



UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

# **Everyone is for the Sámi, yet no one agrees**

Examining ignorances in the Finnish parliament on the Sámi people

Intercultural Encounters

Master's thesis

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**Abstract:** This thesis asks what kinds of themes and ignorances arise in the Finnish Parliament, when Members of the Finnish Parliament (MPs) legislate on Sámi, and what kind of implications Parliamentary discussions have, regarding Finnish policy toward Sámi, and the relations between the Finnish state and Sámi. Sámi, the only recognized Indigenous people in the European Union live across Northern Finland, Sweden, Norway, and the Kola Peninsula, in their traditional homeland Sápmi, and have been, throughout the history, the subjects of various assimilationist and colonial policies and efforts.

To examine the situation, this thesis draws from settler colonial theory as well as theories of knowledge and ignorance. Publicly available parliamentary data two Records of Parliamentary Plenary sessions, PTK 127/2022 and PTK 128/2022, and six written questions, publicly available through the website of the Finnish Parliament, are examined through thematic analysis, as this was deemed the most effective way to examine the contributions Finnish MPs have made between 2014 and 2022, considering that ignorance has not been studied in this context in Finland. The analysis finds six themes regarding ignorances and their implications for the Sámi and the Finnish society as a whole. This thesis finds that both ignorances and colonialisms in the contributions made by MPs are rooted in the view that Indigenous rights are a zero-sum game. Furthermore, the MPs in question have an implicit worry regarding the land use in Sápmi with the emergence of Sámi rights. Finally, the implications of the findings to Sámi, wider society, and further research are discussed.

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# 1. Introduction

The relationship between Sámi, the only recognized Indigenous People in the European Union, and the Finns has historically been marked by assimilationist policies (Kuokkanen, 2020a, 2023a), the “destruction of an Indigenous society” (Kuokkanen, 2020b, p. 514), erasure of traditional Sámi cultures (Kuokkanen, 2020b), and land grabs (Lahti, 2021; Kuokkanen, 2023a). In more recent years the relationship has been strained by the stagnation of the furtherance of Indigenous rights (Kuokkanen, 2020a), and Nordic settler-colonialism (Kuokkanen, 2020a, 2023a; Junka-Aikio, 2023). In addition, green colonialism stemming from Green New Deals that aim to mitigate the climate crisis, is increasingly threatening Sámi (Kårtveit, 2021; Zografos, 2022; Kuokkanen, 2023b). The resulting increase in interest in the Sámi parts of the Arctic from the European Union and Norway suggest that the Sámi’s struggle for self-determination is far from over as the significance of the Arctic region grows (Kuokkanen, 2023c). At the same time as the recognition and implementation of Indigenous rights internationally have developed the situation in Finland has largely stayed stagnant or deteriorated. In the context of international legal framework, the Finnish state has been reprimanded by several United Nations bodies, the Finnish Supreme Administrative Court annulled a Sámi Parliamentary election (*KHO: Saamelaiskäräjävaalit uusittava*, 2024), and multiple Finnish governments have failed to legislate a new Sámi Parliament Act.

In addition to the issue of Sámi Parliament Act a number of other issues cause friction. Since the Sámi *de facto* lost the ownership of their lands (Joonaa and Joonaa, 2023a), land usage has been one of underlying issues. The lands where Sámi practice traditional reindeer herding are in the interest of international mining companies and other extractive industries such as forestry (Hanacek, Kröger and Martínez-Alier, 2024), as well as transportation (Junka-Aikio, 2023), begging the question who has the right to the lands, who benefits and to whom is the land usage harmful (Joonaa and Joonaa, 2023a). At the same time the threat of green colonialism is put against the need of the many in the face of the climate crisis raising the question of what is just and whose justice should prevail when it comes to projects aimed at opposing the climate crisis that require significant land use, such as wind power or mining projects (Joonaa and Joonaa, 2023b). Furthermore, while most young reindeer herders view their prospects in reindeer herding positively, the uncertainty regarding the future of reindeer herding appears to create

localized gender imbalances as women are more likely to get education and leave the traditional livelihoods behind (Joonas and Keskitalo, 2021). While this could lead to the erosion of the Sámi culture Toivanen and Fabritius (2020) found that young Sámi excel in finding new innovative ways of being Sámi without reindeer herding. This in a sense marks a shift in how Sáminess is conducted as Toivanen (2022) argues that in the beginning of 1960s when political Sámi identities first started to be formed reindeer herding was the only livelihood recognized as being Sámi enough, and in Finland the Anainar Sámi, Forest Sámi in Sweden (not to be confused with the self-indigenizing “Forest Sámi” in Finland), and the Sea Sámi in Norway had to deal with their lives not conforming to the main Sámi narrative.

Scholarly efforts have pushed the research around the subject matter to significant new developments from new theoretical avenues on Indigenous self-determination (Kuokkanen, 2019; Constantinou *et al.*, 2024), to several case studies examining different aspects of the ongoing settler-colonial project (Kuokkanen, 2020b; Junka-Aikio, 2023). While research has continually made significant efforts, the Finnish educational system has largely failed in teaching the Sámi history and culture not just to the Sámi but to the general population as well (Aikio-Puoskari and Gáppe Piera Jovvna, 2022). This includes teaching about Finnish settler-colonialism, Sámi culture, as well the basics of international legal framework regarding Indigenous peoples. This lack of education for Sámi and non-Sámi Finns has resulted in significant, and widely recognized, ignorance regarding the Sámi culture, the shared history, and the collective rights of Sámi as an Indigenous people. Education in Sámi languages and school subjects instructed by Sámi are lacking in most municipalities outside of Sápmi, which creates structural inequality for Sámi children (Aikio-Puoskari and Gáppe Piera Jovvna, 2022). Secondly, “Sámi are almost invisible in the curriculum of the Finnish school” (Aikio-Puoskari/Gáppe Piera Jovvna, 2022, p. 487), which has resulted in not only the Sámi not learning about their culture and history, but also the Finnish population not learning about Sámi culture and history. Additionally, while teacher education in universities has increased courses and education on multiculturalism, Sámi are nowhere to be found (Aikio-Puoskari and Gáppe Piera Jovvna, 2022; Korte *et al.*, 2024).

Additionally, the lack of studies on Finnish colonialisms until the 2010s also resulted in the lack of Finnish colonialisms in school textbooks (Koivunen and Rastas, 2020; Lahti and Kullaa, 2020). Similarly, research regarding assimilationist policies and the loss of Sámi language started to take place later in Finland than Norway and Sweden (Kortekangas and Nyssönen,

2021). Finally, the lack of education on Sámi history and colonialisms in Finnish high schools and tertiary education has resulted in difficulties on having conversations regarding racialization and racism in Finland (Lahti and Kullaa, 2020), which appears to be a feedback loop as the lack of conversations on these historical events influence the lack of current conversations on racism, which in turn make it more difficult to have conversations about the current events (ibid.).

Based on this lack of education and competing narratives of Sámi history (Lehtola, 2022) I propose that it is of scientific and societal importance to study whether or not ignorance regarding Sámi is present in the Members of the Finnish Parliament (MPs), and whether there are regional or party differences. In addition to the lack of education, competing narratives the relatively small number of Sámi living in Finland and the geographical distance between the Finnish core and Sápmi contribute to the ignorance of the MPs. As Sámi specific legislation is not a daily topic, the MPs are less likely to acquire substance knowledge on the topic. Combined with the fact that only six MPs are elected from the Lapland constituency, the constituency which encompasses the parts of Sápmi under the Finnish state, it is somewhat expected that the Finnish MPs would present ignorance regarding Sámi. Additionally, Finnish politicians have a somewhat questionable way of utilizing experts in legislation, which may result in politicians making decisions against the scientific consensus (Nyysönen, 2022)

There is an ongoing academic discussion on different forms of Finnish colonialisms regarding Sámi. While research concerning Sámi was actively being *Sámified*, a Sámi version of Indigenization, as early as 1953 (Junka-Aikio, Nyysönen and Lehtola, 2022), research concerning Finnish colonialisms is newer. As mentioned above, studies on the history of Finnish colonialisms started in the 2010s (Koivunen and Rastas, 2020), while research engaging with Sámi and Finnish colonialism date back to 2000s. These range from more critical views on the existence of Finnish colonialisms (Nyysönen, 2013; Lehtola, 2015a) to views that maintain that the relationship between Finns and Sámi is fundamentally a colonial one historically, and continues to be that today (Kuokkanen, 2015, 2020a, 2020b, 2023a; Junka-Aikio, 2023). However, Finnish case of settler colonialism differs from other cases of settler colonialism, so that even the most ardent proponents of settler colonialism have had to admit that it differs from much of the rest of world (Kuokkanen, 2020a, 2023a).

Laura Junka-Aikio (2023) has, following Nancy Shoemaker's (2015) typologies of colonialism, argued that the colonial relationship between Sámi and the Finnish state can and should/could

be classified as extractive colonialism and transport colonialism. Her argument is that by only examining the situation through settler colonial theory, there is a risk of losing the “transformative potential” (Junka-Aikio, 2023, p. 283) of settler colonial theory and becoming stagnant with a form of settler colonial theory that does not reflect the present situation. There are researchers who criticize the colonial view. For example, Veli-Pekka Lehtola (2015a), a notable Finnish Sámi historian, has criticized the view of Finnish actions in Sápmi as colonialism too simple an explanation. In his view sharp statements that claim that either Finland was a colonizing the Sámi or that the coexistence was peaceful, leave out critical nuance regarding the relationship between Finns, Finnish state and Sámi (Lehtola, 2015a). Kortekangas and Nyysönen (2021) elaborate on this criticism of settler colonialism from the point of view of history of education in Finland. According to them simplifying the roles of the residential schools and Sámi in Finland just to the “oppressor” and the “oppressed” as this dichotomy hides the variety of actors and agency (Kortekangas and Nyysönen, 2021). Similarly, Nyysönen (2019), writing on the experiences of Skolt Sámi in the early 1900s, has argued that while the assimilationist narrative serves an important function in the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Skolt schooling, approaching these stories from more polyphonic point of view allows for narrative of “ethno-political victory is -- to be told” (Nyysönen, 2019, p. 58). These studies do not reject claims that there have been offenses performed by the Finnish state, rather they aim to show a more holistic picture of the Sámi experiences in the early to mid 1900s (Lehtola, 2015a).

A Government Resolution titled as Finland’s Strategy for the Arctic Region 2013 (Prime Minister’s Office Finland, 2013) describes a situation and a plan for the extraction of resources that fits Junka-Aikio’s (2023) description of extractive colonialism. A more recent report has emphasized the need for “sustainable mining” (Finnish Government, 2021), however with the current right-wing government in power sustainability and Indigenous rights are unlikely to be their first concern. There have been numerous plans for an arctic railway that would constitute a prime example of transport colonialism. In these plans the Finnish state or a private corporation that has the blessing of the state would use Sápmi land for the creation of transport networks and hubs that would effectively destroy Sámi economies and livelihoods, such as reindeer herding that are fundamental part of the culture (Junka-Aikio, 2023). While the plans are on indefinite hold at the moment, very little consideration was given to the rights of the Sámi in the plan (Ministry of Transport and Communications, 2019). Furthermore, it should be

noted that the plan was put on hold due to economic unfeasibility (Junka-Aikio, 2023). The plan has later been in the works by a private individual (Aula, 2019; Lakkala, 2019) but is on hold at the time of writing. A notable difference between the two discussed plans is that the latter, privately funded plan was highly concerned with cleantech, eco friendliness, and other such terms concerned with mitigating climate change, which brings attention to green colonialism.

