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Regional and indigenous identities in the high north: enacting social boundaries

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ABSTRACT. This paper addresses two processes of social and cultural mobilisation. The first example is a regional movement, as manifested in social and cultural expressions of a north Norwegian identity that was particularly marked in the 1970s and early 80s. The other is the Saami movement, coming out strongly at about the same time, and being part of a global process of indigenous mobilisation. It is argued that although they are similar in the way they articulate a sense of identity and belonging in contrast to an overarching and encompassing state, they are different in their stated objectives, in their relation to the state and the type of achievements gained. The north Norwegian regional movement strived for inclusion into a wider national cultural tradition, and integration has been achieved by broadening the definition of what is considered Norwegian culture. The objective of the Saami movement was the opposite: to gain recognition as a people with a distinct culture, different from but equal in value with the Norwegian culture. The article is introduced by a theoretical discussion of the issues involved, framing the analysis of communicative strategies.

Introduction

This article examines two processes of mobilisation that are similar in that they articulate a sense of identity and belong in contrast to an encompassing state, (the state here is also seen as representing mainstream culture) and use much the same communicative strategies to express this, but are different in the stated objectives, relations to the state and the type of achievements gained. The first example is a regional movement, and I refer to social and cultural expressions of a north Norwegian identity that

was particularly marked in the 1970s and early 80s. The other is the Saami movement, which emerged strongly at about the same time, being part of an international indigenous mobilisation. This movement inspired a new collective Saami self-understanding and contributed to the political organisation of the Saami. I will argue that to grasp the differences in the objectives and outcome behind the similarities in appearance, we need an analytical understanding of the differences of the issues involved. For this purpose we need concepts that capture the different qualities and functions of social boundaries and

the special relations implied by the concept indigenous. I will therefore start with exploring some of the theoretical debates surrounding these concepts.

Indigenous as a special type of relationship

It is not an original observation that 'indigenous' is a contested concept. There are many reasons for this. Representatives for vested interest in many countries grasp, quite correctly, that the claims set forwards by indigenous people in many cases may imply a redistribution of power and influence, most dramatically codified in confrontations over land rights. Political foot-dragging is understandable. But also within *academia* there are debates about what or who are indigenous peoples (Kymlicka 2001; Niezen 2003; Minde 2008). For the purpose of this paper, I will sum up the discussion of this concept as historically situated in an international and transnational movement that started in the mid-twentieth century, gained momentum in the 1970s and brought about a series of innovative international instruments exemplified in the UN Working Group for Indigenous Populations meeting in Geneva from 1982, the UN Permanent Forum opened in New York in 2002 and the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples adopted in 2007. These events have been significant for indigenous peoples in two ways: they have created public arenas in which indigenous peoples have been able to meet and to voice their concerns, and they have established a set of moral standards and a 'customary international law' (Anaya 2004) that can be invoked to address national matters (Saugestad 2008; Åhrén 2010). The Saami in Norway have both been active initiators in this process, and have achieved considerable gains in public recognition. In contrast to the neighbouring countries Norway is among the signatories of the ILO Convention 196 of 1989, on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples.

Throughout this process there have been innumerable meetings, debates and resolutions, bringing forward a working definition that has not been formally codified but that has stood the test of time remarkably well. Following the first report by Martinez Cobo in 1986, and reiterated in numerous United Nation documents, four elements are highlighted: a priority in time; the voluntary perpetuation of cultural distinctiveness; an experience of subjugation, marginalisation and dispossession and self-identification.

This is a polythetic classification as these factors may be present, to a greater or lesser degree, in different regions and in different national contexts, and as such provide some general guidance to reasonable decision-making in practice (Daes, quoted in Simpson 1997: 23). What is important to note is that all these criteria specify a relationship: indigenous peoples occupied their territories *before* other groups moved in, they have maintained cultural distinctiveness *in contrast to* later occupants; the groups have experienced subjugation, marginalisation, discrimination *by* some other group; and they perceive

themselves as *distinct and different from* some other group.

