
Research article

Unthinking historical thinking: lessons from the Arctic

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Abstract

In a 2017 book chapter on the continuing erasure of Indigenous epistemes in academia, the Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen posed an important question: is it acceptable for a site of learning to be so ignorant? Foregrounding Indigenous scholarship from the Arctic, this article examines the potential of history education to address this question. Based on previous research on Arctic gender history and the coloniality of knowledge, I suggest a paradigm shift, in view of the new UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development framework (May 2021). The research investigates the challenges and opportunities that history education offers in terms of epistemic and cognitive justice within the context of Arctic memory cultures. The article concludes that much can be learned from (not about) Indigenous scholarship, which has long demonstrated a range of critical and sustainable methodologies that offer opportunities to seek epistemic justice and the restitution of cultural memory.

Keywords Arctic; memory; cultures; historical thinking; education; justice; sustainability

Introduction

Ignorance of one's ignorance is a bad excuse if one makes oneself an expert and a judge in a field where one ought to know one's limitations. (R. Petersen, 1995a: 124)

Based on recent research on the coloniality of historical knowledge in the Arctic, this article examines the challenges and opportunities that history education offers in terms of epistemic and cognitive justice within the context of Arctic memory cultures (R. Petersen, 1978; Reeploeg, 2021; Segato, 2022). The article begins by engaging with Indigenous and postcolonial scholarship on how historical thinking, as a methodology, can currently be defined as an unsustainable and unjust epistemic habit (Cutrara, 2018; Kuokkanen, 2008). Using Arctic memory cultures as a research field, the article examines historical thinking and historical consciousness not as separate, if overlapping, epistemic traditions concerned with managing learning about the past. This risks becoming another site of sanctioned ignorance, which reproduces and forecloses colonialist structures through the purposeful silencing of particular contexts as being irrelevant or too difficult (Guha and Spivak, 1988). Instead, both are integrated into the wider field of memory cultures that produce (not *discover* or *evaluate*) knowledge about the past through a system of epistemic habits. In doing so, I suggest that unthinking these epistemic habits as part of a more nuanced critical pedagogical praxis is a necessity, if historical thinking is to continue to be part of one of the basic competencies of historians and educators.

History education does not only take place in educational institutions, but also in museums, archives and libraries, and in public discourses and other sites of collective memory (Ricoeur, 2010). These create and transmit a variety of histories and memory cultures, becoming sites of learning about the past (Carretero et al., 2012). Seen from this perspective, historical thinking is part of a whole set of epistemic habits closely tied to the 'cognitive empires' of dominant western epistemologies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021: 882): 'The rise of western empires resulted in a wider dissemination of western knowledge, but also in the destruction of much non-western knowledge, from the burning of manuscripts by missionaries to the extinction of local languages' (Burke, 2010: n.p.).

Seeing that Indigenous scholarship has always combined critical pedagogical praxis with ways of thinking about the past (Berthelsen, 2020; Graugaard, 2016; Jensen Hansen, 2022; Møller and McLisky, 2021), this article foregrounds Inuit and Inuit-oriented perspectives on the coloniality of knowledge in the circumpolar world. (See *Global Social Theory* [n.d.] for a definition of the concept of the coloniality of knowledge.) Within the Arctic context, previous research has shown that 'an understanding of the coloniality of knowledge and its connections to epistemic violence is crucial to the study of memory and historical legacy' (Reeploeg, 2021: 1061). This article concludes that much can be learned from (not about) Indigenous scholarship and praxis in and about the Arctic, which has long combined thinking historically with opportunities to seek epistemic justice and the restitution of cultural memory.

Background, research approach and structure: controlling the cognitive wildfire of coloniality

A new Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework (UNESCO, 2021: n.p.) aims to 'increase the contribution of education to building a more just and sustainable world'. The '*Education for Sustainable Development: Towards achieving the SDGs (ESD for 2030)*' framework calls for education to encourage changes in knowledge, skills, values and attitudes to enable a more sustainable and just society for all. A previous report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on history and history education already emphasised the importance of history for future-oriented policy in education:

[History] can be a generative process for imagining futures which are reparative rather than reproductive of injustices past and present. These approaches to history involve processes of dialogue and exchange; they are constituted through educational relationships and thus they point to the ways in which education is a necessary precondition of reparative address. (Sriprakash et al., 2020: 6)

The authors here clearly call for education as a mode of transformation, as well as an interrogation of the logic of diversity, integration and reciprocity. This may require much more than an 'inclusive' recentring

of non-western ways of knowing, and it must include rethinking the very structures on which western epistemes are based (Kuokkanen, 2008). It must include disassembling structures of harm by decentring of european hegemonies of knowledges, but also by interrogating interlocking systems of epistemic domination and exploitation. In other words: 'We all need to "buy in" through our personal philosophy, informing our professional practice and our professional orientation. We all need to understand the part we continue to play in the colonising process and indeed the decolonising process' (McKenna et al., 2021: 5).