Green colonialism is a relatively new concept with apparent first use in the Sámi context having taken place in 2020 by Aili Keskitalo, the then president of Saami Parliament in Norway (*Arctic-Global Indigenous Dialogue on Indigenous Guardianship and Self-Governance*, 2020). Under green colonialism lands are colonized for the purposes of Green New Deals, a term coined for the massive transitive projects required to combat the climate crises (Zografos, 2022). Most consequences of green colonialism are starting to show up in peripheries of the global south. However, there are a few instances in Europe as well. A mining project in Spain has generated massive opposition due to its effects on local communities (Zografos, 2022). In Sodankylä, Finland, there is a mining project underway that is expected to affect Viiankiaapa mire, a biodiversity extraordinaire, protected both nationally and under European Union Natura 2000 network (Hjelt and Pääkkö, 2006), which signifies the threat of green colonialism to other areas as well, since such protections are so easily dismissed. Finally, there are several wind farms under development in Sápmi affecting Sámi across the Nordic countries. One such instance is the Davvi wind farm under development by ST1, a privately owned Finnish energy company is looking to build a wind park, through its majority owned subsidiary, in Sápmi on land that is sacred to Sámi, without even discussing the situation with Sámi (Leisti, 2020; Perälä, 2023).

There is clear overlap between the above discussed types of colonialisms, with others being more developed in their theory and conceptualization. Due to this, this work adopts settler colonial theory as it has the best developed theoretical tools to examine real world situations. Still, it is important to note these overlaps and new developments for the above-mentioned reasons pointed out by Junka-Aikio (2023). While settler colonial acts can be committed by various actors who vary in size, power, and resources and there is a complex interplay between these actors and these actors can be analyzed at various levels (Veracini, 2010), this thesis focuses on the legislative actions of Finnish Members of Parliament. Following Rifkin (2013) I contend that Indigenous experiences and sovereignties should be at the center of settler

colonial studies, at this time it is necessary to tactically shift the analytical focus to non-Indigenous activities, while maintaining that Indigenous people are the reason this study takes place and that their wellbeing, liberation, and sovereignty form the ethical core of this study.

Thus, this thesis aims to discover what kind of speech takes place in the Finnish Parliament regarding Sámi. To do so I employ settler colonial theory (cf. Wolfe, 1999, 2006; Veracini, 2010; Kuokkanen, 2020b) and various theories regarding ignorance including theories of white ignorance (Mills, 2007; Carlson, 2016), white settler ignorance (Code, 2014; Cook, 2018; Rice *et al.*, 2022), and general ignorance (Dilley, 2010). To accomplish the research goals, thematic analysis is employed on the data corpus, as this allows for a discovery research into the data. The results paint a fairly worrisome picture of the Finnish politics towards Sámi. Not only do Finnish MPs present significant ignorance regarding Sámi, but they also often seem to ignore various international principles that aim to secure Sámi self-determination and livelihoods.

Even though a lot of the legislation regarding the rights of Indigenous people come from international law, the role of the state should not be understated. For example, the Finnish state has failed to ratify the International Labour Organization treaty 169, which outlines the collective rights of the Indigenous peoples. Similarly, mining legislation is largely national, and as discussed above its implications to Sámi are massive. Therefore, this thesis will examine the speeches given at Parliamentary discussions, and in the written questions written by Members of the Parliament. As ignorance takes a central focus in this thesis, the Finnish Parliament is a prime venue to examine it. If ignorance is present in the Parliament it is likely not because of the lack of resources and sources available to the MPs but possibly related to willingness to know. The findings of this thesis could then be used to focus the efforts of Sámi and the people allied with their cause, on certain MPs or parties, as well as recognize what kind of education needs to be given if the rights of the Sámi are to be fully realized.

## 2. Objectives and Research Questions

### 2.1. Objectives

The objectives of this thesis are to discover to what extent the Members of the Parliament are knowledgeable about Sámi, and their rights when they legislate on matters related to them. Additionally, the implications of the ignorance are examined in the context of Finnish colonialisms, as ignorance based on Othering is known to have significant implications for societal structures (Mills, 2007). While the relationship between Sami and the Finnish state has become largely understood as settler colonial or some other more specific type of colonialism in academic research in recent years (Kuokkanen, 2020a, 2020b, 2023a; Junka-Aikio, 2023), there has been little research in the role ignorance plays in the Finnish context, even though the effects of ignorance are widely known in similar situations (Mills, 2007; Sullivan and Tuana, 2007; Rice *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, this thesis aims to shed light on the implications ignorance has for the relationship between Sámi and the Finnish state going forward. Because settler colonial projects are zero-sum games, where the elimination of the Indigenous people, through means that range from genocide to slow assimilation, and the erosion of material resources needed for sustaining Indigenous livelihoods (Wolfe, 1999, 2006; Kuokkanen, 2020a), it is crucial to recognize the political developments that contribute to the elimination of the Sámi. Since, in the Finnish context the modern developments are most likely to be ways of slow elimination and might even come under the guise of development it is important to catch these developments early.

Even though the Finnish state has certainly treated the Sámi population living in the Finnish parts of Sápmi in a way that fulfils the criteria for the settler colonial logic of elimination, there have been some positive developments to the situation since the mid-1990s (Scheinin, 2024), with the situation having become largely stagnant and even taken negative developments in the 2010s and 2020s (Scheinin, 2024), with the possibility for new difficulties to rise in the wake of the climate change (Zografos, 2022; Perälä, 2023). While the examination of the possible ignorance may shed light to why the improvement of the situation has stagnated, it is bound to help understand the difficulties yet to come. Similarly, it will be helpful for Sámi and those who are committed to furthering their rights by illuminating where to direct resources in order to remedy ignorance and to influence decision making affecting Sámi. In terms of furthering

academic research this thesis will shed light on the decision making at the highest national level of the Finnish state, while also contributing to the discussion on Finnish colonialisms.

## 2.2. Research questions

In order to reach the objectives laid out above I propose two research questions:

1. When discussing matters/legislation related to Sámi, do Finnish Members of Parliament exhibit ignorance, and if so what forms does it take?
2. If such ignorances exist to what kind of implications does it have for Finnish policy towards Sámi?

The first question is crucial to discover where the starting point for de-colonizing is the relationship between Sámi and the Finnish state. This relationship is seen as one of nation building, shared welfare, and unity by the majority of the society with the rejection of the idea of Finland being a settler colonial state (Nyyssönen, 2013). In addition, to this “master” narrative alternative narratives exist. The one that has gained traction in the 2010s and 2020s is the narrative that Finland is a settler colonial state (cf. Kuokkanen, 2020a). When approaching the relationship from this point of view, it becomes a story of hundreds of years of stealing land, violating the rights of Sámi, and destruction of their culture (Kuokkanen, 2020b, 2023a). Additionally, Kuokkanen (2020a) has been critical of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) arguing that it can be used as a tool to further the settler colonial project as the TRC would allow the Finnish state to “reconcile [Sámi] into a contemporary injustice” (Kuokkanen, 2020a, p. 309). Regardless of what one thinks of the narratives surrounding the relationship, the relationship itself is and has been strained for decades (Nyyssönen, 2013) or for hundreds of years (Kuokkanen, 2023a), depending on one’s way of thinking. In the 2000s repeated failures to legislate a new Sámi Parliament Act, difficulties with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the arctic railway, and cutting the Sámi Parliament’s funding have put significant strain on the relationship. Furthermore, there are Finnish individuals who cause significant strain on the Sámi-Finnish relationship by self-indigenizing (Lehtola, 2015b; Junka-Aikio, 2023). On the other hand, the archbishop of the Finnish main religion, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, Tapio Luoma issued a formal apology to the Sámi for the wrongdoings they have been subjected to by the church on 8<sup>th</sup> of May 2025 (*Arkkipiispa Tapio Luoma esitti anteeksipyyntön saamen kansalle*, 2025). While two bishops of Oulu have apologized to Sámi in 2012 and 2022, this is the first time the head of the Finnish church has issued an apology to

Sámi (*Arkkipiispa Tapio Luoma esitti anteeksipyyntön saamen kansalle*, 2025). In terms of true dialogue and reconciliation there seems to be massive barriers that need to be overcome and at the moment there is a lack of political will to truly address these issues. On the other hand, the archbishop's apology can be seen as slow but sure progress on the matter.

For example, Cook (2018) has suggestions for the Canadian context after researching the level and the nature of the ignorance present in the Canadian political and societal context. Therefore, in order to do the same here, knowing whether or not the Finnish politicians exhibit ignorance, and if so what is its nature, regarding the Sámi is a crucial step in remedying the situation. The second question explores what kinds of implications ignorance is likely to have for the Finnish policy towards Sámi. While there could be a number of factors that affect what kind of policy the Finnish state adopts regarding Sámi, from national security and economic policy considerations to the factors that stem from Parliamentarians' personal considerations that have to do with their own re-election or standing within the party, to party political considerations in the political landscape that has changed significantly during the temporal scope of the study. While there are these qualities which cannot be fully known or controlled for in this study, ignorance is known to play such a significant role in various situations between white and the Other (Mills, 2007; Cook, 2018; Rice *et al.*, 2022), meaning that understanding the role ignorance plays in the Finnish context is crucial for de-colonization.

### 3. Data and Methods

#### 3.1. Data

The data for this study comes from five written questions starting from 2013 and from two minutes of the Parliament plenary sessions Record PTK 127/2022 (2022) and Record PTK 128/2022 (2022). The written questions serve two purposes for the data set. Firstly, they provide temporal scope, and secondly the MPs who write them have time to prepare them compared with the parliamentary debates where the debates can get even heated, the MPs are at least in theory under the public scrutiny, and they have other MPs who are ready to engage and challenge their arguments (Ilie, 2015). Therefore, the written questions in theory are less prone to ignorance, as the MPs have the resources to ask well informed questions, meaning that if the written questions have ignorance it is more likely to be intentional or rooted in deep false beliefs the MP holds. The two minutes (ibid.) cover the parliamentary debate over the latest bill for the new Sámi Parliamentary Act (*Saamelaiskäräjälaki*) in 2022. These minutes were chosen because they are the most recent and therefore, show the most recent arguments being made. These two data sources provide a rich insight into the thinking and rhetoric of the Finnish Members of Parliament (MPs).

A temporal limit was set to 2013 and the search for the written questions was done using the Parliamentary archives online search tool in the November of 2023. A search was conducted by using a search word “*saamelais*” which is part of the word *Saamelaiskäräjälaki*. By using only part of the word, it was possible to find other documents such as written questions that were Sámi related. The search was further narrowed by using a keyword filter “*saamelaiset*” which translates to Sámi people. This left 201 search results. From these results eleven written questions remained that fulfilled the temporal criteria. Out of these eleven six did not include ignorance and were therefore not included in the final data. The plenary minutes for the data were chosen based on the timeliness of the topic, as the 2022 bill for the Sámi Parliament Act received quite significant media attention, and since it was the most recent Minutes on the topic. Therefore, the data corpus consists of five written questions and two Minutes of the Parliamentary Plenary, which constitute the body of the data which was around 50 pages altogether. The codes by which the original documents can be found from the website of the Finnish Parliament are in Appendix 1. During the analysis it also became clear that the data was saturated as the contributions of the MPs revolved around same topics. Additionally, in the

minutes ('Pöytäkirja PTK 127/2022 vp', 2022; 'Pöytäkirja PTK 128/2022 vp', 2022) the MPs make arguments similar to those that first started in 2012 (Lehtola, 2015a), meaning that there have not been significant developments in how those opposing the changing of the legal definition of who is eligible to vote in the Sámi Parliamentary elections argue.

