



## Indigenising Nordic Feminism—A Sámi Decolonial Critique

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In this chapter, I will discuss how to make space for Sámi feminist perspectives, within both Sámi research and Nordic feminist research.<sup>1</sup> This includes an understanding of how the decolonisation of both research and the feminist movement must become part of the theoretical debate on how knowledge is produced, how some voices get to participate while others are marginalised, and how this is tied to colonial structures of both the past and of present-day Nordic societies. I argue that a key reason why Sámi perspectives on Nordic feminism are important is that, while topics such as racism have been a part of feminism in the Nordic countries for a long time, within both the feminist movement and feminist research, Sámi perspectives have been almost invisible. As a Sámi feminist and researcher,

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The original version of these chapter was revised. The correction to this chapter can be found at [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53464-6\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-53464-6_13)

<sup>1</sup> I want to thank the Indigenous writing group at the University of Washington, USA, organised by Jean M. Dennison and Josh Reid, for insightful comments on this chapter, in addition to their generous hospitality while I was a visiting scholar at that institution.

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I see the need to include Sámi feminist voices to a greater extent in both research and activism, and through this to address how Sámi women today are deeply embedded in multiple layers of colonialism and patriarchal structures that continue to affect both research and activism.

The Sámi are a Finno-Ugric Indigenous people living in Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia, and the only recognised Indigenous people in Europe. Traditionally, the Sámi have pursued a variety of livelihoods, such as reindeer herding, fishing, hunting and farming, but are now to a great extent highly educated and urbanised. From being considered a primitive and marginalised people, they are now moving towards a cultural, linguistic and political assertiveness, with Sámi institutions such as the Sámi Parliaments, Sámi University of Applied Sciences and Sámi media. While there is a tendency for the term “Indigenous” to be linked to a conqueror logic related to “who came first” to a territory, it is important to note that Indigenous is usually defined in terms of a specific relation to a state, not as “the first inhabitants”. While there have been many different theories about the migration routes, culture and genetic makeup of the early inhabitants of the Nordic countries and the origins of the Sámi people,<sup>2</sup> this is not really very relevant in this context. The relevant history here is the early interactions between Sámi and Nordic people before the Nordic states were established, and the relationship between the Sámi people and these states today.

Theoretical debates regarding colonialism in the Nordic countries have mostly been concerned with the cultures and societies of former colonies in non-European territories, while the Nordic countries in general have presented themselves as outsiders to colonial power relations (Mulinari et al. 2009; Wekker 2016). This rose-tinted self-image of the Nordic countries as being “the good guys” in the world conceals the fact that these countries have taken part, and continue to do so, in colonial processes through cultural, political, material and economic ties to the Western world, and have played an active role in slave colonies, as well as the colonisation of Sápmi. As the Sámi scholar Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2015) points out, the colonisation of Sápmi was for a long time considered to be a reflection of unequal power relations, of the people being subjugated by culturally stronger peoples and overrun by modern society as an “inescapable fate”, more than “real” colonisation.

<sup>2</sup>For more information about the early history of the Sámi, see for example Hansen, Lars Ivar & Bjørnar Olsen (2014). *Hunters in Transition: An Outline of Early Sámi History*. Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers.

An important question in this chapter is what a decolonial critique of Nordic feminism is from a Sámi perspective, and how this is articulated in the Nordic countries today. Decolonisation is a relevant debate in this context, and describes the ongoing theoretical and political processes related to the understanding of the impact of colonialism on Indigenous people, including colonial expansion, genocide and cultural assimilation. Above all, it is a concept that is often used to show how colonisation is not an unfinished business, but something that continues to privilege non-Indigenous voices (Smith 2012 [1999], 25).

Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz (2018) analyse the Indigenisation of academia through three concepts: *Indigenous inclusion*, which means increasing the numbers of Indigenous individuals in academia; *reconciliation indigenisation*,<sup>3</sup> which means creating common ground between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ideals, creating a new broader consensus on how Indigenous and European-derived knowledge should be reconciled; and lastly *decolonial indigenisation*, which involves a fundamental reorientation of knowledge production based on balancing power relations and transforming the academy completely (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018, 218–219). These three concepts must be seen not as separate processes, but as different stages in the reorientation of the power balance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. These concepts are also relevant when discussing Indigenous perspectives within both Nordic feminist academia and the feminist movement, because they show us that a decolonial critique within Nordic feminism must involve more than just the inclusion of marginalised voices; it must also include a complete transformation of feminist knowledge production and activism.