The combined desires for unity and fully knowing 'the other' have long shaped history pedagogies, research programmes and government policies, and they appear in the shape of embedded epistemic habits around being and knowing (Jones and Jenkins, 2008). These in turn inform redemptive fantasies and practices around equality and diversity aimed at *overcoming history* without changing ongoing colonial relations. Jones and Jenkins (2008), in a book chapter entitled 'Rethinking collaboration: Working the Indigene-colonizer hyphen', explain the demand for particular types of ongoing collaborative enquiry and redemptive gestures as an expression of a western enlightenment desire for coherence, authorisation and control. As such, this forms part of a modernist, liberal white control system demanding racial harmony, collaboration and understanding (Jones and Jenkins, 2008). So, for example, the work of Canadian settler-scholars Heather and Catherine McGregor seems to offer curricular solutions to the absence of Indigenous knowledges in schools (McGregor and McGregor, 2016). While their suggestion to invite Inuit Elders into the educational settings of Nunavut seems to address a visible knowledge gap, it also enacts the embedded epistemic habits and expertise of the settler-state (in this case, the Canadian regional government administrator) (Douglas, 2013; McGregor and Marker, 2018). However, the selective and momentary engagement with Indigenous knowledges and scholarship as 'additional knowledge' that simply needs to be integrated into the long list of methods and 'things to do' of the busy settler-scholar reduces reciprocity to a redemptive moment (with the emphasis on momentary) that can be adopted by anybody (in unity). This avoids interrogating and unsettling the logic of reciprocity in research and teaching relationships, and working to challenge (not adapt) and undo (not reform) colonial systems of domination and exploitation.

Against this background, Indigenous scholars have long argued for a fundamental restructuring of relations which adds respect, truth telling and relationality to education (Kuokkanen, 2019). For history educators and academic researchers, this means both pedagogic unlearning and 'recognition and intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge' (Steeves, 2021: 20): listening to, learning from, citing and working with Indigenous scholarship, while acknowledging and transforming different types of structural equality that have and are affecting it. In the world of history education, this may include decentring yourself and limiting other dominant voices, if you are in a position to do so. This seems like a first step towards respecting (not 'including') Indigenous epistemes and other forms of knowledge on their own terms, and emerging from their own intellectual environments. 'This sense of relationality to each other, to the past, and to epistemologies is integral to a cosmopolitanism that reflects and respects the uniqueness of local environments' (Cutrara, 2018: 266).

Inspired by Paulette Steeves's (2015: 62) notion of 'pyro-epistemology', the research approach for this article aims for a pedagogic 'cleanse' of current discourses and scholarly content on historical thinking, as they often include 'discussions that misinform and fuel racism'. Having considered the role of dominant, eurocentric scholarship in the displacement and erasure of Indigenous scholarship overall, I have, for example, deliberately reduced the airflow available (via referencing) to the vast volume of non-Indigenous literature about Arctic cultures and histories. This form of weeding or controlled incineration of the cognitive wildfire that is western historical writing seems like a productive way to respond to working within the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano, 2007; Silova et al., 2017). It also informs much of the work done within western historical practice itself, by historians continuously questioning and countering the eurocentric nature of western historical thinking (Rüsen, 2002). Readers keen to point to the lack of engagement with canonical texts from history education research or Arctic historiography should look to Eve Tuck's (2009) 'Suspending damage: A letter to communities', or to Derek Rasmussen's (2002) 'Quallunology: A pedagogy for the oppressor' to understand this approach.

In order to undo embedded practices of cognitive injustice and erasure in academic writing, when it comes to relating to Indigenous scholarship, this article intentionally employs some simple stylistic tools and referencing methods to 'cultivate a conscientious citation practice' (Eidinger, 2019). So, for example, the word 'Indigenous' is always capitalised, while the word 'eurocentric' is not. No italics or quotation marks are utilised when using non-european names, concepts or ideas, but italics or quotation

marks are employed when making use of an overused western term or cliché. Indigenous authors are referred to by their full names, while non-Indigenous authors are referenced by only surname, initial(s) and date (as applied in standard academic writing). Indigenous publications historically credited to a colonial administrator, collector or editor have had their original authors and/or translators reinstated or added. Multi-authored publications show non-Indigenous co-authors as second authors. This praxis is aimed at normalising the giving up of privilege when it comes to relating to (not assimilating) Indigenous scholarship in academic writing, and it is intentional, if somewhat playful and experimental. Hopefully, this research approach, content and style will allow us to think together about how not only to suspend damage, but also to clear the way 'for healthy growth in academic fields of thought and centres of knowledge production' (Steeves, 2021: 20).

The article is structured around three interrelated research questions:

1. Why and how do current dominant epistemic habits foreclose certain types of historical knowledge from entering into the debate, instead inviting them to present themselves (if at all) only on the terms of the western/dominant/colonial culture?
2. Is historical thinking an adequate tool to widen access to the plurality of historical knowledge and wider ecologies of knowledges?
3. How can thinking historically be transformed into a critical and sustainable methodology that offers opportunities to seek epistemic justice and the restitution of cultural memory?

Historical thinking and ignorance: a short history of thinking about the past

As discussed in the Introduction, future-oriented history education plays an important role in achieving justice for all people, and in developing effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. Research on historical knowledge and uses of the past has long problematised the role of historical thinking and historical consciousness in intercultural settings (McKenna et al., 2021; Steeves, 2021; Trouillot, 2015). Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and educators have criticised how non-western knowledges and histories are actively silenced and discriminated against in mainstream research and education (Berthelsen, 2020; Burke, 2002, 2010; Cutrara, 2018; Rasmussen, 2002). More recently, scholars of history education and didactics have argued for an epistemological reorientation, while questioning what is actually worthwhile historical knowledge that transforms and advances intercultural understanding (Chapman, 2021). Historical research not only provides us with data or evidence about historical events, people or spaces; it also expresses gendered, racialised and class-based perspectives, and imperial or colonial complicity, as well as resistance to any of these hegemonic ideas and structures (Fjellheim, 2020; Tester and Irniq, 2008). On the one hand, historical thinking aims to teach 'the skills to think like a historian' (assess significance, interpret evidence, understand patterns of continuity and change, think through cause and consequence, and appreciate the ethics of different perspectives). On the other hand, certain types of historical thinking actually develop a marked intolerance to alternative epistemologies, rather than broadening them to include a cosmopolitan, communal 'conversation about the ways we can teach and learn history' (Cutrara, 2018: 256). History education strategist Samantha Cutrara (2018) has noted that a structured or disciplinary approach to historical consciousness deliberately depoliticises history teaching, making it difficult to respond to calls to decolonise and Indigenise Canadian history. A recent UNESCO report seems to agree: 'Learning with the past – particularly past struggles over the future – is crucial, we argue, for holding open education as a mode of critique, rather than allowing it to sustain systems of domination' (Sriprakash et al., 2020: 3).

