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Whose history is Sámi history? Utility, nation-state and the indigenous studies paradigm – a historiographical comment

In their introduction to the book *Indigenous Peoples. Self-determination, Knowledge, Indigeneity*, published in 2008, Henry Minde, Harald Gaski, Svein Jentoft and Georges Midré argued that indigenous studies have mainly focused on indigenous issues within various nation-states. Transnational discourses and practices have received less emphasis. Studies of Sámi history and culture are, according to the authors, a “case in point”¹ since research “continues to focus on the particular history and circumstances of Sami affairs”² within each nation-state. Almost ten years after the publication of the book, little has changed in historical Sámi studies in this regard.

Why does the history of the cross-national Sámi continue to be written mainly within the context of the nation-state? How have different research perspectives contributed both to the exotification and the nationalization of the Sámi populations in Norway, Sweden and Finland? In answering these questions, this chapter explores three time periods of Sámi historiography and their principal paradigms: Firstly, it discusses the emergence of “lappology” in the seventeenth century with Johannes Schefferus’ work *Lapponia*. Then, it moves on to a discussion on research conducted in the 1980s to the 2000s on the governmental assimilation policies of the Nordic states. And lastly, it explores the recent paradigm shift in historical Sámi studies involving methodologies borrowed from postcolonial studies and especially from indigenous studies. The chapter examines the differences and similarities between these research approaches against the backdrop of the notions of *nation-state* and *utility*. The aim of this chapter is not to offer an exhaustive historiographical overview, but rather to give a more selective background with a comment on the latest paradigm in Sámi history writing. As will be argued in the final part of the chapter, the current research trends somewhat surprisingly resemble earlier paradigms that emphasize utility and benefit as desired outcomes of research projects.

¹ Henry Minde et al., “Introduction”. *Indigenous Peoples. Self-determination, Knowledge, Indigeneity*, Edited by Henry Minde et al. Eburon Publishers, Delft, 2008), 2.

² Minde et al. 2008, 2.

Overall, the chapter suggests three reasons why the history of the Sámi continues to be viewed as a parallel to rather than a part of general Nordic history. There are of course contexts where the particularity of Sámi history should be accepted and even emphasized. However, as the chapter will discuss, this emphasis risks presenting Sámi history in a purely national Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish or Russian context. Stressing the separateness of Sámi history also risks downplaying the contact points between the Sámi and other populations in northern Europe through the centuries.

The three research paradigms that the time periods outlined above bring into focus are the following:

1. The One/Other demarcation (knowledge production within a religiously based or a cultural/racial hierarchy)
2. National minority policies with a point of emphasis on governmental policies
3. The indigenous studies context (focus on the Sámi experience as part of a worldwide indigenous experience)

The chapter will not argue for or against the three paradigms in qualitative or subjective terms. The main argument of this chapter is that these three paradigms have in different ways impeded the development of more cross-border perspectives on the history of the Sámi and the Nordic-Barents region as a whole. I acknowledge that it is of course a welcome change that the focus of Sámi studies has shifted from an outsider's perspective more and more towards well-informed research in Sámi culture, in many cases from within.

1. The One/Other demarcation (knowledge production within a religiously based or a cultural/racial hierarchy)

The first research perspective in focus is what I call the One/Other demarcation. Although the roots of this demarcation can be traced back to the Roman author Tacitus and his description of the primitive *fenni*, Johannes Schefferus' book *Lapponia* is a more relevant starting point for the purposes of this chapter. To quote professor of Sámi culture Veli-Pekka Lehtola, *Lapponia* is the first work on the history and culture of the Sámi that "clearly belongs to the realm of scholarly thinking."³

In 1671, the State Chancellor of Sweden Magnus Gabriel de la Gardie commissioned Professor Johannes Schefferus of Uppsala University to write a book about the Sámi populations in northern Sweden. De la Gardie had a number of guidelines for his commission, paraphrased in the introduction to the 1963 Finnish

translation of *Lapponia* by Tuomo Itkonen. One of these guidelines was to refute rumors that Sámi magic lay behind the victories and the success of the Swedish army on the European continent.⁴ As Schefferus wrote in the introduction to *Lapponia*, it was not the capacity of the Sámi to use magic that was to be refuted, since Schefferus himself believed in the power of the Sámi to channel the power of the devil for their own uses.⁵ Rather, what needed to be refuted was the claim that the Swedish army included a number of Sámi soldiers and sorcerers who gained victory for the Swedes. De la Gardie's guidelines for the book also included the mapping of the climate of northern Sweden as well as describing the way of life of the Sámi, in order to find out how the Swedish state could benefit from Lapland and the Sámi in the best manner possible.⁶

