

The Absent Curriculum in Finnish History Textbooks: The Case of Colonialism

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the gaps in relation to the Sámi people and the colonization of *Sápmi* (Sámi homeland) in Finnish history textbooks. In the Finnish school system, there is very little knowledge about the Sámi and the colonization of *Sápmi*. The article uses the concept of the absent curriculum in order to highlight the gaps in history textbooks. The absent curriculum refers to topics and themes that could have, but have not, been included in the curriculum. Using discourse analysis, the article analyzes two different time periods described in textbooks: The 19th and 20th centuries, as well as “prehistory.” The results show that colonialist interventions in *Sápmi* are not conceptually tied to colonialism in textbooks, even though some textbooks include descriptions of Finnish assimilation acts in *Sápmi*. With regard to “prehistory,” the textbooks vary in their descriptions of the Sámi: Some textbooks clearly define them as a distinct Indigenous people, whereas others do not mention them at all.

Keywords: *absent curriculum; colonialism; history textbooks; Sámi*

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Introduction

In recent years, scholars and other stakeholders have criticized the Finnish education system, particularly history education, for not teaching about the Sámi people (Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the National Minorities (ACFC), 2019; Hakala et al., 2018; Mattila et al., 2023; Rinne, 2019). This criticism connects to the wider discussion about how history education reveals what is considered meaningful history in society, as well as what future generations should know about the history of their own country (Apple, 2012; Wilkinson, 2014). History education has been important in creating nation-states and in maintaining colonial power by silencing the history of the colonized (Mikander, 2016; Stastny, 2022; Stordahl, 2008). In colonial contexts, it is not a given to learn the national history, let alone learn about Indigenous-settler histories. Lately, calls have been made to

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examine the ways in which history education could promote truth and reconciliation processes in settler colonial states (Keynes, 2019). Contemporary truth and reconciliation processes in settler states, including Finland, have centered on history education as one of the main tools in transitional justice (Keynes, 2019; Miles, 2021; Truth and Reconciliation Commission Concerning the Sámi People, n.d.).

The Sámi people are an Indigenous people¹ consisting of multiple groups, which differ from each other in their language, history, livelihoods, and culture (Lehtola, 2015; West, 2020). Their traditional homeland, known as *Sápmi*, stretches over the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, and many Sámi also live outside of *Sápmi* today. Across the globe, the history of Indigenous peoples has for a long time been written by members of other ethnic groups, and further, Indigenous peoples, including the Sámi, have been excluded from the curriculum of the schools they attend (Keynes, 2019; Miles, 2021; Rahko-Ravantti, 2016; Stordahl, 2008). Many stakeholders have criticized the education system in Finland for maintaining the deep knowledge gap about the Sámi (ACFC, 2019; Mattila et al., 2023; Miettunen, 2020; Merivirta et al., 2021). For instance, Miettunen (2020) highlights the knowledge gaps about the Sámi people in learning materials used in Finnish elementary and lower secondary schools. She concludes that the absence of Sámi perspectives in history education maintains ignorance about the current situation of the Sámi people in history classrooms and society at large. This ignorance may pose a significant risk to the well-being of the Sámi people, especially as intolerance and hate speech are on the rise in Finland (see also ACFC, 2019).

The colonization of *Sápmi* took place in a unique way, and yet, it bears similarities to other colonization processes across the globe (Kuokkanen, 2020; Lehtola, 2015; Wolfe, 2006). The Sámi people have been close to and interacted with the surrounding people over many millennia (Mulk & Bayliss-Smith, 2019). Sweden, of which Finland was a part from the 12th century until the beginning of the 19th century, annexed the northernmost *Sápmi* in Fennoscandia in the 14th century. The state laid the foundations for a more rigorous and formal colonization in the 17th century. From the 1700s, a new property and administrative regime took over and slowly replaced the traditional Sámi governance system *siida*. At the turn of the 20th century, the state no longer recognized the Sámi people's rights and ownership of land (Korpijaakko, 1989).

