



## Recognizing the Colonialism Within

by Scott Forrest

Act 4: Finnish Sápmi, June 16 - July 9, 2006

As a Canadian researcher working in Finland and investigating the role and status of indigenous peoples internationally, I would say that I have a greater awareness of the colonial histories of my original and adopted countries than most that live there. In my work, one of the most significant tensions I have encountered has been between the need to acknowledge the wrongs committed towards indigenous peoples in the name of colonialism and the desire to move forward into new relationships based on mutual understanding and cooperation. I share the view of the organizers of the *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* exhibition that these two pulls are not mutually exclusive, but that a frank and honest appraisal of our colonial pasts is necessary for reconciliation.

For this reason, I was pleased that Rovaniemi was chosen as one of the sites of this exhibition. At first, one might wonder why Rovaniemi, clearly outside of Finland's Sámi homeland area (Sápmi), would be chosen as the location for an exhibition and conference on colonialism in Sápmi. Actually, there could be no better place. Just as Archana Hande shows us in her work on India's port cities as the gateway of colonial power and influence, Rovaniemi represents both historically and presently the colonial arm of the state in Lapland. Situating the exhibition in the old locomotive shed (*veturitalli*) of the train station (the line's most northerly terminus) is another piece of strong symbolism. The local term in Lapland for settlers (both historical and recent) is "junantuoma" – those brought by the train. The locomotive shed is nowadays surrounded by piles of timber taken from Northern Finland ready for shipping to the south and international markets. Whilst Rovaniemi's role in the harvesting of Lapland's natural resources is self-evident, it remains, as Kaisa Raitio reminds us, a major issue in the discussions of Sámi land rights.

Thus, the fourth act of the exhibition rightly follows the model of the previous acts by bringing the discussion of Nordic colonialism to the colonial centres

themselves. It is in these centres where the real awareness of our collective colonial histories needs to be developed. Indigenous peoples know their own history as colonial subjects only too well, but all too often the majority population are able to erase these reminders from their physical and intellectual surroundings.

It is in this spirit of confronting uncomfortable truths about our past and making indigenous peoples and their stories visible again that both the exhibition and conference took place in Rovaniemi from June 16 – July 9, 2006. What follows is a brief – and decidedly subjective – overview of both the artistic works presented in the exhibition and the presentations in the conference. I must begin by apologizing to all of the artists and speakers, for it would be impossible for me to do any justice to their work by trying to recapture either their imagery or their words. Instead, I offer only my own impressions of everything that I saw and experienced during the event, as someone with all too many of his own thoughts and ideas on the subject of colonialism and the political histories of indigenous peoples.

### **Exhibition**

I was both interested and hesitant to participate in *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* because my roots are from Western academia and felt that I lacked authority to venture any kind of opinion on the works of indigenous artists. At the same time, the invitation was too intriguing to turn down. Too often, academics speak amongst themselves in their own rarefied language, without being challenged to think from different points of view or use different methods. I suspect the same is largely true for artists, although they work in a more openly creative environment. This is why I welcomed the opportunity to confront issues of the colonial experience in the Nordic countries from both artistic and academic points of view, with participants from both within the region and outside it, and across all points of the colonial divide.

### **Archana Hande**

Upon entering the disused railway locomotive shed that housed the exhibition for Act 4, I was immediately struck by a replica of train station from the period of British rule in India. Archana Hande's installation, "Victoria House," provided a perfect opening to the idea of how colonial patterns repeat in postcolonial societies (indeed a theme that would itself repeat throughout the exhibition and conference). In her replica of a British train station from India, we are reminded of how layers of colonial structures (both physical and social) live on in

postcolonial societies, being transformed and co-opted for their own uses and interests. This is the recurring story of the colonial experience, how the patterns of control practiced by the colonizers are adopted and integrated by the colonized society itself long after the original colonizers have left the scene. If there is one overarching theme I take from this exhibition and conference, it is this.

