In 1929, the geologist Väinö Tanner (1881–1948) published an extensive study in human geography on the economic and social adaptation of the Skolt Sami. Tanner aimed at an understanding and respectful approach, and today he enjoys the reputation of a culturally sensitive scholar: one who tried to see the Skolt Sami culture from within, and who wrote against the most aggressive discourses of his time. There are indications, however, that the relationship between Tanner and the Sami was more complex than previously assumed. His book is examined in the light of recent theorizing on colonial knowledge production, revealing aspects of his relation to the object of study that can be seen as colonialist. The focus in the article is on Tanner’s approach to the hierarchization of the study object, and whether it was primarily the national or the colonial context, and the related discourses, that induced him to write about the Skolt Sami as he did. His unfavorable comparisons of the Skolt Sami to modern societies, and his use of an expert voice in relation to “correct” forms of subsistence, reveal a scholar deeply embedded in colonial discourses, as does his occasional direct praise of colonial politics. The national, however, turns out to be a more constitutive context for Tanner. Colonialism can be seen as too inclusive a super-structure, containing evolutionary and nationalist discourses articulated at the national level as well, but perhaps lacking the explanatory potential offered by the more apparent national context.
CHAPTER 5

Nation-Building and Colonialism: The Early Skolt Sami Research of Väinö Tanner

Jukka Nyyssönen

INTRODUCTION

After Finland gained independence in 1917, Finnish aspirations of eastern expansion were fulfilled when the Pechenga region, in Finnish Petsamo, was annexed to Finland in the Tartu Peace Treaty of 1920. As a result, Finland hosted a “new” minority, the Skolt Sami, an Eastern Sami group. The Skolt way of life was based on a mixed economy, combining small-scale reindeer herding and fishing. Due to subsequent encroachments on Skolt Sami fishing rights and the introduction of industry and modern infrastructure, their traditional sources of subsistence were in crisis, and as one option the Skolt Sami began increasingly to enter modern forms of economic activity. This aroused the interest of numerous scholars in the

J. Nyyssönen (✉)
High North Department, Norwegian Institute for Cultural Heritage Research, Tromsø, Norway
University of Tromsø – The Arctic University of Norway, The Arctic University Museum of Norway, Tromsø, Norway
e-mail: Jukka.Nyyssoenen@niku.no

© The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2022
R. Merivirta et al. (eds.), Finnish Colonial Encounters, Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80610-1_5
human sciences, inspired by evolutionist ideas; a Sami culture in its “most original stage” was about to vanish.¹ The Geologist Väinö Tanner (1881–1948) was among the many scholars who had already made extensive field trips to Eastern Sami areas while Finland was still a Grand Duchy of Russia (1809–1917). In 1929 Tanner published the work which forms the main focus of this chapter: an extensive study in human geography, entitled *Antropogeografiska studier inom Petsamo-området: 1, Skoltlapparna* (Studies in the human geography of the Petsamo district: 1, The Skolt Lapps). The study covered numerous aspects of the economic and social adaptations of the Skolt Sami. Tanner was aiming at an “understanding” and respectful approach, and he enjoys the reputation of a culturally sensitive scholar: one who tried to see the Skolt Sami culture from within and who wrote against the most intrusive discourses of his time.² There are, however, indications that the relationship between Tanner and the Sami was more complicated than has previously been assumed. Here I examine his scholarly work on the Skolt Sami in the light of recent theorizing on colonial knowledge production. This approach reveals certain aspects of his relation to the object of study that, I claim, can be labeled as colonialist. The analysis reveals his hierarchization of the study object; it also displays the interplay of contexts and sources of discourses, national or colonial, which caused him to write about the Skolt Sami the way he did.

The term “colonial science”, which has many disciplinary branches and functions, here refers to scholarly production directly or indirectly contributing to, justifying, and/or participating in colonial efforts and empire-building. Colonial science has been stereotypically portrayed as derivative, instrumentalist, and extractive and has been criticized as an instrument of imperial control, rather than as a key to the development of the target societies. Colonial science has often had the utilitarian, mercantilist goal of charting the availability of profitable raw materials.³ To achieve these goals a number of discursive means were employed, “othering” or even dehumanizing the colonized subjects. The colonial discourses thus articulated in knowledge production included the inability of the indigenous population to govern themselves, or the resources found in the lands to be colonized. These scholarly works aired a need to improve or displace the

¹Harlin and Lehtola 2019, 45–49.
indigenous population, based on the naturalized superiority of the colonizing power and on the goal of utilizing resources.\textsuperscript{4} In addition, geographers were quick to take on board the discourses of social evolution, and subsequent racial ideas and discourses, on the basis of which they constructed hierarchies supporting nations and empires.\textsuperscript{5}

Seen as a whole, all the science of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was (framed by the) colonial: for historical subjects, scholars included, the imperial was the subjective, or, for many, the native category. In the age of empire, it was the dominant mode of fathoming contacts between peoples near and far. In colonial science, however, the national and the global were closely intermingled. The aims of nation-building could end up building colonial hierarchies, by echoing those constructed on a global scale in the empires. And it was scientists who—not alone, but to a significant extent—introduced global/imperial discourses within the national (e.g. Finnish) frame, and created cross-border systems of understanding colonial rule by means of knowledge circulation.\textsuperscript{6} As a decidedly noncolonial nation,\textsuperscript{7} Finland is a good example of the intermingling of the two categories, the involvement of colonial discourses in knowledge production, framed by national goal settings.

