

‘Ensnare the Language’: Imagination and Resilience in Indigenous Arts of the Self

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Abstract

The subjugation of the indigenous imagination has been central to the settler colonial project historically. Indigenous peoples have had to deploy their own arts of imagination in order to fight back against processes of dispossession and denigration. Today, however, the politics of conflicts over the image of indigeneity are in some ways quite different to what they have been historically. Indigenous artists are encouraged and supported to present images of themselves by settler colonial states in search of ‘reconciliation’. In diverse artistic and political contexts an image of indigenous peoples as ‘resilient’, capable of bouncing back from and coping with adversities, is growing in force and power. In this article I discuss this particular way of imagining indigeneity, in terms of ‘resilience’, and argue that it is deeply problematic. Contrary to the popular assertion that resilience is inherent to indigenous ways of being, I argue that it is a colonial concept, projected onto indigenous peoples as a means to sustaining settler colonial relations of power. The article does so by connecting and problematizing various images of indigenous resilience, in North America especially, and contrasts them to images of indigenous resistance deployed by Suohpanterror, an ‘artist’ group active in Finnish Lapland, which offer an entirely different and radically hostile imaginary to that of settler colonialism.

1. Introduction

The subjugation of the indigenous imagination has been central to the colonial project ever since the first encounters of indigenous peoples with their colonizers. Images of indigenous peoples as primitive and under-developed were prevalent historically, and helped legitimate the processes of dispossession by which the

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settler colonial project grew. Indigenous peoples have had to deploy their own arts of imagination in order to fight back. Today, however, the politics of conflicts over the image of indigeneity are in some ways quite different to what they have been historically. Indigenous artists are encouraged and supported to present images of themselves, their communities and indigenous ways of life that celebrate core elements of indigenous cultures and knowledge. In diverse artistic and political contexts an image of indigenous peoples as 'resilient', capable of bouncing back from and coping with adversities, is growing in force and power. In this article I discuss this particular way of imagining indigeneity, in terms of 'resilience', and argue that it is deeply problematic. Contrary to the popular assertion that resilience is inherent to indigenous ways of being, I argue that it is a colonial concept, projected onto indigenous peoples by their colonizers, today as much as in the past. Artists and arts communities, wherever they participate in the projection of the image of indigenous resilience, are themselves therefore complicit with the contemporary colonization of indigenous peoples. I make this argument in this article by connecting indigenous arts projects in Canada, the United States, and in Finland where I live. I also make the argument that when we look more closely at indigenous arts we can encounter ideas and concepts that are fundamentally hostile to the neoliberal and colonial ideology of resilience.

The article opens in the following section with a brief account of the development of the discourse on indigenous resilience on the Canadian arts scene, via the Resilience Billboard Exhibition, as a means towards the reconciliation of indigenous peoples with the Canadian state. In this opening section I articulate my concerns as to why this concept of resilience is problematic, and discuss how it can be seen as an element within a neoliberal strategy for the capture and subjugation of the indigenous imagination. In the second section I discuss the wider importance of imagination and images for indigenous struggles against colonialism historically and again today, and argue that we need to approach indigenous imaginaries with a view to how they conflict with the basic assumptions of resilience ideology. In the third section I do precisely that by analyzing the works and ideas of two Sámi poets, Paulus Utsi and Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, and show exactly how their poetics and aesthetics contest the image of indigeneity projected by proponents of indigenous resilience. In the fourth section I detail the ways in which the image of indigenous resilience is itself depicted and situated as an expression of resistance to neoliberal colonialism, especially in the United States in the wake of the election of Donald Trump as President, and the problems which that mobilization of the figure of indigenous resilience poses for my critique of it. Is the image of indigenous resilience universally subjugating, I will ask, or does it leave itself open to multiple and different kinds of usage? While recognizing the complexity of resilience discourse, and the fact that it can and does refer to different things, I detail how and why it remains captured within neoliberal power relations. In the fifth section I consider where and how today indigenous art and image making might be seen to express a politics which is no longer neoliberal, in which context I make an argument for the importance of Suohpanterror, whose

propaganda art not only draws attention to the continued colonization of Sámi territories, but also defaces iconic images drawn from the colonial west in ways that assert a self-empowering, violent and militant opposition to colonialism. These are images, I argue, which do much more than picture indigenous peoples proffering mere resilience to colonialism. What these images do is to appropriate elements of modernity to imagine indigenous emancipation from colonialism, by way of any means necessary.

2. Resilience and reconciliation

From the first day of June until the first day of August, 2018, billboards appeared across Canada as part of the Resilience Billboard Exhibition, a response to Call to Action 79 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report, aiming at the integration of 'Indigenous history, heritage values, and memory practices into Canada's national heritage and history' (Martin 2018). Call to Action 79 of the Report, titled *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, the writing of which dates back to 2008, directly called upon 'the arts community' to develop such a 'reconciliation framework' (TRCR 2015, 340–341) for Canada and the indigenous peoples living there, whom Canada had for over a century, the report concluded, sought the elimination of (TRCR 2015, 1). The Resilience billboard exhibition was situated as a 'creative act of reconciliation, and a public celebration and commemoration of the work of Indigenous women artists' in particular (Martin 2018). For those two months, images made by 50 First Nations, Inuit and Métis women artists were displayed on billboards in inner cities and on highways across Canada, 'sites from which too many women have disappeared' as a 'physicalized reminder' of the excluded histories of indigenous peoples in Canada (Martin 2018). The project was described by its curator, Lee-Ann Martin, as an attempt to give indigenous women artists the power to 'present their ideas, their visions, themselves' (Martin 2018). The contribution, for example, of Anishinaabekwe artist, Rebecca Belmore, is a photograph of the naked back of a reclining female body, which bears what appears at first to be simply a long scar upon its surface. On closer inspection, however, the image suggests, as Martin describes in her introductory essay to the exhibition, 'both beauty and trauma' (Martin 2018). Beads hang upon the scar, which appears to be a braid, suggesting the craftwork with which the body has both repaired and ornamented itself. As Belmore herself describes, it is a body that has turned its back on the atrocities inflicted upon it, in order 'to find resilience in the future. The Indigenous female body is the politicized body, the historical body. It's the body that doesn't disappear.' (Martin 2018).



Image 1: *Fringe* by Rebecca Belmore 2008.

Resilience, as Martin also tells, is defined in dictionaries as the ability to not just withstand but bounce back from adversities. In the context of the lives of indigenous peoples the central adversity in question is that of colonialism itself (Martin 2018). Yet even before the first encounters with colonizers, Martin argues, resilience was central to indigenous knowledge and ways of being. 'It defines the long-term adaptability of Indigenous cultures to changing environmental and social landscapes', she argues (Martin 2018).

