



Colonialism, Race, and White Innocence in Finnish Children’s Literature: Anni Swan’s 1920s’ Serial “Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa”

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In this chapter, the focus is on cultural colonialism in Finland. I explore one particular influential channel through which colonial discourse, the public colonial imagination, and colonial imagery were created, consumed, and circulated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century: literature addressed to children and young readers. As an example of such Finnish children’s literature, I examine the text “Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa” (“Living as Settlers in Australia”, 1926) by the seminal Finnish children’s and youth writer Anni Swan (1875–1958). The focus in the chapter is on the question of how colonialism and race in the Australian context are depicted in Swan’s text.

A number of studies have shown that (British) children’s literature was an effective means of disseminating imperialist ideology in the late

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R. Merivirta et al. (eds.), *Finnish Colonial Encounters*, Cambridge
Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80610-1_7

nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹ The period of 1860–1930 is known as the “Golden Age” of British children’s literature; not insignificantly, that Golden Age coincided with the period of high imperialism. Imperialist and colonialist children’s literature normalized and naturalized an imperialist world order and colonialism, encouraging readers to accept this ideology and the values that came with it. While British children’s literature of the Golden Age was a special case, in that it spread around the world in works ranging from Rudyard Kipling’s *The Jungle Book* (1894) to J. M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy* (1911), the phenomenon itself was not restricted to Britain: the age of high imperialism saw the development of publishing for children in other European countries as well.² From the late nineteenth century onward, British children’s literature was also the most important source of translations of children’s literature into Finnish, having surpassed translations from German, which dominated earlier.³ Perhaps unavoidably, then, imperialist and colonialist discourses crept into the pages of children’s literature in Finland as well, where a literary culture in Finnish was being created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

I suggest that although Finns, in most cases, did not become “active colonisers” in the narrowest sense of the term, Finnish (children’s) minds were “colonised” by the imperialist and colonialist ideology running through a great part of European children’s literature at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ Educating and civilizing Finnish children and young people was a central element in the project of creating an enlightened Finnish nation. As literature in Finnish was still taking its baby steps, translations from other (Western) European languages played a significant role in developing Finnish children’s literature, and functioned as a writing school for Finnish writers at the time.⁵ Anni Swan, for instance, translated Grimm’s fairy-tales, Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, and H. Rider Haggard’s adventure novel *King Solomon’s Mines*. Translations from other European languages influenced children’s stories

¹For example, Richards (1989); Castle (1996); Kutzer (2011); Singh (2004); Smith (2011); Bristow (2016).

²Bradford (2010), 39.

³Ihonen (2003), 16. For example, German author Karl May’s (1842–1912) adventure novels remained popular in Finland.

⁴See, for example, social anthropologist Ulla Vuorela’s reminiscences of her own childhood reading in the 1950s. Vuorela (2009).

⁵Kuivasmäki (2007), 280.

written in Finnish,⁶ yet this territory of literary studies remains largely uncharted. Perhaps because Finns tend to claim exceptionality and innocence with regard to colonialism and imperialism, the colonialist aspects of Finnish children's literature have remained understudied. By means of an examination of Swan's "Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa", this chapter shows that Finnish children's literature as well was influenced by colonial discourses and the colonial imaginary: Swan's text circulates a number of common European and American colonial tropes in its attempt to portray Finns as White and European.

Anni Swan is known as the Finnish "Queen of fairy-tales" but she was also one of the first youth novel writers in Finland. In fact, she is considered to be the writer who started the genre of youth novel/young adult fiction in Finnish,⁷ or at least created the Finnish girls' novel.⁸ Anni Swan's parents were Swedish-speakers, but her Fennoman father Carl Gustav Swan, appreciative and supportive of Finnish language and culture, made Finnish the family's home language. Swan and her eight sisters were highly educated, and many of them, Anni included, became teachers. Anni Swan worked as a teacher for a decade and a half in Helsinki, where she also ended up spending time with the Finnish cultural élite. The Swans' extensive network of relatives, friends, and acquaintances included a great number of notables from the Finnish cultural élite, including many writers and painters, from Eino Leino and Juhani Aho to Axel Gallén and Pekka Halonen. Anni's sister Saimi married the painter Eero Järnefelt; another sister, Nelma, married Professor Christian Sibelius, brother of the composer Jean Sibelius. Anni herself married the Finnish poet, translator, and professor Otto Manninen in 1907 and they had three sons together. Swan and Manninen read and commented on each other's manuscripts.⁹

In addition to writing fairy-tales and translating children's stories into Finnish, Swan also edited the children's magazine *Pääskynen* ("The Swallow") from 1907 to 1917, and then another children's magazine *Nuorten Toveri* ("Young People's Companion"; renamed *Sirkka* in 1926), which Swan had co-founded, from 1919 until 1945. "Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa" was originally published in 1926 as a serial in *Sirkka*. Swan's biographer Maija Lehtonen has noted that *Nuorten Toveri/Sirkka*

⁶For example, Ihonen (2003), 16.

⁷For example, Kivilaakso (2009), 233.

⁸Lappalainen (1976), 129.

⁹Lehtonen (1997).

originated from the situation of 1918; Swan wanted to participate in the healing process of the nation after the Finnish Civil War, and thought that the work should begin with the younger generation.¹⁰ The magazine's target audience was young readers, from children to teenagers. Swan became the sole editor of *Nuorten Toveri* in 1920, when the ownership of the magazine changed. As editor, Swan needed to acquire a serial for the magazine every year; sometimes she wrote the narratives herself, sometimes she resorted to translating abridged versions of stories from other languages. Many of Swan's youth novels had originally been published as serial in the magazines she edited.

"Uutisasukkaana Australiassa" seems to have been a minor work for Swan, who did not even endow it with her name.¹¹ The serial was slightly revised and more significantly amended before it was published as a book in 1949. The revised version, entitled *Arnellin perhe* ("The Family Arnell"), was Swan's last published novel and is included in the eleven-volume serial of Swan's youth novels (*Kootut kertomukset*, "collected stories") published by the Finnish publishing house WSOY. In the year of its publication, the novel received an honorable mention from the youth writers' association Nuorten Kirja. Its narration was lauded as "warm" and "understanding".¹² Swan's children's stories and translations of fairy-tales, stories, and youth novels are still in print; *Arnellin perhe* is widely available in Finland and has been issued as an e-book in 2020, making the text doubly relevant for our purposes.