My purpose here is to not merely to label Tanner as a colonialist scholar, but to study him critically, to determine whether some aspects of his knowledge production qualify as colonial. I claim no full explanatory power for the term “colonial” in explaining an activity of such complexity as scholarly knowledge production, with all its social and ideological connections. What I do claim, however, that this same complexity, with its multiple contexts, social dependencies, and impulses (including colonial ones), had an impact on Finnish knowledge production.

The historical and geographical context of the article is the period during which Petsamo, located in the border regions of Finland, Norway, and Russia on the coast of the Arctic Sea, was a Finnish province (1920–1921) and municipality (1921–1944). During this era, the extractive aspects of Finnish scientific knowledge production (especially mineralogy) became blatant. Here I address three interrelated questions: (1) in what manner did Tanner encounter and treat the Skolt Sami in the course of his research?

\textsuperscript{4} Dale 2009, 79 et passim; Danielsson 2009, 64–66.
\textsuperscript{5} Wu 2019, 68; Nyyssönen 2017, passim.
\textsuperscript{6} Adelman 2019, 3, 9.
\textsuperscript{7} For example, Airaksinen 2008, passim.
(2) What were his views as to colonial policies and the colonization of Petsamo? And (3) were the discourses that gave rise to or inspired his research colonial and metropolitan, or just national?8

The sources, consisting of relevant published texts, manuscripts of the 1929 publication and some correspondence,9 are read qualitatively and discursively, in search of discursive similarities to colonial science/knowledge production10 and of influential contexts and discourses. The conceptual frame involves studying Tanner’s scholarly production in the light of colonialism as a discursive undertaking: reading scholarly texts as attempts to construct a moral superiority and a socio-cultural difference. The focus of study is on the naturalizing and objectifying grids through which Tanner observed and hierarchized the Skolt Sami.11 The chapter is organized chronologically, I first briefly introduce Tanner and his early career, after which I discuss his activities in Petsamo and his scholarly production concerning the region and the Skolt Sami. I conclude with a discussion of Tanner’s response to Finnish perception of the colonization of Petsamo.

TANNER’S EARLY CAREER AND HIS FIRST FIELD TRIPS

Väinö Tanner (1881–1948) was born in Hämeenlinna to a family belonging to the Swedish-speaking middle class.12 In 1905 he graduated from the Polytechnic, with a diploma in chemical engineering. In 1914 he defended a doctoral thesis on quaternary geology at the Imperial Alexander University in Finland (from 1919 the University of Helsinki). During his early career, through his involvement in the Geological Commission of Finland, he took part almost annually, from 1903 to 1913, in geological expeditions to Lapland. In 1909 he visited the Skolt Sami regions Njuõ’ttjäy’rr13 (Finnish Nuortijärvi) and Suõ’nn’jel (Finnish Suonikylä).

8 Compare Adelman 2019, 10.
9 Tanners personal archives are located at the Arctic University Museum of Norway, in Tromsø.
10 Compare Lehtola 2015, 22–36.
12 Lundqvist 1968, 143–144.
13 I write the Skolt Sami sijdd toponyms in the most recent orthography of the Skolt Sami language, and provide a Finnish translation. Toponyms are otherwise written in the language of each respective country. Where possible, I use ethnonyms indicating the sijdd-belongingness of the individual. On most occasions, this is not possible, since they are not explicated in the sources.
He taught and did research at the Geological Commission, the Polytechnic, and the Imperial Alexander University.\textsuperscript{14} During the years of 1918–1921, Tanner served at the Finnish Ministry of Foreign affairs, whence he was recruited to the Geological Commission. From 1921 to 1930, he served as State Geologist.\textsuperscript{15} Tanner was appointed professor of Geography at the University of Helsinki in 1931. During the rest of his career he did not return extensively to Sami topics. Tanner is best known for his geological studies but also for his extensive work on Labrador.\textsuperscript{16} He took voluntary exile to Sweden in 1944; as a Swedish-speaking Finnish scholar, he experienced conflicts with the Finnish-speaking staff and with pro-Finnish policies at the University during the language disputes in Finland. Tanner was known for his anti-“True Finn” political stance.\textsuperscript{17}

Tanner became closely acquainted with the Sami regions in Sweden and Norway due to his involvement in the international Commissions working on the reindeer herding crisis in Torne Lappmark, in the northernmost part of the province of Norrbotten (chairmanship in 1910–1912 and 1914–1917). The Commissions were meant to resolve the protracted impasse in the negotiations over the pasturing rights of the nomadic Sami from Sweden in the summer pastures in the Troms county in Norway. The Commissions produced reports focused chiefly on biological information as to the condition of the pastures in Norrbotten and Troms, and ended up suggesting the removal of groups of nomads to southern pastures; today this outcome is seen as a great failure, resulting in chaos in pasturing.\textsuperscript{18}

The fieldwork was conducted according to the scientific standards of the time. The scientists and officials were guided by local Sami, who nevertheless appear only seldom in the sources, providing information as to choice of fodder and some social aspects of herding.\textsuperscript{19} The botanical and

