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EDITORIAL

Feminism in Postcolonial Nordic Spaces

I think the dismissiveness of white liberal feminism takes shape in the form of non-recognition, indifference, or plain ignorance. Nordic feminists don't openly resist Sámi perspectives on feminism but they don't engage with them either. (Rauna Kuokkanen)

The quotation above is Rauna Kuokkanen's concise answer to Ina Knoblock in the interview "Decolonizing Feminism: A Conversation with Rauna Kuokkanen" included in this special issue. A browse through the pages of *NORA* over the last 10 years confirms Kuokkanen's diagnosis: Nordic feminism does appear to be overwhelmingly white, even if this whiteness is intermittently pointed out in contributions written from a postcolonial point of view. Indigenous feminism is absent, with the exception of a book review by Heidi Sinevaara-Niskanen (2010) of Joyce Green's edited volume *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* published in 2007.

The tasks confronting postcolonial and Indigenous feminisms in the Nordic area, as elsewhere, are formidable: rewriting history, reconceptualizing the present, and thus grappling with the hegemonic and tacit norms of research as well as social practices are not downhill rides.

One strategy applied by feminist and post-colonial scholars has been to read the colonial archives against the grain. This strategy is discussed and applied in different ways in two of the contributions to this special issue. In "From Female Shamans to Danish Housewives: Colonial Constructions of Gender in Greenland, 1721 to ca. 1970", Signe Arfred and Kirsten Bransholm Pedersen apply these reading strategies in relation to the colonial archives of Greenland. They use the concept of genderlessness, coined by Karla Jessen Williamson (2011), as an analytical lens through which they try to tease out the clash between pre-colonial and colonial gender relations. In a different genre, Iben Mondrup's essay "Pia Arke. Arctic Hysteria. 1997" on the Greenlandic artist Pia Arke's photo work *Arctic Hysteria* also employs this kind of reading. The essay is from the exhibition guide to *Tupilakosaurus: Pia Arke's Issue With Art, Ethnicity and Colonialism, 1981–2006* curated by the platform Kuratorisk Aktion, which was launched in 2006 with the large-scale project *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism: A Postcolonial Exhibition Project in Five Acts* Kuratorisk Aktion (2010) and has since been engaged in critical practices along the lines of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Working uphill is hardly in itself news to feminist research. Neither is the fact (we would claim) that the feminist subject is *not* universal—but rather, as we learned from black feminists in the 1980s, assembled and divided across intersections of local and global grids of power. These frictions might potentially be fruitful tensions urging feminists to enter into dialogue and debate—and struggle, of course—over where to go; but this requires engagement, not indifference, as pointed out by Kuokkanen.

The texts presented in this special issue do not comprehensively cover (or attempt to cover) the vast fields of postcolonial and Indigenous feminist preoccupations. Even so, we think they constitute fruitful points of departure for further discussion and research through the questions they raise. It is our hope that this special issue will contribute to encouraging the kind of (non-arrogant) conversation and dialogue amongst the diverse feminists in the Nordic area called for by Kuokkanen.

We deliberately chose to write “feminism in postcolonial Nordic spaces” rather than “Nordic postcolonial feminism” in our call for papers for this special issue. There were several reasons for this. First of all, speaking about *postcolonial* Nordic spaces does not—in our understanding—indicate a periodization (i.e. after colonization); instead, postcolonialism is used as a critical analytical perspective on both historical and contemporary colonial discourses and relations of power. Following from this, speaking about Nordic postcolonial spaces indicates an overall relation to colonialism and imperialism *shared* by the Nordic area. However, speaking of postcolonial Nordic *spaces* in the plural indicates that this relation is not uniform.

During the last decade, several English-language Nordic anthologies that emphasize the need for a post-colonial perspective and also include feminist and gender perspectives have been published (cf. Andreassen & Vitus, 2015; Keskinen, Tuori, Irni, & Mulinari, 2009; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012; see also McEachrane & Gilroy, 2014). As pointed out by Kristín Loftsdóttir in her article for this special issue, “The Exotic North: Gender, Nation Branding and Post-colonialism in Iceland”, the rewriting of the global history of the present in these publications has resulted “in critical deconstructions of the idea that the Nordic countries existed ‘outside’ the European colonial experience.”

Loftsdóttir and Jensen use the term *Nordic exceptionalism* to describe the self-perception of the Nordic countries. Exceptionalism refers both to the claim that the Nordic states were peripheral in relation to colonialism and contemporary processes of globalization, and to the idea that Nordic self-perceptions have entirely different origins from those of the rest of Europe (2012, p. 2). The claim of innocence in relation to colonialism developed during the twentieth century, and especially after the Second World War. It is premised upon a collective amnesia that, amongst other things, bypasses the crucial questions of race and racism through associating the European use of these categorization systems with the *exceptional* atrocities of Nazism rather than systems that have been inherent features of the make-up of Europe and European global power since colonialism and the Enlightenment period (cf. Goldberg, 2006).

