settlers' appropriation of the Natives' land. Moreover, by foregrounding the violence and savagery in the representation of Native Americans, these stories cast them, as literary scholar Cassandra Jackson notes, "as resistant to white society."³

Paulding's *Koningsmarke* is one of these early American narratives that depends on a binary construction of Native and white Americans as oppositional identities, even if in the novel the latter are clearly of European origin. The Finnish protagonist, Koningsmarke, or the Long Finne, is an idealized representative of racial whiteness, civilization, and seemingly benevolent cultural superiority, despite his participation in the violent conquest of Native American land and cultural mastery of its inhabitants. The novel contributes to the myth of Finns as "benevolent immigrants" but clearly reveals them as active participants in American colonialism and imperialism. The character's projection against Native Americans serves to underscore the desirous position of white masculine men as foundational for American society and pillars upon which the new nation rests. In other words, Paulding presents the white, masculine, and fearless Finnish protagonist as an ideal representative of the desired American national identity—despite his immigrant background.

In writing the novel, Paulding used fact-based circumstances and actual people to weave a story that is "a mixture of history and romance."⁴ Despite its historical inaccuracies, scholar John Eric Bellquist considers it "an excellent reflection of many of the social and

cultural concerns in America during the post-revolutionary period.”⁵ Nonetheless, although Paulding claims to rely on historical events centering on the settlement of Delaware’s New Sweden in the 1600s, the narrative is very much a product of the 1820s. Overall, the novel participates in myth making, which this chapter will situate within the frame of settler colonialism, while also considering the role of Finns as active participants in settler colonialism and the process of constructing history. The novel writes Finns into the early American national culture and social landscape, thus demonstrating the ways in which literature can contribute to the reconstruction of a national past. In this particular narrative Finns are given a central role in the process of nation building and as embodiments of white exceptionality and innocence.

Nascent National Culture

Nineteenth-century literature in the United States, including Paulding’s novel, is bound up with many of the social, political, and cultural challenges and internal conflicts that plagued the new nation. In addition to race and slavery, Indian wars and westward movement were central concerns in early 19th-century America. Land possession was at the forefront of settler interests as the frontier kept moving west: high land prices and high taxes in the east, and potential for new fertile land in the West pushed settlers to embark on westward migration.

In the 1820s, many writers shared the strong nationalist sentiment that followed the War of 1812, which some see as a continuation of the Indian wars since both the British and the Americans tried to enlist the support of various Indigenous tribes in their fight over the frontier and control of the seas. Moreover, American writers who were trying to find a national voice responded to the political climate of the decade, namely the Native American removal policy of the 1820s. Native removal witnessed its culmination during Andrew Jackson’s administration in a formal Indian Removal Act that Congress passed in 1830. The bill entitled the president to exchange lands occupied by Indian tribes in the east for lands in the west of the Mississippi River. The federal government engaged in a removal of tribes and land, which can be associated with power, violence, forced resettlement, and expulsion, all ideas that resonate with settler colonialism.⁶

Koningsmarke reflects this political climate but also echoes the call expressed in Paulding's essay "National Literature" (1820), in which he explicitly demanded the creation of literature drawn from American realities. Such cultural independence from Europe was achieved by celebrating the wilderness and romanticizing the "noble savage"; these were elements, as mentioned earlier, that early 19th-century writers found uniquely American. Visual artists were working toward the same goal. American landscape paintings with Native American themes included Thomas Cole's *Landscape Scene from "The Last of the Mohicans"* (1826), which drew inspiration from Cooper's writing. A few years later, George Catlin made his name in portrait paintings featuring Native Americans, and Horatio Greenough continued to be inspired by the theme decades later, as testified by his controversial statue *The Rescue* (1850, Figure 5.1), which found a prominent place in front of the Capitol building. It depicts a Native American warrior attempting to kill a settler's wife and child with his tomahawk. These artworks created visual narratives of frontier encounters, some of them consolidating the idea of the vanishing Indian. Thus, American artists and authors responded to the pressing challenge to reconstruct a national past.

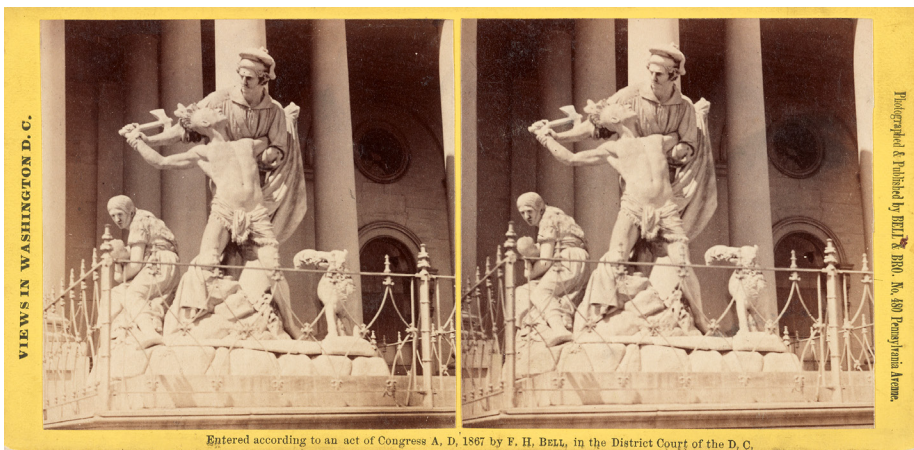


Figure 5.1: *The Rescue* by Horatio Greenough, displaying the common understanding of early 19th-century settler-Indigenous relations, as also evidenced in Paulding's novel. Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2017652473>.

Literary scholar J. Gerald Kennedy suggests that:

Those who produced the images, emblems, songs, and stories of American nationhood found themselves obliged not only to rewrite the past, effacing all that was shameful, but also to ignore or dismiss continuing indignities within the would-be nation. ... Arguably, nation-building – the multiform, self-conscious construction of ideas and images of nationhood – did not become a general project until the formation of an American mass culture around 1820.

Nation-building, Kennedy continues, “encompassed an array of cultural activities.”⁷ Prominent in this process was the representation of the Native, which was collectively invented and disseminated also through lithographs and illustrations that reinforced the textual images appearing in fiction. Together with literary works, the visual arts created and reinforced not only stereotypes but also an idea of a nation and its history and contributed to the construction of the frontier myth.

History Entwined with Romance

With his decision to write about events and characters that actually had existed, Paulding contributed to the nascent formation of national literature but also to the creation of national history. His novel stems from real events, is set in a location and period that correspond to historical realities, and his fictional hero is based on a Finn who immigrated with the early settlers. The Long Finne is the hero of Paulding’s novel, which takes place in a “famous fort and town of Elsingburgh, one of the earliest settlements of the Swedes” in America.⁸ The novel’s fictional fort of Elsingburgh, according to literary historian Adolph B. Benson, was a name-loan from one of the actual districts of the New Sweden settlement called Elsingborg.⁹ Although such names and other elements may be drawn from real life, the novel otherwise has hardly any relationship to actual historical events. Paulding mediated history by creating a romantic and adventurous storyline that catered to his readers’ expectations. The factual information—or “the meat” of the story, as the author calls it—is peppered with Paulding’s imagination, which fills the gaps of events that took place in a remote time and an unremarkable colony. To quote Paulding: he had “chosen for our scene of action, a forgotten village, and for our actors, an obscure colony,

whose existence is scarcely known and the incidents of whose history are sufficiently insignificant to allow us ample liberty in giving what cast and colouring we please to their manners, habits and opinions.”¹⁰ The little-known history of a marginal colony consisting of Swedes and Finns who occupied the banks of the Delaware River offered Paulding a frontier setting and a historical frame but also ample liberty to write a fictional story that nonetheless responded to the prevailing demand for national narratives.

Finns, who at the time were part of the Swedish Kingdom, began arriving in America around 1638 as part of the Swedish colonization of the Delaware Valley. More followed in the 1650s and 1660s, although the numbers were relatively small. Paulding’s novel, which is set in the early 1660s, drew its inspiration from an event that occurred around that time known as “the Long Finn Rebellion.”¹¹ Although only fragmented documentation exists of this revolt, it seems that it was led by an impostor who called himself Köningsmark, also referred to as Long Finne. When English and Dutch settlers started to take over the Delaware region, he wanted his followers, many of them Finns, to stay loyal to Sweden. During the event, it seems, nobody was killed, nor were any colonies lost or gained.¹² Paulding borrowed the protagonist of these events, whose real name was Marcus Jacobsson, and, as indicated above, used the time period and location as the setting for his American narrative.

The plot, as Benson observes, “is largely conventional, with a background of passionate love, gross superstition, and unexpected kindness, Indian captivities, tortures and killings, thrilling escapes and horrible recaptures, the frightening of savages by natural thunder, and the placating of them, with the rescue of white men, by Quakers.”¹³ In the story, the settlement of the Swedes and Finns is under the rule of Heer Peter Piper, who is of German parentage but who has lived in Finland. Although he is the governor, and thus the most influential person in the village, he tends to remain somewhat overshadowed by the title character, who is a strong, virile youth representing idealized whiteness and desirable national character. The events revolve, to a great extent, around the love plot as the young Long Finne is trying to win the love of Piper’s daughter, the equally idealized female protagonist, Christina. She is described as being “as fair a maid as ever the sun shone upon in this new world,” and she is acknowledged to “excel in beauty, grace, and virtue.”¹⁴ She is an embodiment of the virtuous domestic(ated) white

woman of the 19th century, thus appearing as a perfect object of the heroic Finn's wooing. In addition to the Finnish protagonists' romantic entanglements, the plot is buttressed by the constant tensions between the settlers and local Native tribes, the Delaware or Lenni Lenape, as well as the reader's desire to know more about the past of the young Finn. Heer Piper's African slave, Bombie, supposedly knows a secret, which is never revealed, but has something to do with the Long Finne, thus rendering his presence in the settlement suspicious. The fearless Finn, however, gains popularity among the settlers when he performs heroic acts such as saving the villagers from the Natives' attacks. His brave deeds, physical attributes, and character traits typify him as a masculine male capable of conquering wilderness and protecting the interests of white settlers. As Wells summarizes in his "Introduction" to the 1988 edition of *Koningsmarke*, the protagonist's "knightly deeds celebrate the virtues of strength, ingenuity, integrity, and selflessness that will be needed by the people to survive in the New World."¹⁵ In addition to celebrating the actions of the Long Finne, the story pokes fun at the naiveté of the settlers and exposes the hypocrisy of their religious leader. The story ends with British, not Dutch, settlers taking over the Swedish rule. The Long Finne is transported to New York as a prisoner, then liberated, and reunited with the female protagonist, Christina, whom he marries.

The characters are equally predictable as the plot. They are flat character types, some depicted with racist vocabulary. They are described by using instantly recognizable stereotypes, particularly pertinent to "race," and, as such, "they convey enormous amounts of cultural information in an extremely condensed form."¹⁶ The characters associated with Finland serve to stress the virtues associated with whiteness (see previous comments on Christina and *Koningsmarke*). Heer Piper's enslaved woman, Bombie, whom he calls in an insulting way Snow Ball, is an exception. She had been a faithful Mammy figure in Piper's family and had accompanied Heer Piper to Finland, and from there to the New World. The Black woman is a mysterious figure whose physical features, as depicted in the book, rely on stereotypical features: ebony skin, woolly hair, broad flat nose, and eyes dark as coals.¹⁷ Scholars have noted that "stereotyping tends to occur when there are gross in-equalities of power," which is the case with Bombie as well as with her grandson, the already-adult Cupid, who lives within the white settlement.¹⁸

The mischievous Cupid, whose “bacon” the village high constable had saved more than once, is compared to negatively perceived domesticated animals: in addition to the reference to a pig (“bacon”), he is “as obstinate as a mule, as mischievous as a monkey, and as ill-natured as a bull-dog.”¹⁹ His animalistic features are echoed in his name, which evokes the stereotypical idea dominant in the white imagination of Black men’s sexuality. In his presentation, 19th-century racist images of Black men as hypersexual and resembling animals intertwine. For the most part, both Cupid and Bombie are silenced; both are allowed a few words or sentences, many of which are nonsensical.

The Native Americans, instead, are depicted in more prominent roles as warriors but also as wise men, at times engaged in discussion with the settlers, seemingly on an equal footing. In the novel, however, these conversations serve to prove the inferiority of the Natives and to contest their traditions and belief systems. In Paulding’s text, Indigenous people are compared to a very different kind of animal than those used to define the Black characters, one that is voracious, dangerous, and deathly: the wild wolf.²⁰ It underscores not only the ferocity but also the untamed, nomadic life associated with the Natives, thus evoking yet another stereotype, one that is also prominent in settler colonial discourse.²¹

The Civilized vs Savages

At the time of the events, the Delaware area, according to Paulding, was for the most part “perfect wilderness.” The small colonies were in the process of settling the boundaries of their territories and trying to ascertain “who was the real proprietor of the soil. As to the Indians, they were out of the question.” They had sold their land in exchange for tobacco-boxes, pipes, and red paint.²² Settler colonialism relies on such regularization of boundaries that secure for white settlers the possession of land and, consequently, the process of maintaining a territory previously inhabited by Indigenous Americans. Such territoriality, as scholars have observed, is a specific element in settler colonialism.²³ Settlers impose their domination over the land they are making their own, rooting their own culture and colony in a territory they claim theirs, for instance, merely by using the rhetoric of discovery.

Such justification is presented also in *Koningsmarke*: Heer Piper, who governed the settlement of New Sweden, did so “by right of dis-

covery, grant, possession, and what not.”²⁴ The references to the settlers’ “right” is revealing as is the list ending with “what not,” a clear trivialization, which seems to imply that the settlers could invent numerous motives, many of them insignificant, to rationalize their domination over the territory. In addition, the settlers deem it a “fair purchase” of the Native land since liquor, ammunition, and watch-coats were given in exchange for the large territory the Swedish government purchased. The settlers also legitimize land possession because the tribes, as the narrator explains, “wither[ed] away” as a result of their excessive drinking of alcohol.²⁵ And yet, drunkenness, which is presented as an innate weakness and vice of the Natives, is a consequence of trading with the whites. Although they are corrupted by the settlers, the novel shifts the cause for the Natives’ degradation to their “race.”

Historians Jeffrey Ostler and Nancy Shoemaker argue that “As settlers killed, removed, assimilated, and marginalized Native peoples to wrest the land from them, settlers justified their actions with racial logics and romanticized histories that separated Natives from their lands, both actually and figuratively, to privilege settler possession.”²⁶ This is exactly what occurs also in Paulding’s novel. According to the narrator, “The early settlers of this country were, perhaps, as extraordinary a race of people as ever existed. Totally unwarlike in their habits, they ventured upon a New World, and came, few in numbers, fearlessly into the society and within the power of a numerous race of savages.”²⁷ The settlers represent this “extraordinary” race, which evidently refers to their whiteness. The way their arrival is presented underscores their admirable character traits: they were pacific, adventurous, and courageous. They arrive as a small group, which renders them unthreatening. They are said to be driven by curiosity, eager to explore this new land, where they are soon attacked and overpowered by numerous savages. In other words, the settlers are depicted as arriving with peaceful, not bad, intentions but soon become the target of Native American violence. Indeed, as the text points out, the “noble ancestors” with “moral courage” were met by wild and “ignorant people” who were “superstitious”; they were “degenerate,” with “debased” minds, and gradually they became “corrupted by the universal curse of their race, spirituous liquors, the seductions of which the best and greatest of them could not resist.”²⁸ The Natives’ cultural inferiority (implied in their superstitious nature) and innate weakness of character establish them as vulnerable to the corruptive force of liquor, the

“universal curse of their race.” The distance the narrator takes from the causes of the Natives’ debasement liberates the settlers from any responsibility and involvement in their degeneration. What is at play here is the claim of white innocence. As with imperialist nostalgia, “the responsible imperial agent is transformed into an innocent bystander, masking his involvement with processes of domination.”²⁹ The seemingly benevolent presence and pacific intentions of the settlers are foregrounded and reinforced through the themes of innocence, honesty, justice, and their intentions to negotiate treaties, all concepts used as a mere rhetoric strategy to justify oppression of the Indigenous people and possession of their land. The reason for the Natives’ downfall and degradation, as mentioned earlier and repeated here, is liquor, which appears as a racial cause that surfaces because of the weakness of character, not because the white man introduced it to the tribes. Hence, the white man appears guiltless. The distinguishing feature between civilized and uncivilized, then, is “racial.”

Benson further notes that “Paulding, with one or two exceptions, simply maintained a hazy, general cross-section idea of the white Man pitted against the Redskin, and painted it accordingly. His ignorance of specific facts is covered up by satire.”³⁰ The novel abounds in generalizations and repeatedly evokes stereotypes, not only those related to white and Black characters. For instance, although the “neighbouring Indians were, for the most part, on friendly terms with the whites at Elsingburgh,” this was not the case with all Natives, some of whom were more inclined to commit murders.³¹ Such statements seem to further promote the idea that the Elsingburgh whites would have preferred to peacefully cohabit with Native Americans whose aggression is presented as *their*, not the settlers’ inherent tendency. And yet, the initial intentions for peaceful cohabitation and bonding with Indigenous people cease when land possession is questioned. Then, friendliness turns into rivalry and conquest. It is the animosity of the Natives that is explicitly explained, and it is they who are presented as susceptible to vice and violence—they drink and then become violent, which has devastating consequences. Because of their violent nature and tendency to get drunk, Paulding thus presents the Natives as unable to take care of their lands and to live peacefully with the settlers. This in turn renders it impossible to assimilate them into a civilized society governed by the white newcomers. Paulding offers these as valid motives for the settlers’ mastery over the “savages,” to suppress their

traditions, take possession of their territories, and, hence, Heer Piper feels justified to charge the Natives with trespassing “by hunting on the lands ceded by them in *fair* purchase.”³² In this way, the author takes part in reinforcing existing negative images of Native Americans that were circulating in America at the time. The contrast between the “savages” and “civilized” becomes foregrounded through their “race,” character traits, and behavior, and the way they use the land.

Paulding centers human interactions in the process of settlement but at the same time examines the relation of man and nature. In the same way as the settlers oppress the Natives, they also dominate nature by eliminating forests to build forts and towns or by taming rivers. Their civilization campaigns and relationship with nature are destructive. For instance, in the process of taming the wilderness, the settlers build a dam that obstructs the fish from moving down the river, which causes the Natives to starve. Here, to quote the anthropologist Patrick Wolfe, the contest for land clearly is also contest for life.³³ The settlers also destroy the forest by burning leaves and killing trees. Destroying to control, or to remove and replace, are the settlers’ strategies that stand for social development. Farming land and constructing protective walls to secure the whites against the Native tribes are signs of civilization that, according to the newcomers, give them a right to the land and make the settlers prosper. Misunderstandings arise because the tribes claim they sold the land with the trees on it but not the birds in the air, fish in the river, or beasts in the woods. These, they argue, “belong to those who have the courage and skill to catch them.”³⁴ In the Natives’ view, wilderness, in part, is a no man’s land where certain tracts of land and animals are nobody’s possession. These tracts of wilderness were fundamental for survival, the territory for free fishing and hunting. However, not only do the novel’s settlers take possession of the land but they also demonstrate that they wish to oppress the Natives, trying to convert them to “civilized” ways and belief systems. Such a “civilizing” assimilation process relies on the erasure of Native traditions, thus rendering it a form of genocide.³⁵

Scholars such as Patrick Wolfe have argued that assimilation strategies imposed by the dominant culture are less violent than genocide but no less eliminatory.³⁶ In *Koningsmarke*, which attacks every aspect of Native American life, the settlers try to convert the Indigenous tribes to the white man’s religion, their way of cultivating land, building forts, and trading unfairly. Although they share the same geographical space,

there are clear boundaries, both physical and cultural, dividing the settlers from Native Americans.

The Natives acknowledge the settlers' conquest of the territory but accept that the Great Spirit, not the white man, will extinguish them:

We shall perish, or be driven before it, till we come to where the sun sets in the great salt lake of the West, and when we can go no further, there will soon be an end of our race. If such is the will of the Great Spirit, we cannot help it; if it is not his will, you cannot make it so.³⁷

Here Paulding promotes the idea of the vanishing Indian as a predetermined destiny, but the responsibility of Indian removal is shifted from the white settlers, in the novel the Swedes and Finns, onto the Great Spirit, thus negating the settlers' involvement in the push of Natives toward westward migration. Indeed, they appear innocent in the elimination of Indigenous tribes.

If the Natives on the one hand are depicted as cruel with innate tendency for violence, on the other hand they can also be perceived as loyal and noble. The narrator explains that when they agree to a peace treaty they never violate it afterwards. They had few temptations and vices before the arrival of the settlers and "many good, not to say great qualities." They never lied and could always be trusted to do what they promised. Such descriptions evoke the stereotypical idea of the "noble savage." However, in Paulding's narrative, friendship between the white men even with such "noble" Natives is deemed impossible. At the peace talks the Swedish and Finnish settlers accuse the Natives of being ignorant barbarians and are scornful of their spiritual beliefs and worldviews. In the Natives' view, the settlers, instead, "are a bad people" with two faces and hearts. The Natives accuse them of bringing liquor, smallpox, and lies among the tribes. This attitude of no reconciliation triggers a transformation in the Natives: they resume their war-whoops and raise their tomahawks.³⁸

In the novel, the colonial construction of Native Americans as uncivilized and the use of colonialist language by explicitly labeling them as "savages" serve to justify the American expansion that relied on the acquisition of land and natural resources. The domination of Native Americans via oppositional identity construction, their classification as representing different "race" and ethnicity, becomes an enactment of colonial mastery. Cassandra Jackson argues that projecting

alienness onto Native Americans as well as African Americans served to justify “the appropriation of their labor and land.”³⁹ In Paulding’s novel, the tall, white Finn contrasts with not only the “savages” but also Cupid, a “dwarf” with ebony complexion. The oppositional positioning of Indigenous inhabitants and white Americans, furthermore, contributes to the pretext of colonial dispossession of Native Americans. Paulding’s novel buttresses the historical narrative of Native Americans being conquered because of their inferiority. At the same time, it endorses the Indian removal policy.

White Innocence and Exceptionality

The fictional character of Koningsmarke, or the Long Finne, contributes to the creation of the myth of Nordic exceptionalism and white innocence that can also be detected in the settlers’ legitimization of land possession. Social and cultural anthropologist Gloria Wekker has identified elements that denote white innocence, many of them applicable to the Long Finne. For instance, according to Wekker, innocence is associated with smallness, such as a small nation that Koningsmarke also represents, or it may carry “feminine connotations.” Moreover, the claim for white innocence is particularly strong in countries like Sweden where another foundational claim is exceptionalism.⁴⁰ Such concepts are present in Paulding’s novel and it can be argued that they resonate among Finns even today. The description of the fictional Finn, Koningsmarke, relies on references to his height and masculinity but also his effeminate appearance: he is nearly six feet tall, well proportioned, a “fair tall youth” who embodies manly beauty that “might have been thought somewhat effeminate.” He is an idealization of masculinity—with his fierce character and muscular body—but also of sensitivity as well as whiteness, his complexion being “almost too fair for a man.” With his “light blue eye, the colour of the north,” he stands out as “an Apollo among satyrs” among the “sturdy” village “boors.” He is, indeed, exceptional. In addition to being physically superior, he comes from a sophisticated family of certain social position as indicated by the reference to his father, who had been “a gentleman of Finland, called Colonel Koningsmarke,” by now deceased. The female protagonist, Christina, recalls having seen such “species of more polished beings” in Finland, a recollection that emphasizes the uniqueness of Finns.⁴¹ The Long Finne is a highly idealized figure, who

not only appears as the hero of the story but, in doing so, contributes to the myth of racial purity, which is fundamental in the construction of American nationhood.

To reinforce the role of this “tall, straight, light-complexioned, blue-eyed youth” as representative of ideal American identity, the Long Finne, when defying authority, is “whistling Yankee Doodle.”⁴² He embodies American confidence, individualism, and courage. Foregrounding the admirable qualities of the Long Finne—his physical attributes and character traits—serves to emphasize the characteristics of white Americans in general; he is their representative. They appear civilized and superior, which places them in a position of power that is made to seem natural. Such a power structure is reinforced when white Americans are mirrored against Native Americans. The paradoxical relations with Native Americans, whose language the Long Finne speaks, contrast with claims for innocence with disavowed violence. His intelligence and skills evoke another myth about the northerners deemed remarkable for their intellect and education.

The Long Finne assumes the role of an unmistakable hero when he alerts the village of the approaching Indian warriors. Their “horrible yell” confirms the arrival of the “savage warriors,” a yell “which the adventurous founders of the new world were, alas! too well accustomed to hear.” The settlers get ready to defend their fort and even women and children start to load the guns, which they hand to the admirable northern men, “their brave defenders.” A battle ensues but the Natives soon become “discouraged by resistance,” which implies their mental weakness and thus inferiority. It is pure luck, it seems, that an explosion in the villagers’ ammunition deposit shifts the power balance toward a triumph of the Natives. As the villagers flee toward the river, the heroic Koningsmarke remains to fight the “savages.” The settlement houses are burned to ashes, Heer Piper’s dreams of founding an empire vanish, and “a wild, shrill whoop announced the triumph and departure of the savages” who were retreating to their “forest homes.”⁴³ The Natives’ savagery is evoked through their barbaric, wild, and shrill yells, their tendency to violence and cruelty, and their retreat back to the wilderness. The Finnish hero once again stands out with his altruistic, courageous actions to defend and protect the colony. However, after a fierce struggle to protect Heer Piper’s daughter, the virtuous Christina, she and Koningsmarke become captives of the retrieving tribe.

Despite his captivity, the Long Finne remains true to his exceptionalism: he is cheerful, accepting and adjusting to his circumstances, and, because of his ambitious nature, he distinguishes himself, excelling in the skill of shooting so well as to make the Natives jealous. He thus proves the superiority of white civilized men. Not only is he physically strong and handsome, skilled in hunting and war, but his intellectual capacity is such that he knows the Indian language. This enables him to have conversations with the tribe's wisest man, who happens to be the father of the woman whose slave the Long Finne has become.

The superiority of the settlers is articulated by the wise man of the tribe when he tells Koningsmarke that the Natives will never be able to become good white men, shall never become farmers, and are unable to understand the religion of the settlers. In sum, they cannot be assimilated into white society. The reasoning of the Native is logical when he argues, for instance, that the whites "are a miserable race in your own country ... or you would not have come hither to disturb us."⁴⁴ But the arguments, for the most part, are deemed naïve, seemingly childish, and supposedly funny. They serve to testify to the Natives' primitiveness.

The myth of Native–white oppositional positioning is reinforced by the myth of the superior Finn, who gets along with the Natives because of his innocence and benevolence. These are the distinguishing features that separate him from the village "brutes," and which again appear as signs of his superior humanity. His benevolent attempt to explain the civilized–barbarian paradigm fails and soon becomes a legitimization for the settlers' land possession as Koningsmarke undertakes to prove "that a people who cultivated the ground had a right to take it away from those who only hunted upon it, because it was the will of the Great Spirit that the human race should increase to the greatest possible number in all parts of the world."⁴⁵ The argument lacks logic as it makes it seem like hunters or nomadic people are unable to contribute to the increase of human race. The settlers, the Long Finne claims, had a right to the land, it was desirable that they multiply, and the Natives, who (according to him) were incapable of farming land, consequently would, and perhaps should, be eliminated. In the Long Finne's explanation, it was the will of the Natives' Great Spirit, not of the white man, that this should be so. Once again, Paulding introduces a claim of the settlers' innocence. A discussion about the distinction between a man and an animal ensues to elaborate the point: the former is governed

by reason, the latter by instinct, which makes the latter “an inferior race by nature.” It is clear that the former refers to the settlers, the latter to the Natives. The narrator concludes that it was impossible to make the “poor savage” “comprehend the most simple elements of our social and religious systems.”⁴⁶ In this way, the novel takes part in the dominant process to prove that the Natives cannot be assimilated into white society; there are no possibilities for cohabitation since they are helpless cases, which then would justify their elimination or removal. To quote Jackson: casting Native Americans as “incapable of adapting to the present or future, also posed removal as a benevolent act that would both save and civilize Indians.”⁴⁷ Such apparent benevolence contributes to the construction of the innocent, superior, civilized, and in many ways exceptional white settlers, who in the novel are identified as Swedes and Finns.

Women Negotiating Settler Colonialism

The section that takes place in the local Delaware (Lenape) tribe’s territory centers the uncivilized, cruel ways of the Natives. The tropes of romance, wilderness adventure, and frontier encounter intertwine in the scene in which the prisoners are carried deep into the wilderness, a virgin forest where wild animals maintain their land possession. Deviating from traditional captivity narratives, both men and women are abducted. In addition to the Long Finne and Christina, others from the village are also among the captives: Lob Dotterel, Claas Tomeson, his wife, and their infant child. Conventional gender images are evoked as the strong and courageous Finn assists the weak female, Christina, carrying her in his arms through the forest. All men, however, are stripped of their manly power when they are unable to prevent the cruel killing of Tomeson’s wife and child, murders they are forced to witness.

Upon the arrival of the captives in the tribe’s village, they are met with whooping and horrible cries of women, children, and old men, all armed with tomahawks, guns, and clubs. The savagery seems to pertain to representatives of both genders and all ages, not only presented as a characteristic of Native men. The entire tribe’s violent responses are further underscored through a description of the torture inflicted on the captives. The barbaric customs come across as the tribe’s traditions: the relatives of those killed in battle are able to choose to adopt

a prisoner or torture them to death. Here Paulding is drawing material from real incidents that he conflates with his imagination.

The civilized–barbarian dichotomy is foregrounded in the way some of the captives are treated. Claas Tomeson is tortured to death by the Natives, the “inhuman beings” whose answer to his cries is laughter, shouts, and additional torture. Ludwig Varlett, another prisoner, after witnessing the burning of Tomeson, tricks the Natives, who, once they realize they have been fooled into shooting him and thus having been deprived the “fun” of torture, tear his body into pieces and drink his hot blood. These episodes are presented as proof of the Natives’ stupidity, barbarism, and innate cruelty, in sum, that they are “savages” who had to be tamed and civilized. This idea is reinforced in the description of an ensuing celebration of the “wretched bacchanals” that ends, as can be expected, in drunkenness.⁴⁸

The Long Finne with his handsome face and admirable physical form is chosen as a husband or slave by one of the tribe’s women. The relationship with the Native woman may be seen to fall into the category of “common-law” marriage, which was rather common among white settlers, instead of being an official or formal intermarriage. It is potentially acceptable, however, to advocate intermarriage or relations between white men and Native women, but not considered tolerable for Native men to have intimate relations with white women like Christina. This reflects the prevailing attitude in American society at the time, which envisioned intermarriage, when it was deemed acceptable, “as a prerogative of white men, and said nothing about Indian men marrying white women.”⁴⁹ Such attitudes also reflect the period’s racial hierarchies according to which Natives could become white, or at least women could be assimilated into white society as spouses or partners of white men, but Blacks never could. Koningsmarke, however, rejects “the bodies of Natives who supposedly stood between whites and their dream of civilizing America.”⁵⁰ He contributes to the myth of racial purity by escaping when threatened by interracial desire that would contest America’s denial of racial mixing.

If the hero of the story is chosen to cohabit with a Native woman as her slave, the virtuous, white, and fair heroine of the story, Christina, instead, is adopted as a sister to an Indigenous girl, Aonetti or Deer Eyes. She is the dark beauty of the village, thus contrasting against Christina’s fairness. Christina becomes a member of the tribe, assuming the name of Mimi, which signified the Turtle Dove. For a brief

moment, the novel questions what it means to be Indigenous or to be a settler. These two women engage in a negotiation of territorial possession and cohabitation on peaceful terms. They lack the violence characteristic of men (and some of the Indigenous women). They use their “feminine” nature to nurture intimate bonding. The dark and fair women’s differences, however, become apparent when they become rivals: they both love the heroic Finn. The civilized–barbarian dichotomy is played out in the reactions of the two women: Aonetti is ignorant of civilized ways of hiding emotions, thus openly revealing her feelings; she is entirely governed by emotions rather than intellectual reason; she is unaware of “proper” female behavior; and her “gender and tender simplicity” render her inappropriate “indelicate forwardness” rather “affecting.”⁵¹ Christina, instead, appears as the superior white woman: she remains grateful to and affectionate with Aonetti, even when discovering the latter’s feelings for the Long Finne; she feels sympathy for Aonetti for losing her brother in a battle; and she remains virtuous even under challenging circumstances.⁵² And yet, despite their differences and duel for the love of the white hero, the two women protect, care for, and love each other.

Christina thus remains unmarried but forms a homosocial interracial relation with a Native woman, although they are defined as sisters. They are both described as “innocent girls,” but it is in Aonetti’s arms that Christina awakes after her failed attempt to escape. They are said to love each other, and it is on the bosom of Christina that Aonetti weeps, confessing her love for Christina: “I love you,” she would say.” And, although the love was mutual, the civilized white woman “could not help feeling a certain awkward sensation, that sometimes cause her to return the caresses of the Indian maid with a coldness.”⁵³ The emotional affection seems acceptable to Christina but it is the physical contact and intimacy that she rejects. In her civilized society homosocial relations might be accepted as long as they resist crossing the line into homoerotic physicality.

Although both Christina and the Long Finne imitate the tribe’s way of life, which again evokes their white superiority, benevolence, innocence, and resistance to settler complicity, it only serves to underscore the foreignness and inferiority of the Natives’ lifestyle when compared to their own cultural background. At the same time, it serves to demonstrate that the white characters are able to adapt to their circumstances, to assimilate even into the lifestyle of inferior “savages” with-

out compromising their moral integrity. The unequal relationships are maintained, rather than discontinued as Veracini has theorized, but the roles and power balances are momentarily reversed when the Native women become conquerors, possessing captive bodies and flesh.

Conclusion: Creating Transnational Myths

The novel creates and reinforces myths about white superiority and the exceptionality of Finns, who are described as possessing traits that continue to resonate in the idealized constructions of Finnishness: honesty, courage, and innocence linked to their admirable physical attributes. In particular, the male protagonist, the Long Finne, appears in a pivotal role throughout the novel. The conventional overlapping of escape and rescue plot amplify the heroic role of the white Finn in planning and executing the escape and rescuing both Christina and Lob Dotterel at the same time. He demonstrates his exceptionalism more than once, for instance when he assumes the task of exchanging views with the Natives who hold him and the other villagers as their captives. In Paulding's novel, the Natives' identity is constructed by labeling and defining them with clichéd terminology. Overall, the novel affirms stereotypes, justifies settlers' land possession, legitimizes removal and slaughter of Natives, and contributes to defining myths about the new nation and ideal national identity.