\textsuperscript{14} CV, Box 18, Folder 10a, Private documents, Archive of Väinö Tanner (AVT), Archive of Arctic University Museum of Norway (AUMoN), Tromsø, Norway; Rantala \textit{2008}, 45–46.
\textsuperscript{15} CV, Box 18, Folder 10b, AVT, AUMoN, Tromsø, Norway; Susiluoto \textit{2000}, 12.
\textsuperscript{16} Tanner \textit{1944}.
\textsuperscript{17} “Aitosuomalaiset” was an extreme right-wing patriotic political movement, which in its early phase, in the 1920s, focused on the ongoing language dispute, with the aim of suppressing the linguistic rights of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. The group was most visible at the University of Helsinki, Tanner’s place of work, where he did have to unwillingly conform to the demands of the Finnish nationalists. Jutikkala and Pirinen (1996) \textit{2003}, 414–415; Lundqvist \textit{1968}, 215–217.
\textsuperscript{18} Broderstad, Niemi and Sommerseth (eds.) \textit{2007}, passim.
\textsuperscript{19} Nyyssönen \textit{2015a}, 172–173 et passim.
phenological fieldwork was carried out according to scientific principles; the use of the Latin names of plants, and the classification of vegetation into different categories in a scientific manner, served as a way of identifying oneself as a scientist. The reports estimated the carrying capacity of the pastures, based on the growth of lichen and other types of vegetation suitable for pasturing, and the area requirement per reindeer. The situation was in crisis and natural resources were in danger of being destroyed. Tanner became familiar with both aspects in relation to pastures: as a natural resource, as in colonial science, and as the context of Sami social organization.

In his fieldwork, Tanner showed an inclination, on the one hand, toward sensitivity toward the Sami, especially as informants, on the other, toward colonial arrogance. The sources contain indications that Tanner, along with the Swedish and Finnish Commission members, reacted to and resisted Norwegian doubts as to the moral condition of the Sami; the Norwegians claimed that the Sami were unsuited to serve as informants due to their alleged bias. Tanner’s application for a “personal (Sami) assistant” in the final Commission expedition in 1914 was turned down. The hierarchies between the Sami and the scholars were also sustained by the use of titles, signifying the social standing of each participant and guide.

Whether some aspects of this engagement qualify as colonial is debatable. The Swedish motivation for preserving the pastures in Sami usage was based on an economic rationale, but suggestions of a colonial power of definition can be perceived in the Commission’s work as well: the Swedish Sami, according to many scholars, became victims of a physical form of science-based “social engineering” in the forced removals that followed, even if it cannot be directly credited to the Commissions. Tanner supported the idea of cutting the number of reindeer and removing some Sami groups to “new” pastures. In spite of this enforced social engineering, in the course of his fieldwork, he recognized and stressed the

---

20 Minute, Vuoskoäivi, 13 August 1910, Box 1, Folder 1, AVT, AUMoN, Tromso, Norway.
21 Climatic factors causing a deterioration of pasture conditions were also discussed. Undated protocol, Box 1, Folder 1, AVT, AUMoN, Tromso, Norway.
22 Transcript, Instructions for the commission, 1913, Box 1, Folder 6, AVT, AUMoN, Tromso, Norway; Renbeteskommissionens af 1913 handlingar, I:1,13.
23 Correspondence from Kristian Nissen to Tanner, 20.2.1914, Box 17, Folder 9, AVT, AUMoN, Tromso, Norway.
24 Nyyssönen 2015a, 170–171.
indigenous rationality of the Sami organization of herding, expressed in their social and even their political organization. The Commission showed a preference, typical of the time, for an intensive form of herding, based on strict control of the herds, and considered more “original”. The shift observed toward extensive, less stringent herding, however, was explained differently: Tanner and the Commission listened to their Sami informants and blamed external factors, including the border closure of 1889 between Finland and Sweden, increased settlement in the summer pasture areas, restrictions on pasture access, and the unruly, large Kautokeino stocks causing chaos in pastures in Troms and Norrbotten. Explanations by Swedish officials, in contrast, were based on near-racializing characterizations of the mental attributes of the Sami: the “good” way of herding was in a process of “degeneration” due to Sami laziness and carelessness.

In the end, the Commission members had the final say on the matter, which was resolved on the basis of scientific knowledge concerning pasture resilience and productivity; this resonated well with the Sami informants who were hoping for a reduction in the number of reindeer as well. This was the Sami voice allowed to surface in the reports. Tanner effortlessly embraced the role of an expert on Sami issues, a stance which he continued to lay claim to in his future research, and which affected the way the Skolt Sami were positioned and hierarchized in his studies.

**Summers in Petsamo and the Main Work on the Skolt Sami**

The *sijdd*, the Skolt Sami word for “village”, was a demarcated administrative region, divided into kin and family areas; it maintained annual cycles of utilization and had ritual, judicial, and economic functions. In 1920 in Petsamo, three *sijdds* were annexed to Finland (see Fig. 5.1.). At

