

# Introduction

## In Search of Indigenous Voices in the Historical Archaeology of Colonial Encounters

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### Colonial Encounters and Indigenous Lifeways

Colonial encounters between Indigenous peoples and European state powers are overarching themes in the historical archaeology of the modern era, and postcolonial historical archaeology has repeatedly emphasized the complex two-way nature of colonial encounters (e.g., Ferris, Harrison, and Wilcox 2014; Oliver 2013; Hillerdal, Karlström, and Ojala 2017, 9–10). Even though colonialism is mostly about unequal human relations (Gosden 2004), it is clear that these are two-way relations. The colonizers and the colonized both shape the other, and there is an ongoing negotiation of identities, shared spaces, and material culture (e.g., Ferris et al. 2014; Oliver 2013; Hillerdal et al. 2017, 9–10). Indigenous people are therefore fully engaged with colonial encounters and with the changes in material culture in relation to those encounters (Hart, Oland, and Frink 2012, 4). Moreover, colonial interactions include many kinds of processes, such as assimilation, cultural revivalism, and transnationalism (Oliver and Edwald 2016). Ethnic identities in colonial societies are culturally contingent, fluid, and multiple: according to Oliver and Edwald (2016), they are slow and complex legacies of interaction. Seeing colonialism in this way, as a context rather than as a “defining moment” for Indigenous peoples, helps us see colonial encounters as long-term processes on the continuum of Indigenous histories (Silliman 2005; Hart et al. 2012, 5).

This volume has been conceptualized around the role of material culture in the transformation of Indigenous cultures in colonial contact, with an aim to include both emic and etic interpretations and compare Indigenous cultures around the world. Indigenous peoples are culturally distinctive groups whose history is often affected by colonial encounters. While the meaning of "Indigenous" varies nationally and regionally, there are recurring themes in their current and historical trajectories (although the views of different Indigenous groups on those trajectories may differ): rhetorics of sovereignty, narratives of pluriethnic autonomy, and debates over environmental stewardship (Tsing 2007). Following the writings of Katherine Hayes (2015) and Craig N. Cipolla (2017), we see the concept of indigeneity as inseparable from the historical and political context and as a reaction and resistance to European colonialism. As Hillerdal et al. put it: "Concepts of identity and indigeneity are relational, and can be viewed as positions, as marking difference and power in political reality as well as theoretical debate ... [they] challenge simplified categorizations of 'Us' and 'Them', and emphasize the complexity of the relations between indigenous and non-indigenous pasts and presents" (2017, 1).

The examples in this volume come from different parts of the world. They include both overseas colonialism and cases from northern Europe where nation states have exercised colonialism on Sámi. We concur with Hart et al. (2012) that by taking a global perspective, our aim is not to homogenize or reduce the diverse ways in which Indigenous people reacted to colonialism. As the local examples in this book demonstrate, different Indigenous groups had different ways to cope with, resist, and oppose colonialism and to include and transform material markers of colonial contact in their daily lives. A comparative perspective of these case studies offers the opportunity to explore the similarities and differences in the processes behind cultural contacts, change, and renewal. With this volume, we hope to find common trajectories in Indigenous colonial histories and to explore new ways of understanding cultural contact, hybridization, and power relations between Indigenous peoples and colonial powers from the Indigenous point of view. In this introductory chapter, we focus especially on three common threads that are discussed in this volume and that highlight the importance of Indigenous perspectives in historical archaeology. First, we will discuss Indigenous peoples' creative reappropriation of colonizer-produced material things. We will also highlight that colonialism and cultural appropriation are ongoing processes that still need to be mitigated when dealing with Indigenous material culture. Finally, we will discuss the potentials and limitations of historical archaeology in representing Indigenous voices.

## Changing Meanings of Material Culture in Colonial Contexts

The meanings and uses of material culture change over time. These changes are co-dependent and create new meanings for material culture. The meanings attached to objects and places change during their life cycle through social interaction (Appadurai 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Meskell 2004). Already in 1995, Kent G. Lightfoot and Antoinette Martinez noted that colonial-Indigenous interaction can play a critical role in cultural transformations—how people modify, create, and syncretize material objects in culture contact situations (Lightfoot and Martinez 1995, 475). The usual approach has been to investigate how colonialism changes Indigenous cultures under the premise that changes in the cultural practices of the colonizers are innovative adaptations, whereas changes in the cultural practices of the colonized are losses of identity (Beaudoin 2017, 47). Moreover, European observers often interpret the new Indigenous use of European objects as misuse (Cipolla 2017).