Over the centuries, the colonization of *Sápmi* took place through multiple interventions, such as forced assimilation in boarding schools, racial biology studies of Sámi people, material and cognitive destruction of Sámi spirituality, forced conversion to Christianity, and language theft (Kuokkanen, 2020; Ranta & Kanninen,

¹ In colonial contexts, it is customary to explain and justify the terminology used to refer to Indigenous people and cultures. This study uses the term “Indigenous people,” following the example of the Sámi Parliament, which is the supreme political body of the Sámi in Finland.

2019; West, 2020). The state interference in *Sápmi* continues today through different means. These interventions include, for instance, the use of land in *Sápmi* without consent from the Sámi people, as well as violations of Sámi people's right to self-determination (Kuokkanen, 2020; Ranta, 2023).

In textbook research, much focus is given to what is present in textbooks rather than what is absent. This article examines 18 history textbooks used in Finnish elementary and lower secondary schools, by focusing on the absence of the Sámi and the colonization of *Sápmi* in textbooks. These absences are, according to Wilkinson (2014), parts of history that could have been, but have not been, included in the history curriculum. Therefore, this article highlights some of the missing elements in textbooks that could, if included, improve the pupils' awareness of the colonization of *Sápmi*. However, it is also necessary to analyze what is present in the textbooks in order to contextualize these gaps. Therefore, this article uses discourse analysis to situate the discourses in the history textbooks in their social and historical contexts (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). In Indigenous studies, it is customary to acknowledge how the researcher's positionality affects the research setting and results. Therefore, as a white non-Indigenous scholar, who is a citizen of a nation that has colonized the Sámi people, I recognize the effects my positionality has on this study.

The concept of the absent curriculum

This research derives from Critical Curriculum Studies, which focuses on how curricula are influenced by political and social factors (Apple, 2012; Giroux, 2006). One of the main aims of Critical Curriculum Studies is to make hidden ideologies in education visible (Apple, 2012). As such, this research is based on the assumption that "curriculum is part of a selective tradition that makes some phenomena and topics present and others absent as a representation of some group's vision of legitimate knowledge" (Wilkinson, 2014, pp. 419–420). Deriving from this tradition, the concept of the absent curriculum was coined by British scholar Matthew Wilkinson (2014), who studied the gaps in the history curriculum in relation to Muslim history. His conceptualization arises from the critique that notes that most of the studies on curriculum focus on the presence, that is, what is included in the curriculum. On the contrary, Wilkinson approaches curriculum by examining what could have been, but has not been, included. He builds the concept of the absent curriculum by grounding his theory on the philosophy of critical realism. According to him, supporters of critical realism criticize the Western philosophical tradition, which favors positive or present aspects over negative aspects or non-being. Instead, these supporters argue that absence is integral and almost necessary to being, as the removal of something negative is often the prerequisite of positive change. In the context of education, Wilkinson observes that learning essentially means "the removal of ignorance," which is then followed by learning. Therefore, curriculum reform means "a removal

of significant absences and making its hidden ideological drivers visible” (Wilkinson, 2014, p. 422).

The absent curriculum becomes noticeable when descriptions of historical events or phenomena form what Wilkinson calls a curricular sub-totality and curricular totality. He argues:

A curricular “sub-totality” emerges when a “partial totality” is constructed as curriculum and taught as if it were a complete curricular “totality”. This creates a block or a hiatus to gaining an understanding of the nature of the whole event or phenomenon. [...] Partial curricular totalities become “sub-totalities” when key or core elements of the total picture are omitted from officially endorsed narratives for either practical or ideological reasons and then presented by authorized educators either as the complete “partial totality” or even as the complete “totality.” (Wilkinson, 2014)

Therefore, the absences create partial totalities, which are then presented as curricular totalities. Wilkinson argues that schools often teach partial totalities without reference to the greater totalities. For instance, a history lesson about the Second World War focusing solely on Europe would create a partial totality that omits core developments outside of Europe but would be presented in the classroom as the total picture of events. What follows is that pupils’ understanding of a given historical topic becomes limited when key elements disappear from the whole picture. It is true, however, that a total and impartial picture of the past is impossible to construct as the selection of approaches and topics covered in history education is never an ideologically neutral process (Apple, 2012; Freire, 1968/2005). As such, this study does not claim that a total picture of history could be constructed and delivered to pupils. However, it is important to highlight which aspects of history become part of the absent curriculum, as well as to question why certain topics are addressed in history curricula more than others (Wilkinson, 2014).