This understanding, as it appears in UN documents is embedded in a concrete historical process. The political implications and implementation refer to this context and, much like the interpretation of a law text, they are guided by the supplementary guidelines that are provided by this context. I therefore see the relevant characterisation of any given group as indigenous, for instance the Saami, not so much depending on a set of specific properties, that is the ethnographic description of culture, language and adaptation, but on the framing of a relationship that hinges on the recognition, or lack of it, by an encompassing sovereign state. This perspective highlights the significance of symbolic markers to communicate distinction rather than content, and I will return to that point later. But an important point is that the claim set forward by indigenous peoples is fundamentally concerned with self-determination (Henriksen 2008), which is an aspect of a structural relationship. Opponents of the process claim that boundaries are created by exaggerating differences, while adherents see recognition of differences as a condition for mutually rewarding co-existence.

There are also approaches that play on different meanings of the term, most notably because the term 'indigenous' has two meanings in English: one being the dictionary meaning of local or native, as in 'indigenous agriculture' or 'indigenous knowledge', the other being the much more specific and circumscribed meaning of international declarations and UN documents, specifying rights in a particular type of relationship. In a much debated article on 'The return of the native' (Kuper 2003), events taking place at the UN Working Group that met in Geneva are mixed up with the new Permanent Forum that meets in New York. Such conflation overlooks the 20 years of struggle that led to the establishment of the UN Permanent Forum in 2002, the role of the Working Group as a catalyst for much of this activity, and the significantly enhanced status of the Permanent Forum compared to the Working Group within the UN system.

More or less romantic perceptions of an intimate relation to nature (Ingold 2000) capture other and important aspects of traditional adaptations, but the realities that are the subject of his analysis, that is to say those that still are able to 'dwell' within traditional territories, leave out a growing number of landless squatters and migrant slum dwellers (Sissons 2001). Others are less interested in the rights oriented dimension of indigeneity and argue against a debate on indigenous identities that is 'confining them in time, space and enumeration' (Anderson 2009). However, like all concepts dealing with rights and legal implications, the UN/ILO meaning of 'indigenous' is not all embracing, and would lose much of its force if it were used to describe all sorts of social differences. (See for instance Kymlicka's (2001) discussion of similarities and differences between national minorities and indigenous people).

For the purpose of the present article, debates over legal rights and structures of power will provide a framework for examining expressions of regional and indigenous identity and belonging. For such a purpose, the notion of 'boundaries' will be helpful. In a review article, Lamont and Molnar (2002: 168) note that a common theme in much of the literature on boundaries is the search for 'understanding the use of symbolic resources (for example conceptual distinctions, interpretive strategies, cultural traditions) in creating, maintaining, contesting or even dissolving institutionalised social differences (eg class gender, race, territorial inequality).' In order to capture this process, a distinction is made between symbolic and social boundaries. The former are seen as conceptual distinctions made by social actors, the latter are seen as objectified forms of social differences, as these are manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and opportunities.

The regional and the indigenous movements examined here can be seen as contesting both symbolic and social boundaries. This is a common characteristic of social movements, as demonstrated in a growing body of literature dealing with the different paradigms for understanding collective action in relation to 'power, gender, colonialism and the state' (Edelman 2001). A central concept in studies of ethnic, regional and nationalist movements has been the notion of 'identity politics' and the communicative strategies used to frame ideas in ways that generate shared beliefs and motivate collective action. In the present context the aspirations of such motivations may be conceptualised as 'inclusiveness' versus 'distinctiveness' or 'equality' versus 'equity', respectively, emphasising the contrasting aims of activists that claim a regional or an ethnic adherence. It is with a focus on the discursive aspects of social movements that I will now leave the conceptual debate for a while and examine two processes that illustrate the politics of representation. The cases also link this paper to the overall theme of this issue: the changes and challenges in the northern European periphery. My examples are from recent north Norwegian history and focus on the 1970s and early 80s as a period of considerable political and cultural grass-root activism. I came to the University of Tromsø in 1974 after having completed my Masters' degree in Oslo, and the following reflect my own experience of meeting with northern Norway. It offers an analysis with the benefit of hindsight, but the analysis of that particular period seems to be borne out by the developments of subsequent decades.