The understanding of how foreign objects were used in their new Indigenous contexts has been deepened by archaeological research (e.g., Cipolla 2017; Silliman 2005, 2009). Cipolla asks how colonial objects became entangled in their new contexts and how this new set of material relations affected Indigenous identities (2017, 6–10). He concludes that Indigenous groups incorporated foreign objects in their cultural practices in a variety of ways, sometimes replacing “traditional” material culture with foreign objects, sometimes complementing existing practices with new material culture (2017, 21). Along similar lines, Ritva Kylli et al. (Chapter 5) argue that Scandinavian foodstuffs such as butter, flour, bread, and spirits were incorporated into Sámi foodways from early on, the Sámi being actively interested in these products.

According to Creese (2017, 60), “[a] person’s decisions about how to engage with foreign things, however apparently traditional or novel, were always creative and multifaceted acts of social reproduction.” An example of the changing meanings of material culture are objects that moved from a domestic context to a ritual one. Meghan C. L. Howey (2017, 167) describes the Indigenous consumption of European-made kettles in the northeastern region of the US during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In early colonial encounters, Indigenous groups did not use kettles for cooking in the European way, but instead their main function was as grave goods. The kettles were therefore incorporated in symbolically, ceremonially, and socially charged activities and they were likely to be seen as objects ascribed with *manit*, an animating spirit. Inga-Maria Mulik and Tim Bayliss-Smith (Chapter 2) also demonstrate how

ritual practices could change in colonial contacts but at the same time remain resilient to attempts of Christianization.

Material culture also played a role in the interactions that took place between colonizers and Indigenous workers in colonial spaces. Stephen Silliman (2010) has highlighted the role of Indigenous workers laboring in distinctly colonial spaces. He argues that it is extremely complicated to differentiate Indigenous material culture from that of the colonizers because artifacts and spaces in such settings are used by multiple groups of people and their meanings and functions are often ambiguous (Silliman 2010, 29–32). Along similar lines, Risto Nurmi (Chapter 4) discusses the material culture of Sámi laborers in Early Modern mining communities. His chapter demonstrates that although there are objects and cultural practices that can be identified as “Sámi,” most of the material culture was in fact shared by people of different ethnicities. Sámi material culture has played an important role in the daily activities and food culture of the mining communities. Moreover, the Sámi were actively and voluntarily involved in these communities.

The focus on the meanings and roles of material culture in colonial encounters is connected to archaeology’s current occupation with “new materialism” where the agencies of things and material culture are reassessed. It is now widely acknowledged that things and the material world have an active role in shaping human understanding and experience of the world. There is a network of relations between different actants, which can be human or nonhuman. (Latour 2005; Olsen 2010; Hodder 2012) Material culture also has agency in colonial encounters. Material culture can actively participate in and shape power relations between groups of people in a colonial context, as demonstrated by Madeline Fowler, Amy Roberts, and Lester-Irabinna Rigney (Chapter 1). In their case study, control over the Indigenous people by the English was acted out in “bell hegemony” where church bells structured the daily lives of people. William A. White III and Brandi E. Bethke (Chapter 6) offer an example of how material culture has agency in today’s world in the way the precontact landscapes contribute to the Blackfeet’s sense of history and continuity.

