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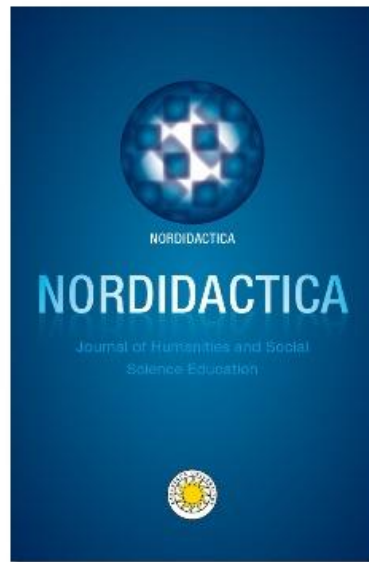
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# Ordinary Finns and Minority Folk: The Representation of Minorities and Colonialism in History Education in Finland

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*Abstract: Although the population of Finland has always been culturally and linguistically diverse, history education in Finland has nonetheless long excluded the history of its minorities and its colonial past. Instead, history education has portrayed Finland as a historically homogeneous nation-state. This article examines the representation of minorities in Finland and the portrayal of colonialism in 18 history textbooks used in Finnish basic education, written in both Finnish and Swedish. It uses discourse analysis to investigate how the selected history textbooks discuss minorities and colonialism within their texts. The study finds that there are significant differences between textbooks written in Finnish and Swedish, the latter including more information of, and critical perspectives on, minorities and colonialism. Nonetheless, many minority groups remain invisible in all the analysed textbooks. Finally, the textbooks, for their part, mainly associate colonialism with overseas activities and do not delve into Nordic colonialism in Sápmi.*

KEYWORDS: HISTORY EDUCATION, MINORITIES, TEXTBOOK RESEARCH

**About the author.** Tanja Kohvakka is a PhD researcher at the Faculty of Education and Welfare Studies, Åbo Akademi University, Finland. Her dissertation examines the representation of minorities in history education in Finland.

## Introduction

History textbooks have traditionally portrayed modern nation-states as predominantly homogenous societies, which has often led to the exclusion of different minorities from the dominant historical narrative while focusing on the majority population (Ahonen 2001; Pingel, 2010; Mikander, 2016). Although history education has become more inclusive and multiperspective in the past decades, studies nevertheless show that prejudices and stereotypes are still perpetuated in school textbooks (Mikander, 2016, p. 50). Similarly, the discussion regarding Nordic involvement in colonialism has often been silenced in history education (Mikander, 2015; Hakala et al., 2018). As Abdou points out, ‘history education continues to largely propagate single master narratives that aim to serve nation states in engineering collective national identities’ (Abdou, 2018, p. 478). In Finland, which has always been multicultural and connected to colonial systems, this causes considerable damage to the minority pupils whose identity development is not supported by exclusive history education (Wilkinson, 2014; Hakala et al., 2018). In doing so, students do not gain an adequate understanding of colonial history and its local and global impact (Wilkinson, 2014).

For centuries, various linguistic, religious, and cultural minorities have lived in the geographic area that constitutes modern Finland, but defining who are the minority groups is not an easy task. The Constitution of Finland is not explicit in its definition of national minorities, and in fact, only Finland-Swedes and Roma are mentioned as minority groups while Sámi are acknowledged as an indigenous people (Hannikainen & Jutila, 2016). The Minority Rights Group Finland (MRG Finland) includes Finland-Swedes, Roma, Karelians, Jews, Russian speakers or ‘Old Russians’ as well as Tatars (Daher et al., 2020) to the traditional minorities. The Finnish National Agency for Education, the core institution in developing the Finnish education system and curricula, follows the list of minorities stipulated by the MRG Finland. For this reason, this article employs this definition of minority groups and therefore does not consider other ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities in the analysis.

Minority groups differ significantly in terms of their legal rights and constitutional status as well as regarding their history and their relation to Finland. From the legal perspective, the Finland-Swedes have a stronger status than that of a national minority, as the Constitution of Finland stipulates that the national languages in Finland are Finnish and Swedish. Further, the Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking populations shall receive the same cultural and societal services on an equal basis (Hannikainen & Jutila, 2016). For the purpose of this article, it is also important to note that Finnish basic education is based on one national core curriculum, but the school system is split into Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking schools. The Sámi people are distinct from other minorities as they are an indigenous nation and holders of indigenous peoples’ rights, most importantly the right to self-determination and land and resource rights (Kuokkanen, 2022, p. 292). Other traditional minority groups have, according to the Finnish constitution, a right to their own language and culture (Hannikainen & Jutila, 2016).

In Finland, colonialism has been regarded as a phenomenon, disconnected from the nation's history, holding little significance in contemporary Finland, except in relation to public discourses about foreign countries (Hakala et al., 2018). The relationship between Finland, as well as other Nordic countries, and colonialism has been characterized by the concept of 'Nordic exceptionalism' (Keskinen, 2019; Rastas, 2007; Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2012), which refers to the belief that Nordic countries are 'innocent outsiders' to European colonialism. Further, 'colonial complicity' (Keskinen, 2019), highlights Finland's ambiguous position as a country that did not possess overseas colonies but nevertheless did not remain outside European colonialism and the economic profit thereof (Hakala et al., 2018). As Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden from the 12<sup>th</sup> century until 1809, and afterwards, the Russian Empire until 1917, its connection to colonialism is even more complex (Keskinen, 2019). Notably, Finland along with other Nordic countries, has taken part in the colonisation of the Sápmi, the home region of the Sámi people (Kuokkanen 2022).