Historical thinking can be defined as an epistemic habit. A habit is 'something that you do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that you are doing it' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2022). Epistemic habits can therefore be understood as habits relating to knowledge, or to the study and production of knowledge, which are repeated without self-reflection, simply because they have become normalised or ordinary through repetition. Historical thinking, as part of history education and research, is also part of the way in which educational institutions reduce a plurality of worlds and experiences into simplistic, transferrable frameworks, which can be repeated more easily in the habitus of the 'national classroom' (Lennert and Brincker, 2019). This means that academic disciplines and educational subjects, including history, are still positioned on 'the dark side of the Enlightenment heritage, and . . . still influenced by a nation-centred and colonial world view' (Nordgren, 2019: 794).

By critically examining the epistemic habits that shape historical thinking, avenues for enhancing history literacy towards a more sustainable future can be identified.

Historical thinking in the Arctic: coloniality on ice

The Arctic region is . . . distinguished by a wealth of Indigenous communities who have been marginalised, historically, and whose cultural and linguistic traditions have been undervalued, if not repressed, by state educational provisions. In the twenty-first century, education is viewed as important to the empowerment of the Circumpolar North. (Beaton et al., 2019: 14)

Historians and social scientists have long pointed out the problematic situation for people living with a colonial history and remaining asymmetric structures and relations (R. Petersen, 1978).

Figure 1 shows the Indigenous population across the Arctic. It demonstrates the diversity of communities present, as well as the very different cultural, historical and geopolitical spaces they occupy across the circumpolar region. Historical thinking, in this context, is therefore complicated not only by its own epistemic habitus, but also by the very structures and relations in which these habits are produced (R. Petersen, 1978). Kalaaleq (Greenlandic Inuit) scholar and former rector of Greenland's university, Ilisimatusarfik, Robert Petersen (1978: n.p.) provides a historical overview of the creation and transmission of 'colonialist attitudes and policies that have persisted in Greenland':

The history of Greenland, written by Danish historians, can hardly be my peoples' history, but a history from the European archives, where the material was written by colonial civil servants. They wrote their notes according to some selective rules that were important for the colonial administration, so in fact an objective history of Greenland cannot be written from the Danish archives.

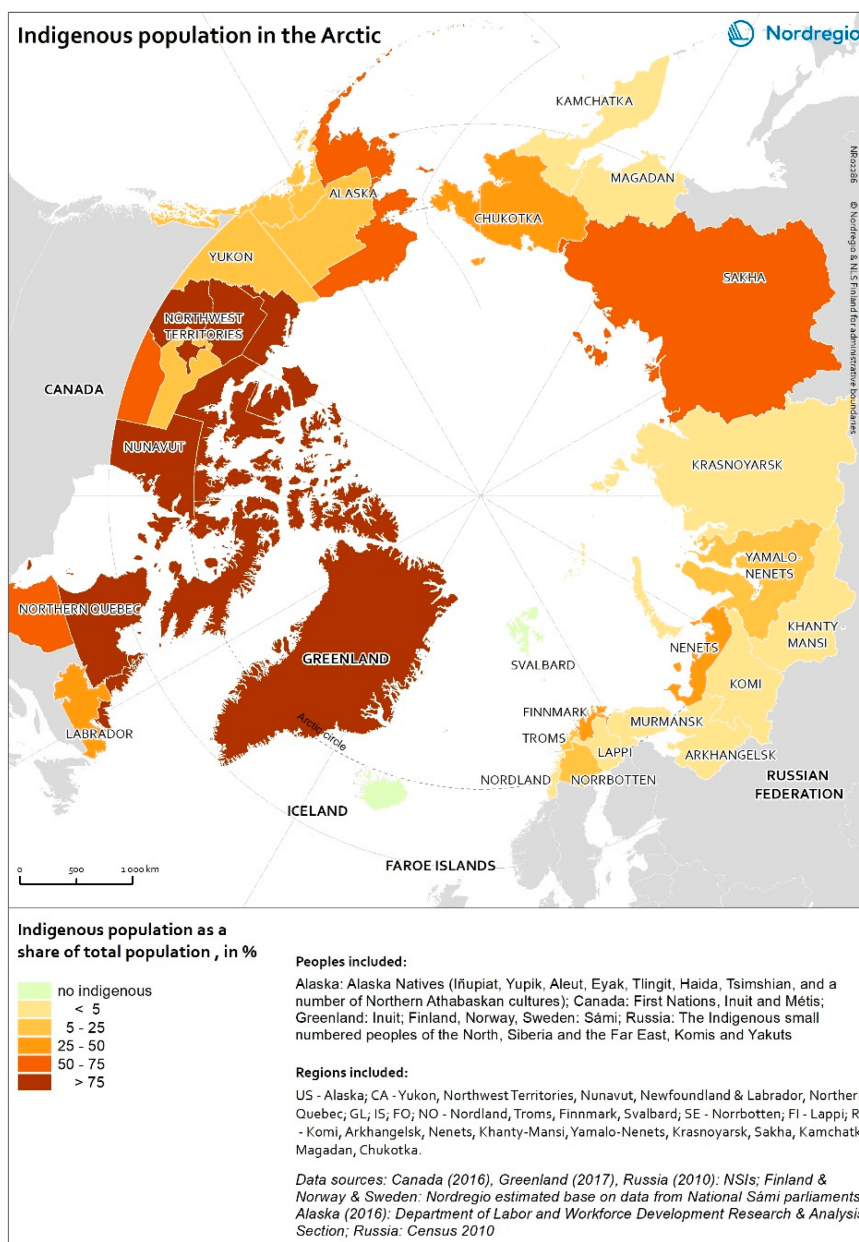
Kalaaleq scholar Aviaja Egede Lyngø has defined this as a form of mental colonisation, which is enacted both by historians and by history education itself: 'We have always been taught that we were one of the best colonies in the world. No slavery, no killings. We learned it through Danish history books and from Danish teachers' (Egede Lyngø, 2006: 1). This perspective not only distorts the relationship between Greenlandic Inuit and their own history and culture; it also creates 'a mentality that indicates a self-consciousness as inferior to other ethnic groups' (Egede Lyngø, 2011: 1). Other scholars have identified the critical, but also potentially transformative, role of history education in this context. They point out the paradoxes, gaps in knowledge and opportunities for decolonial praxis that are part of Arctic histories, epistemologies and research praxis (Berthelsen, 2020; Bianco, 2019; Kleist, 2021; Kleist et al., in press; Vold, 2021).