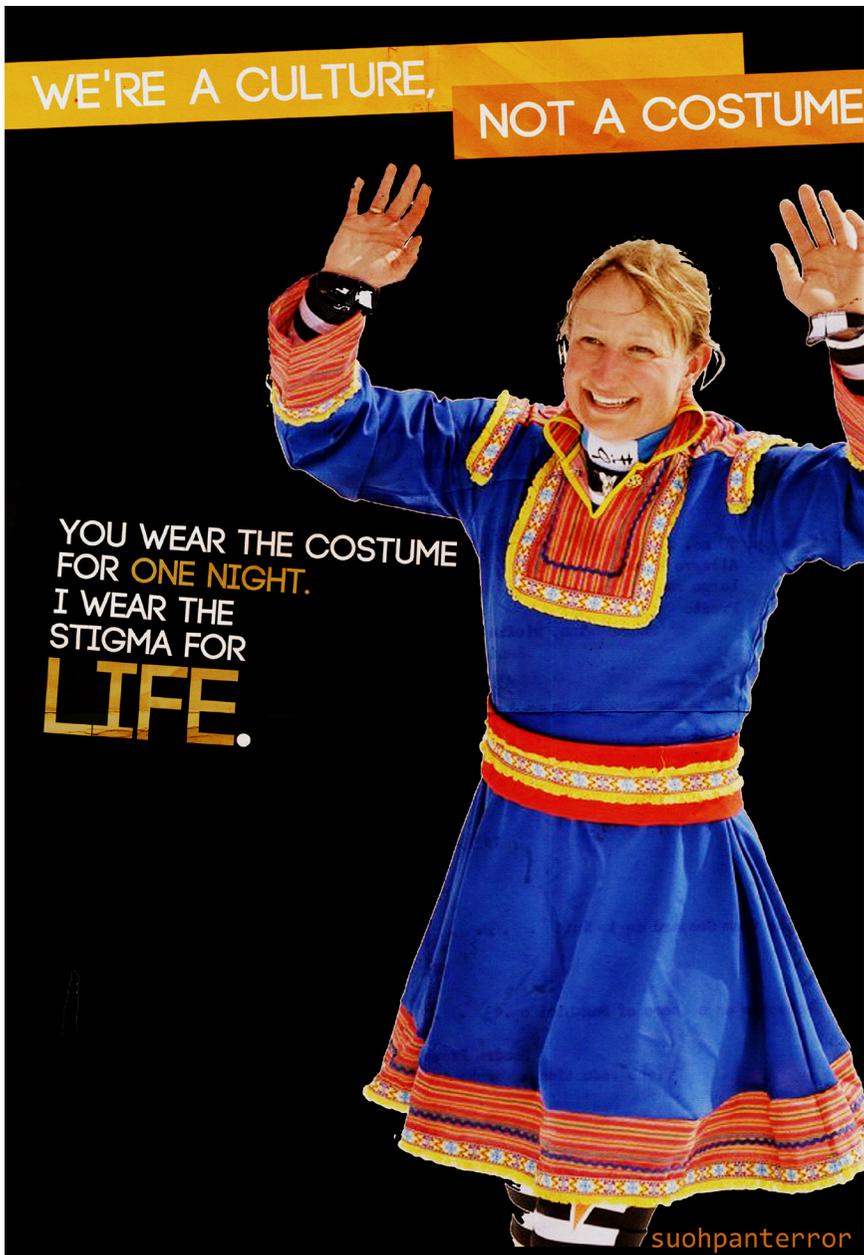
## Ongoing Colonialism and Cultural Appropriation

Colonialism is not just about territorial claims, economic strategies, and racial ideologies; it also involves the appropriation of material culture (Naum and Nordin 2013). In many ways, Indigenous people still consider themselves colonized (Lawrence 2004). Colonial history has consequences

today, as can be seen, for example, in the conflicts concerning the exploitation of natural resources and land ownership (Ojala and Nordin 2015). In addition, colonial legacy concerning Indigenous material culture is also evident in contemporary discourses concerning matters such as the right to Indigenous cultural heritage, repatriation (e.g., Nordin and Ojala 2015), and the cultural appropriation of Indigenous material culture. In Finland, news headlines repeatedly report the misuse of Sámi material culture. Beauty queens and athletes dress in mock versions of Sámi clothing (*gákti*) and advertisers use symbols from Sámi culture (Figures 0.1 and 0.2). Members of the Sámi community see this kind of cultural appropriation as highly disrespectful. For the Sámi, *gákti* connects its wearer to family, shared history, and a place of origin and enables cultural creativity, but the Finns who have worn Sámi dress have used a mock version that presents an insulting, simplified, and stereotypical picture of Sámi culture. In addition, Sámi material culture and history are distorted in advertisements, which may show a woman wearing a traditional man's hat or Sámi shamans (*noaidi*) conducting their rituals in a dark and dirty tent (*lavvu*).<sup>1</sup> The Sámi see the abuse of their material culture as a continuation of colonial traditions. (Mikkonen 2016; Näkkäläjärvi 2016; Seitsonen 2018, 149; cf. Nakatani 2015; Kramvig and Flemmen 2018.)



**Figure 0.1.** Fake Sámi dress (left) and authentic Sámi clothing (*gákti*) (right). (Image courtesy of the Finnish Broadcasting Company Yle. Photograph by Vesa Toppari.)



**Figure 0.2.** The improper use of Sámi dress has raised strong feelings and been commented on in art works by Suohpanterror. (Image courtesy of Suohpanterror.)