This article asks how the current history textbooks used in basic education portray minorities in Finland as well as colonialism. With respect to colonialism, this article concentrates particularly on the colonialist developments in the Nordic context, as well as on a global scale. At the core of this study is the mission to discover how the selected history textbooks portray the multicultural and global history of Finland. As such, it asks what is portrayed as a common, or objective, knowledge of Finland's history regarding minorities and colonialism. As Mikander points out, 'the fact that school textbooks are distributed to and read by all students in Finland make them powerful as producers of what is seen as objective' (Mikander, 2016, p. 111). As such, the textbooks produce meaningfulness by dedicating space to topics or themes that the authors see important. This article does not consider that the textbooks actually portray the objective historical truth but rather critically analyses what is sold to students in Finland as meaningful history.

## **History textbooks as knowledge-producers**

History textbooks portray a certain image of the past and present by constructing essentialist views of individuals and peoples (Dervin et al., 2015, p. 152). Loftsdóttir explains the power of textbooks by arguing that textbooks participate in 'the creation of specific types of subjectivities' (Loftsdóttir, 2010, p. 23). In the case of history education, textbooks construct a specific view of the past and additionally shape schoolchildren's historical perspectives and their self-image (Rantala & Ahonen, 2015; Rantala, 2018). History textbooks in Finland are not evaluated by the state, although each history textbook author must follow and implement the topics and norms articulated in the national core curriculum, which are in turn products of the state (Rantala, 2018; Kohvakka, 2022, p. 86). As Dervin et al. remind us, the textbook authors are nevertheless dependent on multiple actors in addition to the state-sanctioned curriculum, such as publishing houses, editors, other team members and different views on what the needs of teachers and pupils are (Dervin et al., 2015, p. 149). Another issue

that textbook authors face is that the textbooks need to portray highly debatable historical events in a simplified way as the goal of the textbook is to produce easily transmissible historical ‘facts’, a matter that significantly deviates from the nature of historical research and debate (Mikander, 2016, p. 51). However, the national core curriculum emphasises historical thinking skills, such as source criticism or critical thinking, which is also reflected in newer textbooks (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014).

The representation of minorities and colonialism can be discussed within the theoretical framework of multicultural education, which is an educational approach that seeks to diversify contents, actors and methods in education (Gay, 2004; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Banks, 2019). Whereas liberal and mainstream multicultural education implements its ideals superficially through a celebration of diversity – critical multicultural education rather seeks to approach education with a view toward social justice (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004). While the former approach can be described shortly as ‘add minorities and stir’ – education, the latter approach seeks to alleviate the root causes of contemporary inequalities, such as systemic racism (Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Abdou, 2018, p. 479). Therefore, critical discussion on minorities and their history, as well as colonial legacies, are highlighted in critical multicultural history education (Gay, 2004; Bennet, 2019). This article approaches history education from a critical perspective and aims to understand how history textbooks explain the historical roots of contemporary injustices.

On the one hand, previous research on minorities and colonialism in history education has focused on how much space is afforded to minorities and marginalised groups, and on the other hand, on how the minorities are represented or what kind of narratives they are given (Abdou 2018, pp. 478-479). Lampinen (2013) studied the inclusion of minorities and indigenous people in textbooks used in different disciplines in grades 5-7. Based on her observations, the history textbooks series in Finland hold considerable differences regarding the inclusion of different minorities and indigenous people, while the ideal reader of said textbooks, that is – the expected audience, is from the majority group (Lampinen, 2013, p. 30-31). In her study, Rinne determined that geography, history and social study textbooks in elementary school have a Western-oriented worldview, focusing mainly on developments in Europe and Anglo-America (Rinne, 2021, p. 9). In addition, the study found that Finland and Finnishness are constructed through different myths and that the textbooks portray Finland inherently as part of the ‘glorified West’ (Rinne, 2019, p. 10).

Spjut’s (2018) comparative study on Swedish and Finland-Swedish geography, history and civics textbooks showed that the textbooks have a role in educating pupils about national and ethnical identities. As regards Finland-Swedish textbooks, she found that textbooks produce a clear dividing line between the Swedish-speaking and Finnish-speaking populations in Finland. Mikander (2016) studied how history, social studies and geography textbooks in Finland construct an understanding of the West and Western people as superior to others. Her study shows that the textbooks justify or hide Western colonial violence in the past and emphasise the positive sides of Western history. Additionally, Hahl et al. (2015) explore the issue of diversities in textbooks

across disciplines in Finland. One of the chapters in the volume focuses on Holocaust education as an approach to antiracism education, in which the authors (Aminkeng Atabong et al., 2015) propose that the Holocaust could be used as an example of how to teach students about racism and antiracism as they all share similar concepts.

## **Research method and materials**

Pingel (2010) divides research on subject-oriented texts in education into didactical and content analyses. In this research, the focus is on the latter, meaning that the principal question asks: ‘what does the text tell us?’ (Pingel, 2010, p. 31). This article uses discourse analysis with a critical approach as its research method. In discourse analysis, it is impossible to strip a discourse from its broader context, and as such, discourses do not have inherent meaning in themselves (Hardy et al., 2004). The researcher’s task then is to find their historical and social location. Further, social reality is seen as something that is created through discourses, which can be texts as well as material structures and practices (Laffey & Weldes, 2004). Put simply, discourse is not only a product of society but also its creator. Discourse analysis does not offer one single method to be followed in research. According to Laffey & Weldes (2004), discourse analysis ‘examines how discourses are naturalized in such a way as to become common sense, the “regime of the taken-for-granted”’ (p. 28). Therefore, discourse analysis is a useful approach for ‘de-naturalizing’ the ‘common sense’ in textbooks (Fairclough, 2010).

