

Decolonizing Production

Healing, Belonging, and Social Change in Sápmi

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The theory and practice of decolonization present an awkward paradox: How can social change occur in everyday life to disrupt state structures while entangled with the mundane, social, and institutional practices and representations that perpetuate state power? In Sápmi, the transborder Indigenous Sámi homeland, decolonization has been intertwined with the institutionalization of Sámi governance and cultural reclamation through national governing bodies. In the Finnish-controlled regions, failures of national recognition of Sámi self-determination have fueled disenchantment with established political platforms and a growing movement to enact self-representation outside these realms. A study of Sámi craft making uncovers embodied mechanisms of decolonization, actualized through production as fluid boundary making and intergenerational healing. Craft makers reinforce relationships to land and family networks in ways that unsettle racialized and legal delineations of community belonging, redirecting the power of representation away from state-constrained decision-making bodies and toward everyday Sámi practice. In doing so, they also negotiate their own use of rejected tropes and colonial networks of production. This interplay establishes the transformative potential and constraints of an embodied decolonization.

Dekoloniserema diehtu ja práksisa čalmmustahtá imašlaš paradoksa: Movt olbmot sáhttet rievdatit stáhta vuogádagaid, jus sii oassálastit ášahusaide ja ovdanbuktimiidda mat jotket ráhkadit stáhta fámu? Dekoloniseren Sámis lea ealáskan dalle go politihkalaš ja kultuvrralaš sámi ášahusat leat álggahuvvon. Dát ášahusat ledje dávjá oassin našunála vuogádagain. Suoma beale našunála vuogádagain, lea dahkkon boasttuvuođa sámi iešmearrideami ektui. Dat lea dagahan duhtatmeahttuvuođa politihkalaš ášahusaide ja boktán dáhttu olahit ieš- ovddasteami maiddái eará sajiin go dáiin ášahusain. Dát dutkkus sámi duoji birra vuoseha movt dekoloniseren geavvá barggu dahje duddjoma bokte. Duddjomis bohtet golgit kultuvrralaš rájiid ja buorránmeahttun sohkaolvvaid gaskkas. Duojarat nanosmahttet oktavuoda eatnamii ja sogalaččaide. Dat rihkko rasisttalaš ja lágalaš servodaga miellahttuvuoda kategorijaid, ja sirdá ovddasteami formála ášahusain fas sápmelaččaide. Seammás, duojarat birget maid iežaineaset geavahusain kolonialisttalaš doahpagaš ja firpmiin. Dát doaimmat čájehit dekolonialisttalaš vejolašvuodaid ja gáržžadusaid.

Dealing with the legacies of colonialism—the continued perpetuation of settler structures and unequal power relations—scholars, writers, and activists have offered methods for decolonization. Some seek to break down the colonial mind inculcated within the individual and in society, notably through the use of Indigenous languages in writing (Wa Thiong'o 1986). Other scholars emphasize the power of decolonizing practice in Indigenous research (Mihešuaš and Wilson 2004; Smith 2013 [1999]). In these processes there has been tension over the paradox of decolonizing through the same institutions that once informed colonial policies and now perpetuate their structures (Sium, Desai, and Ritskes 2012). Yet operating outside these institutions to enact social change begets a similar question: How can decolonization dismantle state structures through daily acts of representation when, as Sharma and Gupta (2006) remind us, the “state” is also constituted through everyday practices and representations?

Hidden practices of language, gesture, and forms of avoidance are recognized as crucial vehicles of resistance in conditions of unequal power relations (Scott 2008). The everyday

renewal and resurgence of Indigenous relations have become central in decolonial movements (Corntassel 2012), while aesthetic expressions provide avenues of representation, health, and well-being (e.g., Ferrara 2004; Magnani 2022; Willow 2010). Therefore, embodied habits and techniques—the underlying mechanisms of social change—demand deeper study if we are to understand possibilities for and methods of decolonization beyond established political and legal bodies. The production of *duodji* (culturally and aesthetically expressive craft) in the Finnish-controlled areas of Sápmi, the transborder Indigenous homeland of the Sámi, illuminates tacit and bodily processes of decolonization.

In current anthropological discourse on decolonization and representation, it is increasingly the case that the ability to decolonize depends on possibilities for the marginalized to represent themselves (Allen and Jobson 2016; Harrison 1997; Spivak 2010) and to set the terms of this representation outside state structures (Coulthard 2014). When Sámi Parliament decisions are overturned by the Finnish government and the enactment of national and international legislation

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on Sámi and Indigenous rights stagnates, self-representation through political bodies is deemed ineffective and takes on new saliency in alternative spheres. In the current political climate in which Indigenous recognition is thus delimited in Finland, the continued enactment of the self-representation of community belonging in everyday life is “decolonizing” in that it circumvents state jurisdiction over Sámi membership, weakening established power relations.

Finnish colonial structures have subjugated and been challenged by Sámi practice through time. After the German burning of the northern province known as Lapland at the end of the Second World War, Finnish national rebuilding was deeply felt in Sámi life. The government built roads through forests and fells that facilitated traffic all the way to the northern and eastern borders and extended Finnish-language municipal, social welfare, and bureaucratic infrastructure (Lehtola 2015c). These developments folded the region into the Finnish welfare state, intensifying cash economies and commercial networks (Lehtola 2015c), which differentially interwove with or replaced local production such as *duodji*.

“Finnicization,” the term used to refer to the structural assimilation of Sámi into Finnish society, unfolded through the institutions and social relations of the time, becoming embodied in colonial detachments from the skills and materials of self-sufficient production. With postwar educational reforms and nation-building infrastructure, Sámi children moved away from daily subsistence and craft practice to Finnish boarding schools and towns. In the schools they encountered rules against speaking the Sámi language and in wider society a pernicious stigma against visible markers of Sáminess. These experiences led to multiple levels of silent estrangement between Sámi families, a Finnicized boarding school generation, and children who longed for the language and practices of their grandparents. Among Sámi, as in many Indigenous communities, structural disconnect from land and social ties manifests intergenerationally as relatively high rates of substance abuse, mental health issues, and suicide compared with those in majority populations (Sámi Norwegian National Advisory Unit on Mental Health and Substance Abuse 2017; Silvikén, Haldorsén, and Kvernmo 2006); such sufferings constitute the “embodied legacies” of colonization (Adelson 2001).

Yet unexpected avenues of subaltern agency emerge through nation building, wherein education and infrastructure meant to assimilate and produce state subjects generate possibilities to undermine these same processes. As Finland built roads and schools and incorporated diverse populations as Finnish citizens registered and tracked within a social welfare system, it also created openings for ethnopolitical activism. Using their knowledge of the dominant language and political structures, Sámi mobilized across Nordic borders and globally through international Indigenous networks to influence national policy (Lehtola 2015c; Minde 1996; Nyssönen 2013). In Finland this led to the establishment of institutions and the enactment of legislation—the Sámi Parliament, acts on cultural and linguistic autonomy, and funding for educational programs—

that promised to raise Sámi recognition in mainstream forums through self-determined governance.

Despite such gestures toward Sámi self-determination, Finland maintains direct control over natural resources while maintaining Sámi governance firmly within its political structures. While Sámi institutional bodies seek to influence Finnish decision-making and gain greater jurisdiction over their territories, this has achieved limited results because of the Sámi Parliament’s insufficient advisory role to the national government. Operating within state bounds, Sámi self-determination in land use and political membership encounters obstacles when Finnish lawmakers perceive such governance as threatening national egalitarian principles (Nyssönen 2011). In response to developments in Sámi and Indigenous rights legislation, countermovements in northern Finland have mobilized to challenge Sámi Indigeneity and representative bodies, generating multiple levels of local conflict on the legal boundaries of Sáminess. The resulting government response has been a tacit rejection of Indigenous rights in the form of legislative inaction. This includes a failure to approve amendments to national Sámi legislation and the general suspension of the ratification process for the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169 on the rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples (Lehtola 2015a).

The inability of Sámi to determine belonging through established political structures prevents the healing of community and territorial detachments embodied in colonial legacies. As such, to decolonize is not only to resolve the intergenerational consequences of the Finnish nation-building project but also to intervene in the lack of self-representation and self-determination that continues to reproduce individual and collective suffering.

To enact the political interventions of production, Sámi actors are using craft, *duodji*, as well as the revival of language, music, and other mobilizations of practice, to express community belonging and Indigenous presence on the land beyond state-controlled realms. Through a physical engagement with materials of production, Sámi establish relationships to land and kin as representations of Sáminess and Indigeneity and thus define belonging in Sámi homelands while government action on these issues stagnates.

We carried out 12 months (2016–2017) of ethnographic fieldwork in Sámi areas in and around the village of Anár, situated some 330 km north of the Arctic Circle in Sápmi.¹ Anár exists as a crossroads for students and professionals from across the Sámi regions and wider Finland as the location of several major Sámi institutions—the Sámi Parliament, news, museum, and Education Institute (SAKK). A craft workshop and business, Samekki, in the center of the village, became a base for participatory engagement in the daily workings of a *duodji* shop and cotheorization of the embodied meanings of craft making. Interviews with other artisans in Anár and

1. Non-English words and place names are in the North Sámi language unless otherwise stated. Anár is written in North Sámi (Inari Sámi: Aanaar; Skolt Sami: Aanar; Finnish: Inari).

neighboring areas illuminated patterns of thought and action that we continuously discussed further at Samekki.²

This research articulates with additional fieldwork we undertook between 2014 and 2015 with artisans in Skolt Sámi areas (14 months by Natalia Magnani, six months by Matthew Magnani) involving participation in organized craft courses, informal instruction, and interviews on the social meanings of making. Although material from this first fieldwork is not used directly in this article, it informs analysis of the broader social and political implications of craft production in Sápmi. Actual experiences of craft making during this fieldwork were linked to reflections on these processes during discussions and interviews in Anár to analyze the relationship between material practice and decolonial intervention. Theorization of the limits and possibilities of decolonization through production is grounded in the extent to which material representations transform social worlds in the way that artisans intend and the extent to which they are unintentionally implicated in the reproduction of state power and politically constraining stereotypes.