Assertions such as Martin's as to the inherent resilience of indigenous peoples, the deep rootedness of resilience as a way of life for the indigenous, and its centrality to indigenous knowledge, are ubiquitous today (Reid 2018). Indigenous peoples are celebrated as exemplars of resilience, not simply by art curators, but by the very colonial states and international organizations that continue to govern them. The global discourse on indigenous resilience is part of what scholars now name critically, 'the resilience machine' (Bohland, Davoudi & Lawrence 2019). The argument that indigenous peoples are in any sense resilient is deeply questionable, and troubling, given the argument, now widely shared by critical theorists across the social sciences, that resilience is a neoliberal discourse and project designed to convince peoples worldwide of their capacities to bear the brunt of adversities by themselves (Chandler & Reid 2019).¹ Labeling indigenous peoples 'resilient', arguing that resilience is a central tenet of indigenous knowledge and practices, is an expression of a strategy for the subjectification of indigenous peoples in an era in which neoliberal power seeks to mask itself as a regime for the liberation and emancipation of peoples from colonial conditions of existence. Understanding the resonance of art projects such as the Resilience Billboard Exhibition, their power to attract funding and support, and position themselves as enablers of 'reconciliation', requires understanding the power which neoliberalism holds over the images of indigenous modes of being, the governance of images of indigeneity, and the vast scope today of the neoliberal imaginary, which constructs both indigenous and non-indigenous people alike, as resilient to crisis, perseverant in the face of present and future suffering, and accepting of their ongoing experiences of dispossession. To be

¹ This paper draws broadly on the book which I and David Chandler have coauthored on this topic (Chandler and Reid 2019) and which was published in Autumn 2019.

fully understood, neoliberalism has to be grasped as a form of power which works through the imaginations of its subjects, convincing us of the naturalness of the image of the human with which it presents us, and which it presents itself as merely enabling and seeking to protect (Fisher 2018).

How is it, that images of indigenous peoples have become so closely linked to images of resilience? How did the vast plurality and powers of indigenous ways of being come to be so defined by this one concept that works discursively to trap people into accepting the necessity of a life of endless survival, against the odds, in a world defined by continuous adversity. Why would indigenous artists accept that their work be reduced to such a degrading ideal?

For anybody concerned with resistance to neoliberalism today, one central task is to find a way out of the discursive traps laid by neoliberal regimes of power. The image of the indigenous subject as the resilient, perseverant, endlessly adaptive being, capable of coping with serial disasters, and bouncing back is, I argue, precisely such a trap. Images are traps into which we sometimes fall, and often are led to in order that we may do so (Reid 2017). Which is why we need to be wary of how our imaginations can deceive us, as well as invest in the powers of our imaginations to create better images, capable of leading us onto different and more promising paths. Imagination, I believe, is of much greater importance for the possible emancipation of peoples from colonial regimes of power than resilience.

3. Ensnare the language!

Intriguingly, in the language of the Sámi, one indigenous people of the Arctic region, the word for trap (*giela*) is the same as the word for language (*giela*) itself (Gaski 1997, 11). Perhaps there are things in the cultures of indigenous peoples that might, by their very own natures, lend themselves to this problematic of discursive interpellation? Perhaps indigenous modes of being are not simply those of resilient, willfully dispossessed, perseverant subjects of neoliberal lore, but also those of power savvy hunters of power, who know both how to trap and hunt power, as well as the risks of being trapped and hunted by power themselves. Indeed the language of the Sámi would indicate as much. The Sámi writer, Harald Gaski, has already detailed how the history of Sámi resistance to colonization has been defined by the basic idea of the need to hide messages of resistance in imaginative forms such as the *yoik*, the original song and music of the Sámi (Gaski 2011, 36). Colonization of the Sámi, like every other indigenous people, took the form of cultural suppression, and thus Sámi people have had to struggle not only to maintain these cultural traditions, but also to use their traditions in imaginative ways, to hide and convey resistance through a clever deployment of images. How might indigenous peoples today deploy their imaginations in ways that contest and subvert the colonization of indigenous imaginaries? How indeed does the indigenous imagination look, when we attempt to take a look, in disregard of the framing of indigenous imaginaries by the curators of colonialism today as reducible to resilience?

Engaging with indigenous imaginations and images strategically is important

today because the representation of indigenous imaginaries remains so heavily policed by colonial powers. Of course there are plenty of settler states and powers only too happy to talk about the need to revive and protect indigenous cultures today, as Canada is doing right now, and promote the indigenous imagination, so long as the images it produces and the work which indigenous cultures perform remains complicit with a neoliberal agenda. 'Language, cultural expression, and even spirituality don't pose an unmanageable threat to settler colonialism, because cultural resurgence can rather effortlessly be co-opted by liberal recognition,' as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, herself of the Nishinaabeg people, which has long suffered the colonization of the Canadian state, argues (Simpson 2017, 50). Colonizing the imaginations of indigenous peoples was a direct strategy of the Jesuits who, as the anthropologist Hans Belting recounts, 'set out to colonize the imaginary world of the natives...not only by placing pictures before their eyes, but also by attempting actually to imprint the pictures bodily, so that they would take possession of their viewers' imaginations and dreams' (Belting 2011, 40). Today this strategy is still in place, as indigenous peoples across the world are asserting. The National Indigenous Corporation of Chile (CONACIN), in protest at the appropriation and manipulation of a photographic image of a Mapuche woman by a Congress on mental health, alcohol and drugs in Santiago in 1998, described the situation well:

We were stripped of our land. We were deprived of our gods and language. We were brought alcohol and venereal diseases. And after all the plunder, now they want to appropriate our images, and treat us like drunks, criminals, and drug addicts. Our faces and ways of seeing have been taken away. Besides negating our images and usurping our archives of dreams, they have colonized our imagination through the mass media. (Quoted in Salazar and Cordova 2008, 39).

The colonization of the indigenous imagination and the policing of indigenous imaginaries take many forms. Projects arising out of well-intended desires to heal indigenous peoples, by engaging their arts of imaginations, to reduce their suffering, to enable and empower them, or develop indigenous knowledge systems, are often equally as problematic (Rathwell & Armitage, 2016). The Anthropologist, Kim Tallbear, has already well exposed how deeply engrained discourses around the need to protect indigenous peoples and help them survive the threat of extinction have been to settler colonialism, both historically and in the present (Tallbear 2013, 149-150). Contemporary projects, like that of the Resilience Billboard Exhibition, which aim on the surface to give the power to indigenous peoples to 'reimagine' themselves, by making and circulating their own images, as if doing this would validate the results as authentic and free from the dangers of repeating colonialism, fall into the same kind of category. 'Stewardship of the land, respect for the natural world and adaptation to change are values that have always characterized the resilience of Indigenous cultures,' argues Lea-Ann Martin, the exhibition curator (2018). These values are epitomized in *We are the Land* by Lianne Marie Leda Charlie, which according to Martin, depicts 'the timeless connections between Indigenous people and the land,

past, present and into the future' (Martin 2018). The problem is that these ways of representing indigeneity as existing 'outside of time' and irreducibly connected to land have become integral to colonial and clichéd imaginaries (Chandler & Reid 2019).



