

Afterword

Concurrent Events and Entanglements in a Nordic–American Borderland

Gunlög Fur

In 1898, Waguessee (as his name was rendered in the Swedish-language press), a Chippewa (Anishinaabe) man from Mille Lacs reservation in Minnesota, sued Olof Johnson, a Swedish settler, to get back 70 acres of land on the reservation that he claimed that Johnson had illegally settled. Johnson had taken up a homestead with permission from the government but Waguessee, according to the lawsuit, owned that land and had lived on it with his family since 1882 and they had erected a house and planted crops on the property. The Interior Secretary, Cornelius N. Bliss, was reported as stating “that Indians who live together in tribes and as such have special rights, have no rights to take up land as individuals.”¹ Newspapers noted concern that other Indigenous people would challenge Euro-American settlements on the reservations.²

Waguessee’s action came at a time when Indigenous nations were under extreme government pressure to assimilate and give up land and this coincided with peaks in the streams of migrants coming from the

How to cite this book chapter:

Fur, Gunlög. “Afterword: Concurrent Events and Entanglements in a Nordic–American Borderland.” In *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America: Rethinking Finnish Experiences in Transnational Spaces*, edited by Rani-Henrik Andersson and Janne Lahti, 285–292. AHEAD: Advanced Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 2022. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/AHEAD-2-12>.

Nordic countries. For these new immigrants, land no longer appeared as abundant as it had only three or four decades earlier and many took advantage of the provisions of the legislation known as the Dawes Severalty Act, which when passed in 1887 began making land available for settlement within the bounds of Indian reservations. The Act, named after Senator Henry L. Dawes, initiated a process of allotting land individually on reservations (it was also known as the General Allotment Act), which served the dual purpose of encouraging Indigenous people to assimilate into the United States and to free up what was considered surplus land for homesteading.³

The Dawes Act and its subsequent amendments became a powerful tool for the disintegration of remaining Indigenous held land in the United States and created the conditions for scores of Nordic immigrants to become neighbors and sometimes competitors with various Indigenous nations across the country. As Karen V. Hansen has shown when discussing the Spirit Lake Dakota reservation, the opening of land led Scandinavians, primarily Norwegians and Swedes, to take up homesteads. Through the lens of entanglements rooted in land, she reveals both American Indians and Scandinavians as neither only victims nor perpetrators in a context of inequalities shaped by the racial-ethnic division, leading to enduring involvement and complicity.⁴ Hansen's continued work to identify homesteading on Indian reservations and my own initial investigation have revealed several hundreds, if not thousands, of Nordics who participated in the lotteries that initiated settlement on reservations across the continent.

I have spent several years unearthing encounters and entanglements between primarily Swedish immigrants and Indigenous people in North America, arguing that such relations had consequences both for dispossession of Indigenous peoples from land and homes and for a concurrent ethnic home making, to borrow literary scholar Orm Øverland's term.⁵ The brief note on Waguessee in the Swedish American press has come to light due to the digitization of the Swedish-language press and demonstrates how new technologies when wedded to novel approaches in scholarship will enable different stories of settler colonialism than the ones previously known.⁶ Predominantly, histories of Nordic emigration to North America have presumed that migrants arrived to settle land that was already emptied and that therefore they were not involved in the process of dispossession of Indigenous peoples that characterized the establishment of the United States and

Canada. *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America* challenges this perception by approaching settlement and migration from many different directions, representing the first effort to collect scholarship on Nordic involvement in settler colonialism in the Americas and as such it is most welcome. It is about time we complement the prevalent narratives of Nordic laudable efforts to carve out a new future in America despite hardships and against odds, with narratives that demonstrate how Nordics also forged new identities, contributed to settler colonial narratives, and actively took advantage of and became beneficiaries of structures that dispossessed Indigenous peoples, supplanting their rights to lands and subsistence.

These interactions occurred in a larger borderland of transatlantic encounters and so influenced passages back and forth across the Atlantic of people, objects, and ideas and perceptions. In the process, perceptions became lodged in other contexts and conversations and adapted to other circumstances. Thus, Swedish sports teams took on Indian mascots and it became common sense for their fans to argue that they extolled the masculine virtue and prowess of Indigenous warriors through such logos. When subsequently mascots have been challenged and American Indians have exposed them as derogatory, sports teams have found it necessary to change names and alter logos. This has resulted in massive protests from fans who argue that the team's name and mascots are part of their culture.⁷ In other forms of contemporary appropriation, certain rightwing groups in both Sweden and Finland express fear for the extinction of Swedish and Finnish people by reference to American Indians, such as when Swedish national socialists claim that the country is facing an "irreversible development threatening to end the history of our people like that of North American Indians," or when a group of protestors said that they were now the "Indians of Finland" when in 2015 a trickle of asylum seeking refugees from Syria began to arrive.⁸

That is why I think tying these wide-ranging and disparate connections together in a volume like this one is so important. Dag Blanck and Adam Hjørthén have recently pioneered the conceptualization of a Swedish-American borderland to revitalize and capture the broad nature of ongoing research on relations between Sweden and North America. They describe this approach as the study of:

physical, social, and cultural spaces. It deals with life along borders and boundaries of the expanding American empire shaped by settler colonialism and Indigenous relations, it investigates cultural and religious dimensions in social interactions, and it addresses how patterns of transatlantic exchanges and entanglements have been shaped by a range of factors, including capitalism, consumerism, and geopolitics.⁹

This approach seems to me to saturate *Finnish Settler Colonialism in North America*. And the borderlands concept surely stretches to include not just the United States but the Americas at large as perceptions, places, things, and relationships that are so much a part of Finnish or Swedish history, just as Finns and Swedes participate in shaping and being shaped by the conditions of the double continent.