Wilkinson points out that the absent curriculum is damaging for all pupils in multiple ways. Firstly, when history teaching portrays partial totalities as curricular totalities, the absent curriculum decreases the quality of pupils’ learning and understanding of the studied topic. Secondly, when the curriculum excludes a certain group of people, a pupil belonging to the excluded group may feel demotivated to engage in history lessons and feel further marginalized in society. Similarly, Ahonen (2001) argues that students may feel increasingly excluded from society if the history curriculum does not offer points of self-identification for them. Finally, students without these points of self-identification may experience feelings of boredom, frustration, and rejection in history classrooms. The absent curriculum prevents excluded pupils from relating to, remembering, and understanding history taught in schools, which may hinder their learning significantly (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Wilkinson, 2014). In sum, exclusive history education hinders all pupils’ quality of learning and is especially damaging to the pupils belonging to the excluded groups.

Colonialism and history education

Indigenous-settler history, that is, the history of Indigenous peoples and settler states, is a highly contested topic in many countries, which is also reflected in the education system. These debates have often resulted in silencing and marginalizing Indigenous-settler histories, which in turn favors nationalistic settler-centered historical narratives. In these narratives, Indigenous people are portrayed as peripheral and insignificant to nation-building (Miles, 2021, pp. 58–59; Stastny, 2022). In settler states, it is not a given to learn the national history, let alone the Indigenous-settler histories. On the one hand, silencing Indigenous-settler histories maintains the political status quo and therefore benefits the dominant groups. On the other hand, ignorance keeps deep divisions and emotionally charged debates unsolved in settler states (Stastny, 2022). Similarly, Miles (2021) argues that schools and curriculum are implicated in and contribute to the settler colonial project.

According to Eriksen and Svendsen, “coloniality can be traced in education through the reproduction of knowledges that continue to justify European and white de facto supremacy and renders colonized peoples’ knowledges and livelihoods backwards, inferior, or nonexistent” (2020, pp. 2–3). In Finland, this can be observed in the exclusion of the Sámi and other minorities from the history curricula and textbooks. This, in turn, supports the narrative of Finland as a homogenous country that is innocent in relation to colonialism. Stastny (2022) argues that colonial power is based on what she calls “settler regimes of ignorance” that uphold the political status quo. Therefore, “if knowledge is power, so is ignorance” (Stastny, 2022, pp. 5–6). According to Stastny, the present ignorance in relation to Indigenous-settler relations is, in fact, the achievement of (settler) colonial powers. Therefore, ignorance does not equal the mere absence of knowledge but is a product of shared actions. It is not an accident but rather a result of deliberate acts. This is also connected to the philosophy of critical realism, which emphasizes the relevance of absences in relation to the presence, as well as the notion that absences (*ignorance*) need to be removed in order to achieve a positive change (*learning*) (Wilkinson, 2014). However, this positive change, that is, learning, might be hindered by the “desire to not know” (Stastny, 2022, p. 7). As Miles (2021) notes, the belief that history education and schooling in general is the answer to historical injustices in settler states is challenging considering the heavy assimilation that Indigenous people faced in schools.

Finland and other Nordic countries have struggled to acknowledge their colonial history in Sápmi (Hagatun, 2021; Kuokkanen, 2022). While Finnish historians dispute the nature of the relationship between the Finns and the Sámi, and even whether the colonization of Sápmi ever happened, Sámi actors have talked about colonialism for decades. The discussion has revolved around the nature of colonialism in Sápmi, especially in relation to other colonization processes. For instance, Lehtola (2015) sees simplified comparisons between the colonization of the Sámi people and other Indigenous peoples as infeasible due to their significantly different

historical contexts. In addition to having continuous contact with the non-Sámi, the Sámi were not a “treaty people,” as were the Indigenous people in places such as Aotearoa New Zealand and Canada (Gjerpe, 2018). However, as Lehtola (2015) argues, “even though the histories can be different by context and details, the structures of colonial performing, and subjugation [of Indigenous people] seem to be quite similar everywhere” (p. 26). The Sámi people, like other Indigenous peoples, were subjected to foreign authorship that saw *Sápmi* as a territory without a permanent settlement or organized society (Lehtola, 2015; Miles, 2021; Wolfe, 2006). The structural level of colonialism and asymmetric power relations between the colonizer and the colonized impacted development in quite similar ways across the globe.