This article relies on a social constructivist assumption, or in Laclau’s and Mouffe’s words, a discourse theory that does not see the world as an essentialist reality ‘out there’ to be discovered, but rather something that we ourselves create through our actions and discourses (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2001). Therefore, this research is grounded upon the notion that texts – in this case textbooks – construct a certain kind of understanding of – or objectivity regarding –the past and present that is then presented to school children as objective knowledge, constituted by non-ideological facts (Mikander, 2016). In the case of history education, texts reflect the dominant historical narratives in society and reveal what aspects of the past are highlighted and what are silenced (Apple, 2012). The knowledge distributed in history textbooks reflects the victorious side of historical events, which have dominated other, alternative narratives of the same event (Downing, 2008).

This article focuses on history textbooks that are written according to the latest National Core Curriculum for basic education in Finland (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). History education begins in grade four or five, depending on the school, and continues until grade 8. The Finnish curriculum for basic education lists the events and themes that should be covered in history textbooks relatively broadly (Finnish National Board of Education, 2014). Therefore, the authors enjoy rather wide latitude when it comes to the emphases and themes of each book (Kohvakka, 2022). Regarding minorities, the curriculum offers weak support for including minority histories in history education (Ibid.). However, the core values stipulated in the

curriculum support multicultural education (Zilliacus et al., 2017). A total of 18 history textbooks, 5 Swedish and 13 Finnish, from five different publishing houses were included in the analysis. All contacted publishing houses agreed to provide access to their textbooks. All analysed textbooks are listed in Table 1.

TABLE 1

*Analysed textbooks in grades 4-8.*

<b>Textbook</b>	<b>Language</b>	<b>Grade</b>
<i>Mennyt I</i>	Finnish	4
<i>Mennyt II</i>	Finnish	5
<i>Mennyt III</i>	Finnish	6
<i>Ritari 5</i>	Finnish	5
<i>Ritari 6</i>	Finnish	6
<i>Forum 5</i>	Finnish	5
<i>Forum 6</i>	Finnish	6
<i>Forum 7</i>	Finnish	7
<i>Forum 8</i>	Finnish	8
<i>Historian taitaja 7</i>	Finnish	7
<i>Historian taitaja 8</i>	Finnish	8
<i>Memo 7</i>	Finnish	7
<i>Memo 8</i>	Finnish	8
<i>Förr i tiden I</i>	Swedish	4
<i>Förr i tiden II</i>	Swedish	5
<i>Förr i tiden III</i>	Swedish	6
<i>I tiden 7</i>	Swedish	7
<i>I tiden 8</i>	Swedish	8

I began the analysis by reading the textbooks without excluding any of the chapters or pages. In total, there were a few more than 300 chapters and 3000 pages in the selected textbooks. After reading all the textbooks, the focus turned toward two main themes: the representation of minorities in Finland and the portrayal of the colonial past. During a few rounds of reading, I gathered notes and relevant excerpts from the textbooks and collected 60 pages of material that were pertinent to this study. While conducting the analysis, I asked: what is explicit and implicit in these texts and how are the texts situated historically and socially? During the analysis of the material, I came to realise quite early that there were considerable differences between textbooks in Finnish and in Swedish regarding the focus of this study. For this reason, the results are separated according to the language of the textbooks.



## Results

I have divided my results into two main sections, of which the first one focuses on the representation of different minorities in Finland and the second on the portrayal of colonialism. The main sections are further split into two subcategories based on the textbooks' language.

### Minorities in history textbooks in Swedish

The analysis included five textbooks in Swedish that are part of the textbook series *Förr i tiden* for grades 4-6 and *I tiden* for grades 7-8. These textbooks mention the Finland-Swedes, Sámi, Roma and Jewish groups. As the books are used in Swedish-speaking schools, it comes as no surprise that the textbooks mention the Finland-Swedes minority more often than the Finnish-language textbooks, considering that they are the expected audience of the textbooks as opposed to the textbooks in Finnish, in which they represent a minority (Spjut, 2018).

For the most part, the textbooks cover the history of Finland-Swedes from the 11<sup>th</sup> century until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The book series *Förr i tiden* covers their history from the first years in the 11<sup>th</sup> century until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. *Förr i tiden II* portrays Finland-Swedes as a people living mostly in towns as merchants as well as those who emigrated from Sweden to live along the Finnish coastline (*Förr i tiden II*, pp. 92-93). It discusses the diversity of Finland-Swedes since their arrival and does not portray them solely as the population's elite, as opposed to the textbooks in Finnish. Additionally, *Förr i tiden III* describes the arrival of the second wave of Swedish immigrants in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by emphasising that 'many new aristocrats and burghers moved [to Finland] in search of new opportunities' (*Förr i tiden III*, p. 68). The two textbooks represent the Finland-Swedes as tied to a certain location as well as social status and profession, but the authors also describe how the minority itself was fluid and formed by multiple waves of immigration. Rinne (2019) highlights how the discourses about Finland-Swedes in history textbooks tend to emphasise them initially as immigrants, which is also seen in these textbooks.

The textbook series *I tiden* explores the identity of Finland-Swedes and their history in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For instance, *I tiden VII* challenges the myth of the people of Finland possessing a national identity based on their languages:

*Before Finland became part of the Russian Empire, there was no integral people in Finland. (...) The terms 'Finländare' [a Swedish demonym used to designate all people of Finland] and 'Finland-Swedes' were first introduced in the 1910s. Before that, everyone were Finns regardless of the language they spoke (I tiden VII, pp. 131-132).*

This excerpt does not build a clear dividing line between Finland-Swedes and Finnish-speakers. *I tiden VII* and *I tiden VIII* also describe some of the conflicts between the Finns and Finland-Swedes most notably the Finnish-Swedish racial hygienics and the language strife between the two language groups in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The following details how a group of Finland-Swedes sought to construct a nation of their own:

*Race biologists in Finland wanted to show that the Finland-Swedes in Finland belonged to the Germanic race and therefore differed from the Finnish speakers, who were seen to belong to the lower Mongolian race. (...) The Finland-Swedes were encouraged to marry other Swedish speakers and have many healthy children in order to keep the Finland-Swedish population vigorous (I tiden VII, p. 180).*