Image 2: *We are the Land* by Lianne Marie Leda Charlie, 2015.

In this article I am not only interested in the ways indigeneity is represented, politically, in images, to underscore the 'resilience' of indigenous peoples. In contrast with the circulation of images of indigenous resilience, and as a way of cracking open that one particular and dominant image, I will excavate the alternatives which indigenous imaginations avail for us, of themselves, their cultures, and ways of being. There are vast differences between indigenous imaginaries, when we take the trouble to open them up and examine their potentials, and the ways the indigenous imagination is represented by the curators of images of indigenous resilience. Indigenous imaginaries and the imaginations from which they derive are always political, but as I will explore, in radically different, and indeed, contradictory ways.

4. Indigenous poetics

One of the most well known Sámi poets of all time was a man called Paulus Utsi (1918-1975). Hailing from Jokkmokk, a small town in Swedish Lapland, Utsi became well known in the Sámi community in the 1960s and early 1970s as a pioneer of the poem as a form of political expression (Svensson 1978, 229-230). Before his death, Utsi penned a collection titled *Giela giela*, which translates into English as 'Ensnare the Language' (Gaski 1997). In other words, it was language itself that Utsi urged his fellow Sámi to hunt and trap. Never, I believe, was that injunction of Utsi's more urgent than it is today. Once we open them up to proper investigation, indigenous imaginaries can be seen to be far in excess of the compliant and accepting modes of being engendered in dominant Western discourses. They can also be seen as challenging these strategies, in which indigeneity is made into an homogenous mode

of being, through Western discourses which prey on their lives, practices, and ways of being, rendering them functional to the aims and ambitions of the West.

Utsi's poetry still remains, in spite of the global attention commanded by elements of Sámi culture today, largely obscure to Western readers. His work was always written in Sámi, and sometimes translated into Swedish. English language translations of his poems are still hard to find and access, and where they do appear have often been translated from the Swedish rather than directly from Sámi. Their translation and the wider interest in Sámi poetry that developed in the 1970s and 1980s occurred in the context of the development of ecopolitical and ecopoetic movements, which often took inspiration from indigenous voices. Utsi's poems often contain descriptions of non-human nature. For example, 'Snowstorm', and 'The Hut's Smoke', which were translated into English for the Canadian ecophilosophical journal, *The Trumpeter*, in the 1980s, contain descriptions of reindeer, animals the herding of which is integral to Sámi ways of life, and birch trees, which are poetic emblems of the landscapes of the homelands of the Sámi people (Utsi 1987). Yet other poems, for example, 'Thought Work', describe the distinctively human world of thinking and doing.

Tool in, tool your thoughts
in silver, wood and bone

The poem begins by inciting the reader (Utsi 1987, 18). Clearly Utsi is referencing the traditional materials from which Sámi handicrafts are made, but in a way that is celebrative of the distinctly human capacity to work nature into tools and through which humans are enabled to shape their worlds. The poem continues:

Spin, spin your reflections
into rope and threads of skin.
Weave, weave fast your fate
in shoe-laces and wagon straps.

Art itself, in Sámi culture, as Gaski tells us, has a distinctly functional value (Gaski 2011, 33). *Duodji*, as it is called, is a tradition in which value derives from utility, and the arts of which depend on the abilities of the maker to subject non-human nature to instrumentalization. When Western theorists, like Timothy Morton reduce 'indigenous people' to a subject-position of alliance with non-human nature (2017, x) they do so by ignoring these foundations of many indigenous cultures and practices, which, in many senses are yet more instrumentalizing of non-human nature than the Western cultures, supposedly defined and made ill by that propensity.

Another widely regarded Sámi poet, Nils-Aslak Valkeapää, himself a relative of Utsi, once condemned 'the self-righteous grandeur' of the colonizers of the Arctic tundra, and sought to give counter-representation to 'indigenous peoples' values and philosophy', including those of the Sámi, but also of all other indigenous peoples with whom Valkeapää identified (Gaski 2010, 301–305). What would Valkeapää say today, were he still alive, in observation of the importance now given to indigenous

knowledge, by the Arctic Council that governs his own land, Sápmi, as well as by so many other states and powers? Would he simply affirm the embrace of indigenous knowledge, welcome the interests of anthropologists and other Western thinkers and scientists in indigenous ways of being, as steps forward in the advancement of indigenous freedoms, or would he display the same cynicism with which he condemned the colonialisms of his own time?

Poetry itself can be a powerful resource for equipping peoples with the intelligence and necessary cynicism with which to avoid discursive traps and make language and concepts work for and not against peoples. Not least because poetry incites the imaginations of peoples by deploying images in ways that open up the possibility of new worlds, rather than simply governing worlds in the ways that states and international institutions seek to (Chandler & Reid, 2016). The poetry of Valkeapää contains many different ideas, images and thoughts but, like that of Utsi before him, is well known for the importance and beauty it attaches to the image of reindeer. The reindeer herd is a central motif in many of Valkeapää's works (Gaski 2010, 312).

On the one hand this motif might seem simply to embody the poet's defence of Sámi traditions as yet another example of their appreciation of non-human nature and life forms over and against the hubristic humanism of the coloniser (Gaski 2010, 306–307). Reindeer are revered in Sámi culture, it is said, because as 'perfectly adapted Arctic survivors' they provide meat, milk, hides for clothing, shoes, and tents, bones and antlers for tools, handicrafts and weapons, and their sinews are used for clothing (Wall 2019). This is also attested to in the language of the Sámi, which is said to have over 1000 words for describing reindeer (Magga 2006, 31). The reasons for this are not necessarily poetic nor owing to any sense of reverence, but due to the basic need of reindeer herders to be able to describe individual reindeer as exactly as possible, as a means of identification. It is a highly advanced taxonomic system that works to classify reindeer on the basis of age, size, color and appearance (Magga 2006, 25). The fact that indigenous peoples like the Sámi invent and employ taxonomic systems to know and make sense of their worlds and resources may come as a surprise to western thinkers who would otherwise have us believe that indigeneity is defined by an opposition to such ways of knowing (see Spriner & Turpin 2017, xiii–xiv). Taxonomic methods of identification and classification are necessary for Sámi reindeer herders in order to determine which reindeer belongs to whom, because reindeer from one herd are liable to get mixed up with another (Magga 2006, 25). In other words, it owes to the insistence of property - that institution and practice which so many contemporary theorists of indigeneity have claimed has no place in indigenous cultures. It owes also to the needs of the Sámi to decide which of the reindeer are ready for slaughter (Magga 2006, 25). In other words, the complexities and refinements of Sámi language, when it comes to reindeer, owes much not to any simple love, care and interests in non-human nature, but to their objectification and instrumentalization of it for their own peculiarly human ends; ends which they have in common with many other non-indigenous peoples, and which conveniently

get left out of the ethnographic descriptions of indigenous peoples by their colonial observers.