Although Paulding's novel is set in the 1660s Delaware region, it addresses contemporary 19th-century concerns and controversies. These include references to "race" and racial hierarchies, reinforcing stereotypes, justifying Indian removal, participating in the creation of national identity and history, contributing to the process of nation building. The novel even introduces references to the death penalty and lynching, for instance when the Black character, Cupid, is punished by hanging, his body "hanging in mid air."⁵⁴ It vividly evokes an image of a Black body lynched. And, in the context of creating American national literature, the novel explains and legitimizes Native marginalization, removal, elimination, and invisibility. Interracial desire and marriage that posed a national threat of miscegenation is carefully avoided. A land that could be seen to be defined by denial of racial mixing and racism has been rescued from "savages" while at the same time its territories are secured under civilizing influences.

The heroic escape and subsequent marriage of Koningsmarke and Christina bring the novel to a happy ending. The nation is being built and will be inhabited by descendants of these representatives of white innocence and exceptionalism. In the novel, Finns have claimed their place in the context of nation building and contributed to the more general process of reinventing history. The son of the happy couple, the “little blue-eyed grandson” of Heer Piper, is a sign of the white, ideal “race” being prolonged.⁵⁵ The new nation has secured the continuation of the desired citizens, the admirable and honest white northerners.

Notes

- 1 Wells, “Introduction,” v.
- 2 N. Y. Patriot, “Literary Notices,” *American Watchman and Delaware Advertiser* (Wilmington, DE), January 2, 1824. The newspaper’s May 25, 1824, issue carried a short extract from *Koningsmarke* (Book 7, chapter I) in which the characters Edith and Dominie Kantwell collect donations from the inhabitants of Elsingburgh. It was considered “so good a ‘touch at the times’” that the newspaper presented it “as a mirror for the new Tax-gatherers, (who have invented a gospel which oppresses the poor more than the Jewish system formerly did).”
- 3 Jackson, *Barriers Between Us*, 23.
- 4 Paulding, James Kirke, *Koningsmarke*, 3.
- 5 Bellquist, “Book Review: Koningsmarke.”
- 6 On Indian removal, see Weik, *Archeology of Removal*, and Ostler, *Surviving Genocide*.
- 7 Kennedy, “National Narrative,” 9.
- 8 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 5.
- 9 Benson, “Corrigenda,” 43–44.
- 10 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 3.
- 11 Haefeli, “Revolt,” 137.
- 12 See Haefeli, “Revolt” and Benson, “Corrigenda.”
- 13 Benson, “Paulding’s ‘Koningsmarke,’” 20. For a summary of the plot, see also Paulding, *Literary Life*, 164–65.
- 14 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 18.
- 15 Wells, “Introduction,” xii–xiii.
- 16 Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*, xvi; quoted in Jackson, *Barriers*, 4.
- 17 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 5, 15–17, 24, 208.
- 18 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 141; quoting Hall, *Representation*, 258.
- 19 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 33.
- 20 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 13.
- 21 Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 396.
- 22 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 9, 10.
- 23 Wolfe “Settler Colonialism,” 388.
- 24 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 9.
- 25 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 94.

- 26 Ostler and Shoemaker, "Settler Colonialism," 363.
- 27 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 92.
- 28 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 93–94.
- 29 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 109.
- 30 Benson, "Paulding's 'Koningsmarke,'" 22.
- 31 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 94–95, 63, 69.
- 32 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 95; italics added.
- 33 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 387.
- 34 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 99–100.
- 35 For definitions of genocide, see Article II(d) of the UN Convention, 1948.
- 36 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 401.
- 37 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 99.
- 38 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 94, 97, 100.
- 39 Jackson, *Barriers*, 10.
- 40 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 16–17.
- 41 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 18–19; 8, 19; 11.
- 42 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 7.
- 43 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 107–08, 110.
- 44 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 128.
- 45 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 130.
- 46 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 131–32.
- 47 Jackson, *Barriers*, 24.
- 48 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 121–25.
- 49 Cott, *Public Vows*, 27.
- 50 Jackson, *Barriers*, 26.
- 51 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 133.
- 52 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 134, 156, 165.
- 53 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 150–51.
- 54 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 211.
- 55 Paulding, *Koningsmarke*, 255.

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CHAPTER 6

Socialist Visions of American Dreams

The Finnish Settler Lives of Oskari Tokoi and Frank Aaltonen

Rani-Henrik Andersson and Rainer Smedman

In the summer of 1921, two Finnish immigrants met on the streets of Sault Ste. Marie, Canada.¹ There was a short discussion in a very straightforward, even Finnish, way:

- Aren't you Oskari Tokoi?
- But who are you?
- I am Frank Aaltonen from Hollola Lahti, but I live close by on Sugar Island and I came to take you there.

Oskari Tokoi agreed to Frank Aaltonen's request and ended up in a rowing boat crossing the Canadian–US border to Sugar Island on the US side. The crossing of the border was questionable, since Oskari Tokoi did not have the necessary permits to enter the United States. Thus, he became an illegal immigrant.²

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This chapter examines the entangled histories of two Finnish immigrants to the United States, and how their encounter in Sault Ste. Marie led to significant political and social activism. This chapter will build on this meeting on Sugar Island and is tied to [Chapter 2](#) in this volume. Sugar Island is not the focus here; rather, it is the locus where Tokoi's and Aaltonen's experiences and visions of what it meant to be a Finnish American immigrant, a socialist, a settler, and a colonist merged.³ In short, it is about the lived experience of two Finns who were both socialists and settlers. It shows the tensions and intersections of socialist and settler ideas. Tokoi first came to the US in the early 1890s and returned to Finland, where he became the first prime minister in 1917, only to be given two death sentences, forcing him to seek asylum in the US in 1921. Aaltonen immigrated to the US in 1905 and became a major force in organizing Finnish labor unions in America. While their political careers merit investigations of their own, this chapter will focus on their perceptions of Finns as a "special" immigrant group in America, their ideas of race, and their views of Native Americans and Finns as settlers. Their views, presented in their memoirs and writings and sometimes evident in their actions (as miners, farmers, and land speculators), were often paternalistic and reflect what is today referred to as settler colonialism. This chapter also examines their perceptions of socialism, immigration, and Finnishness. Tokoi and Aaltonen were united not only by their new homeland but also by their experience in mining, cooperatives, and trade union movements. Furthermore, Tokoi and Aaltonen organized aid from the United States to Finland during and after the Second World War. While their experiences were different, they shared a vision of an agrarian, socialist society, built on the freedoms of America.

Immigrants, Socialists and the "Vanishing Race"

Oskari Tokoi immigrated twice to North America. Between those journeys he became the first prime minister of Finland. Born in the Yläviirret village in Kannus, Finland, in 1873, Tokoi left for North America as a 17-year-old boy in 1891. He traveled first by ship across the Atlantic to New York, from where the journey continued on a weeklong train ride across the US to the coal mines of Carbon, Wyoming.⁴

In Carbon, Tokoi joined a sobriety club, "Aamurusko" ("Dawn"), founded by Finns. Tokoi was concerned about the consumption of

alcohol by the Finnish immigrants. The Finns built a small church in Carbon, where the sobriety club also met. Tokoi later wrote about how most Finns spent their time in saloons drinking, and in Carbon he had to make a choice: whether to become like them or to abstain from alcohol. He chose the latter and sobriety became one of his life's guiding principles. In Carbon, Tokoi also quickly understood that, in order to be able to participate in community activities, he had to know the language of the country. So, he acquired and read literature, mainly non-fiction. From Carbon, Tokoi moved through the nearby Almy Mine, where his father had also worked, then to the Ines mining area for the winter, and from there to the coal mine in Glenrock, Wyoming. There he founded and became the chairman of a sobriety club, "Star of the Wilderness." While there, Tokoi, perhaps for the first time, met Native Americans, whom he immediately described as "wild beasts in their natural state."⁵

Tokoi's arrival in the American West coincided with a time when the resistance of the Indigenous peoples of the region had just been crushed. In the mid-19th century, as western expansion intensified, the situation in the northern plains, the homelands of the Lakota, the western branch of the Sioux, and their allies, intensified. After the US Civil War, the situation developed into a war, when settler routes passed through the best hunting grounds of the Lakota in the Powder River area. Despite winning the Powder River War, which lasted more than two years, the Lakotas and their allies had to sign the Fort Laramie Treaty in 1868, which assigned them a reservation west of the Missouri River (Dakota Territory) in what is now South and North Dakota. This Great Sioux Reservation included the Black Hills area and a vast domain west and north in today's Wyoming and Montana as unceded Indian territory. Tense relations escalated in the early 1870s when new US army forts were built and when a large expedition led by Lieutenant Colonel George Custer entered the Black Hills in 1874. During the trip, Custer sent messages about the riches of the Black Hills, about gold, and so did the journalists. Western newspapers made these reports headlines, with the result that thousands of gold diggers flowed into the area in a matter of months. Furthermore, the settlers and the government reasoned that the area was good farmland that went completely unused by the Indians, who saw the Black Hills as the center of their world. The government, which, according to the peace treaty (1868), should have protected the Indians, did not have

the courage to prevent whites from invading the area. As a result of the gold rush, the town of Lead and the Homestake Gold Mine were established in the Black Hills in 1876. The claim for the mine was registered even before the town was founded, and in violation of the treaty of 1868.⁶

The establishment of the city of Lead in the heart of Lakota homelands is an appropriate example of settler colonialism, in which the military operation was preceded by the gradual infiltration of settlers and gold seekers into the Lakota homelands, against treaty stipulations. In the aftermath of the Battle of Little Bighorn, the hills were taken from the Lakotas, even then illegally. The Lakotas had to move on the reservation to give space to white settlement. The last fight between the US Army and the Lakota took place along the Wounded Knee River in 1890. The US Army killed more than 250 Lakotas.⁷

Only a year later, Oskari Tokoi arrived at Lead, where he became acquainted with the labor movement, and in 1893 he joined the Central City branch of the Western Miners' Union as its Finnish delegate. His task was to ensure that all Finns belonged to the union.⁸ Around the time Tokoi arrived in the West, historian Frederick Jackson Turner declared that the American frontier was closed. According to Turner, the frontier, western expansion, and the "free" lands were true characteristics and building blocks of American identity and American society. In 1893, according to him, civilization had conquered savagery, Indians had been forced into reservations, and the white man was now entitled to seek his American dream freely.⁹

Tokoi was certainly familiar with the fate of the local Indian tribes since it had only been a few years since they had been removed from the Black Hills area. Lakota reservations were not far from Lead and Natives were present both in the Black Hills and in the cities in the area.¹⁰ In 1892 Tokoi had his first encounter with a group of Lakota, along the Platte River:

One day in late autumn, the government announced that a passing Native American tribe would visit the locality. The announcement called for the saloons to close the windows so that the Indians would not even be able to look inside. In the evening, when the men were just coming out of the mine, a huge crowd of Indians were riding along the road. The riders were all young, healthy men and women. It was the famous Sioux [Lakota] tribe that, with their herds of horses, moved south for

the winter. There were about five hundred riders, all in the original Indian costumes with their feathered headdresses. They were followed by more than hundred wagonloads of older people, mostly women and children. There were a total of two thousand of them.¹¹

Tokoi went on to describe the Sioux as the “last Indian tribe still living wild on the entire American continent,” raising the idea of them being still wild and as such a potential danger in their primitive state. None of them, except for an old woman, could speak English and as evening came they pitched up their tents and many Finns who had never seen so many Indians began to fear. “What if these wild beasts in their natural state, for some reason, became enraged, then they would sweep such a society away from the face of the earth with a single swipe!” pondered Tokoi, but, in a tone of relief, he concluded that “they did not go wild.” In the morning, they assembled their tents and stuff in the usual order and continued their journey to the south calmly. What could be their goal? At least the Finns did not know it.¹²

What Tokoi witnessed was a very common sight in the early reservation era. Many Lakotas visited friends and even former enemies in distant reservations and frequently visited towns that now stood on their former homelands. Tokoi described the Lakota in a very paternalistic tone, evoking sentiments of a bygone era and playing into the noble savage stereotype. Tokoi did not mention that the lands he was staying on belonged to the Natives, nor did he comment on their removal. To him, the Indians passing by were not the rightful owners of the land, rather relics of the past, the last wild Indians that civilization had left to become the vanishing race. Years later he elaborated on the vanishing race paradigm, writing:

White conquerors tried to force the Indians into slavery and obey their laws and manners, but it did not come to anything. And even now Indians, the original inhabitants of America, are under much wardship and more oppressed than any other race. But they have not given up and not a single Indian has been enslaved but they have rather died than succumbed. And as a result of this oppressive politics, it looked like the number of Indians constantly decreased whereas all other races, including the blacks that were brought as slaves, increased and it looked like the entire race was doomed to die.¹³

Defeating the Natives, taking their lands, and destroying their cultures was part of the (white) American dream, and there was no need to question it. Tokoi embraced the American idea of free land, the American dream, and the privilege of a white man to which the Natives did not belong, even if Tokoi here acknowledged that they were the original inhabitants of America.

Frank Aaltonen, born in Hämeenlinna in 1886, arrived in the United States in 1905 and initially lived in western Michigan, where he began organizing the Negaunee Labor Organization the very year of his arrival. Unlike Tokoi, he did not come into contact with the Native people in the area, before his move to the Sault Ste. Marie Area and Sugar Island. Instead, he threw himself wholeheartedly into the affairs of the working-class people, in the socialist cause. During his second year in the United States, he was arrested for causing unrest and charged with communism. The reason for this was a socialist parade in the town of Hancock. The marchers carried the red flag of the socialist revolution in front of the American flag. Aaltonen and 12 others were officially charged with violating flag regulations and disturbing the peace. The case went eventually to the state Supreme Court, and the defendants were ordered to pay small fines, which, according to Aaltonen, were never paid.¹⁴

Aaltonen continued actively in the Socialist Party of America (SPA) and the Finnish Socialist Federation (FSF). He later studied for four years at the University of Valparaiso in Indiana. From 1908 to 1914, Aaltonen was the organizer of the Western Federation of Miners in Negaunee and recruited miners to the union. Aaltonen also tried to influence public opinion by actively writing about Finns and socialism in local newspapers. In 1916 he wrote an extensive article in the *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News*, where he explained why socialism worked so well in Finland and how the organizations and cooperatives founded by the socialists did well in America as well. He highlighted how the socialist movement had been at the forefront of giving Finnish women the right to vote and improving the conditions of the working population. In his opinion, the employment and influence of women in politics had been so successful that “almost no one in Finland opposes it.” In addition, Aaltonen emphasized how state-owned companies, such as railways, performed well. He also showed how things that Finns considered normal, were signs of radicalism to many Americans. In his opinion, the Finnish socialists were not necessarily radical, but

socialism was an “intellectual movement,” which, however, was sometimes difficult to put into practice.¹⁵

Aaltonen obtained US citizenship in 1911. He was the leader of the famous Copper Island mining strike from 1913 to 1914. He also had serious disputes with other leaders of the Finnish socialist movement. These culminated in a meeting in the city of Butte in Montana. Erik Lantala opposed Aaltonen’s presence. He pulled his knife and threatened to stab Aaltonen.¹⁶ In connection with the Great Mining Strike in 1913 and immediately thereafter, charges were brought against Frank Aaltonen and other leaders for, among other things, conspiracy and disturbing the peace. Aaltonen was known as a very active defender of labor issues, but on the other hand he was also considered an agitator and he earned the nickname “The Fighting Finlander.”¹⁷ Aaltonen was clearly strongly patriotic toward both Finland and the United States. Americans suspected that, like other people with a Finnish background, his loyalty was more on the side of the old home country than the new one. This was especially emphasized during the First World War, when the fate of Finland was also decided. Aaltonen himself wanted to show how the Finns were staunch supporters of both their own country and the United States. He wanted the United States to recognize Finland’s aspirations and the right to full independence, and it was not fair to accuse or doubt the loyalty of Finns to the United States. “The Finns in America are not disloyal to the land of their adoption, but how can you expect them to be particularly enthusiastic about this war when their cause equally dear to their hearts is completely ignored.” If Americans wanted the full support of Finns, why could America not openly support Finnish efforts, wondered Aaltonen.¹⁸

Like Oskari Tokoi, Frank Aaltonen traveled widely in the United States and Canada, but never in his correspondence, articles, or memoirs does he touch upon the Native people of the country. It is true that his travels occurred ten years later than Tokoi’s and the Indigenous presence might not have been as prominent. But not before he sets his eyes on Sugar Island, Michigan, does Aaltonen take the time to address the Indigenous people, the Anishinaabeg of the area. As Justin Gage pointed out in [Chapter 2](#) of this volume, even then Aaltonen saw the land on Sugar Island as free. It was there for the Finn, the superior woodsman and farmer, to colonize. The blood that ran in their veins was that of “true pioneers.” The Indigenous people may have owned parts of the land, but Aaltonen, fully believing in the Finn as a superior

race and the Native as the vanishing race, suggested that Finnish presence on the land would bring civilization to wilderness. The full-blood Anishinaabeg, whom he clearly believed to be racially superior race to the mixed-bloods, fully supported his civilizing efforts, whereas the mixed-bloods opposed him. Aaltonen ranked the Native people based on their blood quantum and physical appearance, but also by their willingness to help him “improve” the island. To get the Natives’ support, he promised them employment and, with that, a part in the (Finnish) American dream.¹⁹

Poverty, Socialism and the Native

One might assume that witnessing the poverty most Indians were forced to live in would have in some way influenced both Tokoi and Aaltonen, both of whom came from relatively poor conditions and were interested in socialism. However, this is not evident in their writings. During his travels in Nevada, Oskari Tokoi met a Native man sitting by a lone fire with a bottle of alcohol between his legs. The man gestured to Tokoi to join him. Tokoi described the meeting.

I was hesitant to approach the man. The Indian himself did not seem hostile or scary; rather he had a friendly appearance. However, the almost empty bottle made me wary. I had heard that booze makes an Indian fierce and they can get so fierce that their original savage instincts take over and in that stage the savage mind stalking for white man’s scalp may take possession and cause destruction.²⁰

Tokoi approached the man and, when he asked for more liquor, Tokoi went to a nearby saloon and bought another bottle to the man, who “was forever grateful” for this kind gesture by a white man. Tokoi continued to describe this encounter:

To demonstrate his approval the Indian then wanted to show me all of his tribe’s war songs. An old canister abandoned by the fire could act as a drum and I had to sit there with a stick in my hand to beat the drum with this monotonous rhythm that is characteristic to all Indian dances. And the redskin danced. At certain intervals, he stopped to take a sip from the bottle. After that the dance got fiercer and wilder. Instead of a tomahawk, he held big pieces of burnt wood in his hand throwing them

occasionally in the fire with tremendous anger, causing the embers rise high in the air. The dance would have been funny and interesting to anyone unless the looming danger of the Indian forgetting being civilized, and suddenly believing that he was doing a real war dance that required a reward in the form of a white man's scalp. Due to the whiskey and exhaustion, the Indian's knees started to wobble and after a couple of high-pitched screams he laid down and fell asleep.²¹

Tokoi placed more firewood in the fire and decided to sleep by the fire, and in the morning he continued to the nearby town.²² In his writings, Tokoi assumed a very paternalistic view of Native Americans. On several occasions, he raised the issue of them being wild children of nature, much like Finns. However, alcohol and poverty had reduced them into a vanishing race, a common stereotype at the time. For Aaltonen the Native Americans were just another group of people he needed to win over to accomplish his colonization of Sugar Island. He did offer them jobs for supporting his efforts, but nowhere did he men-



Figure 6.1: Oskari Tokoi signing a copy of his memoirs, *Maanpakolaisen Muistelmia*, during his visit to Finland in 1957. Image courtesy of Finnish Labour Archives.

tion that Sugar Island really belonged to them or questioned whether the “improvements” he brought to the island benefitted the Natives or not. Like Tokoi, he referred to the Natives as wild and childlike, requiring the white man’s assistance, or becoming doomed to poverty and to, if not outright savagery, at least backwardness.²³

Tokoi’s first tour in America, however, was a constant struggle to find employment and his own American dream. In September 1893, the Homestake Mine was closed as a result of the recession, and Tokoi’s journey took to the west coast as a “hobo”, first to Seattle and then crossing the border to British Columbia, Nanaimo, and Victoria on Vancouver Island. Tokoi spent the winter in Seattle, from where he moved to the Carbonado, Washington, coal mines, but work there had already stopped in June 1894. Then Tokoi took to the road again and returned to Wyoming (Rock Springs). But there was little work and Tokoi moved to a new coal mine in Hanna, Wyoming, where he was elected chairman of the sobriety society and joined an orchestra founded on the initiative of a Finnish foreman.²⁴

From Hanna, Tokoi headed to the neighboring state of Colorado for the Leadville coal mining area. In 1895, the City Directory reported that Oscar Tokei—Tokoi—worked as a “trammer,” loading coal onto tram cars. The Finns had also founded both a sobriety club and a horn orchestra in Leadville, both of which Tokoi joined. Here he was first involved in the strike of 1896 for an eight-hour working day. The strike became long-lasting, bitter, and violent. When the strike turned violent, Tokoi left and headed west to California, to Rocklin, where many Finns lived. Here, too, Tokoi served as chairman of the sobriety club.²⁵

On December 23, 1897, Oskari and the Finnish-born Hanna Tykkö married at the Finnish Seamen’s Church in San Francisco. Tokoi was a partner in a quarry, but it did poorly so the young couple moved to Leadville, where Tokoi initially worked as a test driller and later rented an old mine with his friends. The following year, “Oscar Tokyo” was awarded US citizenship. The mine began to run out the following spring, and, as earnings fell drastically, Tokoi and his partners gave it up.²⁶

In May 1900, Oskari Tokoi with his wife and little son, Anders Oscar, left Leadville and returned to Kannus, Finland, where Tokoi bought the Raasakka farm. In addition to managing the small farm, Tokoi started running a store, Tokoi & Jyrinki, and handled minor disputes in the courts. On the banks of the Lestijoki River, Tokoi built an

REGISTRATION CARD 1996

2559

SERIAL NUMBER		ORDER NUMBER	
1	Frank Adolph Aaltonen		
2 PERMANENT HOME ADDRESS: Willwalk P.O. Chippewa, Mich			
Age in Years	Date of Birth		
3 34	4 September 23 rd 1884		
RACE			
White	Negro	Oriental	Indian
			Citizen Noncitizen
5 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	6	7	8 9
U. S. CITIZEN		ALIEN	
Native Born	Naturalized	Citizen by Father's Naturalization Before Registrant's Majority	Declarant Non-declarant
10	11 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	12	13 14
15 (If not a citizen of the U. S., of what nation are you a citizen or subject?)			
PRESENT OCCUPATION		EMPLOYER'S NAME	
16 Farmer and Colonizer		17 In a business for myself	
18 PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS: 118 W. Portage Ave. Saint Ste. Marie, Chippewa Mich			
NEAREST RELATIVE	Name	19 Rauha Aaltonen	
	Address	20 Willwalk P.O. Chippewa, Mich.	
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE			
P. M. G. O. Form No. 1 (Red)		Frank Adolph Aaltonen (Signatures or mark) (OVER)	

Figure 6.2: Frank Aaltonen World War I Draft Card, where he proclaims himself to be a “farmer and colonizer,” United States, Selective Service System. World War I Selective Service System Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration. M1509, 4,582 rolls. Imaged from Family History Library microfilm. Image is in the public domain.

American-inspired “tower house,” soon to become a major landmark in town.²⁷ Oskari Tokoi did not find his American dream, not quite yet, but his years in America made a profound impact on him and his views about socialism and an agrarian society started to take shape. Much like Aaltonen a few years later, Tokoi espoused an idea of a spe-

cial Finnish character that tied him to the land and to the agrarian society.

One reason for Aaltonen's move to Sugar Island may have been the constant political pressure he wanted to escape by moving away from the mining areas. Although Sugar Island had long had non-Indigenous residents, Aaltonen explained that he wanted to establish a colony that would take advantage of the plentiful "free land" on the island. This sounds like a truly American ideology in which immigrants dream of conquering and taking over a free country, whether or not there was an Indigenous settlement. In American self-understanding, this idea of the frontier and bringing civilization into the wilderness is known as the manifest destiny. On the other hand, it can be seen as European imperialism and colonialism. Frank Aaltonen also called himself a "Entrepreneur" and "farmer." But he also noted that he was a "Colonizer," and he was proud of it.²⁸

The Finns had used legal means to oppose unfair working conditions, but still, according to Aaltonen, they had been discriminated against and mistreated. Switching to agriculture was a natural option for Finns, although they also faced land speculators. "They didn't have any friends," which is why Aaltonen founded the Finnish Land Agency. The company's goal was to bring "honest people to honest lands," added Aaltonen. In his opinion, the island was a great place for Finns, the people were friendly, and the soil was very favorable for cultivation. The goal was to make "the wild wilderness a garden in a very short time." On Sugar Island, Finns could escape their archenemies, i.e., mining companies and develop an agrarian society, Aaltonen concluded in an interview with the *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News* in the summer of 1916. This was similar to those Finnish settlement ideas described by Aleksi Huhta in [Chapter 3](#) and Johanna Leinonen in [Chapter 4](#).²⁹ Aaltonen had a clear idea of colonization, based on a very idealistic notion of a "free land" and how the American dream is accessible to everyone, and Finns were also entitled to it. While Tokoi never explicitly mentioned colonialism, he too celebrated the pioneer experience, saying in his 1950s radio program *Amerikan Ääni* (American Voice) that the immigrants "conquered the wilderness for farming and civilization" and it was "the immigrant who planted the noble seeds of the freedom that brought these [immigrant] people into one powerful nation."³⁰

Prime Minister, Refugee, and a Finnish American Supporter

By the time Frank Aaltonen stepped onto US soil, Tokoi had risen to be a major political figure in Finland. In 1901 Tokoi began to take part in meetings opposing the new conscription law, which required Finns to serve in the Russian Army.³¹

In December 1906, Tokoi was elected as a member of the new Finnish parliament from the Social Democratic Party (SDP). His status rose rapidly as he served as speaker and vice speaker of the parliament. Besides reforming municipal laws, Tokoi focused on implementing the General Prohibition Act, improving the status of the farmers and working population, and reforming the conditions of landless population and crofters, issues for which he drew inspiration from his American experiences and used what he witnessed to reform Finnish working-class lives. As in settler colonial US, land was the key here, but in a socialist way. By July 1906 Tokoi was already writing about “Our agrarian question of the future,” in which he suggested to buy large spaces for families who wanted land, and who could then form a cooperative.³²

At the same time, Frank Aaltonen, who had just acquired US citizenship, acted as the recruiter of the Miners’ Association in Kuparisaari, Copper Island, Michigan. Apparently, it was at this time that he also became increasingly interested not only in the position of miners, but also in the idea that Finnish immigrants should have more freedom to decide their own affairs and that independent farming offered an opportunity for that. On the other hand, Aaltonen also saw that in the mining industry the only way to achieve more benefits was to work through trade unions. Aaltonen did not shy away from harsh words, demonstrations, or strikes. His sharp opinions were not to the liking of all Finns either, and he was considered dangerous. Although he was a controversial person, Aaltonen became a significant player in the Finnish trade union movement in the United States and later also in the cooperative movement.³³

Tokoi also played a key role in the trade union movement. In 1912, the Finnish Trade Union Assembly elected him chairman. He focused on organizing the working population, concluding collective agreements, and reducing working hours. Interestingly, Tokoi also played a key role in resolving large-scale strikes at the same time as Aaltonen was involved in the Copper Country strikes in Michigan. Unlike Aal-

tonen, who was considered an agitator in Michigan, Tokoi was more effective by being cooperative, pragmatic, and conciliatory.³⁴

After the Revolution in March 1917, Russia's new interim government restored Finland's autonomy. Tokoi was appointed vice-chairman of the Finnish Senate's finance department, becoming not only Finland's but also the world's first socialist "prime minister." He proposed Finland's independence to be the main goal but was refuted by the Russian government, which disbanded parliament and ordered new elections. Tokoi left his position in August 1917.³⁵

Frank Aaltonen also commented on Finnish affairs. In America, doubts had been expressed as to whether Finnish immigrants were really patriotic, that is, loyal to the United States or to socialism. Finland's aspirations for independence and socialism worried many. In October 1917, Aaltonen wrote in the *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News* that all Finns saw independence as the only option. According to Aaltonen, Finnish politicians, including Oskari Tokoi, maintained that it was only a question of *how* Finland would gain its independence, not whether Finland *should* be independent. Aaltonen furiously condemned doubts about the loyalty of Finns, including socialists, to the United States, stating that everyone was happy to raise the American flag, and many had also fought in the American wars, but the situation in Finland was not talked about enough or understood. Finland had the right to become an independent nation.³⁶

Tokoi believed that the Russians would not give Finland independence until the Social Democrats made a revolution. Increased insecurity, worsening food shortages, acts of violence, and lack of law enforcement had led to the establishment of armed organizations, the Red and White Guards. The explosive situation in Finland came to a head on January 27, 1918, when the Civil War broke out and the Reds established a 13-member revolutionary government in Helsinki, the Finnish People's Delegation, which Tokoi took over as food commissioner. Tokoi believed that the Finnish workers, including himself, were taking part in the Civil War for the independence of Finland and the realization of real democracy in Finland, not for communism.³⁷

However, events unfolded quickly and Tokoi found himself falling into disgrace in the eyes of both the communists and later the newly elected "white" government of Finland. During the Civil War he was working in the Murmansk Legion, aiding the British Army as an interpreter and liaison between the Finns and the British in a war effort



Figure 6.3: Oskari Tokoi worked as a lumberjack in Timisgamini at the border of Ontario and Quebec provinces in 1920–1921. Image courtesy of Lauri O. Tokoi.

against the whites and Germans operating in the area. The Finnish communists did not appreciate this. In September 1918 the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Finland, exiled in Moscow, sentenced Tokoi and three others to death as traitors of the international revolution.³⁸ Yet, he was also sentenced to death by the new “white” Finnish government. He had no choice but to escape, first to England and then to America. In the fall of 1920, Tokoi received a visa and permission to travel to Canada, where he was initially stationed at a forestry camp in Timiskaming close to the border between the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. In mid-summer 1921, Tokoi moved to nearby Winnipeg for haymaking, but he was hoping for a return to the United States.³⁹



Figure 6.4: Frank Aaltonen, adapted from Syrjälä, *20 Years of Cooperation*, 1948.

Anarchists and Agitators?

While waiting for an immigration permit, which Tokoi had forgotten to apply for, he moved to Port Arthur (Thunder Bay), from where he traveled to Sault Ste. Marie, where he met Frank Aaltonen. Tokoi and Aaltonen must have had a lot to discuss, both politics and trade union activities, because Tokoi spent the entire summer on Sugar Island. Tokoi said that life on Sugar Island was pleasant: it was like a “recreational sanatorium for the sick soul” and prepared him for future battles. In an article in the Finnish newspaper *Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti* he enthusiastically wrote about the island, which was mostly inhabited by “Native Indians and Finns.” He saw that this newly conquered wilderness offered tremendous opportunities to the Finnish settlers due to Aaltonen’s pioneering work. Tokoi considered Aaltonen a true settler “pioneer” and a strong socialist, proudly calling him an “agitator.”⁴⁰

In late September 1921, after acquiring his entry permit to the US, Tokoi headed for Fitchburg (MA). “The former Prime Minister of Finland, the current political refugee, is in the care of relatives and friends in our city,” as the arrival of Tokoi was noted by the local news-

paper, the *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*. As an exile, he was soon arrested. "The former Prime Minister of Finland has been imprisoned as an anarchist," the *New York Times* wrote. In fact, Tokoi was suspected of illegal entry. Tokoi spent a few days in jail and was released on bail. He was interrogated by both the FBI and the Immigration Service in Boston and Fitchburg. At that time, a defense committee and a fund were established to support his defense. The Migration Agency issued an acquittal stating that Tokoi had entered the country legally. At the time, the arrest reflected the fear the authorities felt toward socialists.⁴¹

When Tokoi was accused of being an anarchist, his friend Aaltonen, often accused of being an anarchist or agitator himself, rushed to support him. Aaltonen wanted to clear Tokoi's reputation in America and wrote an extensive defense speech on his behalf. It was released in the *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News* in February 1922 under the title "Finn Leader Not a Radical." Aaltonen likened Tokoi to George Washington. If Washington had been on the losing side in the American War of Independence, he would have been in a similar situation as Tokoi was now, according to Aaltonen. The line between a patriot and a traitor was thin. Aaltonen emphasized that Tokoi had been in the United States for a long time before and had acquired citizenship but had lost it after returning to Finland for several years. That is why the United States had to admit him in the country, while deporting him to Finland would have meant certain death.⁴²

In the spring of 1922, Tokoi joined the editorial board of the *Raivaaja*, a socialist settler newspaper. Tokoi edited the paper for 27 years, retiring in 1949. In addition, Tokoi wrote for several magazines and newspapers in Finland and hosted the *American Voice* radio program in the early 1950s. He was also a very active public speaker. In his presentations, Tokoi dealt with the same topics as in his journal articles, e.g., various living standards, party politics and the functioning of the political system, trade union movement and labor legislation, extensive assistance by Finns to Finland, the Soviet Union, communism, and totalitarianism. About 350,000 people listened to his radio program.⁴³

For Aaltonen, Sugar Island had proven to be a success in many ways. In 1928, however, he fell into disfavor when he was accused of electoral fraud in local elections. He left for Fitchburg, where there was already a strong Finnish settlement. When Aaltonen left Sugar Island,

he left behind a thriving community, and even today the islanders refer to the early years of the community as the “Aaltonen Era.”