### 3.2. Methods

In order to produce a piece of research, that moves beyond the harm that academia has done to Sámi and moving away from the view that Sámi are an object of scholarship (Virtanen, Keskitalo and Olsen, 2021), the methodology needs to be decolonial. While there are no one way of doing research this way, and one should not create or strengthen a dichotomous divide between the "Western" way and an Indigenous way (Virtanen *et al.*, 2021), some things are worth considering. Firstly, the position of the University of Helsinki as a central research hub, in the geographical core of Finland is recognized. Secondly, my own position as non-Sámi white man writing this piece of research is critically reflected on in the section 3.4. Researcher positionality. Thirdly, Indigenous methodologies in practice require Indigenous epistemology, Indigenous ontology, and Indigenous axiology or value system, which form a complementing holistic system of researching, titled *lávvu*, a tent (Porsanger and Seurujärvi-Kari, 2021). In the context of this study the *lávvu* method means that I have engaged with Sámi and other Indigenous scholars work, the key concepts are loaned from Sámi scholars and from Sámi thinking, such as the importance of Sámi livelihoods as key aspects of Sámi culture. This is not to say that there is a singular way of Sámi thinking or that it is a dichotomy with non-Sámi thinking. Additionally, drawing from the Canadian context Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021) and Carlson (2017) have formulated their methodology lists especially for researchers who are not Indigenous themselves. In addition to the above points, these lists have guided this research methodologically and ethically.

The method of analysis itself was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis works well together with decolonial methodology as thematic analysis is not tied to certain epistemological or theoretical viewpoints (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). In a way thematic analysis allows the researcher to bring in their own epistemological, ontological, and theoretical viewpoints and adapts to it. This mode of analysis also works well with identifying ignorance and other meanings that may be more or less implicit, as thematic analysis allows for both semantic and latent levels of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) The analysis started with familiarizing myself with the data corpus and then generating initial codes. For this study I chose to do open coding,

which means that the codes were developed and changed throughout the coding process (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). This allowed for more nuanced analysis as sometimes what was being said had very similar but still different meanings or implications. Open coding also allowed for constant revision of the codes as more data was coded. While the coding was done by one person for this thesis the revision of the data and the codes was somewhat similar to having multiple coding the same data as this allowed for a type of dialogue between myself at two different times. The coding was done using ATLAS, a qualitative research software. The codes were then put into initial themes. The themes were reviewed, changed, and combined during the process to either remove themes that did not have significant differences or were not relevant to the research question after the review.

### 3.3. Research ethics

A new set of ethical guidelines for research involving Sámi in Finland was published recently by a group consisting of scholars of Sámi and Indigenous studies from the Universities of Lappeenranta, Oulu, and Helsinki, and members of the Finnish Sámi Parliament, the Sámi Museum Siida, and the Sámi Education Institute (Heikkilä *et al.*, 2024) which lays out key aspects of the ethical standards a researcher should commit to in the context of doing research involving Sámi. Heikkilä *et al.* (2024) formulated four broad guidelines, which are *Gulahallan / Addiittállâm / Kulsõõllmõs* or Reciprocal Communication and Engagement, *Guorahallan ja vihkkedallan / Kuorâttállâm já viekkiistállâm / Tu'mmstõõllõš da vie'ssõõllmõs* or the Assessment of the Benefits and Risks of the Research and the Positionality of the Researcher and their Research, *Gudnejahttin ja árvvusatnin / Kunnijâttem já áárvustanneem / Ciistâst da äärvast áánnmõš* or the Appreciation of and Respect for Sámi Society and Knowledge, and *the Geatnegasvuohhta dieđu máhcaheapmái ja juohkimii / Kenigâsvuotâ macâttiđ já jyehiđ tiáđu / Ôõlgtemvuõtt teáđ maacctummša da juákkmõ'sše* or the Obligation to Return and Share Information.

The ethical guidelines have been built into this thesis from the beginning. “*Gulahallan*” (Heikkilä *et al.*, 2024, p. 35) has guided choices regarding the formulation of the research questions and the choice of data. In the beginning of designing this thesis there was an idea that maybe the best way to design this study was to gather the data by interviewing Sámi people. This would have obviously affected the research questions and the focus of the thesis, meaning that the end product would have been very different from what it is now, as this kind of research design would have centered the experiences of Sámi in ways that is impossible at the moment. However, the decision was made to use existing public data from Parliamentary sources for

several reasons. Firstly, several Sámi who are at least somewhat public figures due to their work or activism or both have repeatedly voiced their frustrations with Finnish general public and politicians who seem to be ignorant of Sámi culture, so in a way there is at least some people's view that ignorance exists. Therefore, getting the "whole" picture would have required asking Sámi to tell their views on ignorance one more time in the form of interviews, putting possibly unnecessary burden on them, which ties directly to the second point. Secondly, as Sámi are one of the most studied Indigenous people in the world (Paksi and Kivinen, 2021), I was worried about burdening Sámi people unnecessarily, which in part led to the decision to use final research design.

Thirdly, as ignorance in the Finnish non-Sámi public is something that has led to several public Sámi figures to voice their frustration, there seems to be a need for research that maps out ignorance in different levels of the Finnish society, meaning that the study and its findings can hopefully be useful to Sámi. Fourthly, as this study does not engage with matters related to Sámi cultural knowledge such as *duodji*, handicraft tradition or others like it (for the full list see Heikkilä *et al.*, 2024, p. 33), the approval of the *Sámediggi* was not required. When formulating the research design, prior to getting a supervisor, I contacted Research Professor Rauna Kuokkanen in the University of Lapland via email to ask for her opinion on the topic of the thesis, which she considered to be a good and timely topic (Kuokkanen, 2023). Furthermore, since this is a master's thesis I have had conversations regarding the thesis with my supervisor Professor Pirjo Kristiina Virtanen in 2024 and 2025

*"Guorahallan ja vihkkedallan"* (Heikkilä *et al.*, 2024, p. 37) have likewise been an integral part of the research process. While the view that Sámi are the target of settler colonial policy is not universally shared (cf. Nyysönen, 2013), and there are aspects, such as Kuokkanen's (2023a) point about the dispossession of the Sámi's lands, that make the case of Sámi unique in the field of settler colonial and Indigenous studies the use of this theoretical framework has seen significant use in the Sámi context in the 2010s and 2020s. While I find Lehtola's (2015a, 2015b) point about colonialism being too simplistic an explanation to explain everything in the relationship between Sámi and the Finnish state, agreeable, settler-colonial theory does hold significant explanatory power in this context, and further work is being done to develop theoretical strides in the Nordic model of settler colonialism (Kuokkanen, 2020b; McGuire, 2022). Therefore, even though it is important to recognize and be aware of these differences between the case of Sápmi and other cases of settler colonialism and Indigenous people, at the

moment settler colonial theory has the most explanatory power, and working with it from a decolonial standpoint allows one to make contributions that aim for Sámi self-determination. It is also possible that in the future green colonialism and/or extractive colonialism become the main theoretical framework (Hanacek, Kröger and Martínez-Alier, 2024), but at the moment and with the data used settler colonial theory was the appropriate choice. Secondly, the use of ignorance and its variations such as settler ignorance (Cook, 2018) provided a theoretical framework for understanding how ignorance works with the existing power structures (Dilley, 2010; Code, 2014).

Important for “*guarahallan and vihkkedallan*” (Heikkilä *et al.*, 2024, p. 37) are considerations regarding the harm the study could cause to the Sámi community. This is of course a serious concern. In the context of this particular study all of the data used is publicly available on the Finnish Parliament’s website. The data, meaning the written and spoken contributions of the MPs, can readily be accessed by anyone with an internet connection. Similarly, the names of the MPs are in the Minutes of the Parliamentary Plenaries and the written questions, meaning that the information of who said what and when are all public information. This combined with the fact that there were a relatively small number of statements analyzed means that this information would be quite easy to track down even if the contributions were anonymized in this study. Additionally, regarding the contributions, the MPs who made them, their parties, and their opinions are hardly surprising to anyone who has followed the political discussions around the legislative processes regarding Sámi. Therefore, the decision was made not to anonymize the data.

“*Gudnejahttin ja árvvusatnin*” (Heikkilä *et al.*, 2024, p. 38) has been most visible in the personal unlearning and learning that has taken place throughout the process of this study. Firstly, it means that in addition to reading prior studies related to this thesis I have read studies that are not cited here but have dealt with different aspects of understanding Sámi culture. Furthermore, I have spent time familiarizing myself with Sámi culture through movies, documentaries, media, and social media. These have included *Máhccan*, Homecoming, a documentary about the repatriation of Sámi *duodji* from the National Museum of Finland back to Sápmi (*Máhccan*, 2023), *Je’vida* a Skolt Sámi language film about the forced assimilation of the Skolt Sámi (*Je’vida*, 2023), as well getting to learn about Sámi culture on social media platform Instagram from Petra Laiti (no date), Helga West (no date), and Suvi West (no date). “*Geatnegasvuohta dieđu máhcaheapmái ja juohkimii*” (Heikkilä *et al.*, 2024, p. 39) relates to

returning knowledge and information back to the Sámi community. The biggest problem here relates to having this thesis translated into the three Sámi languages, which would be ideal and at the moment impossible, due to the lack of resources. A Finnish language popularized version is a possibility depending on the author's resources. Beyond that this original English language version will be made public and given to any and all appropriate parties who want to have it.

### **3.4. Researcher positionality**

In order to position myself in the research concerning Sámi it is necessary to introduce myself and make clear some of the attributes that shape my position and privileges in the Western society (Pease, 2010; Olsen, 2018). I am a cisgender man, and I live in a heterosexual relationship with my cisgender partner. I am white. I am from a middle-sized town from the south of Finland. While I would not say I grew up directly in the core, the core was an affordable hour-long bus ride away. My identity is that of someone's who has grown up close to the core and I do not identify with the peripheries of Finland. I come from an upper-middle class economic background, which has benefited me in numerous ways. During my childhood I would often vacation in Sápmi with my family without knowing or learning anything Sámi. In 2011 while in upper secondary school I went on exchange to live in a place currently known as Belleville, Ontario, Canada, which is unceded land. Close to the place I lived in was the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory, which is the home for over 8 000 members of the Mohawk people (*History*, no date). While I lived so close to land and people who had been targeted by settler colonial state and people for several hundred years (*History*, no date) this was not something that was taught by the local Western high school, nor by the settlers I lived with. I remember there having been some conversations about why the members of the Mohawk people were for example more likely to be struggling financially, and conversations, which were sometimes negative, about different benefits or rights or ways of land use the members of the Mohawk people had a right to practice. These were not conversations to which I would have paid plenty of attention at the time, but now as I am taking steps into the world of Indigenous studies I cannot help but think back to those days and wonder about the silence and the ignorance around the topic. I feel like this has shaped my current work in that I feel an increased responsibility to work in a de-colonial way. Currently, I am a master's student at the University of Helsinki, which is held in high regard. On the other hand, currently I qualify as low income, and I have less financial security than before. Additionally, I am invisibly disabled, somewhere in between masked and unmasked neurodivergent, or something people would call "quirky",

and I have had issues with my mental health. Following Pease (2010) the privileges I have put me in multiple positions of privilege that the less privileged characteristics do not remove. But then again this is not about me, it is about decentering myself. Like Olsen (2018) I read and study material that was not written primarily for me. And like Olsen (2018) I am learning from the Indigenous peoples who have put their time, effort, resources, and knowledge into forms I can access.

## 4. Theory

As the current relationship between the Finnish state and Sámi is increasingly understood as settler colonial (Kuokkanen, 2015, 2020a, 2020b, 2023a; Junka-Aikio, 2023; Constantinou *et al.*, 2024) it is crucial to understand settler colonial theory. This is also not to say that Finland is not engaged in other forms of colonialism (Näre and Nordberg, 2016). As opposed to the “traditional” colonialism where the colonial state aims to extract resources from the colony and the surplus value produced by the colonized workers (Veracini, 2010), settler colonialism aims to eliminate the indigenous population from their lands (Wolfe, 1994, 2006; Veracini, 2010). The reason for this difference is that in settler colonialist projects the labor of the Indigenous is not needed, rather they are a hindrance to the full realization of the settler colonial project and the exploitation of the land (Veracini, 2010). In other words, “people got in the way just by staying at home” (Rose, 1991, p. 46). It is this Indigenous people staying at home where the settler colonial need for the logic of elimination originates. In order to exploit the land, the settler colonialists must first eliminate the Indigenous people from the land. This does not necessarily mean genocides or interpersonal violence as suggested by (Wolfe, 2006). Elimination can manifest in various ways, dubbed transfers by Veracini (2010). Later Kuokkanen (2020b) has argued that in the case of Sámi the elimination has often presented itself as cultural erasure, among other ways, after the Sámi had first been racialized as the other (Kuokkanen, 2023a).