Lapponia was written in Latin and subsequently translated into a number of European languages. A Swedish translation was published in the 1950s, almost 300 years after the first Latin version. There is still no Sámi translation of the book. Clearly, the target audience was abroad. In his dedication, praising and thanking De la Gardie, Schefferus portrays the Sámi as a people living isolated in the forests and by the lakes of northernmost Europe.⁷ To penetrate this isolation and gain knowledge on the Sámi, Schefferus was in contact with a number of priests and bailiffs in the northern part of Sweden. Schefferus thus acquired his information second hand, albeit from people who were well acquainted with the conditions of northern Sweden. In his dedication, Schefferus also stated that by funding the project, De la Gardie was a "glorious example for the patria and a benefit for the kingdom", thus highlighting the advantageous outcome the book was hoped to have for Sweden.⁸

Lapponia is a watershed in the early study of Sámi culture and history. By twenty-first century standards it can hardly be considered a piece of serious historical research. This being said, Schefferus discussed his findings and reasoning in a thoroughly analytical manner. He was rather critical towards many earlier researchers. One of these researchers was Olaus Magnus, the Swedish author of *Carta Marina*, the map of the Nordic countries, and the book *Historia de Gentibus Septentrionalibus* which detailed the life of the Scandinavian peoples. Schefferus accused Magnus of scientific inaccuracies and of failing to establish his results empirically.⁹

Even though Schefferus employed a critical research perspective, a double-edged tendency characterizes *Lapponia*, a tendency that would characterize the research on the Sámi for many years to come. This double tendency portrays the Sámi as an

³ Veli-Pekka Lehtola, *The Sámi People. Traditions in transition*. University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks 2004, 16.

⁴ Tuomo Itkonen, "Suomentajan alkusana". *Lapponia*. Johannes Schefferus. Karisto, Hämeenlinna 1963, 6–7.

⁵ Johannes Schefferus, *Lapponia*. Karisto, Hämeenlinna 1963, 21–24.

⁶ Itkonen 1963, 6–7.

⁷ Schefferus 1963, 17.

⁸ Schefferus 1963, 16.

⁹ Schefferus 1963, 45.

exotic culture existing separately from a common Nordic or European culture, while rooting the research in the cultural milieu of the researcher. To be sure, Schefferus treats the question of the origins of the Sámi quite extensively, and in doing so, connects Sámi history to general Nordic history. Thus, Schefferus treats the history of the Sámi as part of the history of the Nordic region, rather than as something totally separate. He also notes the linguistic similarities between Sámi and Finnish. However, in the introduction to the book, Schefferus, a native of Strasbourg, refers to himself as a “foreigner in this country where the Lapps themselves are foreigners”¹⁰. The Sámi are thus portrayed as fundamentally different and separate from other Swedes, while their history is simultaneously linked to the history of the country they are foreigners in, Sweden.

Lapponia laid the groundwork for much of the subsequent research on the Sámi in at least two ways. Firstly, it established a clearly asymmetrical power relationship by asking how the Swedish state could benefit from research on the Sámi culture and livelihoods. Secondly, by asking this question, the book anchored the Sámi culture and history firmly within the framework of the Swedish state. The book primarily dealt with the Swedish Sámi areas.¹¹ As argued in *The Saami – A Cultural Encyclopaedia*, this cemented Sámi culture and the livelihoods of the Swedish Sámi regions as the standard way of being Sámi, as viewed from the outside.¹²

Lapponia provided the basis for many future top-down studies on the Sámi. This top-down perspective is commonly referred to as *lappology*. The term designates studies that view the Sámi from an outsiders’ perspective, often with the expectation of benefiting in one way or another from the information gained through research. *Lappology* was an academic activity pursued by the elite, and the research results were never distributed to the Sámi who remained mere objects of study.¹³

The top-down perspective of *lappology* was the dominant perspective in research on the Sámi well into the twentieth century. Around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, science replaced religion as the metanarrative of hierarchies between human groups. The previous hierarchy that was based on cultural stereotypes was slowly replaced with racially motivated stereotypes. The national perspective, with Norwegians, Swedes and Finns studying the Sámi from the perspective of the majority populations, still dominated.¹⁴

¹⁰ Itkonen 1963, 21.

¹¹ Schefferus 1963, 47.

¹² Ulla-Maija Kulonen, Irja Seurujärvi-Kari and Risto Pulkkinen (eds.), *The Saami. A Cultural Encyclopaedia*. SKS, Helsinki 2005, 192.