Decolonising and Indigenising Nordic feminism is also something that involves a transformation of both Sámi activism and Sámi academia because feminist Sámi voices have often been silenced (Eikjok 2000; Kuokkanen 2007). A decolonial Indigenisation of Nordic feminism will therefore also be crucial for Sámi society as a whole, because silencing women's issues risks silencing the ways in which "patriarchal and colonial norms have been entrenched in Indigenous communities" (Kuokkanen 2015, 283). As Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck and Angie Morrill point out, the feminist concerns of white women, women of colour, and Indigenous

<sup>3</sup>Here it must be noted that truth and reconciliation commissions have started working in Norway, Sweden and Finland, and that the discourse of reconciliation will no doubt become increasingly important in the years to come.

women often differ and conflict with one another. The issues that Indigenous women face must be seen in relation to the context of land and settler colonialism. Indigenous feminism must therefore be solved via decolonisation and sovereignty, not just parity (Arvin et al. 2013, 10).

The issues of Sámi women can therefore not be separated from the settler colonial logic that all Indigenous people face. While colonialism is often understood as taking control of territories and resources, the logic of settler colonialism, according to Patrick Wolfe (2006), is the elimination of Indigenous people. By elimination, Wolfe does not necessarily mean liquidation, but also includes a variety of ways by which Indigenous people are erased, for example through forced assimilation policies, whereby Indigenous people have been forced in the past and present to forget their languages, traditional knowledge, societal structures and other cultural elements. From this perspective, colonialism is understood as a structure, not an event, that replaces Indigenous people and their societies with the dominant culture. We also need to take into consideration how colonisation impacts the lives of Sámi women, and how female Sámi voices have been excluded in both the past and the present.

#### FEMINISM AND ITS RELEVANCE TO SÁMI DECOLONISATION

I will now discuss how Sámi feminist activists have been crucial in Sámi activism, and how this in turn can be understood as a way of fighting against the settler colonial logic of elimination (Wolfe 2006). As I have already discussed, the inclusion of Sámi perspectives can be understood through the three concepts of Indigenous inclusion, reconciliation indigenisation, and, lastly, decolonial indigenisation (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018, 218–219). These concepts are also relevant when talking about activism, because we need to consider how Sámi voices are included in both Sámi activism and feminist activism, and in what ways. While individuals may be included, this does not necessarily mean that their perspectives are included in a way that involves balancing power relationism, and a fundamental conceptual and ontological reorientation that includes Sámi women's perspectives.

Over the last few years, there has been increasing attention paid to feminist issues in Sámi society, by researchers, activists and the mainstream media. An example is the speech given by Liisa-Ravna Finbog at the Women's March in Oslo on 8 March 2019, the first ever official speech at this march given by an Indigenous woman. The Women's March in Oslo

is an annual event that in 2019 attracted around 14,000 people. This is a good example of how young Sámi women are claiming space in the mainstream Nordic feminist movement.

However, Sámi women's activism is not new at all. As early as 1910, the Sámi pioneer Elsa Laula Renberg (1877–1931) organised the Sámi women's organisation Brurskankens Kvinneforening, which launched the Sámi convention on 6 February 1917, a date that is celebrated today as the Sámi National Day. Renberg (2003 [1904]) was the first published female Sámi author, with her text *Inför lif eller död? Sanningsord i de lappska förhållandena* (Facing life or death? Words of truth in the Lapp situation) that dealt with a broad range of issues, such as rights to land and water and assimilation and educational opportunities for the Sámi people. For Renberg, cooperation between Sámi people in all countries, particularly Sámi women, was crucial for the Sámi movement (Bremmer 2012, 49). The invitation to the convention in 1917 thus actively included a special ruling that asked for Sámi women to be present (Bremmer 2012, 50).