As discussed in the introduction, white settler colonial ignorance (Cook, 2018) is a crucial tool for the upholding of a settler colonial relationship between the Indigenous and the settler state. It does this by taking up knowledge space and filling the space that could otherwise be filled with knowledge, ignorance. It is worth pointing out that ignorance is not understood as the lack of ideas and thoughts regarding something or someone, but rather that it is not based on facts and it incorporates ideas of white supremacy (Mills, 2007). While there have not been systematic studies researching the knowledge Finns have about Sámi their culture and livelihoods. there are several aspects that support the argument that Finnish people in general are not knowledgeable about the Sámi, and that the Finnish Members of Parliament do not make a significant difference in this regard. Firstly, the settler colonial state of Finland has pushed for monolingualism and monoculturalism in regard to the Sámi in the post-War era (Aikio-Puoskari and Gáppe Piera Jovvna, 2022). Additionally, Sámi children whose human right it is to learn their culture are lacking the education (*ibid.*), meaning that it is unlikely that non-Sámi would

learn about the Sámi culture. Considering the small amount of Sámi living in Finland and Sápmi being far from the settler colonial core, it is likely that majority of the MPs would be ignorant regarding Sámi.

Drawing from Dilley's (2010) work on knowledge and ignorance in a French colonial setting in West Africa, wielding power over people and land does not require vast amounts of knowledge, rather it is possible to be quite ignorant towards the people and the land while still wielding power rather effectively. Dilley (2010) argued that in the West African setting the first steps of colonizing did not require knowledge on the people and cultures of the area, rather the colonial machinery required only the more readily available forms of knowledge such as topography. What follows from Dilley (2010) is that the Finnish MPs do not need to be knowledgeable about Sámi culture, livelihoods, traditions, or even their status as an Indigenous people to wield power over them. Rather they can make do with more tangible forms of knowledge such as material resources, economic numbers, and other such facts. This means that ignorance is permitted by the parliamentary system. However, it does not necessarily mean that the ignorance is used against Sámi or that the ignorant MPs aim to weaponize it.

There is also a point to be made here about the Finnish MPs choosing to stay ignorant regarding Sámi, their rights, and their culture. Previous research has shown that people emphasize and react more strongly to the pain of others, with less empathy shown toward strangers (Bucchioni *et al.*, 2015). This means that since the rights of Sámi are seen as a zero-sum game against the rights of the non-Sámi (Junka-Aikio, 2023), and advocating Sámi rights is unpopular to the degree where an MP from Lapland advocating for them is seen as a "political suicide" (Kuokkanen in Paukkeri, 2022), at least some MPs have an incentive to stay ignorant. However, the question becomes more difficult when it comes to MPs from the rest of Finland. As there does not seem to be existing research regarding the Finnish MPs or parties' stances on Sámi, some assumptions have to be made based on the information available. An Amnesty report looking at the presence of human rights in Parliamentary parties' manifestos, Sámi were mentioned in four sentences, and the Greens were the only one to make a point about advancing legislation that respects the Sámi right of self-governance (*Miten eduskuntapuolueiden vaaliohjelmassa näkyvät ihmisoikeudet? – Lue Amnestyn analyysi*, 2023). Additionally, the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's party of Finland both call for the re-legislation of the Sámi Parliamentary Act (*Miten eduskuntapuolueiden vaaliohjelmassa näkyvät ihmisoikeudet? – Lue*

Amnestyn analyysi, 2023). The lack of attention to the Sámi rights is additionally visible in the overall development of the Sámi rights, which has been slow if not stagnant.

#### **4.1. Settler Colonialism**

Settler colonialism is a distinct form of action and structure that is closely related to both colonialism and migration and has characteristics of both while maintaining such differences that it is a useful analytical tool in its own right (Veracini, 2010). Furthermore, neither colonial nor migration theories can sufficiently explain all the characteristics of settler colonialism (Veracini, 2010). While both settler colonialism and colonialism are based on racism, White supremacy, and the exploitation of the “Other” one of the key distinguishing features is how the two structures relate to political sovereignty. While traditional colonialist is dependent on the metropolitan core for sovereignty, settler colonialist brings sovereignty with them to the new frontiers and establishes their sovereign political body on the land (Veracini, 2010). In the settler colonialist’s mind, the land where he chooses to settle is without polity and ownership, a true *terra nullius*, and therefore settling is easily justified in the settler’s mind (for a discussion on how the settlers justify their settlement and how they obscure their effects on the indigenous people see Veracini, 2010). In the case of the Sámi their land ownership, recognized by the state(s), was slowly eroded over hundreds of years (Kuokkanen, 2023a), making the case an unusual one within the settler colonial theory. However, Sámi and the Nordic states are generally considered to be an example of settler colonialism (Kuokkanen, 2020b; Lahti, 2021; Junka-Aikio, 2023). Sovereignty is also what differentiates a settler from a migrant. Whereas the settler brings sovereignty with them wherever they decide to settle, migrants move into a polity, often after having left or having to have left behind their homes and lives, and they often lack the full rights of the citizens and face racist discrimination from those belonging to the majority population (Veracini, 2010).

Another differentiating characteristic between settler colonialism and colonialism is their relationship with and attitude toward the indigenous people living on the land. While both are based on racism (Veracini, 2010; Breen, 2019), and the subjugation and the dehumanization of the Indigenous peoples to the point of subhuman, colonialism has a need for the indigenous people as the colonizers depend on the colonized people for an almost infinite source of cheap labor (Sartre, 2001; Osterhammel, Frisch and Tigmor, 2005; Veracini, 2010). The colonial power structures are still visible in today’s neo colonial world or, as the global north controls most of the global wealth (Martins, 2020) and, knowledge production (Altbach, 1977; Martins,

2020), and overconsumption (Martins, 2020), while the global south is exploited for labor and resources (Udegbumam, 2020), and is left to deal with the consequences of the overconsumption of the global north (Roberts, 2001). Under settler colonialism the role of the indigenous people is different. As the settler pushes forward into the “new frontiers” to claim more land for themselves the indigenous people become a nuisance that does not provide value to the settlers but are a hindrance to the settler’s settler colonial project itself (Wolfe, 1999; Veracini, 2010). As a result, the settlers and the indigenous people are engaged in what Wolfe (1999) described as a winner-take-all project that ends in the replacement of the indigenous people. This winner-take-all nature of the settler colonialist structure was later coined into a concise “logic of elimination” (Wolfe, 2006), which has since become the key theoretical tool of research focused on settler colonialism (cf. Tuck and Yang, 2012; Glenn, 2015; Kuokkanen, 2020a).

While it might not have been what Wolfe (1999) had in mind, this winner-take-all typification also aptly leaves settler colonial projects as on going, until a winner emerges. Following this theoretical train of thought even a slow settler colonial project, that occasionally seems to take steps toward Indigenous liberation, would ultimately still be headed towards that winner-take-all outcome. Veracini’s (2010) argument for the “mimetic character” of settler colonialism would also support this idea that a slow settler colonial project would still be headed towards Wolfe’s (1999) bitter end even if the immediate evidence suggested otherwise. What follows is that the scholars of Indigenous and settler colonial studies as well as those working towards Indigenous liberation should at least stay mindful of this nature of settler colonialism. These arguments also add theoretical weight and explanatory possibilities to arguments that maintain that modern day settler colonialism is alive and well (Breen, 2019; Rice et al., 2022).

While settler colonialism can be understood as both singular and separate events, or as structures that continue to shape various institutions, knowledge, and society as a whole (Breen, 2019; Rice et al., 2022). This latter understanding of settler colonialism is arguably more useful as it allows us for a more holistic view of settler colonial societies and helps focus on settler colonialism even when its “mimetic character” tries to make it invisible (Veracini, 2010, p. 14). Additionally, as separate acts of settler colonialism can be difficult to distinguish, due to them being committed by various actors ranging from private citizen settlers to corporations, to various levels of government, and the intensity of the acts varying in severity from cultural appropriation of Indigenous culture to racist systemic interpersonal violence, and from corporate land use to private land rights stemming from national level legislation, viewing them

through the lens of structural settler colonialism helps to see the big picture of settler colonialism. Additionally, recognizing settler colonialism in the big picture is crucial as many of the individual events or acts of settler colonialism are guised behind the veils of hardship or capitalist norms and goals (Veracini, 2010).

The use of settler colonial theory has been criticized in the Nordic context. Lehtola (2012) has called the relationship and history more complicated than that of settler colonialism. Junka-Aikio *et al.* (2022) point out that since the Finnish state never forbid Sámi languages it means that there was no suppression in principle. Nyysönen (2013) shows the rise and fall of colonial discourse as the main theory of explaining the relationship between Sámi and the Finnish state as the claims of Sámi being colonized in the same way as Indigenous people in the United States, Asia, and Australia left out many Sámi who did not fit the colonization narrative. Toivanen and Fabritius (2020) see the relationship as one that requires more cooperation between all stakeholders living in the Arctic region, especially with the rise in demand for rare earth minerals and land use questions. In general, all agree that the relationship between Sámi and the Finnish state is not without its problems, however, the view of Sámi being the target of an ongoing settler colonial process is questioned.

#### **4.2. Knowledge and Ignorance**

The relationships between different epistemologies, knowledges, modes of knowledge production, and ignorances are complex and multifaceted which is why a brief overview of these, in the context of de-colonialism and settler colonialism and Indigenous studies, is necessary. This brief theoretical overview explains the role ignorance plays in modern settler colonialism in the Finnish context. In the Western thought knowledge is most often associated with power (Foucault, 1980), more recent scholarly efforts have argued that ignorance also plays an important role in societal power distribution. Mills (2007) has called “white ignorance” a key part of white supremacy, as racially charged ignorance strengthens power structures that give white people power over others. Dilley (2010) argues that ignorance and power can go hand in hand, and one does not need to be knowledgeable in order to wield power over others. Examining the French colonial history in West Africa, the French colonial apparatus was able to rule over the local populace while holding on the significant ignorance (Dilley, 2010). Furthermore, Dilley (2010) argues that ignorance in some instances was necessary for upholding power, as knowledge would have led the colonizers to re-examine the morality of their operation.

Firstly, in the West and to a large degree in most of the sciences knowledge is produced through the S-knows-that-p – model, where objective factual knowledge claims are produced by an objective general observer in an empirical setting (Code, 2014). Thus, if two people were to observe a silver-colored laptop on the table, they both can, independently, claim that there is a silver-colored laptop on the table. Similarly, any person from the street could come in and know that there is a silver-colored laptop on the table. Or we could drop an apple and see that it falls in a somewhat similar manner every time, as long as no new variables are introduced. This has largely been the basis for knowing in the post-Enlightenment world where regardless of the observer, the observation or experiment goes similarly every time it is tested and in theory the knower could be anyone off the street (Code, 2014), meaning that the laptop is silver and the apple falls as presumed regardless of whom is observing. While quantum physics has challenged this model of knowledge production based on observation (Barad, 2007), it still shapes plenty of our knowledge production that does not take place at the atomic or subatomic level. Feminist philosophies have also questioned the S-knows-that-p model, by arguing that the observer, S, is not an objective observer, but rather often a white middle-class man (Code, 2014). Another feminist critique is that the claim to universal knowledge is faulty, meaning that instead of universal knowledge, several knowledges are produced and situated and in many instances, due to the object of the scientific inquiry being an agent themselves resulting in the object affecting the observation (Haraway, 1988). These critiques have led to other epistemologies such as gendered epistemology having been developed (Code, 2014).