A north Norwegian regional identity

I use the term 'regionalism' to denote a political and cultural movement, which seeks some sort of recognition as a distinct group associated with a distinct territory within a nation state (Banks 1996). Northern Norway has a long history of being perceived as distinct, in a negative sense. The past history is one of unequal development of

regions: for centuries the people of the north had a lower standard of living, more poverty and less access to facilities provided by the state. Early explorers along the coast filled their journals with descriptions of 'small', 'dirty' or 'lazy' people, and later more romantically as 'friendly natives', but 'emotional' and 'childlike' (Drivenes and others 1994). Recent more flattering stereotypes still tend to set the northerner apart from 'mainstream' Norwegians: the rough and the strong, the skipper on his little boat braving the storms of the North Sea, the woman doing a man's work on the farm (Wold 1985). There was little sophistication associated with north Norwegian culture. In this respect the attitudes can be compared to the way colonisers elsewhere have tended to conceptualise 'the natives' as variously 'primitive' or 'unspoiled' and close to nature (Hall 1992) or at best the 'noble savage'.

Such stereotypes developed because place of origin became significant elements in the codification of a class structure. For centuries the ruling class, the judge and the minister, the doctor and the teacher came from the 'south' with a distinct social background and dialect. People from the 'north' not only had difficulties in getting access to positions of power, but also to the education required to compete for such position. The northern dialect was ridiculed, and reportedly speakers with a northern dialect were discriminated against at the Oslo housing market.

There is nothing new, then, in pointing to the existence of a distinct 'northern' social category. What was new was a process that became highly visible in the 1970s, the reassessment and recodification of a north Norwegian identity, from something inferior to something distinct, different from but equal to a mainstream Norwegian identity.

The broader framework was a comprehensive post World War II policy for economic recovery that reduced social and physical distances through the building of roads and airports, and gradually included the peripheries in social democratic welfare state, including universal education. The University of Tromsø, starting classes in 1972, was an important symbolic statement of such inclusion, as well as an instrument in regional development. Ottar Brox with his provocative question 'What is happening in Northern Norway?' (Brox 1966) set the stage for a debate on regional development policies, which culminated in a referendum in 1972 over Norwegian membership in the European Economic Community (The referendum gave a solid 53,5% national majority against EEC membership, while also reflecting centre-periphery dimension, with an average of 71% no-votes in the three northern-most counties). But I will leave politics aside and give a few examples of cultural expression.

The use of songs and ballads as vehicles for commenting on social and political matters was not a particular north Norwegian phenomenon. It followed in a tradition inspired from American protest songs and the civil rights movement, and created a musical trend by the end of the 1960s that reached northern Norway during the decade that followed. The songs provided convenient vehicles for

expressing sentiments about broad national and international trends, and at the same time to highlight the local implications.

A very popular song praised *Erling Jarl*, an old coastal steamer running from Bergen to Kirkenes. The lyrics describe this arduous form of transport: waiting at the quay, getting on board at four o'clock in the morning, sharing a cabin with a stranger who snores. Cargo is loaded and landed every stop. The song ends with a note of the importance of the coastal steamer for the people living along the coastline, and defies a recent discussion in Parliament concerning reorganisation and possible discontinuation of this service. This is a fairly typical format: first a local setting is described in romantic or humorous details; then some political demands are spelled out.

A regional theatre was started in 1971 and staged plays written on local issues and using local dialect. An early and very popular play had the emblematic title 'This is where I belong' (*Det e her æ hør tel*) and recreated the struggle in one coastal community to secure the necessary public funding for a road connection. Following the same pattern local activism was described in entertaining details, then a critique of current policies. North Norwegian communities would typically share a strong sense of communality in their exposure to forces of nature when carrying out their work. Thus their struggles would easily take on a class dimension in their arguments directed to politicians and bureaucrats safely ensconced in warm offices on land.

Many of the themes were universal: about nature, birds, the quick changes in weather, and love. Some specific themes are of equal currency today: protests against the drilling for oil close to the rich fishing grounds, objections to membership in the European Union. The format included songs, ballads, public debates, newspaper writings, literature and plays. The north Norwegian dimension was not necessarily the main message, but was used to reinforce other messages given.