This book adds significantly to the now-growing output of articles and books that engage with the concurrent and entangled histories, as I have called it, of Nordic migrants and societies and Indigenous nations and territories, and it is the first to consistently bring settler colonialism to bear on a range of settlement contexts.¹⁰ At first glance, it may appear odd that such an initiative would focus on Finns. After all, much larger numbers of Norwegians and Swedes followed the migration flows across the Atlantic, and they did so earlier than most Finns, with the notable exception of those who traveled to New Sweden in the 17th century. However, this collection is a testament to the Finnish academic endeavor to sustain and deepen research on the world beyond Finland. North American studies in Finland has nurtured intellectual exchanges with scholars in the United States and Canada through a Fulbright chair and the Maple Leaf and Eagle Biennial Conference. Similarly, there is a long tradition of Finnish research on Latin American and Caribbean history, particularly with a focus on Indigenous peoples.¹¹

To those unaccustomed to thinking of Finns in relation to colonialism, this intervention into the history of Finnishness may appear unwarranted. After all, Finland did not establish colonies or settle distant lands in large numbers. Yet, as this volume amply demonstrates, Finns had ambitions to settle and became settlers in the Americas, and these experiences impacted imagination, politics, literature, settlement practices, and Indigenous people in a variety of ways. Lives in the past were not lived in isolation, any more than they are today. The arrival of Finns, among the great multitude of immigrants to the

American continent, sent shock waves across Indigenous communities and nations and fundamentally altered conditions, landscapes, and possibilities. Polish historian Ewa Domańska, in commenting on the ever-repeating cycle of conflict surrounding us, writes that the “history of progress is the history of violence.” As Domańska phrases it, “I have to accept that what Europeans cherish as civilization and progress, for non-Europeans (especially indigenous groups) translates into genocides, ecocides and epistemicides.” This intervention into the history of Finnish involvement in settler colonial strategies across the Americas is not only important because it addresses a lack of awareness of how immigrant home making involved a violent removal of Indigenous others but it is also relevant as an examination of “real and imaginary relationships that cross, challenge, and redefine” the space of the transatlantic borderland.¹²

This volume, then, offers encouragement to deal with concurrent events and histories occurring in diverse spaces and timelines.¹³ It builds on and strengthens findings from other Nordic and European contexts and contributes to fleshing out how a settler colonial understanding of the world influenced the politics and ideas activated in nation and identity building in Nordic spaces. It would be worthwhile investigating across the Nordic region what it meant that prominent labor leaders, such as Oskari Tokoi in Finland, Louis Pio in Denmark, Markus Thrane in Norway, and August Palm in Sweden, spent time in the United States and fashioned arguments for a version of socialist politics with inspiration from this time in exile, while at the same time expressing agreement with and understanding of settler colonial dispossession of American Indians.¹⁴ Museum collections in all the Nordic countries contain objects of great value and antiquity that are now coming under scrutiny, as requests for repatriation of collections multiply. In some cases, they reveal deeply traumatic histories, such as when the bodily remains of White Fox, who died in Göteborg while visiting the Nordic countries in 1874 and whose remains were displayed at the Anthropological Exhibition in Sweden in 1878–1879, were finally returned to the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma. In others they offer possibilities for mutual engagement and learning across the Atlantic, and in some instances the return of objects follows only after long searches for objects of spiritual significance.¹⁵

As so many others, I am heir to a small piece of the seemingly unstoppable swelling of emigrants moving west across the North

American continent. My grandfather and his brother worked their way west from Boston to Minnesota in the early years of the 20th century. Perhaps they ended up laboring on farms that had been carved out of Ojibway or Dakota reservations. We do not know other than that they labored as farm hands, as they had in Sweden, before my grandfather had to return home upon the death of his father. He did so with sufficient savings to set him up rather comfortably, while his brother remained and eventually became an American citizen. Both benefited from the relative advantages of being Swedish and thus considered white in the racial hierarchy of the US.

In 2022, the Swedish Emigrant Institute opened a new exhibition on Swedish emigration to North America. The oldest and best-known institution devoted to the large migration movements from Sweden, the SEI included an exhibit through which generations of schoolchildren and tourists had been guided toward an understanding of the hardships, perseverance, and genius of the many Swedes who had been pushed or pulled toward American shores in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This exhibit was in sore need of renovation. I was asked to contribute to this new version and it now includes one entire wall that prominently displays maps, images, and text describing how settler colonialism, in which Swedish emigrants were included and implicated, dispossessed American Indigenous peoples from their land, subsistence possibilities, cultures, and languages. The prominence of the display represents a fundamental change from generations of portrayals of emigrants as arriving to “empty land” and “virgin soils.”