For the purposes of this thesis both of these matters. Both Haraway (1988) and Code (2014) essentially criticize the view that gender and other situated factors are not traditionally considered in Western knowledge production. Haraway (1988, 576) argues that the only people who actually believe and act on “disembodied scientific objectivity – are nonscientists”, meaning that even if scientists themselves maintain that there is an objectivity to science, there is not. Code (2014) takes this further, arguing that there is no objective knower that can produce objective knowledge, rather the imaginary knower is a white male, and his racialization affects the knowledge he produces. In addition to gendered Charles Mills (2007) argued that racial epistemologies exist. While feminist scholars had brought attention to the effects of gender on knowledge production Mills introduced race. Mills (2007) argued that because the norm of knowledge production is the white middle-aged middle-class this model of knowledge holds a Gramscian hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) in the knowledge production space, leading to some

things being left outside the sphere of what is considered knowledge (Mills, 2007). On the opposite side of knowledge is ignorance which Mills (2007) understands as both erroneous beliefs and the absence of true beliefs. Mills' (2007) work gives us a very usable dichotomous knowledge-ignorance dichotomy. Furthermore, his work led him to coining the term "white ignorance" (Mills, 2007), meaning that people are ignorant because of the supreme position whiteness holds in the Western society. Hence, white ignorance is ignorance that is caused by white supremacy, not just ignorance shared by people racialized as white (Mills, 2007). It is worth noting that white ignorance affects all people and it is societal structure to some point, meaning people who are not racist have white ignorance (Mills, 2007).

Mills' (2007) argument about white ignorance was later developed into "white settler ignorance" (Cook, 2018), and later on into white settler resistance (Rice *et al.*, 2022). These understandings of ignorance have not been used in the Finnish setting Cook (.2018) took Mills' (2007) concept and applied it to the Canadian situation arguing for ignorance that comes from the supremacy of the white settlers. Thus, being a settler also shapes the relationships between power, knowledge, and ignorance. Rice *et al.* (2022) on the other hand argued that the Gramscian hegemony of the Western epistemology manifests as a resistance to non-Western knowledges, which means that the white settlers are more likely to reject knowledge that comes from Indigenous people, and that significant work needs to be done by the white settlers, Indigenous educators, and at the governmental level (Rice *et al.*, 2022).

As shown above western epistemology suffers from serious limitations but fortunately there are options. For example, Million (2013) has made known Indigenous knowledges that are the result of settler colonial violence. These knowledges were first and foremost felt by Indigenous women who had been targeted by settler colonial legislation (Million, 2013). At times these women did not (yet) have the words for what they knew and felt in their bodies and the lack of words or the inability for an outside observer to make a measurable observation should not discredit such knowledge (Million, 2013; Code, 2014). After all it was not that long ago when sexual harassment did not exist due to the lack of words, even though numerous women had felt it before the coining of the term (Crouch, 1998). While knowledge is not quite as centered around white men as it used to be it is worth noting that the change has been slow with first introducing women's experiences in the mid-1970s (Crouch, 1998), the experiences of people of color around the 2000s (Mills, 2007), and then slowly the experiences of Indigenous people in the 2010s (Million, 2013). This evident resistance to knowledge produced by others beside

the universal white man is evident in Dilley's (Dilley, 2010, p. 180) typology of ignorance he calls "refusal to know", meaning that one is refusing to accept knowledge presented to them i.e. ignoring evidence. Furthermore, by ignoring, the Indigenous knowledges, the West effectively creates a two-fold ignorance in the sense that they are making Indigenous knowledge ignorance for not fitting in the Western knowledge paradigm and at same time also making themselves ignorant by refusing to consider the possibility of knowledge that is not produced in the Western scientific empirical epistemology.

## 5. Analysis and Results

The thematic analysis of the data corpus resulted in six themes. After several readings of the data corpus, the appropriate contributions by the MPs were coded with the codes changing and becoming clearer with the progress. Since the focus of this thesis is ignorance and its implications the coding process looked at contributions that exhibited ignorance in its different forms and implications. This included contributions that are just based on false knowledge claims, unfair comparisons, arguments that are not based on factual information, but hunches that are less adamant than those based on false knowledge claims. Additionally, there are contributions that are malicious and punitive towards Sámi, and contributions that consider reconciliation as a threat that harms both Sámi and the Finns living in Sápmi and Lapland. For example, MP Kärnä (2022, p. 22) stated that the ILO169 Convention will “never be ratified after this” during MP Honkasalo’s contribution as a response to MP Honkasalo criticizing the state’s inability to further the rights of the Sámi. In another contribution MP Kulmuni (2022, p. 76) was concerned that the bill for the Sámi Parliament Act has “created more tensions and discord than dismantles them”. In these contributions the two MPs highlight the existing or imagined juxtaposition between Sámi and the non-Sámi. It should be noted that these contributions and MPs are not the only ones creating these juxtapositions. The MPs who advocated for the new bill are bound to create these juxtapositions as well, considering that they too see the situation as a zero-sum game. This cleavage in the Parliament also implies difficulties for dialogue and reconciliation processes.

The coding process itself was somewhat tricky since one contribution at times could be coded into several codes and themes. At times when even one sentence could belong to two codes it was coded into both. Longer contributions consisting of several sentences were coded sentence by sentence. Because of the nature of the data some assumptions had to be made at times, such as when coding contributions by MPs to a code titled “chooses to ignore accepted facts”, as there is no way of truly knowing whether or not the MP making the contribution is truly choosing to ignore accepted facts. However, the contributions under that particular code were such that it is fair assume that the MP making such a contribution should know that they are making an ignorant contribution. Additionally, in such cases the same MP could be making very well-informed arguments in the next sentence, meaning that they are in general interested in the topic and are knowledgeable of the political situation, even if they showed ignorance otherwise. However, most often the contributions were clearly opposing something that upholds furthering

the Sámi's rights, such as the ILO169 convention. At times the coding was more related to philosophy and morality, such as the code "Sees Sámi rights inherently subservient to the state" (Appendix 2) where one would have to start pondering where do rights stem from. The decision was made that since, the Sámi predate Finland, and even the Westphalian state system (Kuokkanen, 2023a), the human rights language is based on a notion of universalism and historicism (Lauren, 2011) that predates the concept of states, Indigenous rights are more of a universal right than something granted by the state. In the end the coding process led to twenty-two codes that were then grouped into six themes, the themes and the codes can be found in appendix 2.

The contributions that were coded as ignorant represent MPs from the Centre Party, National Coalition Party, and Finns Party. MPs from these parties made statements against the bill for the Sámi Parliament Act, broadening Sámi's rights, and in support of self-indigenizing people. This is in line with the theorized party stances. The rest of the themes were titled as follows "Anti-Sámi for political gain", "Disagrees with the Sámi self-governance", "Ignorance but not necessarily ignoring", "Ignores the Sámi group right to define group members as posited in the ILO169", "Maintaining or furthering the colonial *status quo*", and "Sees Sámi rights inherently subservient to the state". It should be noted that in all of these themes there is ignorance in some form or other. Sometimes it is the blatant refusal to know i.e. refusing to accept what is considered true facts by Sámi, and sometimes milder cases of ignorance such as when the person contributing seems to believe false information but does not exhibit signs of refusing to know the fact.

### **5.1 The Sámi's right to self-determination is ignored**

Ignoring the self-determination of Sámi was a theme that was heavily present in the data. Most of the contributions under this theme were related to disagreeing with the Sámi right to self-determination, which is already limited to cultural and linguistic self-governance in Finland, and the related group right to define the group's members. Furthermore, there were some contributions that showed the desire to directly interfere with the workings of the Sámi Parliament and how the Sámi conduct their internal politics. For example, MP Kärnä (2019, Translated by the author) said that "the actions of the election committee could be compared to a situation where the sitting government of the state decided who can vote" (p. 1) and continued "unfortunately the situation greatly resembles politics of a totalitarian state" (ibid.). In 2018 MP Majjala (2018, Translated by the author) said "the proposal for the Sami Parliament Act does

not clarify how this law or the Sámi Parliament could represent all of the Sámi” (p. 1) meaning that the Sámi Parliament and the proposed new Sámi Parliament Act would leave out the so called *metsäsaamelaiset*, a self-indigenizing group of people, not recognized as Sámi by the Sámi. In another example from 2014 the MP Maijala (2014, Translated by the author) left a written question regarding the proceedings to ratify the ILO169 asking “why are Lappish people also known as Forest Sámi from Kemi Lapland not taken into consideration in the government’s proposal to ratify the ILO agreement” (p.1). Here again MP Maijala is trying to indigenize non-Sámi and disregarding the Sámi’s group right to define the members of their people. In 2022 during a plenary session concerning the government proposal for the new Sámi Parliament Act (‘Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle laeiksi saamelaiskäräjistä annetun lain ja rikoslain 40 luvun 11 §:n muuttamisesta’, 2022), similar remarks were made. MP Kärnä (Kärnä in ‘Täysistunnon pöytäkirjan pääsivu PTK 128/2022 vp’, 2022, Translated by the author) said that if the proposal for the new Sámi Parliament Act were to become a law:

“Finland would be guilty of committing a serious human right violation by removing the political rights that come with being Indigenous, from some of the Indigenous people in Finland” (p.73)

Here again a bill for the new Sámi Parliament Act, that had the support of the Sámi Parliament, albeit not unanimous, and one that would strengthen the Sámi self-determination, and addressing a situation for which Finland was reprimanded by the UNDRIP, was seen by some MPs as a threat to non-Sámi living in Sápmi. The MPs who disagree with the quite limited Sámi self-governance exhibit ignorance by showing that they refuse to know that the Sámi have a legal right to make decisions that concern themselves by themselves. Even though the Finnish state has failed to ratify the ILO169 agreement, which outlines the responsibilities the governments have towards the Indigenous peoples (*International Labor Organization Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989, 1991*), the Sámi do have a constitutional right to “uphold and develop their language and their culture” (*Suomen perustuslaki, 2000*, translated by the author), and Finland voted in favor of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) in 2007. The issue with both of these that they do not define Indigenous Peoples, and since ILO169 treaty has not been ratified by Finland the legal definition of Sámi remains inadequate. Hence Sámi in Finland is left with inadequate national legislation and claims to international legal standard. The MPs who disregard claims made by the Sámi, the Sámi Parliament who after all are a democratically elected body representing

Sámi, and those based on international legal standards can therefore be said to refuse to know the true facts. Considering that issues have been widely recognized by Sámi, other national politicians, international bodies, and scholars, and the ignorant MPs have access to this information it is a fair assertion that they are indeed refusing to know.

## **5.2 The Sámi group right to recognize the members of their people is ignored**

Another key theme from the data is the Indigenous peoples' group right to define the members of their group, as posited in the ILO169 convention (1991). While the Finnish state has failed to ratify the ILO169 convention (1991), it is a useful analytical tool here as the group rights Indigenous Peoples hold, one thing that legally separates them from minorities, stem from this treaty. In Finland the *de facto* Sámi group approval is whether or not the Sámi Parliament Election Committee recognizes the person as eligible to take part in the Sámi Parliamentary elections by either voting or standing to be elected. Since, the Finnish Sámi Parliament Act has the controversial "*lappalaispykälä*" which in addition to objective criteria allows for the overall assessment of whether the person is Sámi or not. In Finland this has led to numerous complaints after the Sámi Parliament's election committee has rejected applications. The complaints go to the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) of Finland, which is the final ruling body on the subject. The SAC has overturned the decisions made by the Sámi election committee based on the "*lappalaispykälä*, which in turn have resulted in the Finnish state getting reprimands from the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), since the SAC's decision in the CERD's view, among others', violates Sámi's group right to decide the members of their people. Furthermore, in 2024 the SAC's decisions resulted in the cancellation of the Sámi Parliamentary election and the decision to force the Sámi to have a new election and include the people had previously been rejected by the Sámi Parliament Election Committee.