All of Swan's other youth novels were set in nineteenth- or early-twentieth-century Finland, making "Uutisasukkaana Australiassa" with its setting (as indicated by the title) in Australia, an exception. It depicts a Finnish settler family's life in Queensland, focusing on their mostly troublesome encounters with First Nations people.¹³ The Finnish family is

¹⁰ Lehtonen (1958), 72–73.

¹¹ Lehtonen (1958), 77.

¹² Kivilaakso (2009), 230.

¹³ I use the terms First Nations People, Aboriginal person, Aboriginal people/s and Indigenous Australians interchangeably in this chapter. I am aware that the acceptance of some of these terms varies but to my understanding these terms are quite widely accepted. I have tried my best to consult guides for appropriate terminology. Furthermore, the Aboriginal people of Swan's text are imaginary rather than a representation of a specific Aboriginal people and therefore I had to use a more general term, while at the same time acknowledging that Indigenous Australia is multicultural and that there are a great number of separate Aboriginal nations.

portrayed as minding their own business and working hard, while the Aboriginal characters—except for one good servant, Cobi—cause them harm by lying, holding a young Finnish boy captive, violently attacking the farm and its inhabitants, and finally kidnapping the family's youngest child.¹⁴ Race and racialization become key issues in the story, in which the word “negro” is frequently in reference to the Aboriginal characters. The social anthropologist Anna Rastas has demonstrated in her study of the use of the “n-word” in older Finnish texts that negative and derogatory depictions of Black people, which nowadays are seen as manifestations of colonial knowledge and deemed “racist according to any possible criteria”, are also texts in which the word is typically used.¹⁵ Turning this the other way round, the word is typically used in colonialist and racist texts. The focus in this chapter is on the use of the word in “Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa”, and its implications for the worldview and the racial and cultural hierarchies constructed in the story and their connection to cultural colonialism. As Pramod K. Nayar has argued, “[r]ace is the key prism through which all postcolonial analysis is refracted”¹⁶; it is also the key prism through which I analyze the colonialist nature of Swan's text.

Since the Whiteness of the Finnish characters is emphasized in contrast to the Blackness of the Aboriginal characters and since the innocence of the Finnish settler family in Queensland and of Finns in general in regard to colonialism become points in themselves, I apply the concept of “White innocence”¹⁷ as an analytical tool. Gloria Wekker has discussed the concept of White innocence in a Dutch context, noting that innocence is often associated with smallness: a small nation, a small child. Being a small child is associated in the European cultural understanding with a state of innocence and goodness,¹⁸ and many small European nations, such as the Nordic countries and Switzerland, seem to apply the same analogy in describing themselves.¹⁹ In another context, Robin Bernstein has argued that “childhood innocence”, itself racialized as White, helped Americans

¹⁴These particular twists in the plot seem to have been fairly common in Australian (children's) adventure novels in the nineteenth century, for example, Richard Rowe's *The Boy in the Bush* (1869). Rowe was an Englishman but spent fourteen years in Australia. See Bradford (2001), 35–41.

¹⁵Rastas (2009), 93. See also Rastas (2007).

¹⁶Nayar (2010), 1.

¹⁷Wekker (2016); for “racial innocence”, see Bernstein 2011.

¹⁸Wekker (2016), 16–17.

¹⁹See, for example, Purtschert et al. (2015), 4–5.

in the nineteenth and early twentieth century to assert “not only whiteness but also racial difference constructed against whiteness”.²⁰ I suggest that Bernstein’s notion of racialized childhood innocence is useful in analyzing racial relations in “Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa”. As this chapter will show, Whiteness, innocence, and smallness (whether of a child or of the Finnish nation) are interconnected in Swan’s text and are used to portray Finnish settler colonialism in Australia as noncolonial.

FINNISH SETTLERS IN QUEENSLAND

“Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa” is the story of a Finnish family that travels overseas to settle in Queensland after experiencing some hardships in Finland. The father, Mr. Arnell, has left Finland after serving three years in prison for allegedly embezzling money from the bank where he worked, while the rest of the family, that is, the mother and four children—Mauri, 13; Mirkka, 11; Erkki, 8; and little Laura (age unspecified)—have stayed behind in Helsinki and have had to get by with very little money. The mother, Mrs. Arnell, maintains that there is no “better or nobler man” than her husband, no matter what people might say, and that he has done nothing wrong.²¹ In Queensland, the father has bought a small farm and misses his family. When the manager of the bank where he used to work offers to loan the family money for the voyage to Australia, they are excited and hope to earn enough in Australia to return to Finland and clear his name. It is thus emphasized that the family’s motivation for emigrating and trying to raise money overseas is well-justified and “pure”.

Mauri’s classmate Heikki, an orphan who has run away from his aunts, joins the Arnell family during the voyage to Australia. Heikki has plans to search for gold and dreams of striking it rich, but he is also drawn by the promise of adventure. This boy’s dreams are more obviously colonial, and inspired by nineteenth-century history. Some 200 Finns may have moved to Australia during 1851–1869, the early years of the Gold Rush, in “the hope of sudden riches”, and settled there permanently.²² According to the historian Olavi Koivukangas, Finnish prospecting in Australia seems to have been just a brief episode, eclipsed by California. Finnish newspapers

²⁰ Bernstein (2011), 8.

²¹ *Sirkka* no 11926, 3.

²² Koivukangas (1986), 64–71; Koivukangas (1998), 89.

stopped writing about the Australian gold fields in the 1860s.²³ In Swan's story, Heikki fails in his efforts to find gold near the farm, and the Arnells move from farming to prospecting only after a drought has killed all their sheep. Living in poverty and searching for gold two years after their arrival in Australia, the Arnells meet another Finnish man, who eventually confesses that he is actually the nephew of the Finnish bank manager and the one who had embezzled the money. He has now made a fortune in Australia and promises to clear the father's name. The family can thus return to Finland. Furthermore, the other man has found a promising prospecting place and hands it over to the Arnells, who find enough gold to buy a big farm near Helsinki. This happy ending reinforces the view of the "pure" and noble motives of the Finnish family. The other man buys the Arnells' Australian farm and plans to take up large-scale sheep husbandry; Heikki and Cobi, the Arnells' servant, stay with him.