The innovations in addressing these themes were the detailed emic description, the local colour and the use of dialect, and also placing the songs within a wider context. Some vocalists were interviewed on radio and spoke about how important it was to sing in the vernacular. Others described how they started to sing in English or standard Norwegian, because it was not considered stylish to sing in dialect. A recurrent theme was that they now found inspiration as well as security in their own background, giving words to experiences that were unique for this particular part of Norway.

Such expressions of culture came at a time when many of the old differences between the north and the south were beginning to diminish. The traditional fishing-farming adaptation was gradually abandoned. The boat house was emptied of its traditional functions, but was filled with symbolic meaning, representing a distinct quality of life. This was immortalised in the figure of 'Oluf', an extremely likeable stage character, posing as

the archetypical rough fisherman, and transforming the characteristic north Norwegian form of insolent humour into something of an art form. A new class of intellectuals and artists fronted this development. They used images from a way of life that was a shared background, but no longer a part of daily experiences.

The Saami movement

The Saami movement followed the same trajectory in many ways, and made use of similar communicative devices for expressing a collective identity (Eidheim 1971, 1997; Gaski 1997). The same national framework of post-war economic incentives, improved transport facilities and access to universal and higher education applied. The Saami had been subject to even stronger derogative negative stereotypes over many centuries than had their fellow north Norwegians, and had suffered even more cumbersome romantic notions about the exotic, authentic colourful children of nature. The repertoire that they would draw on to communicate about their distinct culture provided dramatic contrasts in livelihood; the highly specialised and photogenic reindeer herding. Representations of language and livelihood highlighted emblematic items: the Saami *koft* (traditional costume) as the equivalent to the Norwegian *bunad*; the *joik* as the Saami version of folk music; arts and crafts (*duodji*) drawing on local resources: skin, fur, bone (Eidheim 1971; Olsen 2003).

Language played an important role in musical expressions. What started with a group of young singers whose songs were not that exceptional, except that they were singing in Saami (*Tanabreddens ungdom*), was brought to artistic perfection by singers like Mari Boine and the multi-talented Nils-Aslak Valkeapää who combined *joik*, lyrics and visual images in new border-transcending expressions. The use of *joik*, the special traditional song form had a special significance because of its contested history. Missionaries in the eighteenth century forbade *joik* as the voice of the devil, while in the new schools built in the 1950s *joik* was prohibited as a part of the assimilation policy.

The political aspect of Saami mobilisation found some of its most eloquent expressions during and after the conflict over a dam on the Alta-Kautokeino River, taking place between the end of the 1970s and early 1980s (Thuen 1995). The dam created an obstruction to one of the migration paths for reindeer between winter inland and summer coastal pastures, and, while a small interference in terms of square kilometres, it was perceived as 'one more' on top of a cumulative encroachment by the Norwegian state on lands traditionally used by the Saami. The protests included massive demonstration on the construction site in the north, to prevent the building for the dam, and the putting up of a small herdsman's tent (*lávvu*) in the centre of the Norwegian capital, where a group of young Saami went on a much publicised hunger strike.

Introductory courses in anthropology and indigenous studies have ever since highlighted and explored the striking images created by Saami demonstrators: a juxtaposition of a small herdsman tent in front of the Norwegian Parliament building; a non-violent hunger strike in contrast to massive use of police to break down resistance at the construction site; the natural resource-based adaptation of the periphery in contrast to the urban power centre; the claim for fairness (for a marginalised minority) in the face of narrow (majority) justice.

Another confrontation rich in symbolism was depicted in the film *The pathfinder [Ofelas]* directed by Nils Gaup in 1987. Set in distant history the film is based on a Saami legend about the fight against invading Chudes from the east. Some families are massacred, but the brave and resourceful hero manages to trick most of the Chudes over a steep cliff where they fall to their deaths, and the remaining community is saved. It is not hard to identify with the Saami hero (clad in white fur) against invading dark forces, and the message was not lost on a whole generation.