Regarding the Sámi's group right to decide who is Sámi, the Finnish MPs made a significant number of contributions that disagree with either Sámi's group right to decide on their members, the principles of ILO169 or both. I will examine some of them. In 2022 MP Riikka Purra said the following during the plenary discussion on the Bill for the Sámi Parliament Act "This would move a large number of people who consider themselves to be Sámi due to their family lineage outside the legal definition of Sámi" (Purra in 'Täysistunnon pöytäkirjan pääsivu PTK 128/2022 vp', 2022, p. 76, Translated by the Author). Here MP Purra makes it clear that she is disagreeing with the international legal norm that Indigenous people have a right to define their

group members, as she is worried about the rights of the individual and completely ignores Indigenous group rights. Secondly, this excerpt is a great example of the ignorance present in the Parliament. It does not matter whether or not one has a family lineage of Sámi and they feel they are Sámi because of that (Näkkäljärvi, 2018a). What matters is whether or not they are living the culture and the Sámi as a whole accepts them to be part of the people. In another contribution MP Kulmuni (Kulmuni in 'Pöytäkirja PTK 128/2022 vp', 2022, p. 77, Translated by author) said: "When a closer look is taken at these people who were confirmed by the SAC, their presentation of evidence [regarding their Sáminess] is very convincing." Here MP Kulmuni makes the mistake of trying to be the person to evaluate the evidence. It is not the job for MP Kulmuni to evaluate who is Sámi, nor should it be the SAC's job to assess the said evidence, if the principle of group recognition of the ILO169 is accepted. Therefore, MP Kulmuni shows not just the desire to disregard the Sámi group right to define the members of their people but also shows what is seemingly ignoring the very basics of Indigenous group rights.

In 2018, then MP Eeva-Maria Maijala (2018, Translated by author) stated in a written question that "[t]he bill for the new Sámi Parliament Act has not been able to show how this bill or the Sámi Parliament could represent all Sámi in Finland". This question was in regard to the then attempt to legislate a new Sámi Parliament Act, showing that the same kind of rhetoric has been used for a while now. Maijala is also a well-known self-indigenizing person and was an MP from the Lapland district, who has been rejected from the Sámi Parliament electorate (Lehtola, 2015a). Therefore, it seems that she is actively ignoring or in other words refusing to know that the Sámi as a group have a right to recognize their members. Likewise, MP Kärnä (Kärnä in 'Pöytäkirja PTK 127/2022 vp', 2022, p. 26, Translated by author) makes a statement referring to the Anaar Sámi and the self-indigenizing "Forest Sámi" "The people who have most been assimilated, they are being made into a second-tier citizens who do not have the right to decide and take part in Indigenous cultural self-determination". As the "Forest Sámi is not an existing Sámi group but rather a group of self-indigenizing Finns living across the Northern Finland (Junka-Aikio, 2023), MP Kärnä is ignoring the Sámi's group right to recognize their members. As for the Anaar Sámi, the relationship between the Sámediggi and the Anaar Sámi has been rocky at times and the self-indigenizing Finns like to argue that all Anaar Sámi have been left outside of the Sámediggi (Lehtola, 2015a). In 2018, the Sámediggi founded the Anaar Sámi advisory committee or *Inarinsaamelaisasiain neuvottelukunta*, that functions as an expert,

cooperation, and negotiatory body to promote the Anaar Sámi point of view. It appears that in his contribution MP Kärnä (Kärnä in ‘Pöytäkirja PTK 127/2022 vp’, 2022, p. 26, Translated by author), is trying to evoke the argument widely used by the self-Indigenizing that the Sámediggi is oppressing the Anaar Sámi (Lehtola, 2015a)

As seen in the above examples, there are MPs who are disagreeing with Sámi on who are Sámi and trying to legitimize other measures of granting the status of being Sámi. The MPs in question are also refusing to know the international legal norm that Indigenous peoples have certain group rights. This is arguably the case since there have been several attempts to ratify the ILO169 and its language was present in several instances when the bill for the Sámi Parliamentary Act was being discussed in the 2022, so it is the logical conclusion that the MPs are willfully ignoring the international legal norm of group right to recognize the members of the people.

### **5.3 Maintaining or furthering the colonial project**

A major theme in the data was furthering or maintaining the colonial project. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, and as argued by scholars such as Laura Junka-Aikio (2023) and Rauna Kuokkanen (2020b, 2023a) amongst others, the relationship between the Sámi and the Finnish state can be described and analyzed through the lenses of different forms of colonialism. Within the contributions made by the MPs were statements that were rooted in colonial thought and worldview and were aiming to maintain the settler-colonial structures. These included instances of calling for the Sámi to act and conduct themselves as the “right kind of Sámi” would, ill intent towards the Sámi, which was rooted in nothing more than the people being Sámi, disregarding the differences in power between the Finnish state and the Sámi people, calls for the state to apparatus to get involved in overturning decisions made by the Election Committee of the Sámi Parliament, calls for punishing and cutting funding to the Sámi Parliament as a result of the Election Committee upholding their right to determine who can vote in the election, and calls for peaceful coexistence that would disregard justice for Sámi for Finland’s current and past wrongdoings,. Additionally, there were statements that were meant to discourage the Sámi from holding on their rights as set in national and international law. Next I will examine some excerpts from the data.

In 2019, in a response to the Sámi Parliament’s Election Committee concluding that 161 individuals were not eligible to vote in the Sámi Parliamentary election and the resulting ruling

of the SAC to allow 37 of these people to vote in the election, MP Kärnä (Kärnä, 2019, Translated by the author) wrote in one written question the following:

“What actions will the Ministry of Justice take, in order to get the Sámi Parliament to abide by the Finnish law and human rights, what will the government do so that the 2019 Sámi Parliamentary election, which is no longer legitimate because of the decision of the Election Committee, is held again at a quick schedule and the appropriate nomination of candidates, is the government planning to cut the funding to the Sámi Parliament, since its current political majority has shown with its actions, that it is not even planning to follow the applicable statutes and the decision of the Supreme Administrative Court” (p. 1)

The lengthy example highlights colonial structures and attitudes, as well as articulating the wish to limit the Sámi's autonomy. Firstly, it places the national law as the supreme legal standard, disregarding international legal standards and morality. Furthermore, it twists the human rights as a rhetorical tool to push an agenda that is inconsistent with other human rights and Indigenous rights coming from UNDRIP, and the international legal standard stemming from ILO169 agreement. Secondly, Kärnä (2019) is in two instances instigating the state apparatus to intervene in Sámi affairs, first by asking for the Ministry of Justice to get involved for the Election Committee practicing their group right to define the members of their people, and then again by asking the government to cut the Sámi Parliament's funding, which would negatively impact key areas of Sámi Parliament's functions such as the development of Sámi languages and culture, hence most likely accelerating the loss of Sámi language and culture, which would in turn accelerate the erasure of Sámi and should be therefore be considered settler colonialism. Thirdly, while calling for the cutting of the funding, Kärnä also relates it to the “political majority” which implies that there are Sámi, in this case likely the majority of the Election Committee who are living their Indigeneity in a way that does not conform to the Kärnä's (ibid.) idea of how Sámi should act and live. Therefore, Kärnä (2019) would only leave a certain way, a way defined by the legislative power of the state, for the Sámi to live.

In another quote, from the Parliamentary Plenary minutes discussing the bill for the Sámi Parliament Act in 2022 MP Purra highlights the problem she has with Sámi group right to decide on their members as well as displaying their ignorance. “We know that in midst of the forest, fell, and fisher Sámi there are lots of people whose family line is clearly Sámi - - but who are being sidelined by this new bill” (Purra in ‘Pöytäkirja PTK 127/2022 vp’, 2022, p. 25,

Translated by author). Firstly, it is not clear what MP Purra means when she says “forest, fell, and fisher Sámi”, as being Sámi is not a designation stemming from occupation, and Sámi have historically had various sources of livelihood (Lehtola, 2015a; Näkkäljärvi, 2018b; Kuokkanen, 2023a) and while Forest Sámi is a term used by those trying to either indigenize themselves or others, it does not refer to a group Sámi recognized as Sámi by Sámi (Näkkäljärvi, 2018b). Secondly, while the bill in question would have increased the number of generations where one’s ancestor spoke Sámi as first language, from the current three to four, the true cause for Purra’s worry seems to be the removal of the so called “Lappalaispykälä”, which is the clause that has been used by those rejected by the Election committee to appeal the SAC. Therefore, it seems that MP Purra is concerned with keeping the situation as it is. Additionally, as it stands having Sámi family generations ago is not what makes one Sámi (Näkkäljärvi, 2018b), so appealing to that demonstrates Purra’s ignorance regarding the topic, in addition to refusing to respect the opinion of the Sámi as well as refusing to know.

The desire to maintain the project as well as seeing the rights of Sámi as secondary to maintain harmonious relations between Sámi and non-Sámi living in Sápmi is also apparent in MP Kulmuni’s statement as she says referring to the proposal for the new Sámi Parliament Act: “in its current form the proposal increases the tensions rather than reduces them” (Kulmuni in ‘Täysistunnon pöytäkirjan pääsivu PTK 127/2022 vp’, 2022, p. 77-78, Translated by the author) meaning that the worries Sámi have, the international legal standards and other such considerations are all secondary to maintaining the *status quo*. In the same contribution she continues “In Norway there is a wide support for self-identification. In Sweden the forest Sámi are a recognized Sámi minority, which is not the case in Finland” (Kulmuni in ‘Täysistunnon pöytäkirjan pääsivu PTK 127/2022 vp’, 2022, p. 25, Translated by the author). As for the Norwegian case there is a strong approval for self-identification (Heinämäki *et al.*, 2017), but there is also a language criterion and Norwegian law does not have the *Lappalaispykälä*” which allows for the consideration as an overall evaluation (Heinämäki *et al.*, 2017). As for Sweden the legal standard for who can register to vote on the Swedish Sámi Parliamentary Election is similar to Norway’s (Heinämäki *et al.*, 2017), meaning that there is no *lappalaispykälä*, and therefore a Sámi minority in Sweden is not the equivalent of non-Sámi being indigenized in Finland. Thus, Kulmuni (2022) is essentially twisting the Norwegian and Swedish cases to support her own point of view. It is also worth pointing out that the study by Heinämäki *et al.* (2017) was published by the Finnish government five years prior to Kulmuni’s above statement

being made, meaning that she would have had access to the information. This gives further credibility to the argument that these MPs are not in fact lacking knowledge available to them, but they rather refuse to know the information.

In addition to other desires to maintain the situation as is, at least one MP made it explicitly clear that they do not consider non-Sámi being elected to the Sámi Parliament a problem. Referring to the bill for Sámi Parliament Act Kärnä did not consider non-Sámi being eligible to vote or stand to be elected a problem to the Sámi's self-determination as they would only account for "five percent of all Sámi" (Kärnä in 'Pöytäkirja PTK 128/2022 vp', 2022, p. 81, Translated by author). Regardless of whether or not these people could make a difference in the election this statement highlights the view on the issue. It does not matter whether or not the group rights of Sámi are being violated as long as some people get to Indigenize themselves, thus placing the desires of the non-Sámi higher than the rights of the Sámi, effectively creating a situation where the Sámi are being eliminated by diluting their capabilities of self-determination, meaning that this can credibly be argued as a case of settler colonialism (Veracini, 2010; Kuokkanen, 2020a).