This article features the stories of Sami-Ásllat and Sunná—two craftspeople (*duojárat*; singular, *duojár*) who mobilize craft as political action yet who (like the majority of Sámi) are not as visible in the legislative realm of Sámi politics. Sami-Ásllat has been active in the Sámi Duodji Association (an association of craft makers), while Sunná has attended Sámi rights protests, yet both have consciously distanced themselves from established platforms of Sámi-state mediation. Their stance reflects a broader sentiment in the Sámi community of disenchantment with the insufficient power of the Sámi Parliament, its trappings within Finnish governing structures, and stagnation on Indigenous rights enactment. Therefore, their stories provide ethnographic depth to the sentiments voiced by many of the artisans and residents we interviewed in Anár and adjacent regions, showing that decolonization occurs not only through activism and visible political arenas but also through ordinary acts of self-representation. Moreover, Sami-Ásllat and Sunná were the *duojárat* with whom we formed the closest relationships during our time in Anár, and as a result they engaged in a process of cotheorization over the course of the writing of this article—from initial research questions to feedback on the resulting text (*sensu* Bonilla 2015; Rappaport 2008). While an early version of this article anonymized Sami-Ásllat and Sunná, they both decided to have their names

2. Interviews around Anár were primarily conducted in Finnish and English. Natalia Magnani had previously been learning Skolt Sámi while living in the Skolt area and carrying out interviews using a particular mix of Skolt Sámi and Finnish spoken in the region. With common words but differing substantially from North Sámi, this language base, combined with preliminary North Sámi study, facilitated conceptual insight into and discussion of Sámi craft making. At Samekki the use of Finnish more than Sámi reflected histories of language loss and assimilation but also the diverse backgrounds of the shop's workers and apprentices, who primarily spoke Finnish and English.

published after joint reading and discussion, establishing that name recognition could be a powerful tool to convey these themes when the article is circulated to the Sámi community, while publication in an academic journal by two non-Indigenous anthropologists could broaden public reach. The hope was that their craft and this text decolonize alongside each other.

In many Indigenous communities, the perpetuation of colonial histories manifests as politically delegitimizing representations and social and territorial detachments. Sámi craftspeople intervene in these processes by affirming the familial and material relations of *duodji*. As they imbue reindeer antler, wood, and cloth with meanings of intergenerational healing and belonging, they reinforce Indigenous relations to land and community, redefine Indigeneity beyond visually stereotyped forms and toward embodied expressions, and effect change on the terms of Sámi practice not subject to state governance. All the while, they negotiate their own unintended reproduction of colonial trappings in these everyday realms. In this way people reconcile the entanglement of decolonization and the reproduction of state power in everyday life through bodily and material practice.

Legislating Sáminess, Embodying Belonging

Failures of mainstream recognition are apparent in the ongoing debate over the legislation of Sámi community membership. To incorporate Sámi governance (albeit without legislative power) within the workings of the Finnish state, the 1995 Act on the Sámi Parliament defined Sámi identity and, by extension, electoral membership according to the meeting of at least one of three criteria: language, the political registration of parents, and, controversially, descent from ancestors designated as “Lapps” in land, population, and tax registers based on livelihood (reindeer herding, fishing, hunting). The latter category is commonly referred to as the “Lapp clause.”³ However, this clause has been highly contested, resulting in tensions between practical and legal norms of belonging.

While Sámi representatives were involved in the drafting of the original proposal, in which the Lapp clause was included in a limited form (consideration of land and tax records only from 1875 to match the language and other generation criteria), the final law was enacted without this year limit because of a bureaucratic technicality bypassing Sámi Parliament approval (Lehtola 2015a:39–42). Through practical rejection of this clause in accepting people to the electoral register, the Parliament enacts self-determination of community membership on the grounds that livelihood-based registers dated before

3. According to the Act on the Sámi Parliament (Ministry of Justice 1995), one is Sámi if he or she identifies as Sámi and if “1) he himself or at least one of his parents or grandparents has learnt Sámi as his first language; or 2) he is a descendent of a person who has been entered in a land, taxation or population register as a mountain, forest or fishing Lapp; or 3) at least one of his parents has or could have been registered as an elector for an election to the Sámi Delegation or the Sámi Parliament.”

the late nineteenth century do not take into account more crucial yet intangible determinants of belonging, such as kin relations and community acceptance.

Meanwhile, multiple levels of decision-making in the Sámi Parliament and the Finnish government, on matters of the Sámi definition and beyond, fuel and are fueled by conflict over the ratification of the ILO 169 on the rights of Indigenous peoples. Ratification would entail legally binding recognition of Indigenous cultural, linguistic, consultation, land, and natural resource rights in Finland.⁴ This has generated local controversy over who may be considered Sámi or Indigenous and thus claim rights under these statutes.

The political entanglement of the Sámi definition and the ILO Convention has led to a legislative standstill on ratification: in 2015 the Sámi Parliament voted to support ILO ratification; this proposal was combined with an amended Sámi definition and sent to the constitutional law committee and then to the Finnish Parliament, which failed to approve all propositions, as each exacerbated the controversy of the other (Lehtola 2015a:38). Since then, seeking to avoid yet effectively perpetuating political tensions in northern Finland, the Finnish government has stalled decision-making on the ILO Convention.

International guidelines in the ILO Convention emphasizing original inhabitation, together with the dispute over the Lapp clause in the Sámi Parliament Act, also gave rise to new political communities challenging Sámi Indigeneity. These groups lobby to make ILO 169 ratification contingent on the equal recognition of their own Sámi or Indigenous status.⁵ The “Lapp movement” comprises those who claim a long history of land use within the present-day borders of northern Finland and therefore entitlement to equal Indigenous rights through recognition that they are Indigenous under the ILO 169 and “Lapps” under the Lapp clause of the Sámi Parliament Act. The Lapp movement has given rise to the forest Sámi movement, which designates many of these claimants as descendants from tax- and land-registered forest and fishing “Lapps.” Arguments of historical descent directly contest the language criteria of the Sámi definition based on lived experiences of belonging (Joonaa 2012). They also focus on national boundaries at the expense of a mobile and transborder Indigeneity (Kuokkanen 2011). This has led to the widespread undermining of reindeer-herding Sámi in particular, perceived to dominate the wider electorate, on the grounds that they settled in Finland only following national border closings and therefore are not the area’s “original” inhabitants (Valkonen 2019). Despite documented accounts of reindeer Sámi migration in contemporary northern Finland and the context of forced settlement on one side of the border in a wider migration area (Lehtola 2015a), the perception of a Sámi Parliament dominated by “less” or non-Indigenous “im-

migrant” reindeer Sámi is continuously reproduced in everyday social interaction and taken up by politicians to undermine the Sámi Parliament as a representative body.

Appeals to Finnish courts regarding membership have also taken up broader designations of “nonstatus Sámi” (Sarivaara 2012)—anybody identifying as Sámi but not recognized as such by the Sámi Parliament. As arguments of equality, land-rights, and human rights buttress different positions in the conflict (Joonaa and Joonaa 2011; Lehtola 2015a), Sámi Indigeneity is precariously situated within national narratives and international rights discourse.

Because of incongruences between legislation and practical acceptance, rights to Indigenous self-determination have become crucial for navigating discontent with legal definitions as they presently stand. On the one hand, the Finnish government has made clear its ultimate jurisdiction over Sámi membership: in 2015 the Supreme Court of Finland overturned almost 100 rejections of Sámi membership by the Sámi Parliament (the Parliament had deemed claims to Sámi membership insufficient when based only on land, population, and tax records). On the other hand, the Finnish government has made attempts to resolve the situation, for example, requesting a report featuring a comparative study of Indigenous rights implementation, including community membership, that concluded with an argument for the unification of a political definition across the Sámi areas of multiple nation-states (Heinämäki et al. 2017).

Many Sámi believe that chronic legislative inaction on the ILO Convention and the simultaneous overturning of Sámi decision-making work to reproduce Finnish assimilation politics of the boarding school and postwar nation-building era. They contend that instead of cultural erasure, the state is undermining Sámi jurisdiction over group membership by providing avenues for those of majority interests to infiltrate the fabric of Sámi political organization. They fear that such decisions will reposition Sámi as minority voices among a Lapland majority (Junka-Aikio 2016). At stake is the ability of Sámi to determine their own affairs and cultural resource allocation, as originally intended by cultural autonomy legislation and international Indigenous treaties.

Regional conflicts building over the entangled issues of the ILO Convention and the Sámi definition are social and political manifestations of embodied tensions between legal parameters and relational forms of belonging. In seeking recognition through the application of international statutes to national legislation, Indigenous peoples navigate external and essentializing representations of cultural distinctiveness (Levi and Maybury-Lewis 2012) and group identity (Valkonen, Valkonen, and Koivurova 2017). Recognition articulated as a “politics of” (Taylor 1994) has been critiqued as limiting Indigenous lives within essentialized notions of cultural practice (Schneiderman 2013). All of this creates openings for challenges to Indigenous rights on the grounds that people supposedly do not exhibit a continuity with ancestral practices (Povinelli 2002).

