

The Ingrained Epistemic Injustice: Recognizing, Overcoming and Analyzing Colonial Tropes in Finno-Ugric Studies

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This research paper examines the persistence of colonial tropes in academic discourse. Ethnography, as a discipline and approach, is deeply rooted in the colonial era, and many narratives produced by colonial ethnography continue to be prevalent. One prominent trope is the depiction of cannibalism among indigenous peoples (Barker, Hulme et al. 1998), which has historically served to alienate marginalized groups. Another means of reinforcing boundaries and accusing distinctive groups has been blood libel (Dundes 1991; Geracy 2000), disseminated against various religious minorities, including Jews, Pagans, Roma, and even Christians during the late Roman Empire.

Art Leete (2019) highlights the origins of the trope portraying Finno-Ugric peoples in the North as peaceful. From the 19th century onward, ethnology, folklore studies, and other humanitarian disciplines produced stable narratives that characterized the *Inorodets* population in the Russian Empire and the USSR as inferior, culturally backward, and submissive. Consequently, groups within the Uralic language family are often labelled as 'silent', 'passive', and 'obedient'. Despite significant epistemological shifts, these narratives remain vivid and are frequently found in academic volumes, textbooks, and media coverage.

In my presentation, I will explore the structuring role that colonial narratives play in knowledge production, operating from 'centre to periphery', from former metropolitan cities to regional margins, and from established academic institutions to academic colonies (as defined by Svetlana Karm). Although these colonial narratives serve as imperial artefacts, their folkloric elements, anecdotal character, and even absurdity render them appealing. This allure tempts authors to embellish their writing and audiences to engage in the unconscious marginalization of others.

Through specific examples from ethnographies and fictitious literature, I will demonstrate how colonial narratives are seamlessly integrated into texts, making them more compelling. Authors often fail to interrogate the stigmatizing effects of these tropes, and audiences are frequently unaware of the layers of social exclusion and epistemic violence that underpin them. By recognizing and compiling such enduring colonial narratives, researchers can uncover new

dimensions of oppression, inequality, and epistemic injustice faced by indigenous populations globally and in Northern Eurasia in particular.

References

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