¹³ Kulonen-Seurujärvi-Kari-Pulkkinen 2005, 189–190.

¹⁴ Kulonen-Seurujärvi-Kari-Pulkkinen 2005, 189–191.

The following discussion will probe into the second research paradigm outlined in this chapter, the Sámi as a minority population within nation-states.

2. National minority policies with a point of emphasis on governmental policies

As Henry Minde has noted in his article *Assimilation of the Sami. Implementation and Consequences*, historical research on the state-Sámi relationship took time to develop. Only after the 1980’s – and the publication of one of the most influential works on minority politics and the Sámi, *Den finske fare* by Knut Einar Eriksen and Einar Niemi – has a growing amount of research been conducted on the way the Nordic states have treated the Sámi populations living within the national borders of each state. As Jukka Nyssönen and Teemu Ryymin have shown, this research has mainly focused on structures of state power and processes such as assimilation through educational systems. Even if the study of the policies of the Nordic states vis-à-vis the Sámi has been critical in these studies, the perspective of the Sámi has received little attention.¹⁵ Ryymin and Nyssönen focus on the Norwegian historiography and the Sámi, but their conclusions can easily be extended to the whole Nordic area populated by the Sámi. A focus toward the governmental policies has naturally fixed Sámi history into the framework of the nation-state. Therefore research environments continue to concentrate their energy mainly in geographically vertical interpretations of Sámi history, where the relationship between the Nordic majority populations and the Sámi are emphasized. Rather recent examples of intranational Sámi history writing include the book *Saamelaiset suomalaiset* (The Sámi Finns) by Veli-Pekka Lehtola¹⁶ in Finland, *Den säkra zonen* (The safety zone) by David Sjögren¹⁷ in Sweden and *Samiske nasjonale strategier* (The Sámi national strategists) by Ketil Zachariassen¹⁸ in Norway. Recently, Lars Elenius has coordinated a project on transnational research on the Barents region and Daniel Lindmark has edited an

¹⁵ Regnor Jernsletten, *Samebevegelsen i Norge. Idé og strategi 1900–1940*. Senter for samiske studier, Tromsø 1997; Patrik Lantto, *Tiden börjar på nytt. en analys av samernas etnopolitiska mobilisering i Sverige 1900–1950*. Umeå University, Umeå 2000; Jukka Nyssönen, “Everybody recognized that we were not white”. *Sami identity politics in Finland, 1945–1990*. University of Tromsø, Tromsø 2007; Ketil Zachariassen, *Samiske nasjonale strategier. Den samepolitiske opposisjonen i Finnmark, ca. 1900–1940*. University of Tromsø, Tromsø 2012; Teemu Ryymin and Jukka Nyssönen, “Fortellinger i nordnorsk minoritetshistorie”. *Historisk Tidsskrift*, Number 4, 2012, 9–11.

¹⁶ Veli-Pekka Lehtola, *Saamelaiset suomalaiset: kohtaamisia 1896–1953*. SKS, Helsinki 2012.

¹⁷ David Sjögren, *Den säkra zonen – motiv, åtgärdsförslag och verksamhet i den särskiljande utbildningspolitiken för inhemska minoriteter 1913–1962*. Umeå University, Umeå 2010.

¹⁸ Ketil Zachariassen, *Samiske nasjonale strategier. Samepolitikk og nasjonsbygging 1900–1940*. ČállidLágádus, Kárášjohka 2012.

anthology on cross-national church history in the same region.¹⁹ Both are welcome initiatives towards more cross-border historical research, also with regard to the history of the Sámi. Swedish historian Julia Nordblad has widened the framework of Sámi historiography through a comparison of the minority policies of Sweden (the Sámi and the Finnish-speakers in northern Sweden) and France (the Breton-speakers in Brittany and the Arab-speakers in the French protectorate of Tunisia). These studies enable the object of study, Sámi history, to be elevated to a more general level of international economical, political and ideological conjunctures. In general, however, the horizontal, cross-border dimension of Sámi history has gained substantially less attention than the history of the Sámi within each Nordic nation-state.

In parallel to the studies on governmental policies, researchers have emphasized the experience and agency of the Sámi.²⁰ Most recent research on Sámi culture and history has been greatly influenced and enriched by the methodologies of indigenous studies, a research theme internationally probably most famously represented by Linda Tuhiwai Smith.²¹ This leads us to the third point of discussion, the history of the Sámi as a part of a worldwide indigenous experience.