At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the situation is not stagnant but ever evolving, even though similar bills for the Sámi Parliament Act have failed in the Parliament for years now. While there have been attempts to further reconciliation with the TRC, Kuokkanen (2020a) has argued that the TRC has threats to the Sámi as well. Similarly, while the Arctic Railway project has been put on hold indefinitely (Junka-Aikio, 2023), it has not been decidedly put to end. In October of 2024 the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (CESCR), and the Committee on the Rights of the Child found that Finland has violated several articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024) by granting "a mineral exploration permit and an area reservation without performing a proper impact assessment and without obtaining the free, prior and informed consent of the Sami community" (ibid.). Therefore, the situation is in constant fluctuation with some issues moving forward and some backwards. With the efforts to decarbonize transportation to combat the climate crisis it is likely that issues such as mining are bound to be on the list that further green colonial projects in Sápmi, if sufficient mineral deposits are found. Green colonialism has already caused significant friction in Spain where communities have been angered by an open pit mine next to UNESCO World Heritage city (Zografos, 2022). Likewise Hanacek, Kröger, and Martinez-Alier (2024) found that green

extractive tendencies are closely tied to ongoing colonial projects in the Arctic region. Furthermore, they suggest that such colonialisms can result in the expansion of necropolitical systems (Hanacek, Kröger and Martínez-Alier, 2024).

While there are enough examples of Finnish MPs making statements that express the desire to maintain or further the current situation, from several MPs from various parties to fill a book, the need to keep this piece of work at a reasonable length requires us to do with the ones presented above. However, these limited examples that have been discussed above and their counterparts have several implications. Firstly, it seems that certain MPs are ready to deny any *de facto* self-determination for the Sámi for what is likely their own political gain. Secondly, as past research has asserted that the TRC process presents a risk for the Sámi in that even though it could be able to shed light to the past wrongdoings, the response from the Finnish state would leave a lot to desire (Kuokkanen, 2020a). In the light of the above statements the previous arguments about the risk of settler colonial (Kuokkanen, 2020a) and other subtypes of colonial futures (Junka-Aikio, 2023) seem very possible.

#### **5.4 Sámi rights are seen as inherently subservient to the state**

In the contributions that were coded into this theme the MPs did not consider the rights of the Sámi to be something that they should have based on their status as an Indigenous people, morals, international legal norms or anything but the goodwill of the state. Included in these contributions was an implied what is given by the state can be taken away by the state as well. Some examples include:

“the Sámi Parliament is funded by the state under the law on Sámi Parliament, and functions as a self-government body within the administrative branch of Ministry of Justice and has with its decision shown complete disregard of the Finnish national legislation and above else of the Supreme Administrative Court of Finland. This cannot happen in a state governed by the rule of law” (Kärnä, 2015, p. 1, Translated by the author).

Here MP Kärnä makes it clear in explicit terms that the Sámi Parliament exists by the grace of the Finnish state and under the Finnish state. He also makes it clear that when the rights of the Sámi are put up against the national legislation, the latter takes precedence. The way MP Kärnä puts it is almost as if the actions of the Sámi Parliament were not simply at odds with the law but a violation of the sovereignty of the Finnish State.

In another example, one MP made the following contribution:

“a sizeable portion of the members of the [Sámi] Parliament, albeit a minority feels this is very unjust, and it tells that the Finnish Parliament must also consider the other point of view ja consider what is just and reasonable.” (Lohi in ‘Täysistunnon pöytäkirjan pääsivu PTK 128/2022 vp’, 2022, pp. 84–85, Translated by the author).

In the above example, MP Lohi (ibid.) makes a point that the Finnish Parliament should also consider the opinion of a minority group in the Sámi Parliament when legislating on the Sámi. While it is beyond the scope of this research to examine the different views and reasons within the Sámi Parliament, the sudden worry of it within the Finnish Parliament is worth considering. In general, and also heavily present in the data, the Finnish Parliamentarians seem to be more worried about even having to discuss issues such as land use with Sámi, fearing this would lead to an increased self-governance for the Sámi. Therefore, the sudden worry for the voices of the Sámi to be heard seems to be first and foremost a tool to hinder the realization of Sámi’s group rights and less about a genuine worry. Additionally, MP Lohi’s (ibid.) contribution posits the development of Sámi’s self-determination as something that is for the Finnish MPs to consider instead of something that the Sámi are capable of doing on their own terms, making the relationship patronizing and colonial.

It is clear from the above examples that the Sámi Parliament exists and functions because of the goodwill of the Finnish state and included is the implicit threat that the goodwill can be withdrawn. They also make visible the power differences between the Sámi and the Finnish state in that the state can take action should the Sámi Parliament stray too far from what its accepted lane. Therefore, it is also arguable that at least in the minds of the MPs lining with the above statements the rights of the Sámi are not something that stem from international legal norms or any such supranational set of norms but from the grace of the Finnish lawmakers, implying that what has been given can be taken away.

In addition to the MP Lohi’s (ibid.) patronizing contribution there were others who mainly saw the Sámi as a group of people who are mainly fighting against each other and incapable of making their own decisions. During the same plenary session in 2022 where the Bill for the Sámi Parliament Act was discussed MP Piirainen (Piirainen in ‘Täysistunnon pöytäkirjan pääsivu PTK 128/2022 vp’, 2022, p. 78, Translated by author) said: “The worst thing about this is that the Sámi are not unanimous”, as if total agreement was the norm for any democratic

system. In another contribution MP Purra said: “In the South [of Finland] the word “Sámi” mainly makes one think of fighting and conflicts” (Purra in ‘Täysistunnon pöytäkirjan pääsivu PTK 128/2022 vp’, 2022, p. 76, Translated by the author). This type of patronizing of Indigenous peoples is nothing new neither in Finland nor the rest of the world. Beginning from the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Sámi were described along the lines of Rousseau’s “Noble Savage” (Kuokkanen, 2001) and even in the 1950s educational materials described Sámi as “slow, melancholic, and morose” (ibid.). Therefore, the patronizing statements made by the MPs join in on this long tradition of infantilizing Sámi based on racist stereotypes as “savagery” has of course been used as a justification to bring people of color and Indigenous peoples to the sphere of Western civilization, by the means of colonization (Wolfe, 2006). Finally, deeming the rights of Sámi as being granted out of the goodwill of the state is inherently colonial (Corntassel, 2012). While this line of thinking may seem like a self-evident fact it is arguably the product of the Westphalian state centric hegemony. Furthermore, it is inherently colonial as the state centric rights discourse cannot transcend the supremacy of the state (Corntassel, 2012). Although international law and treaties are the product of the state centric system, and they confirm the primacy of states, meaning they should not be seen as liberating or decolonial, they do set at least a rhetorically aspirational standard that can work as a measuring stick for national discourse. As such they can be a useful tool in certain instances such as here, where we can compare the contributions of the Finnish MPs to international legal standard.

### **5.5 Ignorances and in the Finnish Parliament their implications**

While different forms of ignorance are present in other themes, ignorances was also a theme in itself. An example of such ignorance is presented in a contribution in 2014 by the then MP Eeva-Maria Maijala (2014) who equates genes to being Sámi by asking “does the government think that it is in accordance with human rights that those who are genetically -- Forest Sámi, are not being recognized as official Sámi in Finland?”. This contribution shows Maijala (2014) is at least somewhat ignorant of what makes one Sámi. In addition, to the implicit notion that it is for the Finnish Parliament to decide who is Sámi, Maijala (2014) confounds the living relationship with Sámi culture, one’s own decision to be part of the Sámi, and the group recognition with a notion that genes would make on Sámi. In addition, to making non-Sámi able to indigenize themselves, by having some Sámi DNA, if such a thing exists, Maijala’s (2014) claim would also make non-Sámi, Sámi against their will if they had the right genes.

Furthermore, the notion of genes as a signifier of any group membership sounds a bit sketchy at best and like eugenics at worst.

In another contribution by MP Mäenpää (Mäenpää in 'Pöytäkirja PTK 128/2022 vp', 2022, p. 89, Translated by author) stated "[h]opefully we could get maps depicting the lands and movements of different Sámi groups throughout years or centuries." Wishing to see lands and movements of Sámi, is most likely a sign of ignorance regarding reindeer herding practices in that the semi-nomadic life left very little signs of the people using the land (Tervaniemi and Magga, 2018). Furthermore, no one is arguing for using data going back hundreds of years regarding the movements or lands of Sámi, as going back far enough would show that Sámi had legal ownership over their lands that has since been taken from them (Kuokkanen, 2023a). Therefore, enquiring into the past lands, land usage, and movements is a sign that MP Mäenpää is ignorant regarding the history of the Sámi, what makes one Sámi, and what the bill for the Sámi Parliament Act was aiming to do.

As shown above Finland is engaged in settler colonial practices in Sápmi and ignorance plays an important role in exercising power over others (Mills, 2007; Cook, 2018; Rice *et al.*, 2022).. Firstly, when it comes to the Finnish MPs we can say that their ignorance is vincible i.e. they could remedy their ignorance by unlearning false knowledge claims rooted in white settler ignorance and by learning factual knowledge (Rice *et al.*, 2022), Their ignorance regarding Sámi, Sápmi, and the shared history between Finns and Sámi is not due to it being something unknowable (Dilley, 2010), and neither can the MPs claim their ignorance to be the result of lack of resources, as knowledge regarding these issues is most likely available to the MPs in the form of written sources or people knowledgeable and willing to discuss the subject. Thus, the logical conclusion is that they choose to stay ignorant. Furthermore, following Dilley (2010) MPs can be said to have a higher moral imperative to be knowledgeable since they wield significant power. When the MPs are ignorant their ignorance arguably creates two implications of ignorance and colonialisms. The first one is the white settler ignorance they hold and perpetuate, and the resulting perpetuation of the settler colonial structures (Mills, 2007; Cook, 2018; Rice *et al.*, 2022). For example, white settler ignorance could lead the MPs to inadvertently enact policies that are settler colonial, or they could certainly further the settler colonial project by spreading white settler ignorance. The other implication is that they choose to advocate for legislation that weakens the Sámi self-determination due to them being ignorant regarding the subject.

Additionally, white settler ignorance blocks factual knowledge from entering the epistemological space (Code, 2014) which perpetuates white settler ignorance and the resulting various forms of settler denial from overt and mind-boggling contradictions (Cook, 2018) to more subtle and apologetic forms of denial (Dion, 2009; Breen, 2019). As such settler denialism prevents the settlers from really *hearing* what Indigenous people are saying (Cook, 2018) (emphasis in the original). As the settlers are unable to hear what Indigenous people are saying they cannot work to decolonialize themselves or the settler colonial system thus perpetuating settler colonialism. Finally, ignorance is partly responsible for preventing the settlers from coming to terms with the material benefits they have reaped from settler colonialism because for the majority of white people the racists and settler colonizers are the other white people and not us white people (Breen, 2019). Similarly, being a racist or settler colonizer is seen as a question of either or with heavy normative implications, and not as a spectrum (Breen, 2019). If different forms of oppression based on white supremacy were seen more as a spectrum and a structure that also affects the lives of white people negatively, recognizing one's white privilege and white supremacy, working towards dismantling white supremacy would likely exert less of a toll on individuals making the work required for a just society easier.

## **5.6 Party Differences in the Finnish Parliament**

From the data corpus a clear fault line in the Finnish Parliamentary politics regarding Sámi emerges. Based on the written questions alone the Finnish MPs and parties are split into two, as the two now former MPs of the Centre Party of Finland, Mikko Kärnä and Eeva-Maria Maijala, both contributed written questions that are concerned with the potential overreach of the Sámi group-right self-determination. It is noteworthy that the two MPs were from the Lapland constituency, meaning that the questions about the rights of the Sámi and land usage are relevant to them and their voters. While the small number of written questions alone would not make it feasible to draw further conclusions of the stances of Center party or its MPs, those views are made increasingly clear in the plenary minutes from 2022, which will be discussed later. On the other hand, the rest of the written questions which were written by a variety of MPs representing the Left, the Green, the Swedish people's, the National Coalition and the Social Democratic parties exhibited some degrees of ignorance, but these differed from the ignorance exhibited by the Center party MPs. The ignorance in the latter written questions was more related to not knowing what had been said in the latest academic research in Finland and in

Canada regarding TRCs for example. In these latter questions the MPs intentions were also clearly for the further realization of the rights of Sámi, meaning that while they exhibited ignorance, albeit lesser ignorance, but due to their good intentions the overall implications of their contributions are unlikely to be negative.