It may be a coincidence that Aaltonen chose Fitchburg as his new home, but by that time Tokoi was also there. Tokoi had spent most of the summer of 1921 as a guest of Aaltonen, and a relationship of trust and friendship developed between the men.⁴⁴

Assisting Finland and the SDP

When Frank Aaltonen met with Oskari Tokoi on the streets of the city of Sault Ste. Marie in the summer of 1921, it was, in fact, not a coincidence, although at first sight it may have appeared as one. Aaltonen had been informed of Tokoi’s arrival by the editor of *Raivaaja* and he had been asked to take care of Tokoi.⁴⁵ Aaltonen and Tokoi both were concerned about working conditions in both Finland and the United States, as well as the situation in Finland more broadly. Their ideological worlds were certainly very close to each other, although Tokoi was not as radical as Aaltonen in his thoughts. On the other hand, Aaltonen did not consider himself, or other Finnish socialists, radical. After all, he emphasized that socialism was an “intellectual” movement whose goals, however, were difficult to achieve. Tokoi’s development as a socialist began during the recession that afflicted the United States in the early 1890s. During the 1898 election, Tokoi participated in the Socialist Labor Party election in Leadville. The speaker at the event emphasized the equality of all people and their equal rights to freedom and happiness. These words gave Tokoi the keys to socialist thinking and an understanding of socialism. The election process, as well as Marx and Engels’s “Communist Manifesto,” which Tokoi read carefully, formed the basis for his later thinking. Freedom, equality, and democracy became his ideological cornerstones. It did not include violence. The pragmatic and moderate Tokoi was not interested in the theories of socialism. For Tokoi, Marxist thinking was mainly about his views on alcohol (prohibition) and the social standing of small farmers. Tokoi understood the development of society through production. His socialism was not understood so much through class struggle; rather, it was production that determined the direction of a society. Thus, it was labor, and especially farming, that was the basis for his socialist society. For Tokoi, communism was a religion that was enforced through a dictatorship in which freedom is replaced by totalitarianism

that enslaves humanity. He was frightened on behalf of Western European countries, which “trembled in the face of rapidly advancing and ubiquitous totalitarianism.” Tokoi never belonged to the Communist Party, but all his life belonged to the Finnish Social Democratic Party.⁴⁶

Both Aaltonen and Tokoi had sought to promote the position of the Finnish labor movement. At the same time as Aaltonen was an advocate for miners’ affairs in the US, Tokoi was making significant reforms in Finland. Both aimed at the best possible livelihood and improvement of the living conditions of Finns on both sides of the Atlantic. This was also the aim of the agricultural society that Aaltonen wanted for Sugar Island—a kind of Finnish socialist American dream.

After the outbreak of the Winter War in 1939, a movement emerged among American Finns, which aimed at sending aid to Finland. Between 1940 and 1941, grants totaled more than \$400,000. The Fitchburg Aid Committee raised about \$66,000. Tokoi chaired the central committees of the Finnish aid committees. The United States’ accession to the war cut off aid to Finland.⁴⁷

After Germany surrendered, aid by the Finnish Americans resumed. In December 1944, an initiative was taken in New York to establish Help of Finland Inc., Suomen Apu Inc. In total, about 400 Finnish aid organizations were formed across the United States. The relief operation was led by US president Herbert Hoover and Tokoi served as its vice president. After the war there was major political turmoil in Finland between the socialists and the communists. The fight against communism required extensive funds and Finland’s Social Democratic Party sought help from the United States. Thus, when it became necessary to think about how this form of aid would be channeled to Finland, Tokoi raised the issue with Aaltonen, who expressed his interest in organizing aid to the party.⁴⁸ Aaltonen was able to procure the goods and deliver them to Finland through his Frank Aaltonen Company, Exports Packing and Shipping, which operated in New York. Aaltonen took care of the practical arrangements, and no doubt made a profit for his company. Aid operations slowed down and ended during the 1950s.⁴⁹

Conclusion: Race, Finns, and Native Americans

In their memoirs, Tokoi and Aaltonen return to Native Americans, even though they are not at the center, rather a curiosity of a distant past. For both, Native Americans were the people whom the Finns met—and got along with—at the Delaware colony in the 17th century and continued to maintain a friendly relationship with because of their similarities in character. Tokoi went so far in his romanticized idealism that he wrote: “I have no intention to claim, or prove, that the Indians and Finns are of the same race, although I absolutely have nothing against it if a scientist would prove such a thing.” Perhaps they were not of the same race, but both were an honest people, who liked to stick to themselves and lead a simple life in the woods, he believed. For Tokoi, this special bond between the Native and the Finn was still alive in the mid-20th century: “The similarity, should I say kinship, of Indians and Finns, was convincing also in this Second World War. Finns demonstrated their excellence in northern wilderness fights, where they, as children of nature, could take advantage of all the benefits of nature and thus win the strongest of opponents.” Similarly, Native Americans “proved their excellence in wilderness and jungle battles. As children of nature, they have developed their sight and hearing to incredible levels and they have the ability to adapt to nature and use all the benefits of the environment,” wrote Tokoi to a friend, continuing with what today could be viewed as not only stereotypical but highly racist description: “The Indians were even more skillful than the Japanese and were able to hide themselves and unexpectedly like leopards attacked the enemy. And the Indians had so much better instincts than the whites that the number of fallen and injured among the Indians was remarkably lower than among the whites.”⁵⁰

Frank Aaltonen too, as explained by Justin Gage in [Chapter 2](#), expressed deeply racist views of Native Americans, categorizing them through their blood quantum and depending on how willing they were to support his colonizing plans. Later in life both Tokoi and Aaltonen, however, reflected upon the Native people in a very romanticized fashion. However, even when they evoked positive images of the Natives, it was often in connection with Finns. Fully buying into and promoting the idea of Finns as a special immigrant, Tokoi pointed out that Finns always treated Native Americans with respect and honesty and when

the US government finally in the 20th century adopted a more similar approach, the:

civilization of the Indians, if it can be called such, has happened much faster. They go to school nowadays and take up all the common jobs, like doctors, lawyers, teachers etc. but *still rarely become operators of machines or hard industrial labor*. They love the nature the freedom of nature. They remain proud of their race and their racial qualities, which they want to retain and leave as inheritance to their children. And the love toward the nature, simple natural life. Finns have also tried to hold on to their freedom and the nature, and so have the Indians.⁵¹

In a very nostalgic, paternalistic, and racial tone, he ended his letter to a friend saying: “At least they [Native Americans] give this country the best any race can give: freedom, love, and honesty.”⁵²

The life stories of these two Finnish immigrants are intertwined on many levels: Both sought new life in the United States. Tokoi first wandered from one job and state to another and later settled as an exile on the east coast. Aaltonen found his place in Michigan in the mining and labor movement and as a “multi-actor” on Sugar Island before moving to the east coast in the late 1920s. However, it was the socialist idea that truly united Aaltonen and Tokoi. Socialism was the force that they believed would improve both the living conditions of the working population and Finland’s position as an independent state. Both also experienced hatred. Aaltonen was almost stabbed and Tokoi was sentenced to death in his home country. They were considered radicals and anarchists in the United States, and it is probably true that in American society their ideas manifested themselves as very radical, even dubious. After all, Aaltonen defended Tokoi, stating that he was not radical but represented a special Finnish socialist thinking. It is also true that Tokoi was more pragmatic in his thoughts than Aaltonen, who clearly had very strong opinions and the ability to drive through his goals with any means. Tokoi was a practical politician, while Aaltonen was a kind of a visionary, even an idealist. In a way, they complemented each other.

The notion of settler colonialism adds a new dimension to the actions and ways of thinking of Frank Aaltonen and Oskari Tokoi. Both men, as immigrants to the United States, bought into the idea of the American dream and neither saw taking Native lands as inappropriate, let alone wrong. It was all about civilization and racial hier-

archies. Aaltonen proudly declared himself a colonist, who wanted to civilize the wilderness and the Natives were there either to help his efforts or to die off as a vanishing race. Tokoi never mentioned colonization or taking Native lands, even though his early travels in the US took place around the time when Native resistance to colonialism was crushed and most tribes were forced onto reservations. It is interesting that both men were eager to fight for the poor and the working class, and believed in an agrarian society, but Native Americans had no place in that society. It may well be that, at least for Tokoi, who understood socialism and society through production, Native Americans living on reservations incapable of participating in production as labor force were left out of society. It was clear to both that the Finnish immigrant had the right to seek the American dream and that the free land—and its use for agriculture or mining, for example—was justified, regardless of what the Indigenous peoples of the region thought. Perhaps Tokoi's attitude is essentially what the Swedish historian Gunlög Fur meant when she said that Scandinavian (including Finnish) colonialism has “disappeared” under the systematic colonization of other nationalities, which allows for a certain kind of indifference and, on the other hand, gives the impression of innocence.⁵³ In the case of Tokoi, it could have been a matter of indifference, even innocence, but Aaltonen's action aimed at the establishment of a colony on Native lands, demonstrating his ignorance. Their attitudes and behavior, whether deemed ignorance or indifference, relates to the larger notions of what is today often referred to as “white innocence” or “colonial complicity,” making both men actors in Finnish settler colonial history in North America.⁵⁴

In any case, the common ground for the men's friendship was found in their experiences in the new homeland and socialism, which made Tokoi and Aaltonen eventually work together on behalf of the old homeland. Their new homeland, however, signified opportunity, freedom, and an ideology that both men wholeheartedly espoused. Both Tokoi and Aaltonen spoke and wrote sympathetically about Native Americans in their later years but those were late born sympathies colored by the nostalgia of a bygone era and misguided notion of a vanishing race, and, even then, it was always in connection with their vision of Finns as special immigrants and about a particular Finnish American dream.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was supported by the Kone Foundation Grant for the HUMANA-project.
- 2 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 318–19.
- 3 For more on Sugar Island see Chapter 2 in this volume.
- 4 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 28–34. Aaltonen, “Oskari Tokoi,” 66–67.
- 5 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 41–48.
- 6 There is a plethora of works about the Lakota but for some of the most recent, see Hämäläinen, *Lakota America*; Andersson and Posthumus, *Lakhóta*. See *Homestake Mining Company History (1877–2000)*, <https://republicofmining.com/2015/05/06/homestake-mining-company-history-1877-2000>, *Golden History*, <https://www.leadmethere.org/history>.
- 7 Andersson, *Lakota Ghost Dance*; Andersson, *Whirlwind Passed*.
- 8 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 50–51.
- 9 Turner, *Frontier in American History*. For a discussion on Turner’s thesis see, for example, Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 21–30, 71.
- 10 For Lakotas and other nations visiting white settlements in the 1880s and 1890s see Gage, *We Do Not Want the Gates*.
- 11 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 48.
- 12 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 48.
- 13 Oskari Tokoi, Letter to Friend (“Indiaanit ja suomalaiset”, undated), Tokoi Collection, CP 124, Folder IV.
- 14 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” Louis Adamic Papers, Box 55, Folder 2, 11–12. See Holmio, *History of Finns in Michigan*, 280, 294–96; Andersson, Flavin and Kekki, “Sugar Island Finns.”
- 15 Frank Aaltonen, “Finns in Chippewa,” *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News*, November 22, 1916, 2; “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” Louis Adamic Papers, Box 55, Folder 2, 8–12.
- 16 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” Louis Adamic Papers, Box 55, Folder 2, 21–23. The event was described in *Daily Telegram*, July 4, 1914, 1; *Calumet News*, July 3, 2019, 14, 2. See also Majander, *Demokratiaa dollareilla*; Kaunonen, *Challenge Accepted*.
- 17 *Calumet News*, August 11, 1913, 9; *Calumet News* January 15, 1914, 2; *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News*, November 17, 1915, 2; “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” Louis Adamic Papers, Box 55, Folder 2, 22–23.
- 18 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” Louis Adamic Papers, Box 55, Folder 2, 17–21; Frank Aaltonen, “Why Finns Here Are Not Strong for the Allies,” *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News*, October 27, 1917, 5.
- 19 “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” Louis Adamic Papers, Box 55, Folder 2, 26–29. See [Chapter 2](#) in this volume.
- 20 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 82–83.
- 21 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 82–83.
- 22 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 82–83.
- 23 See [Chapter 2](#) in this volume. See also Andersson, Flavin, and Kekki, “Sugar Island Finns.”
- 24 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 51–52, 62–65, 67–70.

- 25 Tokoi, *Maanacolaisen muistelmia*, 74–77, 88–90. Mine number 1 was reopened after two years. In May 1903, it suffered an explosion that killed 169 men, 99 of whom were Finns. Hanna became a town of widows. Bob Leathers, *THE HANNA MINER: At the Bottom of the Mine*, 2019, <http://www.hannabasinmuseum.com/a-history-of-the-hanna-coal-miner-from-1868-to-2017-bob-leathers-notebook.html>.
- 26 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 91–93, 94–98, 102–03.
- 27 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 104, 127; Koivikko, “Oskari Tokoin kehittyminen,” 50–51; Hanni, *Kotoisin Kannuksesta*, 152, 181.
- 28 US Draft Records, Sugar Island, Frank Aaltonen File, www.ancestry.com, April 24, 2018. See Chapter 2 in this volume.
- 29 Frank Aaltonen, “The Finnish Land Agency,” *Sault. Ste. Marie Evening News*, July 15, 2015, 5. “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” Louis Adamic Papers, Box 55, Folder 2, 24–31. See Chapters 1, 2 and 3 in this volume.
- 30 Oskari Tokoi, *Amerikan Ääni*, November 18, 1951, and November 30, 1952.
- 31 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 109–117; Aaltonen, “Oskari Tokoi,” 70–71; Municipal meeting minutes 1900–1910, Kannus City Archive; Koivikko, “Oskari Tokoin kehittyminen,” 54–57; Tuovinen, “Oskari Tokoi kansanedustajana,” 18–20; *Raivaaja*, August 19, 1926; *Työväenliike Kannuksessa*.
- 32 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 127–34, 141–42, 147–51; Tokoi, “Tulevaisuuden agraarikysymyksemme,” *Kokkola*, July 14, July 25, 1906. See also *Kokkola*, April 6, 1907, *Kokkola*, July 18, 1908, *Vapaa Sana*, May 22, 1909, *Vapaa Sana*, February 18, 1910, *Vapaa Sana*, January 18, 1911, *Vapaa Sana*, August 20, 1913, *Kokkola*, July 22, 1916. See Soikkanen, *Kohti kansanvaltaa 1*, 162–64; Tuovinen, *Oskari Tokoi kansanedustajana*, 20–100.
- 33 Frank Aaltonen to Veikko Puskala, December 14, 1949, Paananen Papers, 392, 5. See “Frank Aaltonen Memoir,” Louis Adamic Papers, Box 55, Folder 2; Aaltonen, “Cooperating Farmer,” 5–9; *Calumet News*, March, 11, 2013, 9; Frank Aaltonen, “Finns in Chippewa,” *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News*, November 22, 1915, 2–3.
- 34 Suomen Ammattijärjestö, “Annual Reports 1912–1918”; Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 152–60; Oskari Tokoi, *Muisto-Kertomus: Suomen Ammattijärjestön toiminnasta 1912–1918*, August 16, 1955; Aaltonen, “Oskari Tokoi,” 77–81, Soikkanen, *Kohti kansanvaltaa*, 151; Tuovinen, *Oskari Tokoi kansanedustajana*, 80–84.
- 35 K. H. Wiik diary, March 17, 1917–February 8, 1918, Kansan Arkisto; Tokoi Speeches, April 20, 1917, June 12, 1917, July 18, 1917, Parliamentary Records; Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 172–75, Soikkanen, *Kohti kansanvaltaa*, 199–219; Ketola, *Kansalliseen kansanvaltaan*, 29–36, 39–42, 48–53, 55–62, 116–19, 144–45, 195–204, 320–32; Vahtola, *Suomen historia*, 251–55. For more on Tokoi’s Senate, see *Tokoin senaatti (26.3. – 8.9.1917)* <http://www.tyovaenliike.fi/tyovaenliikkeen-vaiheita/alasivu-2/tokoin-senaatti>.
- 36 Frank Aaltonen, “Why Finns Are Not Strong for the Allies?” *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News*, October 27, 2017, 5.
- 37 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 195–211; Soikkanen, *Kohti kansanvaltaa*, 251–60, 262–70, 289–90; Vahtola, *Suomen historia*, 251–61; Rinta-Tassi, *Kansanvaltuuskunta*, 89–90, 114, 128–29, 158–60, 208–14, 289. *Raivaaja* June 9, 1922. See also Ketola, *Kansalliseen kansanvaltaan*, 373.

- 38 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 289–303.
- 39 Report of Lient. T. C. Wetton, 1959, Finnish National Archives; Declaration of Alien About to Depart for United States; *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti*, September 12, 1919; *Muurmannin suomalaisen legioonan paluu*; Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 306–13, 319–24, 329–36; Nevakivi, *Muurmannin legioona*, 301–05; Harjula, 177–178.
- 40 Oskari Tokoi, *Suomen Sosialidemokraatti*, October 27, 1921.
- 41 Alien Visitor's Head-Tax Certification, September 21, 1921, Oskari Tokoi, Folder II; *Fitchburg Daily Sentinel*, November 26, 1921; *New York Times*, January 1, 1922; Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 321–27.
- 42 Frank Aaltonen, "Finn Leader Is Not a Radical," *Sault Ste. Marie Evening News*, February 3, 1922, 6.
- 43 *Raivaaja*, December 9, 22, 29, 1922; Elis Sulkanen to Oskari Tokoi, December 21, 1949, Oskari Tokoi, Folder II; Voice of America 1951–1953, Keski-Pohjanmaan Liiton arkisto. See Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 331–34; Kolehmainen, *The Voice of America*, 13–19, 70–71, 82–86, 94–97.
- 44 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 319.
- 45 Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 318.
- 46 Tokoi's speeches published in *Raivaaja*, June 9, 1922, September 3, 1925, July, 9, 1926, February 9, 1927, March 29, 1928, January 27, 1933, March 13, 1933, and a debate between Oskari Tokoi and Axel Örn, October 10, 1932; Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 7–13; Paasivirta, *Ensimmäisen maailmansodan voittajat*, 78; Soikkanen, *Kohti kansanvaltaa*, 147, 151–52.
- 47 See Tokoi 1948, 360; *Raivaaja*, November 23, 1939; *Työssä Suomen hyväksi*, 5–9, 14–20, *New Yorkin Uutiset*, Kangas, *Sodanaikainen avustus Suomeen*; Tokoi, *Maanpakolaisen muistelmia*, 390–91, *Help of Finland Inc, Initial Report*, 4–7. See also, *Savon Sanomat*, September 20, 1949 (Tokoi interview). See Määttä, *Oskari Tokoin toiminta*.
- 48 Aaltonen to Puskala, December 4, 1949, and Tokoi to Leskinen, December 22, 1949; Frank Aaltonen Correspondence, 1949–1951, GEA, Työväen arkisto. Ks. myös Majander, *Diplomatiaa dollareilla*, 110–11, 122–23.
- 49 Aaltonen to Tokoi, December 2, 1949; Aaltonen to Ernst. T. Barringer, March 3, 1950; Aaltonen to Aarne Paananen, May 22, July 18, July 14, 1950, May 31, 1951; Tokoi to Paananen, January 6, March 20, April 4, August 24, January 1, 1950; Tokoi to Leskinen, December 22, December 28, 1949, September 1, August 24, 1950, Frank Aaltonen Correspondence, 1949–1951, GEA 9, Työväen arkisto. See, Majander, *Demokratiaa dollareilla*.
- 50 Oskari Tokoi, Letter to Friend (undated), Tokoi Collection, CP 124, Folder IV.
- 51 Oskari Tokoi, Letter to Friend (undated), Tokoi Collection, CP 124, Folder IV. Emphasis by the authors.
- 52 Oskari Tokoi, Letter to Friend (undated), Tokoi Collection, CP 124, Folder IV.
- 53 Fur, "Colonialism and Swedish History", 18. See also Fur "Indians and Immigrants."
- 54 For colonial complicity see Vuorela, "Colonial Complicity," and for white innocence see Wekker, *White Innocence*. See Introduction and Chapter 8 in this volume.

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CHAPTER 7

Indigenous and Settler

The North American Sámi Movement

Erik Hieta

The chapter is a study of how the North American Sámi movement expands definitions of what it means to be both settler and Indigenous in the 21st century. It focuses on the specific case of Finnish/Nordic immigrants to North America claiming and promoting Indigenous connections and on how they straddle and blur the boundaries between settler and Native, while negotiating their place in the settler colonial state. Its initial working hypothesis is that the close connections between the North American Sámi community and Native American communities offer a vision of cultural difference at once shaped by global corporate capital and media and yet communicated as local sites of empowerment and protest. Contemporary Indigenous articulations, while informed by state institutions and conditioned by the marketplace, are also contingent and open-ended, complicating familiar narratives of modernization and progress. The term “Indigenous” takes on new meanings as people work both within and against dominant norms of identity formation and economic power, revitalizing local cultural traditions in modern North America, which has never been decolonized but remains settler colonial. Recent ethnic

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renewal movements of European-origin settler groups have included seeking a common symbolic experience from the past in the present, of maintaining diasporic ties and promoting heritage. When taken together with these movements, the North American Sámi case provides an interesting example of what James Clifford refers to as the paradox of articulating “traditional futures,” of articulating histories of survival, struggle, and renewal within the context of colonization, globalization, and “indigenous becoming,” of “adapting and recombining the remnants of an interrupted way of life.”¹ While his discussion need not emphasize routes over roots, the process of selectively reconnecting with the past as a way forward toward a decolonized future is a complex exercise of practice, performance, translation, and community building, of coming to terms not just with what was lost but with what still can be found.

A second hypothesis is that 21st-century Indigeneity is less about strict timelines and more about shared cultural practices and relationships to the land, which allows space for the Sámi and Native Americans to often view the North American Sámi as different settlers who both share transnational migrant identities and have found common ground with other local Indigenous peoples. When confronting the historical process of remaking settler and Indigenous spaces, postcolonial narratives struggle with the unresolved legacies of how people have chosen to reimagine and reorganize societies over time at local and transnational levels. Settler colonialism’s strong emphasis on the dispossession and marginalization of Indigenous peoples has left little room for exploring alternative lived experiences of migration and mobility, for exploring Indigenous kinship connections and connections to nature in transnational contexts. It has neglected an assessment of the everyday encounters between Indigenous peoples and newcomers not overdetermined by the settler colonial project as a geopolitical mode of domination. What this also means is that little space has been devoted to assessing the migration of Sámi people under the guise of national settler projects. While Native American scholars for their part have recently begun turning their attention to how transnational politics and movement have reshaped contemporary Indigenous culture, they have done so from a standpoint that largely ignores overlapping settler–Native perspectives as pedagogies of resistance to hegemonic narratives, as stories that complicate the settler–Native dichotomy.

The chapter explores the makings of the North American Sámi movement and the building of cross-cultural connections and interactions with Indigenous groups. It does not seek to analyze Sámi American identity formation at the individual level. As such, it addresses two crucial questions: How is the North American Sámi movement challenging the divide between settler and Native, and how does it complicate settler colonial narratives in the 21st century? In what ways do descendants of Sámi immigrants to North America find common cause with Native American groups and impact transnational Indigenous movements and political practices? This chapter discusses settler colonialism, the settling of lands taken from Native Americans, and the complex intersections of settler colonialism and Indigeneity. It focuses on how many Sámi Americans acknowledge their complicity in settler colonial practices and yet increasingly search for their Indigenous roots, claiming a special standing as “in-between” in the settler–Native divide. The first section tracks the foundational historical narratives of the migration of Sámi peoples to North America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The second section focuses on the role of written texts and heritage display in reclaiming a North American Sámi and transnational Indigenous/settler connections. The third section centers on environmental activism as a space for creating shared Indigenous meanings. Finally, the chapter concludes by offering some thoughts on a world that is becoming more multicultural but not necessarily more homogeneous.

Reclaiming Stories of Migration

The Alaska Sámi migration is one important founding historical narrative in the story of Sámi immigration history in North America. On May 12, 1894, a small group of 16 Sámi from northern Norway arrived in New York City, “all clad in their native costumes . . . of reindeer hide.” They left the same day by train for San Francisco and then by steamship to Alaska. The US government had hired them for three years, at \$27.50 per month plus board, “to instruct Alaskans in the art of driving and herding reindeer,”² believing that reindeer husbandry offered the local Iñupiat and Yupik peoples the best chances for economic survival in changing times. The Sámi taught the local Iñupiat and Yupik not only how to herd and drive reindeer but how to milk the reindeer and make cheese, and how to make various pieces of equipment, such as

sleds, boots, and harnesses. The Iñupiat and Yupik soon became interested in the potential of reindeer herding.

With the discovery of gold in 1897, the US government saw an additional need for the Sámi and their reindeer: transporting goods to mining camps in the remote interior parts of Alaska. It arranged for the transport of roughly 100 more Finnish and Norwegian Sámi herders and their families, 537 reindeer and 4,000 sacks of moss to feed them, and 418 pulkas (Sámi sledges) across the United States. It promoted this with much fanfare as “The Lapland-Yukon Relief Expedition,” or Manitoba Expedition (after the name of their ship). The group arrived in Seattle only to discover that no ship was waiting to take them to Alaska. The Sámi spent several weeks walking the reindeer around Seattle’s Woodland Park, to the amusement of large crowds of people fascinated by their colorful cultural costumes and the associations of reindeer with Santa Claus and elves, before eventually traveling to Alaska.³

Though the US government had bought the reindeer from the Sámi, it continued to need the Sámi herders not just to teach herding skills to Alaska Natives but also to help them provide prospectors with food and other provisions. Still, as short-term laborers, some already chose to return to Sápmi in the early years of the 20th century. But other Sámi families decided to stay and borrowed reindeer from the government herd to establish herds of their own.⁴ However, in 1937, to the detriment of the remaining Sámi, the Bureau of Indian Affairs restricted ownership of reindeer to the Iñupiat and Yupik, thus cutting off access to a reindeer livelihood for many Sámi immigrants. Nonetheless, close and ongoing ties had developed between the Iñupiat, Yupik, and Sámi people in Alaska, including intermarriage (making it possible for Sámi to continue as reindeer herders) and shared cultural practices.⁵ In later interviews, Finnish Sámi who had spent parts of their younger years in Alaska described the time as one of curiosity and adventure, of numerous cross-cultural encounters and economic opportunities.⁶ Overall, approximately one third of the herders remained in Alaska, about one third ultimately returned home to Sápmi, and roughly one third moved south, mainly to the Seattle area, to find work in other industries.

With herding lands becoming ever scarcer in Sápmi due to encroaching pioneer settlers, and with the governments of Norway, Sweden, and Finland/Russia closing the physical borders between the countries, cutting off herding routes, migration offered a new hope

for many. The stories of other Sámi migrants to North America, however, became part of a less well-known “hidden” migration, as Thomas DuBois terms it,⁷ a complex gray area existing in the spaces between homogenizing Nordic national discourses. Many Sámi chose to leave a stigmatized Sámi identity behind, hiding it behind the mask of a national identity. Some had already arrived as part of the Great Laestadian Migration after the death of revivalist leader Lars Levi Laestadius in 1861. Most were south Sámi farmers as well as coastal Sámi and forest Sámi from the Tornio Valley and Kemi area in the Finnish–Swedish borderlands rather than reindeer herders.⁸ European mining companies also recruited workers from the northernmost Finnish regions for the newly established copper mines in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and in northeastern Minnesota in the later 1800s and early 1900s.

Sámi from Finland often became indistinguishable from other later arriving Finnish immigrants who found little land available save for parcels stripped from Native Americans during the allotment era of the 1880s to 1920s. New identities emerged. Finnish settlers married tribal members, with it being unclear how many such “Finns” may have in fact been Sámi. Given the uncertain racial identity of Finns, sometimes being linked with Mongolians and even American Indians in legal disputes in the very early 1900s,⁹ Sámi from Finland were subjected to general anti-Finnish sentiment in the Upper Midwest, often stigmatized for their darker appearance and confronted with signs that read “No Finns need apply.”¹⁰ Recent scholarly work on the so-called “Finndian” or “Finnishinaabe” persons living on reservations has found that many of them identify as Native American with Finnish roots, very much aware of the fact that their ancestors struggled together with Native Americans to survive in difficult economic circumstances.¹¹ Historians, though, have long contributed to a tradition of suggesting that certain European groups, in this case Finns and other Nordics, enjoyed a more benign and less brutal relationship with Native peoples and the land. Some have noted, for instance, that the Lenape people called Finns and Swedes *akoores* or *nittappi* (meaning “friend” or “those who are like us”) in recognition of a shared familiarity with the forest, a collective name that they did not use for English, German, and Dutch settlers (*senaares*), who the Lenape viewed as rather alien in worldview.¹² Such a perspective undercuts the greater complexity of stories of migration, race, place, memory, and cultural connections at the local level. While the on-the-ground process of settler colonialism, of accommodation

and resistance, cannot be readily outsourced to other groups or wished away as exceptional examples of persons unwittingly taking on the role of settler because of systemic poverty or (racial) oppression,¹³ local designations like “Finndian” highlight the intersecting story of settler colonialism and Indigenous belonging.

Diaspora identity can be complex and messy on the margins, at the borderlands between place-based notions of Indigeneity and the need to migrate. Tim Frandy and Ellen Marie Jensen explore the idea of “diasporic indigeneity” to account for the storytelling and performative expressive culture that serve as mechanisms of cultural revitalization and reclamation efforts. The term addresses a hybrid, more general Nordic heritage claimed by immigrants who do not, for instance, really know “where Finnish ends and Sámi begins” or “where Laestadianism ends and Sámi culture begins.”¹⁴ Diasporic Indigeneity accounts for a growing number of immigrants currently claiming an Indigenous status in their new place of residence in North America based on a status as colonized indigenes in the place where their ancestors formerly lived, such as Maya peoples from Central America. While such claims do not reverse settler colonialism, they represent a popular challenge to the colonialist and nationalist mythology and their underlying morality as well as to various forms of political-economic domination.¹⁵ This reading of Indigenous communities in diaspora has not forestalled critics from charging a lack of continuity and authenticity to such revitalization efforts, though such charges have also been leveled against many Native American and First Nations peoples and various ethnic groups seeking to reconnect with their traditional cultures in the contemporary world.

While the geographically dispersed and fluid transnational identities of Sámi migrants renegotiating social and cultural realities at the local level could never ignore the assimilating tendencies of national politics, they could never entirely be subsumed by them either. Though such a perspective may fit easily within the recent transnational turn in migration studies, it does not account for the tendency of North American Sámi to promote Indigenous connections. What then was the catalyst for a “hidden,” even “shameful,” Sámi identity, an ethnic identity denigrated by mainstream Americans and Nordic immigrants alike, to gradually emerge as a source of strength for later Sámi descendants (with the estimated number ranging between 30,000 and 60,000¹⁶) wanting to seek out, recover, document, and ultimately cel-

eborate their Indigenous history and heritage through storytelling and performative display?

The North American Sámi Reawakening

Storytelling has a healing effect, teaching people to know and respect their ancestors, teaching the ways of a culture, of one's place in society and the larger world. The international journal *Báiki* (1991) grew out of a search by immigrants in North America for their Sámi roots and for connections, with the name being the nomadic reindeer-herding society's word for cultural survival, meaning "the home that lives in the heart" as one travels from place to place, the invisible bond that transcends time and space.¹⁷ The journal's founding editor, Faith Fjeld (Figure 7.1), had met and received encouragement from Sámi artist and



Figure 7.1: Faith Fjeld with a *Báiki* display in Virginia, Minnesota, c. 2011. Image courtesy of Marlene Wisuri. All rights reserved.

activist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (Áilohaš) at the World Council of Indigenous Peoples. One of her overriding questions was “Are Sámi-Americans Indigenous?” She looked to Valkeapää’s work for inspiration and took heart from his response that in Sápmi “indigenous means harmony with nature”; it is more than just a timeline.¹⁸ Valkeapää’s poem “My Home Is” struck a chord with North American Sámi, especially his words “of course I recognize you even if you are among others ... of course I recognize you even if you are not wearing Sámi dress ... even though we have never met I recognize you.” The poem helped many Sámi immigrants begin to come to terms with decades of struggle over their place in the settler state.

Faith Fjeld also received strong support closer to home from Rudolph Johnson, a librarian at the University of Minnesota-Duluth who had immigrated from Sápmi with his parents as a child, who later spent time in Norway, and who contributed important articles on how best to define Sámi cultural identity in a North American context. Sitting together in his kitchen in Duluth, Minnesota, in March 1991, Rudolph Johnson, his wife, Solveig, and Faith Fjeld brainstormed about telling stories of Sámi history and forced assimilation and comparing Sámi culture with that of Native American peoples. Four months later, the first ever gathering of North American Sámi took place at their house, where proofs of the journal’s first issue were inspected.¹⁹ Published alternately in the San Francisco Bay Area and Minnesota on a shoestring budget, even for several years in Alaska as Faith Fjeld moved from place to place, *Báiki* represented a major milestone in gathering and promoting the collective memories of persons of Sámi descent throughout North America. But it was not the only one.

Artists and writers, too, began to draw attention to North American Sámi experiences, to highlight efforts at group and cultural survival. The work of writer and photographer Marlene Wisuri combines striking images of the interrelationship between reindeer and people in the Arctic with a personal account of the last days of her grandmother, Mary Christine Pekkala, born north of Rovaniemi:

She was thought to be Sámi / Many Sámi “passed” when they came to this country / Native peoples face scorn world wide ... Ninety-two years later as she lay dying / she dreamed and talked of reindeer and lost chil-

dren / her dead mother and betrayal by her father / and the old country
 ... Her granddaughter sat by the bed and listened.²⁰

Her poem is an effort at peeling back the layers of silence, of listening for connections and resonances that have often long since disappeared on both sides of the Atlantic.²¹ Indeed, many North American Sámi do not have such clear connections to their cultural background. Genealogy studies and DNA testing suggest one possible route for establishing genetic roots and family connections. Yet, several of the main Y-DNA and mtDNA haplogroups differ noticeably among various Sámi people and are also found at moderate frequencies in Eastern Europe, so testing often does not provide conclusive results. Likewise, not everyone can readily find family members in the parish church records or census records. Members of the younger generations often encountered silences and a sense of “shame” among first-generation immigrants when raising the question about Sámi ethnic and cultural identity, with many migrants not wanting to discuss past traumatic experiences.²² Writers used the words “decolonization,” “healing,” and “recovery” to characterize the specific trauma faced by North American Sámi as the descendants of immigrants who still bore the stigma of an Indigenous identity deemed racially and culturally inferior.²³ They asked whether Sámi cultural ties had been irretrievably lost. Slowly, though, Sámi heritage discovery and cultural revitalization efforts gained momentum.