Recent research in Nuuk's secondary school education investigated examples of significant cultural differences between Danish teachers and Greenlandic students in educational settings, concluding that 'the educational regime in Greenland is not suitable for the Greenlandic culture' (Reimer Olsen, 2021: 2). Using interviews and observations from the classrooms at GUX (Nuuk's high school), the author commented on a range of miscommunications that centre on conflicting knowledge and communication systems between Greenlandic students and their Danish teachers. So, for example, a focus on verbal communication and culturally specific ideas about time often leads to a situation where 'de to kulturer taler forbi hinanden' (the two cultures talk past each other) (Reimer Olsen, 2021: 95). This is not a new phenomenon, with education being seen as an important part of both the modernisation and Indigenisation of Greenlandic Inuit (Lennert and Brincker, 2019; R. Petersen, 1980, 1995b). Yet, at the same time, education is also an integral part of 'Greenlandic bureaucracy and state apparatus', which is 'overwhelmingly influenced by Western values and epistemologies' (Berthelsen, 2020: 56). Reflecting on and restructuring epistemic habits as part of everyday praxis is thus one way of resisting the ever-present risk of 'being absorbed by a very different, totalising logic' (Tester and Irniq, 2008: 59). So, while Arctic memory cultures are produced as parts of imperial and colonial historical processes and narratives, they are also sites of multiple interventions, significant, active, geopolitical domains, and concurrent national and (post)colonial identities (Graugaard, 2016, 2020; Kleist, 2021; Kleist et al., in press).

A process of school reform by Naalakkersuisut (the Greenlandic Government) that took place between 1999 and 2002, Atuarfialak (the Good School) focused on strengthening Greenlandic Inuit

identities. It was based on ‘educational research among indigenous and postcolonial countries’ (Egede Lyng, 2011: 276; Olsen and Tharp, 2013; Wyatt and Lyberth, 2011). However, as the main focus of this reform seemed to be more on the development of policies and frameworks, rather than on their implementation (Lennert and Brincker, 2019), and as its success was evaluated according to indicators provided by the danish evaluation institute (EVA), it is difficult to see how it integrated Indigenous Greenlandic Inuit knowledges, skills, values and attitudes. This approach, combined with the fact that danish language and culture are necessary for social and economic advancement, set limits on the actualisation of ‘pluriversal worlds of knowing’ (Lennert Jensen et al., 2022). More nuanced, place-based and Indigenous research such as this is needed to see how sites of learning actually transmit Kalaallit knowledges, in particular knowledge about the past, rather than reproducing epistemically problematic assessments from outside.

Figure 1. Indigenous population in the Arctic (source: Nordregio, 2019)



Arctic memory cultures and historical thinking: an oxymoron or a dialogue?

The title of this section playfully appropriates that of a book chapter by one of the leading figures in historical thinking in Canadian history education, Peter Seixas, who has questioned whether and how Indigenous historical knowledge can be considered historical thinking at all (in Carretero et al., 2012). The reductive approaches of this type of disciplinary thinking illustrate the way in which current scholarship on history education in Canada 'imposes a settler grammar over the study of the past in ways that lessen the space available to develop the respect, openness for truth, and relationality needed' (Cutrara, 2018: 125). Significantly, Cutrara (2018) argues that this approach to historical thinking is problematic for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous teaching and learning alike. It not only does damage in terms of misrepresenting Indigenous ways of knowing the past as radically *diverging* from normal or standard western historical thinking; it also effectively attempts to erase it (ontologically) from history education altogether. Researchers from Nordic countries have managed to offer a more nuanced and critical stance, concluding that the perceived boundaries of historical consciousness reflect an entirely realistic tension, rather than incommensurability, between different knowledge positions – 'one that defines a specific ability that has emerged through the specific historical process of Western modernity, and another, which from more general observations, seeks to understand how people, at different times and in different cultures, create meaning through experiences of continuity and change' (Nordgren, 2019: 780).