---

25 Nyyssönen 2015a, 174 et passim.
28 Nyyssönen 2015a, 179.
29 Nyyssönen 2015a, passim.
the time the Skolt Sami were undergoing catastrophic difficulties, which had begun half a century earlier. Recent scholarship has attributed the subsistence and social crisis in the *sijdds* to external factors. For example, sedentary settlement of the Petsamo fjord had made fishing of the Peaccham (Petsamo) increasingly difficult. The demarcation of the national border cut off several *sijdds* from their resource zones: Peaccham from a summer pasture area, Suõ’nn’jel from their winter village, and Paččjokk (Paatsjoki) from their coastal fisheries. Industrial forms of economic activity entered Peaccham and Paččjokk.\(^{32}\) The crisis was accelerated during the Finnish era, with continuing encroachment on the remaining Skolt Sami subsistence rights. From early on, the state of Finland had high hopes concerning the establishment of fisheries and a fishing industry in the region. Summer fishing places and the exclusive fishing rights possessed by the Peaccham-Sami in Liinahamari were lost to the Finnish fishing industry and fisheries when the road reached the new harbor in 1930. The Peaccham-Sami received no compensation for the intrusion. Finnish fishing in the fjord, which extended over a longer period, reduced the salmon catch in the Petsamo River and the fjord, and the settlers began to herd their own reindeer stocks in the pastures belonging the *sijdd*. The Peaccham-Sami had to resort to occasional paid labor, for example, in the fish processing factories (Fig. 5.1).\(^{33}\)

In the 1920s, as this process, close to a land-grab, went on, Tanner visited Petsamo numerous times. Officially, he was in Petsamo because of the search for nickel ore, in his capacity as State Geologist for the Geological Commission. The quest came to a halt, to Tanner’s disappointment, when due to lack of state funds he had to recommend to the Geological Commission that prospecting be given over to an international actor.\(^{34}\) Here we see him in perhaps his clearest extractive-colonial moment. The nickel mine and refinery was established on the lands of the Paččjokk *sijdd*, some years after Tanner’s work.

As a byproduct of these expeditions, he issued several publications on Petsamo, including the classic 1929 study on the Skolt Sami. *Antropogeografiska* is a multidisciplinary study, with a theoretical frame in

\(^{32}\)Lehtola 2012, 166; Tanner 1929, 152–157.

\(^{33}\)Lehtola 2012, 170, 258–259.

\(^{34}\)PM. on Petsamo 1928, Box 3, Folder 1g, AVT, AUMoN, Tromsø, Norway; in 1934, the English affiliate of International Nickel Company Ltd., The Mond Nickel Company received the concession to utilise the nickel in Petsamo. Vahtola 1999, 287.
human geography. Tanner’s aim was to survey the people, their semi-nomadic adaptation, history, politics, viability and administration, along with the socio-economic crisis of the three Skolt Sami sijdds now belonging to Finland. The political agency of the Skolt Sami was constructed in a groundbreaking way with Tanner’s analysis of the Norráz/Sobbar, the organ responsible for the Skolt Sami sijdd administration, which allocated usage rights to fishing waters and lands to the families. This was one of the culturally most sensitive contributions for which Tanner is credited: a functionalist perception of the sijdd, as an entity of a people defined by kinship ties and by the terrain they utilized, and within which they allocated...
resource zones in an *orderly* manner.\textsuperscript{35} Tanner wrote decidedly against the Finnish public discourse on the Skolt Sami, which accused them of merely wandering aimlessly in the mountains and in general perceived their culture as less valuable. In addition, Tanner wrote against “Lappologist” research, which to a great extent was aimed at Finnish nation-building; it applied diffusionist hierarchies of culture, which showed the lower position of the Sami in socio-cultural hierarchies.\textsuperscript{36} One clear agenda of Tanner’s work was to reveal many Finnish policies in Petsamo to be inadequate and ill-advised.

Due to this take on the Sami, the book enjoys a good reputation among scholars, to a great extent deserved. The book has a programmatic aim of presenting the Skolt Sami as they appeared to him: as “the most gifted, and in terms of their moral frame of mind … the most developed population element we met up there”; ravaged, however, by external conditions and thrown into poverty. The book’s aim was further elaborated, as being “to promote the happiness of a people of nature” by producing objective, factual knowledge of forces at the extreme north, and how to operate with these forces to the benefit of a “people of nature”.\textsuperscript{37} Among the forces impacting the North was modernity, which resulted in the immediate hierarchical positioning of the Skolt Sami, even in the very motivation of the book. The book contains an unresolved tension between, on the one hand, the idea of the inevitability of modernization, leading to the crisis and the loss of a traditional form of subsistence, on the other, Tanner’s “purist” view of the rightfulness of semi-nomadic reindeer herding as the original, most appropriate and “correct” form of herding.

Tanner tried in earnest to understand the internal rationale of a folk living in interaction with their surroundings, as is evident from his meticulous depictions of the annual cycle of the *sijdds*. He did not refer to stereotypical descriptions of the Skolt Sami according to the majority of scholars and authors in the Finnish public sphere, as lazy, listless drunkards (see the article by Lahti in this volume). He also avoided taking a position in terms of contemporary racial categories: he does not use the terms “Aryan” or “Germanic”, but once refers to the “Nordic” race. He thus avoided the crudest forms of typification in the human sciences.\textsuperscript{38} In spite of this, in

\textsuperscript{35} Susiluoto 2003, 82, 97; Tanner 1929, passim.
\textsuperscript{36} Nyyssönen 2015b, 151–153.
\textsuperscript{37} Susiluoto 2003, 98; Tanner 1929, 7–9.
\textsuperscript{38} Thomas 1994, 97.
numerous passages in the book Tanner relied on hierarchizing discourses. He relied uncritically on local Norwegian officials, such as teachers, ending up echoing their aggressive Social Evolutionist views of the Njauddam Sami (Näätämö, a Skolt Sami sjidd in easternmost Norway). Typically of the time, he blamed the Skolts for their “wrong” subsistence choices, aired doubts as to their capacity for paid employment, and predicted the “natural death” of the Paččjokk sjidd after witnessing their “apathy” in a time of crisis. In these passages, the scholarly discourses of evolutionary identity, caught up in the framework of progressive developmental stages, are aggressively audible in the text. The Skolt Sami are in a liminal state: authentic children of nature, paralyzed in passivity and incompetence and bypassed by modern times, which they have to be helped to enter. At the time this was a very typical, indeed colonial view of a “primitive” people.