Keskinen et al. (2009; see especially Vuorela’s chapter) suggest that we may capture the shared, if varying link between the Nordic countries and colonialism through the notion of *complicity*. The Nordic countries may have been peripheral compared to the major European metropolitan centres (although Denmark was a regular—if perhaps minor—colonial power, both within and outside the Nordic area). They were nevertheless directly involved in colonial enterprises through, for instance, missionary activities or as settlers in the colonies of other European powers. Complicity, however, also refers to the fact that the Nordic countries “generally participated in the production of Europe as the global center and profited from this experience” (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012, p. 1). Following from this, complicity may also be taken to refer to the governmental technologies of colonialism. Intersecting classed, racialized, and gendered distinctions

are central to these technologies, placing the educated white European male at the summit of civilization. As shown in various chapters of the Nordic anthologies mentioned above, racialization and the continuing struggle over who will count as white are central in relation to issues of migration and the ongoing (populist) struggle over the definition of national identities. Gender equality has been articulated as an inherent trait in Nordic national identities, providing further proof of our superiority vis-à-vis other “cultures”, and fuelling activities to save brown women from brown men (Spivak, 1988, p. 296).

Despite the overall complicity of the Nordic states, Nordic spaces are differently located in relation to colonialism. In this special issue, Kristín Loftsdóttir discusses the ambiguous location of Iceland, arguing that the country’s dual colonial experience, as both an object of colonization (by Denmark) and actively contributing to racialized colonial discourses, is a constituent in its current branding as an exotic destination. This branding bears traces of the position of Iceland in the European imagination as primitive; a position that was actively resisted by Icelandic men trying to rescue Iceland into modernity and civilization, and thus into European whiteness. The current uptake of the exotic—as was the case with colonial conceptions of the primitive and the distinction between good and bad savages—is both racialized and gendered and criss-crossed with (other) binaries such as nature versus culture. While the specific history is different, Iceland shares with Finland an ambiguity of positioning in the European racial hierarchy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The position and history of Indigenous peoples—the Sámi and the Inuit—in the Nordic countries remind us that complicity is perhaps not all-inclusive as a description of Nordic colonialism. Like other Indigenous peoples around the globe, the Sámi and the Inuit have been subjected to very direct processes of colonization and exploitation over the course of history, in the form of the theft of land and natural resources, as well as policies of assimilation and separation based on racialized discourses.

These colonization processes seem to be rather obvious, but, surprisingly, they are also circumscribed by the collective amnesia mentioned above. Although often forgotten in Danish historiography or displaced as parenthetical and long gone, the tropical colonies are recognized as “proper” colonialism. When it comes to the Danish possessions in the North Atlantic (currently the Faroe Islands and Greenland; historically also Iceland) the existence of colonialism is either directly denied or highly contested. Similarly, as argued by historian Åsa Össbo, Sweden has adhered to “The Blue Water Thesis”, the idea that colonialism can only occur across oceans. Colonialism within Sámi areas, constructed as unpopulated peripheries at the edges of the Swedish state, has thus been made invisible (Össbo, 2014, pp. 9–10)

Today, ongoing colonial processes are seen in the continuing dispossession of Sámi people of their land, industrialization such as mining, hydropower, and forestry in Sápmi, and state interventions that limit Sámi social practices such as reindeer husbandry regulations or language policies. Even though Greenland has obtained a larger degree of self-government, Denmark still governs it in a range of areas. Furthermore, political action is curtailed by the colonial legacies of economic disempowerment and social tragedies that haunt Greenlandic society.

One question worth exploring further concerns the similarities and differences between the colonial practices of Nordic countries and settler colonies such as Canada, the USA, Australia, and New Zealand. Pursuing this, we have invited Cheryl Suzack to write a position paper for this special issue. Suzack has co-authored (with Shari Huhndorf, Jeanne Perreault, and Jean Barman) an award-winning collection, *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture* (2010), and in her position paper “Indigenous Feminism and Social Justice Activism in Canada” she takes us on a guided tour through the concerns of Indigenous feminisms, zooming in on the situation in Canada in particular. Suzack suggests that the concept of *active silence* may provide a fruitful way into the intersectionally constituted location of Indigenous women, and in the case studies from Canada that are presented in the second part of the paper we glimpse the overlapping concerns of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the Nordic countries.

Within the logic of settler colonialism, land is viewed as an asset to be explored and, subsequently, used for settlement or various development projects by the colonial powers. For Indigenous peoples, this entails a disintegration of their relation to the land and, ultimately, the undermining of their continued social and cultural existence (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013, p. 12).