Hande's referencing of "colonial English, cricket, spoon and fork, suits and dresses, partitions, colonial architecture and statues, English tea, and names on streets, colonies, companies, parks, and landmarks" marks the ways in which the patterns of British colonialism still persist in contemporary India. I would suggest that all of us – regardless of whether we represent the colonized, majority, or some other category – need to build this kind of awareness into our daily lives. We need to undertake these searches for patterns, systems, and remnants of the colonial past and for a start simply become aware of them. To be sure there is much negative about the legacy of systems of control based often on dominance, theft and exclusion. But any meeting of cultures also involves positive aspects. We should endeavour to consider all of these disparate elements and ask for ourselves why they are there? How did they come about? Whose interests are they serving? What good are they doing the rest of us?

### **Geir Tore Holm**

While the railway station within the railway station dominated the visual senses of the hall, the auditory was captured by a curious, yet somehow familiar song. Geir Tore Holm uses humour (I hope) to look at what is on one level a simple song – Serge Gainsbourg's "Je t'aime (moi non plus)," which has become a completely malleable staple of the globalized pop music world – but recast in Sámi as "Mun rahkistan – in mun ge." Actually one of my favourite pieces of the exhibit, I can also easily understand why its non-stop repetition in the exhibition must have drove the curators a bit crazy by the end of the day. This is not a song known for its harmony and indeed it seems that Geir is intentionally playing with this dissonance. The song is ostensibly about love, but perhaps only the one-sided kind. Without reading too much into this, there is perhaps something else in the dissonance of the voices and interplay between the male and female parts that echoes the troublesome relationship between colonized and colonizer and their dysfunctional co-dependent relationship. – "I love you"... "me neither."

Geir Tore Holm also presented “Vara addit!” (Give Blood!), capturing both the symbolic and practical importance of Sámi blood. The entire installation is a blood donation point, with information presented for prospective donors in Sámi language. While it fulfils more than an artistic function in raising awareness about the need to give blood, it also raises interesting questions about other values of Sámi blood beyond medical. In the background are ideas of blood quantum as a means of defining Sámi and other indigenous ethnicity. But while lives can be saved by giving blood, can a culture stay alive only through bloodlines? Whilst this is an interesting idea, perhaps this piece would have been more effective had it actually become a functioning blood donation point, as I believe was the artist’s original intention.

### **Kent Monkman**

While Archana Hande and Geir Tore Holm’s pieces were presented front and centre in the exhibition space, the film works of Kent Monkman seemed hidden away, playing out in a dingy old office up the stairs and in the back of the hall. In spite of its location, Monkman’s work couldn’t be any more in your face. While he also takes up more common themes such as the creation and history of his people in the form of dance (in “A Nation is Coming”), Monkman’s most challenging work is “Future Nation,” which tackles issues of homosexuality within an indigenous context. Within most aboriginal societies, homosexuality is even less accepted than it is within the general society at large.

The films also touch on the persistence of the effects of colonization and cultural erosion. The protagonist of native heritage, but raised by a white foster family and searching for her lost brother, is an almost obvious allegory for the search for links to cultural rootedness and lost heritage caused by the separation of generations of native peoples from their families and communities. That these patterns are now replicated within urban ghettos and dysfunctional family networks only makes the despair more palpable.

### **Katarina Pirak Sikku**

Probably the most personal and powerful of the works presented, Katarina Pirak Sikku’s put herself in the centre of the work as the physical remains of culture and life lie shattered on the floor of exhibition space. On the wall, the colonial tools were starkly presented, next to a picture of the artist herself being measured with the same tool that had been used to take racial measurements of her own grandparents. It is almost impossible to describe the emotional effect of this stark presentation. For academics as myself, it is easy to abstract

stories of the wrongs perpetrated in the name of civilization and progress. This work made such experiences real and personal.

Sikku's piece also serves to remind us that colonization was and is a very modern phenomenon, and that the tools and means used were designed to regulate social life into carefully prescribed categories and observations. The chart on the wall and the tool that was used to perform physical measurements illustrate how the colonial state used observation, measurement, and categorization to enforce its control. The ruthless bureaucracy of colonialism erases pre-existing forms of knowledge and culture as it writes. Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens and others have used the image of the Panopticon to show how the modern state succeeded through observing, measuring and regulating: what can be observed and measured can be controlled.