Identification by contrast

Processes of the kind described here build on identification by contrast (Hall 1992; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). The boat, fish and shore, the reindeer and tent, were used as descriptive elements, but they also served as metonyms within a wider context in which a north Norwegian reality was contrasted to that of the south. In order to create a manageable contrast to the south some select aspects of north Norwegian reality were chosen, mainly those that for one reason or another were perceived as typical and could convey an image of a distinct culture to the audience. Elements associated with traditional activities served well as such symbols, while in some crucial sense they also convey a sense of what tend to be associated with the past. This challenge in finding appropriate emblems for expressing collective identities, without reverting to listing rigid essentials, is of a fairly general nature, and applies to expressions of regional, ethnic or indigenous identity alike. In this respect the extensive drawing on idioms connected with reindeer herding was quite effective, as providing the clearest contrast to the Norwegian south, and corresponded well with the more stereotyped icons preferred by the Norwegian society.

However, for the Saami movement this 'success' has come to represent some real challenge in the process of ethnic incorporation that took place in the years after the dramatic confrontations over the Alta-Kautokeino issue. Less than 10% of the Saami are directly involved in reindeer herding; most are farmers, labourers or civil servants. Saami practicing fishing and farming combinations along the coast have mostly abandoned the Saami language and are practically indiscernible from their Norwegian neighbours. Much communicative work has been required in order to broaden the image of the Saami

to include also coastal Saami in the concept of Sápmi, a 'Saami nation'.

Similar appearance, different objectives. Some conclusions

In this paper I have outlined two cases that articulate very similar sentiments, but engage with very different social objectives within the same state borders. I will argue that both the processes described have been quite successful. But despite the similarities in performance and congruence in time, they had different, indeed contrasting objectives. The one case transcends symbolic boundaries, offering a broader definition of 'Norwegian nationhood', while the other case converts social boundaries into a social and legal entity. In this process the northerners ignore (some deny) the relevance of ethnic difference, while the concept of 'a Saami nation' underscores it.

The processes have been similar in many respects: both movements addressed a mainstream, southern Norwegian public audience; making life in northern Norway more visible by presenting it as a theme for songs, a subject of books and plays, motives for art. Both regional and Saami cultural expressions were compared to similar (matching) expressions in mainstream Norway in a fashion that claimed that these expressions should be recognised as equivalent, that is equal in status and appreciation. The identities communicated about were presented as representing basic value orientations and unique experiences that that could not be easily picked up by outsiders. In this respect, both north Norwegians and Saami can be said to share a 'northern' identity in contrast to a 'southern' and central hegemony.

But there is one significant difference: in the communication to a general Norwegian public, the north Norwegian regional movement has strived for inclusion. North Norwegian regionalism was never a breakaway movement; the focus was on inclusion into a wider national cultural tradition. In social and economic terms integration was part of national policy and was implemented through an equitable distribution of the institutions of the welfare state. In symbolic terms integration has been achieved by expanding the definition of what is considered Norwegian culture. In many ways one can compare this process with the nationalist movement of the nineteenth century, drawing on the cultural heritage of rural Norway (legends, artefacts) to codify a contrast to the Danish cultural hegemony. The gain has been representations of mainstream Norwegian culture that include elements that previously were perceived as marginal, odd or exceptions.

I will argue that the objectives of the Saami movement are exactly the opposite: not to change Norwegian collective self-understanding, but rather to gain recognition as a distinct culture, different from Norwegian culture, but equal in status and appreciation. This is a much more complicated task and one which involves the restitution of distinctive features that decades of assimilation

policies have striven to eradicate. In symbolic terms, to use Eidheim's (1971) classical terminology, the task has been dichotomisation, to create a contrasting identity to the majority counterpart, and complementarisation to present this as a complementary identity with the possibility of experiencing equality. In institutional terms this dichotomisation is almost complete: a Saami Parliament, a Saami University College, Saami media, theatre, schools, festivals, sports events, exhibitions, and so on, complement the Norwegian institutions, by and large financed by public funds. The formal criteria for being a Saami is found in the regulations for the electoral roll for the Saami parliaments, that specifies self-ascription (important in indigenous movements) and having at least one Saami speaking great-grandparent or being the child of someone registered in the electoral roll. Currently (2009 election) some 14 000 persons were registered. In more existential terms, being a Saami is a combination of self-ascription and ascription by others, Saami can choose to what extent they will exercise and expose their 'Saaminess', while Norwegians cannot choose to be Saami.