While a written definition has been important to the implementation of Sámi governance in relation to Finnish state

4. However, it remains unclear how these general guidelines would be enacted in practice.

5. These social movements have formed alliances to varying degrees (see Lehtola 2015a for details).

structures, it nevertheless privileges “objective characteristics” like language or descent (Lehtola 2015a), risks racializing the concept of culture (Tuulentie 1999), and eclipses kinship-based recognition as customary law (Valkonen, Valkonen, and Lehtola 2017). Maintaining the ability to self-determine membership on a case by case basis not only fulfills international treaties on the rights of Indigenous peoples to determine their own affairs (Cobo 1986) but also reconciles the rigidity of legal frameworks with a dynamism of Indigenous experience and recognition of community belonging.

To override infringements on Sámi governance perpetuated by constraining representations, everyday self-determining action has emerged beyond the legislative sphere. As expressions of embodied Sámi identity (Valkonen 2014), they comprise counterrepresentations of relational group belonging that have failed to be legally enacted. “Self-recognition” (Coulthard 2014) and “refusal” (Simpson 2014) extend recognition beyond the limitations of external representations and government policy, toward expressive formations of ethnicity (Sylvain 2014), comprising attachments that are affective and material (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:149). The ways in which people on the Finnish side of Sápmi overcome structural barriers to recognition through alternative mediums of self-representation advance understanding of Indigeneity beyond essentialized notions of genes and descent and toward embodied, socially situated practice.

Duodji as Self-Representation

Duodji presents the ideal medium for representation as decolonization on Sámi terms. The word duodji in North Sámi challenges divisions between craft, art, and cultural objects and tradition and modernity (Hansen 2016) and has been defined more broadly as “Sámi culture expressions” (Guttorm 2012). Made with a potential for functionality guided by aesthetic value, birch knives, bowls, and reindeer antler spoons are individually engraved with regional symbols, and Sámi dress (*gákti*) is vibrantly patterned according to family specifications. Making duodji blurs boundaries between the Sámi concepts of to know (*diehtit*) and to be able to execute bodily and practical knowledge (*máhttit*; Guttorm 2011).⁶ The ability of duodji to transcend simple characterizations makes it ideally suited as a dynamic medium of self-representation wherein the bends and contours of production are translatable to a Sámi public rather than to government or majority actors.

Contemporary production carries continuities of past meanings, continuously transforming in dialogue with social and political processes. Items of wood and antler were originally household items; as they decreased in use and production with postwar road construction, commercial availability, and board-

ing school dislocations of practice (Lehtola 2015c), they simultaneously took on new values and forms in Lapland tourism that boomed with the same infrastructural rebuilding. All the while, object forms and designs were developing in dialogue with increasingly specialized duojárat, who came to be recognized by their individual, family, and regional styles. As a particularly visible marker of Sáminess, *gákti* was especially subject to assimilation pressures within an emerging Finnish nation. Younger generations quickly replaced their dress with Finnish styles, while older generations who still held the habit of daily wear grew fewer as they passed away (Lehtola 2004). Revived duodji practice since the 1970s, supported by the establishment of Sámi governing bodies, cultural autonomy legislation, and craft and language education, institutionalized duodji representations in relation to family and region. Everyday self-representation of community belonging through duodji is therefore informed by these histories and shapes the ways they are remembered.

Institutional mediations of belonging occur through trademarking and education. SAKK, based in Anár, receives funding through the Finnish National Agency for Education but has a degree of local control through a board of Sámi Parliament and municipality representatives. Through the teaching of Sámi language, craft, and other employable skills, SAKK promotes Sámi culture and economic opportunities in northern homelands and at the same time reinforces community boundaries based on regional material culture and practice. Dress and language are taught specific to regions and codified with the help of books. Non-Sámi artisans are encouraged to develop their own designs for wooden and antler items instead of using local patterns. More recently, some craft courses have switched to instruction in North Sámi, effectually providing an initial screening of community ties for learning duodji.

In a more official process of evaluation, the Sámi Duodji Association certifies objects as duodji to protect Sámi craft from copying and cultural misuse by non-Sámi and commercial interests and grants the duodji label only to those products made by Sámi. This simultaneously guides boundaries of innovation and deviation in duodji practice and belonging. In these assessments, souvenir Sámi dress sold in tourist shops, without the appropriate family signifiers and Sámi makers, does not receive the label of Sámi duodji and remains contested and are assumed to be culturally appropriated (Kramvig and Flemmen 2018). Institutional regulation is thus mobilized to realize cultural and economic well-being (Nuorgam 2017) and as a key mechanism in the self-determination of relational community boundaries.

Institutional values of production structure duojár practice to varying degrees, as many are trained at SAKK or seek certification through the Sámi Duodji Association. But there are also individual decisions based on collective sensibilities that determine the ways in which Sámi craft makers actualize the political potential of duodji in the self-determination of social boundaries. Duojárat expand territorial temporalities while delimiting belonging to present-day social relations. The kin-based sourcing of materials, knowledge, and designs of production

6. The functionality of duodji requires only the potential of use—e.g., while a laboriously engraved and costly Sámi knife may in theory be used, often it remains on display in the home because of the risk of losing an item of high economic and social value.

simultaneously links the maker and wearer to transborder areas in deeper time and to living relations. Like family names, shared dress patterns across national borders bear witness to Sámi conceptions of belonging that defy contemporary political boundaries. When making dress for others, several duojárat we spoke with avoid making gákti characteristic of a particular region or family without clear ties known to both maker and wearer. These actions directly challenge the Finnish government overrule of Sámi Parliament decisions, regulating boundaries based on shifting and dialogic relations instead of registers retrospectively delineated within present-day national borders.

Enacted according to internal evaluations of contemporary belonging instead of external judgments of phenotypic and biological purity, duodji practice also subverts colonial depictions of “the other” as portrayals of a static culture (Said 1978), reproduced in nineteenth-century Lappological research that classified Sámi on the basis of preconceived typologies (Hirvonen 1999). Although this research was diverse and reflected lines of thought that challenged each other (Lehtola 2017), a general emphasis on physical appearance based on biological categories shifted perceptions of Sámi cultural difference away from that marked by dress, language, and various practices (Baglo 2001). The assertion of craft production as a form of self-representation transforms portrayals of Sámi away from external typologies. For example, the wearer of the gákti looks no different from anybody else (blonde or brunette, blue or brown eyed, born into the family or adopted), but it is their belonging to contemporary Sámi family and community that gives them social sanction to wear the dress.

As a form of “decolonial aesthetics” challenging established political structures through artistic expression (Martineau and Ritskes 2014), Sámi craft making has the potential to subvert essentializations and contestations of Indigenous identity by creating recognition beyond legal frameworks. At the same time, it raises questions of whether such self-representation can actually be achieved if it is not recognized by dominant political bodies (Spivak 2010). Gákti production and use extend representation beyond externally recognizable cultural forms, toward unspoken dimensions of practice enacted by and for Sámi themselves. While to an outside observer gákti indicates a Sámi wearer, one belonging to a Sámi community can deduce an individual’s family affiliation or marital status from finer details. Furthermore, shifting habits and norms of production and wear (e.g., trends in fabric and hem length) are constantly negotiated in dialogue with Sámi family, friends, and dressmakers. Through such informal and changing controls and sensibilities, duodji reorders colonial representations based on external appearance toward an embodied logic regulated by community actors.

As duodji practice acts as a locus of self-representation, silent material practices negotiate political boundaries of community belonging in ways that have the power to enable or impede recognition of Indigenous rights. By shifting representations of Sáminess away from racialized stereotypes and

legislative criteria and redirecting the power of recognition away from Finnish governing bodies, material production advances recognition of Sáminess as expressions of community belonging in everyday life. In this way duodji provides a vehicle of self-recognition (Coulthard 2014) or refusal (Simpson 2014)—a means by which Indigenous communities create alternative avenues of recognition that refuse to engage colonial institutions.

Materials of Healing

Following decolonial acts through the making of cultural objects elucidates the actual embodied practices that produce feelings of rootedness to land and community and thus repair a sense of intergenerational and postcolonial detachment. Individuals leverage material properties to stake political claims (Chance 2015), engage emotional associations that imbue objects with meaning (Sennett 2008), and guide production and sensory engagement (Ingold 2007, 2013:19). Therefore, it is not just the agency of things (Gell 1998; Latour 2005) but also the unfolding experience of making these things that allow people to reorder their worlds. When such practices become experienced as the extension of local ecologies and family networks, material production becomes a site to assert a fluidity of social and territorial connections that nuance Indigenous recognition.

The Sámi artisans we spoke with around Anár often referred to duodji as a form of “healing.” Experiential qualities of craft production, as a form of caregiving and self and memorial care (Kleinman 2016), allow people to cope with ongoing social and political uncertainties by giving meaning to emotional and bodily suffering (Kleinman 1988, 2007). In the Sámi context, craft techniques take on meaning as intergenerational healing when enacted through familial reconnection in learning to collect and work materials. Emotional suffering is experienced as the manifestation of a historical disenfranchisement that created distance between generations and between people and their land and resources. A sense of repairing these relationships through craft making reorders bodily experience as political action and positions intergenerational dialogues as key mechanisms of decolonization.

An approach to decolonization as simultaneously embodied and political illuminates purposeful intervention in subjugating structures. On the one hand, embodied material practices reinforce ties to land and social relations in ways that heal colonial detachments. They allow people to distance themselves from state-structured political platforms where Sámi community practices and land claims are publicly contested. At the same time, participation in global capitalist extraction and circulation, which reproduce systems of Indigenous exploitation in other parts of the world, generates affective constraints to production as decolonization. Thus, Sámi craft makers repair relational ties locally while negotiating the unintended reproduction of dislocations elsewhere.