It is in these aggressive and racializing ruptures that colonial discourses show their force. The book is burdened with inconclusive vacillation between, on the one hand, the idea of the innate capacities of the Skolt, on the other, that of the external forces affecting them. Tanner is inconsistent in pointing the blame, for example, in encountering people showing symptoms of cultural trauma or colonization.

Tanner’s perception of history was framed by social evolutionism, locating different nationalities along an evolutionary scale. He also applied this hierarchizing evolutionist perspective to historical encounters along the Arctic coast, which he depicted as taking place between the Skolt Sami, who had arrived earlier, and the more powerful Norse and Finnish population groups. Somewhat inconsistently, he entertained ideas of the simultaneous coexistence of overlapping cultural spheres, not necessarily engaged in mutual conflict or competition. In contrast, for Professor Väinö Voionmaa, one of the few historians to show an interest in the Petsamo question, the struggle was taking place between two unequal races. Tanner had ideas that place him in the colonial flank, as well as less aggressive ideas of ethnicities in history. The book was unfinished and

39 Tanner 1929, 155.
40 Tanner 1929, 157–159.
41 Helander-Renvall 2011, 8–9.
43 Tanner 1929, 11–22.
44 Manuscript «Lapparna inom Petsamoområdet», Box 6, Folder 1a, AVT, AUMoN, Tromsø, Norway.
45 Voionmaa 1919, passim.
hastily edited, and therefore contains numerous and sometimes contradictory opinions on a range of issues.

Tanner does not use terms originating in a colonial discourse/terminology as such; they tend, rather, to be derived from the Nordic political context and terminology. When he uses such terms as “kolonist” or “kolonisation”, he attaches to them the sense of a cultural loss of the most authentic forms of subsistence, adding to them a hierarchical tone. In a brief remark on Russian “kolonisation” (from the 1870s onward), the tone is different: he refers to the active Russian policy of settling the peripheries, “dissociating” the original nationalities, and annexing the territories to the Russian “folk region”.

Finnish settler activity in the eighteenth century in the Kemi Lappmark, and the “vanishing” of the old siidas after the shift to agriculture, was of lesser aggressive force. This perspective echoed the historical understanding typical of his time, but can also be seen as a sign of Tanner’s hidden agenda, pointing to the general weakness of the Finns as historical actors, as well as a reluctance to see the process in terms of the parameters of colonialism, which would have been ahistorical and anachronistic.

Tanner credits the sijdds/siidas to a varying extent with socio-cultural and economic agency and a robustness in encountering actors from the south, but ultimately the forces of settlement, colonization, and modernization stand stronger.

After the Skolt Sami had given up independent and systematic reindeer herding, Tanner observed a material and intellectual transformation. He also noted that the lure of trade and goods had revealed an “Epicurean weakness”, a proclivity typical of “children of nature”, among the Skolt Sami. The earlier paternalistic family structure had given way to a more individualistic approach—members had begun to tear themselves away from their families in search of subsistence elsewhere; this brought about a loosening of group sentiment within the sijdd, which then broke up under the strain of the “Europeanizing” form of culture invading the region from sea and land. As inevitably as in these socio-cultural hierarchies, the racial categories employed in the book place the Skolt Sami on the lowest rung in the stereotypical stages of development; notably,

---

46 Tanner 1929, 62, footnote 1.
47 Tanner 1929, 403–404.
48 Tanner 1929, 230–232.
however, and unlike numerous other scholars, Tanner saw the Skolt Sami as a viable people, capable of development and adapting to the modern.\textsuperscript{49}

The text contains numerous descriptions of the Sami “character”, and advice as to how the Sami could best maintain their “happiness”. Although Tanner did collect information from his Skolt Sami guides, and included Sami voices in his book (though in a controlled manner), he found satisfaction in a prescriptive position as well. He avoided the typical Finnish form of power of definition, which imposed the idea of a “higher” form of subsistence, primarily agriculture, on the Sami; what he was aiming at was a relativistic gaze, acknowledging the intrinsic value of the Sami culture as such. The tension arises from the power of definition inherent in the culturally relativistic and positive scholarly gaze as well, if and when one sets down a specific ideal, a particular “correct” subsistence form; in Tanner’s case, this meant semi-nomadism, which the Skolt Sami sijdds were then in the process of gradually abandoning.\textsuperscript{50}

This gaze was purist and normative, and contained numerous colonial tropes, though in mild form. On a positive note, Tanner used reindeer and reindeer herding as a tool to endow the Sami with cultural potency and agency,\textsuperscript{51} and praised them for their successful adaptation to their environment.\textsuperscript{52} At the same time, Tanner’s conception of the Skolt Sami culture as a reindeer-herding culture, an idea contested by subsequent research,\textsuperscript{53} became a cultural straitjacket in the book and a source of vulnerability,\textsuperscript{54} binding the Sami unavoidably to the lowest position, both socio-economically and culturally. It can also be argued, from the book’s general anti-Finnish agenda (along with certain brief passages where Finnish settlers are compared unfavorably to the Sami), that Tanner used his book to convey a politics of identity; the passages where the Sami are elevated in status within the book’s hierarchies may in part have served the purpose of showing the Finns their lowly place along the Arctic coast.\textsuperscript{55} The context of the identity politics expressed in the book is thus national, not colonial.