We can thus say that women's organisations have been an important part of Sámi activism all along. Sámi women were heavily involved, for example, in activism during the period of the so-called Alta conflict during the 1970s and 1980s, a series of protests concerning the construction of a hydroelectric power plant on the Alta River in Finnmark in Northern Norway.<sup>4</sup> The fight against Norwegianisation, neo-colonialism and the struggle for land and water became a crucially important part of Sámi activism during the 1970s and 1980s, with the Alta controversy being one of the most important struggles at the time. According to Beatrice Halsaa, Sámi feminists at the time therefore made an active choice to set aside their feminist agenda for the greater cause (Halsaa 2013). But is this the whole truth? Or does it involve too narrow a definition of Sámi feminism that does not take into account the logic of the elimination of settler colonialism, whereby Sámi feminism must always be seen in relation to the survival of the Sámi people as a whole? We can see traces of how Sámi women defined themselves in relation to feminist issues through how they were represented within the ethno-political movement during the period of the Alta conflict. Sámi women were heavily represented in the ethno-political

<sup>4</sup>The most important protests were the activism at the construction site itself, with activists setting up a camp and blocking the machines, the hunger strikes outside the Norwegian Parliament in Oslo, and the occupation of the Prime Minister's office by a group of Sámi women.

movement in the 1970s and 1980s as being “strong” and “less repressed” than other Nordic women. This developed from a notion of Sámi society as more matriarchal than the patriarchal Norwegian society (Bremmer 2012, 78).

We see that the ethnopolitical movement of the 1970s and 1980s made it difficult to mobilise around feminist struggles. While some feminine symbols were used in the movement, these symbols gave the focus on women a rather instrumental character. We can thus say that Sámi women were representing a kind of “mother earth” creation to serve the movement’s political and social needs, as a kind of strategic essentialism, a concept defined by Gayatri Spivak as “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (Spivak 1985/1996, 214). We must, however, not underestimate the value of Sámi women within Sámi activism. They played an important role in the fight for Sámi rights in the movement, for example the group of Sámi women who occupied the Prime Minister’s office on 6 February 1981. The experience they had gained from organising and leading activist organisations, protests and events during the 1970s and 1980s also became important for the establishment of several Sámi women’s organisations during the late 1980s and early 1990s, such as *Sáráhkká* in 1988 and *Sami NissonForum* in 1993.

The way in which Sámi women were constructed as strong and powerful within the Sámi movement during the 1970s and 1980s did not necessarily serve all the needs of Sámi women. While they clearly played an important role in Sámi activism at the time and, compared to other European women, Sámi women have historically held a strong position in their communities, this can easily turn into an effective way of silencing their voices. Jorunn Eikjok (2000) and Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) have raised this critique in a Sámi context, claiming that the ideal of strong Sámi women, and societies in which women have traditionally been equal to men, risks silencing Sámi women who advocate for women’s issues. Eikjok (2000) argues that colonialism and cultural impositions on Sámi society have ensured that formal legal rights to traditional industries and economic activities in Sámi communities are now connected to men, not women. Therefore, according to Eikjok, there is an alliance between colonial patriarchy and patriarchal structures in Indigenous communities that contribute to the weakening of Indigenous women’s position and knowledge. Gender relations in Indigenous societies are thus shaped by both masculinist and colonialist ideologies about gender and colonised people (Eikjok 2000, 120).

Similarly, Kuokkanen (2007) addresses the myth of the Sámi as a peaceful people who never fought any wars. She claims that upholding this myth creates a blind spot to incidents within Sámi societies, where violence, incest, rape, sexual abuse and child molestation risk not being addressed in a serious or systematic manner. This critique does not imply that the stereotype of strong Sámi women has no roots in reality, but it does often involve positioning Sámi culture within a mythical past where colonisation and Christian ideas of hierarchical gender norms, female piety and humility did not exist, rather than raising important issues in Sámi societies today, such as violence and the sexual abuse of women (cf. Eriksen et al. 2015).

In 2016, Árran Lule Sámi Centre in Divtasvuona/Tysfjord municipality in Norway held a seminar about the health effects of the forced assimilation policy in Norway. A woman from Tysfjord, Marion Anne Knutsen, chose to stream her own presentation directly on her Facebook page, and it instantaneously went viral (Matre and Mortensen 2017). She confessed to the audience about her own experiences related to her younger brothers' deaths and the sexual assault and subsequent suicide of her mother. Her confession became the first of many personal stories and subsequent criminal charges and court cases from the Tysfjord community around sexual abuse, and dramatically changed the way in which Sámi society had to deal with issues related to sexual assault and abuse. The so-called Tysfjord case attracted considerable attention in both the Norwegian and international media, and forced the local community of Divtasvuona/Tysfjord, the Norwegian Sámi Parliament and the Norwegian Government to draw attention to the explicitly gendered aspects of Sámi culture.