Interested persons began to meet, formed Sámi associations, and organized community celebrations and events to claim a particular Indigenous Sámi cultural heritage. The North American Sámi community grew rapidly in the early years of the 1990s, with more and more people of Sámi descent participating in the annual FinnFest and other Nordic festivals. In 1994, the community organized the first Sámi Culture Day and a reindeer festival in Minnesota, where reindeer owners like Tom Scheib provided herding demonstrations (an estimated 6,000 to 8,000 domesticated reindeer, most descendants of the Alaska reindeer, were being herded in the Lower 48 at the time), as well as *Siid-dastallan* gatherings, a biannual event organized by the Sámi Siida of North America (SSNA). The SSNA was created as a loosely organized group of regional Sámi communities in the United States and Canada. Anja Kitti-Walhelm, Cari Mayo, Marlene Wisuri, John Edward Xavier, and Mervi Salo have each served successively as elected council chairs and been important leaders for the North American Sámi commu-



Figure 7.2: Cari Mayo and Anja Kitti-Walhelm, right, presenting the Sámi flag at the opening ceremony for Finnish Days at Ironworld (now Minnesota Discovery Center) in Chisholm, Minnesota, 1997. Image courtesy of Marlene Wisuri. All rights reserved.

nity (Figure 7.2). Local Sámi Siida communities quickly formed in the Great Lakes region, California, and the Pacific Northwest. The SSNA newsletter *Arran* was founded by Mel Olsen in 1995, who was later joined by Arden Johnson, and published as a quarterly complement to *Báiki*.

The two publications have provided valuable insights into the development of Sámi American communities, helping make the movement truly transnational in scope and with a strong focus on revitalization efforts already taking place in Sápmi. Both journals published numerous articles on Sámi lore, focusing especially on the importance of reclaiming the knowledge of Indigenous elders, both Sámi American community elders and Native American elders. Seeking to fill in the silent spaces demarcating hidden Sámi migrant identities, some people traveled to Sápmi. Among them was Ken Jackson (Grey Eagle), a lecturer in American Indian studies at the University of Washington,

who collected stories being recovered by a younger generation of Sámi activists and drew links between such stories and stories told by Native American groups.²⁴ He presented Sámi stories and legends at the Nordic Heritage Museum in Seattle, among other places. They reveal a trickster element, Sámi insiders exposing and outwitting outsiders not through strength or aggression but through superior knowledge of the land and its resources. By emphasizing the continuing North American Sámi story, underscored by the idea of a special relationship to the land as a cornerstone of Indigenous identity, the movement has increasingly established and asserted its narrative position in a globalizing world.

The effort to reclaim a pride in being Sámi and a deeper knowledge of Sámi culture and continuity has gained dramatic expressions through contemporary revitalization efforts. One example is music. Beginning largely in the 1970s, Sámi artists began performing a traditional musical form known as the yoik at festivals, events, and social gatherings. According to Valkeapää, the Sámi yoik, long denigrated and misunderstood by non-Sámi peoples, “is a symbol of Sámi identity, a weapon to strengthen Sámi culture.”²⁵ The yoik is communication between the Sámi and nature, a way of asserting connection to the land. Valkeapää is credited with helping reestablish the yoik as a contemporary art form. After having reportedly “electrified” other Indigenous delegates with his yoiking skills at the first meeting of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples in 1975, he then toured North America in 1982 with Seppo (Paroni) Paakkunainen and his jazz group from Finland, inspiring many later activists in the North American Sámi movement to reinvigorate Sámi cultural practices.²⁶ Promoting the sacredness of nature, with melodies evoking the soundscapes of forest and fells, wind and water, the songs invoke the trance-like rhythm of pounding Sámi drums combined with chanting and throat-singing. The songs connect people to their natural surroundings not as a romantic return to tradition and the past but as a living and evolving cultural present, incorporating influences from spiritual, reggae, country, hard rock, and folk music. Nathan Muus, one of the only North American Sámi who has yoiked publicly at ethnic heritage festivals like FinnFest and enjoyed success as a recording artist, learned from masters like Valkeapää, Mari Boine, and famed Finnish Sámi throat-singer Wimme Saari. But he, like other North American Sámi descendants, have always been acutely aware that they are trying to reclaim family stories and connections, not claiming to be Sámi as such. They do

not want to appear to be impostors or seemingly stray across the line separating cultural revitalization from cultural appropriation. Muus has been intensely gratified that Sámi from Sápmi have heard his yoiks and said, “You’re good. Just keep doing what you are doing.”²⁷ The yoik for him comprises an oral component of storytelling, a creative process of relationship building and of bridging the silences of the past with raised voices of the present.

Storytelling is about naming. In celebrating the survival of Sámi roots and connections, the North American Sámi movement has opened up a space for gatherings that explore what it means to be Indigenous, with no marker of cultural distinctiveness being more central than that of reindeer and reindeer herding. Though the Sámi migrating to North America may already have faced pressure to assimilate in their home countries, including a forced language shift or pressure to discard highly visible forms of cultural dress, and even though they may never have actively practiced reindeer herding (only a minority of Sámi ever herded reindeer), the different groups of Sámi migrants have come to recognize a shared kinship through memories and relationship to the land and experiences as settlers with an Indigenous background.²⁸ Exhibitions have helped keep alive the names and memories of the Sámi who came before. With the assistance of Alaska Reindeer Project family members, Faith Fjeld and Nathan Muus carefully documented the stories of “The Sámi Reindeer People of Alaska,” including names, photographs, and numerous examples of handicrafts, for a traveling exhibition that began in Alaska in 2004 and has since been displayed throughout the continental United States and Sweden. The *lávvu*, a temporary tipi-like dwelling used by herders in Sápmi, became not just a central feature in the material display of culture at “The Sámi Reindeer People of Alaska” exhibition and at numerous other festivals and events, it also helped trigger connections with nature and ancestors and stories of migration in general.

Symbols build on stories and images to connect people to a shared sense of community. Lois Stover especially contributed many photographs and artefacts from her family, helping name those involved in Sámi activities both past and present. Pearl Johnson, from Nome, Alaska, has strong connections to the Alaska Native Iñupiat and Yupik communities as well as to North American Sámi and has been a vital resource in sharing not just North American Sámi memories of the reindeer herding experiment but also Alaska Native perspectives.²⁹

She notes that the Alaska Natives always recognized the Sámi herders as indigenous and not as colonizers.³⁰ Though journalists in Alaska long referred to the remaining Sámi reindeer herders as “The Last of the Lapps,” while in the Nordic countries these Alaskan Sámi herders were “The Ones who Disappeared,”³¹ the stories from Alaska resonate and live on throughout the North American Sámi community. They have given concrete expression to an awakened desire by many Sámi Americans to learn more about and connect with their ethnic roots. (See Figure 7.3.)

The North American Sámi awakening occurred at the confluence of a search by third-generation European Americans for their ethnic roots and the American Indian ethnic revival movement. Nearly all the principal leadership among the North American Sámi have had



Figure 7.3: Lois Stover (left) and Pearl Johnson in traditional dress at the opening of “The Sami Reindeer People of Alaska” exhibit at the Vest-erheim Norwegian American Museum in Deborah, Iowa, December 1, 2012. Image courtesy of Marlene Wisuri. All rights reserved.

close ties with the Native American community dating back many decades. Both Sámi Americans and Native Americans recognize the complexities of Indigenous and settler categories, marking such categories as more descriptive than absolute in the case of Sámi migrants, who do always not feel entirely comfortable calling themselves *either* Indigenous *or* settler.³² Native Americans do currently tend to view Sámi Americans differently from other settlers, especially those who have increasingly reclaimed their Sámi connections in the last 30 years and realized what colonization has meant to the Natives.³³ They share Indigenous values, a closeness to nature, and similar legacies of colonialism and assimilation, albeit filtered through different experiences of racism and access to economic power and privilege. The North American Sámi face a particular challenge of recognizing their European roots without their Indigenous claims seeming like a fad, “Indigenous chic” as one writer termed it,³⁴ akin to “white” Americans claiming distant relations to a Cherokee princess or just wanting to “play Indian.”³⁵

The current popularization of long-disused rituals and efforts to recover sacred objects and sites, a “resanctification of the earth” as Fergus M. Bordewich terms it,³⁶ has become for many Indigenous peoples a way to reconnect with the past and the lives of ancestors by expressing shared environmental and spiritual values. Yet, it raises the question of how the images and alternative environmental perspectives, even if based on both local traditions and shared transnational cultural values, can be taught without flattening them out into stereotypes. After first being too “Mongolian” to be white, now Sámi are often dismissed by others as too “white” to be Indigenous.³⁷ In seeking to reassert a deep connection to the land and nature without it seeming like some mystical variant of New Age pseudo-Indigenous spirituality disconnected from language, culture, and politics,³⁸ North American Sámi just want to have their own say on the matter. They seek to assert a similar structure of relationships to the natural world and history of colonization, to share definitions of Indigeneity that better reflect the global realities of the 21st century.

Environmental Activism

Environmental alliances have provided an opportunity to link the goal of building lasting cross-cultural ties with a common sense of place, defined often in opposition to corporate globalization. As with

other Indigenous movements around the world, grassroots efforts by Sámi writers, artists, and poets inspired others to become community organizers and activists. Just as the North American Sámi are keenly aware that their identities have emerged out of stories of Sámi migration and not out of a profound connection to Sápmi as such, their connections with Indigenous peoples stem from shared histories of colonization and cultural repression; their sense of Indigeneity has helped them reconnect their stories to new sites. At the crossroads of complex, overlapping settler and Indigenous identities, many affiliated with the North American Sámi movement realize that the best way forward is to work for change, to make a commitment to action based on consensus of how best to overcome the legacies of collective trauma and colonialism.

Norwegian Sámi activist Hans Ragnar Mathisen (Elle-Hánsa—Keviselie) wrote a letter from Sápmi, published in *Báiki*. In it he suggested that Sámi immigrants to North America should formulate a declaration of understanding and solidarity as a sign of respect for the original owners of the land, noting that they had been unaware they were moving onto stolen land and that they had not come “as aggressors and destructors of Native American cultures” but rather as persons fleeing the same fate back home. He asks quite pointedly, “have you ever reconciled with the Native Americans?”³⁹ Such a reconciliation would, in his opinion, focus attention on the issue of Indigenous peoples worldwide who have been forcibly alienated from their own lands and heritage. His letter raised important questions about the North American Sámi as colonizers or colonized. It prompted academic Liz Carlson, of Swedish, German, and Sámi descent with connections to Anishinaabe and Cree communities in Canada, to carefully explore how the varieties of ancestries and experiences of North American Sámi relate to questions of “whiteness” and different levels of socialization into the dominant society. Carlson highlights the fact that some may have migrated recently, retaining important aspects of Sámi culture, some have ancestors who emigrated generations ago, and some have mixed ancestry, like herself having “passed for white” and not suffered from race-based oppression. She finds, in response to Mathisen, that many Sámi Americans as a result identify with *both* colonizers and colonized in their efforts to tell stories of travel, place, and cultural renewal.⁴⁰ They wanted to create a shared space to tell those stories.

The Sámi Cultural Center of North America was opened in Duluth, Minnesota, in 2014 in large part to house the expanding collections of Sámi material culture. It stresses a way forward in learning about the links between material culture and traditional ecological knowledge, the importance of family and place to Indigenous ways of knowing. Indeed, one of its central goals is to maintain relationships between Indigenous and environmental communities, thereby facilitating cross-cultural connections both locally and at the transnational level. Activists in Sápmi have generally supported efforts by the center to promote connections between the Sámi and descendants of Sámi immigrants to North America, and, like Mathisen and Valkeapää, they have contributed letters of support and numerous articles to *Báiki* and *Arran* and participated in North American Sámi heritage celebrations and environmental protests. Most people who approach the center with an interest in exploring their perceived Sámi heritage also already have some connection to Native people or culture. They continue to maintain close ties with Indigenous communities, often by blood or marriage, allowing them to construct new frameworks of belonging based on a defense of common cultural lifeways. For instance, Marlene Wisuri, chairperson for the Sámi Cultural Center of North America, has Ojibwe relatives and notes that neighboring Indigenous communities, like the Fond du Lac Reservation in Minnesota, have been incredibly welcoming toward her personally.⁴¹ Prominent Ojibwe elder and writer Thomas D. Peacock has invited Wisuri to collaborate artistically on several award-winning books that tell stories of Native existence, history, trauma, and survival and how to present those stories to schoolchildren in a way that celebrates multiculturalism.

In this context, the ties to place can be both local and transnational. In the documentary *Solveig: The Life and Artwork of Solveig Arneng Johnson* (2012), Solveig, wife of Rudolph Johnson, discusses how her artwork plays with the effects of light and darkness on northern landscapes, how “her passion was to give through her paint.” She was the first North American Sámi artist to become a member of the Sámi Artists’ Union (Sámi Dáiddačehpiid Searvi) in Alta, Norway, in 1991. She only came to terms with her Sámi roots, though, after emigrating to the United States because of the stigma attached to such an ethnic identity back home in the early and mid-1900s, with neighbors only wanting to speak Finnish or Norwegian. Her family had even changed its surname to Arneng, the name of the place where her father had grown up, to

hide any links to a Sámi background. She and her work have helped shape shared stories of nature and emotional attachment to the land and reflect the importance of family and community as “functioning parts of the landscape.”⁴² Even as her art draws on local settings from Sápmi and the Great Lakes region, it is connected to broader environmental concerns and issues of social justice. Increasingly, other North American Sámi activists as well have turned to various forms of art and heritage display to redress past wrongs by focusing on how best to reject aspects of the industrial capitalist mindset that have led to commodification of the environment, systemic forms of environmental racism and injustice directed principally at people of color, Indigenous peoples, and the poor, and the destruction of local community.

Environmental alliances undercut the seeming historical inevitability and legitimacy of settler colonialism and reaffirm the complexity of Indigenous/settler cultural identities and blurred social boundaries at the local level. Sámi descendants have begun telling their life stories and reclaiming memories that reverse the process of assimilation.⁴³ For many, the revitalization of and reconnection with traditional arts and crafts has helped them reassert community-based identities and to reconnect with a forgotten heritage. Laurel Sanders, for instance, blends Anishinaabe and Sámi beading and band weaving to create unique pieces, such as powwow costumes for her children. She has taught classes at the Sámi Cultural Center and been influenced by family connections on the Fond du Lac Reservation and with the Walla Walla Native community in the Pacific Northwest, evidence of a diverse Indigenous heritage.⁴⁴ The Pacific Sámi Searvi in Seattle, for its part, has been a particularly active regional association. Troy Storffjell, Julie Whitehorn, and Lynn Gleason, together with supporters like Renee Joy and Rose Edwards, have all done important activist work in the region. Some former Alaska Sámi reindeer herders moved to the nearby community of Poulsbo, forming strong contacts with the local Suquamish people, connections that trace all the way back to the time of Chief Seattle in the latter half of the 19th century.⁴⁵ In addition to stories and creative artistic expressions that help North American Sámi connect with a deeper sense of place and more socially just, ecologically resilient forms of community and form stronger links with neighboring Native American groups, the rapid expansion of social media in the last few decades has also greatly facilitated such interactions. It has made it much easier for North American Sámi and other

Indigenous peoples to share stories and plan events or even protest movements.

By developing common cultural attachments and relationships to the land, Native and non-Native peoples have joined in decolonization efforts. For instance, in 1998 North American Sámi artist Kurt Seaberg joined the Mendota-Midewakton (Dakota) people in protesting a proposed light rail line and highway plan that would require displacing people and cutting down four sacred oak trees planted in 1862 in memory of the forced removal of Dakota peoples from their lands in Minnesota. Though official histories of the Dakota War of 1862 tell of a bloody event fought between settlers and the Indigenous Dakota, and though many firsthand reports breathlessly recount instances of extreme brutality, German and Nordic settlers had already coexisted with the Dakota peoples for many years. Yet, stories of their attempts to assist one another went largely undocumented. The attempt by Seaberg and the Dakota to find common cause in relating the past to the present did not meet with success, though. On December 20, 1998, in a predawn raid, 600 Minnesota state troopers and Minneapolis police in full riot gear arrested 30 protestors at the memorial site. A year later, at his court trial, Seaberg spoke out against the long history of stripping Indigenous peoples of their rights to the land.⁴⁶ He called attention to memories of the connections between settler and Indigenous communities and the fact that the forced removal of the Dakota from their homes had ruptured those ties, just as the government was again seeking to displace people and nature in the name of progress. His words highlight the sometimes “unlikely alliances” that can form between certain (local) ethnic communities and Indigenous peoples, further transforming seeming “outsiders” into “insiders” by redefining contested local spaces as common ground.⁴⁷

Earlier environmental protests foreshadowed what was to become the largest demonstration to date of Indigenous environmental solidarity: the Dakota Access Pipeline protests at the Standing Rock Lakota reservation in 2016–2017. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous environmental activists joined together to protest the pipeline’s threat to the reservation’s primary water supply and sacred sites. Representatives from hundreds of Indigenous groups from around the world joined the Dakota/Lakota peoples, with temporary communities of thousands created on the reservation borderlands in a show of non-violent resistance. Tribes and non-Native supporters rallied in cities

across the country. Sámi activists in North America connected with activists in Sápmi via Facebook to provide updates and advance shared transnational Indigenous social, cultural, and political agendas.⁴⁸

Numerous photos underscore especially the strong role played by Sámi women in creating social bonds,⁴⁹ participating in gift-giving ceremonies with other Indigenous peoples, wearing *gákti* (traditional clothing), and displaying the Sámi flag as a show of resistance. In one prominent instance, Tim Frandy secured funding and, together with other North American Sámi activists, made arrangements for the twice-Grammy-nominated Swedish Sámi artist and singer Sofia Janok to take part in the protest, with the aim of convincing the Swedish parliament to condemn US actions at Standing Rock, which it did.⁵⁰ In a further visible display of how notions of body, landscape, and the sacred can become integrally connected to new forms of transnational Indigenous collaboration, young Sámi in Norway tattooed themselves with the image of a black snake, derived from Lakota prophecy as a symbol of resistance.⁵¹ Sámi American activist Ellen Marie Jensen, in Norway at the time, organized protests and solidarity events. The show of solidarity, combined with the efforts of North American Sámi protesters and Nordic Sámi at Standing Rock to obtain documentation of human rights abuses, ultimately forced the First Bank of Norway to pull its investments out of the Dakota Access Pipeline.⁵² Such documentation also prompted cities like Seattle and San Francisco to sever ties with Wells Fargo bank for its support of the pipeline. Despite the widespread media attention and international outpouring of sympathy, armored vehicles and police in riot gear cleared the camps using concussion grenades, rubber bullets, attack dogs, and a water cannon in freezing weather. It was part of a larger scale pattern of violence and discrimination against Indigenous peoples, an effort to suppress public protest and criminalize dissent.⁵³

The Standing Rock protest was, however, more a beginning than an end to broader-based solidarity efforts. While alliances to defend land and water at the local level have taken shape for decades, the ongoing fights against further climate damage and injustice are no longer isolated struggles. Lyz Jaakola, an Anishinaabe/Finnish American and member of the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa who also has ties to the Sámi Cultural Center of North America, has taken a strong role in protesting the threat posed by large oil companies and mining operations to the Lake Superior ecosystem. Jaakola, an inter-

nationally renowned musician, has joined other Indigenous women staging public protests, often in the form of drumming circles at shopping malls and elsewhere, as part of the grassroots Idle No More movement, which began in Canada in 2012 and quickly spread to the United States, attracting Native and non-Native supporters in both countries. The Pacific Sámi Searvi of Seattle issued a statement in support of Idle No More, acknowledging their role as settlers in displacing and dispossessing the Indigenous peoples of Washington state and vowing to stand in solidarity with them in the pursuit of knowledge about and connections with the land.⁵⁴

In winter of 2021, North American Sámi protestors joined with residents of the Fond du Lac Reservation to protest the construction of Enbridge's Line 3 pipeline across the northern part of Minnesota. The desire to refocus on Indigenous knowledge systems in the wake of climate crisis has accelerated efforts to restore community wellbeing at the local as well as transnational level. Though such efforts have expanded, they are not uncontested. Differing ideas of self-determination have emerged, as some tribal members at Standing Rock and Fond du Lac argue that militant protests are dangerous and hurt the local economy, where jobs are often scarce, and moreover they disrupt daily life in the community. The rapid spread of information has not necessarily led to easy answers about how best to sustain community and relations to the land, even if it has helped develop common cultural perceptions of the value of place and a sense of common understanding. As such, activists have also continued to pursue less confrontational forms of protest.

North American Sámi have turned their attention to how to restore the land and retell different stories of place and Indigenous belonging that challenge prejudice and existing perceptions of difference. Art and humor can convey images of Indigenous survival and cultural resistance in a nonthreatening manner. In 1966, ethnographer Martti Linkola took a picture of Nils-Aslak Valkeapää with his car parked inside a *lávvu* in Enontekiö, Finland, humorously noting a modern use for a traditional reindeer herder's tent. The editorial staff at *Báiki* called attention to Valkeapää's use of humor and art as a way of reclaiming and updating Indigenous stories. It published examples of culture jamming, like a CD cover by Peter Twitchell (a descendant of the Reindeer Project herders) showing a jar of "Eskimo Jam" on the snow-covered Alaska tundra with a spoon shaped like a guitar "stir-

ring things up.”⁵⁵ Such efforts demonstrate the deeper complex history underlying labels, place, and identities. Digital technology has further facilitated the sharing of stories of cultural resistance and the deepening of inter-ethnic relations through various artistic and narrative forms. For instance, a recent digital storytelling exhibition in Toronto, Canada, called “inVISIBILITY: Indigenous in the City,” created a space for urban Indigenous youth to represent themselves and tell their own stories of place and cultural awareness. Educator Mervi Salo’s contribution, “Fragments: A Film about Being Indigenous in the City,”⁵⁶ gave a particular Sámi focus to the power of diverse stories and voices to further transform stereotypes about Indigeneity in the 21st century.

Through art and artwork, through telling stories of belonging that disrupt familiar narratives of migration and settlement, of colonizer and colonized, the North American Sámi are making their voices heard in a rapidly changing world. Though the subscription-based publication of *Báiki* ended with the passing of Faith Fjeld in 2014, and *Arran* stopping publication the following year, *Báiki* continues in the form of occasional special issues, with the Sámi Cultural Center of North America coordinating its activities and carrying on her work at community building and preserving Indigenous values. Art exhibits, educational forums, and multicultural outreach efforts with other local Indigenous communities help celebrate and keep alive her guiding words:

To believe that my indigenous roots died when they were pulled up and transplanted is to ignore the fact that indigenous peoples are always in the process of migration and relocation; mobility and flexibility are integral to the indigenous way of life. To believe that my spiritual connections are limited by time and space is to forget that relationships are circular as the Indigenous have always known, not linear as the assimilated seem to think. To believe that I can cease to be Sámi is to deny the emotion and yearning that stirs in my Sámi-American heart!⁵⁷

Conclusion

Diasporic Indigeneity, or Indigenous immigrant, is an emergent form of awareness that challenges easy understandings of settler colonialism. In responding to the questions of why some immigrants want

to identify as Indigenous and why members of Native nations in the United States and Canada accept their Indigenous claims, this chapter has focused on the importance of storytelling and public celebrations of heritage in fostering an awareness of Sámi culture and facilitating connections among descendants of Sámi immigrants to North America. The Sámi American story is but one story of diasporic Indigeneity that has gained greater voice in the last decades, whether transnationally or in evolving local urban and rural spaces. As with all questions of collective narrative identity and belonging, the personal, cultural, and political are deeply intertwined. This chapter has shared the stories of people with Sámi heritage who have established enduring links with neighboring Native peoples and who have increasingly found links to their own family stories.

Such efforts emerged in the United States and Canada in the wake of the activist movements of the 1970s and as the result of new genealogy tools and new ways of sharing stories and information on social media. Faith Fjeld and others experienced firsthand the ethnic revitalization efforts sweeping the Bay Area and other parts of the United States and Canada in the late 20th century. In the first issue of the journal *Báiki*, published from an apartment on Fillmore Street in San Francisco, she laments:

Not knowing who I am and where I am from, it has been difficult for me to “fit in.” I am drawn to Indian America but I am not American Indian. I am attracted to the black and Latino cultures of America, but I am not from Africa or Latin America. I have heard that our origin is in Asia, but I am far from the keepers of oral tradition who could tell me if it is true.⁵⁸

The apartment served as a gathering place for peoples from many different ethnic backgrounds seeking connection and alternative ways of creating and sustaining community.⁵⁹ *Báiki* at times also shared space at the Native American Intertribal Friendship House in Oakland. The North American Sámi movement first took root in a multicultural context and it has always since been deeply embedded in local concerns and transnational forms of engagement. Reestablishing community is not a one-off process of learning the language, taking a genealogy test, wearing a *gákti*, or claiming a special connection to nature. While it might involve each or all of them, it is first and foremost a lengthy

process of reconnecting with stories and ways of knowing that can take years or decades, but also a process of remaking cultural traditions in the present.

The Sámi Cultural Center of North America and Sámi organizations throughout the United States and Canada continue to share stories of cultural survival and revitalization both locally and internationally. They continue to collaborate with local Native communities on art exhibitions and in pan-Indigenous celebrations. North American Sámi have continued to receive positive feedback from activists in Sápmi, glad that people in North America are telling stories of Sámi migration.⁶⁰ The stories have resonated elsewhere as well, with North American Sámi invited in 2017 to contribute 36 pieces to the ongoing *Imago Mundi* exhibition in Italy as part of the exhibition's larger Sámi collection and works of the world. The North American Sámi artists range in age from ten to 90 and come from different parts of the United States and Canada, with contributions encompassing paintings and drawings to works of fiber, wood, photography, and various types of *duodji* (handicrafts).⁶¹ Their work challenges popular definitions and racist myths about what it means to be “authentically” Indigenous.

Twenty-first-century Indigeneity is in many instances defined less in stark opposition to settler colonialism and more as a mutually shared common cause and cultural identity binding Native North Americans and Indigenous immigrants, a shared relationship to the land that exposes the damaging legacies of settler colonial projects substantiated by racist, patriarchal ideologies of socioeconomic progress and legitimized through overly simplistic national historical narratives. The claims of Indigenous immigrants constitute a form of covert activism, one that can also foster sympathetic alliances and cooperation with other Indigenous groups fighting for environmental and social justice and a redistribution of political and economic benefits.⁶² By challenging dominant definitions of Indigeneity, of the “vanishing Indian” or “vanishing Sámi,” they are challenging the moral superiority of those controlling national narratives and easy definitions of settler versus Indigenous as a way of justifying prior colonial practices.

Notes

- 1 Clifford, *Returns*, 7–8; see also Clifford, *Routes*.
- 2 Fjeld, “The Sami in America,” 3.
- 3 The *Seattle Post Intelligencer* first published stories about the popularity of the reindeer herders, later reprinted in the Sámi-American journal *Arran* under the title “Lapp Visitors Stopover in Woodland Park! Bound for Alaska Hungry Reindeer Occupy Woodland Park.”
- 4 See Vorren, *Saami, Reindeer, and Gold*.
- 5 Fjeld, “The Sami in America,” 4.
- 6 DuBois, “Recalling—Reconstituting—Migration,” 49, citing Pekka Sammal-lahti, “Muitalusat sámiin geat vulge veahkkebargui Alaskai”: Clement Sara, “Marry Baer,” <http://arenan.yle.fi/1-3467152> (YLE, 2016) and “Ivar Vest vulgii maid Alaskai veahkkebargui_viejlja Jouni Vest muitala,” <http://arenan.yle.fi/1-3467152> (YLE, 2016).
- 7 DuBois, “Recalling—Reconstituting—Migration,” 56–62.
- 8 Wisuri and Johnson, “Sami Pioneer Communities.”
- 9 Kivisto and Leinonen, “Ambiguous Identity,” 75–76.
- 10 Majava Hensel, “Pilgrims of the Midnight Sun.”
- 11 See, e.g., Kettu, Koutaniemi, and Seppälä, *Fintiaanien mailla*.
- 12 Jordan and Kaups, *American Backwoods Frontier*, 89.
- 13 Tim Frandy, Assistant Professor, Folk Studies, Western Kentucky University, email correspondence, February 9, 2021.
- 14 Frandy and Jensen, “Kulttuurinen pois pyyhkiminen, resilienssi ja jatkuvuus,” 52, 62.
- 15 Fox Tree, “Diasporic Indigeneity,” 1.
- 16 Frandy and Jensen, “Kulttuurinen pois pyyhkiminen, resilienssi ja jatkuvuus,” 51.
- 17 Valkeapää, “My Home Is,” 4; Gaski, “Báiki,” 1–2.
- 18 Fjeld, “Are Sámi-Americans Indigenous,” 7.
- 19 Fjeld, “The Beginnings of *Báiki*,” 10.
- 20 Wisuri, “Shadows from the Past,” 9.
- 21 Marlene Wisuri, Zoom conference call, February 20, 2021.
- 22 Kurtti, “Finnish or Sami?” 2–4.
- 23 See, e.g., Carlson, “Finding the Home,” 7.
- 24 See, e.g., Grey Eagle, “Sámi Storytelling and Identity,” 5.
- 25 Muus, “Nils-Aslak Valkeapää discusses his work,” 7–8.
- 26 Muus, “Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, 1943–2001,” 18.
- 27 Nathan Muus, musician, associate editor of *Báiki*, and Sámi Cultural Center of North America board member, Zoom conference call, February 20, 2021.
- 28 Frandy and Jensen, “Kulttuurinen pois pyyhkiminen, resilienssi ja jatkuvuus,” 58.
- 29 Marlene Wisuri, Zoom conference call, February 20, 2021.
- 30 Marlene Wisuri, email correspondence, November 16, 2021.
- 31 “The Ones Who Disappeared,” 14.
- 32 Tim Frandy, email correspondence, November 8, 2021.
- 33 Marlene Wisuri, email correspondence, November 16, 2021.
- 34 Oberg Hanf, “Indigenous Chic,” 11.

- 35 See Green, “Tribe Called Wannabe”; Deloria, *Playing Indian*.
- 36 Bordewich, *Killing the White Man’s Indian*, 160.
- 37 Frandy and Jensen, “Kulttuurinen pois pyyhkiminen, resilienssi ja jatkuvuus,” 65–66.
- 38 See “Sámi Oainnát,” 11–12.
- 39 Mathisen, “Have You Ever Reconciled with the Native Americans?” 4.
- 40 Carlson, “North American Saami,” 12.
- 41 Marlene Wisuri, email exchange, March 17, 2021.
- 42 Deloria Jr., “Reflection and Revelation,” 29–34.
- 43 Jensen, *We Stopped Forgetting*; see also Jensen, “Sámi Immigration.”
- 44 Steiner, “Growing Art,” 217–19.
- 45 Nathan Muus, Zoom conference call, February 20, 2021.
- 46 Seaberg, “Among Sacred Oaks,” 15, 20.
- 47 See Grossman, *Unlikely Alliances*, especially 10–17.
- 48 On the significance of participatory social media, see Cocq and DuBois, *Sámi Media*.
- 49 See, e.g., Bonogofsky, “Indigenous Activists in Norway.”
- 50 Tim Frandy, email correspondence, July 30, 2021.
- 51 Monet, “What Standing Rock Gave the World.”
- 52 Bonogofsky, “Indigenous Activists in Norway.”
- 53 See, e.g., Estes and Dhillon, *Standing with Standing Rock*; Estes, *Our History is the Future*.
- 54 Pacific Sámi Searvi, “Statement of Privilege and Responsibility,” (2020): <https://www.pacificsami.org/privilege>.
- 55 Fjeld, “Art, Humor, and Images of Survival,” 6. For more on examples of cultural discordance, see, e.g., Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places*.
- 56 Salo, “Fragments,” 3–5.
- 57 “Faith’s Words in 1991,” 3–4.
- 58 Fjeld, “Editorial,” 3.
- 59 Nathan Muus, Zoom conference call, February 20, 2021.
- 60 See especially *Báiki*, “30th Anniversary.”
- 61 *Báiki*, Special issue no. 1 (Spring 2017): 2–3.
- 62 Fox Tree, “Diasporic Indigeneity,” 13–14.

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PART III

**Settler Narratives and
Legacies**

CHAPTER 8

Life Writing as a Settler Colonial Tool

Finnish Migrant-Settlers Claiming Place and Belonging¹

Samira Saramo

By writing their stories of settlement in Canada and the United States over the decades, Finnish migrants and their descendants have claimed their place and belonging in these national histories. Through autobiographical and family history life writing, migrant-settler authors contribute personal narratives of migration, adversity, adventure, and (most often) positive integration that collectively build a rich view of Finnish lives and communities in North America. The most significant boom of published Finnish North American life writing occurred in the 1980s through the 1990s, within the supportive atmosphere of multiculturalism and social history, which sought to populate national historical narratives with a polyphony of voices and experiences. Later life writing works have largely continued in the spirit of marking Finnish migrant-settler contributions to building Canada and the United States into modern nation-states. Through these texts, we are able to see some of the strategies and practices Finns have employed in establishing their North American migrant settlerhood.

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This chapter reflects on life writing as a settler colonial tool. I analyze narrative strategies in 12 Finnish migrant-settler works to better understand the subtle, everyday shaping of settler histories and futures, and how they tie to broader notions of Finnish (settler) colonial complicity. I begin by outlining a needed shift in the terminological framing of Finnish migration settlement that allows us to more effectively confront the implications and impact of generations of presence in North America. I tie this into a brief discussion of assumptions of Finnish (colonial) exceptionalism. I then turn to a close analysis of the Finnish North American autobiographical and family history texts to examine the ways this life writing serves to claim belonging through *sisu*, land, and silences, to create separate settler and Indigenous spaces, and to legitimate settler–Indigenous interactions based on consumption. I conclude by reflecting on how our future can benefit from a conscientious reading of past life writing.

From Immigration and Colonial Histories to Histories of Migrant Settlerhood

With the recognition that settler colonialism is a structure rather than an event,² we can unpack the implications of generations of Finnish presence in North America. Despite the personal motivations and intentions of individual Finnish migrants, the settlement of Finns in Canada and the United States is one piece of the overarching settler colonial project. This project aims to eliminate—or at best disrupt and remove—Indigenous people, lands, governance, knowledges, cultures, and languages, in order to replace them with a settler state in the image of (an imagined) white European colonial metropole.³ In theorizations of settler colonialism, people on the ground rather than distant colonial administrations are typically understood to be the key to implementation.⁴ Settler colonialism, as Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang emphasize, “is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain.”⁵ Regrettably, the historiography of North American immigration has been slow to do the work of interrogating the entanglements of migration and settler colonialism. Already 20 years ago, historian Adele Perry was calling out the “powerful fiction” of this historiographical divide:

colonization and immigration are presented as wholly separate topics with little in common. Their seemingly discrete character is a fiction of a confident colonizing project where settler dominance is assumed to be normal and inevitable. It is a powerful fiction that masks the fact that dispossession and resettlement were and are deeply and irreparably inter-twined, and indeed they derive their social power from that connection.⁶

Though the current volume marks an important step, scholarship on Finnish settlement in Canada and the United States still has much work to do to overcome such analytical separation.