### **Fatimah Tuggar**

The idea of a montage seems ideally suited for the colonial experience. For what can better represent colonization than an array of elements from different cultural contexts taken out of their previous context and mixed together to produce an absolutely new reality? Fatimah Tuggar's work captured both the richness and chaos of not only the "classic" colonial encounter, but revealed it in new forms of globalization and modernism.

These ideas exude from both works, which seem ready to play with Huntington's proscription of a "Clash of Civilizations." Is the chaos and conflict that we see in Tuggar's montages reflective of our current reality, or at least the one we perceive through CNN? The first scene takes place against a backdrop of an airport – our modern version of Archana Hande's colonial railway station. The protesters, riot police, and Imams among the jetliners seem to fit our modern struggle for peace and justice amid ethnic and economic tension and American imperial aggression.

The second montage seems more personal, building on the artist's own sense of being an outsider as a foreign black, Muslim woman living in the United States. Although the picture is ostensibly an American snapshot there is definitely something of the Third World about its collection of characters, and the affluent white couple in the middle look to represent the tourists-at-home, only interfacing with their surrounding through carefully mediated ways (phones cameras, laptops, etc). These are truly the images of our globalized world. Everywhere, anywhere, and nowhere.

## Conference

Act 4 also featured a two-day conference where the same themes that were showcased by the artists' works in the exhibition were taken up by a series of speakers and open discussions that bridged the artistic and academic worlds. The conference, entitled *Beyond Subject and State: Indigenous Interests in the Age of Globalization*, invited local people to comment on questions of Finland and Lapland's own colonial history, and the current situation of Sámi rights and self-determination, as well as the broader themes raised by the speakers. I thank the organizers once again for giving me the opportunity to serve as moderator for these fascinating, and often emotionally charged, discussions.

I can't possibly do justice to the excellent speakers we had during this conference by trying to summarize their presentations or to that of the engaging discussions we had after each presentation and at the end of each day in a roundtable format. Instead, I can only give my very subjective perspective, which comes from a background that is built on many of the very same foundations of colonization: the observation, measurement and control of time and space... that is science and academia.

Although there could have been better participation from local institutions and the general public in the conference, I feel that this was more due to the necessary timing of the event, which was held after the end of the academic year, just before the beginning of most peoples' holidays, and at a time when there were other cultural events happening in Lapland. With that said, the level of discussion and engagement among the participants was excellent, and produced an excellent attempt to try to bridge understandings between the worlds of artists, academics, colonized peoples and dominant society, and the many hyphens, slashes and in-between others that actually make up the majority amid these confused and often all-too-artificial categories.

The conference's title already laid out two interlinked ideas, which would dominate the days' discussions: colonization and globalization. While we are used to dealing with these topics as two socially and historically distinct phenomena, the conference was able to highlight many parallels and similarities. We can consider that the period of colonization (the European colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Americas) was in many ways the first wave of globalization. If the age of colonialism was the first mass wave of cultures coming and clashing together, then the current age is a period of hyper-intensified interaction. The scale and types of interaction were different, but at that time the transformations to culture and society would have been just as drastic and dramatic, if not more so.

Another thread that emerged during the conference was the idea of hyphenation, a product of both colonization and globalization. Looking at the list of both names and countries of our speakers in this conference, I was struck by the number of hyphens and slashes. We all seem to be from somewhere else, and suffer from the modern phenomenon of split personalities. We can no longer really speak of single cultures or identities, for we all have to balance many different kinds of forces that shape who we are and from where we draw our picture of ourselves. While this may be characterized as a modern phenomenon, that is not to say that is necessarily *recent*. The roots of these cultural schisms and blendings can certainly be traced back to the first ages of colonization.

It was of course necessary during the conference to examine just what is it we mean by this term *globalization*, and whether its effects on indigenous and other marginalized cultures can be considered entirely negative. The varied processes that we refer to under the blanket term of globalization have on the one hand seen indigenous peoples emerge as important international actors in their own right in forums like the Arctic Council and the United Nations. No longer merely objects of colonialism, indigenous peoples have achieved recognition as active subjects and used that status to fight for their own rights and futures.