In the 1920s, Queensland attracted migrants, mostly men, from central Ostrobothnia. The peak year of immigration was 1924. The Australian economy developed rapidly after World War I and the country's labour legislation attracted people to a "workers' paradise". Reports of the high wages available in Northern Queensland's sugarcane fields, along with news of the success of Finnish immigrants in Australia, also encouraged more people to migrate. Koivukangas notes that "the overwhelming reason on the personal level was the aim of building up capital in as short a time as practicable, in order to buy a farm back in Finland". Many only meant to go for two to five years. New immigrants could expect to get almost exclusively agricultural work, which was not better paid than in Finland. By 1925 over a hundred Finns had settled in the area near Cairns, and some 1000 more arrived in Australia during the 1920s. A frequent route from Finland to Northern Queensland was from Hanko to Sydney via England and the Suez Canal—which took fifty days—and from Sydney to Northern Queensland via Brisbane.²⁴ This is also the route taken by the Arnells. The serial offers very little in the way of dating the story but the events presumably take place in the 1920s, since there is no indication that this would not be a contemporary narrative set in the time of its writing. In the novel, *Armellin perhe*, the children get excited about Sydney's Harbour Bridge, constructed between 1923 and 1932, which thus dates the story.

²³ Koivukangas (1998), 89.

²⁴ Koivukangas (1986, 109–125; 1998, 95–99).

A farm called Suomi (“Finland Farm”) was established near Cairns in Northern Queensland. Nestori Karhula, a well-known man in the Ostrobothnian district of Lohtaja, moved to Australia in 1921 and acted as a trailblazer. Working as a foreman on the “Suomi Farm”, Karhula penned descriptions of life in Queensland for Finnish newspapers without hiding the fact that making it there required hard work and sacrifice.²⁵ A pair of Ostrobothnian brothers also sent accounts of their migrant experiences in Queensland to the newspaper *Ilkka* in 1924. They recounted the story of Karhula and the beginnings of Suomi Farm in 1923, adding that by August 1925 Karhula and other Finnish workmen had cleared sixty acres of forest for farming and were now growing sugarcane.²⁶ One Finnish newspaper, *Karjala*, published a piece on Finnish migrants’ journey to Australia in November 1924. The article, written by “A.E.L.” in Northern Queensland, mentions Suomi Farm—describing it almost as the Finnish headquarters in the area—and adds a few lines about the work of Nestori Karhula. A.E.L. also notes that there are very few Black people in the area, adding that larger communities of natives are still living beyond the nearby mountains, where they live a free, natural life in large forests. The writer explains that they do not often encounter Aboriginal people because the latter hate White people so much that they stay away.²⁷ This is one of the few instances in which Indigenous Australian people are mentioned in Finnish immigrant stories published in the newspapers.

These reports in the press on the Suomi Farm, and on Finnish immigration to Queensland more generally, were probably a factor contributing to Anni Swan’s decision to set a story there. While living on the farm, Swan’s Finnish settler family comes into contact with Aboriginal people, some of whom work as their servants while others attack their farm. As the immigrant letters published in the Finnish press did not say much about Aboriginal people, Swan’s decision to cast them as violent must have been inspired by other sources. Swan never visited Australia, but Lehtonen mentions that Swan drew on the reminiscences of her brother-in-law Heikki Manninen.²⁸ Manninen had served as a sailor from 1911 to 1919, and had visited Australia. Within the literary world, Swan drew inspiration

²⁵ Koivukangas (1998), 95.

²⁶ “Matkalla Austraaliaan.” *Ilkka* 1 November 1924.

²⁷ “Kuvauksia suomalaisten siirtolaisten Australian matkalta.” *Karjala* 2 November 1924, No. 256, p. 9.

²⁸ Lehtonen (1958), 104.

from British and American children's and youth stories she read and sometimes translated.²⁹ Swan may have also read Australian colonial texts, which were dominated, in the words of Clare Bradford, by a "discourse of savagery", describing "indigenous peoples as uncivilized, located on the very border between men and animals".³⁰ At least one of the characters in Swan's novel *Arnellin perhe* (1949) reads books by the Australian children's writer Ethel Turner to acquaint herself with the continent.³¹

In Swan's story, the Arnell family settles in Queensland in an unproblematic manner, without any discussion of land-owning rights or colonial relations in the area. The father had informed his family of his purchase of a farm in a letter before they left for Australia. Mauri's schoolteacher tells his class that Queensland is a large and thinly populated region, where workers are sorely needed. When the family is reunited in Sydney, the father is described as a man who has lived for years among strangers, first in prison and then in Australia, working hard. The mother takes in her husband's transformed appearance, and senses that he has suffered a lot. The sympathies of Swan's young readers are thus directed toward the respectable but wrongly treated and hardworking Finnish family, who are settling in Australia only to try to right the wrong done to them. In this project, the small farm purchased by the father is instrumental: they need to make it sufficiently profitable to pay to clear his name.

Colonialism is not something that is discussed or acknowledged in the serial; neither the word nor the idea is ever actually mentioned. However, in the revised version of the text, *Arnellin perhe*, published as a novel in 1949, colonialism is briefly referred to. The original story gives no explanation as to whom the father bought his farm from, but in the novel he explains that he bought it for next to nothing from Tom Kelland, an Englishman who had returned to his country after inheriting from his uncle.³² After a violent attack on the farm by some Aboriginal men, the father explains that such incidents are unusual, but that there are reasons for them. He refers to the brutal treatment of Black Australians by Whites,

²⁹ Kivilaakso (2009), 198.

³⁰ Bradford (2001), 15.

³¹ Ethel's Turner's novel *Seven Little Australians* (1894), the work that is seen "as the first authentically Australian work for children" (Bradford 2001, 5), was translated into Finnish in 1896 by Antti Rytönen.