Sami-Ásllat, a duojár who was in his mid-30s during our fieldwork in Anár, has a bittersweet relationship with silver. While he sustains his business, Samekki, through the sale of silver jewelry for Sámi dress and the broader public, he prefers making wood and antler craft. Sami-Ásllat privileges these local materials over silver and considers them to be more authentic duodji, more firmly tied to the movements and subsistence practices of his ancestors in the territories between Áŋŋel and Gáregasnjárga (about 100 km from Anár), situated on but transcending the border between Finland and Norway.

The Samekki shop is made from local pine. It is the oldest building in Anár since the Germans burned the village at the end of the Second World War. Samekki's products are in high demand because Sami-Ásllat's father, from whom Sami-Ásllat inherited the shop, had over several decades developed Samekki's reputation for quality duodji. When a customer enters Samekki, the wooden table of the adjoining workshop comes immediately into view, covered with works in progress, usually silver (see fig. 1). On the walls hang *guvssit* (singular, *guksi*), drinking vessels made of birch burl, reinforced at the handle with reindeer antler and engraved with Sámi patterns, and *niibbit* (singular, *niibi*), knives with handles of birch and sheaths of reindeer antler. Higher on the walls is Sami-Ásllat's childhood cradle (*gietkka*), carved from pine and wrapped in reindeer leather, displayed next to his old Sámi dress in the distinctive style of his family and region.

As an adult, Sami-Ásllat learned skills of wood and antler working through a course at SAKK, where many of his relatives teach craft, and then through an apprenticeship with his father. This built on bits and pieces of embodied knowledge acquired in

childhood with his father at Samekki and with uncles and aunts employed at SAKK; at that time he was always surrounded by but never fully trained in the making of things. Even while immersed in these practices that wove him and his relatives together, Sami-Ásllat experienced a gnawing sense of disconnect in the silences between him and his father, interrupted by stories of boarding school Finnicization in Finnish. When his parents divorced, Sami-Ásllat moved to Helsinki, where he eventually went on to receive a university degree in computer science. He remembers one event from that time that lingers as part of his journey back north: once he was handing out flyers for a Sámi event while wearing his dress, with the vibrantly colored four-winds hat (see fig. 2), when a passerby pointed and laughed, “*Narri!*” meaning fool or joker in Finnish. “That made me feel pretty bad . . . but I actually think he didn't have a clue what I was.” Instead of continuing to toil with computer technologies and odd jobs, Sami-Ásllat moved home to learn the Sámi language and his family trade, back to the place where he did not need to explain to people “what he was.” Through this relearning, which he refers to as “decolonization,” he could begin to repair multiple levels of disconnect magnified over generations.

We would spend days at Samekki before or after interviews with other artisans, dropping in during peak production and winding down in the afternoon with a cup of coffee after the duojárát had put down their silver engravers and wood carvers. There was Sami-Ásllat, apprentices from SAKK coming and going, Cypriot and Finnish craft makers who had studied at SAKK, Sami-Ásllat's family members, villagers passing through to order silver jewelry or a *guksi*, and us, learning about craft as political expression. All of us had one thing in common that led



Figure 1. Silver buttons with the signature Laiti design on the worktable at Samekki.



Figure 2. Four-winds hat displayed at Samekki.

to daily experiments in cotheorization; through our individual tools of production—duodji and writing—we were interested in the transformative potential of craft in everyday life.

Despite Sami-Ásllat's conviction about the local affirmations of wood and antler at Samekki, he encounters daily tensions in working the shop's silver as a historical material of global trade and exploitative extraction. While the *solju* (see fig. 3), a silver brooch on the *gákti*, conveys strong ties to Sámi culture, it was not until recently that Sámi made silver objects themselves instead of commissioning them through trade (Immonen 2006), embodied as part of broader colonial networks (Nordin 2012). Today, silver that is not recycled is sourced from mines such as those in Latin America and Australia; as a result, for many artisans, working silver elicits the ethics of the exploitation of Indigenous labor, natural resources, and land beyond Sápmi.⁷

Although Sami-Ásllat uses recycled silver, he is aware of the symbolic associations of the materials he uses with the perpetuation of global inequalities. Not wearing a mask or ventilating the workshop to prevent the inhalation of silver particles, Sami-Ásllat connects the invisible and noxious processes of silverwork to the equally concealed and pernicious political and social structures reproduced by all actors. He explains this connection one day as he begrudgingly works away on a piece of silver and Natalia makes indentations in more silver: "As I said, everything is linked. . . . All those structures in legislation and attitudes are still there, they are just more politically correct. And that makes me sick, I don't

7. CPM Group (2021) contains statistics on contemporary silver extraction.

want to be on Facebook anymore; I'm kind of retreating from the world because it hurts me so much, . . . and that's why I need to do these handicrafts [wood and antler], because it's healing for me."

In contrast to silver, wood, bone, and antler are comparatively localized avenues of production actualized through Sámi social networks and therefore provide mechanisms for healing and belonging on Sámi terms. Craftspeople source reindeer antler from family herds or other regional owners, with whom they must have a strong enough relationship to receive information about antler availability before reindeer are sent away for slaughter. Wood is also often collected on family lands—Sami-Ásllat uses a stockpile that his father curated over decades, picking up ideal burls for *guvssit* and birch pieces for *niibbit* that he noticed while on his way to fish or go to his cabin.

Sami-Ásllat embodies ties to a transborder region and ancestors as he carries his first *guksi* and the skill (*máhttu*) that traveled across Sápmi and generations in his family to shape the burl cup (see fig. 4). His father learned techniques and engravings for making *guvssit* while studying at *Dálvvadis* (*Jokkmokk*) on the Swedish side of Sápmi; on returning to Anár, he applied these skills to local materials. Decades later, during Sami-Ásllat's apprenticeship, he taught his son how to make a *guksi* with the design that has come to mark the family, also shared across borders. Materials and skills of production are thus mobile across Sápmi and generations. Together, the techniques, materials, and designs interweave to represent Sámi as mobile communities superseding national boundaries while countering narratives of Sámi "immigration" to Finland.



Figure 3. Silver frame of the *solju* awaits dangling pieces of silver and the engraved antler inlay in the wooden box.

Meanwhile, the knowledge of collection and working requires teaching by older generations, so the communication generated through production acts as a mechanism for reforming ties to people and natural resources alienated by state

policies. In seeking where to find and how to harvest materials, what tools to use, and how to use them, Sami-Ásllat activates family knowledge and connections. Therapeutic engagement with craft materials reinforces these interactions as acts of self-care



Figure 4. Sami-Ásllat's photograph of his first *guksi*.

and collective care, personal and community healing. This process is depicted through a film made during Sami-Ásllat's duojár apprenticeship: he and his uncle, also a SAKK instructor, discuss state separations from family and homelands and the contemporary role of duodji in repairing these attachments, all while Sami-Ásllat learns to make a guksi (Interaktiivinen Sápmi 2011). Beyond the script, the interaction between Sami-Ásllat and his uncle shows that it is the social reconnections forged through production that act as mechanisms of decolonization.

In the film, each step of making a guksi is used as an opportunity to share stories about the meanings of the production of a mobile object produced through knowledge of local raw materials passed between generations and techniques shared more broadly across Sápmi. His uncle shows him where to collect and identify the appropriate birch burl. Later, they continue discussions in the workshop as Sami-Ásllat uses a combination of power tools and a handheld gouge to carve the concavity of the burl into a guksi, remarking that the curly birch (*Betula pendula*) is more difficult to shape because of its concentration of branches. Through these acts of production using new tools reinforced across the Sámi regions through institutionalized craft education, his uncle explains that the authenticity of craft is not determined by a "clinging to the past" but by the making of duodji by Sámi people for contemporary needs.

As Sami-Ásllat applies extra force to compensate for the properties of this particular birch, he considers the pressures to Sámi life reflected through the making of duodji—community ties and well-being unsettled by government boarding schools, Finnish nation building, and their reverberations into the present. These stories and reflections continue through the making of the guksi so that by the end of the film, Sami-Ásllat and his uncle are visibly closer—smiling and drinking from two handmade guvssit. Through each stroke of the gouge and sander, they are caring for family attachments crucial to repairing postcolonial disruptions of practice.

The properties of materials and the social and ecological associations they engender guide these reconnections to land and kin. While shaping local burl, tools allow the hand to respond to physical properties and the developing form (Ingold 2000:299–302), generating therapeutically meditative attention to the unwritten script between material and body and evoking ties to practices and environments shared across borders and intergenerationally. Unlike silver, described by artisans as relatively homogeneous, soft, and malleable and on which a form may be more easily imposed through cutting, hammering, and heat-treating, wood has its own logic. It guides the hand around curves of grain, variations of durability according to the particular tree and the part of the tree from which it was collected, thus evoking relationships with unique places on the landscape that transcend national boundaries.

Meanwhile, antler reinforcement on the handle of the wooden cup affirms social ties to migrating reindeer herds in

family areas. Bone and antler procurement compels dialogue between artisan and herder about which parts will yield the appropriate properties for a specific craft. State pressure, including Finnish regulations and European Union laws on reindeer husbandry, has impacted the availability of desirable materials by favoring younger herds, decreasing the size and thickness of antler. Therefore, antler workers must navigate not only durable sections of bone and the brittleness of hollow spaces to create a solid form but also the family ties that give them access to rare raw materials. Through such engagements Sami-Ásllat uncovers the latent potential of muscles and thought that reenact ancestral interactions with local materials, conjuring skills of production and associated family ties unremittingly under pressure by state policies.