The Sámi poet Valkeapää had no interest himself in continuing the tradition of herding reindeer (Gaski 2010, 316). The reindeer he owned were of a distinctly 'private' nature, existing in his head, the property of his imagination, shared with others by way of his poetry (Gaski 2010, 316). Within the poetics through which Valkeapää constructs his images of reindeer, through the deployment of Sámi language, the reader can encounter ideas that conjoin also with the interests of indigenous peoples, including the Sámi, in maintaining their autonomy from Western powers. Here the reader, whether indigenous or non-indigenous, can encounter anthropomorphized images of reindeer, through the redeployment of the taxonomic vocabulary by which the Sámi proprietize reindeer into a poetic language and aestheticized form that also evokes a political sensibility of a distinctly human kind. Property too, has its own aesthetics, and it is not simply a liberal western one.

In a poem published in his book *The Sun, My Father*, for example, the words of the poem, which themselves are drawn from the taxonomic vocabulary of reindeer, spread out, gradually, across the pages in a manner that, to the eye of the reader, directly evokes the image of a herd of reindeer moving from right to left in the opposite direction of the reader. The first reindeer the reader encounters is that of *Menodahkes* (Gaski 2010, 320). *Menodahkes* represents not just any reindeer but the reindeer who 'thrives best by itself', and which 'is in the habit of trying to avoid being taken hold of' and 'prefers to keep to itself' (*ibid.*). It relates to the verb, *eaidat*, 'to become a stranger to something or someone, to keep apart by itself, without having anything to do with others' (*ibid.*).

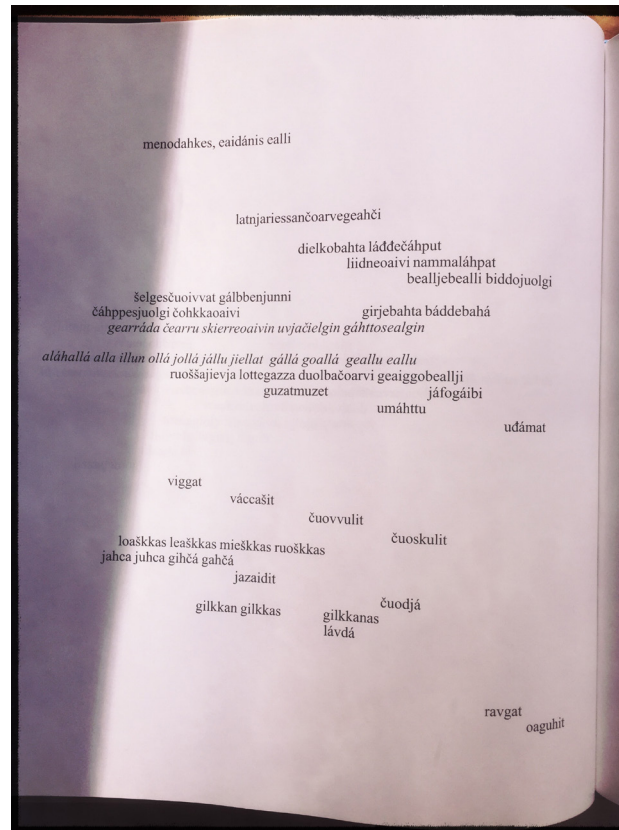


Image 3: *The Sun, My Father* by Nils-Aslak Valkeapää.

While, in ordinary Sámi language, *Menodahkes* might be used to designate a reindeer of that nature for purposes merely of distinguishing ownership, in the poetry of Valkeapää this feature of the behavior of the animal takes on an aesthetic form. The resistance of the reindeer to its indigenous master becomes itself a poetic substance. Becoming a stranger, maintaining distance, avoiding being taken hold of; these are fundamentally political practices, the poetics of which are integral to Valkeapää's work and ethics, and to Sámi poetics and practices as a whole. These indigenous poetics of autonomy recall the Yaqui shaman, Don Juan, whose life and teachings were detailed in the anthropology of Carlos Castaneda and which described a set of practices that come close to *eidat*, and a way of being *Menodahkes* as it were. Like Valkeapää, Don Juan taught respect for the earth and for species of life other than humans, while at the same time being immensely concerned with the arts by which we humans can best live. He taught the arts by which the indigenous subject can 'build a fog' around itself and cultivate the 'ultimate freedom of being unknown' (Castaneda 1972, 31). Don Juan emphasised the importance of disconnection as life practice and as the basis of ethics. 'Your friends, those who have known you for a long time, you must leave them quickly,' he advised Castaneda (*id.*, 42). Of course, it is often said that Castaneda's study of Don Juan was a fiction, and lacking any 'scientific' grounding, but others, including the great anthropologist, Rodney Needham, have argued that it is among the best works that anthropology has

ever produced, precisely on account of its deployment of imagination as method (Needham 1978, 76). If the disciplinary knowledge of the western academy is to do justice to indigenous cultures of shamanism, which are themselves based on 'immoderate capacities' for imaginative fantasy, then it would do well to lose its belief in 'science' and actively embrace the powers of the imagination as method, which Castaneda no doubt did; indeed with a 'literary artistry' unrivalled by any other anthropologist since (Needham 1978, 51-76).

In her analysis, Kathleen Osgood Dana has argued that Valkeapää, also, is best understood as a 'shaman-poet' whose vision penetrates time itself, employing poetry as a power to look into the past, future and reality itself (Dana 2004, 9). *The Sun, My Father* is itself, she argues, a kind of shamanic drum, 'capable of seeing into other worlds, into the past, and into the future' (*id.*, 9). Like Don Juan, what Valkeapää is really concerned with is truth: the search for it, and the ability of the subject to align itself with its own truths, to act without doubt or remorse. 'I have no doubts or remorse,' as Don Juan said, 'everything I do is my decision and my responsibility,' because in this world 'there is no time for regrets or doubts. There is only time for decisions' (Castaneda 1972, 56). Like Don Juan, Valkeapää's shamanism seeks to free the self from doubt and attain the power of decision that is the hallmark of sovereign subjectivity.