\textsuperscript{49} Tanner 1929, 329.
\textsuperscript{50} Undated notes on Albin Neander, Box 6, Folder 1a, AVT, AUMoN, Tromsø, Norway.
\textsuperscript{51} Tanner 1929, 25–27.
\textsuperscript{52} Handwritten notes on Petsamo-Sami, Box 5, Folder 3, AVT, AUMoN, Tromsø, Norway.
\textsuperscript{53} Nickul 1948, 60.
\textsuperscript{54} Tanner 1929, 27.
\textsuperscript{55} Tanner 1929, 25–27.
Tanner explicates his view on colonialism

Tanner seldom expressed any views concerning colonialism. In 1927, in an article on the economic potential of Petsamo which has received perhaps the greatest scholarly attention, he presented the idea of the cultural integration of Petsamo as desirable and advocated for the introduction of agriculture as a means to prevent the feared pauperization. When it came to the actual colonization of the region, Tanner preferred not a “plunder economy”, but a mild, Finnish variant of colonization, whereby the Skolt Sami were to be treated as equals. Tanner uses the term “our ‘colonial policy’” only once, in the context of the need for the state to take an expert and guiding role in Petsamo. Otherwise the region is referred to in the text by its new name, Petsamo, or is described as a new part of the country, at the far fringe of the land (maanääri) or as a “Finland of the Arctic Ocean” (Jäämeren Suomi), pointing to the recent annexation and relative foreignness of the region, but not necessarily to a colonial relationship as such. The region to be annexed was part of the state. The lecture on which the 1927 article was based was addressed to a Finnish audience consisting of agricultural scientists; hence the agriculture-friendly stance. Rather than going into this widely studied article in depth, I take up a less familiar example from the 1929 book: a brief reference to the colonial dynamic of the Finnish annexation and of Petsamo as a colony.

In the 1920s and 1930s, there was some reluctance in Finland over representing the country as a colonial power. One exception is a little-known article by Ilmari Laukkanen (1926), which Tanner had read; I use it here to identify the elements of the idea of Finland as a colonial power to which Tanner was reacting in the 1929 book. According to Laukkanen, Petsamo could be characterized as a colony (alusmaa), but did not fully qualify as one. This was because Petsamo had been annexed to the state as an equal territory: first as a province, then as a jurisdictional district (kihlakunta). What lent legitimacy to speaking of Petsamo as a colony, according to Laukkanen, was the educational level and nationality of the population, along with the prior societal, economic, religious, and administrative conditions of the region. There were many alien features, due to which a “sibling relationship” between Petsamo and rest of the country was “unnatural”, and which made for a colonial relationship between

56 Susiluoto 2000, 13; Tanner 1927, 6, 109 et passim.
57 Airaksinen 2008, passim; also Tanner himself is an example of this, Tanner 1927, 6.
colony and “mother country” (emämaa). Laukkanen coded the region as non-western, evident, for example, in the vague and unclear legislation regulating land ownership. The fact that the land of the region was declared to be state (owned) land was represented as “conquest-like” attitude on the part of the Finnish state. The act was legal, in the sense that it had been carried out according to existing Finnish legislation; the forms of private land ownership were formalized and given to those who had the right to them, and land was leased to the settlers. A special Petsamo settlement law, regulating the land and its leasing, was enacted in 1925 (“naturalising” the situation in Finnish legal reasoning). One (unintended) aspect of cultural colonization is found in Laukkanen’s text as well: the “persevering” and “skilled” Finnish settlers were to serve as an example to the Orthodox population. For Laukkanen, the Skolt Sami did not fulfill the parameters of “Finnishness” due to their wandering way of life; hence, they did not qualify for inclusion in the state system. Laukkanen expressed suspicions as to whether the Skolt Sami wished or were capable of becoming sedentary farmers or fishermen, with rights identical to those enjoyed by Finns, and whether they would give up their preferred “forest-dweller freedom” (metsäläis-vapautensa), with its connotations of primitivism.58

Provoked by Laukkanen’s demeaning ideas of the Skolt Sami and of Finnish natural superiority, Tanner included a critical reference to the article. The passage, which once again draws in numerous directions, deals with the misery of the Pacjokk Sami, opening with a long list of positive depictions of their ability to contribute in numerous areas of economic activity beneficial to society as a whole. Surprisingly, Tanner goes on to say that the Skolt Sami were so deep in misery that it would be highly risky to leave them to rely on their own resources, as suggested by Laukkanen. In addition to being provoked by Laukkanen’s doubts as to the personal capacity of the Pacjokk Sami, Tanner appears to be most critical of the idea of uncontrolled sedentarization, which they were in the process of being sucked into, on their own, Skolt Sami initiative, which Laukkanen at least implicitly had described as a desirable policy.59 In Tanner’s view, this was not a desirable solution for the Skolt Sami.