In the summer of 2017, Samekki closed for renovation (see fig. 5). Sami-Ásllat took sick leave to figure out how to deal with the embodied disruptions that had become part of his everyday life and how he could ultimately heal beyond the temporary relief of material contact. Although Sami-Ásllat's goal was to make wooden and antler duodji as a method of healing, there were so few times over the course of the year we were at Samekki when he was able to make these products. He reluctantly took orders for wood and antler items, knowing that he would most likely not be able to complete them, and managed to make only enough silver to sustain the shop. He describes a kind of bodily hindrance to entrepreneurial productivity, implicating the embodiment of colonial histories. Before closing Samekki, Sami-Ásllat applied for and received a grant through SAKK that would temporarily fund his duodji work and mitigate his economic dependence on silver. Therefore, during his sick leave and Samekki's renovation, Sami-Ásllat sought to use the grant and time to finally focus on materials of healing.

While suffering may be forgotten or attributed meaning through sensory contact, the craftsman cannot engage in the process of production endlessly. It is in coming to terms with uncertainty and the dark side of human experience and re-making practices to navigate and rework this terrain that one copes with suffering (Kleinman 2007). Material practices reorder social worlds, but more effective transformation may be enacted through engagements that do not cease when one leaves the workshop. This is why many Sámi advocate for the continuous material practice of duodji in particular dress beyond occasional wear for special events, which creates opportunities for decolonization in everyday life. On social media, hashtags commonly refer to this as the everyday gákti (*árgagákti*), or what Sunná, Sami-Ásllat's niece, calls a "second skin."

Beyond Recognition and toward a Second Skin

In her cabin down a quiet road toward Áŋjel tucked away from Anár village, Sunná, a young Sámi artist and dance therapist, talks about her gákti. By wearing Sámi dress outside



Figure 5. Samekki workshop closed for several years after our time there.

formal occasions in everyday life, she mobilizes its material properties of wool broadcloth as a second skin. She makes and wears the *gákti* every day for one year not only to decolonize her own bodily practice but also to break down racialized representations of Sámi that create obstacles to Indigenous rights. She explains, “It was my idea to decolonize my closet because I don’t have dark skin all the time, I have really white skin all the time. And people mess up that I’m not Sámi. . . . I wanted to show that my *mind* is not white, that my father is not white, my mother is not white. And then I got the idea that I have the skin, my own skin.”

In the nineteenth century, typological classifications in government policy and biological anthropological discourse entangled the physicality of skin with concepts of race in the popular imagination (Pyykkönen 2015; cf. Howes 2018). Rarely did this research find that people conformed to racial categories, but results were interpreted as the corruption of distinct types through intermarriage to confirm preexisting race ideologies (Schanche 2002). Racialized conceptions of Sámi identity continue today as people cite the presence of “mixed” families and a lack of dark facial features to delegitimize Sámi “purity” and thereby claims to Indigenous rights. In this way, legacies of race research circulating in public discourse form contemporary challenges to Sámi self-determination.

The *gákti* as a second skin emerges from a source of tension between constructions of race and culture. The second skin is a form of bodily adornment that makes moral and social worlds visible (Prosser 1998), a liminal boundary between self and social world (Schildkrout 2004; Turner 2012). Sámi experiences of dress as a lived second skin merge the social meanings of skin and cloth (Allerton 2007; LaFrance 2018:6). On the one hand, this naturalizes cloth to take on meanings similar to

those of skin, risking racialization. On the other, the making and wearing of dress have the potential to reorder associations of skin and culture in ways that disrupt racializing representations and redefine belonging on Sámi terms.

Acting as an experiential and performative medium that facilitates individual agency (Eicher 2000; Miller 2005), cloth extends the communicative power of skin to challenge racialized representations of Sámi in northern Finland. It does so by indexing an embodied cultural unity as a material worn on the body (Somby 2011) but only among those socially sanctioned to wear it. Similarly, dress and cloth engage authenticity expectations introduced by cultural tourism (Theodosopoulos 2012; cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:9, 25; Conklin 1997)—expectations often based on phenotypic stereotypes. By being grounded in social norms of belonging instead of externally perceived “whiteness,” “nonwhiteness,” and “racial purity,” dress mediates Indigenous agency in representation, self-making, and self-determination. The production and wear of Sámi dress thus redirect experiences of cultural difference away from the skin and toward indisputably Sámi cloth to challenge representations of Sáminess as the extension of genes, blood, and descent.

Sunná’s sense of Sámi and Indigenous identity strengthened when she studied in Rovaniemi.⁸ Sunná was born in Lahti to a father from the northern Sámi regions and a Karelian mother from southern Finland. In Rovaniemi she usually did not tell people that she was Sámi because it evoked hurtful stereotypes about Sámi appearance and behavior—people who are drunk and dirty and wear funny four-winds hats. The pain of these

8. Rovaniemi (as it is written in Finnish) is the capital of the Lapland region and is located 330 km south of Anár on the Arctic Circle.

encounters shaped her awareness of her own Indigeneity. She found that the best way to deal with the injury of misrepresentations was not to confront them directly but instead to express Sáminess in everyday life.

In 2017, the 100-year anniversary of a pan-Sámi political awakening in Trondheim presented an unusual opportunity for Sunná to wear the gákti every day for an entire week. At the end of that week she launched the gákti 365 project, resolving to wear the gákti every day for one year. She intended to “decolonize her closet” and, by extension, her day-to-day practice by reintegrating gákti as a daily material in Sámi life.

Through time, the intended audience of political action via dress has oscillated between other Sámi and external governing bodies (Magga 2018). Sunná explains that when she and others wear the gákti at special events, “we are really in our bodies, we are really comfortable about ourselves, because we are there together wearing our clothes showing who we are.” The gákti transforms habits of wear—posture and the way that people carry themselves—in a way that communicates collective security and belonging for both Sámi and other communities. On the other hand, who gets to wear the dress and how they wear it have become increasingly guarded in a political climate of contestation over Sámi and Indigenous status. Wearing dress “wrong” conspicuously indicates nonsanctioned use and lack of belonging. Those familiar with the making of gákti notice when a sewing technique is not quite right, gender norms of wear are unintentionally breached, or patterns and overall production do not align with contemporary family or regional practice. Remaking the gákti as a second skin shifts such expressions and social controls normally reserved for cultural and political gatherings into daily life to enact duodji as an embodied medium of self-representation and recognition.

Like skin on the body, gákti has become inseparable from Sáminess, as the terms of Indigenous recognition hinge on the embodiment of cultural difference. Duojárat like Sunná navigate the essentializing pitfalls of this global terrain by blurring boundaries between fabric and body, reorienting conceptions of skin beyond phenotype. This process is similar to the “epidermal text” of interactions between objectifying gazes and the resignification of skin in ways that both counter and exist in dialogue with racial essentializations (Stephens 2014). While Sunná feels trapped by the social and racial associations of skin (cf. Fanon 1968), she is hindered not by a marginalized phenotype but by its lack. When people in northern Finland contest Sámi rights, they often question the authenticity of Sámi who do not fit stereotypes of dark eyes and hair and the morphological diagrams of Lappological texts. To counter such perceptions, Sunná mobilizes a second skin that plays on these associations to convey Indigenous belonging in relation to family and community instead of phenotypic expression.

The gákti is not only Sunná’s skin but also a collective skin because Sunná’s actions exist in dialogue with how other Sámi understand dress, themselves, and their history. Material production provides a vehicle to rework the meanings of historical events, intergenerational disconnect embodied within

individuals, and continued political and social obstacles to health and well-being. This happens not only when making the gákti reinforces relationships with family members in the exchange of knowledge, skills, and materials but also when methods of production are guarded within communities of practice. One who does not make the gákti in a particular way immediately stands out as not belonging to those social networks. In this way codes of gákti production create mediums of embodied recognition beyond legal frameworks.

Incorporating cloth as a second skin requires sensorial attunement to the practical considerations of gákti materials. By breaking practice with the precautions involved in occasional wear, one dissolves an invisible boundary between body and cloth. At Trondheim Sunná noticed that her silk scarf was restricting movement, and she gradually wore this piece less. As she began wearing gákti while carrying out daily tasks at home, she began favoring wool over synthetic or imported fabrics, occasionally compromising with the latter “nonpractical” and “colonized” materials. With older and woolen gákti, she was less afraid of staining, washing dishes, and collecting water, and she could get the dress clean by airing it out inside out overnight. This care for a material used for centuries in her family connected her practice to that of past generations. Prolonged use reenacted ancestral habits to create something as intergenerationally embodied as skin itself.

In threading functionality and aesthetic in the materials of her dress, Sunná also mends together complex colonial histories, generational stories, and relationships. Her *gahpir* headpiece contrasts with the gray cloth of a Swedish military jacket bought from a flea market, cut-up pieces of an old silk shawl purchased at a Sámi craft market on the Norwegian side of Sápmi, red fabric from her aunt, and her own woolen yarn collected over years. The *gahpir* form is from Eanodat, the region of her father’s family, while the cutout pattern is from her aunt, passed down from her grandfather’s mother. Eanodat dress forms and patterns are similar to those across the Norwegian border in Guovdageaidnu, where Sunná also has relatives; therefore, wearing the dress indexes Indigeneity in relation to not only the Finnish state but also a wider transborder region. Sunná wears the *gahpir* with a dress made 10 years earlier by her grandmother that she has since altered and mended with purchased fabric from Sámi duodji. Occasionally, she compromises her social and environmental values to buy commercial fabrics of unknown origins and chemical treatments. “I do not want to buy jeans that have killed two men in a factory,” she explains, echoing an ethics similar to her uncle Sami-Ásslat’s relationship with silver.