Centring this type of strict disciplinary thinking within a standardised national curriculum does not actually increase the ability of teachers and students to understand and contextualise historical sources (Samuelsson and Wendell, 2016). If anything, it makes it more difficult to construct truly meaningful accounts of the past, which seems contrary to the intention behind the historical thinking methodology. As Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2006: 28) points out, this discussion is really about power and justice, with colonial viewpoints clashing with critical aspects of self-determination and justice for all: 'The sense of history conveyed by these approaches is not the same thing as the discipline of history, and so our accounts collide, crash into each other.' So, if we are to continue to employ historical thinking in history education, is it not a necessity to unthink aspects that create ignorance, misunderstandings, erasure – in short, damage? As reconciling, repairing, rewriting and righting remain central features of historical literacy and self-determination for Indigenous scholars, there is an uneasy relationship between historical thinking and Indigenous epistemes, especially when it comes to self-reflection: 'If one cannot observe one's own prejudices, the results will be filled with ethnocentrism' (R. Petersen, 1978: 13). With oppression and discrimination being intentional parts of colonial epistemologies and ontologies, and thus of historical thinking itself, 'Western epistemologies and Indigenous epistemologies cannot easily fit together without being honest that the colonial grammar of one has delegitimised the other' (Cutrara, 2018: 268).

An important aspect of understanding Indigenous perspectives is that the very conceptualisation of Indigenous knowledge is not a neutral, universal or place-based idea, but an intentional piece of colonial epistemology. It aims to flatten and homogenise what are nuanced, localised knowledge ecosystems, forcing them into western frameworks (Steeves, 2021). A recent review and mapping of Indigenous knowledge concepts in the Arctic shows many different types of understanding of this concept across the circumpolar north. These not only vary significantly across time and place; they are also shaped by both Indigenous agency, and by national and transnational colonial and political-economic processes (Egede Dahl and Tejsner, 2021): 'colonised nations and their indigenes have never been the passive victims of colonial rule but rather vibrant actors with agency, active engagement, and resistance, albeit in situations with grossly unequal power' (Subramaniam et al., 2016: 423).

In an attempt to communicate this difference to non-Indigenous audiences, some Indigenous scholars have opted to map their own ways of knowing on to western knowledge only in very specific cases, in order to avoid recolonising their own epistemes. Table 1, for example, emphasises both possible convergences and incommensurabilities when trying to compare the binary western '-ologies' with plural 'ways of ...'.

Table 1. Our knowledge and western knowledge (source: McKenna et al., 2021: 5)

Our knowledge	Western knowledge
Ways of valuing	Axiology
Ways of knowing	Epistemology
Ways of doing	Methodology
Ways of being	Ontology

These frameworks of knowing can either limit or open up our access to ‘ecologies of knowledges’ (Ndlovu-Gatshehi, 2021), as both historical thinking and historical consciousness are firmly rooted in, and complicit with, western modernity as an epistemological paradigm (Burke, 2002). Both as intellectual and as disciplinary praxis, historical thinking and historical consciousness therefore follow the imperial, patriarchal and colonial logic of a world view created back in the sixteenth century (McKenna et al., 2021). This world view initially included a wide variety of cosmopolitan and intercultural ways of thinking that represented and transmitted the past via local epistemes and highly complex, often non-textual, evidence (Burke, 2010). However, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, european conceptual frameworks started to calcify into separate disciplines and networks of cultural, social and political practices. As a result, general ideas about time, space and place were redefined and renegotiated according to western imperial, colonial and capitalist logic (Berthelsen, 2020; Vuorela, 2009). Peter Burke (2010: n.p.) notes how this process resulted in knowledge gain, as much as loss, in the form of ‘hiding, destroying and discarding of knowledge’ – which today provides ‘a challenge to any vision of the history of knowledge as simple progress or accumulation’.

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2006) describes a set of nine interconnected ideas that have shaped history as being conceived as a universal, totalising discourse. This discourse constructs the past as following a linear timeline centred on certain humans, as well as defining the practice of historical thinking as part of an ‘innocent’ discipline that simply collects ‘left over’ evidence in a chronological order (Smith, 2006: 30–1). Burke (2002) outlines a similar system of ten canonical principles that have shaped western historical thinking. They range from an emphasis on linear chronologies, progress or development (control of time), to ideas of detachment and objectivity (lack of emotional attachment, self-interest or bias), to an emphasis on expressing a ‘western’ sense of space that separates humans from land or territory (that is, map making). It is easy to see how these assumptions have shaped western historical thinking, including Burke’s silence around important ideas, such as the patriarchal nature of history (generally assumed to be normal or *natural*), and the application of preconceived imperial/colonial frameworks and vocabularies. So, for example, historical thinking, as disciplinary praxis, defines both gender and gender relations according to a colonial logic, often imposing patriarchal ideas as normative and inevitable (Jessen Williamson, 2011; Lugones, 2008). These more reductive types of historical thinking also distort other ideas, such as what counts as legitimate evidence, or what is of historical significance at all. The resulting disciplinary framework makes it difficult to escape the colonial knowledge paradigm when trying to genuinely think historically, in a sense of ‘learning with the past’ (Sriprakash et al., 2020):

Under colonialism indigenous peoples have struggled against a Western view of history and yet been complicit with that view. We have often allowed our ‘histories’ to be told and have then become outsiders as we heard them being retold. Schooling is directly implicated in this process. Through the curriculum and its underlying theory of knowledge, early schools redefined the world and where indigenous peoples were positioned within the world. (Smith, 2006: 33)

As Burke (2002, 2010) explains, western historical thought has been created from a predetermined system of ideas that both produces and erases knowledges about the past. The aim is to ‘delegate and pre-determine’ historical knowledge (Sriprakash et al., 2020). So, on the one hand, it delegates historical knowledge in the sense of arranging it in a predetermined hierarchy. On the other hand, this process also assimilates non-western ways of knowing about the past by replacing them with its own

versions of his-tory (the patriarchal nature of this knowledge being so aptly included in the word itself). Western modernity thus both defines itself and what can be known – an ‘epistemological paradigm’ – or, to use Kuokkanen’s (2017) concept, a network of epistemic habits that limit, rather than expand, the cognitive potential of knowing about the past: ‘historical thinking starts and ends with a disciplinary approach to history not designed for fluidity and respect for multiple understandings of the past – multiple interpretations of history based on historical evidence, yes; but not different ways of seeing and being able to see into the past’ (Cutrara, 2018: 266).