In relation to the Norwegian public, we note some of the complexities of the issue in the current debates over the Finnmark Act, legislation that follows implementation of ILO convention and sets up a model for giving legal recognition of traditional land use. The regional movement could be accommodated within a cherished Norwegian ideal of equality in the sense of sameness, by doing away with some stereotypical conceptual borders. But according to the same line of argument, opponents to the Finnmark Act argue that the implementation of the UN/ILO definition of indigenous status has created new divisions by drawing up legal borderlines (Fossbakk 2010).

Internally, amongst the Saami, the aspirations towards a unified Saami nationhood have generated arguments similar to the discussion above on regionalism, in other words about the accommodation of internal variation. Most significantly, the inclusion of fishing, farming and salaried Saami in a collective representation has been necessary, and has called for new strategies to convey a sense of unity. Different preferences are expressed in regional and party policies. Language as a unifying emblem also has its problems as many people no longer speak Saami (but young people take classes and parents send their children to Saami speaking pre-schools). Traditional Saami lifestyles compete with the modern, and rural adaptations compete with the urban, as, paradoxically but unavoidably, Oslo has become the largest Saami settlement, in terms of numbers. These internal differentiations can be considered as part of being a people and becoming a nation. People in this sense as recognised by the government that 'the kingdom of Norway is based on the territory of two peoples' (Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet 2000:11, translation by author), and *indigenous* people in terms of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The broader picture

To the extent that my assertion holds true that the processes of regional and indigenous mobilisation considered here have been successful, this is not only, not even mainly, because of the innovative use of songs, theatre and civil action. The Saami mobilisation has been part of, and indeed contributed significantly to, the global process that in turn has set the parameters for the current Norwegian-Saami dialogue. And the geopolitical process starting with Glasnost and the opening of the border to Russia (1991) and subsequent policies across the national borders to create a new Barents region, and identity, is borne by recognition of joint economic interests in the exploitation of natural resources in the Arctic regions, combined with advanced technology and knowledge based industry. Even then one may assume that the new emphasis on a high north is better grounded in a local presence than it would have been without the fierce assertion of north Norwegian identities some decades ago, and a vocal Saami presence.

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Migration of children from northwest Russia to northern Norway in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s

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ABSTRACT. The present article focuses on children from Russia, who immigrated to the northern part of Norway in the end of the 1990s and in the first decade of the 21st century. The Russian immigration to north Norway is particularly strong, and therefore it is an obvious choice to focus on this group if one wishes to study Russian immigration to Norway. By studying the immigrants in Sør-Varanger, will we discover some objective tendencies and peculiarities of adaption of Russian immigrants in Norway at large? Attention to children-immigrants' life in school and outside school, their friendships, their contacts with their homeland and attitudes toward future work, allows us to understand their position, views and level of mutual understanding with those people who surround them in the new country. In the present article special attention is also paid to the parents, first and foremost the mothers, who brought the children to north Norway, and their opinions about the welfare of their children in the new country as well as their own well-being. In many ways these children and their mothers from northwest Russia make a shining example of a successful establishment of a new life style in a foreign country. One may ask, however, is it too successful?

Introduction

What has happened in the northern territories of the Russian north and Norway from a social-cultural point of view during the last two decades? Have these territories been transformed? One thing is certain. The period from 1990 to the present day is important, in many respects, both for the development of the Russian economy, for social welfare policy and for the simultaneous renewal of Russian-Norwegian contacts after the 'cold war' period. The inter-relations and mutual contact between ordinary individuals and families living on either side of the Russian-Norwegian border have become increasingly active (Tevlina 2009: 54–56). The 'thaw' has given people in both countries the opportunity to meet, and not only to communicate with one another, but also to study,

work, create families, migrate and, one could say, even to initiate a new stage in the interaction between the two countries (Rogova 2008: 5–7).

This study of the situation of children-immigrants in northern Norway concerns not only the question of their well being, but to a certain degree also the Norwegian inhabitants' relations to the immigrants at large. And an answer to the question will be sought concerning how the mutual relations between this young generation of immigrants and the surrounding core population are developing after the end of the cold war.

Theoretical framework

There are several theories that can help in considering social-cultural aspects of immigration, and in estimating