This is the only instance in which Finland-Swedish racial hygienics are mentioned in the textbooks. Further discussion of this history could provide a great opportunity for discussing the history of ‘race’ in Finland by demonstrating the fluidity of ‘race’ in a historical context (Keskinen 2019). *I tiden VIII* describes in detail the language strife between Finnish-speaking and Finland-Swedish activists starting from the 1920s when the Finnish parliament accepted the language act that officially made Finland a bilingual country:

*Many right-wing movements, such as the Lapua Movement, had Finnish-nationalist traits. Their goal was the total Finnicisation of Finland. (...) There were frequent clashes between Finnish and Swedish students. (...) Bilingual signs were also sabotaged and there were even acts of violence. (I tiden VIII, p. 47).*

These excerpts allow the pupils to learn about the complex situation of the Finland-Swedes in Finland without avoiding controversial topics, such as racial hygiene. In addition, the textbooks portray the Finland-Swedes as active actors and not as a passive, internally homogenous group, which is often the case in representations of other minorities (Abdou, 2018). It is clear that the expected reader of these textbooks is a Finland-Swede as there is more focus on their history compared to Finnish textbooks (Lampinen, 2013).

There is less space provided to other minorities or the Sámi compared to Finland-Swedes. The textbook series *I tiden* is the only book that describes Finnish state orchestrated discrimination against the Sámi and Roma, particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *I tiden 7* illustrates how discrimination against minorities has deep roots and is tied to racist thinking:

*The Nordic race was seen as superior while the Sámi, Roma and Jews were seen to belong to lower races (I tiden VII, p. 179).*

This excerpt encourages discussions around race and racism in Finland and therefore enables a critical examination of the past (Gay, 2004). Racism towards, and assimilation of, the Sámi people are often suppressed topics in Finnish society and therefore it is uncommon for history textbooks to describe these themes, especially when attributing this discrimination directly to the Finnish state (Hakala et al., 2018). As Ahonen (2001) argues, history textbooks are prone to depict historical events without naming anyone as the actor, therefore many events, including violent acts, are described as something that ‘just happened’ regardless of anyone’s intentions or actions.

In contrast to the majority of history textbooks in Finnish, *I tiden VII* connects the assimilation of the Sámi directly to Finnish state actors. As an example of the racial hygienics of that time, *I tiden VII* contains an old picture collection of Sámi people who are described in racist terms in the photo series (*I tiden VII*, p. 177). *I tiden VII* describes

how discrimination against the Sámi began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ‘because of territorial disputes between farmers and the Sámi’, and further, how ‘the Sámi were seen as an inferior and uncivilised people and their language, lifestyle and culture were looked down upon’ (*I tiden VII*, p. 181). The textbook further describes how the Finnish state eventually forcibly assimilated the Sámi people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

*The politicians decided to make the Sámi people Finnish. Sámi children would learn Finnish and live in Finnish-speaking boarding schools for nine months a year. It was forbidden to speak Sámi at these schools and children could get beaten if they did not follow the rules. In school they did not receive any teaching in their own language, nor about their history or own culture (I tiden VII, 181).*

These excerpts shed light on the oppressive practices taken by the Finnish state as well as on discrimination against the Sámi. The passages also focus on the more recent history of the Sámi instead of the ancient past, as proposed by Miettunen (2020), and in this way, create an opportunity to discuss the relatively recent discrimination against the Sámi.

The textbook series *Förr i tiden* mostly portrays the Sámi as a people from the past while connecting them to contemporary Finnish society. *Förr i tiden II* relates the following in its chapter: ‘The Sámi are Finland’s indigenous people’:

*In the time of Tacitus] the Sámi lived in the whole area of modern Finland, but they were forced to withdraw to the North when the ancestors of today’s Finns migrated in and displaced them. (...) When the Sámi people’s old lands were divided between four countries, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Russia, the Sámi became a minority and were often oppressed by the newcomers. Today, the Sámi are the only people in the EU with the official status of an indigenous people (Förr i tiden II, pp. 58-59).*

This textbook acknowledges the status of the Sámi people as an indigenous people who were pushed out by the ancestors of today’s Finns, thus referring to the early stages of the Finnish settler colonialism in Sápmi (Kuokkanen, 2022, p. 297). The connection to contemporary Finnish society is short and the textbook does not further elaborate on their status today.

In addition to Swedish-speaking Finns and the Sámi, the Swedish textbooks only mention the Roma and Jewish populations in Finland only on a few occasions. *I tiden VII* shortly mentions historical discrimination against the Roma people:

*There were many prejudices towards the traveling people and laws were enacted that made it difficult for the Roma to settle, work and vote. Additionally, their children were forcibly taken into custody, some people were deported and others were forcibly sterilised (I tiden VII, p. 181).*

While the focus on these discriminatory acts is welcome in history textbooks (Bennet, 2019), the pupils are nevertheless left without a contemporary context: the discriminatory acts from the past laid the foundation for today’s injustice and inequality, and teaching about these events would create ideal moments to draw connections between past atrocities and contemporary inequality (Aminkeng Atabong et al., 2015).

In addition, this excerpt uses the passive voice and the past tense, therefore implying that the discrimination of the Roma in Finland is a bygone phenomenon.