While there had been debates about sexual assaults in Sámi communities before, the Tysfjord case coincided with some other important debates at the time, such as the #metoo movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault, and the need for Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) in Sápmi. This opened up space for new debates on Sámi women and feminism. Rolf Steffensen, a priest and politician who has worked in the region for many years, argued that it should go without saying that the TRC should look into the Tysfjord case. He stated in the media that:

It will give space and attention to the violations and abuse that will not be prosecuted because of obsolescence, or not brought to court. In such a commission, the focus will be on the victims' need for recognition and for

the society's need for knowledge and understanding of its own responsibility. (Steffensen in Aslaksen et al. 2018, my translation)

While women's issues were left out of the activism of the 1970s and 1980s, we can now see a change in Sámi society, with the narrative of present-day Sámi struggles also including the oppression of women. The Tysfjord case was put on the agenda at a national level, creating a new space for defining a Sámi feminist agenda that was linked to decolonisation. The Tysfjord case is a good example of how decolonisation also involves fighting for the rights of Sámi women and children. We can see how women such as Marion Anne Knutsen and Liisa-Ravna Finbog are taking a stand against both the destructive forces within their own society and the silencing of Sámi women's issues in mainstream Nordic feminism. Their actions serve as a symbol of Sámi women claiming space and speaking up, not only for Sámi women's rights, but for the healing of Sámi society as a whole. As Kuokkanen argues, the repeating of the myth of Sámi women as strong becomes an excuse to remain passive, thus in turn becoming a means of accepting current circumstances. One should therefore, according to Kuokkanen, employ the notion of strong Sámi women as a proactive strategy of healing and transformation of not only women, but all of Sámi society (Kuokkanen 2007, 86–87).

In this powerful sentence, Kuokkanen raises an important question about what is at stake if we fail to address these issues, and makes it clear that feminism is necessary as part of the decolonisation process in order to advance and rebuild Sámi communities. Rather than seeing feminism as irrelevant for Sámi societies, or as something that may stigmatise Sámi people even further (Eikjok 2000, 2007; Kuokkanen 2007), we can see how feminist interventions can be analysed as part of the healing and transformation of Sámi society. Reconciliation and decolonisation involve more than just inclusion (cf. Gaudry and Lorenz 2018, 218–219), they involve a total reorientation of the balance between indigenous and non-indigenous people, establishing common ground in order to create a broader consensus about how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people should be reconciled, and lastly a fundamental reorientation of the power relations within society as a whole, and between men and women.



## INDIGENISING NORDIC FEMINISMS—INCLUSION OR EXCLUSION?

I will now consider how Sámi feminist voices are included in Nordic feminist research. While neither Sámi researchers nor feminist scholars in the Nordic countries have focused much on the development of a Sámi feminist perspective, there is growing interest among Sámi scholars, Sámi activists and Sámi stakeholders. However, the Nordic countries differ quite significantly when we look at how both Sámi studies and gender studies are organised, institutionally and financially. While both gender studies and Sámi/Indigenous studies are institutionalised in different ways in the Nordic countries, there is a tendency for these research fields not to be connected in any systematic way.

In the Nordic countries, there are several gender research institutions, as well as several Sámi research institutions. There are, however, no formal institutions or research programmes that focus explicitly on Sámi feminist issues, nor are there very many scholars at the respective institutions who focus on such issues. There is also little interaction between those researchers working with Sámi-related issues and those working with gender- and feminist-related issues. However, the Future of Feminism in the Nordic Region Network that initiated this book represents an exception to this rule. As Kuokkanen points out, there is not an open resistance in Nordic feminism to Sámi perspective, but Nordic feminists do not engage actively with them either. A good example according to Kuokkanen is the ignoring and exclusion of Sámi feminist and Sámi women in conferences, with the NORA conference, *Voices in Nordic Gender Research*, in Denmark in 2014 an example of this (Kuokkanen in Knobbloch and Kuokkanen 2015, 278).