Mock Sámi dress has also been seen in art. In 2016, the Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Finland exhibited the artwork *Grind* by video artist Jenni Hiltunen. The video is said to be a playful take on the dancehall culture with its provocative costumes, suggestive poses, roles, and blatant sexuality,<sup>2</sup> but its display of female buttocks dressed in male Sámi clothing aroused criticism of both the artist and the museum, which was seen to have symbolically given its blessing to the exploitation of Indigenous cultures (Paltto 2016).

In Chapter 7, Katherine Hayes discusses cultural appropriation through the case study of Sam Durant's sculpture *Scaffold* (2012) at the Walker Art Center Hayes in Minneapolis. She argues that art can be seen as cultural appropriation and that historical narratives can lose some of their meanings when told by non-Natives. Here, as in the case of Hiltunen's video, the artist does not fully grasp the nuances of historical traumas. But art can also be used to raise awareness (Edelman 1995). For example, a group of Sámi artists called Suohpanterror uses their art to take a stand on ethnopolitics, criticizing, among other things, the above-mentioned abuse of Sámi clothing (Hautala-Hirvioja 2015) (Figure 0.2).

## Reinterpretations of Sources in Search of Indigenous Voices

A unifying theme across many of the chapters in this volume is the attempt to find Indigenous voices through a careful reinterpretation of archaeological and historical sources. Questions about what constitutes an Indigenous voice, how to hear it, and how to interpret it have been sources of debate in anthropology, archaeology, and postcolonial studies for decades (e.g., Spivak 1988; Hall 1999; Hart et al. 2012; Weidman 2014; Cipolla 2017). A voice, as a metaphor, has been associated with individuality, agency, and authority in Euro-American modernity. However, voices are culturally constructed and hence variable (Weidman 2014). Historical records have usually been created by elite members of the society and represent various elite opinions, voices, and strategies. On the other hand, subaltern groups, such as slaves, ethnic and sexual minorities, certain social groups, and Indigenous peoples often have no voice in historical documents (Spivak 1988). It is clear that any researcher trying to give a voice to subaltern groups of the past, whether through historical records or material culture, must be careful not to impose her own opinion on the group of people she is studying (Spivak 1988; Liebmann 2008). Indeed, Spivak (1988) is even skeptical of the idea that subaltern voices can be found by rereading historical documents.

Historical archaeology has a long legacy of using material culture as a means of finding alternative interpretations and subaltern voices of the past (Hall 1999; Hart et al. 2012; Cipolla 2017). Unlike historical documents, however, material culture was used and left behind by all social groups, including Indigenous people (Liebmann 2008). Therefore, in principle, there is a material record left behind by Indigenous people, although their voices may be absent from historical documents. Still, it has to be remembered that the material culture is interpreted by archaeologists, who can only claim to speak about, but not for, the Indigenous people in question (Liebmann 2008). Moreover, it is crucial to understand that the Indigenous peoples of the present do have a voice (Källen 2015).

Several chapters in this volume combine different sources, such as archaeological and historical data, oral histories, and current Indigenous voices to find ways to speak about Indigenous history and cultural heritage. LisaMarie Malischke (Chapter 3) combines historical and archaeological data from Fort Saint Pierre, Mississippi. By rereading historical sources from an ethnohistorical perspective, she gains a better understanding of the reversed power dynamics between the Indigenous groups and the French.

In Chapter 5, Ritva Kylli et al. take into reconsideration a body of historical sources that has previously been used to construct narratives about the primitiveness of the Sámi food culture and the Sámi in general. By carefully rereading these sources and using archaeological data to support their ideas, Kylli et al. find that the Sámi food culture was hybridized with Scandinavian and Finnish food cultures from early on. The Sámi also had agency and initiative in incorporating new foodstuffs into their foodways. Most importantly, Kylli et al. show how historical data that has previously been interpreted as evidence of Sámi primitiveness can be reread, when supported by archaeological data, to reveal how the Sámi actively shaped their material culture by using their own needs and strategies as a point of departure.

William A. White III and Brandi E. Bethke (Chapter 6) reinterpret the history of the Cut Bank Boarding School in Montana in search of Blackfeet voices. The Cut Bank Boarding School was situated in the precontact landscape with its memories of Blackfeet presence and resilience from earlier centuries. Such boarding schools were established to destruct the culture and enculturate Native peoples, and their histories are often told through the framework of the Boarding School administration. . However, White and Bethke search for the Blackfeet narrative of the history of the Cut Bank Boarding School, based on archaeological data, oral histories, and archival sources. They are able to show how the Blackfeet

people are actively reclaiming and reinterpreting the landscape that they have continually used for centuries.