³² All references to the novel are to the following edition: Anni Swan: *Arnellin perhe*. Porvoo: WSOY 1992 (orig. 1949), here 74. All translations from the original are by the author.

noting that Kelland had been a representative of the old, merciless generation that treated Aboriginal people like slaves and flogged them. Kelland had had the brother of an Aboriginal leader badly beaten, thus crippling him; the leader, Gilba, had probably sought revenge and attacked the farm, thinking that it was inhabited by Kelland's relatives. The father adds that had he known this history beforehand, he would not have bought the farm³³—thus absolving himself of any guilt. In the later text, British colonialism in Australia is thus condemned and the brutal treatment of Aboriginal people acknowledged, although the father does not want to go into detail as to what happened.³⁴ This acknowledgment and condemnation, however, do not extend to Finns, who throughout the text clearly remain outsiders and innocent of colonialism. If anything, the Arnells are presented as victims themselves: first Mr. Arnell is framed for a crime he did not commit, and when he tries to create a new life for himself in a foreign country through hard work, he and his family are attacked by First Nations people for no fault of their own.

RACIALIZATION OF ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

The Aboriginal people in the story—most of them men—are the Other to the Finnish family. From the first encounter, Aboriginal people are racialized by the use of the “n-word”, which is frequently employed—along with “savage” or “native”—in place, for instance, of the neutral “man” when referring to an Aboriginal character otherwise than by his name. While not stated explicitly in the serial, it is quite evident that the family could not survive on the farm without their Aboriginal servants, of whom there seem to be several. They provide the labour that allows the farm to be viable. Yet, the servants are described as “so unusually lazy that they seemed to be competing over who managed to do less work”,³⁵ thus conforming to the usual colonial stereotypes of active White and passive Black people. The focus in the serial is on the hard work the family does on the farm, along with the adversities they encounter. After the hot weather and consequent drought, Aboriginal people represent the greatest threat to the endeavours of the Finns; this has been the case ever since Heikki, who has left the others to go in search of gold, has encountered and been captured by Dvinda,

³³ Swan (1992), 130.

³⁴ Swan (1992), 130.

³⁵ *Sirkka* no 111926, 110.

an Aboriginal man residing with his people in the forest into which Heikki has ventured. Dvinda's people are led by Snoki (renamed Gilba in the novel); after his people release Heikki he is assumed to be friendly, only to betray this trust and attack the family farm when an opportunity presents itself. Snoki's plans are thwarted by a rival group of Aboriginal people, led by Waibu. At first the family distrust Waibu, but with his help they are able to defend their farm. The Arnells are always afraid of the First Nations people, who "smile cunningly"; when Heikki disappears, for example, the family is worried that the "savages" may have taken him, the children concerned specifically that they may also have "roasted him".³⁶

The only Aboriginal child in the story, a girl who remains nameless, is encountered by Heikki while he is being held by Dvinda's people. The girl is described as having "a cunning expression on her ugly face" when she looks at him and wonders what to give him to eat. When Heikki, who is described as "a white stranger", is offered a frog and a snake to eat, he remembers that in Australia "not only wild natives but even white-skinned bushmen gladly eat both snakes and frogs".³⁷ Whiteness here, unlike so often in Western culture, is not invisible or a non-race.³⁸ Whiteness is something that definitely sets the Finns apart from First Nations people in the story and confirms that they belong among other White Europeans. First Nations people, on the other hand, are categorized as "Black", which in the story and probably in the Finnish imaginary of the time means being a "negro" as the repeated use of the word in the story indicates. The background of the story may have been affected by the search for a Finnish racial origin in the 1920s, when Swan's serial was originally published, and its connection to the Finnish national identity.

European racial theories of the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century classified Finns as "Mongols", and they were thus placed somewhere between Indo-Europeans and Blacks in the racial hierarchy.³⁹ Finns had largely accepted this categorization, until at the turn of the twentieth century, the belief in racial hierarchies and in the superiority of the "White race" in many European countries led Finns to debate the matter and challenge the "Mongol" theory.⁴⁰ After gaining independence in 1917, there

³⁶ *Sirkka* no 81926, 74–75.

³⁷ *Sirkka* no 91926, 83.

³⁸ See, for example, Dyer (2017 [1997]); Wekker (2016).

³⁹ Kemiläinen (1993), 57–62, 139–144.

⁴⁰ Kemiläinen (1985), 306.

was an increased desire to formulate a Finnish national identity, and studies in physical anthropology were a part of this quest. This led to an increasing certainty as to the erroneousness of the Central European categorization of Finns as Mongols.⁴¹ One prominent theory in the 1920s was that of an East-Baltic race, comprising Finns and their Eastern and Southern neighbors.⁴² An interest in racial theories and in the origin of Finns grew outside expert circles as well, and related issues were discussed in the periodical press.⁴³ The anthropologist Kaarlo Hildén, for instance, wrote about “Finns in the light of racial research” in 1928, noting that it can be said with certainty that Finns are not Mongols and that they differ greatly in their anthropological qualities from representatives of the “Yellow race”. In conclusion, he wrote that based on their racial constitution, “Finns are equally ‘good Europeans’ as for instance the cultural nations of Central and Northern Europe”.⁴⁴ The goal of the educated Finnish élite, who had an interest in constructing a Finnish national identity, was to link Finns with Europeans and Whiteness and to deny the Mongol theory.⁴⁵

Africans and/or Blacks played a central role in the construction of Finnish Whiteness. Mari Lyytikäinen, in a study of the representation of “Negroes” in Finnish geography textbooks of the 1920s, notes that the image constructed of Africans was used to confirm the place of Finns beside other Europeans. Africans were represented as the opposite and negation of Finns; this would help in constructing Finns as White Europeans, since Africans were presented as the common Other of Finns and (other) White Europeans.⁴⁶ In Swan’s “Uutisasukkaana Australiassa”, the same dichotomy appears to apply to Australian First Nations people as well. A significant racial difference is constructed between Blacks and Whites, and it is this division that matters in the serial. The use of the racializing n-word blurs and even eradicates cultural and racial differences between African, African American, and Indigenous Australian peoples; their cultures and perceived “characteristics” are then treated interchangeably, with all “Black” people across the world collapsed into a single

⁴¹ Kilpeläinen (1985), 193.

⁴² See Kemiläinen (1985), 318–344.

⁴³ Tallgren (1985), 398–405; Kemiläinen (1985), 380.