Sámi feminist issues have also frequently been ignored or forgotten at the most important conferences in the field of gender research. A plausible explanation for this is that, even though both Sámi studies and gender studies in the Nordic countries have been important fields of research for several decades now, there has been little overlap between these fields. When conferences like the NORA conference are planned, this means that those who are not directly associated with the field of gender research in the Nordic countries can easily be forgotten. The lack of inclusion of Indigenous women in Nordic gender research can be seen as an unintended, but still persistent, ignorance of the settler colonial elimination of Indigenous people. As a result of the critique in 2014, we can see a change

in the way the NORA conference of 2019 was organised. On this occasion, they actively took action to include Sámi and Indigenous voices, and the Sámi and feminist researcher May-Britt Öhman was a part of the conference committee. Two of the four keynote speakers had Indigenous backgrounds: Rauna Kuokkanen (Sámi) and Kim TallBear (Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate). If we look at the key concepts for the conference, we also clearly see that they want to engage to a greater extent with issues related to Sámi feminism.

We can see the same tendency in the field of Sámi studies, where feminist and gender perspectives have not held a strong position. Since Indigenous feminism has not been an influential perspective within Sámi studies either, including Sámi voices at conferences such as NORA may not be enough. If there are only a few Sámi feminist researchers to include, this potentially creates a new problem. For example, there has been little or no focus within the Sámi research programmes funded by the Norwegian Research Council on gender-related issues, and there have been no large funded research projects with an Indigenous feminist perspective. In SAMISK III, the new programme launched in 2017, we can see that gender has also been included:

This will entail greater focus on studying how identity and community-building have taken, and are taking, place, with emphasis on the diverse roles played by Sámi actors and their various connections with the public authorities and other population groups. (...) Here the program will encourage the use of both long and short historical perspectives, particularly when exploring the significance of Sámi identity in various places, at various times and in various contexts. (...) A focus on the complexity of the Sámi community as well as on gender may supplement these perspectives. (SAMISK III 2017)

We can see here that Sámi feminist voices push forward a new debate on feminism as a part of the Sámi decolonisation process. Through the process of trying to find common ground, we can see that both Sámi feminist scholars and other Nordic feminist scholars are trying to create common ground and, through this, develop a broader consensus between feminist and Indigenous ideals. We can categorise this as a process of reconciliation indigenisation that is more than mere inclusion in numbers (cf. Gaudry and Lorenz 2018, 218). While there is still a long way to go to achieve full Indigenous decolonisation, we can say that this is a good

starting point for a process in which both Sámi scholars and Nordic feminist scholars can find common ground to discuss what reconciliation and decolonisation really mean.

### INDIGENOUS FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES

I will now discuss how a feminist critique is important for Indigenous decolonisation in both academia and society in general. A decolonial critique from a Sámi feminist perspective not only means that the settler colonial societies have to change, it also involves a complete transformation of how Sámi society defines itself. While we can see that Sámi feminist perspectives are gradually becoming a more and more important part of Sámi politics and activism in general, there is still a need to explore how Sámi feminist perspectives in particular, and Indigenous feminist perspectives in general, can be defined from a theoretical point of view. According to Joyce Green (2007), a common claim that is used to reject Indigenous feminism from an Indigenous point of view is that it is un- or anti-traditional, not based on Indigenous traditional knowledge, and that many have voiced scepticism about what feminism has to offer Indigenous women, since it has largely emerged from privileged white women in the Western world, including a historical insensitivity to the impact of colonialism. This critique ignores the fact that tradition is neither monolithic nor axiomatically good, and that denying feminist voices within Indigenous societies and academia risks silencing important voices that can be beneficial for the future of Indigenous societies.

When talking about Indigenous perspectives, the Indigenous scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith is a name that often comes up. In her influential book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, she explores the intersection of Indigenous activism and Indigenous research. According to Smith, decolonising methodologies is concerned with “‘talking back to’ and ‘talking up to’ research as an institution of knowledge that is embedded in a global system of imperialism and power” (Smith 2012 [1999], ix). In the foreword, she states that she wrote the book because she wanted to disrupt the relationships between the researchers (mostly non-Indigenous) and the researched (Indigenous), between colonised institutions of knowledge and colonised people, between academic theories and values and Indigenous perspectives, between institutions and Indigenous communities, and between and within Indigenous communities themselves (Smith 2012 [1999], x).