Colonial interventions in *Sápmi* are occasionally perceived as an example of internal colonialism. Kuokkanen (2020, 2022) sees this as inaccurate and states that the internal colonialism theory constructs Indigenous peoples as minorities and strips them of their Indigenous rights to land and self-determination. In the Canadian context, St. Denis (2011) and Miles (2021) have similarly argued that equating Indigenous peoples and racialized minorities is yet another form of colonialism, which positions the Canadian state as the only sovereign actor on the land. Kuokkanen (2022) proposes that in the *Sápmi* context, settler colonialism theory recognizes better the continuation of colonialism, as well as the intersecting power structures that constitute the colonial state of Finland. Rather than being a historical event or epoch, settler colonialism refers to a structure and permanent settlement on Indigenous lands (Keynes, 2019; Miles, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 2006). Territory, or access to land, is the primary goal of the settler colonial project. Therefore, it is not accurate to only talk about the legacies of colonialism as the colonization of *Sápmi* continues today through planning and implementation of massive land projects on indigenous land (Kauanui, 2016; Kuokkanen, 2022; Miles, 2021; Ranta & Kanninen, 2019). This raises a challenge to history educators in promoting reconciliation and transitional justice in colonial contexts, as injustices towards the Indigenous people never ceased to exist (Keynes, 2019).

Research material and method

In Finland, history is taught in elementary and lower secondary schools in Grades 4–8. It follows the National Core Curriculum (NCC), drafted by the Finnish National Board of Education (2014), which stipulates the key content areas and goals for history education. Both teachers and textbook authors follow the NCC, which gives them a relatively loose framework to work within (ACFC, 2019; Kohvakka, 2022). The time allocated to teaching history in elementary and lower secondary schools has diminished over recent years (Hakoköngäs et al., 2019). History and social studies form a unit in elementary and lower secondary schools, and there are 12 weekly lessons per year allocated to this unit (FINLEX, 2023). One weekly lesson per year amounts to an average of 38 lessons. To compare, mother tongue and literature

comprises 42 lessons per week throughout the school year, while 32 lessons per week over the course of the school year are dedicated to mathematics (FINLEX, 2023).

The Finnish school system operates in the national languages of Finland, that is, Finnish and Swedish. Education for Sámi pupils operates within this bilingual school system, as there is no separate school system nor curriculum for them (Rahko-Ravantti, 2016). The NCC provides guidelines for the education that is specifically organized for Sámi pupils. However, it has been criticized for not explicitly including the Sámi people in the aims of history education for all pupils (Kohvakka, 2022).

This article examined 18 history textbooks that are currently in use in Finnish elementary and lower secondary schools.² These textbooks were chosen for this analysis because they were published after the current curriculum entered into force. All textbooks in Finland are provided by private publishers, and authors commonly consist of historians and history teachers. The selected textbooks are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Analyzed textbooks in Grades 4–8

Textbook	Language	Grade	Publisher
Mennyt I	Finnish	4	Edukustannus
Mennyt II	Finnish	5	Edukustannus
Mennyt III	Finnish	6	Edukustannus
Ritari V	Finnish	5	Sanoma Pro
Ritari VI	Finnish	6	Sanoma Pro
Forum V	Finnish	5	Otava
Forum VI	Finnish	6	Otava
Forum VII	Finnish	7	Otava
Forum VIII	Finnish	8	Otava
Historian taitaja VII	Finnish	7	Sanoma Pro
Historian taitaja VIII	Finnish	8	Sanoma Pro
Memo VII	Finnish	7	Edita
Memo VIII	Finnish	8	Edita
Förr i tiden I	Swedish	4	Schildts & Söderströms
Förr i tiden II	Swedish	5	Schildts & Söderströms
Förr i tiden III	Swedish	6	Schildts & Söderströms
I tiden VII	Swedish	7	Schildts & Söderströms
I tiden VIII	Swedish	8	Schildts & Söderströms