Beyond these personal and intergenerational dialogues, the ritualization of cloth as skin extends the communication of bodily practice to non-Sámi publics. This creates avenues for the representation of Sáminess that cannot be racialized or legislated according to blood and descent. Sunná explains that transitioning dress from festive to everyday use shifts representations away from racial stereotypes toward nonbiologically determined culture:

It's again about decolonization. . . . When we tell to people who don't know about the Sámi culture that no, it's just for festive activities, we are actually killing our tradition or our culture. And yeah, it's fighting against the stereotype that we are dirty and drunk Sámis. . . . When we don't have our *gákti*, we don't look like Sámi because there is no stereotypical Sámi person; when we are naked we are just human *because we don't have that Sámi gene*. If we are not seen as a Sámi when we are walking on the streets of Rovaniemi or Helsinki or Anár, then we are actually not existing.

The need to show a different skin other than a white one is necessitated within a Finnish state that emphasizes egalitarianism yet paradoxically requires demonstration of Sámi difference as a precondition for Indigenous rights. Cloth becomes a way to show difference when the physical stereotypes that inform public perception do not actually exist. In this way it straddles an awkward line between race and culture, evoking concepts of skin that have racial connotations yet disrupting them by making skin cultural.

Through definitions of what makes Sámi different from Finns, who is Sámi and who is not Sámi, Sámi concepts of identity and group belonging are forced to conform to legislative structures of Finnish and international governing bodies. Sunná describes this meeting as that of incompatible choreographies:

It's not enough to dance the choreography of what others have made up. . . . I don't like [Sámi] politics . . . because it has been reformed like the Finnish government system. We have reshaped ourselves and our culture so much so that we can sometimes hear your people are OK, so that we can be recognized as a people. . . . But in the process we have lost our own system of doing, *siida* [Sámi structures of governance], forms of deciding things, and so on. . . . When you identify yourself as a Sámi but you don't represent it in everyday life, then you are cutting the connection to yourself.

Sunná's efforts to subvert external representations of Sáminess through everyday expressions of community belonging parallel academic discourse critically approaching a politics of recognition as it occurs within colonial, racialized, and essentializing identity scripts (Sylvain 2014). The making and wearing of dress have the potential to reconcile incompatible choreographies of state and Sámi governance. In this process, material indicators of participation in or exclusion from Sámi production communities mediate internal recognition. These actions decolonize self-determination beyond a politics of recognition guided by state-sanctioned delimitations of identity and toward a self-recognition, following Coulthard's (2014) term, that favors Indigenous concepts of belonging and governance.

While decolonization begins with self-representation and self-recognition, it is fully actualized when institutions mediating Indigenous-state relations begin to lose their legitimacy as representative bodies. This results in calls for institutional restructuring to better enact community practices of belonging.

By rejecting Sámi mediation through state-supported governing bodies, they call for the reform of their structures to adequately fulfill the needs of Sámi cultural autonomy. In 2015 the president of the Sámi Parliament resigned in protest after the Finnish Parliament failed to approve revisions to the Sámi definition. Many others like Sami-Ásllat and Sunná support these public acts as they also silently resign but self-determine through their craft, evaluating belonging in ways that do not require Finnish parliamentary approval.

Decolonizing Production

The potentials for social change through bodily practice depend on the ability to navigate the potentials and constraints of decolonization. While political disenfranchisement assembles tendencies to reproduce embodied suffering (*sensu* Bourdieu 1990), manifesting as issues of mental health and well-being, bodily practice may also be mobilized to reorder dominant forms of thought and governance, weakening the dispositions that produce such experiences.

A decolonial material production encounters similar contradictions: the localization of social and territorial ties while drawing on global networks of unequal labor and resource extraction, the representation of relational and embodied belonging that challenges racial stereotypes by playing on these tropes. As a tangible mechanism by which bodies mediate between social and bodily, individual and collective experience (Kleinman and Kleinman 1994), craft making requires the sourcing of materials, skills, and knowledges of production that remake intergenerational and community ties. By representing these acts as lived experiences of belonging, artisans maintain the fluidity of social and territorial relations not subject to state jurisdiction and recognition, calling for a restructuring of governing institutions where the absence of these relations is felt and contested.

In these ways the affective and embodied associations of production cultivate expressions of belonging that do not restrict the dynamism of Indigenous lives transcending state boundaries. The resignification of ancestral bodily practices within current political contexts challenges established temporalities that relegate Indigenous politics to discrete historical periods and relinquish state accountability for contemporary injustices. It disrupts racialized representations that seek to freeze the fluidity of community belonging and patterns of migration at a specific point in time and delineate Indigeneity within the confines of national borders. This suggests that representation need not occur in visible political arenas to generate social change. When national forms of recognition fail, self-representation may be enacted through embodied means in everyday life.

In seeking to understand the silent ways that people remake social worlds, material production serves as a lens into mobilizations of practice as means of political change. A focus on the making of cultural objects reveals nuances of movement, skill, and technique that reorient the status quo. This not

only establishes embodied and material patterns of social change but also provides a framework for enacting interventions of practice.

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Comments

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In this paper, Magnani and Magnani superbly address the concept of decolonization by using an original perspective. In this response, I would like to draw attention to two items that the authors use to explain new embodied practices of decolonization: the *duodji*, traditional Sámi handicrafts, and the *gákti*, the traditional Sámi dress. I will then explain how performing traditional activities can help address relevant political issues while advancing the legal framework.

Drawing their attention to Sámi traditional handicrafts (*duodji*), the authors explain well how those objects represent the fusion of Sámi theoretical knowledge and practical skills. These artistic expressions, in the form of handicrafts, help the Sámi keep their culture alive in the modern world, and they are used as mediums for self-representation and self-healing. Making *duodji* by using traditional local resources (i.e., wood, reindeer antlers, and bones) has become an activity that many Sámi perform to rediscover themselves and regain possession of their identity while enhancing a sense of belonging and promoting healing. As the authors affirm, “A study of Sámi craft making uncovers embodied mechanisms of decolonization, actualized through production as fluid boundary making and intergenerational healing.” Sami-Ásllat creates *duodji* to face the intergenerational trauma he is still suffering while regaining attachment to his traditional land and community, thus rediscovering his own Sámi identity. Drawing from my fieldwork experience with the First Nations in northern British Columbia (Canada), I can assert that this is a practice shared by many Arctic Indigenous peoples. For the First Nations, traditional activities such as hunting, skinning, and tanning, as well as beading and cloth making (i.e., for traditional moccasins and mittens), act as important means of healing. The

practice of traditional activities is then intertwined with the transmission of traditional skills to new generations and the re-discovery of one’s roots and identity (Archibald and Dewar 2010).

Decolonization is a long process that can be achieved only if there is a substantial shift in the political discourse as well as in the way in which spaces, objects, and clothes are depicted. It is then necessary to use a new decolonizing approach that some scholars have called “decolonial aesthetics.” According to Mignolo (2000), decolonial aesthetics is a fundamental step for non-Western people and societies to reclaim their culture, creativity, history, beliefs, and, ultimately, political power. It can be interpreted as a process of creating original subjectivities grounded in Indigenous survival and reemergence. Those who embrace this vision imagine “worlds otherwise” (Martineau and Ritskes 2014:2). This resonates well with what Magnani and Magnani have described regarding the use of the *gákti*, the traditional Sámi dress. Sunná explains that wearing the *gákti* is a way to decolonize her bodily practices while gaining confidence in herself and her appearance. She started using the *gákti* to challenge the stereotype that Sámi people have dark skin (while she has very white skin), and by doing so, she rediscovered what she calls her “second skin.” Sunná launched the project “*gákti* 365,” aiming to change the perception of traditional clothes by wearing them every day of the year. By doing so, she promoted the rediscovery of not only traditional clothing but also traditional materials (e.g., wool). The *gákti* is then perceived as a collective skin, as it represents how the Sámi understand dresses, their identity, and their history. Moreover, Sunná’s actions challenge the official and political definition of Sáminess. A Sámi is a person who is able to make the *gákti* in a specific way, beyond political recognition. Thus, specific codes of *gákti* production act as mediums of embodied recognition, overcoming political and legal issues.

In this sense, the authors clearly explain how issues related to the recognition of Sámi rights have undermined the ratification of the International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 169, the only binding document on the rights of Indigenous people. The Finnish Parliament was supposed to ratify the ILO Convention in 2015; however, the reluctance of the government to recognize Sámi rights to the land (and to natural resources that can be found in Sápmi, the traditional Sámi territory) compromised the ratification process. As the authors point out, the inability to ratify the Convention has been perceived by several Sámi as a way to reproduce Finnish assimilation politics of the boarding school and postwar nation-building era by undermining Sámi jurisdiction and political independence instead of promoting cultural erasure. Therefore, by performing ordinary acts of self-representation, Sami-Ásllat and Sunná promote decolonization in everyday life, beyond the official political institutions. As Sunná said, “When you identify yourself as a Sámi but you don’t represent it in everyday life, then you are cutting the connection to yourself.” It is then clear that for Sunná and Sami-Ásllat, being Sámi means to act in everyday life, despite political representation and recognition.

As Sunná argues, Sámi politics and institutions have been shaped according to the Finnish political model; therefore, they do not really represent the way of the *siida*, the original Sámi structures of governance. The shift in how people perceive and define themselves as Sámi is important and perhaps very much needed, considering how the 1995 Sámi Parliament Act defines who can be considered Sámi (and so who is entitled to vote for the Sámi Parliament).⁹ In conclusion, defining Sáminess by using “objective characteristics” has perhaps been necessary in the past to implement Sámi governance in the context of the Finnish political structure. However, self-recognition through the creation of duodji and the use of the *gákti* can be a new way to define Sáminess while promoting Sámi rights and helping people rediscover their Sámi identity and connection to their land.