Thinking through and adapting the terminology we use to frame Finnish communities in North America is part of this work. In my own research, I moved first from the term “immigrant,” in line with the immigration social histories from which my work has drawn direction, to “migrant,” acknowledging the multiple mobilities and networks that shape people’s experiences over the course of their lives. Using the term “settler,” in turn, recognizes what Aileen Moreton-Robinson has identified as the “white possessive logics,” through which people from away have come to claim ownership and dominion of land that is not theirs.⁷ Tuck and Yang have further challenged me to think through the terminological positioning of my work. They argue: “Settlers are not immigrants. Immigrants are beholden to the Indigenous laws and epistemologies of the lands they migrate to. Settlers become the law, supplanting Indigenous laws and epistemologies. Therefore, settler nations are not immigrant nations.”⁸ Tuck and Yang’s differentiation offers a poignant way to reframe our view of “immigrant nations.” Yet, the seeming staticity and homogeneity of “settler” implicit here and in their definition of settler colonialism as “homemaking” (as quoted above) can be further nuanced to capture the multitude of power dynamics and the diversity of settler backgrounds, aspirations, and encounters at play in settler colonialism.

I have come to think of Finns in Canada and the United States as “migrant-settlers,” acknowledging the significance of both of these positionalities. I see the language of “migrant-settler” as offering an opening to talk about the complex ways Finns have experienced and shaped settler colonial North America, while maintaining generations of multifaceted transnational ties. In this way, my thinking is very much in line with Laura Madokoro’s call to work through the lens of

“migrant settlerhood.” As Madokoro frames it, “migrant settlerhood refers to movement and settlement of people that perpetuate, in the past and the present, settler colonial aspirations while recognizing that beyond the physical presence of people, however permanent or fleeting, there exist affinities and loyalties beyond the strictures of the modern nation-state.”⁹

Claiming Finnish (Colonial) Exceptionalism

These “affinities and loyalties” influence the ways Finnish North American communities see their historical position in Canada and the United States, as well as in the world. The national discourse and historiography of Finland has long framed Finns as a historically subjugated people, under the rule of foreign empires until 1917 and long balancing precariously between the geopolitical “East” and “West.” The argument follows that, owing to this positioning, Finns are largely free of the burden of responsibility for European colonialism. When confronted with the legacies and ongoing impacts of occupation of Sápmi lands and Finnish presence globally, however, Finnish state involvement is framed as a “gentle colonialism.” As Veli-Pekka Lehtola explains, Finns have largely subscribed to the broader Scandinavian opinion that their “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.”¹⁰

These ideas of subjugation and collaboration also stand out in the ways Finnish settlement in North America is discussed. One oft-repeated argument states that, as early Finnish migrant-settlers were considered “Mongols” and not “white” in the turn-of-the-century racial hierarchy, Finns faced discrimination and had to struggle to gain social footing without privileges.¹¹ To probe the argument further, however, as Finns fought to become white, particularly through labor politics,¹² they inherently contributed to the entrenchment of the settler colonial order. By Finland’s independence in 1917, Finns had secured their position as “preferred immigrants.”¹³ These counterpoints, however, still often find an uneasy reception in community dialogue. Finnish migrant-settler ways of positioning their history are in line with broader trends of multiculturalizing. As L. K. Bertram identifies in the Canadian context, “Narratives of ethnic arrival often cast immigrants

as co-victims, incapable of participating in the dispossession of others and imagine them as latecomers, who arrived ‘after’ Canadian state campaigns against Indigenous people and claims.”¹⁴

Finnish exceptionalism in North American settler colonialism is further promoted through claims of special affinities between Finns and Indigenous—and particularly First Nations—people.¹⁵ Take for example a 1989 article in a magazine for Finns living abroad, in which the author Paul Sjöblom, a Finn, presented third-hand views of “the Indians’ Finnish friends.” According to Sjöblom, his settler friend was told by “Chief Buffalo” (whose tribe was not named but readers were told “it was his grandfather who signed the treaty creating the Indian reservations in Minnesota”): “Whereas White men of other nationalities tended to regard the Indians as inferior and downright despicable ... the Finns nursed no racist prejudices but treated them considerately as friends and neighbors.”¹⁶ This self-congratulatory writing demonstrates how the widely espoused belief that Finnish migrant-settlers were not/are not racist like other settlers is perpetuated. Purported evidence of this affinity is given through longstanding close cohabitation between Finns and First Nations people, most often with the Anishinaabeg and Cree in the Great Lakes region—but the myth is traced to the New Sweden colony in Delaware in 1638—and further boosted by pointing to intermarriage and the resultant “Finndian” (or “Fintiaani”) descendants.¹⁷ These are the kinds of “moves to innocence” that Tuck and Yang have identified as strategies for securing “settler futurity.”¹⁸ That is, by claiming a righteous past, Finnish migrant-settlers assert a future claim to land and belonging. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth asking when and how claims of connection—and particularly blood connection—may further function as tools to equate Finnishness with Indigeneity (including race-shifting).¹⁹ Such settler moves rarely leave space for a critical examination of competing interests or Finnish participation in processes of Indigenous displacement, such as land use/holding practices. Yet as Gloria Wekker emphasizes, “no one colonizes innocently ... no one colonizes with impunity.”²⁰

In order to further dialogue and understanding, to move to reckoning through returning land back, “colonial complicity” offers a useful lens to situate the (settler) colonial entanglements of the Finnish nation and Finnish people. Simply put, on the level of the nation-state, colonial complicity addresses “countries [that] were neither part of the

colonial center but nor can they claim to have remained outside European colonialism.”²¹ In Suvi Keskinen’s view, complicity with global colonial power structures provided the fledgling Finnish nation-state and its citizens with the opportunity of “being included in hegemonic notions of Eurocentric modernity and the material benefits it promise[d].”²² Ulla Vuorela demonstrated the intimate everyday ways colonial complicity shaped (and continues to shape) Finnish lives and attitudes, particularly through schools and children’s upbringing: “our minds were ‘colonised’ into an acceptance of colonial projects, and we took on board the then ‘universally’ accepted regimes of truth.”²³ These “truths,” in turn, entail/ed equating (Northern) Europeanization with “civilization” and the accompanying internalization of white supremacy inherent in such a belief.

Placing Finnish North Americans through Life Writing

With a fresh framing for viewing Finnish migrant settlerhood, contextualized in Finnish notions of their colonial positioning, we can now turn fruitfully to a close reading of Finnish migrant-settler autobiographies and family histories. These sources lend themselves to engaging, as Laura Madokoro has compellingly urged, in the work of “unpacking the various dreams, motives, and aspirations of people in motion to discern what they can tell us about the making of settler colonial societies and their continued preservation as communities where the nationhood and legal claims of Indigenous peoples are marginalized.”²⁴ Here, I bring together 12 texts written by and about Finnish North Americans, providing a representative sample of autobiographical works available through the Migration Institute of Finland’s comprehensive library of Finnish North American publications.²⁵

Two of the analyzed works are exceptional in that they were directed at popular audiences in Finland and were published much earlier than the others. K. E. Lahtinen’s memoir of fur trapping in 1930s Canada, *Suomalaisia Intiaanien Poluilla – Turkismetsästäjän muistelmia* (Finns on Indians’ Paths: A Fur Trapper’s Memoir), was published in Finland in 1946 by Gummerus. The 1950 Otava-published book *Tau-Wow – Matkani Kanadassa* (Tau-Wow: My Travels in Canada) by Valentin (the pen name of journalist Ensio Rislakki) is a travel memoir, rather than a settler narrative, but provides useful insights on Finnish com-

munities in Canada at the time and about Finnish conceptions of First Nations people.

The other ten texts analyzed texts are, in chronological order of publication: Reino Nikolai Hannula, *Blueberry God: The Education of a Finnish-American* (1979); Maria Lindroos, *Me and My Life* (1980); Olga Fagerlund, *Tarinani lännen ihmemaassa* (*My Story in the Wonderland of the West*) (1980); Ernest T. Koski, "Autobiography" (1981); Sanelma S. Pulkka, *Let Me Be Me* (1988); Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz, *Helmi Mavis: A Finnish American Girlhood* (1989); Gertrude Tiitinen, *A Finnish American Family: How It Was in the Old Days* (1991); Nelma Sillanpää, *Under the Northern Lights: My Memories of Life in the Finnish Community of Northern Ontario* (1994); Veli Ensio Eronen, *Kanadan Kutsu* (2001); and Nancy Jarvis Hager, *Traces of Four Finnish Families* (2015). Out of these, all but the works of Lindroos, Hiltunen Biesanz, Sillanpää, and Eronen were self-published.

I approach these autobiographies and family histories as *life writing* texts, through which the authors seek to share something of their sense of self, and situate themselves in time, place, and belonging.²⁶ In the Introduction to *Helmi Mavis: A Finnish American Girlhood*, Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz explains the impetus for her writing:

Now nearing the end of my seventh decade of life, I am writing this memoir for several reasons. My mother, relatives, and children want me to. My grandchildren say their contemporaries will learn a lot from it, and my own contemporaries will laugh and weep over memories so much like their own. But also, it helps me find out who Helmi Mavis is.²⁷

Like the memoir of Hiltunen Biesanz, the other life writing texts analyzed here (with the exception of the two earliest works) can also be seen as primarily writing/speaking to the author's own family and descendants, in an effort to preserve the family's migrant-settler legacy. They can also be seen as addressing other Finnish migrant-settler descendants, who have a shared frame of reference for the places, pasts, and cultures that are detailed through the text, as well as a wider but arguably also settler North American reader, who can situate the Finnish presence in the broader settler colonial historical narrative of a "nation of immigrants."

Finnish migrant-settler life writing can be characterized as overwhelmingly following the "settler narrative of adaptation, struggle

against a harsh environment, economic development, and integration.”²⁸ A close reading of the life writing texts shows recurring and intersecting narrative strategies in the depiction of Finnish settlement in Canada and the United States. I use the term “strategy” as a nod to both the process of producing life writing narratives and the active work of maintaining settler colonialism. The first is the strategy of claiming belonging through *sisu* and land. Often working in unison with the first, the second strategy is silence, through which colonial histories and practices and Indigenous people and places are rendered absent. The most visible strategy is the delineation of parallel worlds, in which Finnish settlers and Indigenous people coinhabit spaces but without meaningful and/or regular encounters or understandings. The fourth strategy is one of consumption, in which interactions with Indigenous people and places are marked by exoticization and tourism. Many of the texts demonstrate the use of multiple, overlapping strategies, and together tell us much about internalized implicit/complicit settler colonial attitudes and values. As I will demonstrate, the life writing texts also show tensions between the authors’ settler colonial worldviews and their varying levels of recognition of the impacts of dispossession on Indigenous people. An analysis of these life-writing sources provides us with rich and complex new views of Finnish settler colonialism in North America.

Collectively, Finnish migrant-settler life writing serves to situate Finns in North American national histories. They are about belonging. Reino Nikolai Hannula made this objective explicit in his 1979 work *Blueberry God: The Education of a Finnish-American*. Hannula explains that when he realized that Finnish settlers were not part of the leading historical study of his home community of Gardiner, Massachusetts, he was “shocked!”²⁹ He explains: “I tried to shrug it off but I felt as if I were throwing my identity away. ... How could I let those indomitable men and women drop into oblivion without some effort on my part?”³⁰ Hannula, then, set out to write a history of his family and the early Finnish socialists, who he situates as having made significant contributions to society in the United States. These “corrective” North American histories most often follow a struggle to success narrative progression.

Sisu, Land, and Silence

Finnish migrant-settler “pioneer” narratives of settler belonging are told through stories of *sisu*. Hannula’s blue and white book cover, for instance, is emblazoned with this very word (Figure 8.1). *Sisu* is considered to be an essentialist Finnish characteristic without an adequate English language equivalency, but it is often described as a mix of determination, grit, perseverance, and stubbornness. *Sisu* has offered a way to voice Finnish migrant-settler exceptionalism and a tool for interpreting the success of Finnish settlement: Finns thrived in the harsh physical and social environs of Canada and the United States because of their uniquely Finnish *sisu*. Nancy Jarvis Hager concludes her family history by declaring:

This story is about our Finnish forefathers and what they went through. It is also about the Jarvinen (Jarvis) family and what life was like in the early days living on our land. The labor it took to clear the land and to make it livable. The hardships the family went through and the joys of family and friends. It is my desire that you will appreciate whence you came from. You are made of good stock. May you remember you are from Finnish heritage and you have “SISU.”³¹

Sisu has taken on new meanings and significance in the context of migration and forms a key component of Finnish North American identity.³² It has come to define what it means to be Finnish, particularly for the second, third, and fourth (and beyond) generations. The intrinsic connection between settler-migrant *sisu* narratives and settler colonial ethnic chauvinism and attitudes about land ownership are rarely probed.

Land plays a crucial role in the claiming of settler colonial place and history, through the physical and material staking of land for settlement, altering physical landscapes, and renaming, but also through personal and collective level mythologizing of belonging on settler-claimed Indigenous lands. Claiming connection to land(scapes) was a significant project of Finnish nationalism from the late 19th century. Through land, Finnish people solidified and asserted their culture and right to autonomy. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, this practice was continued in North America, with Finns employing their connection to the natural environment as a basis for claiming belonging, identity,

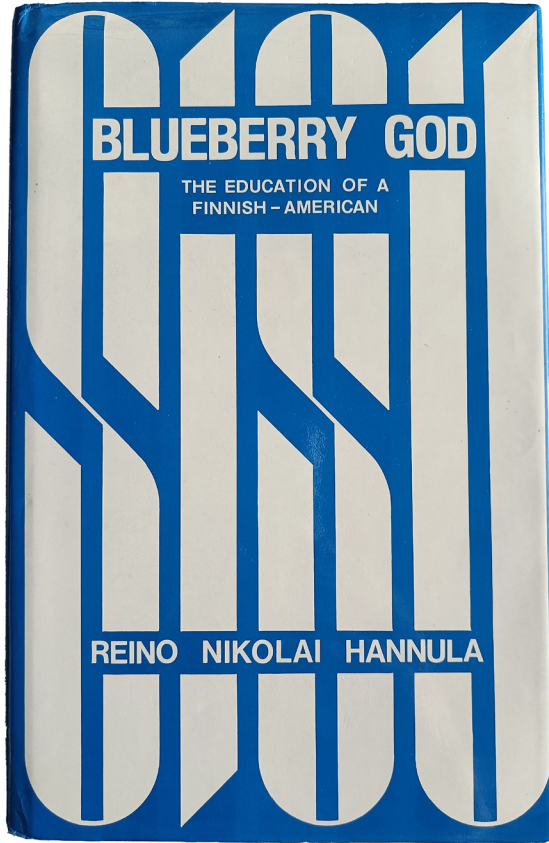


Figure 8.1: Cover of Reino Hannula's *Blueberry God: The Education of a Finnish-American* (San Luis Obispo, CA: Quality Hill Books, 1979).

and history in Canada and the United States.³³ Particularly by drawing on similarities between Finnish nature and the boreal environment of the Great Lakes region, where the most significant number of Finns migrated to, Finnish migrant-settlers were able to assert their “natural” belonging on the lands they settled. The themes of *sisu* and land are closely interwoven and provide an origin story to serve as a foundation for a Finnish North American migrant-settler identity. Through family histories detailing the early days of settlement—felling trees, clearing land, building housing, hunting, and foraging³⁴—Finnish migrant-settlers demonstrate their mastery over the landscape and their entitlement to the places they “developed” through their labor and *sisu*.

Further, by tracing the early North American mobility of Finnish migrant-settlers, the mark they made on many places, and how their descendants ultimately spread out, often settling scattered across the United States or Canada, the life writing serves to map Finnish presence, solidifying their belonging.³⁵ Such mapping entrenches a history and ensures a future.

In telling their families' stories, it is common for the life writers to make no direct reference to North American colonialism, or to Indigenous people or places. It is important to probe such silences, where we identify them, because there is an urgent "need for accountability in the context of generations of presence."³⁶ Perhaps indicative of tendencies more prevalent in urban settlement narratives, Veli Ensio Eronen's life writing about moving to Toronto in the 1950s is without any Indigenous presence.³⁷ Reino Hannula's life writing text melds autobiography with the history of Finns in the United States, covering an impressive array of events and topics, but colonialism is never mentioned and Indigenous people and histories are not featured in any role in the book. Such omissions provide explicit examples of the ways settler colonialism erases and replaces, making invisible local and Indigenous history while writing new settler histories of place and belonging.

While never mentioning Indigenous people or places, throughout her autobiography, Sanelma Pulkka makes several references to "one hundred percent Americans."³⁸ Pulkka does not position herself, her family, or Finnish migrant-settlers in this way, but never explicitly defines what makes a person "100%." It seems, however, that, for Pulkka, ethnic invisibility—bearing no cultural, linguistic, or historical hint of what came before—is the key to this label of Americanness, which is something Indigenous peoples in the United States are never afforded.³⁹ Similarly, in Maria Lindroos's 1980 autobiography, *Me and My Life*, the only mention of First Nations peoples is linked to her thoughts on the "American Melting Pot" and how most people are identified with their ethnicity. Lindroos wrote: "Sometimes I wondered who and where were the real Americans, besides the Indians."⁴⁰ The statement seems to contain a simultaneous acknowledgment and dismissal of Indigenous claims to Americanness and situates Indigenous peoples outside her construction of "America." This type of positioning of North American Indigenous people outside of the Finnish migrant-settler narrative is very common in the studied life writing.

The Narrative Construction of Parallel Worlds and Encounters

The role of other fellow Finns as neighbors and partners in homesteading projects is highlighted in the “pioneer” narratives, at times creating the illusion that they were alone.⁴¹ Nelma Sillanpää’s autobiography provides an example of how space was conceived of as settled when land was cleared and there were other Finns, but everything immediately beyond the Finnish homestead or bush camp was vast wilderness, with connotations of being unclaimed and uncivilized.⁴² The title of Lahtinen’s 1946 memoir depicts ideas of vastness and invisibility (Figure 8.2). Translating into English as *Finns on Indians’ Paths*, the title acknowledges that Finns were indeed on and using Indigenous lands, but leaves open the question of where the Indigenous people were when Finns used their paths. It nods to exoticization and ideas of the “vanishing Indian.”⁴³ Settler colonialism is justified, in part, through the myth of empty lands, belonging to no one (*terra nullius*). This idea of “excess of geography”⁴⁴ is readily evident



Figure 8.2: Cover of K. E. Lahtinen’s *Suomalaisia intiaanien poluilla* (Jyväskylä: Gummerus, 1946).

in Valentin's *Tau-Wow – Matkani Kanadassa*, published in 1950. The book begins: "When Indians and white men meet in the Canadian wilderness, in vast open spaces or unmeasurable forests, they greet each other with the words: 'Tau Wow.' [Translated] in[to] Finnish it means something like 'there's plenty of space.'"⁴⁵ For Finnish audiences, the (supposed) greeting and the presumption of vast spaces positioned settler colonialism as harmless, justified settler land-taking, and assumed the division of spaces for Indigenous communities and settler communities.

When Indigenous people and places do appear in Finnish migrant-settler life writing, they are often framed as separate or parallel to Finnish places and activities. Sillanpää remembered that when she was a child in Algoma District, Ontario, at the beginning of the 1920s, she knew that down the road was an "Indian camping-ground, but didn't dare go that far."⁴⁶ Instead, Indigenous people were primarily watched from a distance. Sillanpää was fascinated to watch First Nations people fishing from canoes on the lake and driving dog sleds on the ice.⁴⁷ K. E. Lahtinen, likewise, described watching passing groups in canoes on the waterways of Northern Ontario with intrigued caution.⁴⁸ The presumed difference between Indigenous people and white people is also readily apparent in the ways they are described. For example, Lahtinen consistently referred to "white skin" but described Indigenous people as having "red leather."⁴⁹ This dehumanizing language situated First Nations people as not just wild animals but harvested animals.

Though much more historical research remains to be done to more fully understand the gendered nature of Finnish and Indigenous encounters and exchanges, existing scholarship based on interviews suggest that, while Finnish men had opportunities to interact with First Nations men at job sites and in the wilderness, Finnish women had fewer occasions for such meetings.⁵⁰ As Anne McClintock has demonstrated, meanings of imperialism and its colonial reach, and how people experience it, is gendered, in addition to racialized.⁵¹ For example, when an Inuit man selling caribou meat came into Sillanpää's home when she was alone, the man's presence and their inability to communicate marked the encounter as frightening.⁵² This experience is reminiscent of encounters narrated by Laura Ingalls Wilder about her family's days of prairie settling during the "Indian Wars."⁵³ In contrast, Sillanpää fondly remembered getting rides on a sled from a First Nations girl who lived nearby.⁵⁴ The life writing examined here

confirms Stanley Hunnisett's conclusion in his 1988 study of historical Finnish and First Nations (specifically Ojibwe and Cree) interactions in Northern Ontario that "relationships between the two groups seem to have been relegated largely to chance encounters."⁵⁵ The Finnish migrant-settler authors do not write about any meaningful personal relationships with Indigenous people.

The life writing often reflects a curiosity about Indigenous people, but a simultaneous unwillingness, disinterest, or fear of learning more. Through fur trapping and fishing in the early 1930s, Lahtinen came into regular contact with First Nations hunters and trappers. Yet, none of the many Indigenous people written about in the book are given a name; they are all referred to as "the Indian." In one case, Lahtinen wrote about a group of First Nations fishermen who asked his trapping group where they were headed, but the text does not narrate the Finnish group asking anything in return. Instead, he explained that after the fishing season "they disappear like ash into the wind, each in their own direction, striving for the hem of the rigid wilderness."⁵⁶ Such descriptions gave the impression that Indigenous people are only concrete beings when the object of the white gaze. The lack of engagement with the work and mobility of Indigenous people also calls to mind Aleksi Huhta's demonstration of how Indigenous people largely fell outside the limits of Finnish North American radicals' expressions and commitments of solidarity, because they "were seen as inhabiting areas – and a time – outside industrial civilization."⁵⁷ Huhta argues that this inability to view Indigenous people as workers "illustrates how evolutionary thinking conditioned the racial thinking of many Finnish-American[s],"⁵⁸ which accords well with the impression I have gained through reading these life writing texts.

The "Autobiography" of Ernest Koski is unusual in that his family spent one year, around 1916, living on Net Lake Reservation in Minnesota. His father was employed as the reservation's blacksmith and Ernest was about eight years old and attending second grade. Koski wrote about how the other white families working on the reservation had private tutors, while he and his siblings attended the local school. In the case of his family, Koski explained, "For our parents and for us children, it was exciting to get to know people of another race, to experience their culture, and especially how to learn to get along with them even while we felt our differences."⁵⁹ He recalled learning some "Chippewa" (Anishinaabemowin) through his interactions with class-

mates, exploring the burial ground, and his family attending the harvest feast.⁶⁰ At home, Koski and his sisters would imitate in play the ceremonial drumming, singing, and dancing. His time living on the reservation is covered in one page of his 24-page autobiography. Written 65 years later, and possibly reflecting hazy childhood memory, his Anishinaabe neighbors and friends are not referred to by name, and only extraordinary events are noted, such as suggesting that the main course of the feast was dog meat.⁶¹ Koski's time living at Net Lake provided his life writing with "exotic" anecdotes that firmly maintained the cultural difference and social positions of his migrant-settler family and the Indigenous people on whose lands they lived.

Consumption and Exoticization

Indigenous people in Canada and the United States are presented as for the benefit of white consumption in other Finnish migrant-settler life writing as well. Not only were Finns curious to watch Indigenous people when they passed by chance, some went on outings to try to catch a glimpse. Olga Fagerlund wrote about her delight to have the opportunity to be taken to look at First Nations people at a reserve near her summer work place in Muskoka, Ontario, in the 1930s, exclaiming "are they real Indians!"⁶² Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz wrote that the Chippewa dances were the "traditional highlight" of the annual Fourth of July celebrations in Tower, Minnesota, in the late 1920s.⁶³ She described her memory of the men's and women's clothing, the music, and the dancing. She remembered, "The music stopped, and the chief held out a basket for donations as the spectators began to disperse. ... [W]e named one of the braves 'Hiawatha' and a girl 'Minnehaha,' and all the way up Main Street we practiced powwowing for our summer games in the woods."⁶⁴ David Hoffman has argued that "non-Native children donned Indian identities in order to take them off," further entrenching their own social position.⁶⁵ For Finnish children like Hiltunen Biesanz and Koski, "playing Indian" served to reinforce settler colonial divides between colonized and colonizer.⁶⁶

When Indigenous people themselves set up ways to gain income from the white gaze directed at them, migrant-settlers often expressed dismay and disparaged the labor. Valentin depicted First Nations tourism in Northern Ontario by, firstly, drawing a contrast between "heavy

labor” and what he saw as First Nations people’s “preference” to make “tourist goods.”⁶⁷ He then described:

One little Indian girl who held her one year old sister on her lap, sold to tourists nothing but her face; the girl stood on the edge of the rapids, where travelers came with their cameras to eternalize the landscape. Almost all the photographers quickly realized of course that the rapids and the Indian girl together are better than the rapids alone, and so Blackhair with her sister ended up on film. For her trouble she always got some coin.

Similarly, Gertrude Tiitinen wrote about her family’s road trip stop at an “Indian Trading Post” in South Dakota:

A Sioux Indian chief, of the Ogallala [Oglala] tribe, dressed in full chief regalia was available for pictures beside his tepee. We took his picture with Barbara. We began to walk away after the picture. He called “Lady, people usually give me a dollar for a picture.” I thought he probably was some poor Indian so I gave him a dollar. He gave Barbara a business card on the back of which he wrote an Indian greeting. In our car we read the other side of the card. It said he was a Sioux chief who owned four other Trading Posts in Arizona and New Mexico! That poor Indian probably had more money than we’ll ever have.⁶⁸

The referenced photograph is included in the book. This rich passage suggests that the Sioux man, as viewed by Tiitinen, was only “deserving” to be paid for his time and presence if he was sufficiently poor. It confirms Reetta Humalajoki’s finding that, while the consumption of Indigenous art and culture was seen as quaint and interesting, it also fueled white anxieties.⁶⁹ These passages about encounters in contexts of tourism and leisure point to the difficulty of many migrant-settlers to reconcile their colonial imaginaries of primitive and vanishing “Indians” with contemporary Indigenous people.

Uneasy Divides

Life writing allows us to examine the writers’ tensions about claiming place and belonging for Finnish people while also recognizing the implications of settler colonialism. Lahtinen’s memoir at times dem-

onstrates a keen understanding of colonial realities for Indigenous people, while still most often presenting them as a matter of fact, without acknowledging any role or responsibility for himself or Finnish migrant-settlers more broadly. For example, Lahtinen wrote about the ways the Hudson's Bay Company's monopoly and inflated prices for food and essential goods spawned unjust dependency and indebtedness for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people living in remote areas.⁷⁰ Yet, he explained that "often Indians get to suffer straightforward from lack. . . . But these children of nature accept their part and suffer calmly even hunger."⁷¹ Similarly, Lahtinen acknowledged that white settlers have "shoved" First Nations people from their fishing areas, while also describing the hard work and *sisu* of Finns to settle the very same area.⁷² The memoir narrates Lahtinen and his group getting help from and giving help to First Nations families.⁷³ As a fur trapper and fisherman, working far from settler towns, Lahtinen's life shared similarities with Indigenous people engaged in the same work, yet a consistent division is clear throughout the life writing.

Mavis Hiltunen Biesanz's memoir demonstrates a greater empathy than the other texts. It is worth considering that she grew up to become a world traveler, and wrote several ethnographic and sociological studies of Latin America, which may mark the shaping of her life writing narrative. She recalled, as a girl, being very disturbed by Zane Grey's 1925 novel *The Vanishing American* and being "lost in the story of Indians dispossessed of ancient tribal lands and forests, water sources, buffalo herds, and trapping areas."⁷⁴ In the life writing narrative, Hiltunen Biesanz's socialist big brother made the novel relevant for their area of settlement and class positioning by arguing, "You could say we did that around here too. All of this was Chippewa territory. You can find injustice almost anywhere. The mine owners, the lumber barons . . ."⁷⁵ Thus, while acknowledging dispossession, the emphasis was quickly turned back toward the hardships Finnish migrant-settlers had to endure. *Helmi Mavis* is the only work out of the studied autobiographies and family histories that explicitly presents Indigenous people as modern and similar to the Finns. She remembered the local Anishinaabe "teen-age girls [who] flouted tradition. They wore modern makeup rather than war paint, and a reluctant air of just going along with the tribe. Mischievous but unsmiling, they occasionally did a few steps of the polka or the Charleston."⁷⁶ Again, however, these teenagers were watched from a distance. They were similar to Hiltunen Biesanz

and her Finnish migrant-settler siblings and friends, yet they remained distinctly apart.

Conclusion

The parallels and silences employed by Finnish migrant-settler life writers belie the deep entanglements entailed in the structures of settler colonialism. Finnish migrant-settlers' genealogies and identities have been at the expense of Indigenous people. Finnish *sisu* has been exerted on dispossessed lands. "Finntowns" and Finnish rural enclaves are on taken Indigenous places, remade and renamed into the image of the Finnish settler colonialist. The socioeconomic structures Finnish leftists fought to reform entrenched settler governance and the racialized hierarchy of labor. Such realities can be difficult to accept when confronted so bluntly. Finnish migrant-settler life writing, then, provides an important and accessible way to see the everyday ways Finns have been complicit and participant in the shaping of settler colonialism, creating their own version of migrant settlerhood.

Through life writing, we gain intimate and concrete views of land being cleared, of Finnish-style homes and saunas being built, and of game, fish, and berries being harvested. It outlines the branching of Finnish migrant family trees and the establishment of roots in settled land. It shows the ways cultures are consumed, appropriated, and assimilated. Life writing lets us feel the struggles and successes of Finnish migrant-settler protagonists, and makes it clear that the lines between power and subjugation are never clear-cut.⁷⁷ Through their writing, individual life writers claim little pieces of place and history by writing their family's presence and perseverance on Indigenous lands. Taken together, all of the personal life writings come to amount to a significant assertion of Finnish migrant-settler belonging, stretching across the settler states of Canada and the United States.

Creating a written record of their place and past in North America, life writing can serve as a tool of legitimization for the future of Finnish migrant-settlers. Being aware of the narrative strategies used in this process is important. It allows us to be able to identify and counter the ongoing ways Indigenous peoples' rights and personhood can be depreciated through community discourse and commemoration. By offering us a micro-level view of the ways settler colonialism is built and upheld, life writing may also offer us the tools for its dismantling.

Notes

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- 2 Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 388.
- 3 In this chapter, I have tried to be as specific as possible when referring to Indigenous peoples. When information is available, I refer to the tribe or territory, or specify, in the case of this chapter, First Nations, Inuit, or Métis. I use “Indigenous” when the sources are not specific or if the point being made is more broadly applicable.
- 4 For example, Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” and Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*.
- 5 Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is not a Metaphor,” 5.
- 6 Perry, *On the Edge of Empire*, 19. Gunlög Fur has also called out this persistent division in “Indians and Immigrants.”
- 7 Moreton-Robinson, *White Possessive*.
- 8 Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” 6–7.
- 9 Madokoro, “On Future Research Directions,” 2. Madokoro’s “migrant settlerhood” is in dialogue with theorizations of contemporary “immigrant migranthood.” See for example, Chatterjee, “Immigration, Anti-Racism,” 646.
- 10 Lehtola, “Sámi Histories,” 23.
- 11 On the longstanding Finnish racial question, see Kivisto and Leinonen, “Representing Race.”
- 12 Classic analyses of these intersections include Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, and Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*. See also Saramo, “Capitalism as Death,” 672.
- 13 Walker, *History of Immigration*; Lee, *America for Americans*.
- 14 Bertram, “Icelandic and Indigenous Exchange.”
- 15 On the “fictions” of Indigenous-Scandinavian migrant-settler relations, see Fur, “Indians and Immigrants,” 58–61.
- 16 Sjöblom, “Indians’ Finnish Friends,” 37.
- 17 Huhta, *Toward a Red Melting Pot*, 390–91; Kettu, Koutaniemi and Seppälä, *Finntiaanien mailla*.
- 18 Tuck and Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” 3.
- 19 On the practices and damages of such practices, see Leroux, *Distorted Descent*, and Sturm, *Becoming Indian*.
- 20 Wekker, *White Innocence*, 3.
- 21 Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences,” 164.
- 22 Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences,” 164.
- 23 Vuorela, “Colonial Complicity,” 52.
- 24 Madokoro, “On future research directions,” 3.
- 25 The analyzed texts are, in chronological order of publication: Lahtinen, *Suomalaisia intiaanien poluilla*; Valentin, *Tau-Wow*; Hannula, *Blueberry God*; Lindroos, *Me and My Life*; Fagerlund, *Tarinani lännen ihmemaassa*; Koski, “Autobiography”; Pulkka, *Let Me Be Me*; Hiltunen Biesanz, *Helmi Mavis*; Tiitinen, *Finnish*

- American Family*; Sillanpää, *Under the Northern Lights*; Eronen, *Kanadan kutsu*; and Jarvis Hager, *Traces of Four Finnish Families*. All translations from Finnish to English are by the author.
- 26 My analyses of life writing are particularly influenced by Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, and Douglas and Barnwell, *Research Methodologies for Auto/biography Studies*.
- 27 Hiltunen Biesanz, *Helmi Mavis*, viii.
- 28 Veracini, "Imagined Geographies," 187.
- 29 Hannula, *Blueberry God*, xii.
- 30 Hannula, *Blueberry God*, xii–xiii.
- 31 Jarvis Hager, *Traces of Four Finnish Families*, 211.
- 32 For an analysis of *sisu* in Finnish North American literature, see Taramaa, "Stub-born and Silent Finns."
- 33 Saramo, "Lakes, Rock, Forest."
- 34 For example, Sillanpää, *Under the Northern Lights*, 6–9.
- 35 For example, Tiitinen, *Finnish American Family*; Jarvis Hager, *Traces of Four Finnish Families*; and Pulkka, *Let Me Be Me*.
- 36 Madokoro, "On Future Research Directions," 2.
- 37 Eronen, *Kanadan kutsu*. On urban visibility, narratives, and histories, see Trush, *Native Seattle*.
- 38 For example, Pulkka, *Let Me Be Me*, 25, 33.
- 39 For example, Pulkka, *Let Me Be Me*, 147–49.
- 40 Lindroos, *Me and My Life*, 110.
- 41 For example, Tiitinen, *Finnish American Family*, 46.
- 42 Sillanpää, *Under the Northern Lights*, 9 and 25; Saramo, "Lakes, Rock, Forest," 67–68.
- 43 See for example, Deloria, *Playing Indian*, 64.
- 44 Veracini, "Imagined Geographies," 190.
- 45 Valentin, *Tau-Wow*, 5.
- 46 Sillanpää, *Under the Northern Lights*, 14.
- 47 Sillanpää, *Under the Northern Lights*, 14.
- 48 For example, Lahtinen, *Suomalaisia intiaanien poluilla*, 9.
- 49 For example, Lahtinen, *Suomalaisia intiaanien poluilla*, 55.
- 50 Somero, "Sweat-Bath-Men," 25; Frank Hunnisett, "From Pohjanmaa to the Shores of Gitchee Gumees," 24.
- 51 McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 5–6.
- 52 Sillanpää, *Under the Northern Lights*, 78–79.
- 53 Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*.
- 54 Sillanpää, *Under the Northern Lights*, 14.
- 55 Hunnisett, "From Pohjanmaa to the Shores of Gitchee Gumees," 24.
- 56 Lahtinen, *Suomalaisia intiaanien poluilla*, 55.
- 57 Huhta, *Toward a Red Melting Pot*, 391.
- 58 Huhta, *Toward a Red Melting Pot*, 394.
- 59 Koski, "Autobiography," 2.
- 60 Koski, "Autobiography," 2–3.
- 61 Koski, "Autobiography," 3.
- 62 Fagerlund, *Tarinani lännen ihmemaassa*, 14.
- 63 Hiltunen Biesanz, *Helmi Mavis*, 63.