In much of the literature on indigeneity today we encounter the claim that indigenous subjectivity is defined by a sense of the interconnectedness of the self to others. The life histories of indigenous peoples are said to show a moral ordering of sociality that emphasises mutual support and concern' (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 15). Doubtless these are important aspects of many indigenous cultures and life practices as they are probably, of most cultures. Indigenous cultures, however, are also rich in ideas about how the self cannot just support but achieve power over others, hunt and trap, deceive, and outwit the other. The recent case of the attempts of a Christian missionary, John Allen Chau, to connect with an indigenous people known as the Sentinelese who inhabit an island in the Indian Ocean quite well illustrates the point. Chau is believed to have been speared to death by the Sentinelese, a people with deft archery skills, who have been killing anyone who attempts to land on their island and make contact since records of their existence began (Wallace 2018). These are not cultures defined, simply, if at all, by 'mutual support and concern' but by a will to defend their autonomy, to the death. Which is every bit as admirable, and possibly even more so, than the moral capacities for care and concern by which scholars today package indigenous peoples to make them more appetizing to liberal sensibilities.

Imagination is perhaps the greatest weapon that the human has. In the West, the power to deceive, hunt and trap the other has, since Plato at least, been understood to owe to the power which some humans hold over the imaginations of other humans: the ability to deploy images, and make the illusory appear true (Plato 1993). In the Western tradition it has been seen to be at the root of many human problems, from madness to political fanaticism to illegitimate government. In Indigenous cultures too, though, writers state that we can encounter the same ideas, involving power

and imagination, perhaps even in a more affirmative way. Valkeapää writes, in *The Sun, My Father*, much of images, employing the Sámi words *govva*, to evoke a world which, in Osgood Dana's descriptions of it, is itself *govvás máilbmi*, a 'world full of images', or world-as-image (Dana 2004, 9). The word *govva* evokes, in Northern Sámi language as much as in its Finnish language equivalent *kuva* (picture/image), Osgood Dana also argues, the particular image of a drum, and the drum of the shaman himself especially, an instrument for the making of images (*ibid.*). At the same time, it also evokes the power of the hunter, for both *govva* in Northern Sámi and *kuva* in Finnish were originally terms for decoys used by hunters to lure birds (Dana 2004, 9). The image in Valkeapää's poetry is unambiguously powerful, as a means with which to hunt and trap, empower the self, and live more. As Dana expresses it, images are, for Valkeapää, 'potent emblems of life itself, written both on the drum and on the land' (Dana 2004, 13). It is not incidental to Valkeapää's work that he also made a lot of music (Lehtola 2003, 186). Contemporarily his influence is testified to strongly in the field of Sámi rap, in the work of rappers such as Ailu Valle, who cite him directly (Nykänen 2015).

The suppression of Sámi culture in the Arctic proceeded through the confiscation and destruction of Sámi drums; the *govadasat*, with which they conjured images (*id.*, 19). The war on indigenous peoples in the Arctic, as conducted more or less worldwide by Western colonial regimes, was a war upon their image-making powers, a war to either extinguish or control their imaginations. As it was for those indigenous peoples unfortunate enough to have encountered the Jesuits who colonised their imaginations, not just by placing pictures before their eyes but by imprinting pictures upon the bodies of natives, 'so that they would take possession of their viewers' imaginations and dreams' (Belting 2011, 40). The struggle against the imposition of a particular imaginary of an indigenous mode of being, can only happen through the restitution of the powers of imagination. Today however indigenous peoples are facing a new and different, more subtle and clever regime of power relations, which seeks to imagine for them what their imaginations can do. Colonial images of indigenous peoples as exemplars of resilience are more difficult to reject and destroy because, as we will see in the next section, they claim legitimacy as icons of indigenous resistance to western colonialism.

5. The image of indigenous resilience

How does the production of the image of indigenous resilience work? Today the colonization of indigenous imaginaries takes more subtle forms when compared with the past.² One example, which I want to draw attention to here, is that of one of the most iconic recent images of indigenous resilience: Ernesto Yerena Montejano's portrait of Lakota elder, Helen 'Granny' Redfeather at Standing Rock, which was developed for the 'We the People' mobilization of indigenous peoples and their

² This section of the paper draws from my earlier essay "'We The Resilient': Colonizing Indigeneity in the Era of Trump' in *Resilience* (Reid 2019).

settler allies against the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States in 2016. Following Trump's racist and xenophobic electoral campaign, and in the wake of his election to become the 45th President of the United States, in November of 2016, Montejano teamed up with fellow artists Jessica Sabogal and Shepard Fairey, and the non-profit Amplifier Foundation, a self-described 'art machine for social change', to produce works for the Foundation's campaign. The campaign's objective was, as described to its Kickstarter funders, to resist Trump, by flooding Washington D.C. with symbols of hope on January 20th of 2017, the date of Trump's inauguration. And indeed, pictures and video footage of the marches and demonstrations that took place that day, in Washington, as well as throughout much of America, indicate the efficacy of the campaign. To look at those pictures is to see people marching in their numbers carrying the images created by Fairey, one of an African-American woman, another of a Muslim woman, and one of a Latino woman, each titled, 'We the People'. We can also see Sabogal's image being displayed, depicting two women, looking at each other tenderly, one above the other, whose neck she cradles, and whose hat reads 'Women are perfect'. The image itself is titled underneath, 'We the Indivisible'.



Image 4: *We the Resilient*, by Ernesto Yerena, 2017.

Yerena's contribution was a stenciled image, featuring Lakota elder Helen 'Granny' Redfeather, a frontline warrior fighting against the Dakota Access Pipeline at

Standing Rock, where Yerena himself also spent time in the November of Trump's election. Yerena's work situates the Lakota elder underneath its title 'We the Resilient: Have Been Here Before'. Giving background to his work, reasons for making it, and thinking behind it, Yerena explained:

My relationship with the U.S. is very complicated...I was born here, I live here, but the government is like an occupying force on this land. The colonization process was so violent. It outlawed people from being able to practice Indigenous traditions and languages. How, through all that, have people been able to survive? Considering how hostile the attempted erasure was toward everything to do with our people, Indigenous people, it's incredible. That's resilience. (Gursoz 2017.)