⁴⁴ Hildén (1928), 282–291. See also Tallgren (1985, 401–405), who discusses Hildén.

⁴⁵ Jokisalo (2010), 9, 21.

⁴⁶ Lyytikäinen (2003), 84–86. As a case in point of the othering, stereotyping and derogatory depiction of Africans, see Favorin (1925).

category under the racializing word. One of the Aboriginal servants in “Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa”, for instance, is called Sambo, which is also the name of one of the slave overseers who work for the cruel slave-owner Simon Legree, in Harriet Beecher-Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852). Swan has probably borrowed the name from the novel, although “Sambo” was also a popular American stereotype of a child-like, happy, contented slave, lazy, but devoted to music and dance. Swan’s Sambo does have some of these characteristics, including laziness, but he is not a “fool or jester”.⁴⁷ An abridged version of Beecher-Stowe’s novel was published in Finnish as early as 1856, as one of the first American novels to be translated into Finnish; this was followed by several other translations and adaptations for young readers, testifying to its popularity. Furthermore, in the serial, Cobi calls Mr. Arnell “massa”, indicating that Swan may have confused (or even deliberately used) African American vernacular English with the English used by Aboriginal people in Queensland. Swan was familiar with African American vernacular English from her translation of Joel Chandler Harris’ *Tales of Uncle Remus (Jänis Vemmelsäären seikkailuja)* fifteen years earlier. This collection of Black American folktales in a Southern plantation context was originally written in a dialect devised by Harris to represent a Black vernacular of “the deep south”; it may well have influenced Swan’s text. In Swan’s revised 1949 novel, *Arnellin perhe*, the American-derived name Sambo has been changed to Woomera,⁴⁸ and the word “massa” has been replaced with “master”.

In addition to Anglophone children’s and young adults’ literature, one can surmise that Swan’s description of Australian Aboriginal people was influenced by Finnish geography textbooks. One such textbook, published in 1925 in its sixteenth edition, includes the following description:

Australian natives have weak mental abilities and are ugly in appearance. Their cheekbones are pronounced, the forehead is low and sloping. Big, bushy eyebrows, broad nostrils, a large mouth and black, glittering eyes make them look wild. [...] In their wild state an Australian wears no clothing but if they get their hands on some rags, they will wear them, more out of vanity than of necessity. Birds’ down is used as decoration. [...] The Australian’s only domesticated animal is the dog, and farming is wholly unknown to them. What they need, they get from the forest. Ants, snakes,

⁴⁷Pieterse (1992), 152–154.

⁴⁸Woomera is actually an Aboriginal word in the Dharug language of the Eora people, the traditional custodians of the Sydney area. It refers to a traditional spear-throwing device.

lizards and even maggots do for food for him. Some tribes even eat human flesh.⁴⁹

The textbook goes on to comment that Aboriginal peoples possess no cooking utensils, and only very simple weapons. Such racist and essentializing descriptions of non-European and particularly Black people were common in Finnish geography textbooks from the late nineteenth century down till at least World War II, in some cases even until the 1960s. The authors of these textbooks drew on European geographical and travel literature.⁵⁰ Anni Swan was a former teacher and had three sons (born 1907, 1909, and 1915), who would have been going to school in the 1910s and 1920s, so Swan herself was probably familiar with the kind of geography textbooks cited above; thus, she may have simply drawn on these textbooks for her story. A geography lesson is actually included in the story, where Heikki and Mauri tell their teacher of Mauri's plans to travel to Australia. Australian geography and animals are then discussed in class, although no Aboriginal or other people are mentioned.

In keeping with the above, forest-dwelling First Nations people are portrayed in "Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa" as ignorant savages, whom Finnish children can teach a thing or two about European civilization. While at Snoki's abode, Heikki is "gripped by a burning desire to show these natives products of European culture"⁵¹; in practice, this means he lights a match, thus astonishing the women watching him. In the novel, the same incident is described as Heikki's "burning desire to show these primitive beings products of white culture",⁵² and thus display his superiority. Heikki had noticed that a nameless Aboriginal girl lit a fire by rubbing two pieces of wood together, which makes him say: "The natives of Queensland do not commonly use fire sticks, unlike the negroes of Western Australia".⁵³ Heikki also gifts the women with a piece of a mirror, a broken comb, and a shiny button, which they appear to be seeing for the first time: "the women's joy was great and sincere".⁵⁴ Later at the Arnell house, Dvinda, who has assaulted and tied up Mauri, is frightened out of the house by the light of two suddenly lit torches. The narrator explains that

⁴⁹ Favorin (1925), 141. Translation by the author.

⁵⁰ Paasi (1998), 226, 230–232.

⁵¹ *Sirkka* no 91926, 83.

⁵² Swan (1992), 91.

⁵³ *Sirkka* no 91926, 83.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

“the superstitious native” was scared by “the quality of the incredible magic light”, as he had not seen “such witchcraft before”.⁵⁵ The Aboriginal people of the story are constantly described as superstitious, and their culture comes across primitive in comparison to European culture, testifying to the circulation of European colonial discourses in Swan’s story.

Moreover, whereas Gilba’s people are amazed by Heikki’s Western products, Heikki is amused by the state of dress—and undress—of some of the members of the group. One of the men is wearing Heikki’s felt hat around his neck with the top of the hat cut off and Heikki’s coat inside out, while the others are “stark naked”. Furthermore, Dvinda is so “funnily dressed” that it is all Heikki can do to stop himself from laughing out loud. Dvinda’s dress includes an old felt hat with a red feather, a bright yellow scarf around the neck, and various bangles on his wrists and adornments around the waist. The scene created out of these “strange” forms of attire, and the inducement for readers to laugh at the men along with Heikki, point to Western civilizing discourse and help readers to label First Nations people as “savages”. As Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff put it in the context of missionary work, “Christian cultures put clothedness next to godliness”; learning to wear (Western) clothes was part of the “civilizing” project, although one also had to remain modest and show restraint in the selection of these clothes.⁵⁶ Western missionaries attempted to determine the proper attire for their converts, with varying rates of success. Western garb was sometimes worn as “prescribed”, but local people could also wear them in their own, innovative ways, which the missionaries often found ridiculous—or transgressive.⁵⁷

In Australia, as in Africa, missionaries and anthropologists had definite ideas about the clothedness/nakedness of Aboriginal people, and tried to impose these views on the latter. Peggy Brock notes that “Aboriginal people were attracted to clothing and sought it out, but experimented with garments in ways which both missionaries and anthropologists found disconcerting”.⁵⁸ European clothing was not always practical to wear or manage in Australia. Some Aboriginal people also “adapted European goods to their own cultural requirements”.⁵⁹ The attitude of finding

⁵⁵ *Sirkka* no 121926, 119.