Rather than claiming to speak in the voice of the Indigenous group in question, the chapters in this volume present multi-angled perspectives of colonial encounters and seek to challenge old colonial narratives about the relationships between the colonizers and the colonized. The interpretations given in the chapters are just that, interpretations, presented by researchers who carefully position themselves and critically examine their ability to speak of the Indigenous perspective. Despite these challenges and reservations, the chapters in this volume show that through critical multi-source approaches, new insights into Indigenous experiences in the past can be gained. Combining material culture with historical sources, oral histories, archival sources, and current debates, the authors tease out more nuanced understandings of colonial encounters, especially the perspectives of Indigenous peoples on those encounters. The greatest contribution of this volume, then, is not the discovery of “authentic” Indigenous voices in the material or archival records, but that a more nuanced understanding of colonial histories needs to be acknowledged and sought through multiple sources.

## **Conclusion: New Insights and Indigenous Voices from Local Approaches**

An expanding body of literature on historical archaeologies from different parts of the world has deepened our understanding of the variety of colonial encounters. Colonial encounters in places like Scandinavia, Africa, Australia, Oceania, and southeast Asia are increasingly addressed by archaeologists (e.g., Reid and Lane 2004; Paterson 2011; Naum and Nordin 2013; Flexner 2014; Cruz Berrocal and Tsang 2017). This is an important development because it allows us to emphasize local histories and interpretations over Eurocentric ones and provides alternative stories and interpretations of colonial histories, which have been as varied as the peoples taking part in them. Along the same lines, Indigenous archaeologies from different parts of the world have the potential to highlight how Indigenous peoples around the world have negotiated their relationships with colonial powers.

This volume, representing various ethnic groups from different parts of the world, shows that while colonial histories share a number of characteristics—such as unequal power relations, changing meanings of material culture, and cultural appropriation—the responses and solutions of the Indigenous communities coming into contact with colonial

powers were clearly local and individual. They were also dependent on the historical context and the goals, means, and ideologies of the colonizers.

A unifying theme across this volume is that specific archaeological finds and spaces can seldom be labeled as “Indigenous” or “colonizer” material culture. Interactions between different groups in colonial societies were often close-knit. Material culture and spaces were shared by different groups. Indigenous groups adopted the colonizer’s material culture and made it their own, and vice versa. The premise of several chapters in this volume was to look at the encounters between (at least) two ethnic groups in a colonial setting. However, the chapters clearly show that the use, ownership, and interpretation of material culture in colonial societies are complex issues. The agency and creativity of Indigenous peoples in transforming and negotiating (material) cultural practices in colonial settings was something that emerged from all chapters in this volume. Indigenous peoples as well as colonizers created their own solutions and cultural practices, independently or codependently. Sometimes the relations between groups were forced and fraught with tensions, sometimes they were driven by mutual interest and benefit.

In the context of Indigenous people consuming colonizers’ things, this materiality was often, but not always, shaped by power and tension between the local culture and the colonizing state. The interplay of colonial power, Indigenous agency, and materiality is dependent on the nature of the colonial relationship and the strategies and choices of the people involved. In our mind, the most interesting thing about materiality in contexts of colonization is not necessarily that it differs from materiality in other contexts (because culture and materiality are always in the process of borrowing, changing, adapting), but that it can tell alternative stories about processes of colonization and the everyday lives people lead in places of colonial encounter.

Telling alternative stories is also at the heart of the second theme that emerges from this volume, the search for Indigenous voices in the past material and other records. We feel that the contributions in this volume are valuable not because they have found the way to channel “authentic” Indigenous voices from the past, but because they demonstrate that we can get closer to a multi-angled understanding of past colonial encounters by using multiple sources, such as archaeological record, historical record, oral histories, and current debates.

Finally, the chapters show that traces and tensions of colonial encounters are still present when the material culture of Indigenous peoples is displayed, used, and discussed. Cases of cultural appropriation have raised questions about who is allowed to use, modify, and mimic

Indigenous material culture and how this may be done. Thus, archaeology has a vital role to play in deepening our understanding of the histories and meanings behind the use of Indigenous material culture.

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## Notes

1. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/travel/video-1213752/100-Days-Polar-Magic-unique-expedition-Finland.html> (last accessed 26 April 2019).
2. <https://vimeo.com/44392653> (last accessed 26 April 2019).

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