Smith's agenda is not only to change how research is being done in Indigenous societies, but also to change the values and practices of academic institutions, not dissimilar to what Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz (2018) define as "decolonial indigenization". According to Smith, many Indigenous researchers struggle to connect the demands of research on the one hand, and the demands and needs of their Indigenous communities on the other. She seeks to make space for Indigenous perspectives within academia by promoting different approaches and methodologies that are being developed to ensure that research on Indigenous people can be more respectful, ethical and useful to Indigenous communities and not only to the institutions and people of academia. Her project is to articulate an Indigenous research agenda that not only questions the ideals and practices that they generate, but serves as an alternative story: the history of Western research through the eyes of the colonised (2012 [1999], 2).

Smith thus seeks to address issues regarding the colonial oppression of Indigenous people and how imperialism and colonialism are embedded in disciplines of knowledge. Through the perspectives of the colonised, we can develop new critical approaches to research that open up opportunities for more creative ways of talking about Indigenous groups and communities (Smith 2012 [1999]). However, it is not enough to include Sámi researchers. We must also, as Smith (2012 [1999]) reminds us, recognise that there are differences between different Indigenous groups, and that there are different layers of relationships and meanings within and between different groups. There is not one "truth", but many.

In a similar way, Rauna Kuokkanen (2000) insists that we need to move beyond postmodern or poststructuralist perspectives, because we need to address the colonial and political context of Indigenous people's struggles. The very concept of "traditional knowledge" is problematic, because it "can suggest racist notions of a frozen culture giving rise to false views of authenticity" (Kuokkanen 2000, 418). We therefore need to critically analyse the concept of "Indigenous knowledge"; otherwise, we risk losing touch with reality and may "become as essentialist and or elitist as those whom we are opposing and challenging" (Kuokkanen 2000, 420). We need to avoid binary thinking that reproduces Indigenous people as "the other" of the West, as non-subject, disconnected from concrete experience and the possibility of change.

Another aspect of the relationship between feminist theory and land and water in Indigenous feminist approaches is the spiritual. The spiritual

dimension is often an intrinsic aspect when talking about Indigenous worldviews. A typical Indigenous critique of academic work is that it does not take into account the spiritual aspects of the social, the political or the juridical. Within Sámi studies as well, the focus on the gendered aspects of religious practices in Sámi societies in historical times is also something about which there have been small, but at the same time important, academic contributions.

One Sámi scholar and activist who raised important issues from a feminist and gender perspective was May-Lisbeth Myrhaug.<sup>5</sup> In the book based on her magister thesis<sup>6</sup> *I Máttaráhkkás fotspor* (In Máttaráhkká<sup>7</sup>'s footsteps) (Myrhaug 1997), she rereads old historical sources on Sámi conditions from the position of a coastal Sámi and woman. In the preface, she writes that she wants to contribute to a knowledge production in which women and goddesses are made visible, and to show how Sámi women have played an important role both in cultural activities and as *noaidis* (shamans). According to Myrhaug, the gods and goddesses, the spiritual, humans, nature and natural objects, the feminine and the masculine, life and death, the past and the present, were all interconnected and part of a holistic world order. In her work, Myrhaug shows us the importance of feminist perspectives on spirituality in historical Sámi societies, and that this in turn can also be used for feminist movements within Sámi societies today. She presents a critique of what she calls “reversed cultural imperialism” (Myrhaug 1997, 10), whereby, rather than defining Sámi religion as something evil, one risks abusing and romanticising it in a “positive” way, idealising its views on nature and its feminine aspects in a way that creates a false image of harmony.

Other researchers in the field of Indigenous research have also been engaged in the debate about colonial notions of Indigenous authenticity. Joanne Barker claims that international and state recognition of Indigenous

<sup>5</sup> May-Lisbeth Myrhaug sadly passed away in 2017. I am extremely grateful for all of our conversations at the Sámi House in Oslo during my work on my master's thesis.

<sup>6</sup> The Magister's degree in Denmark and Norway was an advanced research degree corresponding to the PhD in the Anglo-Saxon system. It became increasingly rare after the 1970s and has now been completely abolished and replaced by PhD degrees as a result of the implementation of the Bologna Process.