- 64 Hiltunen Biesanz, *Helmi Mavis*, 63.
 65 Hoffman, "Playing Indian at Jewish Summer Camp," 415.
 66 See Deloria's influential *Playing Indian* and Fur, "Indians and Immigrants," 67.
 67 Valentin, *Tau-Wow*, 114.
 68 Tiitinen, *Finnish American Family*, 233.
 69 Humalajoki, "Consumption as Assimilation," 979.
 70 Lahtinen, *Suomalaisia intiaanien poluilla*, 56.
 71 Lahtinen, *Suomalaisia intiaanien poluilla*, 56.
 72 Lahtinen, *Suomalaisia intiaanien poluilla*, 9 and 46.
 73 Lahtinen, *Suomalaisia intiaanien poluilla*, 63–67 and 70–74.
 74 Hiltunen Biesanz, *Helmi Mavis*, 74.
 75 Hiltunen Biesanz, *Helmi Mavis*, 75.
 76 Hiltunen Biesanz, *Helmi Mavis*, 63.
 77 Vuorela, "Colonial Complicity," 49.

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CHAPTER 9

Finns and the Indigenous People in the Great Lakes Region

Playing with Settler Myths in Late 20th- and Early 21st-Century Finnish American Fiction

Roman Kushnir

Introduction

The myth of a special relationship between Finnish settlers and the Indigenous peoples in North America has proven persistent.¹ From the Finnish settlers of the New Sweden colony in the Delaware area in the 17th century to the immigrants arriving during the “American fever” in the 19th–20th centuries and their descendants today, traditional mythology of Finnish migration often creates an idealized picture of affinity and similarity between the newcomers and the Indigenous population. Finns are typically presented as peaceful, benevolent colonists who were not complicit in the settler colonial dispossession and elimination of the Natives. They stand in sharp contrast with the majority of other Europeans in North America. Finns build amicable relations with Native Americans and share similar cultural traits

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including a particularly close relationship with nature and land. Finns constitute “whites-who-are-like-us” and “sweat lodge men.”² They are also described as fellow victims of racism, prejudices, and discrimination stemming from white America. In the early 20th century, there were even public signs saying “No Indians or Finns allowed.” Various forms of media have been used to perpetuate the myth both in Finland and North America ranging from monuments, post stamps, and celebrations commemorating the first Finnish settlement in Delaware to the recent publications and TV programs of the Yle, Finland’s national broadcasting company.³ While there is more than a grain of truth in this myth, it often glamorizes, romanticizes, and idealizes the history of Finnish–Indigenous relationship, as well as ignores the participation of Finns in American colonialism.

I will explore the Finnish settler migration mythology through a selection of Finnish–American literature produced in the late 20th and early 21st centuries in order to shed light on the ways in which these texts create, spread, and perpetuate the settler myths. Remarkably, in most such texts the Indigenous peoples and all interactions between them and Finns are absent. Nevertheless, there are few exceptions such as the fiction that I study: the collection of short stories *Down from Basswood: Voices of the Border Country* (2001; the second edition in 2013 has the title *Down from Basswood: Voices of the Boundary Waters*) by Lynn Maria Laitala (Figure 9.1), and the novels *Gift: A Novel of the Upper Peninsula* (1992) by Joseph Damrell and *Welcome to Shadow Lake* (1996) by Martin Koskela. I will focus on how these texts feature the relationship between Finnish Americans and the Indigenous peoples of the Great Lakes region (the historical dimensions of Finnish–Indigenous interactions in this region are addressed in [Chapter 2](#) in this volume). My chapter is divided into two sections. In the section “Sharing the Land,” I will investigate how their Indigenous neighbors are present (or not present) in the lives of the Finnish American characters. At the same time, in the section “Taking the Land” I will also pay attention to how Finnish Americans and the Indigenous population are portrayed in relation with another myth of Finns in America—the myth of taking the land in the new country.

All the texts have a strong regional flavor. They are written by the authors from the Great Lakes region (Michigan in the case of Damrell and Koskela, and Wisconsin in the case of Laitala) and are set there,



Figure 9.1: The Ojibwe-themed works by Carl Gawboy, a prominent Ojibwe and Finnish American artist, are used as book covers for *Down from Basswood*. “Morning Chores” (the upper image) is on the cover of the first edition, and “Slipping Away into the West” (the lower image) is on the second. Other illustrations in both editions are also made by Gawboy. The images are used with the permission of the artist. All rights reserved.

mostly in Minnesota and/or Michigan, especially the Upper Peninsula, also known as the UP or Yooperland. This region, originally the home to the Anishinaabeg, also became an adopted home of Finns in America.⁴ Attracted by the available jobs in the mining and lumber industries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Finns came there to stay. Together with their descendants they have eventually made the Great Lakes region the “sauna belt,” a hub of Finnishness in North America. Thus, Finnish Americans and the local Indigenous peoples share a long and rich history of living side by side in the area. The Ojibwe (also known as the Chippewa), who belong to the Anishinaabeg, are the most prominent Indigenous people in the Great Lakes region with whom Finnish Americans have had most interactions.⁵ The Ojibwe are also the Indigenous people mentioned most frequently in the texts I study.⁶ *Gift* tells the story of an old-timer, second-generation Finnish backwoodsman, Gus, and his nephew Harry in the Upper Peninsula in the 1990s, recounting the mysteries, family dramas, and environmental issues that touch their lives. *Welcome to Shadow Lake* portrays the hardships, struggles, and victories of immigrant Finns and their US-born children in a small UP town during the Great Depression. *Down from Basswood* chronicles the lives of several generations of Finnish Americans and the Ojibwe in Minnesota from the early 1900s to the late 1970s. Lynn Laitala, a third-generation Finnish American, is a cultural historian and a prose writer. Joseph Damrell, also a third-generation Finn, is a writer and ethnographer, and a professor of sociology and Native American studies at Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin. The late Captain Martin Koskela, a US Army Second World War veteran and entrepreneur, was a second-generation Finnish American who spent most of his life in the Upper Peninsula. Damrell and Laitala are famous writers in the Finnish American community, while Koskela’s reputation, with only one novel published, is more modest.

Sharing the Land

Although the Ojibwe are present in all three texts as neighbors of Finns in the Great Lakes region, their roles and position are different in each. In Damrell’s novel, the Ojibwe characters are featured often and play an important role in the plot: meeting with two healers from the Watersmeet reservation is a turning point in the protagonists’ lives, but the

major focus is not on them.⁷ Koskela's writing has only some tertiary Chippewa characters who are mentioned rather briefly and who are not involved in the central story. Laitala's collection in turn is one of the most (if not the most) Ojibwe-centered Finnish American texts. In *Down from Basswood*, the interactions between the Ojibwe and Finnish immigrants and their descendants is a key component of the plot. However, despite differences in the roles of the Indigenous people, all three texts convey a positive relationship between Finnish Americans and the Ojibwe. When they describe the lives of the Indigenous population and Finnish settlers and their descendants, they feature friendships, romances, intermarriages, closeness, and shared values and attitudes. At least, there is a picture of both groups peacefully living side by side, having good neighborly relations, and thus sharing the land in the Great Lakes region. There are no tensions or conflicts between Finnish Americans and the Ojibwe in the texts. In all three texts (with some exceptions in Laitala's collection) it is the Finns who are in main focus.

The source writings distance Finnish Americans from other whites in their attitude to the Indigenous peoples. Instead, the good relationship between Finnish Americans and the Ojibwe is contrasted with the racism and the derogatory treatment of the Indigenous population by the white US society. For instance, in *Welcome to Shadow Lake* the predominantly Finnish community, called "little Finland," is presented as accepting, tolerating, and welcoming others regardless of their background.⁸ This, the book suggests, makes it stand out in 1930s US society. As one of the non-Finnish characters praises Finnish Americans, "they couldn't care less what nationality you are. You can be black, yellow, red or whatever, and they'll hardly notice. In their country they never learned such biases. Show them respect and you'll get theirs."⁹ So, in the book some Chippewa people also live side by side with Finns.¹⁰ Similar notions of the special relationship between the Ojibwe and Finnish settlers are also present in *Down from Basswood*. One of the protagonists is the Finnish newcomer Antti, who has just arrived in the USA in the early 20th century. Indigenous characters do not see him in the same way they perceive the majority of other "whites." Instead, he is unique and different not only in appearance but also in his friendly, respectful, and curious attitude, and his desire to learn their ways of life.¹¹ This is in sharp contrast with 1910s–1920s US society's racist, highbrow, or at best condescending treatment of the

Indigenous peoples as “simple primitive Natives” and “a dying race.”¹² In *Gift*, one of the central characters, the Finn Gus, and to an extent his nephew Harry, the protagonist of the novel, both spend time and share secrets with several Ojibwe, who otherwise face a negative attitude from local white authorities and police.¹³ So, Finns are portrayed as exceptional in their relationships with the Indigenous population.

They are also similar to the Natives. Both Finns and the Ojibwe are portrayed as frugal and self-reliant outdoorspeople knowing “how ... to live from nothing but what creation provided,” which is in line with the myth that nature unites Finnish Americans and the Indigenous people.¹⁴ Both groups live off the land and share a deep connection to the land and nature (this aspect will be addressed in more detail in the section “Taking the Land” below). These related values and attitudes are defined as “the Code of the Woods” in *Gift* or “the rules” in *Down from Basswood*.¹⁵ Both groups are also presented as sharing their know-how of the self-sufficient outdoors life. While the Finnish characters learn a lot from the Ojibwe, they can also teach them skills the immigrants have brought from Finland. For instance, in Koskela’s novel, the Finnish hermit Gust makes traditional Finnish skis for both Finnish Americans and Chippewa.¹⁶ In *Down from Basswood*, Finnish woodworking skills impress the Indigenous people.¹⁷ The abovementioned Antti, who once lived with the Ojibwe, utilizes the knowledge of “living from the woods” to save his and his Finnish friends’ freedom from greedy American companies and to go through the hard years of the 1920s–1940s. He eventually passes the Indigenous ways he has learned to his nephew, thus perpetuating their heritage among Finnish settlers in Minnesota.¹⁸ The special relationship with nature, which unites Finns and the Indigenous population, is also present in *Gift*: “Weren’t Finns coming out of some stone-age Lapland/reindeer herd/frozen tundra/mythic Arctic past that wasn’t altogether different from the Native experience, or at least akin enough to allow them to relate to Native people?”¹⁹ Gus, a decades-long poacher and skillful outdoorsman on his own, is saved from death in the wilderness by two Ojibwe healers, Eddie Small Legs and Dan Foucault. His outdoors lifestyle makes him “primed” to share the Indigenous secrets and wisdom.²⁰ This experience gives him a new vision of his own place in nature.

The source texts also draw parallels between Finns and the Indigenous people by portraying them as brothers and sisters in troubles, and fellow victims of the white US society and authorities. This is

particularly the case with the episodes of *Down from Basswood* detailing the early days of Finnish America in the first half of the 20th century, when both Finnish immigrants and the Ojibwe are being alienated, stigmatized, and downtrodden by white Americans with their racist, prejudiced, and oppressive attitudes. Both groups are at the bottom of the society. Despite their wisdom, knowledge, and skills, they both are othered, distanced from white America, either as “primitive Natives” destined to die out in reservations or as low-paid manual workers: “Finlanders ... weak minds but strong backs” at best, or ungrateful and undesirable “alien filth – scum” and “violent radicals and revolutionaries” at worst.²¹ Oppression and violence are directed at them both. While the Ojibwe are removed from their ancestral lands against their will, sent to the reservations to live under the government’s control and restrictions, and forced to hide or abandon their heritage altogether, Finnish immigrant laborers are simultaneously “treated like beasts” in the mills, lumber camps, and mines.²² They are “less than a slave,” and are blacklisted and persecuted indiscriminately after labor strikes in which the Finns participated.²³ Any attempts to resist the oppression in the early 20th century are brutally subdued by the US authorities. The Ojibwe’s sacred sites are taken from them by the government, and the immigrants’ prized Finn Hall is also eventually sold out by the Americanized Finn not interested in preserving the old heritage. Thus, both groups practically mirror each other’s experiences. Later in the century, both Finns and the Ojibwe are sent out to fight America’s wars overseas (the Second World War and Vietnam).²⁴ In *Down from Basswood*, the shared experience of being excluded and marginalized minorities is presented as creating particular understanding between Finnish Americans and the Ojibwe and making them help each other. The similarity of their experiences is neatly summarized by the characters’ words near the end of the book. In the late 1970s the US government’s new forest legislation and restrictions on logging and natural resource use are ruining the Minnesota locals’ (including Finnish Americans) way of life in the same manner Washington once ruined the Indigenous lifeways. So, the characters bitterly conclude: “We are all Indians now ... we are all Indians.”²⁵ However, it is remarkable that these particular words are uttered decades after the immigration era and only in the moment when the local white dwellers’ rights to use the land, which used to be safe before, are being threatened by the US

authorities that earlier took the land from the Ojibwe and gave it to the immigrant settlers.

The topic of being fellow victims is also present in *Gift*, where the Finnish American central characters and their Ojibwe friends Dan and Eddie are all targets of the negative attitude of the authorities and consequently share a marginalized position as late as in the 1980s–1990s. The Indigenous people are “not treated very well by the cops around here - to say the least” and are “a customary, perpetual focus of official action” in the UP.²⁶ Their friend Gus, in turn, is “a troublemaker,” “a rebel,” and “something of a certified public enemy” at odds with the police, game wardens, and authorities in general (also with mainstream US society with its commercializing attitude to nature).²⁷ This fiercely independent second-generation Finnish old-timer along with his kind are presented as suspicious relics from the past, so out of place in the “modern” Michigan of the 1980s–1990s, an “embarrassment” being “in the way of progress.”²⁸ In such treatment, the parallels between him and the Indigenous people are obvious. After having troubles with the law, Gus finds a place to hide in the reservation, and the police after him are portrayed as being derogatory toward both “dumb Finlanders” and “bow and arrows.”²⁹ Both *Gift* and *Down from Basswood* present Finns and the Ojibwe as fellow victims. Both texts also tell a similar story about how mainstream US society comes to the Upper Midwest, has little to no concern for the locals and their way of life, and ruins it.³⁰ This poses a threat to Finnish Americans and the Indigenous people of the Great Lakes region.

The source fiction also portrays how Finns and the Ojibwe participate in each other’s cultures, share practices, rituals, and traditions, and sometimes produce new hybrid forms of culture. Koskela’s novel briefly mentions the Finnish hermit Gust’s having a Chippewa dream catcher in his house given to him by his Indigenous friends.³¹ Damrell’s and Laitala’s texts describe the interaction between two cultures in more detail. In *Down from Basswood*, Antti, who lives among the Ojibwe, is depicted as someone able to join (or at least understand) them in their reverent attitude to the woods: “I touched Antti’s wrist, to make him still while I listened to the voices of the manitous, the mysteries in the woods. Did Antti hear them, I wondered?”³² When the Ojibwe village is hit by the Spanish flu and then forcibly relocated to the reservations, he builds on the grave of his Ojibwe friend Charlie “a strange new spirit house like no one had ever seen. It was built

of squared logs, tightly fitted, with dove-tailed corners. ... The spirit house stood over Charlie's grave for many years. Charlie's spirit had gone from it, but Antti's lingered on."³³ Remarkably, the final story in Laitala's collection is culminated with the episode of the powwow memorial dance, which serves to commemorate one of the elders of the local Ojibwe community. The dance is joined by both the Ojibwe and some Finnish Americans.³⁴ The shared dance, "the river of life that flowed around the circle," can be understood as a metaphor of the decades-long history of Finnish American and Indigenous people living and dying side by side, peacefully sharing the land of Minnesota, and having a similar worldview, all of which is the central topic of this collection of short stories.³⁵

In *Gift*, Finnish and the Indigenous cultures and traditions (especially those connected to nature and mysticism) become intertwined. The Ojibwe healers Dan and Eddie save both the life and soul of Gus, the protagonist Harry's uncle. He is then allowed to participate in a number of their ceremonies. This sets Gus to a new course in life—he quits his career as a poacher and instead becomes a defender of the local wilderness to give something back to the woods.³⁶ "[T]hey said finding him was a great spiritual sign and that Gus was no longer the old Gus but had been reborn."³⁷ The novel also puts an emphasis on the sauna and sweat lodge, which is in line with the myth of particular closeness and understanding between Finns and the Indigenous peoples. For Harry and his family, their sauna plays a special role in their lives. Built by their immigrant ancestors and later restored by the US-born descendants, it is "the soul of the ... farm" and "a piece of family history."³⁸ Yet it also becomes a site of tragedy as Harry's father commits suicide in the sauna. Dan and Eddie declare it "haunted," and the sauna has to be burned down and later rebuilt.³⁹ When Gus takes part in their ceremonies in the reservation, he fondly remembers the sweat lodge and compares it with the Finnish sauna: "the wigwam lodge, a smallish dome made of saplings, cedar boughs and canvas, was equal of the best sauna in its capacity to produce mind-melting heat."⁴⁰ After Gus's death, Harry, Dan, and Eddie take a sauna together to mourn and honor him. As Harry puts it, "Sauna, sweat-lodge, steam bath—all the same. The walls dripping, the steam flowing through one's body, merging memory with present; visions of ancestors and friends, of the wolf, raven, bear, tribe, the living, the dead."⁴¹ Thus, for the characters, Finnish and Indigenous lore comes together there.

On the whole, in portraying the Indigenous people in the lives of Finnish Americans in the Great Lakes region, the source texts curiously play with the myth of a specific Finnish–Indigenous relationship. On the one hand, the novels and short stories present the interactions between Finns and the Ojibwe sharing the land in accordance with this myth. They feature many similarities and shared cultural practices and experiences. What emerges is an image of a positive Finnish–Ojibwe relationship with some stereotyping, idealization, and romanticization. Yet the fiction analyzed can also be understood as dispelling and deconstructing the myth. It is remarkable that in all three texts it is some sort of outcasts and outsiders of Finnish community in North America (be it vagabonds, hermits, loners, rebels, troublemakers, or activists of different sorts) who have the best relationship with the Indigenous people. In the texts, the bulk of Finnish Americans in general do not show any particular interest toward the Ojibwe and simply live their own lives in America with little to no interactions with the Indigenous population. Finns and the Ojibwe *en masse* are portrayed as living nearby for years and even decades, sharing the land but not necessarily sharing any activities together. As the protagonist Harry puts it in *Gift*, “Indians and Finns had only labored together but never had any joint community involvements of which I was aware.”⁴² So, in the texts the special relationship between Finnish Americans and the Indigenous people in the Great Lakes region is shown to be primarily on the individual level rather than on the level of their communities. Even among the individual characters not everybody has this closeness and shared understanding with the Indigenous population. In Laitala’s text, some Finnish immigrants, fresh off the boat and at the bottom of the US society in the early 20th century, still see (at least for a time being) the Indigenous people with suspicion, as “wild Indians,” which is the way US white society sees them.⁴³ In *Gift*, Harry, although friendly with his uncle’s Ojibwe friends, is not as close with them as his relative, and expresses some wariness and suspicion.⁴⁴

As for the myth of being fellow victims, the texts also deconstruct it to an extent. They portray the earlier Finnish American generations’ experiences with the US racism and prejudices questioning the “whiteness” of Finns. For instance, Koskela’s and Laitala’s books mention the attempt to classify Finns as Mongolians and deport them under the Oriental Exclusion Act in the early 20th century.⁴⁵ However, the texts also draw attention to Finns quickly becoming “white” enough and thus

accepted.⁴⁶ Damrell's novel also tells about the US-born Finns' deliberate efforts to distance themselves from their suspicious immigrant past and roots in favor of "good Lutheran, Republican, north country, white guy values."⁴⁷ Thus, distance eventually grows between Finns and the Indigenous people, once fellow victims of US racism. While Finnish Americans, "white-who-are-like-us," are portrayed as becoming more and more "white," and gradually allowed (but not quite as their immigrant past has not been entirely forgotten and can be remembered and reminded of), the Indigenous population stays behind. As one of the Ojibwe bitterly concludes in Laitala's short stories, even in the late 1970s the Indigenous peoples remain the "lowest thing in America."⁴⁸ The texts also play with the myth of Finnish Americans being not complicit in American (settler) colonialism and replacement of the Indigenous population, which is the topic of the following section.

Taking the Land

In the Finnish American migration mythologies there is also another prominent myth—the myth of taking the land and Finnish-specific attitude to nature, living off the land in harmony. Getting their own land formed one of the main motivations of Finns (and other European immigrants in general) coming to North America. The myth emphasizes the settlers putting down roots and acquiring a sense of belonging in the new country by claiming the land as theirs. In this myth, the Finnish Americans created their own "Little Finland" in the USA and Canada, particularly in the Great Lakes region. They did so coming to the "wild, empty, no one's land" and making it their own, as well as bringing culture and civilization. They practically carved this "Little Finland" with farms, schools, Finn Halls, and other Finnish facilities and activities out of the "wilderness" as brave and heroic pioneers (see [Chapter 2](#) in the present volume, which addresses the settlers' cherished self-image as Finns "making gardens out of the wilderness").⁴⁹ At the same time, this myth ignores the fact that historically this allegedly "no one's" land was often taken from the Indigenous peoples shortly before or after the arrival of Finns to America, and the area was made ready for Finns to settle. This is hardly congruous with the myth of good relationship with the Indigenous population and Finnish exceptionalism, yet both myths somehow coexist in the mythology of Finnish migration. The topic of acquiring their own land and making

the land theirs remains notable in Finnish American literature, and Anita Aukee Johnson highlights the central role of the land in providing value and identification.⁵⁰ However, Finnish American texts rarely reflect on how taking the land is connected with the Indigenous dispossession—the Indigenous people are conspicuously absent when it comes to the topic of land acquisition.

This theme of Finnish Americans' "own land" and closeness with this land also permeates all the source texts of my chapter. The authors portray how Finns get enrooted in the Upper Midwest and attach themselves to the land. This firm and at times practically spiritual connection to the land and nature constitutes one of the main plot lines in all three texts. In *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, the characters seek to protect their farms, co-op sawmill, and local forest from the perils of the Great Depression and a local Finnish American timber baron in particular (and the whole US capitalist system in general). In *Down from Basswood*, the author chronicles the history of Finnish immigrants coming to get "their own land" in Minnesota and developing a fledgling Finnish American settlement into a full-grown community on that land. In *Gift*, the former poacher Gus, after his pivotal meeting with the Indigenous people and shared mystical experience, turns into an environmentalist, an "eco-warrior" protecting local nature.⁵¹ Later he goes to die in the woods to give something back and to become one with the land that has provided for him his whole life. Thus, the motivation of Finns' interactions with the land and nature may be different—some want to start a farm or begin a successful logging business, while others seek to find a place far from civilization to achieve solitude and peace for their souls. Yet the similar motive of the land and nature is present, and throughout all three texts the Finnish Americans are portrayed as living off the land and "living on the land."⁵² The land feeds them through farms, tree farms, logging, hunting/poaching, fishing, foraging, etc. It provides Finns with sustenance and material goods, but also with freedom, independence, and the sense of belonging. However, the authors treat the Indigenous peoples, who are the original inhabitants and owners of that land, in different ways. They are practically nonexistent in relation to the land in *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, more notable in *Gift*, and most prominent in *Down from Basswood* (which is also the only text addressing the dispossession of the Indigenous population).

Thus, the myth of taking the land is present in the source fiction: Finnish settlers claim a place in North America via emphasizing their

“natural” connection to the environment. Claims for the Great Lakes area as a Finnish region, “Little Finland,” recur in all three texts. They emphasize that Finns are everywhere throughout the Upper Midwest and even the United States in general. “[L]ots of you Finns in Minnesota” is an observation made by a non-Finn in Koskela’s novel, while in one of Laitala’s short stories a Finnish immigrant in early 20th century proudly says: “anywhere you go, you’ll find Finns.”⁵³ Damrell’s novel in turn, being set in the 1980s–1990s, portrays the lasting legacy of once-numerous first- and second-generation Finnish settlers in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. In all three texts, Finnish presence in the area is made visible by depicting Finnish farmsteads, saunas, and log cabins in the local landscape. Perhaps most notably, the topic of rootedness of Finns in the region (and in America in general) and the similarity between Finland and the Great Lakes area is addressed in Koskela’s novel. The Finnish American characters trace their community of Shadow Lake back to the original New Sweden colony: a founding father of their settlement is told to be a Finnish pioneer, “probably the first settler” in the area and “a descendant of the Delaware Finn colony of 1638, who wandered westward.”⁵⁴ His footsteps were followed by other Finns lured to the area “because it reminded them of the Old Country and offered them something they never had there, a chance to build their own future on their own land.”⁵⁵ Using their “natural talent” in woodlands and outnumbering other Europeans, the settlers quickly turned Shadow Lake and the surrounding territories into something “like a colony of their Suomi homeland” and “the ‘little Finland’ of farmers.”⁵⁶ There they can live in a safe bubble of Finnishness, “among their own kind, in a sanctuary where they feel secure,” and where it is not even a necessity for the immigrant generation to speak English.⁵⁷ As the author puts it, “[t]hey felt at home in Michigan’s upper peninsula [sic] of lakes and forests. The peninsula ... resembled their departed homeland in many respects” and they “turned to the land, to struggle among tree stumps and stones, as their fathers and forefathers had done.”⁵⁸ Thus, for the settlers, the decades-long history of the ownership of the land, similarity between Finland and the UP, and “natural” connection to the land legitimize their presence in America and in the Great Lakes region in particular. For them, all of this makes the land theirs and consequently their home.

The Finnish American settlers in the texts are at times celebrated as heroic pioneers and civilizers of the region who clear the land and

triumph over the rugged landscape and other obstacles in the process. They are shown as coming to the allegedly wild unsettled land of the Great Lakes region, often even “discovering” it (as some of them see their immigrant ancestors not only as the first settlers, but also practically as the first people in the area) and “creating farms out of the wilderness” and “establishing a home” there.⁵⁹ The texts also emphasize that, besides building farms and homes, and carving livelihoods out of the wilderness lands, the newcomers bring along culture and civilization. Koskela’s and Laitala’s texts describe the settlers establishing Finn Halls with numerous cultural facilities and activities such as libraries and amateur theaters, starting co-ops and other businesses, turning a local crag into a ski hill, etc.⁶⁰ Damrell’s novel in turn pays attention to how their Finnish culture eventually got firmly enrooted in the Upper Peninsula and thus became involved in forming the unique regional culture. Overall, the texts mostly portray the Finnish presence in the area as a boon to the Great Lakes region. Finns are depicted as the people transforming the wilderness into cultivated and civilized land. This is in line with how the land-taking myth sees the settlers. It is also remarkable that, despite Finns and the Ojibwe in the texts having a good and even exceptional relationship, the Indigenous people are conveniently absent when it comes to the land, which is seen by the settlers as “no one’s, empty, wild,” and ready for them to take. Although it may be only one part of the story, most of the settler-generation characters really see the land and their role on it in accordance with the land-taking myth. So, this perceived emptiness of the wilderness lands follows the myth and the way the Indigenous people are usually treated in and by that myth.

Yet, on the other hand, the source novels and short stories are not uncritical of this myth. In portraying the Finns’ interactions with the region, they also offer a different approach to the land and land-taking that can be seen as deconstructing the abovementioned myth. This is especially true when considering the alleged noninvolvement of Finnish Americans in American settler colonialism and exploitation of nature. The concentration on the land and its central position in the texts draws attention to the fact that the characters’ interactions with it can be understood as settler colonialism. Land, territory, and access to land lie at the heart of settler colonialism, and territoriality is its specific irreducible element.⁶¹ Settler colonialism destroys to replace; the variety of ways and strategies of liquidation and erasure, such as renaming,

are used to eliminate Indigenous population, the original owners of the land, who stand in the way of precious resources.⁶² The colonial acts of discovery are often used as an excuse to claim Native territory.⁶³ At the same time, colonialism and migration can be connected, specifically in the process of settler colonialism. Early European settlers coming to North America were later followed by migrants moving to the areas where these first settlers had established their presence, and two histories were thus conflated to justify the migrants' presence.⁶⁴ Although the source texts rarely depict the Finnish Americans as deliberately destroying and erasing the Indigenous presence in the Great Lakes region as settler colonialism presumes, their interactions with the land still bear many typical features of settler colonialism.

This is noticeable in Koskela's novel. The text casually mentions the Finnish immigrant old timers participating or nearly participating in such projects of American colonialism as Cherokee land rush and building Union Pacific railroad, while the descendants of the Finns from the New Sweden colony are praised by a non-Finn for their being "among the leaders in the push westward from the Atlantic" as a compliment to Finnish Americans.⁶⁵ However, more specifically, (settler) colonialism and immigration come together in the novel in the plotline of the Sateenkaari forest, which is one of the central plotlines. The founding father of the Finnish community of Shadow Lake, Martti Mantyla, presumed to be one of the descendants of the Delaware Finns on his way west and the first Finnish settler in the area, stays and acquires the local forest, which eventually receives the Finnish name Sateenkaari (Rainbow).⁶⁶ In his last will he asks later settlers, immigrants from Finland, to preserve this forest for the future generations. Eventually, this causes a conflict among Shadow Lake Finns: while the local Finnish timber baron wants to get and cut down Sateenkaari for his profit, the benevolent Finnish farmers seek to protect the forest and leave it to the state to be used as a conservation area.⁶⁷ Thus, a reader may note that the fate of the forest is practically a Finnish internal affair: the Finnish settlers have discovered it and named it, and it is Finns who decide its future. While the novel briefly acknowledges the presence of the Chippewa in the area, the Indigenous people have no voice with regard to Sateenkaari, and their perspectives are not considered by the sides involved. This can be approached as an act of settler colonialism as Finns coming to region bring replacement and colonial erasure, albeit not deliberate. They give Finnish names

to the local places (besides Sateenkaari, the novel mentions the name Itä Perä (East End), used among Finnish American farmers to refer to their farmland), they use and exploit the local resources as they see fit, and they view the region as “theirs,” while the Indigenous people have no say in the matter. Moreover, the Sateenkaari forest can be seen as a monument to New Sweden, celebrated as a benevolent colony in Finnish American migration mythology. It commemorates the Delaware Finns and their legacy and can be read as symbolically linking the benevolent colony of New Sweden with the benevolent community of Shadow Lake (also called a Finnish “colony” in the text). This accentuates benevolent Finnish colonialism as the majority of the characters want to preserve the forest, not to destroy it, and the forest is ultimately saved at the end of the novel.

The topic of settler colonialism is more directly addressed in Laitala’s short stories, which openly tell about the role of Finnish immigrants in the dispossession of the Indigenous people. Early in the text, the local Ojibwe community has been forcibly relocated to the reservation just shortly before or after the arrival of the majority of Finnish American immigrants. These newcomers are by no means responsible for the relocation which has been done by the US authorities. However, the author does not hide the fact that they benefit from that relocation as they get the chance to acquire “their own land” they have dreamed of. Albeit inadvertently and/or unwillingly, Finnish Americans in the area are also shown as being involved in ruining the Indigenous way of life and erasing them. For instance, the immigrants in the 1920s are hired to construct dams, which among other things results in flooding out the wild rice, an important sustenance for the Indigenous people.⁶⁸ The short stories highlight how, while not done as a deliberate malicious act on the Finns’ behalf, they nevertheless replace the Indigenous presence in the area when former tribal lands with a destroyed Ojibwe village eventually become a place where the Finnish community is built. After the Indigenous people have been sent away to reservations, the newcomers successfully use the skills and know-how earlier learned from them to settle down in the region.⁶⁹ At times, it is practically a literal replacement: when a Finnish American boy discovers what he sees as an “Indian grave,” it proves to be a mass grave of immigrant miners.⁷⁰ This can be interpreted as a potent symbol of Finns replacing the Indigenous presence both on the land and in the ground of Minnesota. Laitala’s short stories constantly juxtapose the Indigenous

and Finnish relationship with the land. The former are removed from their ancestral land and homes, and “scattered throughout Minnesota and Ontario” by the government, and put to prison-like reservations.⁷¹ Even there the Department of Natural Resources and the Bureau of Indian Affairs deprive them of the rights to use the land (via hunting, fishing, logging, rice harvesting, etc.).⁷² Finns, however, are generally allowed to settle and live on “their own land” as they see fit. The Ojibwe are portrayed as being forbidden to connect to their tribal lands and thus devoid of stable identity and anchor, while the Finnish settlers are left alone to construct their identities on the said land. While Finns get their new home, the Indigenous people lose their home.