⁵⁶ Comaroff & Comaroff (1997), 223.

⁵⁷ Huuhka (2019), 183; Comaroff & Comaroff (1997), 236.

⁵⁸ Brock (2007).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

idiosyncratic ways of wearing Western clothes ridiculous and/or transgressive is apparent both in the Finnish geography textbook's description of First Nations people and in "Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa". In Swan's serial, Dvinda is presented as someone who mimics Euro-Australians but does it badly, appearing ridiculous. Young Finnish readers are invited to laugh at this figure and feel superior to him: even (Western) children know that this is no way to wear Western clothes. Interestingly, Swan may have used an actual photo of an Aboriginal man as her model, as there is a photo of a man with the caption "Dvinda" (no other details given) in *Sirkka*.⁶⁰ Dvinda's amusing clothes are not the only feature that makes the White Heikki seem superior to him. Dvinda speaks broken English; while it is noted in the text that the Finnish children, including and especially Heikki, cannot speak English that well either, the language they use when talking to Aboriginal people is always correct and proper Finnish, standing in for English. In contrast, the language used by Aboriginal people is always "bad Finnish".

The Aboriginal characters in Swan's serial conform to negative colonial stereotypes and caricatures: they are repeatedly depicted as ugly, often grinning maliciously, with (unnaturally) white, gleaming teeth; superstitious, unreliable, cruel, and greedy. At one point after the attack on the farm, Mauri sees "Black, greasy, shining bodies sneaking like snakes among the plants",⁶¹ revealing yet another colonialist trope in Swan's text. Comaroff and Comaroff note that the image of "the greasy native" had appeared in late-eighteenth-century Dutch depictions of the Khoisan people, as well as in other accounts of Southern African people in Western, for example, British, literature and periodical press. By the mid-nineteenth century, the figure of "the greasy native", associated with dirtiness and ugliness, had become common in popular literature.⁶² The emphasis on the perceived ugliness of the White Finns' Other is particularly interesting; one of the qualities linked to the Mongol race was ugliness, whereas beauty was considered a quality belonging to the Aryan or Nordic race. Furthermore, outward beauty had been traditionally connected with moral goodness.⁶³ Swan's text seems to be trying to prove that it is Black

⁶⁰ *Sirkka* no 111926, 110.

⁶¹ *Sirkka* no 151926, 152.

⁶² Comaroff & Comaroff (1997), 224.

⁶³ Kemiläinen (1985), 381.

people who are ugly; the Finns in the story are their opposite and are therefore to be considered White and European, not Yellow and Asian.

CANNIBAL CRUELTY AND WHITE INNOCENCE

One of the defining characteristics of the First Nations people in the serial is cruelty—often connected with cannibalism—whereas the Finns in the story are characterized as innocent. The cruelty of the Aboriginal people in the serial is apparent from the beginning. Travelling from Sydney, where their ship has arrived, to the farm in Queensland, the children spot a koala on a tree and look at it, amazed. But while the children admire the animal, Cobi takes a bow and arrow and shoots the koala dead. He then tells the father happily: “It died, mister. Cobi shoot it”. He is then reprimanded by Mirkka, who wants to adopt the koala’s joey.⁶⁴ Cobi, representing First Nations people more generally as the first First Nations person the children encounter, is thus described from early on in the narrative as a cruel man, capable of senseless acts of violence. In many ways, he is like a child, who acts on impulse and needs reprimanding by a Finnish teenager. Furthermore, without any prior contact with First Nations people, the family seem to possess all sorts of knowledge about their cruelty. It is noted, for instance, that Heikki “*knew* how bloodthirstily and deeply the different tribes could hate each other”.⁶⁵ The father explains to his family—and to the serial’s young readers—that “an Australian negro doesn’t feel affection towards anyone—and s/he can never be entirely trusted”. He goes on to give an account of a situation where an Aboriginal servant of ten years’ standing suddenly tried to hit his master over the head with a club, which would have killed the master, had he not moved away quickly. The father then says that “we Europeans are unable to understand to what extent Australians are slaves to their dark basic instincts”.⁶⁶

Swan may or may not have been aware of the “Queensland Cannibals”, discussed by Leila Koivunen in this volume; at the time of the troupe’s visit, Anni Swan would have been eleven years old. Be that as it may, the idea of cannibalism, “the capital sin of otherness”,⁶⁷ is strongly connected to Queensland’s Aboriginal people in the story. When a group of Aboriginal

⁶⁴ *Sirkka* no 51926, 42.

⁶⁵ *Sirkka* no 151926, 155, my emphasis.

⁶⁶ *Sirkka* no 171926, 172.

⁶⁷ Schaffer (1995).

people attack the family's farmhouse, Mauri "knows what a terrible death awaits them. There were still many cannibal tribes among Australian savages".⁶⁸ The belief that (some of) Queensland's Aboriginal peoples were cannibals was common enough "knowledge" in Finland in the early twentieth century to be printed in geography schoolbooks,⁶⁹ and as a schoolteacher and a mother, Swan would have found textbooks an accessible source of information about faraway countries for her children's stories. She may also have been imbibing information from British sources, such as travel literature. Kay Schaffer notes that the British assumed that indigenous peoples (in the South Seas) were cannibals and "took this 'knowledge' with them on their voyages of discovery", with explorers, travellers, and seamen all reporting on such practices even "in locations where it was not known to exist".⁷⁰

The question of cannibalism is raised a number of times in the texts. The children in particular wonder about "savage tribes" that might catch, kill, and eat them, and their parents say nothing to alleviate this fear. Swan's readers were inclined to believe this oft-repeated claim. When the Arnell children encounter an Aboriginal person for the first time, Erkki immediately asks: "Does it eat children?"⁷¹ Later, Heikki imagines meeting a "wild Black tribe" on his trip to search for gold, a "tribe" that would at first plan to kill and eat him, but which would then adopt him as their leader. In his vision, the "tribe" would attack the Arnells and scare them, only to be saved by Heikki himself, who would step up with a boomerang in his hand and calm things down.⁷² While this flight of the imagination is not realized, the Aboriginal characters in Swan's text are represented as treacherous and dangerous, inclined to kidnapping and even threatening to eat children. Although not overtly stated, this idea justifies the White European settlement of the Aboriginal lands in "Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa".