## 6. Discussion

Throughout the analysis of the data, it becomes painfully clear that the main type of ignorance is not due the MPs having false beliefs *per se* but a combination of structure and the unwillingness of the MPs to consider all information. While there were examples, where the MPs appear to lack knowledge, in most cases the ignorance stems from the MPs' refusal to know as in they are intentionally leaving some information out recognizing or leaving out of account (Dilley, 2010). While their ignorance is in line with white settler ignorance (Cook, 2018), the structure upholding white ignorance should not be said to be the lone culprit, as the MPs can be said to have a moral obligation to know because of their position of power (Dilley, 2010). The ignorances exhibited are largely in line with Cook's (2018) analysis of white settler ignorance in the Canadian TRC process. Unlike in Canada, in this data the erasure of past assimilationist policies or residential schools that took place in Finland are more subtle. Mostly, these things were considered to belong in the past. Furthermore, peculiarly the MPs exhibiting ignorance use the rhetoric originating from the self-indigenizing Finns (Lehtola, 2015a), such as claims that the "Forest Sámi" are the oppressed minority within minority and claim to take their side. Still these rhetorics only surfaced in the early 1990s when Finland was on track to recognize Sámi as Indigenous people in the Finnish constitution (Junka-Aikio, 2022).

Consequently, a question can be asked whether or not the ignorance present in the Finnish Parliament qualifies as white settler ignorance as discussed by Cook (2018) or whether it is a somewhat different version of white ignorance. Since the history of Sámi in Finland and the current policies are different from other settler colonial contexts (Kuokkanen, 2023a) I am drawn to conclude that while white settler ignorance offers us insight into the ignorance MPs exhibit, the Finnish ignorance differs from that exhibited by white settlers in Canada. Still, there are clear indications that the Finnish ignorance belongs within the same sphere as Cook's (2018) white settler ignorance. Furthermore, considering that the Finnish Parliamentary discourse has characteristics of white settler ignorance, this makes Kuokkanen's (2020a) argument about a TRC posing a risk for Sámi, and even preventing true reconciliation, even more probable. If the majority of the Finnish legislative body cannot accept information that should be fairly straightforward to digest, let alone recognize the structural racism and oppression, it is unlikely that they could accept even more difficult truths brought into light by any TRC process.

Framing the ignorance present in the Parliament as white settler ignorance (Cook, 2018), or at the very least as a form of white ignorance, suggests that there are ways to counter it. Considering that white settler ignorance is structural ignorance the remedy is changing the structure (Cook, 2018). Cook (2018) argues that countering white settler ignorance requires making Indigenous voices heard, which in addition to platform requires that the non-Indigenous people are willing to really hear what is being told to them. This information and education should then, with the assistance of those forming lasting allyships, transform the knowledge structures (Rice *et al.*, 2022). Because there is no lack of information, one must conclude that either the Finnish MPs exhibiting white settler ignorance are not willing to hear Indigenous voices, or Finnish MPs, and even most of Finland, is being held so strongly by a form of white ignorance, that nothing can enter that knowledge space. White settler ignorance as a concept might be critiqued in the Finnish context since only part of what is now Finland was settled in regard to ancient, and pre-modern Sámi lands. Still the ignorance exhibit in the parliament has a lot in common with white settler ignorance as portrayed by Cook (2018), such as denial of past wrongdoings, and distancing present from the past. Examining differences in ignorance exhibited by non-Indigenous Finns and settlers in the North America, Australia, and New Zealand is something that future research should look into.

Additionally, the analysis has shown that there is serious ignorance present in the written and oral contributions given by a large number of MPs. It would seem that the MPs who present ignorance are rejecting information that does not suit their motivations. This notion is further confirmed by contributions that stated that MPs had discussed the 2022 bill for Sámi Parliament Act with Sámi. While it is not possible to know who the MPs had conversations with, and it is not possible to know what percentage of Sámi supported the bill, the majority of the Sámi Parliament supported it, meaning that either the MPs had conversations with only one part of the Sámi, they conversed with self-Indigenizing non-Sámi, or the bill for the Sámi Parliament Act divides Sámi along party political lines. Whatever the answer may be, the MPs exhibiting ignorance did demonstrate the refusal to accept information that was against their pre-existing knowledge. Once again this might very well be true for the MPs who did not exhibit ignorance in the context of this study but examining them is beyond the scope of this research. Considering how adamant many of the MPs exhibiting ignorance were in their stances I must conclude that they are unwilling to accept information, from at least some of the Sámi.

The ignorance of the Finnish MPs means that the remedy to the problem differs from the one suggested by Cook (2018) for the Canadian situation. As the Finnish MPs are rejecting key elements of Sámi's group rights as an Indigenous people and actively trying to indigenize non-Sámi, an increased effort by Sámi to educate the MPs or increased visibility of Sámi is unlikely to solve the situation. These issues are intimately tied to the motives of the MPs from certain parties the National Coalition Party, the Centre Party, and the True Finns party and regionally mainly Lapland electoral district and the. As discussed in Chapter 2, political advocacy for Sámi rights is not hugely popular in the constituency of Lapland, within which Sápmi also lies (Paukkeri, 2022). In addition to personal political calculations the MPs from Northern Finland have, wider party-political considerations are also likely to affect the MPs stance. As Sámi are only some 6000 people in Finland the political sway they can have on Parliamentary politics through voting is seriously limited, and it is not clear to what extent furthering Sámi rights through Parliamentary elections is a political cleavage even for Sámi themselves. Due to their small number, it is unlikely that Sámi could significantly affect the election outcome even if furthering Sámi rights through national Parliamentary election became the top priority for them, effectively leaving them in a dead-end with Parliamentary politics. It might be that change can only come once the understanding of the shared history between Sámi and the Finnish state becomes more widely known, and education regarding Indigeneity becomes more regular.

As pointed out earlier the conversation regarding Sámi self-determination, and self-indigenizing Finns has followed similar paths for more than a decade. While it could possibly mean that the self-indigenizing Finns have not come up with any new arguments, it also means that the conversation has grown somewhat stagnant. Furthermore, it seems that each party of the conversation is fairly dug in in their positions, lessening the possibility of true dialogue and reconciliation. Even though the data is not suitable for temporal analysis as, the majority of the data is from 2022, there was no evidence that the discourse on Sámi would have evolved during the time period. This opens up avenues for further research to properly assess whether or not there is evidence of the discourse evolving to less white settler ignorant direction.

## 7. Concluding remarks

This research has examined how Finnish Members of Parliament (MPs) discuss Sámi in various Parliamentary settings from plenary discussions to written questions, whether or not ignorance is present, where the ignorance stems from, and what kinds of implications these have for the relationship between Sámi and the Finnish state, and Finnish legislation regarding Sámi. By employing a decolonial theory this research has aimed to be a decolonial in nature and both recognize colonial structures and offer suggestions on how to decolonialize the relationship. The findings are fairly damning for the Finnish Members of Parliament, and the conclusions are in line with prior research. The relationship between Sámi and the Finnish state is burdened by several colonial logics, such as settler colonialism, extractive colonialism, and transport colonialism. While the main culprit of transport colonialism, the Arctic Railway, is at the moment frozen, the two other forms of colonialism are alive and well, and as discussed in the analysis there is a vocal group of MPs trying to keep it that way, by limiting or even *de facto* rejecting various aspects of Sámi self-determination by numerous means.

Additionally, the Finnish society largely does not consider itself to be a colonial society (Lehtola, 2015b). Due to what is currently Finland having a history of being part of first Sweden and later Imperial Russia, the Finnish mindset, and memory politics is one where Finland is seen as the victim of imperial powers, and therefore Finns and Finland could not have been in the past let alone at the present, colonizers. The non-colonizer mindset seems to penetrate most of the society regardless of educational background the latest example of this took place in 2024 when the President of Finland Alexander Stubb asserted that Finland does not have a “colonial background” (Stubb in Harjumaa, 2024, Translated by the author) during a Kultaranta Talks, a Finnish Presidential Talks regarding foreign and security policy. With settler colonialism being such a significant framing for the relationship and on the other hand the Finnish denial of colonialisms the possibilities for reconciliation and true dialogue seem thin. On the other hand, the archbishop’s newly issued apology for the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Church’s part in the assimilationist policies (*Arkkipiispa Tapio Luoma esitti anteeksipyyntön saamen kansalle*, 2025) is a sign that some progress is being made.

The political climate at the moment is less than suitable for the furtherance of Sámi self-determination. Likewise, the advancement of the climate crisis is likely to bring new challenges to Sámi and other Arctic Indigenous people in the form of destruction of environments required

for traditional livelihoods and culture, and in the form of new extractive projects taking place in the lands of the Indigenous peoples. As discussed before Finland was lately reprimanded for violating UN Convention by granting mining rights without the consent of the Sámi. It is unlikely that these kinds of instances become less common the more minerals are found. Additionally, large mining operations require infrastructure and transportation methods which can add the burden to the delicate Arctic environment and the people inhabiting it.

The analysis suggests that the Sámi and those sided with them still have a long and difficult struggle ahead of them in order to be free of Finnish colonialisms. While this thesis has dealt mainly with the Finnish Parliamentarians, the Finnish colonialisms are not limited to the Parliament, but rather they are found throughout the Finnish society. While past research in different fields has made it clear that ignorance regarding Sámi is heavily present in the Finnish society and mapped out the historical assimilationist policies and other wrongdoings, future research, should investigate how colonial the Finnish society and Finns are towards Sámi and Sápmi. In the recent years there have been several instances where non-Indigenous Finns have appropriated and used Sámi culture, and other Indigenous cultures in ways that have not just been appropriating but also belittling or carnivalizing the cultures in question. Additionally, ignorance and white ignorance, and the related power dynamics are matters that should be further studied in the Finnish contexts, to resist racism, misogyny, and queer phobia, just to name a few possibilities. Furthermore, future research should examine whether the Finnish kinds of colonialisms are found across Norway and Sweden, which both have similar histories on how the states have treated Sámi in the past. These studies would offer insights into the current situation between Sámi and the states they inhabit and could find ways to remedy the situation. Finally, new theoretical explanations possibly formulating a Nordic model of settler colonialism could be useful, since the Nordic situation differs from Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand.

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## **9. Appendices**

### **9.1. Data document identifiers**

KK\_57+2019.pdf

KK\_248+2019.pdf

KK\_320+2015.pdf

KK\_354+2018.pdf

KK\_939+2014.pdf

PTK\_127+2022.pdf

PTK\_128+2022.pdf

### **9.2. Themes and Codes**

#### **9.2.1. Anti-Sámi for political gain**

Supporting anti-Sámi claims

Twisting human rights to support own, anti-Sámi, agenda

#### **9.2.2. Ignorance but not necessarily ignoring**

Ahistorical

Confounding genes with being Sámi

#### **9.2.3. Ignores the Sámi group right to define group members as posited in the ILO169**

Chooses to ignore accepted facts

Disagrees with ILO169 definition or Sámi definition of Sámi

Trying to Indegenize non-Sámi

#### **9.2.4. Ignores the Sámi's right to self-determination**

Considers upholding Sámi rights similar to totalitarianism

Ignores the Sámi's right to self-determination

Wants to interfere with Sami self-governance

### **9.2.5. Maintaining or furthering the colonial project**

Colonial

Good Indigenous trope

Ignores how being Indigenous changes power relations

Ignores the assimilation of the Karelian people

Ignores the difference in conditions

Ill intent and punishing of Sámi

Peaceful coexistence over justice

Peaceful coexistence over rights

Settler colonialism

Sort of good indigenous but also disagrees with self-determination

### **9.2.6. Sees Sámi rights inherently subservient to the state**

Patronizing

Sees Finland as the rights granting body