The three source texts (more deliberately in the fiction by Damrell and Laitala) also dispel another element of the land-taking myth—the especially careful attitude of the Finns to the land and nature in contrast to the US exploitation. Despite emphasizing the settlers’ “natural connection” to the region, the books also do not shun that they can (and often do) exploit and ruin the area. The texts address deforestation inflicted on the region by the Finnish workforce in the lumber industry, sometimes not only by hapless poor immigrant lumberjacks but also by wealthy Finnish American timber barons.⁷³ The “natural connection” and its know-how can be used by Finns just to exploit the local nature more ruthlessly than others. For instance, in the novel by Damrell, the second-generation Finnish American skilled outdoorsman Gus uses his talents for poaching and is notorious for allegedly “killing the last wolf in the U.P.,” and it is only the meeting with the Ojibwe that makes him change his ways after “years of predation and self-destruction.”⁷⁴

Overall, not all the books show land-taking as territorial acquisition from the displaced Indigenous people, whose ownership of the land is erased. Not all of them openly address the underside of the “taking the land” myth. Many elements of this myth are still present in the fiction in question, namely the theme of settling as “improving land,” bringing along culture and civilization, claiming “empty and wild land,” etc. While the Indigenous people may be treated with sympathy by the characters, they are still put aside by the settlers in the same way as US white society does, when it comes to land. However, the texts also draw attention to a clear advantage in terms of the land and its use that the Finnish settlers have over the original owners and inhabitants because of the mainstream US attitude. While, on the one hand, Finns

and the Indigenous people are shown as having much in common, on the other hand the texts illustrate that there is an important difference between them. Finns may face problems in the new country, but nobody prevents them from taking and using the land as much as they want, while the Ojibwe are not allowed to use their own land. However, in general the texts still feature the images of settler–Indigenous amity and reconciliation that, according to Penelope Edmonds, are so common in American history.⁷⁵

Conclusions

In Finnish American literature there has been (and to some extent still is) mostly silence about Finnish American settlers' interactions with the Indigenous peoples practically in the same way the Finnish migrant life writing stays silent on the matter (see [Chapter 8](#) in this volume).⁷⁶ Yet a close reading of literary texts can offer the opportunity to refocus, reframe, and reconceptualize Finnish experiences in North America. Ethnic and immigrant literatures often reinvent the past by creating an image of newcomers' history in their adopted land, at times idealized and whitewashed. Finnish American literature is not an exception. It is highly important to study what kind of image of Finnish Americans and their past (and present) these literary texts project. My analysis demonstrates that, on the one hand, the texts can be approached as reinforcing the Finnish–Indigenous myth. They feature perennial images and themes as well as familiar one-dimensional and/or glamorizing and sugarcoating stereotypes, such as shared lore and mysticism, sauna–sweat lodge similarity, shared special affinity with nature and woods, and, all in all, Finnish uniqueness and exceptionalism in their relationships with the Indigenous peoples. When they portray the interactions between the Finnish American and the Indigenous population, the novels and short stories usually bring to the forefront predominantly amicable relationship. They seemingly shun and hide the less pleasant side of the real history such as Finnish settlers also being complicit in the acts of American colonialism and the Indigenous dispossession. This is epitomized in the presence of two hardly congruous (yet somehow coexisting in Finnish migration mythology) myths in the source texts: the myth of a Finnish–Indigenous special relationship and Finnish exceptionalism, and the myth of taking the land. When it comes to the process of claiming the Great Lakes region as Finnish, the

local Indigenous peoples are portrayed as being conveniently absent, and the land is “empty and wild” for Finns to take.

Yet, on the other hand, the novels and short stories in question, at least to some extent, can be approached as also going deeper and beyond the familiar myths, and giving readers the opportunity to look at them from a different angle. This challenge to the myths is most deliberate in the fiction by Laitala and partly by Damrell, while rather inadvertent in Koskela’s novel. Overall, these three texts both reinforce and deconstruct these myths. For instance, while painting an amicable relationship between Finnish Americans and the Indigenous people, they can draw attention to the fact that only a handful of Finnish Americans have this special relationship, while the majority of Finns are rather indifferent to their Ojibwe neighbors and live their own lives without any significant contacts or interactions. So, this special relationship is depicted as far from universal. While the texts feature the myth of taking the land and Finnish settlers’ “natural” connection with it, the novels and short stories also do not hide that despite their special affinity with nature, Finnish American characters are as involved in exploiting and destroying the local nature and wildlife of the Upper Midwest as anybody else. In the texts, the settlers’ interactions with “their own” land and the process of turning the Great Lakes region into “Little Finland” can be approached as settler colonialism, replacement, and erasure, although the texts themselves may not necessarily present them as such. However, in my selection of fiction only the collection of short stories by Laitala openly and directly addresses the underside of the “taking the land” myth by showing where the settlers’ “own land,” allegedly empty and free to take, has actually come from, and demonstrating the role of Finns in the process of the Indigenous dispossession. On the whole, the multifaceted topic of the complex relationship between Finnish Americans and the Indigenous peoples, and land as represented in Finnish American literature deserves further study. Hopefully, my chapter will draw more attention to it. As it has shown, the Indigenous population, while not in the focus, are not missing entirely from Finnish American literature.

Notes

- 1 This chapter was made possible by generous support from the University of Jyväskylä.
- 2 Kettu, Seppälä and Koutaniemi, *Fintiaanien mailla*, 8, 40.
- 3 The YLE materials include but are not limited to the documentary *Fintiaanit* (2019) and a number of articles such as “Findians: The Story of Finns’ Distant Cousins” (2016) by Silja Massa and “Suomalaissiirtolaisia ja intiaaneja yhdisti metsä” (Forest United Finnish Immigrants and Indians) (2015) by Heidi Sommar.
- 4 Kettu, Seppälä, and Koutaniemi, *Fintiaanien mailla*, 14.
- 5 Kettu, Seppälä, and Koutaniemi, *Fintiaanien mailla*, 19.
- 6 The words Ojibwe or Chippewa are not used in Damrell’s novel, and the Indigenous characters are referred to as just “Indians” there, but, given it is mentioned that they come from the Watersmeet reservation (Lac Vieux Desert Reservation in Watersmeet Township in the Upper Peninsula inhabited by the Lake Superior Chippewa), it can be presumed from the context that these characters belong to the Ojibwe.
- 7 Damrell, *Gift*, 65.
- 8 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 25, 72.
- 9 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 117.
- 10 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 103, 139.
- 11 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 7–11, 13–14.
- 12 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 82; 89. As Brian W. Dippie demonstrates in his classic study *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (1982), such a perception of the Indigenous peoples as a “dying” or a “vanishing race” doomed to extinction has been persistent and widespread throughout the US culture, literature, and policy for centuries. It was used as a convenient justification for the Indigenous elimination and dispossession.
- 13 Damrell, *Gift*, 5.
- 14 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 9.
- 15 Damrell, *Gift*, 32; Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 92–93.
- 16 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 137.
- 17 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 140.
- 18 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 58–59, 92–93.
- 19 Damrell, *Gift*, 90.
- 20 Damrell, *Gift*, 90–91.
- 21 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 37, 62–63, 82.
- 22 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 54. Although the most significant dispossession of the Anishinaabeg happened throughout the 19th century with the USA and Canada involved, in the 20th century the Ojibwe in the Great Lakes region also experienced loss of the land and the white authorities’ efforts to erase their culture with such assimilation policies as boarding schools, land allotment, laws limiting the use of their land (for instance, prohibiting hunting and fishing, and imposing agriculture instead), etc. Mining and lumber companies hungry for the resources of the region as well as a number of construction projects such as dams also played their part in destroying the Indigenous way of life. For more

- information see Gagnon, *Story of the Chippewa Indians*, Norrgard, *Seasons of Change*, and Bellfy, *Three Fires Unity*.
- 23 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 46–47. In the first half of the 20th century Finns were actively involved in socialist and labor movement in the USA. This was particularly the case in the Upper Midwest where the immigrants from Finland were heavily concentrated in mining and lumber industries. They were active participants in labor strikes such as the 1907 Mesabi Iron Range strike, the 1913 copper-mining strike in the Upper Peninsula, and another strike on the Mesabi in 1916. As a result, the Finnish Americans as a whole ethnic group got a reputation of the “Reds” and dangerous political radicals, and many of them were blacklisted indiscriminately. For more information see, for instance, Kaunonen, *Challenge Accepted*; Kero, “The Social Origin”; Kostianen, “Politics of the Left and the Right.”
- 24 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 120, 174–75, 205.
- 25 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 201–02.
- 26 Damrell, *Gift*, 96, 108.
- 27 Damrell, *Gift*, 4–7, 30–31.
- 28 Damrell, *Gift*, 5, 116.
- 29 Damrell, *Gift*, 61–62, 70–71.
- 30 In Damrell’s novel, this invasion of the US society is in the form of the Department of Natural Resources’ restrictions as well as tourism and general commercialization of the “wilderness”.
- 31 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 139.
- 32 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 11.
- 33 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 17.
- 34 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 205–06.
- 35 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 206.
- 36 Damrell, *Gift*, 66, 89–90.
- 37 Damrell, *Gift*, 65.
- 38 Damrell, *Gift*, 53.
- 39 Damrell, *Gift*, 31.
- 40 Damrell, *Gift*, 90.
- 41 Damrell, *Gift*, 86.
- 42 Damrell, *Gift*, 90.
- 43 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 23.
- 44 Damrell, *Gift*, 31, 88.
- 45 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 120–21; Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 180.
- 46 From an early point in their history in the USA, Finns experienced the ambiguity of their racial identity as the immigrants were not conclusively considered to be white. In the John Svan case in 1908, mentioned in Koskela’s and Laitala’s books, such an uncertain “whiteness” of Finns was used as an excuse to deny citizenship rights to several Finnish activists after the Mesabi Iron Range labor strikes. Thus, like for many immigrant groups, for Finns it took some time and efforts to win their quest for “whiteness”. For more information see Roediger, *Working toward Whiteness*, and Kivisto and Leinonen, “Ambiguous Identity.”
- 47 Damrell, *Gift*, 28.
- 48 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 194.

- 49 All of this has obvious parallels with and ties to the US ideology of manifest destiny, which promoted the mission of remaking the “wild” lands of the west and also celebrated white pioneers’ efforts in bringing culture and civilization.
- 50 Johnson, “Finnish-American Literature,” 244–45.
- 51 Damrell, *Gift*, 66, 89.
- 52 Damrell, *Gift*, 116.
- 53 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 52; Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 43.
- 54 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 10.
- 55 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 45.
- 56 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 25, 67, 72.
- 57 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 72.
- 58 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 177.
- 59 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 178.
- 60 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 56–59; Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 85, 213.
- 61 Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 387–88.
- 62 Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 388.
- 63 Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism,” 390–91.
- 64 Hjorthén, “Transatlantic Monuments,” 116.
- 65 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 219, 19.
- 66 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 10, 19.
- 67 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 100, 174.
- 68 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 37, 47.
- 69 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 58–59.
- 70 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 59.
- 71 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 81, 83–84.
- 72 Laitala, *Down from Basswood*, 83–84, 172–74.
- 73 Koskela, *Welcome to Shadow Lake*, 10, 25, 269; Damrell, *Gift*, 63.
- 74 Damrell, *Gift*, 80, 91.
- 75 Edmonds, *Settler Colonialism and (Re)conciliation*, 19–23.
- 76 By literature in my chapter I mostly mean fiction.

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CHAPTER 10

Gustaf Nordenskiöld and the Mesa Verde

Settler Colonial Disconnects and Finnish Colonial Legacies¹

Janne Lahti

Suddenly the forest thins, and in a moment, the most grand and peculiar sight spreads itself before the eyes of the rider. We stand at the edge of a precipice. In the cañon wall directly facing us on the other side, in the depths of a high-vaulted grotto, a confusion of towers and walls rise up out of gravel piles. This is “Cliff Palace”²

Revealing his penchant for the dramatic, this is how Gustaf Nordenskiöld, a young and aspiring Swedish-Finnish scientist, narrates his arrival on the cliff dwellings at Mesa Verde, Colorado, in early July 1891 (Figure 10.1).

Reaching these old Puebloan (often referred to as Anasazi) ruins in southern Colorado, Nordenskiöld sees an opportunity for scientific discovery and potential fame. And he grasps it. He stops his world tour and sets up an excavation process for the summer, canvasses the area

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Figure 10.1: Cliff Palace, Mesa Verde, Colorado. Photo by Gustaf Nordenskiöld, 1891. Finnish Heritage Agency, VKK420:1. Released under CC BY 4.0. <https://www.finna.fi/Record/museovirasto.1E8D48A435C25E4B9B2D6EEDBE14ABE8>.

for more discoveries, and starts writing of his adventures and findings. Moving fast, Nordenskiöld hires workers to dig and prepares items for shipments to Sweden amid controversy and strife, as local settlers start questioning his actions.³ By the end of the year, Nordenskiöld had over 600 Indigenous artefacts and human remains removed overseas to Northern Europe. Most of those items remain in Finland today, in the collections of the National Museum. The museum did return approximately 10% of the articles to the Pueblo peoples in the US Southwest in September 2020.⁴

Son of the famous polar explorer Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, Gustaf was a Swedish citizen with Finnish parentage as both of his parents had been born on the lands that had become the Grand Duchy of Finland in the Russian Empire. His father had earned his doctorate at the Imperial Alexander University (present-day University of

Helsinki), before his anti-tsarist views made him a political refugee, forced to flee Finland to Sweden.⁵ Growing up in Sweden, Gustaf often visited his maternal grandparents, the prominent Mannerheim family, at Louhisaari, in the vicinity of Turku. By 1889, Gustaf had earned a bachelor's degree in mineralogy and chemistry at Uppsala University and was keen to follow in his father's footsteps. Both he and Adolf Erik wanted this. Gustaf prepared to start his doctoral studies and explored Spitsbergen in 1890, while his father eyed funding and government support for an expedition to Antarctica, with Gustaf in the lead. Gustaf was a mere 22-year-old with a bright future, but he was also battling tuberculosis. Seeking the popular travel cure in healthier climates for his illness, Gustaf embarked on a world tour, or what was supposed to be a world tour but was cut short by Mesa Verde. Unaware of what awaited him, Gustaf went for tourist look-see, a small detour from Denver on his way to San Francisco and Yokohama, Japan. But at Cliff Palace he made his tour into a scientific expedition. He studied and excavated Mesa Verde ruins for several months, writing and publishing of his findings and exploits in newspapers and scientific publications. He saw a void in the scientific and exploratory record and sought to fill it.

Gustaf Nordenskiöld was a transient outsider with seemingly no direct role in the settlement of the US Southwest and the dispossession of its Indigenous peoples. He was unconnected with the settlers or the Indigenous peoples on a personal level. Yet, his decision to excavate, build a scientific collection of Indigenous artefacts and human remains, ship it abroad to Northern Europe, and publish on his exploits globally did not exist outside the processes of settler colonial conquest and replacement. Indeed, Nordenskiöld tied in with settler colonialism in several ways, albeit his experiences and narratives showcase disconnects as much as connections. Importantly, his actions and the fate of his collection created a lasting connection for Finland with US settler colonialism. Yet, this is generally overlooked in Finnish discussions as Finland has sought to disconnect itself from being implicated in any kind of colonialism. In 2019, when the repatriation process was announced, media comments hurried to claim that Finland had nothing to apologize for as Nordenskiöld did not break any laws and had only acted as was customary at the time. In this manner the 21st-century Finland created distance from Nordenskiöld and the colonialism associated with his actions.⁶

Arguably, the 19th-century US settler conquest and takeover provided Nordenskiöld with access to these Ute, Pueblo, Navajo, and Jicarilla Apache lands. Mesa Verde is located on what used to be an overlapping borderlands zone of Indigenous sovereignty, but by 1891 the area was subordinated to US rule, with Indigenous peoples pushed to reservations and subject to forced assimilation.⁷ Settler colonialism thus made the lands available for Nordenskiöld's perusal. In other words, settler expansion had "tamed" the Natives so that European science could make sense of the region's past. Moreover, Nordenskiöld's excavation and knowledge production, in turn, was one of the many practices of settler colonialism, showcasing a form of Indigenous elimination. When writing about his exploits, the Indigenous past, and settler colonial present of the US Southwest, Nordenskiöld advanced conceptual displacement, the substitution of Indigenous pasts and knowledge with linear and modern settler histories. His excavations and writings propagated a disconnect of dead civilizations, vanishing Indigenous presents, and empty lands, ripe for settler colonialism to "discover" and make sense of. For Nordenskiöld, the settlers were greedy exploiters, eternal outsiders whose right to the Mesa Verde site was unfounded. Those who had once inhabited the Mesa Verde, Nordenskiöld viewed as static objects belonging in a dead past. While encountering contemporary Native peoples, such as Navajos, Utes and Hopis, or when identifying the latter (whom he called Mokis) as descendants of the Mesa Verde people, Nordenskiöld saw cultural deterioration and regression, severed connections, and vanishing relics of the past. In short, while writing of the Mesa Verde, he distanced from each other the contemporary Indigenous peoples, the history of the site and those who once occupied it, as well as the local white settlers. He also distanced himself, or actually put himself above all these others as a man of knowledge, a scholar operating on a global canvas of exploration and science.

This chapter tracks settler colonialism as a structure shaping individual experiences and mindsets as well as individual engagement with those settler colonial framings. It looks at disconnects and connections at various points in these settler colonial histories Nordenskiöld funneled and promulgated; in his narrations of Indigenous past and presents, in his views of local settlers, and between the processes of colonial looting and their ongoing connections. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section briefly outlines the transimperial world

of empires, where Gustaf operated as a man of science and exploration. The second and third sections focus on Gustaf's experiences and writings in the American West. I will address his movement in the Southwest and his views of local white settlers and Indigenous peoples, those narrations of discovery, and the ruptures shaping Nordenskiöld's taking and exporting of Indigenous artefacts in the name of science. The final section brings the story to the present day, on colonial amnesia, durabilities, and legacies, to the questions of repatriation and Finnish self-perceptions of historical colonial involvement and complicity.

Transimperial Lives of Discovery

By the 1890s exploration had become an obsession in the Western world. Used for national aims, it stood as a fiercely competitive enterprise used to measure the civilizational capacity and energy of nations and peoples.⁸ Exploration and science closely linked with national prestige and honor on the one hand and on personal narratives of adventure and danger on the other. The era's heroes were made by empire. They lived, breathed, and wrote empire. Older explorers like Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama assumed mythic status in the European mind, "serving," historian Dane Kennedy notes, "as the harbinger of Europe's triumphal entry onto the world stage."⁹ Each nation sought and produced their own explorers to honor and celebrate in books, monuments, and other commemorations. The British hailed James Cook, Richard Francis Burton, or David Livingstone, the Germans Alexander von Humboldt, and Americans began to revere Meriwether Lewis and William Clark. Explorers harbored iconic importance to the countries that claimed them as their own.

Coexisting with this ethos stressing competition between nations was the fact that explorers lived extremely transimperial lives. Their lived experience transcended the space of any single empire or nation, and they actively partook in interimperial circulations of peoples and commodities and transfers of knowledge production. They in fact functioned as mobile transmitters of knowledge. As they regularly crossed imperial boundaries they collected and distributed artefacts and wrote to global audiences. In this process, they were preoccupied, immersed, and contributing to what historians Christoph Kamissek and Jonas Kreienbaum have called the "imperial cloud." This "cloud" was a global shared reservoir of knowledge, practices, and norms that

was not bound to a single empire, and which drew from multiple professions, nationalities, and classes of peoples on the move in the world made of entangled, competing, and cooperating empires.¹⁰

Navigating this global order were people like Gustaf Nordenskiöld and his family, who aspired to personal, national, and global fame through discovery and scientific knowledge. Gustaf's motivation to utilize Mesa Verde stemmed from his aspiration to live up to his family reputation, expectations that must have been considerable as his father, Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, was still basking in a global spotlight. Adolf had gained fame with his successful maiden voyage of discovery through the fabled Northeast Passage in 1879–1880 and the subsequent world tour on his return to Sweden. This dramatic voyage, during which ten months was spent stuck in ice in the Bering Strait, was followed intensively in Sweden, in Finland, and around the world. It captured the attention and the imagination of peoples of different classes. The elder Nordenskiöld was considered a national hero, both Swedes and Finns making claims on his achievements. The king of Sweden made him a baron in 1880, while the following year he dined as an honored guest of the Russian tsar at St. Petersburg. He received numerous decorations and honorary memberships in international scientific societies, and in 1893 Adolf was appointed into the Swedish Academy.¹¹

Being an explorer and a man of science meant publishing an assortment of texts. It was what one did to build a reputation as a scientist as well as a public hero. All the famous explorers did so in the Victorian world. For example, the British explorer Richard Francis Burton put out as many writings as a small publishing house. His famed exploits to Mecca disguised as a Muslim pilgrim and his search for the source of the Nile resulted in thick volumes of texts.¹² Following his Congo expedition, Henry Morton Stanley also immediately released a volume of his exploits that was quickly translated into numerous languages, even in Finnish.¹³ Disseminating information and techniques of representation to global audiences was also Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld's book on the discovery of the Northeast Passage. Published in 1881, *Vegas färd kring Asien och Europe* (The Voyage of the Vega round Asia and Europe) became a bestseller, with translated editions released in several countries. Testifying to the practical value of exploratory publications, during his US trip Gustaf repeatedly asked his father to send copies of the *Vega* book to people who aided him in his Mesa Verde

excavations. Gustaf used his father's book as currency, as a gesture of appreciation and good will toward those helpful and useful to his own interests.

While the elder Nordenskiöld published extensively on his exploits, he instilled these ideas on his son too. Gustaf had already written a scientific report on his exploits to Spitsbergen right after his return from the Arctic islands in 1890. He knew that if he were to follow in his father's footsteps he needed to take advantage of any opportunities that presented themselves, even if by accident as in Mesa Verde. These ruins would ideally serve as vehicles for advancing his career, for making claims as a respectable scientist and as a Victorian man of knowledge and an explorer. They would be a stepping-stone for further exploits, a beginning for making a name for oneself and building a reputation in the world of exploration.

Gustaf took full advantage of his Mesa Verde excavations. He wrote different kinds of publications, serving different ends and catering to different audiences. Some of his personal letters were published in the newspaper *Stockholms Dagblad*,¹⁴ while his scientific articles were released in Swedish journals in 1892. His travel memoir *Från Fjärran Västern: Minnen från Amerika* by G. Nordenskiöld was also released the same year by a Stockholm publisher.¹⁵ It narrated day-to-day adventures in an exotic land of the American West, featuring Colorado and the Grand Canyon country of northern Arizona. It depicted Gustaf's personal encounters with nature and the Indigenous inhabitants of the area. A prolific writer, Gustaf wasted no time in releasing his major scientific opus in Swedish and in English in 1893, *The Cliff Dwellers of the Mesa Verde, Southwestern Colorado. Their Pottery and Implements*. Here Gustaf had come up with a meticulous, highly detailed, and well-illustrated monograph on the subject of his excavations that became the authoritative reference on the Mesa Verde cultures and remains much cited even today.¹⁶

In his writings, Nordenskiöld grasped for scientific authority and also tried to brand himself as an adventurer, entering a fabled destination wrapped in mystery. Gustaf's writings and the publicity surrounding his excavations installed Mesa Verde as a stop in the "imperial adventure circuit," to borrow terminology from historian Andrew Offenburger, that covered plenty of ground from African safaris and Egyptian pyramids, to lost treasures in Latin America.¹⁷



Figure 10.2: Gustaf Nordenskiöld, in Stockholm, 1887. Finnish Heritage Agency, HK19701231x:30. Released under CC BY 4.0. <https://www.finna.fi/Record/museovirasto.611A5362264B8C873F12F6B0F42A049A>.

Further participating in the global imperial culture of exploration, and promoting his findings and career, in 1892 Gustaf, together with his father, partook in the Columbian Historical Exposition in Madrid. Honoring the 400th anniversary of Columbus and his discovery of America, the exposition presented a massive collection of Americana, with over 250,000 pieces from dozens of nations showcased by their leading scholars. Gustaf went with his Mesa Verde materials: the photographs he had taken, artefacts, and the models he had built of the cliff dwellings. He left with a gold medal and a rising international reputation. Next year, the Chicago Columbian Exposition featured some of Nordenskiöld's Mesa Verde photographs and numerous items from the site, as well as miniature replicas of some of the houses. Nordenskiöld, however, did not attend.¹⁸ He had continued pursuing a PhD in mineralogy, devoting his time to research. He also got married in 1893 and started a family. All was cut short, however, by the return of

tuberculosis symptoms in 1894. Gustaf Nordenskiöld died on June 6, 1895, just shy of his 27th birthday.¹⁹

Discovery in the Wilderness

“It was my intention to spend about one week in Mancos Cañon. That week has now gone by, and I have decided to extend my stay to one or two months.” This is how Gustaf Nordenskiöld informed his father on July 2, 1891, of his changed plans. He wrote of having made a wonderful discovery of old abandoned dwellings “on a high cliff shelf,” upon which “I decided to excavate.” After spending two days “digging,” his findings were such that Gustaf changed all his travel plans in an instant. He hurriedly informed his father and asked for more money to hire a crew of diggers and buy equipment. He had decided to put together a world-class Mesa Verde collection of his own.²⁰

Upon entering the US Southwest, Gustaf Nordenskiöld positioned himself as an outsider. A temporary visitor, he was one of many who came to the Southwest for his health. Travel cure was common for tuberculosis at the time, promoting the healing effect of a change in climate. Whether it was the dry mountain air of Colorado, the high deserts of northern Arizona and New Mexico, or the oceanic warmth of California, all ranked high in the travel itinerary of tubercular patients. Traversing the Southwest on his way to San Francisco seemed like a logical choice for Gustaf’s health. But Mesa Verde was not part of his initial plans. Writing to his father on March 7, 1891, from Italy, Gustaf confirmed that he intended to head to Chicago, Denver, Yellowstone National Park, and San Francisco before embarking for Yokohama, Shanghai, Canton, and British India, and then heading home via Suez.²¹ When penning this, Gustaf was already on the road in Europe, seeking a cure first in Berlin, then in Rome. Next up were Naples, Marseille, Paris, and Antwerp, before sailing to New York.

Yet, there was another side to Nordenskiöld’s trip all along. Arriving to the US in May 1891, he expressed a keen interest in phosphate mining with an intent both to collect some samples and to write of his findings in South Carolina, Florida, and Kentucky (Mammoth Cave). Thus, excavation, collecting, and writing/publishing were part of Gustaf’s journey all along, reflecting his exploratory mindset and readiness. Mesa Verde simply magnified the scope of those possibilities. Leaving Chicago, Gustaf reached Denver in late June. He visited librar-

ies and museums, witnessing a Mesa Verde collection on display at the local historical society. Gustaf got interested, especially after talking with Alice Eastwood, a local teacher and future famed botanist, who had visited Mesa Verde. She also knew the local experts, the Wetherill family, from whose efforts the collection in Denver originated.²² The Wetherills were ranchers who had carved a side-business of escorting people to the Mesa Verde ruins and of gathering artefacts into collections. They had the indispensable local knowledge Gustaf could not do without. And they had the willingness to guide and provide labor that Gustaf's endeavor needed. As Gustaf departed Denver for Mesa Verde on June 30, he wrote to his father in Sweden that he went to look for "crania and artifacts."²³

Since the late 1880s, the Wetherills had dug at Mesa Verde, escorted people there, and worried that tourists would destroy the site. They had written several letters trying to interest the Smithsonian Institution in excavating the ruins and of turning the area into a national park, which would have made it one of the earliest national parks in the country. But their writings worked to little avail, possibly because of a lack of available funds.²⁴ Mesa Verde had already reached some public notice in the 1870s as members of Ferdinand V. Hayden's survey party visited some of the cliff dwellings.²⁵ The publicity that resulted from their writings, however, did not lead to increased scientific or government interest. Acknowledging previous efforts, while highlighting the unprecedented scientific caliber of his own engagement, Gustaf wrote to his father how these earlier scientists in the 1870s "noted the existence of some ruins, and that was about all," with only a few items being collected and some pictures taken. In all, those who had visited the ruins before him had come up with "a rather incomplete knowledge of the appearance and extent of these remarkable ruins," in Gustaf's estimation. For the most part, he continued, the collecting had been "handled only by cowboys and dilettantes." While the former had put together an impressive collection on display in Denver, Norden-skiöld further stressed the unprecedented nature of his diggings when stating that neither "the Smithsonian nor any museum in Europe has any collection from the cliff ruins of Colorado." He also emphasized that the earlier findings "have not been described in writing." Museums and writings, two hallmarks of public and scientific engagement with the past, were missing from Mesa Verde. Gustaf sought to stress the unused scientific potential of the ruins and wanted to make the

most of it when marketing his plans to his father. He also stressed that he would not sell any of the items he collected in the US, but would bring them home to Europe, for the honor of the scientific community there.²⁶ His was the kind of science that took from other people's lands, without permission or moral squabbles, and used it to the benefit of his personal and national aims. In short, it was very much what colonial science did.

Eager to move fast, Gustaf asked his father to hurry with sending more money so he could hire people and equipment to start the diggings in earnest. As he planned his moves, Gustaf's thinking connected a number of important "firsts": of scientific excavation, major collection in a major museum in Europe, and proper published academic studies. Starting the diggings in July 1891, he downplayed the recent visit to the ruins by the American author, traveler, mountaineer, and self-trained archeologist Frederick H. Chapin. Chapin had already published a popular article on the Mesa Verde in the *American Antiquarian* in 1890. By the time he wrote his main publication *The Land of the Cliff-Dwellers*, published in 1892, Gustaf certainly knew of Chapin and called one plateau of the ruins "Chapin's Mesa." Yet, he also referred to Chapin's earlier contribution as "a short paper," although the first to publish "any description of the more important ruins of the Mesa Verde."²⁷ So, while Nordenskiöld recognized Chapin, he did not consider his work to be of the same scientific pedigree as his own. Gustaf seemed determined in highlighting the uniqueness and superiority of his own efforts.

Gustaf Nordenskiöld went to work methodologically. He made site plans, penned voluminous notes, and organized the objects by numbering and naming them. His crew of diggers worked meticulously when going through the different cliff houses they were investigating (Figure 10.3). As Gustaf made sketches of the architecture and artefacts, his workers vigilantly excavated, in search of submerged treasures. Also, once having secured a camera, Gustaf took over 240 photographs of his findings, the excavation process, and the area.²⁸

As a scientist and adventurer, Nordenskiöld sought to find value and meaning in Mesa Verde as a treasure trove lost to time and disconnected from the surrounding settler society and its civilization. He narrates a discovery, a forgotten mysterious place, an out-of-the-way corner of the United States. The Mesa Verde ruins "lie in the wilderness, quite far from settlements of white men."²⁹ The place was dif-



Figure 10.3: Nordenskiöld's crew members, Alfred and John Wetherill, taking a break from excavation at Chapin's Mesa. Photo by Gustaf Nordenskiöld. Finnish Heritage Agency, VKK420:8. Released under CC BY 4.0. <https://www.finna.fi/Record/museovirasto.475104C583D82F7A729213401F127153>.

ficult to reach and out of the usually traversed paths. Gustaf further stressed the aspects of discovery. “There was no railway to the west from Durango,” he added, traversing by horseback and in a buggy, leaving behind several settlements and “their patches of cultivated ground.” In all, he, as a true explorer, had entered a massive abyss of canyons and plateaus, and extensive plains.³⁰ Evidently Gustaf felt the pull of a free and mobile life, of being out in the wilds and conducting explorations in these—he noted—“desolate places of the Far West.”³¹ He applied a similar rhetoric to the broader Southwest. Before heading

home to Sweden, Gustaf traversed to the Grand Canyon, narrating to his readers how he took a long trip on horseback “through this wilderness, only seldom visited by the white man.”³²

Vanishing Natives and Disruptive Settlers

“Nordenskiöld Imprisoned in America. A telegram from Colorado to New York Herald tells that the naturalist, candidate Kustaa Nordenskiöld, the son of the famed traveler, who is currently exploring the cave-dwellings on Indian lands in Utah, has been imprisoned for the theft of ancient artefacts.”³³ This is how a local newspaper in eastern Finland reported on October 9, 1891, as Gustaf and his Mesa Verde exploits quickly became global news.

Nordenskiöld entered the US Southwest just as the region was emerging from decades-long wars against independent Ute, Navajo, and Apache groups. The US had conquered the area through destructive campaigns targeting whole societies and their livelihoods. But by 1891 sovereign Indigenous groups no longer existed as all were forced to live in a state of US occupation.³⁴ Not only was Gustaf aware of these histories of violence around him; these notions of past adventure and mayhem shaped his views of the region and his own mission. He, for one, played with the idea of ongoing potential Indigenous savagery when writing half-seriously to his cousin that on his upcoming trip to the Indian country of Arizona in November, “I will be accompanied by a party of 5 men, so that my scalp remains relatively secure. For safety’s sake, I have gotten my hair cut quite short, so that the value of my scalp will be more problematic.”³⁵ Gustaf’s appearance on this trip reflected much the same. “Bright brass cartridges wrapped around our waists like belts, and large-caliber revolvers hung from our sides. Winchester repeater rifles slung by the saddles completed our weaponry.”³⁶ Exactly whom he thought he was up against is a mystery. Perhaps the Wetherills made their European quest more amusing by allowing Gustaf to live out his western fantasies.

When Gustaf saw contemporary Native Americans as dangerous savages, he made their present irrelevant, as people who only have meaning and importance in relation to past violence and wars. In this way, Gustaf excluded the Indigenous peoples of the area from the modern world. Their presence and futures hardly matter. In short, Gustaf did what most Hollywood films ended up doing some decades later:

keeping the Indians locked in the past. In the process, Gustaf painted them as a threat now ceased due to civilized efforts and men like himself. For example, as Nordenskiöld narrated stories of past violent clashes between Indigenous peoples and whites he gave the hostility of the local Indians as one of the reasons why no previous excavations had been conducted at Mesa Verde. He told his father that luckily “now they [the Indians] are quite docile,” as this allows him to dig at Mesa Verde.³⁷ Consequently, while at once exaggerating the dangers for the sake of thrills, Nordenskiöld also acknowledged that settler colonial expansion had created suitable conditions for his scientific endeavors. Settler expansion had already quelled the purportedly wild Natives so that European science could make sense of the region’s past.