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Duodji Matters

Central in Natalia Magnani and Matthew Magnani’s article is the assertion that material production matters: it has the power to generate social and political change, also when it occurs outside traditional political arenas and governing institutions. Studying practices, practitioners, and products of *duodji*, a North Sámi concept often translated as art and craft, the Magnanis argue that duodji can be a vehicle for Sámi self-representation and restoration and therefore decolonization. Although they state that duodji challenges simplified divisions between art, craft, and cultural objects, they do not linger in conceptual deliberations and use craft and duodji interchangeably. Thus, they barely touch the many different ways to conceive of duodji that exist within Sámi societies (see, e.g., Grini 2017; Guttorm 2004; Nango 2018).

However, in contrast to the many generalizing descriptions of Sámi issues, the Magnanis’ article is exemplary in its contextualizing approach, being a case study of duodji production in the village of Anár, on the Finnish side of Sápmi, or the Sámi areas. They succeed in exposing complex entanglements of Sámi matters in the politics of the states that Sápmi transcends. The Sámi homelands stretch across four countries, Finland, Norway, Russia, and Sweden, and cover about 400,000 km² of highly diverse geography and around 2 million inhabitants with multiple identities and languages. In Finland, Norway, and Sweden, three Sámi parliaments officially represent and

administer Sámi politics, whereas in Russia there are ongoing efforts to organize a similar parliament. These parliaments are subordinate to the national governing bodies, and many of their members desire more Sámi self-determination and territorial autonomy. Statutory decisions concerning Sámi issues are implemented differently in each state, and the International Labor Organization Convention 169 has been ratified only by Norway. Moreover, the legislation of Sámi electoral membership differs significantly among the states. As the Magnanis explain, the definition of Sámi identity and its legal status have been disputed in Finland ever since the founding of the Sámi Parliament there in 1995. At stake are the rights to the usage and ownership of land and water, as well as struggles over personal identity, Indigeneity, and community ties.

While the background and the theoretical considerations are important for an understanding of the specific situation in the Finland-controlled areas, I miss a more elaborate presentation of the actual activities and materials that the article intends to discuss. It takes some time before the reader reaches the wooden table in Sami-Ásllat’s workshop in Anár and meets actual duodji objects, like the *guksi*, a drinking vessel made of birch burl, and the *niibi*, a knife with a handle of birch and a sheath of reindeer antler, and gets a glimpse of the process of making them.

Undertones of sorrow and confrontation characterize the personal stories mediated in the article, for example, in Sami-Ásllat’s qualms about working with silver. Silver has a long history in Sápmi. According to the ethnologist Phebe Fjellström (1962), the category “Sámi silver” stems from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when income from trade with furs, stockfish, and various reindeer products materialized in the form of silver spoons, heavy silver cups, and jewelry. Objects were made to order for Sámi customers by silversmiths in places like Jiellevárre/Váhtjer, in the Swedish part of Sápmi, and in Duortnus, on the Finnish side. In many cases, the results were solid silverware adapted to a nomadic lifestyle and embellished with traditional Sámi and Christian symbols and patterns (see Dunfeld 2006). A rich and distinct tradition developed and is revitalized today by Sámi artisans like Sami-Ásllat’s father, Petteri Laiti, and his pioneering work (Sámi Center for Contemporary Art 2020). Silver is found naturally in the mountainous parts of Sápmi, linguistically and historically in Sámi place names like Silbbatjähkká and Sillbanássja, and materially in the archaeological traces from mining operations in Sámi areas (Nordin 2012). For Sami-Ásllat, silver primarily embodies the exploitation of land and labor in an unceasing global hunt for raw materials, a hunt that in the case of silver happens mainly in the Americas today. Like many contemporary Sámi silversmiths, he uses recycled silver, but he does not wear a mask or use ventilation to prevent the inhalation of poisonous particles. The anthropologists explain this as a conscious act to connect “the invisible and noxious process of silverwork to the equally concealed and pernicious political and social structures reproduced by all actors.” They recount how Sami-Ásllat ends up withdrawing from silver making to

9. The act takes into account three elements: language (Sámi spoken as a first language by an ancestor); registration of one ancestor in a land, taxation, or population register (Lapp clause); and registration (or the possibility of registration) of one ancestor in the electoral roll (Ministry of Justice 1995).

focus on wood and antler duodji, that is, to work with what he experiences as more healing materials.

Tactics of renunciation and recognition also surface in the portrayal of Sunná. She shows resistance through choosing to wear specific fabrics or garments and disavowing others, gradually giving up the silk scarf that adorns so many Sámi dresses. Silk is imported fabric, not tied to the natural elements of the region like silver, but like silver it travels through ancient trade routes and present-day networks that relate to colonialism and exploitation. As a performative statement, she wore the *gákti*, the Sámi dress, every day for a full year, communicating her project on social media with the hashtag #gákti365. The authors make a point of how she describes the *gákti* as “a second skin” that affords her an ethnic marker that she considers lacking in her bodily features.

The article is a timely effort to address contemporary autochthony debates and emotionally and politically charged questions of belonging. It does so by pointing to the role of materiality and performative operations as political and restorative acts. Even if the authors shy away from the thornier topics related to the rights to perform such gestures in Sápmi (for more difficult discussions, see, e.g., Bydler 2017; Schilar and Keskitalo 2018), parts of them emerge between the lines in sentences like these: “Who gets to wear the dress and how they wear it have become increasingly guarded in a political climate of contestation over Sámi and Indigenous status. Wearing dress ‘wrong’ conspicuously indicates nonsanctioned use and lack of belonging.” A question that remains is how to decolonize without reinforcing the binaries and authenticity claims that originate in and underpin colonialism both historically and today.

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22 XI 21

I once, in early 2000, visited the Sámi Parliament in Inari, Finland, as part of an informal, curiosity-driven inquiry into Sámi activism and Nordic state responses to Indigenous rights claims. My host, a woman with long experience as a parliamentarian, explained to me the restricted scope of the Parliament’s jurisdiction but saved her most intense ire for a brochure put out by the European Union (EU). The document seemed intended to extol the EU’s recognition of Indigenous peoples. The cover of the brochure depicted what looked to me like a smiling Sámi woman but who, my guide pointed out derisively, was actually a Lapp. The design on the smiling woman’s hat, she explained, was clearly that of a Lapp, with no connection whatsoever to any of the Sámi communities in Finland or elsewhere.

Her indignation at this (to me at the time) seemingly innocent oversight by the EU ran deep. I had trouble understand-

ing why, when there were so many other claims to make that related directly to sovereignty and territory, the design on a hat should provoke such scathing indignation. Coming many years after my visit to Inari, Natalia and Matthew Magnani’s essay relates Sámi struggles over symbolic control back to the more consequential failures of state recognition, Indigenous self-determination, and landrights.

In Finland, one of the fulcrums of state encroachment on Sámi sovereignty and territory has been their right to define their membership. Lapps, who share many qualities of the Sámi way of life but do not share language and community membership, have made frequent claims to Sámi status, which, in turn, confers access to resources. By overruling Sámi decisions concerning their membership, Finnish courts indirectly undermine all distinct rights claims of any consequence, claims that might entail some compromise of state control of jurisdiction and resources (Niezen 2003:173).

Magnani and Magnani show in detail and with nuanced interpretation how one response Sámis have taken to such long-term injustices is a retreat into the political quietism of craftsmanship. Unlike the usual meaning of quietism, this turn to craft does not imply acceptance but a refusal of things as they are. They invoke the concepts of self-recognition (Coulthard 2014) and refusal (Simpson 2014) to bring attention to the ways Sámi activists extend recognition “beyond the limitations of external representations and government policy.” To these concepts, we might add the notion of irreconciliation, reconceived as a social good that interrogates the status quo of chronic injustice (Mookherjee, forthcoming).

In what remains of this commentary, I want to briefly broaden the range of contrast implicit in their observation by drawing from my experience in the international movement of Indigenous peoples, including my observation of Sámi leadership in action in meetings of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations, the drafting of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the terms of reference of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Sámi leaders of the Nordic countries were instrumental in negotiating new regimes of legal recognition in the origins of the international movement of Indigenous peoples (Minde 1996). Their relative proximity to Geneva, where consultations took place; close familiarity with the politics of dominant states; and abilities with English certainly contributed to this state of affairs. There was also a way that they, like the leaders of the Grand Council of the Crees (Eeyou Ischee), with whom I worked more closely, were able to make Indigenous justice claims commensurable within the structures and language of international law. Unlike many Indigenous representatives, they appeared to have little difficulty replicating state symbols, using the language of diplomacy, and shoe-horning their leadership into the form of nongovernmental organizations as a condition of effective participation in international forums.

The Sámi leadership’s capacity for engagement with state power is also illustrated by the office of the Finnish prime minister’s October 28, 2021, announcement of the establishment

of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission concerning the Sámi People, “prepared in close cooperation with representatives of the Finnish state, the Sámi Parliament and the Skolt Sámi Siida Council.” The official goal of this commission will be “to collect Sámi people’s experiences of the actions of the Finnish state and its various authorities and to make this information visible to the public” (Prime Minister’s Office 2021). Looking past the anesthetizing effects of state discourse, this statement is revealing. Its language is obtuse, vague in a way that avoids state-incriminating language. It announces a victim-centric approach to state harm; that is to say, it is oriented toward collecting Sámi experiences of displacement and suffering. This is well and good, but missing from this announcement is the promise of statements, from historical records or from actors in the present, that might provide insight into the creation and implementation of government policies that produced collective harm. A focus on experiences of historical suffering occludes attention to its causes and continuities.