Jewish people are discussed in the context of the Second World War and the Holocaust and in relation to the Finnish state. The descriptions narrate on the one hand a righteous past and, on the other hand, regrettable and shameful acts by the state. The former is especially apparent in this excerpt:

*[The fact] that Finland and Germany were military allies does not mean that Finland was a Nazi country or that the Finnish people were Nazis. On the contrary, there were only a few countries in Europe where Nazism had as weak of support as in Finland. (...) The 2000 Jews in Finland were allowed to keep their citizen rights throughout the entire wartime even though Hitler tried to persuade president Ryti and Field Marshal Mannerheim to hand over its Jewish population to Germany (I tiden VIII, p. 72).*

The textbook emphasises the innocence and righteousness of the Finnish leadership during the Second World War and describes the support for antisemitism and Nazism as weak in Finland, even though antisemitic thinking was also supported in Finland (Ketola, 2021, p. 112; Muir, 2021). The emphasis here is on the Finnish people, while the Jewish people are described without agency, as they simply ‘were allowed to keep their citizen rights’ (Abdou, 2018). The latter narrative is again apparent in *I tiden VIII*, which depicts Finland and its leaders in a less affirmative way in this excerpt about wartime Jewish refugees in Finland. It describes how ‘the conscience of the Finnish authorities is not completely clear when it comes to the Holocaust’ (*I tiden VIII*, p. 98). It further explains:

*In 1938, a refugee boat with approximately 60 Jewish refugees from Austria arrived in Helsinki. The Jewish community promised to take care of the refugees, but the Finnish authorities wanted to avoid a ‘refugee invasion’ and forced the boat to return to Germany where many of the refugees later died (I tiden VIII, p. 98).*

This narrative is interesting because, on the one hand, it names the perpetrators (the Finnish authorities) and thus uses active sentences, but on the other hand, it portrays them as primarily good actors because their conscience was not ‘completely clear’, implying that for the most part they made morally correct choices (Ahonen, 2001). The excerpt shortly mentions the Jewish community in Finland and therefore attempts to show more than one side of the narrative. The Jewish community is otherwise quite invisible and without agency in the textbook. The reader is therefore left with little information about the Jewish community in Finland, which is common in textbooks in Finland (Rinne, 2019).

### **Minorities in history textbooks in Finnish**

The Finland-Swedes receive, for the most part, less attention in textbooks in Finnish than in textbooks in Swedish. In addition to Finland-Swedes –Roma, Sámi, and Jews are discussed, while Tatars are mentioned only once. The 13 textbooks in Finnish that were analysed referred to the Finland-Swedes seven times and most of these references

are related to the Swedish language and not to the people who spoke Swedish. The textbooks that mention the Swedish-speaking Finns tend to portray them only as a ruling upper class who had little interaction with the Finnish-speaking population. *Forum VI* makes a clear division between the Finnish-speaking and Swedish-speaking populations:

*Ordinary Finns lived a very down-to-earth life in their own village communities. They were called the common people. They spoke a different language than the gentry, i.e., the higher-ranking people. The Finnish language was only the language of the common people, the gentry spoke Swedish and church services were held in Swedish or Latin (Forum VI, p. 156).*

The description portrays the Finnish-speaking people as ‘ordinary’ and ‘common’ and the Finland-Swedes as ‘the other’ or the gentry and somewhat detached from the rest of the population. Finland-Swedes are described as the elite, whereas the Finnish language is associated with real Finnishness (Rinne, 2019, p. 183). The textbook describes both language groups as internally homogenous and portrays them as one another’s opposites. Spjut (2018) states that bilingualism, in combination with the traditionally unequal relations between Finns and Finland-Swedes, has meant that it has been important to highlight the boundaries between the two language groups. *Memo VII* follows the same narrative and portrays the Swedish-speaking population as superior:

*The Finnish language was rarely used as a written language at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century because most of the educated people were born Swedish-speaking. The educated people also did not know of the Finnish peasant culture but disparaged it (Memo VII, p. 170).*

This example also describes the Swedish-speaking Finns as a homogenous, well-educated class who perceived the ‘Finnish peasants’ negatively. Although the upper class consisted mostly of the Swedish-speaking population, the textbook does not inform the reader about the diversity of the Swedish-speaking minority regarding social class, wealth and occupation (Kortteinen, 1996, p. 98). The discourse depicting the Finland-Swedes as elite dismisses the fact that in reality, the majority of them were farmers and fishermen (Meinander, 2023). Rinne (2019) points out that the representation of Finland-Swedes in textbooks implies that they are ‘less Finnish’ than Finnish-speakers.

Compared to the textbooks in Swedish, the Finnish textbooks remain mainly silent about the indigenous Sámi people and mostly focus on them in prehistory. In general, they are portrayed as a separate and somewhat marginal group in national history (see similar findings: Rinne, 2019). *Forum VI* describes the Sámi in the following way:

*The life of the Sámi people in Northern Finland was closely connected with nature. (...) The Sámi’s close relationship with nature was seen in their beliefs. (...) The Sámi’s sacred places, or seitas, were, for example, rocks and large stones. (...) The Sámi people worshiped ancient gods even when the rest of Finland lived under Christianity (Forum VI, p. 172).*

In this excerpt, what is noteworthy is the emphasis on the Sámi people’s relationship with nature as well as their spiritual life. This above portrayal depicts the Sámi as exotic

and ancient. As Miettunen (2020, p. 11) argues, the information about the Sámi in Finnish schools is prone to stereotype the indigenous people as unconnected to mainstream Finnish history or modern society. *Forum VII* depicts the Sámi as a people unknown to the majority:

*Although the indigenous people of Finland living in the north fascinated researchers, very little was known about their living conditions due to difficult transportation conditions (Forum VII, chap. 5).*

What is important to note in this excerpt is the ubiquity of the Finnish perspective as the focus of the text is on the Finnish researchers and what they knew about ‘the indigenous people of Finland’. Therefore, the Sámi people are portrayed as the ‘other’ and as a curiosity for Finnish academics. This ‘fascination’ among the Finnish researcher was also deeply grounded in racist Lappology studies (Kuokkanen, 2022, pp. 292- 293). *Forum VII* nevertheless briefly mentions discrimination against the Sámi:

*When the Sámi were baptised in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and thus brought under the control of the church and the crown, they were treated quite approvingly. However, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the situation of the Sámi deteriorated when they were required to become Finns. The old Sámi traditions threatened to disappear completely under the pressure of these demands (Forum VII, chap. 5).*

As in some of the previous examples, the events described in this excerpt also appear in the passive voice and therefore no actor is ever mentioned, which follows the tradition in Finnish textbooks (Ahonen, 2001). However, the baptism of the Sámi people did not happen in a vacuum but was implemented by Finnish missionaries, who were primarily responsible for the material and cognitive destruction of the spiritual life of the Sámi (Kuokkanen, 2022, p. 296). Additionally, the Sámi are portrayed as ‘the other’ that needed the approval of the ‘majority’, namely, Christian Finns.