The image Yerena created soon became ubiquitous, a symbol of hope and defiance for peoples protesting the xenophobia and white supremacist racism which Trump's election represented. On January 21, 2017, Yerena could be seen distributing 4000 of his 'We the Resilient' posters within 15 minutes at the Women's March in Los Angeles. Yerena himself was born in California, close to the Mexican border, and identifies as a 'straight cis-gender Mexican-American Chicano male'. Although identifying as Chicano, he also strongly identifies as indigenous. As such his work is dedicated to exposing 'the weight of colonization and the effects of Westernization of Indigenous cultures'. 'Trump is the Chernobyl of colonialism', he explains, 'but I don't want to make artwork that's against him; it gets too dark. I want to make artwork that's for something. I'm for dignity. I'm for resilience. I'm for Mother Earth. I'm for honoring elders. I'm for working with my friends. I'm for making positive messages' (Gursoz 2017).

The power of Yerena's image of the resilient indigenous grandmother, Helen Redfeather, to have not only made the protests at Standing Rock of indigenous peoples fighting against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline more visible and known, but to connect indigenous struggles and subjectivities to the wider struggles and protests against Trump, 'the Chernobyl of colonialism' as well as global resistances to continuing forms of colonialism worldwide, is significant. Yet at the same time the underscoring of the image of this indigenous warrior as a figure defined by her and their collective resilience is problematic for all the reasons already stated.

What then to make of that particular image of indigenous resilience? And what to make of the many people carrying the 'We are Resilient' banners on the marches and protests against Trump? Is that image, and the people spreading it, on the streets of American cities, as well as virtually by dissemination on websites and via social media accounts, also to be condemned, along with the discourse and concept of resilience itself as part of the problem of colonialism today? Is resilience universally subjugating, or does it leave itself open to different usages when it comes to the indigenous? Are there different ways of imagining indigenous resilience? And how do indigenous imaginaries avail themselves of such differences?

I recognize the salience of critiques of the critique of resilience that have appeared in recent years. I read with interest the work of colleagues, such as Peter Rogers, who have argued that we must avoid the cynicism of a blanket dismissal of resilience and seek to distinguish between its positive and negative aspects, and recognize instead its potential; a potential for more open and inclusive democratic political orders, as he has claimed (Rogers 2015, 66). The geographer Ben Anderson has made similar kinds of points when asking 'what kind of thing is resilience?' and by imploring that we make the connections between resilience and neoliberalism, 'into a question to be explored rather than a presumption from which analysis begins' (Anderson 2015, 60). These are useful interventions, the basis for which echoes throughout this phenomenon of the power of indigenous resilience to mobilize and symbolize popular resistances of indigenous peoples and their allies to extractive industries and the states supporting them. The resilience at stake in strategy documents of states and international organizations is not simply the same as that which was enunciated on the streets of Washington, Los Angeles and other American cities as indigenous peoples and their allies took to those streets to fight the election of Donald Trump.

There is a difference likewise between indigenous peoples imagining themselves as resilient and intergovernmental forums made up of the representative of colonial states, such as the Arctic Council, saying that indigenous peoples are resilient. For one thing, the resilience which indigenous peoples claim for themselves refers fundamentally to their having survived a centuries old project of colonial extermination, while the resilience which colonial states now identify with indigenous peoples more often refers to their abilities to cope with environmental disasters and pays little heed to their own history of colonial violence against indigenous peoples. Perhaps we need more imagination when it comes to the political theorization of resilience, and recognition of the multiplicity of possible worlds which indigenous resilience makes possible.

Nevertheless, there is a surface of contact between these different usages of resilience, and while their points of articulation are indeed different and to some extent opposed, they are nevertheless related by the concept itself. In each case, the indigenous subject which resilience refers to is defined by its capacity to survive. But is there anything problematic in that? Ernesto Yerena Montejano, like everybody else, and every other entity with a stake in the future, has also to survive. An artist has to make a living, and art, for the most part and for the majority of artists pays badly. In Yerena's case, survival requires once in a while taking a job that entails a relative sacrifice of principle. Which is why Yerena has sold his images to the manufacturer of the energy drink, Red Bull. Some of their cans are decorated with his signature rose symbolizing dignity and a *calavera* (Mexican sugar skull). As he candidly explains, 'sometimes corporations will hire me because they want to tap into the "Latino" market. I take some of the jobs because I need to keep paying rent, but it's a fine line. What I really want is to make critical, challenging work. A lot of times I have to self-fund [these pieces] or work with a small stipend. Unfortunately, the people with the best ideas don't have a lot of money' (Gursoz 2017).

Many of us know this conflict between good intention and its sacrifice to political and economic power. Images, ideas, concepts and arguments are all eminently open to manipulation, appropriation and commodification by agencies whose intentions and effects are malign, or simply self-interested, as is the case with the profit-maximizing Red Bull, an Austrian company with the highest market share of any energy drink in the world, selling five billion cans a year; a market share that owes in no small part to the distinctiveness and recognizability of the blue silver design of the cans in which its drink is sold and on which Yerena's designs appear.

There is no direct connection between Yerena's work for Red Bull and the 'We The Resilient' poster that he made for the campaign against Trump and in defense of indigenous rights. In effect, the former served the latter. Selling to Red Bull meant Yerena could pay the rent and paying the rent meant Yerena could design for the non-profit Amplifier Foundation and its political campaign against the particular formation of white racist neoliberal capital that Trump's presidency exists to defend. There is no reason to believe Red Bull saw any capital in hiring an artist with his politics or with his links to indigenous peoples and political struggles. As Yerena is aware and states clearly, Red Bull were interested in tapping into the Latino market and it is the resonance of his designs with Chicano culture that attracted them. But there is some sense of a connection, vague and difficult to see, but there somewhere nevertheless, in this collaboration, between Yerena and Red Bull on the one hand, and the 'collaborations' taking place between resilience and neoliberalism on the other.

Red Bull, as the most iconic energy drink of its generation epitomizes resilience culture. It is what you drink when you are struggling to cope, stay awake, or persevere amid stress, physical or psychic. If you need resilience in a liquid form you need Red Bull. It is also the drink that, besides giving you resilience, gives you stereotypes. On the website, Native Appropriations, a forum for discussing representations of native peoples, including stereotypes and cultural appropriation, a commercial campaign of Red Bull beginning in 2009 is described as reading like a 'check list of native stereotypes' (Adrienne K 2010). Amid tipis, smoke signals, war whoops, and 'tom-tom' drumming, two natives, Brown Bear and White Dove, express in third person broken English their frustrated sexual desire for each other.