Those who follow the annual meetings of the United Nations Climate Change Conference understand well the sense of futility from participants in global governance initiatives on issues of urgent importance. So much of what looks like progress in the elaboration and implementation of rights standards involving states actually goes no further than words on paper. This is occurring in the context of increased stridency in voices of nationalism, impelling governments toward “equality” and away from distinct rights. New treaties are celebrated, and states then violate them with impunity. New regimes of rights and venues of truth telling are nearly impossible to arrange unless they are defanged by their terms of reference from the beginning.

Small wonder, then, that Sámi responses to impositions of state power include the quietism of craftsmanship, of artistic expression with foundations in distinct collective forms. This brings to the fore the puzzling variety of stratagems and moral commitments of activists in the Indigenous peoples’ movement, the inclusion of the extremes of precompromised engagement and disengaged refusal in the same communities. The remarkably wide range of Sámi responses to the imposition of national agendas is the lesson I take from this essay when I situate it next to my experience with international Indigenism. And this, in turn, introduces questions of change and process, the trajectories of different forms of engagement, resistance, and refusal.

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Natalia Magnani and Matthew Magnani discuss the numerous paradoxes of decolonization in Finnish Sápmi in an illuminating manner. The text is a welcome addition to a new wave

of Sámi studies shedding light on grassroots experiences, elaborations on being colonized, and *duodji* (Sámi handicrafts) as a political vehicle in dealing with the colonial situation. As settler-colonial theorizing has gained ground in parts of Sámi studies, it has become commonplace to describe the Sámi condition in its totality according to this discourse. This is the case in the article by Magnani and Magnani as well: even though they take many precautions, the colonial policy and disruption serve to a great extent as the explanation concerning the Sámi sociocultural condition. In Sámi research, there are still at least two more cautious approaches: one highlighting the Sámi relying on colonial (or state) structures as a resource (Selle et al. 2015:17ff.), the other, while seeing relevance in the concept, claiming that colonialism is too generalizing as the sole depiction of the Sámi-state relationship (Lehtola 2012). Concerning the first-mentioned “school,” the recent findings about the deep integration into the national institutions among the Sámi in Norway are a case in point, but it can be explained (away) by settler-colonial theorizing of a case of colonized minds. In recent years, the research field has been unable to come up with explanations or a narrative with no political underpinnings.

One institution finding itself in the midst of this colonial situation is the Sámi Parliament, presented as part of the problem: a failing institution because of its foundation on political platforms of the state, one of the roots of Sámi disenchantment and the search for alternative channels of self-recognition through *duodji*. This last-mentioned issue is dealt with thoroughly in Magnani and Magnani’s article, but I wish to deepen the analysis of the historical foundation of the Sámi Parliament to nuance their depiction of the institution as a problem for Sámi decolonization. The authors are correct in stressing the root cause of the problem, the embeddedness of the Sámi self-government institution in state structures. In the article, the institution is depicted as an instrument of self-determination. From a formalistic point of view, the institution was never meant to become a full “parliament” or a regional governmental organ for the Sámi. For the state administration envisioning the institution back in the early 1970s, a fear of checking the rights of other groups residing in Lapland was the guiding principle in mandating the Sámi delegation (established in 1972). The institution became immersed in negotiations with the state, with a weak advisory mandate that went mostly unobserved in the years that followed. This was the case even after a change in legislation in 1995 and an increase in the mandate to plan and implement the cultural self-government of the Sámi as Indigenous people of Finland (Lehtola 2005). The history of Sámi disenchantment and frustration with the slow development of collective rights is long and is based on the institution falling short of any definition of self-determination. Is the categorization of self-determination among the Sámi informants more indicative of the expectations of the institution?

From the 1990s onward, the Sámi Parliament has been a target of sustained campaigns from the “Lapp” movement. This movement has undergone numerous transformations and has employed affective narratives of oppression and

exclusion regarding the Sámi Parliament. The movement is not free of posttruth elements, but it has gained partial support in academic circles and from certain kinds of readings of history, for example, constructing an alternative Indigenous ancestry. This movement has managed to sow doubt in the highest echelons of the Finnish political system as to whether the number of claimants of (still-unrealized) Indigenous rights is correct or whether the restrictive policies of the Sámi Parliament in adding people to the electoral register have blocked rightful claimants from their status as Indigenous peoples. In addition, in recent years, an internal elected opposition has attacked the Parliament from within as a result of the opening of the electoral register to applicants not enjoying internal recognition from the Sámi community. These are the sources of the latest disenchantment, but perceived corruption has longer roots in the regionally organized countermobilization, which is now apparently, and to a partial extent, supported by the rulings of the Supreme Administrative Court of Finland allowing access to a larger group of voters (Lehtola 2015a).

Simultaneously, the Sámi Parliament has been a functioning institution throughout. To begin with, its employees stand on the front line in the legal battle against hostile attacks on the electoral register. Because of the sectorialization of Sámi issues within the organization, its hybridity has become more complex: the Parliament still retains some of the features of a romanticized defender of Sámi rights and of cultural protection, but it also undertakes a number of purely developmental and administrative tasks. It is an institution growing to become a bureaucratic instrument, definitely not a neutral one, but boasting an ethnic program. This normalization of Sámi self-governance also means that the institution is open to internal criticism like any other administrative organization, which may be perceived as part of a normal state of democracy, not necessarily only a sign of a deeper problem of legitimacy or colonialism.

The authors are correct in emphasizing the dissatisfaction regarding the stagnation of Indigenous rights enactment. Aside from noting the individual and embodied forms of resistance on the part of the crafters, the authors also call for a decolonizing of institutional forms of self-government, or “institutional restructuring to better enact community practices of belonging.” This last-mentioned, huge task is left for future scrutiny.

Reply

Decolonization at the Crossroads of Theory and Practice

The responses to “Decolonizing Production” encompass differences in perspective between those whose primary research has been in Sápmi (Grini and Nyssönen) and those working

with Canadian First Nations but with comparative experience in the Sámi regions (Amatulli and Niezen). The former emphasize details of local political conditions and concepts, while the latter articulate connections to Indigenous movements globally. All contribute thought-provoking considerations engaging the main point of the article—that craft making has transformative power in the enactment of Indigenous governance beyond formal institutions. In the short reply that follows, we reflect on some key issues raised by the commentators that help to illuminate future directions for the study of Indigenous craft and art as decolonial expression.

There has been substantial debate surrounding decolonizing discourse, in academic and Indigenous communities especially. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2021 [2012]) have interrogated settler-colonial tendencies to use the term “decolonization” metaphorically without committed action toward Indigenous restitution. Over a decade earlier, Vine Deloria Jr. (1998) expressed a similar concern about discourses of “sovereignty” and “self-determination,” that they had lost their “political moorings” (27).

In the case presented here, decolonization is not a metaphor—it is the lived reality through which some Sámi artisans (*duojárat*) with whom we work practice *duodji*. As they articulate the political strivings of their craft, they enact locally rooted visions for the future in broader conversation with global movements. Like many young *duojárat*, the artisans of “Decolonizing Production” mobilize wider Indigenous discourse in their day-to-day practice. They nevertheless do so in silent realms more often than through public protest or political representation reaching national and international audiences.

Despite this transformative potential, the decolonization concept is not free of controversy in Sápmi. Younger generations are increasingly finding empowerment in the ways that decolonization, as both theory and practice, connects them to other Indigenous communities fighting similar state structures. Meanwhile, community debate grows surrounding the potential colonial trappings of decolonizing discourse, manifesting in external impositions of thought and action.

Similarly, narratives of colonialism have been met with ambivalence. While many scholars use the term as a way to describe the process by which states came to govern and exploit Sámi lands, they are also cautious to avoid doing so in ways that are generalizing (Nyssönen 2013) or that reproduce “colonial” impositions of agency-depriving narratives (Lehtola 2015b). As a result, there has been focus on dialogic relations—the ways that colonial structures, from roads to education, are co-opted to advance Indigenous rights even as they create new infrastructures of state control and exploitation. According to the Sámi historian Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2015c), the establishment of majority education institutions in Sápmi fostered assimilative damage to community ties and well-being but also cultivated a generation of activists who could elevate Sámi political rights to national and international levels.

Like the critique of discourses of colonization, decolonization, self-determination, and sovereignty, community disenchantment

with Indigenous institutions has become more visible. Nyysönen suggests that the growing critique of the Sámi Parliament may be not only due to the failures of state recognition but also due to democratic developments in the “normalization of Sámi self-governance,” a process that inevitably exposes institutions to internal criticism. This view has been more prominent on the Norwegian side of Sápmi, where the presence of a strong opposition party in the Sámi Parliament has been supported by Sámi media and politicians as important to the vitality of the Parliament as a democratic institution.

Terminology aside, the power of Indigenous craft making remains. Niezen aptly terms this the “quietism of craftsmanship”—a silent process by which belonging is affirmed and meaning cultivated outside formal institutions. It is through such acts that materiality becomes political and restorative (Grini) while furthering efforts toward community healing (Amatulli). While these acts on structures of power are indirect, they constitute a strengthening of community and inter-generational ties that can be mobilized to reform and shape institutions.

The trappings of decolonization emerge at the crossroads of theory and practice. As Grini states, “A question that remains is how to decolonize without reinforcing the binaries and authenticity claims that originate in and underpin colonialism both historically and today.” We envision future directions of work on material and aesthetic expressions to delve beyond frames of colonization and decolonization and reveal innumerable quietisms in the creation of worlds otherwise.

—Natalia Magnani and Matthew Magnani

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