Arctic memory cultures and historical thinking: learning to unlearn together

[L]ife is an ocean of unfoldment and growth, Inuit should not have to hunt for an accredited tap every time they feel the thirst of curiosity. (Rasmussen, 2002: 90)

Places such as the Arctic are often represented as subject to, rather than active participants in, imperial and colonial historical processes and memory narratives. Inhabitants of the circumpolar north often find themselves erased from their own homelands in the ‘empty, icy North’, described as progress-averse ethno-types, colonial possessions, or the focus of thinly disguised racialisation and exotification (Arke, 2006; Nagy, 2008). As in other parts of the world, written scientific and historical knowledge developed concurrently to imperial relationships (Egede Lyng, 2006). This forms part of the techniques of colonial reimagining and re-engineering of geographic and ecological domains, ethnic boundaries and national identities (Carretero et al., 2012).

Scientific expeditions, in particular, were and are a central part of a global network of incomers producing knowledge about a ‘developing’ colonial world (Stuhl, 2016). However, while colonisation historically brought local colonial administrators, and historiographies written by colonial powers, Indigenous historians, artists, musicians and storytellers also created their own historical narratives and memory cultures concurrently (Møller and McLisky, 2021; H.C. Petersen, 1991). This was and is done using existing, place-based, historical literacy, vocabularies and languages, while at the same time contributing to the development of new scientific disciplines such as geography, by taking part in the collection and publication of descriptions and natural histories of local places for global audiences (Sellheim et al., 2019). So, for example, the first books printed in Nuuk during the mid- to late nineteenth century combined a pluriverse of Greenlandic cultural and historical knowledges. These multi-authored publications featured both graphic illustrations and narratives about the past, in its widest sense (Amon et al., 1860; Berthelsen et al., 1859). The second book of an initial quartet, for example, contains 80 works by 24 authors, in Kalaallit (Greenlandic), with danish translations and summaries. Other publications provided english and french translations and illustrations thought to be of interest to international audiences. However, the materials were also, over time, decontextualised and assimilated into ethnographic and literary collections (Rink, 2022) and consequent canonisation literature (Kaalund, 1997; Kangermio et al., 1860). So, on the one hand, the work can be seen as illustrative of how Greenlanders have made ‘their own significant interventions in national discussions around identity, economics, and politics’ all along (Møller and McLisky, 2021: 711). On the other hand, the materials at the heart of these publications were also subsequently removed and dispersed (delegated) to colonial archives, and rearranged and censored according to european premises, including the values, tastes and ideas of individual collectors, institutions and audiences (Kaalund, 1997). To teach history with these materials today not only means acknowledging this process of delegation and predetermination, but also identifying ways to interrupt the coloniality of knowledge production (Arke, 2006; Berthelsen, 2020; Silova et al., 2017).

While initially an attempt to aid intercultural understanding and mutual respect, the process described above also produced an ignorance of Indigenous ways of knowing and valuing by assimilating and delegating entire world views, relationships and cultural competencies into western epistemic structures and habits (Graugaard, 2016; Jessen Williamson, 2006; Öhman, 2017). Here is where historical thinking, as a colonial epistemic habit, closely connects to other methodologies of western scientific research. Scientific research was and is, in turn, implicated in colonialism and imperialism, and in how ‘knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and represented back to the West, and then through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized’ (Smith, 2006: 30).

Sanctioned ignorance, epistemic resistance and counter-narrative opportunities

When the privileged demand and then reject the conceptual and epistemic goods that the marginalised produce, they erase practices of epistemic resistance. (Berenstain, 2016: 10)

Having considered historical thinking as a form of habitual and sanctioned ignorance, I now turn to the erasure of epistemic resistance and counter-narrative opportunities. These reveal acts of erasure and forgetting (Ricoeur, 2010), as well as the potential of thinking historically to reckon with the coloniality of historical knowledge (Segato, 2022). So, for example, Denmark's national history curriculum limits historical thinking to events and persons that form part of the national narrative or canon:

[T]here is a canonised list of 29 events and persons the teachers are obliged to integrate in the topics and themes, and the curriculum divides the 29 events and persons into the three phases and prescribes that they are taught in chronological order. Thus, this list has great influence on the content. In addition, 20 of the 29 events and persons are closely connected to the history of Denmark and the rest are from the history of Europe, while none of them are from non-European history. (Poulsen, 2013: 407)

Derek Rasmussen (2002: 91) illustrates the impact of these differences in world views when it comes to history education from the perspective of Inuit from Nunavik, Alaska and Nunavut, Canada:

Until Qallunaat arrived, Inuit children would grow and take their place in their vibrant civilization without any sense that they ought to have been 'instructed' about things. Then along came this invention called Education, and its first wave of proponents kidnapped and attempted to assimilate Inuit youth. Realising that that was wrong, the second wave of Qallunaat school promoters now tell Inuit: 'We're on your side, we want to protect your language and culture; so we're going to boil it down into books and curricula and administer it to age-separated cohorts inside concrete buildings.' A Qallunologist would note that his subjects like to take an abundance, make it scarce, and certify people (and charge them money) to get access to it.