Knowledge production in a colonial/imperial setting has been seen as meaning the creation of intelligible spaces, over which mastery was

59 Tanner 1929, 159–161.
possible,\textsuperscript{60} and the introduction of European conceptions of territoriality at the periphery.\textsuperscript{61} Both Laukkanen and Tanner integrated Petsamo into Finnish administrative territoriality, Laukkanen in a highly formalist manner; both were constructing an extension of the mother country, the colonial features of which were somewhat defective. It was not the idea of Petsamo as a colony as such that bothered Tanner this time; it was his resistance to pronouncements expressing Finnish superiority that prevented him from adopting the most aggressive or arrogant colonial rhetoric. This would have demonstrated the imperial potency of the state he wrote against, and its capacity to bring the Skolt Sami into the modern era. While this stance on the poorly hidden contemporary agenda was what partly motivated his culturally sensitive take on the Skolt Sami, it had other roots as well; these included the friendly relationships he enjoyed in the field,\textsuperscript{62} and the turn in the scientific paradigm toward placing a value on indigenous sources of knowledge.\textsuperscript{63} For both men, however, the place of the Skolt Sami in the quasi-colonial setting was the same: the lowest.

In 1931 Tanner attended an international geography congress in Paris; on the occasion, he took part in an expedition to Algeria. Tanner praised French colonial policies as economically and politically elevating, as well as promoting socio-cultural and national assimilation.\textsuperscript{64} His harsh criticism of the native tribes of Labrador adopted a similar, matter-of-fact manner.\textsuperscript{65} When not provoked by Finnish paternalist voices, such as that of Laukkanen, boasting of Finnish superiority, he aired effortlessly pro-colonial sentiments; it was the national context that was the provoking factor, while colonial discourses provided him with additional tools enabling him to locate the natives on the hierarchical ladder. In any case, the fixed position for the Skolt Sami was the lowest, which the destabilizing weakness of the ("colonizing") potency of the Finns could not shake.

I have found only one indication, in a draft letter found in his correspondence, of Tanner airing and showing an awareness of the anti-imperialist attitudes of the times. In the draft, Tanner writes with reference to an unspecified text by Professor Friedrich Ratzel, a pioneer in the field of human geography, in which Ratzel speaks of the "killing race", that

\textsuperscript{60} For example, Skurnik 2017, 9–10.
\textsuperscript{61} Wu 2019, 64.
\textsuperscript{62} Susiluoto 2000, passim.
\textsuperscript{63} For example, Lagerspetz and Suolinna 2014, 15–17, 52–53.
\textsuperscript{64} Tanner 1932, 35–36.
\textsuperscript{65} Tanner 1944.
destroys “nature folk” by barbarically colonizing them. Tanner lists the victims of this onslaught, specifically mentioning “[American] Indians, Tasmanians and the Eskimo”. Diseases are imported and new temptations are introduced to “children of nature”, at the same time that they are robbed of their resources and their socio-political structures. Some of these processes were visible in Petsamo too, but Tanner suggests there is no cause for despair (this is where the draft ends). 66 Tanner was aware of contemporary anti-imperialist critique and logic; in the 1929 book, however, no such stance was adopted.

CONCLUSIONS

Tanner acted in Petsamo in numerous capacities: as a state official in search of nickel ore, and as a self-proclaimed expert on the Sami. He asserted the typical colonialist presumption of (scholarly) authority, resulting in asymmetric and conflicting representations of the Skolt Sami. On the one hand, his 1929 book is among those sympathetic and relativistic colonial representations which were critical of the writer’s own society: Tanner was definitely critical of the state of Finland. On the other hand, he failed in his quest to produce a consistently sympathetic report on the Skolt Sami. 67 He found this people in the midst of an accelerating process of change in their form of subsistence, something that intrigued Tanner and led him to write about them in various ways, implicitly dependent on international colonial discourses. The general tendency in the book is to be incapable of presenting the Skolt Sami as anything other than on the lowest developmental rung and weakest of the peoples struggling to survive and adapt. Tanner escapes full-blown colonialism only by crediting the Skolt Sami with aptitude to adapt, though only under his guidance. The subsistence crisis of the Skolt Sami and their apparent poverty led Tanner to describe a society at risk of disappearance, which had chosen the wrong path. The “happy” life of the Sijdd-society was beginning to be a lost option; herding had adopted the “wrong” practices and the modernization occurring in the region appeared to him as threatening to the Skolt Sami. To be fair, Tanner cannot be accused of seeing only a cultural desert, a territory awaiting industrial utilization; he also recognized a landscape of meaning.

66 Undated draft and an outline titled “Bidrag till Petsamo-områdets antropogeografi”, Box 18, Folder 6, AVT, AUMoN, Tromsø, Norway.
and function.\textsuperscript{68} This was the picture conveyed by his informants, and was another central point in the book he produced. The book was not merely an ill-advised or ignorant example of the colonial encounter.\textsuperscript{69} The 1929-piece took part in what the global knowledge regime was concerned about: discussions and debates on modernity,\textsuperscript{70} but the last-mentioned taints the book in a partially uncontrolled manner and results in numerous contradictions.