The connection between colonialism, (rumours of) cannibalism, and the gold rush evident in Swan's story is familiar from Australian history. Kay Schaffer has noted that during the first decades of colonialism there were no mentions of Aboriginal people's cannibalism in the local Australian

⁶⁸ Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa *Sirkka* no 151926, 152.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Favorin (1925), 141.

⁷⁰ Schaffer (1995), 110–111, drawing on Gananath Obeyesekere's "British Cannibals" in *Critical Enquiry* 18 (1992).

⁷¹ *Sirkka* no 51926, 42.

⁷² *Sirkka* no 721926, 64.

press. From the late 1820s onward, the *Sydney Gazette* began to publish settlers' letters describing scenes of cannibalism. These stories "helped to justify colonial practices of extermination. [...] The stories of native cannibalism became more bizarre in time and with further white settlement".⁷³ Yet, there is no evidence of Aboriginal people consuming the flesh of Europeans, even if violent frontier conflicts caused fatalities on the European side as well. After the 1870s gold rush in Queensland, however, there were rumours about Aboriginal people eating the flesh of Europeans, but particularly favouring that of the Chinese. As Schaffer explains, these rumours would discourage the Chinese, thus "reducing competition for the Europeans".⁷⁴

The frequently mentioned cannibalism of the First Nations people in "Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa" serves to carry the othering process to its extreme, especially when contrasted with the innocence of the Finns. As Kay Schaffer writes, "[w]ithin a colonial mentality, cannibalism represented the ultimate denial of a common humanity, the ultimate sign of depravity, the ultimate mark of savagery and, above all, a guarantee of European superiority".⁷⁵ The accusation of cannibalism has been commonly explained by its use to justify conquest and colonization, as well as to amplify the value of Christian civilization. What was at question was "a moral hierarchy in cultural models".⁷⁶ The first tales of cannibalism outside Europe were circulated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, with the word "cannibal" being derived from "Carib(al)s", residents of the Caribbean islands.⁷⁷ Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) set the example of a White man's encounters with non-European cannibals; the canonical status of the novel probably contributed to the popularity of the theme (and may have inspired Swan as well). Several features of the novel's depiction of cannibalism are, as Patrick Brantlinger points out, "frequently repeated in later colonial discourse", including the notions that "cannibalism is the absolute nadir of human behavior" and that "it is practiced by black or brown savages but not by white Christians, who are horrified by it".⁷⁸ In Swan's colonialist text, the cannibalism of Aboriginal people also

⁷³ Schaffer (1995), 118, 120.

⁷⁴ Schaffer (1995), 120–122.

⁷⁵ Schaffer (1995), 108.

⁷⁶ Pieterse (1992), 115–116.

⁷⁷ Pieterse (1992), 114.

⁷⁸ Brantlinger (2011), 2–3.

affirms the superiority, Europeanness, and Whiteness of the Finnish characters.

The threat that Aboriginal people pose to the Finns in the story, and the treachery of even their own servants, culminates in the attack of Snoki's men on the farm, while the father is away with Cobi on a trip to the market and their home defended only by teenage boys. The family do not trust their servant Sambo, the only grown man in the house, whom they deem cowardly and untrustworthy. A group of six or seven men are camping out close to the farm after the father has left. Their "devious-looking" chief, Waibu, explains that they are there to protect the family from the "bad fellas", that is, Snoki and his men, who had beaten Waibu's people and driven them away from their village. Dvinda tricks the family by coming to ostensibly warn them off and telling them that Waibu and his people have killed the father and are planning an attack on the farm. That turns out to be a lie, part of Dvinda's design to gain the trust of the family, kill both Waibu's people and then the father when he returns, and steal the farm's sheep for his own people.

The violent attack—in the course of which Mauri is throttled, hit over the head, and tied up by Dvinda and Sambo, who has also turned against the family—comes to a halt when the men see an extraordinary sight:

A small white being sat kneeled in the middle of the floor. Her hair shone like the silver moon, her face radiated with whiteness, and her dress was like silver. [...] The white being had clasped her hands, her lips were moving silently and her gaze was raised upwards. There was a moment's silence. One of the savages raised his head when he saw what he perceived to be a supernatural spirit, let out a low groan and left crawling towards the broken window. Without daring to glance back, he climbed out the window. And as if transported by a secret power, the others left after him, shaking.⁷⁹

As Laura finishes praying, there is more noise and fighting outside the house: the two groups of Aboriginal people are now fighting each other. Little Laura's Whiteness and innocence are central motifs in "Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa". They are constantly set against the Blackness and superstition of Cobi, who says early on to the father: "Cobi take massa home. Cobi loyal black man. Good spirit is with us. Evil spirit cannot approach". The father then explains that "Australian natives are

⁷⁹ *Sirkka* no 151926, 152.

very superstitious. Our daughter's blonde curls and blue eyes have apparently bewitched him". To this Laura adds: "perhaps Cobi sees Laura's guardian angel. Mother has said that little children have their guardian angels".⁸⁰ Laura's words, together with subsequent events at the farm, seem to confirm the angel-like status of the little White girl. After the attack is over, Heikki reflects that he had had to rely on his own fists and resourcefulness but that the family members would all have perished if "the appearance of *innocent* little Laura had not bewitched those superstitious negroes".⁸¹ In her book, *Racial Innocence*, Robin Bernstein notes that by the mid-nineteenth century the previously prevailing doctrine of infant depravity (children were born with original sin) was inverted and children were no longer seen as sinful but innocent; "not depraved souls risking hellfire but holy angels leading adults to heaven. [...] Childhood was then not understood as innocent but as innocence itself; not as a symbol of innocence but as its embodiment. The doctrine of original sin receded, replaced by a doctrine of original innocence. This innocence was raced white".⁸²