Textbooks reflect social reality and also create it (Apple, 2012; Mikander, 2016) and, as such, they produce knowledge and reveal what knowledge is considered important and relevant. For that reason, the research material was analyzed by using discourse analysis. According to Laffey and Weldes (2004), discourse analysis “examines how

² I have examined this research material previously in another article. See: Kohvakka, 2023.

discourses are naturalized in such a way as to become common sense, the ‘regime of the taken-for-granted’” (p. 28). One of the assumptions of discourse analysis is that it is impossible to strip a discourse from its broader context and, as such, discourses do not have inherent meaning in themselves (Hardy et al., 2004). The researcher’s task then is to find their historical and social location. In discourse analysis, social reality is seen as something that is created through discourses, which can be texts as well as material structures and practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Laffey & Weldes, 2004).

Following the research design by Wilkinson (2014), this article illustrates the absent curriculum by focusing on textbook chapters in which the history of colonial interventions in *Sápmi* could have reasonably been expected to be included. I began the analysis by reading the textbooks without excluding any of the chapters or pages. As Mikander (2016) points out, the researcher may find interesting research findings in unexpected textbook chapters, and therefore the researcher should not hastily leave anything out based on their presumptions. After reading all the textbooks, focus was given to depictions of the Sámi as well as to chapters where they could have been assumed to be included. During a few rounds of reading, I gathered notes and relevant excerpts from the textbooks, and collected 60 pages of material that were relevant to this study. While making the analysis, I asked: What is explicit and implicit in these texts and how are the texts situated historically and socially? In particular, I compared textbooks intended for the same grade and focused on their different descriptions – or the lack thereof – of the Sámi and the colonization of *Sápmi*.

Results

The selected textbooks consist of approximately 3,000 pages or 30 chapters. Within those 3,000 pages, the Sámi are mentioned 19 times, and only one subchapter consisting of multiple pages is dedicated to the Sámi (*I tiden VII*). The results of this study are divided into two subchapters, which focus on the 19th and 20th centuries respectively, as well as on prehistory. As has been pointed out by Indigenous activists and scholars, the Western term “prehistory” arbitrarily places and divides Indigenous peoples in a time framework, which makes them seem primordial and uncivilized as opposed to “historical” Western people (Oland et al., 2012). While recognizing that dividing time into prehistoric and historic is Eurocentric and colonial, this study follows the structure of the analyzed textbooks and, as such, sees this division as a research result in itself.

Colonization of Sápmi in the 19th and 20th centuries

According to the curriculum, the 19th and 20th centuries are covered in textbooks for 7th and 8th graders. *I tiden VII* (2017), a history textbook for seventh graders in Swedish, describes in detail the discrimination and racism against the Sámi in the 19th and 20th centuries. It informs the reader of how the Sámi race was considered inferior to the Nordic race, and how the non-Sámi people saw them as uncivilized with

their “inferior” languages, living styles, and cultures (*I tiden VII*, pp. 179–181, 2017). Instead of using the term colonialism, the textbook utilizes the term *förfinskande* (Finnicization), which indicates a process in which a group of people is assimilated into the Finnish language and culture. Further, *I tiden VII* (2017) describes how the politicians chose to Finnicize the Sámi by sending their children to Finnish boarding schools, where the use of Sámi languages was prohibited. It further highlights the negative consequences of boarding schools by describing how Sámi children eventually lost contact with the Sámi languages and cultures:

As the children only saw their parents during the summer holidays, they lost contact with the Sámi language and culture. Many also chose not to learn to hunt, fish and herd reindeer, which their ancestors had done for hundreds of years. (*I tiden VII* p. 182–183, 2017)³