Both contexts—the national and the imperial/colonial—carry a risk of reductionism. The relationship between scholarship and nationalism, industrialism and imperialism is sometimes presented as organic, whereby scientists saw themselves as serving the nation and its expanding empires. This image is true to some extent and is an apt description of some parts of the sciences in Finland as well. In the true imperial centers, the motives of scientists entering academia varied tremendously: sometimes they were openly hostile to the imperialist industrialism many thought they were meant to serve or to the conquest of different parts of the Empires.\textsuperscript{71} The motives of a scientist or scholar might originate from their personal values and include moral motivations and agendas connected both to nation-building and to a broader, personal world-view.\textsuperscript{72} As a Swedish-speaking Finn, Tanner is a good example of a scholar who was troubled by the Finnish nationalistic perspective in scholarship, which he found inappropriate to be advocated in his writings.\textsuperscript{73} The same goes for the idea of Finnish colonial superiority, which he could not align himself with. The national and colonial do intermingle in his book, but in a way that forced Tanner to downplay the colonial rhetoric.

The 1929 book contains aspects of discursive colonialism—the construction of moral superiority and cultural difference are present, but the level of symbolic violence is relatively low;\textsuperscript{74} residual signs of symbolic and discursive violence are observable in the rejection of indigenous rationales of adaptation, for example, in (according to Tanner) the key cultural marker, reindeer herding. The book does not contain explicit colonial framing or the crudest colonial characterizations of the natives, and Skolt

\textsuperscript{68} Pyenson 1982, 27.

\textsuperscript{69} See, for example, Dathan 2012, passim.

\textsuperscript{70} Compare Adelman 2019, 2–7.

\textsuperscript{71} Bowler 1997, 189, 202; Skurnik 2017, 3–4.

\textsuperscript{72} Jalava, Kinnunen and Sulkunen 2013, 13.

\textsuperscript{73} Nyyssönen 2017, passim.

\textsuperscript{74} Compare Cooper and Stoler 1997, 3–4.
Sami citizenship meant that the relationship could not be articulated purely as colonial, since the colonial subject was not formally subject to tutelage of any sort. The tools for hierarchizing, based on race and source of subsistence, were derived from the Social Evolutionist arsenal—which, to be sure, were also to be found in the discursive toolbox of actual settler colonies. The 1929 book lacks the most aggressive colonial discourses: the inevitable destruction of a people in a racial struggle, the displacement of a people due to the need for colonies and resources, the idea of natives as a threat to the rightful colonizer, or a regressive and degenerate people populating valuable resource areas.\(^75\) This relative mildness applies to most Finnish science concerning the Sami, where the disappearance of the Sami was inevitable and regrettable, but not something actually advocated.

It is tenable to propose a totally new interpretation of Tanner as a colonial scholar, but mostly because of the large and inclusive capacity of the definition of the scientific colonialism, embracing both nationalist and evolutionist aspects. We find a man suggesting the forced relocation of reindeer-herding Sami southward from their villages of origin;\(^76\) operating on the naturalized scales and parameters of Eurocentric cultural hierarchies, and categorizing Sami handicrafts as “primitive”;\(^77\) leading the search for nickel ore, for mines that would soon destroy the traditional way of life of one Skolt Sami sijdd; contemplating French colonial policies in a positive light; and reporting condescendingly on the “degeneration” of native groups in Labrador. This would be as reductionist as to rely solely on the previously reigning interpretation of Tanner as a benign and sensitive scholar, who “understood” the Sami. He has both sides to him. At his finest, he managed to lift himself above the dominant colonial tendency of Nordic research, the discourse of the Sami as a dying and disappearing, inferior culture, by acknowledging the viability of Skolt Sami society.

**Epilogue** The fate of the Skolt Sami and that of Tanner’s 1929 book reveal some unexpected twists to be encountered in trying to apply colonial terminology to the Finnish case. It was the great powers of the time, Germany and the Soviet Union, declaring themselves as anti-imperialist at the

---

\(^75\) Danielsson 2009, 59–65; Thomas 1994, 44.

\(^76\) Manuscript «Talma byalag», Box 1, Folder 2b, AVT, AUMoN, Tromsø, Norway.

\(^77\) Third version of the manuscript «Könkämä byalag», Box 1, Folder 2b, AVT, AUMoN, Tromsø, Norway.
time,\textsuperscript{78} whose war machinery made it impossible for the Skolt Sami to continue their form of subsistence in their traditional lands. After the Second World War, the Finnish scholarly community, out of necessity and an aversion toward the two dictatorial powers, launched an anti-imperial project of their own, meant to cleanse the human sciences of aggressive nationalism. In this project, specific readings of Tanner’s work were available; the long-term effect of the reception of the 1929 book was mostly positive, as sustaining a sense of knowledgeable people living close to nature and mastering their environment; an image that resonated well in the Finnish scholarly and literary public sphere after the war, and was repeated in numerous studies. The colonial scientist became emblematic of a prolonged and more sensitive anticolonial take on the Sami in Finnish scholarship, making the idea of a “colonial Finland” increasingly alien.

\textit{Archive of Väinö Tanner (AVT), Archive of Arctic University Museum of Norway (AUMoN), Tromsø, Norway.}

\textit{Official publications:}

\textit{Renbeteskommissionens af 1913 handlingar, I:1,13.}

\textbf{References}


Cooper, Frederick, and Ann Laura Stoler. 1997. Between Metropole and Colony, Rethinking a Research Agenda. In \textit{Tensions of Empire, Colonial Cultures in a}

\textsuperscript{78}This was one of the arguments in favour of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact in 1939. Rentola 1994, 139–145.