There is only one long description of the Roma in the textbooks in Finnish. *Forum VII* mentions the Roma people in the sub-chapter ‘Minority people’, in which it describes how their arrival from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards was viewed with suspicion. Subsequently, it states:

*Therefore, the Roma were deported and threatened with hanging. The official control measures directed at the Roma primarily resembled persecution, which was accompanied by people’s suspicion and fear of a foreign culture and those who looked a little darker (Forum VII, chap. 5).*

The excerpt highlights the heavy persecution of the Roma since their arrival as well as the racism they have experienced from the onset of their appearance in Finland. The actors (the persecutors) nevertheless remain unnamed, while the majority’s racist behaviour is described in a somewhat softer tone as they ‘feared’ a foreign culture and people who looked ‘a little darker’. Like the Sámi, the Roma are also left without an agency and are portrayed as mere recipients of their mistreatment. Furthermore, they are depicted as group disparate from the majority (Hakala et al., 2018; Rinne, 2019). Nevertheless, this excerpt sheds light on the historical injustices that the Roma have

faced and, in that sense, supports its critical multicultural (history) education credentials (Abdou, 2018; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004).

Research on Holocaust education has demonstrated the potential of these lessons to promote global human rights and antiracism education as it provides a concrete example of the use and abuse of power as well as responsibilities of individuals and nations when they face human rights violations (Aminkeng Atabong et al., 2015). In this regard, Holocaust education can also shed light on country-specific history in relation to the Holocaust and historical responses to the events. However, *Memo 8* is the only textbook in Finnish that mentions the Jewish population in relation to Holocaust at length. Contrary to the *I tiden VIII* in Swedish, which covers the same period, *Memo VIII* raises the issue of antisemitic sentiments in Finland, before and during the war. It states how ‘some Finns, excited by the rise of the Nazis, tried to incite hatred towards the Jews in Finland as well’, but the ‘Finnish authorities treated the country’s own Jewish population of 1500 people as they did other citizens’ (*Memo VIII*, pp. 109-110). As opposed to the treatment of ‘the country’s own Jewish population’, the textbook describes the treatment of Jewish refugees arriving from other parts of Europe:

*The Jewish refugees who arrived in Finland from Central Europe sparked a wider discussion. Some were against accepting refugees, fearing that the Jews, who often worked as merchants in their home countries, would spoil Finnish business life. (Memo VIII, pp. 109-110).*

The textbook describes the situation in Finland in the 1930s and 1940s as complex: antisemitism persisted in Finland and the authorities were apathetic about helping too many refugees, but antisemitism never reached the same level as in some other parts of Europe. In the text, a particular distinction is made between ‘the country’s own Jewish population’ and the Jewish refugees from Central Europe, of which the latter faced more virulent antisemitism. *Memo VIII* further portrays the complex situation and conflicting interests at play when Finland accepted and eventually deported eight Jewish refugees to Germany in 1942. However, it does not provide clear answers to the background of the deportations:

*The decision to deport Jewish refugees has been explained in retrospect, for example, by the pro-Germanism of a few ministers and the head of the state police. However, there is no concrete information about the background of the deportations (Memo VIII, pp. 109-110).*

Once again, the excerpt does not name any actors that were responsible for the deportations and leaves the discussion with a high level of uncertainty about the eventual outcome of the deportations. Further, it describes the events in the passive voice and does not specify who the ‘few ministers’ were (Ahonon, 2001). Therefore, the pupils are left without any further explanations as to why the deportations took place.

### **Colonialism in textbooks in Swedish**

The textbooks in Swedish offer a relatively in-depth discussion of colonialism and its consequences. While the book series *Förr i tiden* focuses on early colonialism from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the book series *I tiden* discusses later developments in the

19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. History education has been criticised for not taking the Nordic involvement in colonialism into consideration (Hakala et al., 2018). Both the *Förr i tiden* and *I tiden* textbook series attempt to connect the Nordic countries to colonialism and the slave trade. *I tiden VII* differs quite significantly from the rest of the textbooks in grade 7, mainly because it links racism to colonialism and highlights Nordic involvement in global colonial practices (Hakala et al., 2018). The textbook has a chapter under the title ‘Racism’, in which the textbook encourages pupils to think about the European mindset behind colonialism:

*How could the Europeans allow millions of Indians, Africans, Aborigines and indigenous people in North and South America to be exploited, abused, killed and forced to live in inhumane conditions or starve to death? (...) One reason is the scientist Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. (...) This idea was further developed by racial biologists to justify the discrimination and exploitation of some people (I tiden VII, p. 175).*

This excerpt is worth mentioning for at least two reasons. Firstly, racism and race biology are not oft-discussed topics in school history textbooks (Mikander, 2016; Hakala et al., 2018), and this is the only occasion in which those phenomena are directly connected to colonialist practices and thinking. Secondly, it builds a narrative in which colonialism affects the majority of people, both in the exploiting countries and exploited colonies. Therefore, the textbook portrays colonialism in such a way that the pupils understand how the European countries and populations benefitted from colonialism while native peoples were exploited in their own lands and, further, how the supply chain of exploitation was justified by Europeans’ racist ideas (Bennet, 2019; Gay, 2004). Further, the textbook introduces the concept of race as a system of a socially constructed category (Gillborn, 2008).