Bernstein notes that Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, with her blonde curls and blue eyes and her habit of dressing all in white, is an emblematic innocent White child. Little Eva was not a unique character but an archetype of White and sinless young heroines in nineteenth-century sentimental fiction. In Bernstein's words, "Little Eva was a hub in a busy cultural system linking innocence to whiteness through the body of the child".⁸³ I argue that the exact same thing happens with Laura in "Uutisasukkaana Australiassa". Throughout the text, the little blonde Laura embodies innocence; furthermore, in that she is constantly mentioned in conjunction with Cobi's superstition and Blackness, she also embodies Whiteness, confirming the Whiteness of Finns and distinguishing them from the Blackness of the First Nations people. Significantly, as Bernstein argues, "[t]he white child's innocence was transferable to surrounding people and things, and that property made it politically usable". Little Eva's hugging with Uncle Tom in various images extended the White child's aura of innocence to the enslaved African American, and made not only Tom, but by extension also abolition, seem righteous. The inverse was also possible:

⁸⁰ *Sirkka* no 71926, 62.

⁸¹ *Sirkka* no 161926, 166, my emphasis.

⁸² Bernstein (2011), 4.

⁸³ Bernstein (2011), 4–6.

a White child was used three decades later to transfer innocence from a White child to a happily enslaved Uncle Remus in Joel Chandler Harris's story to romanticize slavery.⁸⁴ This works two ways in Swan's text: Cobi is indeed the loyal and trustworthy servant he says he is, happy—seemingly due to Laura's influence—to serve his “massa”, while the innocence of the White and shining Laura is transferred to her family, who become innocent White settlers in Australia.

The innocence radiating from Laura to her family is apparent in several ways. The teenage boys in the family have had to defend their home and family, but do not have blood on their hands: they remain innocent children, even in the aftermath of the attack, when the children encounter the treacherous Sambo once more in the nearby woods. Sambo pretends to be ill and get the children to help him. He says: “White man be good and beautiful. Sambo be mean man. Need lots of whip”⁸⁵—a statement with which young readers are intended to agree. Sambo then proves his treachery again when he kidnaps Laura and is about to take her to Snoki. When Erkki resists, Sambo threatens to eat him: You'll make “a good roast”.⁸⁶ Erkki overcomes his enemy without resorting to violence: he climbs a tree, where he finds a stretcher on which a deceased Aboriginal person's body has been laid to rest. He shoves the stretcher, which falls down, landing on and killing Sambo, with Erkki's innocence still intact.

The innocence of the little Laura extends to her parents as well. In the novel (though not in the serial), the mother says: “I could not have imagined that the Australian natives would attack *innocent white people* like this. Now we can never live in peace again”.⁸⁷ Mrs. Arnell is a White settler who has probably settled on Aboriginal land; her family views Aboriginal people as cruel savages and employs them as servants (almost slaves); but she nevertheless considers herself and her family innocent and victims of inexplicable attacks. This is followed by the father's explanation of British colonialism (discussed above) and his reluctance to even talk about it: “I don't want to repeat that dark account”.⁸⁸ As Bernstein notes, “[t]o be innocent was to be innocent of something, to achieve obliviousness. This obliviousness was not merely an absence of knowledge, but an active state

⁸⁴ Bernstein (2011), 4–6.

⁸⁵ *Sirkka* no 181926, 183.

⁸⁶ *Sirkka* no 191926, 193.

⁸⁷ *Arnellin perhe* 129, my emphasis.

⁸⁸ *Arnellin perhe* 130.

of repelling knowledge”.⁸⁹ The father here repels knowledge: he does not want to tell his family or the young readers of the novel about the colonial history of Australia or the brutality of the treatment of First Nations people by European settlers. He, his family, and the young Finnish readers of the story are thus cocooned in obliviousness and innocence. This is in line with Gloria Wekker’s point about the claim of innocence being a double-edged sword, also containing “not-knowing” and “not wanting to know”, which in itself is an expression of White “privilege, entitlement, and violence that are deeply disavowed”.⁹⁰

CONCLUSION

As this chapter has shown, Finns cannot be regarded as having been outsiders to European colonialism, even if Finland did not have any formal overseas colonies. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Finnish culture was influenced by European colonial discourse, which was adopted, adapted, and circulated by Finns through various cultural products, including children’s literature. As an editor of a well-known children’s literary magazine and a celebrated children’s writer, Anni Swan was an influential figure in the emerging field of Finnish children’s and youth literature in the early twentieth century. The fact that she was a teacher may have even added to the didactic potential of her children’s stories and helped disseminate the notion of racial hierarchy evident in “Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa” among her young readers. Moreover, Swan was also a member of the Finnish cultural *élite*. She was in a prime position to contribute to the contemporary discussion and thinking concerning the nature of Finnish culture, national identity, and even race.

I have argued that constructing Finnishness as White and European is at the heart of “Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa”, with the (intended or unintended) consequence of a colonialist and racist portrayal of First Nations people. The negative stereotypes of Black people in Swan’s text, themselves influenced by many European and American colonial texts, are constructed by circulating popular colonial tropes and by juxtaposing innocent, White Finns with superstitious, untrustworthy, and dangerous Aboriginal people. This is further proof of Lüthi, Falk, and Purtschert’s suggestion that “colonial images and perspectives influenced and still do

⁸⁹ Bernstein (2011), 6.

⁹⁰ Wekker (2016), 17.

affect political, popular as well as scientific discourses in countries without formal colonies”.⁹¹ Furthermore, as Wekker notes, through colonial/ist texts, “racial notions [...] have been transmitted to following generations, sometimes above, often below the level of consciousness”.⁹² As is the case with Anni Swan’s *Arnellin perhe*, the reincarnation of “Uutisasukkaana Austraaliassa”, many such colonialist Finnish texts are still in circulation and being read by new generations of Finns, White Finns as well as Finns of colour, with possible and frightening implications for their identity formation. By acknowledging the colonialist and racist nature of such writings, we can begin the work of dismantling their legacy.

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⁹¹Lüthi et al. (2016), 5.

⁹²Wekker (2016), 20.

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