I would like to think that this display, as this book, does justice to migrants and dispossessed peoples on both sides of the Atlantic and that our work as scholars, to illuminate the entanglement of the histories of progress with histories of violence may contribute to a more honest, just, and factual understanding of our joint and concurrent past.

Notes

- 1 *Svenska Folkets Tidning*, April 27, 1898.
- 2 *Svenska Monitoren*, April 22, 1898; *Svenska Amerikanska posten*, April 5, 1898.
- 3 Hoxie, *Final Promise*.
- 4 Hansen, *Encounters on the Great Plains*.
- 5 Øverland, *Immigrant Minds*; I specifically outlined this line of research in Fur, “Indians and Immigrants.”
- 6 <https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=swedish+american+newspapers&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8>.
- 7 <https://hockeynews.se/articles/21072>; <https://hockeysverige.se/2020/07/13/gunlog-fur-om-frolunda-indians-logga>; <https://www.gp.se/sport/ishockey/glenn-hysen-och-lasse-kroner-om-frölundas-indianbesked-1.34241532>.
- 8 Poohl et al., *Organiserad Intolerans*, 28; A small item in *Dagens Nyheter* noted protests against a bus arriving with refugees in Northern Finland.
- 9 Blanck and Hjorthén, “Introduction,” 8.
- 10 Hansen uses the perspective in her work on the Spirit Lake Reservation, as does Anders Bo Rasmussen in his recent *Civil War Settlers*.
- 11 Pärssinen, “Latin American Studies.”
- 12 Domańska, “Wondering about History.”
- 13 Brydon, Forsgren, and Fur, *Concurrent Imaginaries*.
- 14 Similar to Tokoi in this volume, Anders Bo Rasmussen finds that Pio and Thrane both spent time in the US and both expressed a lack of understanding for the exploitation of Indigenous peoples, but rather showed support for the policy of Manifest Destiny. Rasmussen, paper at Nordic Historical Congress, Göteborg 2022.
- 15 Björklund, *Hövdingens totempåle*; Jibréus, *White Fox’ långa resa*; Naum, “Souvenirs from North America”; Fur, “Captain Jack’s Whip”; <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/18/world/americas/indigenous-artifacts-sweden-museum.html>.

Bibliography

- Björklund, Anders. *Hövdingens totempåle: Om konsten att utbyta gåvor*. Stockholm: Carlssons förlag, 2016.
- Blanck, Dag, and Adam Hjorthén. “Introduction.” In *Swedish-American Borderlands: New Histories of Transatlantic Relations*, edited by Dag Blanck and Adam Hjorthén, 1–42. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2021.
- Brydon, Diana, Peter Forsgren, and Gunlög Fur, eds. *Concurrent Imaginaries, Postcolonial Worlds: Toward Revised Histories*. Leiden and Boston: Brill/Rodopi, 2017.
- Domańska, Ewa. “Wondering About History in Times of Permanent Crisis.” Opening Ceremony Program, International Congress of Historical Sciences, Poznań 2020/2022. <https://www.engliska.uu.se/sinas-en/research/borderlands>.
- Fur, Gunlög. “Captain Jack’s Whip and Borderlands of Swedish-Indigenous Encounters.” In *Swedish-American Borderlands: New Histories of Transatlantic Relations*, edited by Dag Blanck and Adam Hjorthén, 192–210. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2021.

- Fur, Gunlög. "Indians and Immigrants – Entangled Histories." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 33, no. 3 (2014): 55–76. <https://doi.org/10.5406/jamerethn-hist.33.3.0055>.
- Hansen, Karen V. *Encounters on the Great Plains. Scandinavian Settlers and the Dispossession of Dakota Indians, 1890–1930*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Hoxie, Frederick E. *A Final Promise: The Campaign to Assimilate the Indians, 1880–1920*. Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984, 2001.
- Jibréus, Dan. *White Fox' långa resa*. Stockholm: Hagströmerbiblioteket, 2013.
- Naum, Magdalena. "Souvenirs from North America: Understanding and Representing 'Indianness' in Nineteenth-Century Sweden." *History and Anthropology* 13, no. 2 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2021.1885401>.
- Øverland, Orm. *Immigrant Minds, American Identities: Making the United States Home, 1870–1930*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000.
- Pärssinen, Martti. "Latin American Studies in Finland: Past Trends and New Perspectives." *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* 72 (2002): 105–13.
- Poohl, Daniel, Martha Hannus, David Lagerlöf, Mikael Brunila, Li Andersson, and Dan Koivulaakso. *Organiserad Intolerans i Finland och Sverige*. Stiftelsen Expo och Hanaholmen – kulturcentrum för Sverige och Finland, 2012.
- Rasmussen, Anders Bo. *Civil War Settlers: Scandinavians, Citizenship, and American Empire 1848–1870*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022.