*Förr i tiden III* briefly mentions the colonial connections that Sweden had in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. For instance, it mentions how the Swedish East India Company ‘imported over ten million coffee and teacups’, by which it implies that the Swedes had ties with the global colonial trade (*Förr i tiden III*, p. 64-65). The same textbook establishes an even stronger connection between Sweden and colonialism in the sub-chapter that deals with Swedish colonies overseas. *Förr i tiden III* explains that the Swedish Empire acquire colonies in order to ‘economically profit from faraway regions’ like ‘other great powers’ (*Förr i tiden III*, p. 72). The textbook specifies:

*In West Africa, in today’s Ghana, the Swedes had a trade station through which thousands of slaves were shipped to the Caribbean. Sweden also had a colony in the Caribbean. Concerning the slave trade, Sweden was nevertheless a small actor compared to Portugal, Holland and England (Förr i tiden III, p. 72-73).*

This is the only occasion in which Swedish involvement in colonialism and the slave trade is mentioned in any textbooks for sixth graders. However, Sweden’s involvement in such practices is explained by rational choices, such as economic gain (Mikander, 2016). Furthermore, the textbook describes the events in the passive voice (‘thousands of slaves were shipped’) and sees Sweden as a less abhorrent actor in the slave trade compared to the other great powers. This follows the common historical narrative that



sees the Nordic countries as less liable for their role in colonialism (Keskinen, 2019). Nevertheless, the textbook raises the issue of colonialism, at least partially, and its connection to Nordic history, which has long been a suppressed topic (Hakala et al., 2018, Keskinen, 2019). In addition to *Förr i tiden III*, *I tiden VII* mentions the Swedish involvement in colonialism and the slave trade:

*It was not only the great powers that owned colonies. Sweden owned Saint Barthélemy in the Caribbean in 1784-1878. The biggest income for the Swedish state came from the slave trade on the island. There were large warehouses filled with slaves in the island's harbour, from which they were shipped further abroad for sale (I tiden VII, p. 174).*

What is noteworthy in this excerpt is that on the one hand, it describes the longevity of Swedish colonialism in the Caribbean, and on the other hand, it highlights the historical importance the slave trade has had for the Swedish economy. Compared to *Förr i tiden III*, it does not trivialise Swedish involvement in the slave trade nor downplay the financial gain it achieved from it, therefore standing in contrast to the narrative that Sweden was an outsider in European colonialism (Palmberg, 2009).

The majority of the textbooks consider colonialism as something that ended when former colonies gained their independence after the Second World War, and therefore any forms of neo-colonialism are not often discussed. *I tiden VIII* is an exception in this as it describes the neo-colonialist practices in Africa committed by Europeans and other rich countries:

*The continued control by rich countries and large corporations over farmland and raw materials in African countries that are formally independent is called neo-colonialism (I tiden VIII, p. 190).*

This excerpt encourages pupils to approach colonialism in a new way, in which colonialism never really ended, whereby wealthy countries and companies are still complicit in exploiting the land and natural resources in African countries.

### **Colonialism in textbooks in Finnish**

The selected textbooks in Finnish have a different perspective on colonialism compared to the textbooks in Swedish, and there are additionally quite significant differences between different book series when it comes to their emphases or thematic choices. Compared to the textbook series *Förr i tiden*, *Mennytt III* does not explicitly discuss Sweden's role in colonialism but rather describes how 'great voyages' increased the demand for timber and tar from Sweden and Finland (*Mennytt III*, p. 71). Further, it explains how the European powers sought to 'secure their trade routes and occupied regions', after which 'the Swedish decision-makers noticed they could profit from this competition' (*Mennytt III*, pp. 71-72). The textbook remains silent about colonialism, and instead, it explains the 17<sup>th</sup>-century developments in much softer terms or phrases and does not delve any deeper in explaining how Sweden benefitted from its trade that was closely connected to colonial practices. Other textbooks mention tar and timber trade only briefly, such as *Ritari VI*, which explains how tar 'was shipped in large quantities to England, Holland, Spain and Portugal, where wars and marine traffic to

colonies had increased the need for more ships' (*Ritari VI*, p. 139). The importance of this trade to the Swedish economy is highlighted, but then again, the connection to colonialism is not mentioned and the discussion simply revolves around trade.

Contrary to the textbooks in Swedish, none of the textbooks in Finnish discuss Nordic involvement in colonialism. This resembles the conventional history telling in the Nordic countries, which depicts the narrative of Nordic exceptionalism in relation to colonialism (Hakala et al., 2018; Keskinen, 2019). Instead, the textbooks discuss colonialism on the European level and describe how European countries benefitted from colonialist practices. For instance, *Historian taitaja VII* describes the impacts of colonialism in Europe and Africa:

*However, the disadvantages of the actions committed by the conquerors far outweighed the benefits. (...) This can be seen even today in several African countries, where they unilaterally produce only some crops or raw materials inherited from the colonial era (Historian taitaja VII, chap. 18).*

In this excerpt, the textbook highlights how colonialist history impacts the economy in some former colonies. However, it does not mention the actors who have benefitted from their colonialist past or new forms of (neo-)colonialism (Ahonen, 2001; Mikander, 2016). Although it is not explicitly mentioned, *Memo VII* focuses on the current practices of neo-colonialism and sheds light on Western countries and international corporations and extractive colonialism in the former colonies:

*Western countries and international corporations benefited from Africa's chaotic conditions and military leaders. They have used African countries as producers of cheap raw materials (Memo VII, chap. 27).*