'Greetings White Dove, my heart is heavy', says Brown Bear. 'Mine too, Brown Bear', replies White Dove. 'The end of the year is near, and we still can't get together. Brown bear can't jump that far!' complains Brown Bear. 'And White Dove can't fly! We are only united in mind' concludes White Dove. 'Yes, but my body longs for you too', confirms Brown Bear. White Dove sighs. 'No Red Bull, no happy ending', warns the narrator. Yes Red Bull is not only the drink that gives you resilience. It's the drink that gets you laid. Or it's the drink that gives you the necessary resilience to get laid. And, which in sexualizing resilience, also sexualizes indigeneity, making a commercial stereotype out of indigenous perseverance, and stoking colonial myths.

Red Bull is responsible for mythic representations of indigenous peoples, but what about resilience itself? In March of 2017 the *Journal of Multidisciplinary*

Healthcare published an article titled 'Mental Resilience, Perceived Immune Functioning, and Health'. The article is a generic representative of its kind, describing resilience as the 'trait that enables an individual to recover from stress and to face the next stressor with optimism' (Lantman *et al.* 2017, 107). People with resilience, it argues, 'have a better mental and physical health' (Lantman *et al.* 2017, 107). People with reduced immune functioning tend to be those who are less resilient, while people with resilience tend to have better functioning immune systems, is the conclusion it draws on the basis of a large empirical study (Lantman *et al.* 2017, 112). Like a lot of medical research, the article had as many as eight authors, among who is named a Dr Joris Verster from the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands. In the Disclosure section of the article the authors list the sources of financial support that have funded their research. Verster, an advocate of resilience, lists among the different funders he is in the patronage of, Red Bull. Which is interesting. In fact Verster is also the author of another study, published 2016, in the *Journal of Human Psychopharmacology*, titled 'Mixing Alcohol With Energy Drink: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis' (2016).

The article addresses the popular social belief that people who mix energy drinks such as Red Bull with alcohol end up drinking more alcohol than they ordinarily would. Reassuringly, Verster and his colleagues conclude that their research proves that mixing energy drinks with alcohol does not increase the total amount of alcohol consumed. Which is also interesting. What to make of these connections between the science of resilience, so assured in its conclusions concerning the reality of resilience as a property of healthy people everywhere, and an energy drink manufacturer which funds the science of resilience, and which employs the same science to defend itself from mythic representations of the properties of the product as a source of alcoholism and ill health? A corporation, and icon of the neoliberal economy, furthermore, which sells its products on the basis of colonial representations of indigenous people, as well as by decorating its cans with the designs of an artist who, unwittingly no doubt, is himself a proponent of indigenous resilience, and the creator of what is one of the most iconic images of indigenous resilience, the picture of Lakota elder Helen 'Granny' Redfeather, carried on banners by the many people who showed up to protest the election of Donald Trump, in Washington DC and other American cities in January of 2017.

6. Reimagining indigeneity

Given the complexity of these power relations, how, if at all, might indigenous images of resilience be reclaimed? When and where does indigenous art and image making become political and how to recognize when it expresses a politics which is no longer neoliberal? How might we all 'create networks of reciprocal resurgent movements with humans and other humans' and radically imagine our way 'out of domination', as Leanne Simpson urges us (Simpson 2017, 10)? Which among us is 'not afraid to let those imaginings destroy the pillars of settler colonialism' (Simpson 2017, 10)?

Regardless of the many, complex as well as unwitting, ways in which images of indigeneity serve a neoliberal imaginary, indigenous peoples and indigenous art does no doubt offer alternatives to the stultifying image of indigenous resilience generated by this nexus of relations between science, art and corporate capital that, in turn, governs indigenous resistance. Judith Bessant and Rob Watts have usefully detailed the ways in which community development projects aimed at the neoliberal governance of indigenous youth, in Western Australia, and operating through the making of video art and digital media, contain the basis for politicization, because they entail the possibility for indigenous peoples to reclaim images of indigenous peoples for themselves (Bessant & Watts 2016, 1). Are there ways in which indigenous propaganda art, of which Yerená's 'We the Resilient' poster is an obvious example, breaks with a neoliberal strategy of interpellation?

In the Arctic an interesting and potentially political example exists in the form of Suohpanterror, a largely anonymous group of Sámi 'artists', whose propaganda art made in the form of posters has achieved wide popularity in Finnish Lapland and beyond. All of the images which I discuss here are available to see on their website (2019). What they do is to appropriate iconic images drawn often from Western traditions of art and image-making and subject them to their own defacement such that they function to politicize the governance of Sámi identity and draw attention to the continued colonization of their homelands in Finnish Lapland and the wider Arctic region (Junka-Aikio 2018).

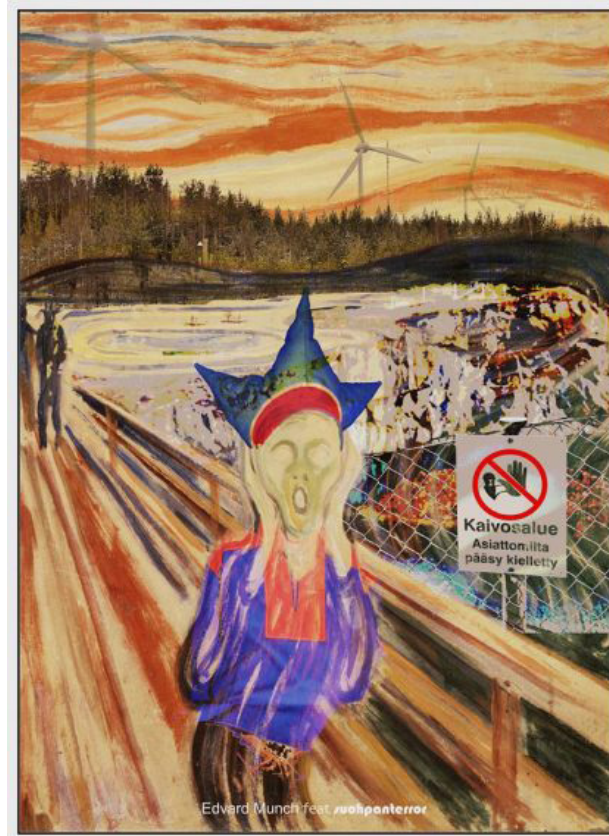


Image 5: *The Scream* by Suohpanterror.