While the United States sought to contain Native peoples in reservations within the federal system, the settler project typically depicted Natives as backward and timeless peoples, stuck in a premodern condition and destined to either vanish in the face of settler civilization or to assimilate with the help of the whites.³⁸ Writing in this framing, Nordenskiöld marginalized Indigenous voices and ontologies of place and space and replaced them with an authoritative settler voice, the voice of a European scientist. He saw contemporary Indians eventually disappearing, for example, when noting that “Like most of the North American tribes the Ute Indians are rapidly dying out, and form but the last remnant of a once great and powerful nation.”³⁹ While Gustaf painted the Indigenous peoples he met as ubiquitous others destined to vanish, he expressed typical settler colonial narratives built around the elimination of Natives and their replacement with settlers.⁴⁰

The trope of the vanishing Native was coupled with ideas of cultural deterioration, a fundamental disconnect between the peoples who had once lived at the Mesa Verde houses, before they were abandoned hundreds of years prior to Nordenskiöld’s arrival, and those Natives who now occupied the surrounding areas. Gustaf advanced the notion that the Hopis (whom he calls Mokis, a variant of the then popular term Moqui used by outsiders) were the descendants of those who had once lived at Mesa Verde, although he saw the condition of the Indians as a sign of regression. Like those at Mesa Verde, the Hopis had stone houses, albeit considerably poorer ones, in Nordenskiöld’s estimation. And they also showed skills in pottery, as had the residents of Mesa Verde all those centuries ago. But here too the Hopis were no match for their predecessors, Nordenskiöld rated.⁴¹ The notion of disconnect

is embodied in this deterioration. The Natives of Nordenskiöld's day proved far inferior to those who came before them at Mesa Verde, the connections between them being lost. This is also how settler colonialism works in practice. It not only claims the Natives will vanish, but belittles the "tamed" Native in the present in order to explain the substitution of the Native with the settler.

As Nordenskiöld made contemporary Indigenous people appear irrelevant and detached from their Mesa Verde heritage, it was the white settlers who proved to be his biggest irritation and obstacles. By summer's end, Gustaf had packed his first findings in crates and barrels and hauled them by wagon to Durango for shipment east and then overseas to Sweden. In September, Gustaf returned to Durango with another load of materials. Yet, now he heard that the first shipment had been impounded by local authorities and that the railroad refused to send this new batch. Next, he was arrested.⁴² The strife boiled down to the location of his diggings, removal of items abroad, and the question of human remains.

Trouble had brewed since August, when the federal Indian Agent for the Southern Utes had issued posters that called for a \$1000 fine for foreigners entering the reservation without a permit. Yet, Nordenskiöld quickly obtained a permit from a local army garrison, but it carried "the inconvenient addendum that 'this pass do not include any right of making excavations on the ruins,'" as Gustaf admitted to his father. Yet, Gustaf basically chose to ignore this stipulation restricting his activities and continued the excavations. He also became much more evasive. Gustaf explained to his father somewhat confusingly the exact times when he had been inside the reservation and when not, and what exactly he had permission to do there. Moreover, he assured his father that he had been promised by an "influential acquaintance" that he would not be bothered as long as "no ruins were destroyed."⁴³

Rushing to take as much as he could, Nordenskiöld continued to be ambiguous on locations of his excavation sites. In a letter to his mother before all the troubles began with the locals, he acknowledged that the site he was then digging "lies within an Indian reservation."⁴⁴ In reality, the reservation boundaries remained rather contested. The large Southern Ute reservation had been cut and reduced by settler gold rushes and treaties in the 1870s, with further land losses to settlers, allotments, and disputes active by the time of Gustaf's visit.

Meanwhile, locals fumed that Nordenskiöld was destroying the famous ruins, stealing as much as he could and taking it abroad. The settlers wanted him stopped. Gustaf wrote how locals “have begun to oppose my excavation” in ways “that makes it desirable for me to soon leave this area.” He scorned that settlers would rather let the local cowboys and miners, meaning amateurs in search of profit, dig as they pleased than have foreign scientists and explorers take anything.⁴⁵ In a letter to his cousin, Gustaf went as far as suggesting that some of the locals contemplated lynching him for stealing the ruins.⁴⁶

With hostile settlers closing in, Nordenskiöld painted his work as that of removing precious artefacts to safety from the pawns of the greedy and ignorant locals. With the help of powerful friends and diplomatic aid, Gustaf was swiftly released from jail, and by early October his case was dismissed in the local court. He had broken no laws as taking artefacts out of the country was not illegal.⁴⁷ Yet, his actions continued to irritate local settlers, especially as there was still the open question of human remains. When acquitted by the courts, some officials understood that Gustaf was not to keep any human remains for himself and to take them from the country. The Ute agent stated that there had been complaints on the matter from the Indigenous peoples too. Human remains proved the most sensitive matter, and Gustaf knew he was taking away the remains of the ancestors of those Pueblo Indians who continued to live in the area. Much earlier, the Wetherills and Chapin had already also witnessed Ute protests over the excavating of human remains from Mesa Verde.⁴⁸

Based on his actions and correspondence, Nordenskiöld chose to ignore these criticisms. He was determined to finish quickly and get his precious items “away from the claws of the Yankees,” as he wrote.⁴⁹ Gustaf’s inventory to his father from October 22 shows the presence of several skeletons and bones in his shipments, and he openly discussed gravesites and the well-preserved skeletons in his article published in 1892. His *Cliff Dwellers* book even had a whole appendix on the human remains he had excavated, with illustrations and all.⁵⁰ Moreover, when Gustaf was already back in Stockholm, the Wetherills apparently mailed him more human remains from Mesa Verde.⁵¹

In all, Gustaf Nordenskiöld took to Sweden an estimated 600–800 Mesa Verde items, sending out, in his own calculations, some 1,400 pounds of materials.⁵² On October 23, he expressed his satisfaction

with what he had pulled off: “My collections will travel ever so calmly home to Sweden, and everything is once again in the best of order.”⁵³

Colonial Heritage

“After more than 100 years in a museum in Finland, the ancestral remains of Native American tribes that once called the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde National Park home are coming back to Southwest Colorado.” Thus announced the local southern Colorado newspaper in October 2019, celebrating the homecoming of these remains precious to the Pueblo peoples. “The news has been lauded by Native American tribes, who can finally put to rest their ancestors who were disturbed all those years ago. And, it sends a message of hope that other remains out there, scattered across the globe, can one day return,” the paper continued.⁵⁴ A week earlier, on October 2, 2019, the US and Finnish governments had announced the return of Indigenous ancestral remains and artefacts from the Mesa Verde Collection at the National Museum of Finland. The announcement accompanied a presidential meeting between Donald Trump of the United States and Sauli Niinistö of Finland. It took close to 130 years for the return to happen, and even now actually only some 10% of the whole collection has been given back. This meant about 60 items, of which 22 were human remains.

Once back in Stockholm by New Year’s Day 1892, Gustaf Nordenskiöld used his Mesa Verde collection for preparing his publications and for the exhibition in Madrid. He wanted to place the items in a Scandinavian Museum, but no museum was interested in the purchase. So Gustaf faced a dilemma, especially as his trip had proven very costly and those debts needed to be paid. Herman Fritjof Antell, a wealthy Finnish physician, a collector, and friend of the Nordenskiöld family came to the rescue. He offered to provide funds with Gustaf’s collection as collateral. As Antell died soon thereafter in 1893 and had no offspring, the collection was left to the Finnish people, ending up with the predecessor of today’s National Museum (Finland was not independent until 1917).⁵⁵ There the collection stood for decades, usually in storage and only seldom on display. In 1991, the Finnish National Museum loaned some artefacts and photographs for the commemoration of the 100th anniversary of Nordenskiöld at the Mesa Verde National Park.

Much earlier than this, the actions of Gustaf Nordenskiöld had motivated the local white residents living in the Mesa Verde region to petition for a national park to preserve the site. Not only was the park established in 1906, as the seventh national park in the US, but during the same year the Antiquities Act became the earliest US legislation to regulate the removal of cultural heritage. Here too Gustaf Nordenskiöld had played a sizable role as a dangerous precedent on what could happen if sites remained unregulated. However, it would take until 1990 and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act for Native American tribes to have any legal rights regarding their own heritage and ancestral remains.⁵⁶

Sonja Salminiitty discusses how members of the Hopi tribe had begun the Mesa Verde repatriation claim process unofficially in 2015, but how communications halted as the Hopi contact, who was not an official representative of the tribe, grew impatient with the process, and the Finnish government advised the National Museum to stop communications. The matter was back on the table when the US government became active. As Salminiitty explains, after Presidents Trump and Niinistö agreed over the issue, meetings began in November 2019 between the US embassy people and curators from the National Museum.⁵⁷ Eventually, after some confusion and communication problems, human remains and burial items were returned to the Hopi-led Pueblo delegation, who buried them accordingly. This was the first formal case where Finland agreed to return human remains back to another country. It would not be the last. In 2021, the National Museum returned thousands of artefacts to the Sami peoples in the Arctic North, and one precious stone ruler symbol taken by Finnish missionaries from German Southwest Africa is due to head back to Namibia soon (two other stones have already been sent back earlier by the Finnish Missionary Society). Yet, the National Museum still has multiple collections originating from colonial expansions and times, from Russian Alaska, German Southwest Africa, the North American Plains, and the Belgian Congo, among other places. The colonial heritage of Finland as exemplified by these collections and the historical and present-day connections they carry remain unresolved.⁵⁸

Today the question of repatriation and reconciliation has become a global question, a matter of heated debate as more and more former colonized peoples demand the return of their heritage and history from the museums in the Western world.⁵⁹ This has also raised ques-

tions concerning colonialism and colonial complicity in Finland and other Nordic countries, where traditionally there have existed strong claims of Nordic exceptionalism, that colonialism was something that happened far away and proved insignificant for Nordic histories. There has been a kind of awakening from colonial amnesia, recognition that participation in or association with colonial practices of cultural looting and collection also involved Nordic peoples, including Finns and Finnish institutions. Adding a Nordic dimension to the understandings and discussions of global colonialism shows how colonial histories, heritage, and legacies are anything but uniquely national stories that only concern traditional great powers, such as Britain or France.⁶⁰

In many ways, the Nordenskiöld case has set the precedence and tenor for Finland. Yet, the public discourse surrounding the return of Mesa Verde items often looked the other way—noting how Nordenskiöld was a man of this times, did nothing illegal, that Finland is not guilty of anything, there is nothing to apologize for, that it was not really colonialism, or that at least Nordenskiöld was in fact a Swede not a Finn.⁶¹ While these are all complicated issues, with many nuances and viewpoints, denial does not help in understanding them.

Conclusion

“One of the most important goals,” writes the Indigenous historian Amy Lonetree, is “to assist communities in their efforts to address the legacies of historical unresolved grief by speaking the hard truths of colonialism and thereby creating space for healing and understanding.”⁶² While Lonetree is referring to the role of tribal museums in the US, her words carry an important message to the general debate on repatriation and decolonizing museums ongoing globally. We need to look hard at the difficult histories of colonialism, to comprehend the complex legacies stemming from past interactions of unequal power, and machination of hierarchies. We need to look at the historical processes of how different artefacts ended up in the Western museums. How did they get here? For what kind of purposes and under what kind of specific conditions of power?

Gustaf Nordenskiöld’s experiences and narrations both reflected and functioned in the kind of recalibration of geographical spaces that the settler invasion caused. The ruins provided him a lens to an exotic wilderness and to mythic past civilizations, as a canvas where he could

play out his fantasies of adventure and his scientific aspirations. When looking at how Nordenskiöld represented the land and its peoples and positioned himself in it as a white civilized explorer, we can see how he commented on and interacted with the settler colonial realities of the Southwest as he saw them. He positioned himself above it all, displaying a disconnect from both the settlers and the Native Americans when embracing Mesa Verde as a dead past. He depicted the contemporary Native Americans as dying relics of a more glorious past, a deteriorated form of Indigeneity when compared to those who preceded them at Mesa Verde. He also represented the local settlers as avaricious exploiters who did not value scientific efforts or understand Mesa Verde, who had no connection to it. A close reading of Nordenskiöld's writings shows one way that explorers and adventurers who entered a settler colonial terrain, and who were basically outsiders to the settler project, without a national stake or a personal intent on taking the land, nevertheless actively engaged with the settler colonial space, made claims to it, and reaped personal benefits from it. And they also left lasting legacies because of their engagement and actions. They did that because they wanted authority over some aspect of the land and its history.

Notes

- 1 This research was supported by the funding from Academy of Finland.
- 2 Nordenskiöld, "On Some Remarkable Ruins," 73. Pages 69–81 contain the reprint of this Nordenskiöld article, originally published in *Ymer: Journal of Svenska Sällskapet för Antropologi och Geografi* in 1892 (pages 3–11).
- 3 Unlike in Gustaf's times, today the ruins of Mesa Verde are a protected site as a national park, managed by the US federal government. See <https://www.nps.gov/meve/index.htm>.
- 4 For the Finnish government memo, see Ministry of Education and Culture, "Kansallismuseon Mesa Verde -kokoelmiin sisältyvien ihmisjäänteiden ja hautaesineiden luovuttaminen," August 7, 2020, <https://valtioneuvosto.fi/paatokset/paatos?decisionId=0900908f806cfd84>. On the return of these items in Finnish newsmedia, see Jukka Huusko, "Viimeinen matka Mesa Verdeen," *Helsingin Sanomat*, September 25, 2020, <https://www.hs.fi/ulkomaat/art-2000006647282.html>; Mikko Marttinen, "Donald Trump veti Suomen kansallismuseon historiallisen eleen osaksi vaalikampanjaansa," *Ilta-Sanomat*, September 17, 2020, <https://www.is.fi/ulkomaat/art-2000006639546.html>.
- 5 Blåfield, *Nordenskiöld*, especially 59–72, 145–60; Kalleinen, *Kuninkaan ja keisarin Nordenskiöldit*, 133–38.
- 6 See, for example, Veirto, "Suomi palauttaa 20 intiaanin jäänteet Yhdysvaltoihin."

- 7 On the Indigenous and colonial histories of this region, see Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land*; Brooks, *Captives & Cousins*; Jones, *Being and Becoming Ute*; Decker, *The Utes Must Go!*; Jacobs, *Engendered Encounters*; Montoya, *Translating Property*.
- 8 On exploration and empire, see Kennedy, *Last Blank Spaces*; Kennedy, *Reinterpreting Exploration*; Driver, *Geography Militant*; Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire*.
- 9 Kennedy, "Introduction," 1.
- 10 Kamissek and Kreienbaum, "Imperial Cloud," 166; Lahti, *German and United States Colonialism*.
- 11 On Adolf Erik Nordenskiöld, see Wråkberg, "A. E. Nordenskiöld in Swedish Memory"; Kalleinen, *Kuninkaan ja keisarin Nordenskiöldit*, 191–94; Blåfield, *Nordenskiöld*, 367–430.
- 12 Kennedy, *Highly Civilized Man*. On the vast volume of Burton's writings, see <https://burtoniana.org>.
- 13 Stanley, *Kongo, uusi vapaavaltio mustien maanosassa*.
- 14 Reynolds and Reynolds, *Nordenskiöld of Mesa Verde*, 61.
- 15 The first full English edition did not appear until 2010 (Nordenskiöld, *From the Far West*).
- 16 The original in Swedish *Ruiner af Klippboningar i Mesa Verde's Canons* came out in February 1893, with the English edition released a few months later.
- 17 Offenburger, *Frontiers in the Gilded Age*, 25.
- 18 Reynolds and Reynolds, *Nordenskiöld of Mesa Verde*, 117–19.
- 19 Reynolds and Reynolds, *Nordenskiöld of Mesa Verde*, 126–39.
- 20 Letter No. 15, Gustaf to his Father, Mancos, Colorado, July 2, 1891, in *Letters*, 29.
- 21 Gustaf to Adolf Erik, March 7, 1891, excerpts reprinted in Reynolds and Reynolds, *Nordenskiöld of Mesa Verde*, 41.
- 22 Soon after meeting Gustaf, Alice Eastwood departed to California where she made a career that included over 300 published articles and building the botanical collection at the California Academy of Sciences, in San Francisco.
- 23 Letter No. 14, Gustaf to his Father, Denver, Colorado, June 30, 1891, in *Letters*, 28.
- 24 Harrell, "We Contacted Smithsonian"; McNitt, *Richard Wetherill*, 36; Wetherill, *Wetherills of the Mesa Verde*, 128; Smith, *Mesa Verde National Park*, Chapter 2 https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/smith/chap2.htm.
- 25 McPherson and Neel, *Mapping the Four Corners*.
- 26 Letter No. 15, Gustaf to his Father, Mancos, Colorado, July 2, 1891, in *Letters*, 30; Letter No. 16, Gustaf to his Father, Mancos Valley, July 3, 1891, in *Letters*, 32; Letter No. 19, Gustaf to his Father, Durango, Colorado, July 29, 1891, in *Letters*, 37.
- 27 Nordenskiöld, *Cliff Dwellers*, 12, 49–50. The "short paper" refers to Frederick H. Chapin, "The Cliff Dwellings of the Mancos Canons," *The American Antiquarian* (July 1890). See also Chapin, *Land of the Cliff-Dwellers*.
- 28 Some of these photos have later been published as Gustaf Nordenskiöld, *Mesa Verde as Captured by the Camera of Gustaf Nordenskiöld* (Mesa Verde National Park, 1984).
- 29 Nordenskiöld, *From the Far West*, 3.
- 30 Nordenskiöld, *Cliff Dwellers*, 1–2.

- 31 Nordenskiöld, *From the Far West*, 3.
- 32 Nordenskiöld, *From the Far West*, 5.
- 33 *Savo-Karjala*, October 9, 1891, 4.
- 34 On US military conquest of the Southwest, see Lahti, *Wars for Empire*; Kiser, *Coast-to-Coast Empire*; Wooster, *American Military Frontiers*.
- 35 Letter No. 40, Gustaf to his cousin Karl, Mancos, October 23, 1891, in *Letters*, 63.
- 36 Nordenskiöld, *From the Far West*, 6.
- 37 Letter No. 15, Gustaf to his Father, Mancos, Colorado, July 2, 1891, in *Letters*, 30.
- 38 The literature here is voluminous. See Hoxie, *Final Promise*; Genetin-Pilawa, *Crooked Paths to Allotment*; Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*; Adams, *Education for Extinction*.
- 39 Nordenskiöld, *Cliff Dwellers*, 3.
- 40 In this Gustaf expressed similar views as did those Finns who came as actual settlers in North America. See also Chapters 2 and 6 in this volume.
- 41 Nordenskiöld, "On Some Remarkable Ruins," 80–81.
- 42 Reynolds and Reynolds, *Nordenskiöld of Mesa Verde*, 69–72. See also Letter No. 29, Gustaf to his Father, Mancos, September 9, 1891, in *Letters*, 51.
- 43 Letter No. 24, Gustaf to his Father, Navajo Canon, August 23, 1891, in *Letters*, 45–46; Letter No. 33, Gustaf to his Father, Durango, September 27, 1891, in *Letters*, 54–55. See also Lister, *Trowelling through Time*.
- 44 Letter No. 17, Gustaf to his Mother, Mancos, Colorado, July 15, 1891, in *Letters*, 33.
- 45 Letter No. 32, Gustaf to his Father, Mancos, September 19, 1891, in *Letters*, 53.
- 46 Letter No. 40, Gustaf to his cousin Karl, Mancos, October 23, 1891, in *Letters*, 63.
- 47 See Reynolds and Reynolds, *Nordenskiöld of Mesa Verde*, especially 72–81, for the official correspondence and maneuvering concerning Nordenskiöld's arrest and release.
- 48 Salminiitty, "Question of Repatriation," 40; Lister, *Trowelling Through Time*, 24–25; Smith, *Mesa Verde*, Ch. 2.
- 49 Letter No. 34, Gustaf to his Father, Durango, September 30, 1891, in *Letters*, 56.
- 50 Letter No. 38, Gustaf to his Father, Durango, October 22, 1891, in *Letters*, 61; Nordenskiöld, "On Some Remarkable Ruins," 78–79; Nordenskiöld, *Cliff Dwellers*, Appendix.
- 51 Reynolds and Reynolds, *Nordenskiöld of Mesa Verde*, 116.
- 52 Letter No. 41, Gustaf to his Father, Mancos, November 1, 1891, in *Letters*, 65.
- 53 Letter No. 40, Gustaf to his cousin Karl, Mancos, October 23, 1891, in *Letters*, 63.
- 54 Jonathan Romeo, "Artifacts Taken from Mesa Verde Are Coming Home," *The Journal*, October 8, 2019, <https://www.the-journal.com/articles/artifacts-taken-from-mesa-verde-are-coming-home>. See also Kevin Simpson, "More than a Century Ago, a European Visitor Took More than 600 Native American Remains and Artifacts from Colorado's Mesa Verde," *Colorado Sun*, October 10, 2019, <https://coloradosun.com/2019/10/10/mesa-verde-remains-nordenskiold>.
- 55 Reynolds and Reynolds, *Nordenskiöld of Mesa Verde*, 155–56; Koivunen, *Eksootiset esineet*, 139–41.
- 56 Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader*; McKeown, *In the Smaller Scope*.
- 57 Salminiitty, "The Question of Repatriation," 42–44.

- 58 Maria Tolsa, “Suomi palautti Namibiaan pyhiä kiviä, mutta Kansallismuseossa on yhä arvokas kokoelma siirtomaa-ajoilta – ‘Suomessa on tahto luovuttaa niitä,’” December 1, 2021, <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-12210842>.
- 59 Hicks, *Brutish Museums*; Procter, *Whole Picture*; Colwell, *Plundered Skulls*; Mihesuah, *Repatriation Reader*.
- 60 On current discussion, see Höglund and Andersson Burnett, “Nordic Colonialisms and Scandinavian Studies”; Keskinen, “Intra-Nordic Differences”; Koivunen and Rastas, “Suomalaisen historiantutkimuksen uusi käänne?”; Kullaa and Lahti, “Kolonialismin monikasvoisuus.”
- 61 Ulla Veirto, “Miksi23-vuotiasuomalainen tyhjensi Mesa Verden intiaanien haudat – Miten vainajat päätyivät Suomeen ja tehtiinkö siinä rikos?” February 29, 2020, <https://www.apu.fi/artikkelit/miksi-23-vuotias-suomalainen-tyhjensi-mesa-verden-intiaanien-haudat-miten-vainajat-paatyivat-suomeen>; Huusko, “Viimeinen matka.”
- 62 Lonetree, *Decolonizing Museums*, 5.

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Afterword

Concurrent Events and Entanglements in a Nordic–American Borderland

Gunlög Fur

In 1898, Waguessee (as his name was rendered in the Swedish-language press), a Chippewa (Anishinaabe) man from Mille Lacs reservation in Minnesota, sued Olof Johnson, a Swedish settler, to get back 70 acres of land on the reservation that he claimed that Johnson had illegally settled. Johnson had taken up a homestead with permission from the government but Waguessee, according to the lawsuit, owned that land and had lived on it with his family since 1882 and they had erected a house and planted crops on the property. The Interior Secretary, Cornelius N. Bliss, was reported as stating “that Indians who live together in tribes and as such have special rights, have no rights to take up land as individuals.”¹ Newspapers noted concern that other Indigenous people would challenge Euro-American settlements on the reservations.²

Waguessee’s action came at a time when Indigenous nations were under extreme government pressure to assimilate and give up land and this coincided with peaks in the streams of migrants coming from the

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Nordic countries. For these new immigrants, land no longer appeared as abundant as it had only three or four decades earlier and many took advantage of the provisions of the legislation known as the Dawes Severalty Act, which when passed in 1887 began making land available for settlement within the bounds of Indian reservations. The Act, named after Senator Henry L. Dawes, initiated a process of allotting land individually on reservations (it was also known as the General Allotment Act), which served the dual purpose of encouraging Indigenous people to assimilate into the United States and to free up what was considered surplus land for homesteading.³

The Dawes Act and its subsequent amendments became a powerful tool for the disintegration of remaining Indigenous held land in the United States and created the conditions for scores of Nordic immigrants to become neighbors and sometimes competitors with various Indigenous nations across the country. As Karen V. Hansen has shown when discussing the Spirit Lake Dakota reservation, the opening of land led Scandinavians, primarily Norwegians and Swedes, to take up homesteads. Through the lens of entanglements rooted in land, she reveals both American Indians and Scandinavians as neither only victims nor perpetrators in a context of inequalities shaped by the racial-ethnic division, leading to enduring involvement and complicity.⁴ Hansen's continued work to identify homesteading on Indian reservations and my own initial investigation have revealed several hundreds, if not thousands, of Nordics who participated in the lotteries that initiated settlement on reservations across the continent.

I have spent several years unearthing encounters and entanglements between primarily Swedish immigrants and Indigenous people in North America, arguing that such relations had consequences both for dispossession of Indigenous peoples from land and homes and for a concurrent ethnic home making, to borrow literary scholar Orm Øverland's term.⁵ The brief note on Waguessee in the Swedish American press has come to light due to the digitization of the Swedish-language press and demonstrates how new technologies when wedded to novel approaches in scholarship will enable different stories of settler colonialism than the ones previously known.⁶ Predominantly, histories of Nordic emigration to North America have presumed that migrants arrived to settle land that was already emptied and that therefore they were not involved in the process of dispossession of Indigenous peoples that characterized the establishment of the United States and

Canada. *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America* challenges this perception by approaching settlement and migration from many different directions, representing the first effort to collect scholarship on Nordic involvement in settler colonialism in the Americas and as such it is most welcome. It is about time we complement the prevalent narratives of Nordic laudable efforts to carve out a new future in America despite hardships and against odds, with narratives that demonstrate how Nordics also forged new identities, contributed to settler colonial narratives, and actively took advantage of and became beneficiaries of structures that dispossessed Indigenous peoples, supplanting their rights to lands and subsistence.

These interactions occurred in a larger borderland of transatlantic encounters and so influenced passages back and forth across the Atlantic of people, objects, and ideas and perceptions. In the process, perceptions became lodged in other contexts and conversations and adapted to other circumstances. Thus, Swedish sports teams took on Indian mascots and it became common sense for their fans to argue that they extolled the masculine virtue and prowess of Indigenous warriors through such logos. When subsequently mascots have been challenged and American Indians have exposed them as derogatory, sports teams have found it necessary to change names and alter logos. This has resulted in massive protests from fans who argue that the team's name and mascots are part of their culture.⁷ In other forms of contemporary appropriation, certain rightwing groups in both Sweden and Finland express fear for the extinction of Swedish and Finnish people by reference to American Indians, such as when Swedish national socialists claim that the country is facing an "irreversible development threatening to end the history of our people like that of North American Indians," or when a group of protestors said that they were now the "Indians of Finland" when in 2015 a trickle of asylum seeking refugees from Syria began to arrive.⁸

That is why I think tying these wide-ranging and disparate connections together in a volume like this one is so important. Dag Blanck and Adam Hjorthén have recently pioneered the conceptualization of a Swedish-American borderland to revitalize and capture the broad nature of ongoing research on relations between Sweden and North America. They describe this approach as the study of:

physical, social, and cultural spaces. It deals with life along borders and boundaries of the expanding American empire shaped by settler colonialism and Indigenous relations, it investigates cultural and religious dimensions in social interactions, and it addresses how patterns of transatlantic exchanges and entanglements have been shaped by a range of factors, including capitalism, consumerism, and geopolitics.⁹

This approach seems to me to saturate *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America*. And the borderlands concept surely stretches to include not just the United States but the Americas at large as perceptions, places, things, and relationships that are so much a part of Finnish or Swedish history, just as Finns and Swedes participate in shaping and being shaped by the conditions of the double continent.

This book adds significantly to the now-growing output of articles and books that engage with the concurrent and entangled histories, as I have called it, of Nordic migrants and societies and Indigenous nations and territories, and it is the first to consistently bring settler colonialism to bear on a range of settlement contexts.¹⁰ At first glance, it may appear odd that such an initiative would focus on Finns. After all, much larger numbers of Norwegians and Swedes followed the migration flows across the Atlantic, and they did so earlier than most Finns, with the notable exception of those who traveled to New Sweden in the 17th century. However, this collection is a testament to the Finnish academic endeavor to sustain and deepen research on the world beyond Finland. North American studies in Finland has nurtured intellectual exchanges with scholars in the United States and Canada through a Fulbright chair and the Maple Leaf and Eagle Biennial Conference. Similarly, there is a long tradition of Finnish research on Latin American and Caribbean history, particularly with a focus on Indigenous peoples.¹¹

To those unaccustomed to thinking of Finns in relation to colonialism, this intervention into the history of Finnishness may appear unwarranted. After all, Finland did not establish colonies or settle distant lands in large numbers. Yet, as this volume amply demonstrates, Finns had ambitions to settle and became settlers in the Americas, and these experiences impacted imagination, politics, literature, settlement practices, and Indigenous people in a variety of ways. Lives in the past were not lived in isolation, any more than they are today. The arrival of Finns, among the great multitude of immigrants to the

American continent, sent shock waves across Indigenous communities and nations and fundamentally altered conditions, landscapes, and possibilities. Polish historian Ewa Domańska, in commenting on the ever-repeating cycle of conflict surrounding us, writes that the “history of progress is the history of violence.” As Domańska phrases it, “I have to accept that what Europeans cherish as civilization and progress, for non-Europeans (especially indigenous groups) translates into genocides, ecocides and epistemicides.” This intervention into the history of Finnish involvement in settler colonial strategies across the Americas is not only important because it addresses a lack of awareness of how immigrant home making involved a violent removal of Indigenous others but it is also relevant as an examination of “real and imaginary relationships that cross, challenge, and redefine” the space of the transatlantic borderland.¹²

This volume, then, offers encouragement to deal with concurrent events and histories occurring in diverse spaces and timelines.¹³ It builds on and strengthens findings from other Nordic and European contexts and contributes to fleshing out how a settler colonial understanding of the world influenced the politics and ideas activated in nation and identity building in Nordic spaces. It would be worthwhile investigating across the Nordic region what it meant that prominent labor leaders, such as Oskari Tokoi in Finland, Louis Pio in Denmark, Markus Thrane in Norway, and August Palm in Sweden, spent time in the United States and fashioned arguments for a version of socialist politics with inspiration from this time in exile, while at the same time expressing agreement with and understanding of settler colonial dispossession of American Indians.¹⁴ Museum collections in all the Nordic countries contain objects of great value and antiquity that are now coming under scrutiny, as requests for repatriation of collections multiply. In some cases, they reveal deeply traumatic histories, such as when the bodily remains of White Fox, who died in Göteborg while visiting the Nordic countries in 1874 and whose remains were displayed at the Anthropological Exhibition in Sweden in 1878–1879, were finally returned to the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma. In others they offer possibilities for mutual engagement and learning across the Atlantic, and in some instances the return of objects follows only after long searches for objects of spiritual significance.¹⁵

As so many others, I am heir to a small piece of the seemingly unstoppable swelling of emigrants moving west across the North

American continent. My grandfather and his brother worked their way west from Boston to Minnesota in the early years of the 20th century. Perhaps they ended up laboring on farms that had been carved out of Ojibway or Dakota reservations. We do not know other than that they labored as farm hands, as they had in Sweden, before my grandfather had to return home upon the death of his father. He did so with sufficient savings to set him up rather comfortably, while his brother remained and eventually became an American citizen. Both benefited from the relative advantages of being Swedish and thus considered white in the racial hierarchy of the US.

In 2022, the Swedish Emigrant Institute opened a new exhibition on Swedish emigration to North America. The oldest and best-known institution devoted to the large migration movements from Sweden, the SEI included an exhibit through which generations of schoolchildren and tourists had been guided toward an understanding of the hardships, perseverance, and genius of the many Swedes who had been pushed or pulled toward American shores in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This exhibit was in sore need of renovation. I was asked to contribute to this new version and it now includes one entire wall that prominently displays maps, images, and text describing how settler colonialism, in which Swedish emigrants were included and implicated, dispossessed American Indigenous peoples from their land, subsistence possibilities, cultures, and languages. The prominence of the display represents a fundamental change from generations of portrayals of emigrants as arriving to “empty land” and “virgin soils.”

I would like to think that this display, as this book, does justice to migrants and dispossessed peoples on both sides of the Atlantic and that our work as scholars, to illuminate the entanglement of the histories of progress with histories of violence may contribute to a more honest, just, and factual understanding of our joint and concurrent past.

Notes

- 1 *Svenska Folkets Tidning*, April 27, 1898.
- 2 *Svenska Monitoren*, April 22, 1898; *Svenska Amerikanska posten*, April 5, 1898.
- 3 Hoxie, *Final Promise*.
- 4 Hansen, *Encounters on the Great Plains*.
- 5 Øverland, *Immigrant Minds*; I specifically outlined this line of research in Fur, “Indians and Immigrants.”
- 6 <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=swedish+american+newspapers&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.
- 7 <https://hockeynews.se/articles/21072>; <https://hockeysverige.se/2020/07/13/gunlog-fur-om-frolunda-indians-logga>; <https://www.gp.se/sport/ishockey/glenn-hysen-och-lasse-kroner-om-frolundas-indianbesked-1.34241532>.
- 8 Poohl et al., *Organiserad Intolerans*, 28; A small item in *Dagens Nyheter* noted protests against a bus arriving with refugees in Northern Finland.
- 9 Blanck and Hjorthén, “Introduction,” 8.
- 10 Hansen uses the perspective in her work on the Spirit Lake Reservation, as does Anders Bo Rasmussen in his recent *Civil War Settlers*.
- 11 Pärssinen, “Latin American Studies.”
- 12 Domańska, “Wondering about History.”
- 13 Brydon, Forsgren, and Fur, *Concurrent Imaginaries*.
- 14 Similar to Tokoi in this volume, Anders Bo Rasmussen finds that Pio and Thrane both spent time in the US and both expressed a lack of understanding for the exploitation of Indigenous peoples, but rather showed support for the policy of Manifest Destiny. Rasmussen, paper at Nordic Historical Congress, Göteborg 2022.
- 15 Björklund, *Hövdingens totempåle*; Jibréus, *White Fox’ långa resa*; Naum, “Souvenirs from North America”; Fur, “Captain Jack’s Whip”; <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/18/world/americas/indigenous-artifacts-sweden-museum.html>.

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F*innish Settler Colonialism in North America* reinterprets Finnish experiences in North America by connecting them to the transnational processes of settler colonial conquest, far-settlement, elimination of natives, and capture of terrestrial spaces. Rather than merely exploring whether the idea of Finns as a different kind of immigrant is a myth, this book challenges it in many ways. It offers an analysis of the ways in which this myth manifests itself, why it has been upheld to this day, and most importantly how it contributes to settler colonialism in North America and beyond.

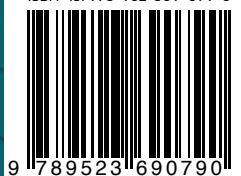
The authors in this volume apply multidisciplinary perspectives in revealing the various levels of Finnish involvement in settler colonialism. In their chapters, authors seek to understand the experiences and representations of Finns in North American spatial projects, in territorial expansion and integration, and visions of power. They do so by analyzing how Finns reinvented their identities and acted as settlers, participated in the production of settler colonial narratives, as well as benefitted and took advantage of settler colonial structures.

Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America examines the diversity of roles, experiences, and narrations of and by Finns in the histories of North America by employing the settler colonial analytical framework.

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