Clearly, western education, in the Arctic, has had a negative impact on Inuit epistemologies, but also on ways of being in the world (ontologies). When knowledge is extracted and only available via the 'accredited tap' of state education (Rasmussen, 2002: 90), it is incorporated into what Aymara scholar Rivera Cusicanqui (2012: 102) refers to as the 'political economy' of knowledge. Here, a combination of epistemic habits is put to work, ranging from traditions of assimilating and neutralising present or future decolonial practices, to 'post'-colonialism and whitewashing ('liberation' of the subaltern by the colonial and/or metropolitan centre – via the urban, educated elite) to the creation of strategic intellectual mini-empires (academic decolonisation discourses separate from praxis/actual change making). They include diversions, such as mislabelling movements for Indigenous sovereignty as 'nationalist' or 'reverse racism', therefore entrenching existing ignorance about historical, systemic inequalities. In addition, Indigenous science and technology are often extracted and appropriated as resources for more colonialism, while denying financial and institutional resources for decolonial action, such as language vitalisation and economic sovereignty. Unsurprisingly, this process can also be traced in history education, which often prefers to use a rhetoric of neutrality that hides the epistemic violence at the root of historical thinking behind the cloak of *objectivity*. So, for example, it presents *bias* as a mistake or wrong, subjective, 'stance' that can easily be overcome through intellectual activity/skills, without addressing the politics of structural inequality and need for change. For example, Cusicanqui (2012: 97–8) notes how: 'The cultural studies departments of many North American universities have adopted "postcolonial studies" in their curricula with an academicist and culturalist stamp devoid of the sense of political urgency that characterised the intellectual endeavors of their colleagues in India.' A similar transformation in European and Nordic universities has not gone unnoticed, with research frames on the human dimensions of climate change in the Arctic, for example, excluding the politics of colonialism from the study of human vulnerability and/or adaptation (Cameron, 2012).

In Arctic scientific practice, this position often combines with perceiving local knowledges as ethnographically or anthropologically interesting, but as ultimately secondary or irrelevant. This has

generated common generalisations and misconceptions about Indigenous knowledge production: 'Indigenous nations are not inherently anti-science, but instead aspire to a form of science and knowledge production that is objective, yet ethical and empathetic to peoples who have been affected by histories of structural inequality' (Smiles, 2021: 227). Framing Inuit histories as politically inactive 'cultures' whose authors are merely victims of modernity, imperialism, colonialism or climate change, rather than people in constant interaction with, and resistance to, all of these, has long been part of education and politics in the Arctic (R. Petersen, 1995a; Rasmussen, 2002). As is the case with historical thinking, these epistemic habits are designed to continue colonial structures, relations and discourses into the future, rather than to restructure them in the present. They form part of 'A tacit agreement to misinterpret the world' (Berenstain, 2016: 586), but they are also the basis for finding counter-narrative opportunities and possibilities for change.

Changing habits and restructuring relations: lessons from the Arctic

The ethnic condition is ironic, indeed: on the one hand, by our own example, we are a necessary, external contribution to the European self-perception; on the other hand, due exactly to this self-perception, we are not quite matching the European superiority, and must generally remain a sadly outdistanced supplement, an unbearable reminder. (Arke, 2006: 3)

The previous analysis has explored, on both a theoretical and a practical level, whether and how scholars and sites of learning should and can resist what Spivak (1987: 199) calls the 'sanctioned ignorance' that is achieved through the epistemic habits of western historical thinking. One way to unlearn existing epistemic habits is perhaps to follow Nordgren's (2019) suggestion to understand historical consciousness as an interpretative process that is both trans-historical and trans-cultural. This approach at least allows us to unthink the rationality that guides questions around historical thinking. It allows for the assimilation of historical thinking into critical pedagogical practices that create reparative futures (Sriprakash et al., 2020) with 'an openness to letting the present and the future impose new requirements on the past' (Nordgren, 2019: 794).

Indigenous scholars such as Rauna Kuokkanen (2017) also suggest a more active role for educators and academia. She points out that it is the responsibility of both the individual academic, academic disciplines and academia as a whole, to actively engage with unjust and ignorant epistemic habits – 'in the form of responding and reciprocating' to Indigenous epistemes and other forms of knowledge (Kuokkanen, 2017: 323). When the Greenlandic artist and philosopher Pia Arke (2006: 16) states that 'The suppressed remains suppressed no matter how conscious I am of its suppression', she points to a central problematic within dominant postcolonial historical thinking. While postcolonial theory has been very successful in pinpointing the perplexities of the *postcolonial condition*, it has failed in fostering accountability and action when it comes to addressing complicity with existing colonial structures, ideas and methodologies (Arke, 2006; Vuorela, 2009). So, rather than continuing a never-ending loop of pointing out oppression and silences, she suggests filling the silences and gaps intentionally, with intercultural dialogue and opportunities 'to play with the pieces of different worlds' (Arke, 2006: 17). This means intentionally transforming historical literacy and history education into a form of productive dialogue with knowledges outside the existing 'cognitive empire' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2021: 882). It means engaging in a process that starts by adopting viewpoints and methods that interrogate and dismantle the logic of coloniality, instead of continuing it. This way, we all participate in unthinking and unlearning western modernity as an epistemological paradigm.