<sup>7</sup> Máttaráhkká is one of the *áhkkas*, the Sámi goddesses. Máttaráhkká is the mother of the tribe, goddess of women and children, and it is she who gives humans their bodies. She is also, together with Sáráhkká, one of her three daughters, the goddess of fertility, menstruation, love, human sexuality, pregnancy and childbirth, and is popular among Sámi feminists.

rights is connected to a certain kind of Indigeneity, defined in terms of “authenticity” that is often defined by otherness, as being “obsolete but for the costume” (Barker 2017, 3). Barker states further that imperialism and colonialism require Indigenous people to fit within the heteronormative archetypes of an Indigeneity that used to be authentic in the past, but now is something dead and gone (Barker 2017, 3).

Research in both Indigenous studies and gender studies needs to move beyond essentialist, binary and static notions of indigeneness and gender. As I show in this chapter, important contributions have been made towards overcoming this, but there is still much work to be done. This also has implications for the study of gender and Indigenous societies and how we analyse the positions of the researchers and their relation to the societies within which they work and the gender with which they identify. All knowledge is situated, even marginal knowledge (Haraway 1988). The embodied nature of vision implies that we need to critically analyse, decode and deconstruct all positions, including marginal positions, since our vision will always be partial and limited. As Haraway claims, “Location is also partial in the sense of being for some worlds and not others. There is no way around this polluting criterion for strong objectivity” (Haraway 2004, 237).

We need to avoid romanticising marginal positions and instead critically examine the research process and the position of the researcher. Rather than reproducing an image of the innocent Indigenous researcher, we need to include a more dynamic and critical perspective that gives space to different voices within Indigenous societies. However, it is important to remember that, while no position is innocent, some are more innocent than others, and we need to address how Indigenous voices have been silenced as part of colonisation and its impact on present-day society (Wolfe 2006) in the Nordic countries (cf. Mulinari et al. 2009). The way in which whiteness is constructed in the Nordic countries, where the position of the white majority is not acknowledged as a racialised/ethnicised position at all (cf. Wekker 2016, 2), renders privilege and colonisation invisible, and the privileged majority innocent.

This critique is also related to other debates regarding Indigenous perspectives and their connection to other forms of knowledge, scholars and institutions. Some argue that contemporary theories on group action are insufficient for explaining the cultural and political organisation of Indigenous people, and that these theories fail to conceptualise the specific interests and needs of Indigenous communities. They claim that one

should rather focus on developing theory and research that presents a coherent theoretical and methodological approach to the study of Indigenous peoples, and their communities, cultures and historical experiences (Champagne 2007, 353–354). Others argue that research and theories on Indigenous issues are fragmented and part of many disciplines. Rather than claiming that “terms like ethnicity, race, nation or post-modernism are doomed by their institutional genealogies” (Andersen 2009, 94), we need to take into account the fact that the problems do not simply evaporate if we just stop using these concepts, since the Indigenous critique of them is an important part of their theoretical development. A failure to account for the density of Indigenous societies in research will elevate the danger of producing a naïve and parochial Indigenous theoretical perspective: “Concepts—*all concepts*—are by definition schematic and as such are laughably simplistic in the face of the enormous complexity of human life” (Andersen 2009, 96). In a similar way, Jace Weaver argues that each view from traditional disciplines is limited and partial, and that Indigenous studies must draw together the various disciplines and methods “in order to achieve something approaching a complete picture of Natives, their cultures and experiences” (Weaver 2007, 74).

We need to give Indigenous studies space for critique, and to include multiple perspectives in order to grasp the complexity of Indigenous societies. While I think that it is important to include Indigenous perspectives and concepts in research, we need a variety of such perspectives and concepts. Otherwise, we risk essentialising the complex issues that exist within Indigenous societies. If we want to work against the marginalisation of Indigenous perspectives in academia, we need to participate in the various debates within and across the various disciplines. Both Indigenous studies and gender studies include research and education that have emerged out of multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary concerns, without strong ties to the traditional disciplinary logic of academia. At the same time, their ties to various disciplines maintain an important space for the critique of academic practices in general.

So how can we open up opportunities for a Sámi feminist perspective in academia, and how does this differ from other feminist perspectives? As I have shown in this chapter, both Indigenous studies and gender studies are fields that are often characterised by their strong links with movements outside academia, and the inclusion of knowledge production that takes place outside academia. To answer this question, it is highly relevant to look back to the agenda of the Sámi pioneer Elsa Laula Renberg. In her

work, she focused on the activism of both women and men, rights to land and water, and the survival of the Sámi culture as a whole (Renberg 2003 [1904]). A Sámi feminist perspective should therefore also address rights to land and water and how, in turn, this is related to Sámi women's issues.