In her study, Mikander (2016) has found similar narratives in textbooks and sees them as descriptions of globalisation and as a continuing form of colonisation. The emphasis on neo-colonialism is additionally strengthened in the next chapter, in which *Memo VII* further explains global economic imbalances:

*Power and wealth are unevenly distributed in the world. (...) Powerful states strive to secure their own economy and dominant position. This may be at the expense of smaller and poorer states (Memo VII, chap. 28).*

The textbook highlights how the 'powerful states' aim to secure their dominance at the 'expense of smaller and poorer states'. However, it does not name which countries belong to the categories of powerful and poor countries, or what are the mechanisms through which powerful states exploit poor countries. Nevertheless, the textbook sees discrepancies between rich and poor countries as a consequence of actions by powerful states, which has not been a dominant narrative in textbooks (Rinne 2019, p. 149).

## Discussion

After reading all 18 textbooks, one thing was clear: none of the textbooks adequately provide information about minorities in Finland. In total, the 18 textbooks consist of more than 3000 pages and more than 300 chapters; however, no chapter focuses solely on minorities. This conclusion supports previous research findings on history education

in Finland, which show that discourses in history education maintain the dominant historical narratives (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985/2001; Hakala et al., 2018; Rinne, 2019). Although this does not mean conclusively mean that minorities are entirely invisible, nonetheless, the textbooks do not, quantitatively, offer much priority or space to minorities. This in turn signals that minorities and their histories are deemed less significant topics in history education (Ahonen, 2001; Wilkinson, 2014). Having said that, it is also noteworthy to highlight that the textbooks vary in their emphases on minority histories. Furthermore, as the analysis demonstrated, there are significant differences between the representations of minority groups. The differences between textbooks written in Finnish and Swedish are interesting, in particular in relation to critical perspectives associated with multicultural education, but there are no clear-cut answers to explain these differences. Previous research has argued that a minority position may increase sensitivity towards other minorities, but situations nevertheless vary (e.g., Mansikka & Holm, 2011). The differences could be also explained by other factors, such as differences between publishing houses, editors and different views on what the needs of teachers and pupils are (Dervin et al., 2015).

The Roma people are mentioned only occasionally and briefly, which makes them, for the most part, an invisible minority in the Finnish historical narrative in the selected school textbooks. Out of the 18 textbooks, only two textbooks mention the Roma. Similarly, the Jewish community is mostly inconspicuous and discussed mainly in connection to the Second World War. Tatars are only mentioned once in one subordinate clause. Karelians or the Old Russians are never mentioned as separate groups with their own languages. Sarhimaa (2017) argues that this is due to the fact that Karelians are seen as an integral part of Finnish people and culture, and therefore their own distinct culture and language are not recognised. This exclusion renders these cultural and religious minorities almost entirely invisible (Hakala et al., 2018). Furthermore, they are all discussed from the majority's perspective and left without their own agency (Abdou, 2018). Furthermore, minorities are often described in the past tense without any connections to contemporary Finnish society.

The Finland-Swedes are given more space than any other minority group, although there are significant differences between textbooks written in Swedish and Finnish. This may be due to their stronger constitutional status as opposed to other minority groups. Furthermore, they are described as a linguistic minority rather than an ethnic or cultural minority (see similar results: Rinne, 2019). The textbooks in Swedish describe Finland-Swedes in a more nuanced way and generally describe their history in detail. In contrast, the textbooks in Finnish mainly portray them as an isolated, wealthy and elitist group in contrast to ordinary Finnish-speaking Finns. The difference can be explained by the fact that the textbooks in Swedish are directed at the Finland-Swedish audience and therefore more focus is given to the minority's history (Lampinen, 2013; Spjut, 2018).

Colonialism is discussed in every textbook at varying lengths as well as thematic and semantic choices. Textbooks written in Swedish take a more critical stance on colonialism and shed light on Nordic involvement in colonialism, which the textbooks in Finnish do not do. The textbooks in Swedish see colonialism as a part of Sweden's past but do not mention any Finnish actors or colonialist practices in the textbooks

(Keskinen, 2018). Furthermore, colonialism is understood as practices in overseas regions, and not as phenomena that also took – or continues to take - place in Sápmi. While the history of the Sámi people and their mistreatment by the state(s) are discussed, in particular in the *I tiden* textbook series, the shared history between Finnish and Sámi people is never viewed through colonialist lenses, at least not explicitly. This is somewhat unsurprising as it follows the mainstream history writing in Finland (Kuokkanen 2022). Even more concerning are the textbooks that entirely exclude the history of the Sámi people after the prehistoric period, portraying the area as inhabited only by Finnish ancestors.

## Conclusion

The story of how Finnish authorities treated and still treat minorities is the story of Finland (Abdulkarim, 2018). This tale, however, is not part of the narratives portrayed in most of Finland's current history textbooks. Based on the findings of this study, the historical knowledge produced and distributed in textbooks does not adequately include the rich multicultural history of Finland. The exclusion of the indigenous people and minorities portrays Finland as a historically homogenous country with little connection to colonialism. The major historical events in Finnish history are only discussed from the majority's perspective, and there is little focus on how they affected different minority groups. For example, the Second World War impacted the minority groups differently—the Sámi in the north and the Karelians and the Roma in Karelia—but these narratives are not integrated into the main historical narrative. Wilkinson (2014) argues that the exclusion of minorities from dominant narratives may reflect the majority's weak understanding of their multicultural and globally connected past. Truly inclusive history textbooks require a critical and multi-perspective approach to the past in order to build a sense of belonging in history classrooms and beyond.

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ORDINARY FINNS AND MINORITY FOLK: THE REPRESENTATION OF MINORITIES AND COLONIALISM IN HISTORY EDUCATION IN FINLAND

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