As pointed out by Rauna Kuokkanen in this special issue, Nordic countries have benefited from the wealth originating from Indigenous land, and there are important social consequences of the exploitation and dispossession of Indigenous peoples in the Nordic area. Kuokkanen highlights how in contemporary Sweden the extraction industry forces out reindeer herding, at the same time as it is reported that young -reindeer herders are committing suicide in higher numbers than average. These, she insists, are related issues that should be addressed in terms of colonialism.

In Marie Kathrine Poppel’s position paper “Are Women Taking over Power and Labour from Men? Gender Relations in Pre- and Post-colonial Greenland”, she examines how major societal changes, initiated by Danish modernization politics during the 1950s, has influenced women, men, and gendered relations in contemporary Greenland. In relation to changes in the labour market, Poppel addresses how the decline in employment in the traditional trades of hunting and fishing has marginalized many men. Taking our cue from Kuokkanen, we suggest that this marginalization (and the ensuing crisis of masculinity in Greenland) is related to the fact that Greenland has the world’s highest suicide rate among young men (Lynge, 2013). These examples underline the need to address the interconnections between feminist, colonial, and Indigenous issues across Nordic postcolonial spaces and align them with the situation of Indigenous peoples in other settler colonial spaces.

A further topic for exploration is the racialized state policies adopted by the Nordic states towards Indigenous peoples as these have resulted in different (and often gendered) patterns of inclusion and exclusion and hierarchization. As reindeer herding has been central for the control of Sámi identity and the rights attached to being Sámi, its regulation is of vital importance. Discriminatory legislation has resulted in higher frequencies of women losing their Sámi reindeer-herding rights than men and gendered inequalities in relation to marriage/divorce as well as within units of reindeer husbandry (Amft, 2000, pp. 95–97; Kuokkanen, 2007, pp. 79–80; Kuokkanen, 2009; Ledman,

2012, pp. 84–86). As an example, nomadic reindeer herders were differentiated from Sámi in other occupations in Sweden due to a paternalist discourse of difference, the so-called “Lapp-shall-remain-Lapp policy” (cf. Josefsen, Mörkenstam, & Saglie, 2015, pp. 35–36), and belonging to the reindeer herding community was regulated in a way that took gendered forms. Through the Reindeer Herding Act of 1928 (in place until 1971), a Sámi woman who married a man without reindeer herding rights lost her own rights, and was effectively forced out of reindeer herding, while the same did not apply to men (Ledman, 2012, p. 85).

In Greenland, as Arnfred and Pedersen demonstrate in their article for this special issue, the colonial enterprise initially took on a segregationist approach that was greatly concerned with gender, class, and sexuality. The colonial laws were specifically designed to prevent contact between Inuit women and European men according to Arnfred and Pedersen in order to prevent “immoral behaviour and illegitimate children of mixed origin”. Marriage regulations were strictly ordered along lines of race and class. In the mid-twentieth century, Denmark changed its official policy towards Greenland by declaring it an integral part of Denmark. With the ensuing increase in the numbers of Danish men working in Greenland, there followed a large rise in the number of children born out of the temporary meetings with Greenlandic women. However, laws (1914–1974) applying to unmarried Greenlandic mothers rendered the children legally fatherless and without the right to know, contact, or inherit from their fathers; in effect continuing a racialized segregation protecting Danish men and their (perhaps future) spouses and legitimate children from the consequences of sexual meetings in the contact zone. It was not until 2014 that the Danish state, under pressure from the Greenlandic Self-Government and activists among the legally fatherless, granted the now grown-up children the right to pursue paternity suits and thus to inherit from their fathers and take their names.

As suggested in the texts included in this special issue, Indigenous peoples in the Nordic region are intersectionally located in the crossings of mutually constitutive relations of power. One of these is the intersection between Indigeneity and gender. Indigenous articulations and conceptualizations of feminism emphasize issues such as self-determination and decolonization, nation and nationhood, environmental protection and cultural and social reproduction (for example, language transference over generations). Thus, the gendered dimensions of self-determination and decolonization processes as well as power relations within the communities are addressed, especially highlighting women’s participation and influence (Eikjok, 2007; Hirvonen, 2008; Kailo & Helander-Renvall, 1998; Kuokkanen, 2007). These may not be recognized as feminist issues within the discourse of white liberal feminism, but, as underlined by Rauna Kuokkanen and Cheryl Suzack, they are vital in order to address the impact of structural violence on Indigenous women’s and men’s lives.

Seen from the vantage point of hindsight, we should have pluralized another term in the headline for this special issue: given that we are trying to highlight the situated nature of feminist perspectives, *feminism* should have been *feminisms*. What becomes evident is the complexity of power relations between majorities and minorities; within Indigenous communities; between feminists struggling over what might count as feminism. This is the debate to which we have devoted this special issue; a debate that we hope will continue, in *NORA* and elsewhere.

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