Indigenous feminism is also a perspective that is connected to colonial processes in the past and present concerning Indigenous claims to traditional territories, because Indigenous status is something that is defined directly in relation to traditional territories and the use of land, in addition to culture, practices and institutions. The significance of place, of land, of landscape and of other things in the universe, in defining the very essence of a people, makes for a very different rendering of the term essentialism as used by Indigenous peoples (Smith 2012 [1999], 77).

In the same way, the Sámi scholar May-Britt Öhman claims her space as a feminist, scholar and activist, engaging in the protection of lands and waters, and in the future survival and decolonisation of Sámi territories and Sámi bodies (Öhman 2017, 152). Indigenous critiques of mainstream academic production also challenge the way in which we understand knowledge production, since they show us how mainstream academic ontology is inherently connected to our Western scientific culture, a perspective they share with other feminist critiques of scientific production and objectivity (Haraway 1988, 2004; Harding 1992). Harding writes that "to examine critically Western science from the perspective of this kind of history enables us to detect distorting assumptions structuring it that are shared by most Westerners" (Harding 1992, 584). There is therefore a need to develop visions of a decolonial transformation of Nordic knowledge production that includes both feminist and Indigenous perspectives, through creating common ground for reconciliation with academia that includes a balancing of power relations, transforming the academy completely (cf. Gaudry and Lorenz 2018, 218–219).

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have explored how we can make space for a Sámi decolonial critique in research on Nordic feminism. We need to move beyond hegemonic ways of defining feminist perspectives to include Indigenous perspectives. An important question in this chapter is what a decolonial critique of Nordic feminist research and activism is from a Sámi perspective, and how this is articulated in the Nordic countries today. As I have argued in this chapter, we need to find a way to include Sámi perspectives



in Nordic feminism that moves beyond mere inclusion (cf. Gaudry and Lorenz 2018). We need to consider how Sámi feminist perspectives can be incorporated in a more fundamental way that involves more balanced power relations.

I also point out that the lack of formal organisation within both activism and academia has been an obstacle to the development of Indigenous feminist perspectives within Sámi studies. While there are individuals and institutions both within and outside academia focusing on gender perspectives and Indigenous and Sámi perspectives, the differences between the Nordic countries and the extent to which these research fields have been organised could explain why this field of research has been relatively invisible. We need to consider how we can create common ground for both Sámi and feminist perspectives as a first step in the decolonial transformation of both feminist studies and academia as a whole.

The lack of Sámi perspectives within Nordic feminist research and activism is quite paradoxical, given the fact that intersectional and postcolonial aspects of feminism have become an important part of feminist perspectives both within academia and among activists, especially in Sweden (de los Reyes et al. 2002; Mulinari and Rätzkel 2007). Postcolonial critiques of Nordic feminism that simultaneously involve silencing Indigenous feminist voices, intentionally or unintentionally, risk maintaining the silencing of Nordic colonial complicity, that is, “the manifold ways in which North-European countries have taken, and continue to take, part in (post)colonial processes” (Mulinari et al. 2009, 1). This in turn continues to legitimise the settler colonial elimination (Wolfe 2006) of Indigenous voices, including Sámi women in Nordic feminism. Therefore, the issues of Sámi women cannot be separated from the settler colonial logic that all Indigenous people are facing. A similar argument can be seen in the Sámi feminist scholar Rauna Kuokkanen’s work, when she states that:

We are losing people through increased physical and sexual violence—suicides, mental illnesses, substance and alcohol abuse—but also through structural violence manifested in the lack of participation, further assimilation and integration into mainstream societies, and ultimately, the loss of what makes us Sami. (Kuokkanen 2007, 86–87)

A Sámi decolonial critique of Nordic feminism involves destabilising the taken-for-granted silencing of Indigenous perspectives and people, and opening up spaces for creating common ground between Sámi

feminist perspectives and Nordic feminism. This will also benefit Sámi activism and academic critique, since an inclusion of Sámi feminist voices within Nordic feminism can also help in the fight against the ways in which patriarchal and colonial power still continue to shape the lives of Sámi women.

To you, you young men and women, I want to say a word. Our people's future lies within your hands. With your power shall our people and land be maintained. (Renberg 2003 [1904], 29)

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