The description of boarding schools and the negative consequences they had for the Sámi people resemble closely the history of other Indigenous peoples in boarding schools (Lehtola, 2015; Miles, 2021; Stastny, 2022). Further, the textbook mentions the Church as one of the drivers of forced Finnicization, informing the reader that the Church required the Sámi to be able to read in Finnish if they wanted to be confirmed or married (*I tiden VII*, p. 183, 2018). Overall, the textbook illustrates how the Sámi were forcibly stripped of their identity and assimilated into the Finnish language and culture, as well as the Christian religion. These texts do not connect the assimilation of the Sámi to colonialism or inform the reader about the similarities between *Sápmi* and other colonized regions and peoples. All the selected textbooks for seventh graders describe colonialism overseas and how the European conquerors colonized Indigenous peoples in various regions (*Forum VII*, *Historian taitaja VII*, *I tiden VII*, *Memo VII*), but the colonization of *Sápmi* is not covered in those chapters. This kind of silencing is common in historical narratives on Indigenous–settler relations, especially when they are part of national historical narratives (Miettunen, 2020; Stastny, 2022).

In *Forum VII*, a description of the Sámi people is placed in an information box about different minorities, under the headline “Minority folk” (*Forum VII*, Chapter 5, 2022). In this subchapter, the textbook describes different minorities that lived in Finland in the 19th century, that is, Roma, Tatars, Jews, Russian- and Swedish-speaking minorities, and the Sámi. Contextualizing the Sámi as one of the minority groups gives readers an inaccurate perception of them, by not mentioning their different position as an Indigenous people. The discourse on internal colonialism considers Indigenous peoples as minorities and therefore, by not acknowledging their status as Indigenous people, strips them of their Indigenous claims (Kuokkanen, 2022; Miles, 2021). Miles (2021) has made similar findings in Canada, where the curriculum positions

³ Translations have been made by the author and checked by a professional translator.

the injustices faced by Indigenous peoples and racialized minorities as equal, which ultimately undermines Indigenous claims for land and self-determination.

However, *Forum VII* later describes the Sámi as the “Indigenous people of Finland” that “fascinated researchers” and whose living conditions were unknown to others (*Forum VII*, Chapter 5, 2022). Therefore, the textbook’s use of concepts is contradictory. On the one hand, it informs the reader about the forced assimilation policies, but on the other hand, uses a language that describes the interventions in a neutral way. For instance, the textbook describes how the Sámi were brought under the control of the Church and the Crown after being baptized in the 18th century, and how eventually this process made others “treat the Sámi approvingly” (*Forum VII*, Chapter 5, 2022). The passive voice does not inform the reader about how these interventions happened and who was behind these decisions. Further, the textbook does not describe the Christianization of the Sámi as a forced and violent event, which included both the material and cognitive destruction of traditional Sámi religiosity (West, 2020). However, the textbook eventually mentions the forced assimilation of the Sámi by Finnish actors:

However, the situation of the Sámi deteriorated towards the end of the 19th century when they were demanded to become Finnish. The old Sámi traditions threatened to disappear completely under the pressure of these demands. (*Forum VII*, Chapter 5, 2022)

This excerpt does not inform the reader about what these assimilationist demands were in practice. Further, the use of the passive voice makes the actors behind these acts invisible and in that way does not clarify the power imbalance between the Sámi and the Finnish authorities.

Prehistory

Settler colonialism operates through a continuous effort to make its existence natural and establish newcomers as natives (Kuokkanen, 2022, p. 300; Wolfe, 2006). This is done, for instance, by maintaining historical narratives that omit key information about the Indigenous people and their long-lasting history in the territory. Having said that, it is difficult to understand the colonization of *Sápmi* in textbooks if there is little information about the history of the Sámi in general. If we understand the absent curriculum as something that could have reasonably been included in learning materials but has nevertheless been excluded (Wilkinson, 2014), the Sámi and the prehistory of modern Finland is a good example to examine. Prehistory is covered in history textbooks for fifth graders in chapters that focus on the Stone, Bronze, and Iron Ages in Finland, and on one occasion in a history textbook for sixth graders (*Ritari VI*, 2022). For example, *Mennyt II* (2016) separates the ancestors of the Sámi and Finns from one another and informs the reader about the differences between the two groups. *Mennyt II* explains that the Sámi are the Indigenous people of Finland, who lived in the whole area that is nowadays Finland. Further, it describes how the

ancestors of modern Finns were different from the Sámi in their appearance, language, and way of life (*Mennytt II*, p. 59, 2016). Therefore, it clarifies their distinction from the newcomer ancestors of modern Finns. The textbook continues by describing the relations between the Sámi and other peoples in Northern Europe:

During the time of Tacitus [Roman historian], the Sámi lived in what is now Finland. Over the centuries, however, they were forced to move northwards, as ancestors of the Finns migrated to the area [...] The Sámi became minorities in the territory of present-day Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia, and came under the control of newcomers. (*Mennytt II*, p. 59, 2016)

This excerpt describes how the Sámi were forced to migrate north, which makes the reader assume that the power relations between the Sámi and the newcomers were asymmetrical. In comparison, *Ritari VI* (2022), a textbook for sixth graders in Finnish, explains that “when the settlement of Finns expanded further and further inland from the coasts, some of the Sámi moved further north” (*Ritari VI*, Chapter 7, 2022). The two textbooks explain the same event, but only the first one writes about the forced migration and the minoritization of the Sámi people. *Mennytt II* (2016) describes the process in which the Sámi became a minority, which was then put under foreign control.

The absent curriculum is evident in textbooks that describe prehistory in present-day Finland without mentioning the Sámi. *Forum V* (2022), a textbook for fifth graders in Finnish, fails to mention the Sámi in prehistoric Finland, thus making them invisible to the reader. According to the textbook, the first inhabitants of Finland “were a mixture of multiple peoples that merged with one another over many millennia” (*Forum V*, p. 154, 2022). Further, it focuses on the Finnish language and the birth of a “Finnish tribe.” Compared to the previous example, the textbook does not mention the Sámi, let alone distinguish them from the rest of the inhabitants. Making the Sámi people nonexistent in the historical narrative on Finnish prehistory is an example of how coloniality continues to be reproduced in education (Eriksen & Svendsen, 2020). Further, it is an illustrative example of the absent curriculum, in which a partial curricular totality becomes a complete totality (Wilkinson, 2014). In this example, the Sámi are a key element that has been omitted from the historical narrative on Finnish prehistory presented in this textbook. An inadequate narrative, or a partial totality, has thus become a curricular totality.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined the absent curriculum in relation to the Sámi people and the colonization of *Sápmi* in Finnish history textbooks. With the article, I have aimed to fill the gaps the selected textbooks leave on the history of the Sámi and the relations between the Sámi and others. The textbook analysis shows that the colonization of *Sápmi* is not entirely absent in some of the textbooks, but that the

textbooks fail to conceptually frame the described interventions as colonial. The term “colonialism” (*kolonialismi* or *kolonialism* in Finnish and Swedish, respectively), is never used in relation to the history of *Sápmi* under Swedish-Finnish or Finnish rule. Different types of colonial interventions in *Sápmi* are described, such as boarding schools and forced Christianization, without informing the reader that they were part of the colonization process, even though those interventions were colonial in nature. This is particularly apparent when comparing these descriptions to colonization processes in other Indigenous lands and the word choices used in those chapters. As Stastny (2022) notes, it is more convenient to focus on the history of foreign countries than on the history of one’s own country and Indigenous-settler histories, as that does not disturb the dominant national narrative. Similarly, Kuokkanen (2022) reminds us that one of the main misconceptions about the colonization of *Sápmi* is that it is separate from colonialism proper or the colonization of overseas territories. The article shows that the textbooks chosen for this study reflect this misconception.

However, some textbooks did not examine the Sámi at all, therefore creating a total absent curriculum. This was particularly evident in chapters that covered prehistory in modern-day Finland. The majority of the textbooks did mention the Sámi as a separate people from others, but also discourses that entirely excluded the Sámi were found. History textbooks that omit core information about the Sámi and the colonization of *Sápmi* support colonial and racist ways of thinking, while signaling that they are of secondary importance in national history (Wilkinson, 2014). Further, the absent curriculum in relation to the Sámi and the colonization of *Sápmi* prevents all pupils from receiving adequate knowledge about the history of Finland as a colonial state.

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Author biography

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