However, the same processes of globalization that have arguably weakened the nation state's monopoly on sovereignty have also seen seemingly unstoppable intensification of trade liberalization, resource extraction, and international economic transactions. This trade liberalization has intensified threats to indigenous land rights and livelihoods from competing resource development, and often weakened legal measures meant to safeguard indigenous and other local interests. Thus, globalization should be seen as having at least two distinct sides, for the purposes of our discussion: increased political expression and sovereignty for non-state actors and a new form of trade liberalization that privileges large multinational interests over local users.

A final theme that emerged during the conference was how the colonized "learned" patterns of behaviour from colonization. Richard William Hill began the conference by alluding to this theme in both art and indigenous politics, and it remained central to the discussion up until the final session. How do we recognize and identify these values, knowledge patterns, and systems that are inherited from the colonizer and the colonization experience that get replicated even into indigenous cultures, and are inherent even in the expressions of resistance to that power? As Rauna Kuokkanen reminded us, these expressions often appear

in the form of classism, racism, sexism (patriarchy and misogyny), as well as other expressions and applications of power that are inherent to the nature of the state.

### **Richard William Hill**

A native curator shared with us his initial optimism and perhaps a growing sense of frustration with both the world of the dominant society, but also the amazement and frustration with how native resistance has mimicked the very structures it purports to tackle. As a curator, Hill was concerned with how indigenous peoples had been “written out” of the societies in which they live, as exemplified with the lack of indigenous representation in Canadian museums.

As the first speaker, Hill introduced the important idea of *mimicry* – how in both art and in other aspects, indigenous peoples reflect their colonizers and the patterns of colonization. In this discussion, he used the frequently reproduced image of James Earle Fraser’s “End of the Trail,” to show how this dialogue between indigenous peoples and dominant society has played out in a dialogue of imagery, reflection, and co-optation. Hill reminds us that this same kind of mimicry of colonial patterns is present even in the native resistance movement, as the language and attitudes of the dominant power are unconsciously borrowed even in attempts to break them.

### **Henriette Rasmussen**

As an educator, journalist, and politician in Greenland, Henriette Rasmussen is in a unique position to comment on the difficulties of maintaining cultural heritage. Her presentation shows that Greenland has enjoyed both successes and failures in its attempts to preserve its culture. Really this is a story about the simultaneous pulls of tradition and modernization that is a constant struggle and balancing act for all indigenous peoples. How can one maintain the cultural traditions that reflect your identity while adapting as a living culture in the modern world? As Rasmussen illustrates, this is no easy matter, and even Greenland with a strong degree of self-determination has struggled to find this balance.

We are also reminded that the benefits of preserving cultural heritage go far beyond just the cultural expressions of the people in question. The environmental knowledge and alternative approaches to livelihoods and relationships to our environment may be critical to finding solutions to the economic and environmental challenges the whole world now faces.

### **Kaisa Raitio**

Another local example of the overall themes we examined in the conference was presented by Kaisa Raitio, an academic and activist from the University of Joensuu, Finland. In her paper, “Environmental Politics in Sápmi: The Conflict Between Sámi Reindeer Herding and State Forestry in Anár, Finnish Sápmi”, Raitio presents a new kind of resource conflict that illustrates how globalization is shaping both identities and interests among contexts that had been defined previously by a relationship between indigenous peoples and the state. In the conflict over logging and reindeer herding in the Inari region of Lapland, the international environmental movement (in the form of Greenpeace) has been brought into the conflict by a group of herders. While this “unholy alliance” has changed the configuration of the conflict somewhat, Raitio points out that the intransigence of the state to hold to structures that privilege broader economic interests (logging) provide little space for local actors (both indigenous and non-indigenous) to have a say on land use and resource development in their region.

The lesson I draw from Raitio’s presentation is that the indigenous-state relationship has evolved into something far more complex in the modern globalized world, with conflicts that cut across ethnic divides and produce unexpected identities and positions. In some cases common interests will bring local groups together to fight outsiders (the state, multinational corporations, or even international environmental groups), but these alliances are highly contextual and depend on narrowly defined common interests that can quickly disappear.