Rather than attempt to 'stay true' to Sámi aesthetic traditions, Suohpanterror have deliberately embraced and subverted Western techniques, symbols and images (Hautala-Hirvioja 2015). For example, Edvard Munch's *The Scream* is repurposed such that the figure is dressed in traditional clothing of the Sámi people and screaming in horror at the exploitation of the land. Wind turbines appear in the background of the defaced image of the painting and a sign warns in Finnish language, 'Mining Area: Trespassing Forbidden.' Their use of *The Scream* is interesting not least in so far as it is an iconic image of Western expressionism in art, a movement which drew deliberately on insights derived from medical and psychological sciences to depict the human unconscious, deconstruct and explore human emotions, moods and psychiatric disorders of depression and anxiety of which Munch himself was a victim (Kandel 2012). The image has been claimed to depict the distortion of the human by the subjectivizing force and flows of nature.

In its appropriation by Suohpanterror, the figure suffers the distortions of the natural landscape marked by an industrialization, which it feels itself powerless to do anything about. In that sense, it appropriates an image that aestheticizes the human/nature divide and depicts the fear and anxiety, which flows from modern man's encounter with its sublimity and reverses the power relations involved, such that it is nature which is threatened by human encroachment. But the image does more than that, for it also appropriates the aesthetics of neurosis, which underpin modern psychiatric discourses and images of selfhood. In so much of the Western anthropological literature on indigeneity we encounter the claim that indigenous peoples are above and beyond any sense of self, that they do not possess a self, and that their concept of otherness is ontologically inaccessible for self-minded cultures such as those that define the West. Here, in the iconography of Suohpanterror, by way of contrast, the indigenous self is asserted, and in every bit as neurotic a modality as the psychiatrized versions of the self, which Munch's art depicted.

Indeed, while drawing attention to the kinds of land-related issues which indigenous politics is well known for, the images Suohpanterror make tend mostly to leave nature to the background while foregrounding, like Munch and other modernists, distinctly human figures. Nature figures as backdrop in the political aesthetics of Suohpanterror while the human is foregrounded. Often the images celebrate a violent militancy. For example, an image of a Sámi offering a handshake to a businessman carrying a briefcase is juxtaposed with an image of the same Sámi delivering a karate style kick to his head. Again, we are a far cry from the image of the indigenous suffering the instrumental and structural violence of the colonial state and not being equipped to fight back other than through strategies of queering and performativity.

Reindeer, that motif of the Sámi poets who came before Suohpanterror, also appear in the images, but in radically different ways. In one image a military checkpoint on a road into Lapland is depicted. The politics of the checkpoint depicted is ambiguous. Is it a checkpoint manned by the State and an expression of colonial power? The combat fatigues and guns of the soldiers in the image manning it would

indicate as much. Or is it a Sámi checkpoint designed to keep the colonizers out from their lands? ‘Area of reindeer husbandry’ reads the text in the familiar language that does indeed appear in signs around Lapland. A smaller sign appears in the foreground of the image in which a drawing of a reindeer is depicted as is the case of many signs around Lapland. ‘Stop! Halt!’ the sign in the foreground of the image reads. ‘Checkpoint Sapmi No. 169’.



Image 6: *Checkpoint* by Suohpanterror.

The reference is to ILO Convention 169, which binds states to consult with indigenous peoples about the uses of natural resources on their lands, and which Finland has so far refused to ratify; a refusal which is denounced in the Sámi Manifesto, endorsed by the principal artist behind Suohpanterror, Jenni Laiti, and her collaborators (Holmberg & Laiti 2015). In another image, a group of Sámi and their reindeer are depicted standing before a wall, in evocation of the walls erected in Israel, which functions to divide Palestinians from each other and which for many symbolizes colonial occupation. The wall, in the image of Suohpanterror, likewise divides one group of Sámi from another, depicted on the other side, as well as from the fells that appear in the distance on the other side of the wall. In another image reindeer are depicted crossing the fells marked in text as *Gallok*, the Sámi name for Kallak, an area close to Jokkmokk, the town where the poet Paulus Utsi was born, and where

the Sámi are now mobilizing to prevent the proposals of the British mining company Beowulf to build an iron ore mine.

All of these images express a very different imaginary of indigeneity to that which enables the image of indigenous resilience. Indeed what we see happening here is an indigenous people doing a cultural appropriation of a political modernity denied to them by the Western guardians of the image of indigenous peoples as existing outside of and in antagonism to that of modernity. An appropriation that shifts the image of indigeneity out of its colonial grounding in the capacities that the colonizer has sought to pin indigenous people down to, and asserts the radical equality of indigenous people to the access of distinctly political capacities for emancipation from the imagination of the other. The image of the resilient indigenous subject is precisely that, a product of the imagination of the colonizer, projected onto indigenous peoples, including the Sámi, who as Tuija Hautala-Hirvioja has told, have long since had to struggle to maintain their own identities and senses of self-worth against colonial regimes which have forced them to adapt to majority cultures and values (2017, 99). It is absurd that today the indigenous capacity for 'adaptation' is celebrated as a feature of their cultures and ways of being, when it is a capacity forced upon them by colonialism. Likewise twee images of indigenous peoples 'existing as and being part of nature' are elements of such 'mental colonisation' which Sámi and other indigenous peoples must still reckon with when confronting regimes of power and discourse which claim to be supportive of decolonization when, actually, they are not (Hautala-Hirvioja 2017, 99).

7. Conclusion

Imagination is integral to the political strategies by which colonial powers have sought control over indigenous populations and the image of their indigeneity, as well as to the strategies of radical resistance of indigenous peoples to colonialism historically as much as today. The policing of the indigenous imagination and the image of indigeneity it avails to us permeates Western discourses on indigenous peoples as much as it does the reception of the political aesthetics of indigeneity. When we examine, more closely, the actuality of indigenous aesthetics, and the development of indigenous poetics, we get a very different picture, literally, to that told and represented to us of how indigenous peoples see themselves in art and political aesthetics. Far from the image of indigenous peoples celebrating their subjugation to a natural world that is beyond their control, the analysis of indigenous poetics made here reveals all the tropes of the political modernity which indigenous peoples are represented as existing outside of and against. Corporate sponsored artists, as well as corporate capital itself, may still possess the power to control some of the images of indigeneity that circulate, as resilient, but there are plenty of other images available which project alternative and more empowering visions of what indigeneity entails and can, in the future, become. Of course, for indigenous peoples to reject the discourse of resilience, as it is applied to them by the international order, will entail certain risks; the risk of not meeting the colonial expectations of their

would-be masters. However, like my colleagues, Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen, I believe it is a risk worth taking (2018, 127-144). Whatever is lost in the process, in terms of rights and recognitions, will in turn allow for a more complex and varied understanding of the nature of indigeneity (Lindroth & Sinevaara-Niskanen 2018, 144). Without such complexity and variation indigenous peoples will remain hostages to the colonial imagination of the West, possessive of rights which afford them no real autonomy, recognized not for what they are but what the West wants them to be, and forever subject to the whims of the colonial order.

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