3. The indigenous studies context (focus on the Sámi experience as part of a worldwide indigenous experience)

In a recent comparative anthology on indigenous history in Montana, U.S.A. and northern Norway, Bjørg Evjen and David R.M. Beck discuss the history and future of research on indigenous peoples. Evjen and Beck anticipate that in the future, indigenous history will to an even greater extent make use of a methodology the authors call "a new methodology". Whether the term new methodology is appropriate can be discussed, since a number of indigenous scholars have already used this methodology for quite some time.²² Either way, the main content of the new methodology is, according to Evjen and Beck, the following: In academia, more room should be prepared for indigenous researchers, traditions and categories of

knowledge. The aim of this is to ensure that the research outcomes will benefit the indigenous communities and not only outsider researchers and majority societies.²³

The definition of the "new methodology" shows that the pendulum of research on the Sámi has again, with the indigenous studies paradigm, swung to a position where research questions are directly related to questions of benefit. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes in her oft-cited introduction to the book *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*, scholars involved in indigenous studies should ask themselves a set of questions, among them these three: Whose research is it? Who owns it? Who will benefit from it?²⁴

From an instrumental perspective, then, one might ask whether the task of the research set out by Tuhiwai Smith, Evjen and Beck is that different from the tasks set out in Schefferus' *Laponia*? Whereas the questions above present a fresh approach in questioning the aims and motives of earlier research, it also heavily implies the idea that research should be of practical benefit, in this case mainly to the indigenous community. It is a positive development that indigenous communities call for research that benefits them after centuries of research that benefits someone else. From a strictly scientific perspective, however, the principles of indigenous studies can be questioned. The "strictly scientific perspective" can of course in its turn be criticized as being a product of centuries of research on the terms of the outsider, just as Tuhiwai Smith has done.²⁵

Comparative approaches such as Kathryn W. Shanley's and Bjørg Evjen's anthology reach towards a global framework at least in two ways. Firstly, comparisons with other indigenous peoples have the potential of creating a cross-border perspective on historical relations between indigenous peoples and newcomers. Secondly, in referring to a contemporary framework of indigenous rights, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the struggle for more rights and cultural autonomy is connected to an international framework. However, the primary provider of the rights and cultural autonomy continues to be the nation-state. The outcome of this is that research on Sámi history and culture, even after the turn towards indigenous studies, continues to be conducted very much within and seldom across the borders of nation-states.

In the case of the Sámi, when discussing imperialistic or colonial oppressive policies, the particularity of the Nordic Sámi colonial case has to be addressed. In many colonized areas, such as Latin America, the colonial power has been a more abstract force used by representatives of a king or a government overseas and far away.

¹⁹ Lars Elenius (chief editor), *The Barents Region – A Transnational History of Subarctic Northern Europe*. Pax forlag, Oslo 2015; Daniel Lindmark (ed.), *Gränsöverskridande kyrkohistoria. De språkliga minoriteterna på Nordkalotten*. Umeå universitet, Umeå 2016.

²⁰ Ryymin and Nyyssönen 2012, 17.

²¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Zed Books Ltd, London and New York, 2006.

²² See for instance Tuhiwai Smith 2006, 11–12, 1, 2000.

²³ Bjørg Evjen and David R. M. Beck, "Growing Indigenous Influence on Research, Extended Perspectives, and a New Methodology. A Historical Approach." *Mapping Indigenous Presence. North Scandinavian and North American Perspectives*. Edited by Kathryn W. Shanley and Bjørg Evjen. The University of Arizona Press, Tucson 2015, 51–52.

²⁴ Tuhiwai Smith 2006, 10.

In the Nordic countries, the geographical proximity of the center to the periphery means that the colonial history of the Sámi very easily becomes contextualized inside each nation-state. Perhaps for this reason, it has been hard for researchers to see power in a more abstract sense than national governments and their representatives on a regional and local level. This has complicated viewing the use of power as part of a larger Nordic, European and global context.

Conclusion and discussion

After the various movements that it has gone through since Schefferus' *Lapponia*, research on the history of the Sámi has returned to the question of benefit and utility, and remains stuck within the nation-state framework, where the Sámi appear as a separate entity mostly within and rarely beyond this structure. Is there ways around these limits? My suggestion would be to trace back the nationalizing and exotifying histories and historiographies, and to seek both intra- and transnational models of explanation for the trajectories taken by different countries and the Sámi populations in these countries. In doing this, it is possible to discover other historical narratives than those treating with dichotomies such as oppressors/oppressed, powerful/powerless, One/Other, and even non-indigenous/indigenous. This kind of historical inquiry should go hand in hand with the bottom line of Evjen's and Beck's methodological discussion: the responsibility of all researchers to contribute to an academic discussion where everybody has the opportunity to participate on equal terms.²⁶

Trans-border perspectives