### **Rauna Kuokkanen**

Dr. Rauna Kuokkanen of McMaster University, Canada takes the idea of replicated colonial patterns, introduced by Richard William Hill, a step further to consider how attitudes of sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy are also reproduced from the colonial experience. In her paper, “Sámi Women, Autonomy and Decolonization in the Age of Globalization,” Dr. Kuokkanen shows how the role of Sámi women and attitudes and perceptions towards them have been produced by successive phases of colonization and are now reflected in the current political mobilization for indigenous rights of the Sámi. The influence of Christianity (particularly Laestadianism, the form adopted among many Sámi communities) as well as the privileging of male property rights in reindeer herding are cited as examples.

These examples remind us that the application of colonialism has been by no means even and has always produced winners (largely those that allied with the colonizers and adopted their patterns of power to become the elite among their own society) and losers. Gender roles are a striking way in which the values and power structures of colonization have been reproduced among indigenous societies. The difficulty of not only identifying such acts of mimicry, but also altering them, is exacerbated by the dominance of power structures and elites that benefit from them.

### **Archana Hande**

Just as she introduced the idea of echoing colonial structures in her exhibited work, Archana Hande took this in new directions in her presentation, "Home Grown." Most significantly for me is her introduction of the question of who exactly is indigenous, and upon what contexts and criteria does that depend? In India, the ideas of tribal, indigenous, local, etc., flow across other social division such as race, language, religion, and caste. It would be difficult to imagine a more complex situation than India's postcolonial society.

The example of India proved to be a good starting point to consider the idea of mixed identities and societies, and come back to the idea of hyphenation. After centuries of cultural and genetic mixing, can we really still talk about a binary idea of indigenous and non-indigenous? Certainly, there are many more nuanced kinds of identity that should be considered.

### **Makere Stewart-Harawira**

Dr. Makere Stewart-Harawira of the University of Alberta ably brought the conference presentations to a close with her paper, "Nation States and the Struggle for Empire: Indigenous Peoples in the Interregnum." Touching on many of the main themes and issues of the previous days as well as bringing those ideas to bear on new contexts, Dr. Stewart-Harawira's presentation was powerfully personal and moving. She served to remind us that the violent power of the nation state, which has been responsible for the most terrible wrongs of colonialism, still continues to exert a tremendous influence in world affairs. We only have to look at the events taking place in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere to see that millions of people are under threat of death and displacement at the hands of forces not dissimilar to those that drove colonization. A stark reminder that colonization never went away, it has merely been subsumed into the societies it colonized, and taken new forms as it spreads elsewhere.

## Conclusion

The sense of helplessness and despair that I felt at the end of the second days' presentations, I think, was fairly commonplace among the group, as we attempted to somehow wrap up in a half-hour all that had been expressed and felt in the previous days. The suggestion, appropriately from the last speaker Dr. Stewart-Harawira, was to consider how to move from mere words to practical action that could actually have an influence on some of the injustices that we had identified, or as I put it with tongue-in-cheek, how we can save the world in 30 minutes.

The problems seemed even broader and more complex than they had before. It's not just colonization that we have to deal with. In many ways, the same abuses and inequalities of distribution of power are having profound effects on the way the entirety of world society functions. Individuals and local communities are further and further removed from decision-making power over issues that directly affect them. The economic system of so-called liberal free trade means that decisions can be abstracted to purely bottom-line financial considerations, rather than any question of morality or justice.

The idea of revolution was set aside (revolutions never work, they only end up reproducing the same structures and abuses of power, merely changing the old elite for a new one – much like colonialism). Instead, we came back to the idea of small action, both local and personal. We recognized that among our group of artists and educators, we enjoyed a relatively strong influence to shape ideas and opinion, and along with that power goes responsibility. Our best hope then, much as the *Rethinking Nordic Colonialism* exhibit has attempted, is to use whatever influence we have to make visible the hidden values and structures of colonialism and the injustices they have produced in order to multiply our voices and our power.