Unthinking historical thinking: lessons from the Arctic

The first step – 'cease to do evil' – is understanding what one is currently doing. This is the essence of a pedagogy for the oppressor. (Rasmussen, 2002: 86)

This article has set out to advance the current role of history education and historical thinking in view of the new Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) framework. Foregrounding Indigenous scholarship from the Arctic, the research explored the potential of history education as a critical

pedagogical practice which resists and transforms epistemic habits that shape knowledge, skills, values and attitudes (Sriprakash et al., 2020; Tester and Irniq, 2008). By critically examining the epistemic habits that shape historical thinking, avenues for enhancing history literacy towards a more sustainable and equitable future can be identified. However, in order to achieve sustainable and just epistemic habits, the potential of thinking historically, when enacted and adapted into local pedagogic praxis, needs to be investigated. How do Indigenous scholars, teachers and students combine local and global history with their own cultural capital in the form of local language and knowledge, when teaching history within their own communities? Urgent research is required into how history education can be used in Indigenous communities and classrooms as a reparative means to epistemic justice, both as a mode of relational critique and a methodology for the restitution of cultural memory.

The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development centres on three dimensions that affect sustainable development: economy, society and environment; 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are deployed, aiming to confront the main global challenges, such as poverty, climate change and education, as well as health, peace, gender equality and sustainable cities (UNESCO, 2021). SDG 16 is entitled 'Peace, justice and strong institutions', the purpose of which is to 'promote peaceful and inclusive societies to achieve sustainable development, provide access to justice for all people and develop effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels' (UNESCO, 2022: n.p.). Seen in this new context, the idea of 'restructuring relations' takes on a central role when unthinking historical thinking as a function of creating 'a more just and sustainable world' (UNESCO, 2021: n.p.). Rather than reproducing more misinformation and polarised western thinking from what we think are objective perspectives, relationality can include the co-creation of pluriversal worlds, within a framework of respect, reciprocity and mutual understanding (Lennert Jensen et al., 2022).

Lummi scholar Michael Marker (2011) summarises four characteristics of Indigenous community memories, which current western historical thinking misunderstands, ignores or actively rejects. Notwithstanding the localised and place-specific nature of Indigenous knowledges, Marker (2011) outlines a number of commonalities that are central to Indigenous understanding of the past, such as the circular nature of time, the central role of relationships to local landscape and non-humans, an emphasis on local space and time, and a focus on resistance to, and survival of, histories of colonisation and erasure of knowledges. Framing any of these aspects as problematic is not only applying a 'colonial grammar of understanding' to these ways of thinking historically (Cutrara, 2018: 264), but also intentionally ignoring the history of historical thinking as a tool of discrimination. There is certainly not a conflict or a sense of the extraordinary with Indigenous ways of knowing the past, such as cyclical time. As Peter Burke (2002: 18) explains: 'different ideas of progress have long coexisted with the opposite, cyclical theory of historical change ... The idea of equilibrium, a balance that may be tilted but is always redressed, was a fundamental organising concept in Western historical thought from Giovanni Villani to Edward Gibbon.'

Neither are linear views of history only a western phenomenon: 'Messianic and millennial expectations ... can be found in many parts of the world in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries ... the result not only of the spread of Christianity but also of its interaction with indigenous traditions' (Burke, 2002: 18). Indigenous ways of knowing can thus be seen as part of a whole parallel and overlapping pluriverse of different histories and positionalities of knowing the past. Understanding this complexity should enable a common access to 'holistic and interdisciplinary way[s] of understanding reality' (Marker, 2011, in Cutrara, 2018: 267) – including different relations with the history of western thought.

Conclusion

Using Arctic memory cultures as a field of study, this article has examined historical thinking and historical consciousness not so much as mutually exclusive epistemic habits concerned with managing learning in and about history. This is an approach that risks becoming another site of sanctioned ignorance that reproduces and forecloses colonialist structures through the purposeful silencing of particular contexts as being irrelevant or too difficult (Guha and Spivak, 1988). Instead, both have been integrated into the wider field of memory cultures that produce (not discover) knowledge about the past through a system of epistemic habits. However, and as the above examples and arguments demonstrate, they are shaped by the colonality of knowledge, which produces ignorance, inequality and the erasure of resistance. Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ), the Inuktitut phrase for Inuit Traditional Knowledge, Institutions and Technologies, already captures the complexities and responsibilities inherent to Inuit identity: 'IQ

is about remembering, an ethical injunction that lies at the root of Inuit identity. It is also about acting from a particular intellectual and spiritual location. IQ, as resistance, is persistently present' (Tester and Irniq, 2008: 59).

In conclusion, Indigenous epistemes are not in themselves, nor have they ever been, incommensurable with the everyday business of *doing history*, or a pluriversal sense of the past when *thinking like a historian*. Equally, western ways of thinking historically are not intrinsically reductive or ignorant epistemic habits, narratives or approaches. They always coexist and interact with other ways of thinking, and are subject to continuous change and transformation. So, for example, the stress on individual agency in western historical thought runs counter to the emphasis on the collective agency of the empire or the nation state: 'As in the case of linear and cyclical history, we are dealing with the coexistence with and interaction of opposing trends' (Burke, 2002: 22). This is where history educators can probably most engage with the ample volume of Indigenous scholarship included in the references section of this article. It emphasises both an openness to other ways of thinking, and an integral ethical injunction that lies at the heart of thinking historically: 'to hold in check relations that seriously threaten Inuit culture and, in so doing, put before us relationships between and among people, animals, and landscapes relevant to all of us that might otherwise be absorbed by a very different, totalising logic' (Tester and Irniq, 2008: 59).

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