

# Chapter 1

## Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives



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**Abstract** In this chapter, we give a brief outline of the South Saami people's historical, linguistic and political position as a so-called *minority within the Saami minority* in Fennoscandia. One of the research questions asked in the book is how the past has been incorporated into modern South Saami self-understanding and how the past is actively used to shape contemporary society. In this volume as a whole, we aim to promote research that sheds light on the complexity and development of the South Saami communities. Part II focuses on the socio-linguistic aspects of the modern South Saami language. Part III analyses and discusses key historical and archaeological issues relating to prehistory and historic research questions within the South Saami sphere. Part IV will focus on the extent to which and how the South Saami people and South Saami affairs are represented, and to what extent and how the South Saami voices take part in the public general discourse. Part V discusses some contemporary policies in Norway. Questions of how land disputes and the South Saami use of history, culture and traditions play a role in the identity processes and the struggle for the South Saami land is one aspect examined in this chapter, in addition to negotiations between indigenous groups and majority societies.

**Iktedimmie** 1. kapihtelisnie aktem ånehks bijjieguvviem vedtebe åarjelsaemiej histovrijes, gïeleldh jih politihkeles posisjovnen bijjelen goh akte unnebelåhkoe dan saemien unnebelåhkoen sisnjelen Fennoskandijesne. Akte dejstie dotkemegy-

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htjelasijste gærjesne lea guktie ávtetje aejkie lea meatan vaaltasovveme dan daajbaaletje áarjelsaemien jijtjehoerkesen síjse, jih guktie ávtetje aejkie eadtjohkelaakan átnasávva juktie daajbaaletje tíjjem hammoedidh. Abpe daennie gærjesne eajhnadovvebe dotkemem áehpiedehtedh mij gellievoetem jih evtiedimmiem dejstie áarjelsaemien siebriedahkijste vuesehte. Bielie II tjoevkesem beaja dejtie sosio-gíeieldh bielide áarjelsaemien daajbaaletje gíelesne. Bielie III vihkeles histovrijes jih arkeologeles gyhtjelassh analyserede jih digkede mah leah dej ávtehistovrijes jih histovrijes gyhtjelassi bijre áarjelsaemien suerkien sisnjelen. Bielie IV jarngesne átna man vijries jih guktie almetjh jih áarjelsaemien aamhtesh leah áehpiedahteme, jih man vijries jih guktie doh áarjelsaemien gíelh leah meatan dennie byögkeles síjhme digkiedimmesne. Bielie V sáemies daejbaaletje politihkeles strategijh Nöörjesne digkede. Gyhtjelassh guktie ovvaantoeht dajvi bijre jih áarjelsaemien átnoe histovrijistie, kultuvreste jih aerpievuekijste aktem ráállam utnieh identiteeteproses-sine, jih gæmhpoeh dan áarjelsaemien dajven ávtete lea akte biehkíe maam lea goerhtamme daennie kapihtelisnie, lissine dejtie rááresjimide aalkoalmetjedáehkiej jih jienebeláhkoesiebriedahki gaskem.

## 1.1 Who Are the South Saami?

The traditional land of the South Saami people is in central parts of the Scandinavian Peninsula (Norway and Sweden). The Saami are minority populations in Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, and the indigenous people of Fennoscandia. To different degrees, Finland, Norway, Russia and Sweden have recognized the Saami people's status and rights. The traditional concept of the Saami, not least in the popular media, has been an image of a homogenous people living as semi-nomadic reindeer herders on the mountain plains of the far north. Reality is more multifaceted. Most Saami are not reindeer herders, there are several Saami dialects/languages and traditional Saami culture varies in essence and expression. The Saami of Norway, Sweden and Finland have their own parliaments and are given certain political rights as an indigenous people. The Saami constitute a people in as much as they share common cultural, historical and linguistic roots.

Commonly the Saami language group is divided into 10 variants.<sup>1</sup> Northern Saami has the most speakers, estimated at approximately 10–17,000 in Norway, Sweden and Finland, whereas South Saami is spoken by around 5–700 speakers in Norway and Sweden and Lule Saami by between 800 and 2000 speakers in Norway and Sweden (Sammalahti 1998; [samer.se](http://samer.se) [a]). All figures are estimates as there seem to be no extensive, current and reliable official statistics for the number of speakers of the Saami languages ([samer.se](http://samer.se) [a]). The South Saami is the southernmost of the Saami peoples, frequently described as a minority within the minority. South Saami

<sup>1</sup>South Saami, Ume Saami, Pite Saami, Lule Saami and North Saami spoken in the southern, western and northern regions of Saepmie; Inari Saami, Skolt Saami, Akkala Saami, Kildin Saami and Ter Saami spoken in the northern and eastern regions of Saepmie (Sammalahti 1998).

culture has not been as visible in the majority perspective as that of the North Saami, the people of the northernmost region of Fennoscandia popularly looked upon as the heartland of Saami culture. The description of the South Saami as a ‘minority within a minority’, although frequently used by members of the South Saami community, can be the subject of discussion. Originally, the phrase was coined to highlight the South Saami position versus the North Saami majority. However, as with many popular phrases, it might easily turn into a cliché, thus obscuring the original power of the phrase. Still, when we have decided to use the phrase in the title of our book, it is to emphasize the position of the South Saami as a minority not only in the states of Sweden and Norway but also within the Saami context of the Saami nation. The asymmetry is indeed even greater in comparison to the majority, non-Saami national culture. This situation is one of the issues addressed in this volume. The way and the conditions under which South Saami identity has been formed is one of several parts of the Saami history that has been given less attention than that given the North Saami culture. Knowledge of the past is essential for understanding the present. An interesting research question is how the past has been incorporated into modern South Saami self-understanding and how the past is actively being used to shape contemporary society. In order to promote constructive development of the South Saami community, targeted, high-calibre research is essential for forming a better basis for decision-making and public administration and for providing critical input for societal and cultural development. In this book, we aim to promote research that sheds light on the complexity and development of the South Saami communities.

South Saami politicians have played a crucial role in the early political manifestation of the Saami people. In the first decades of the 1900s, the Saami political pioneers Elsa Laula Renberg (1877–1931)<sup>2</sup> and Daniel Mortenson (1860–1924) advocated Saami rights and organized Saami political efforts. Their political activism was a reaction and a protest against colonialization, state assimilation policies and racism. Both in Norway and in Sweden, these processes peaked during their lifetime. Elsa Laula Renberg’s pamphlet *Inför Lif eller Död?* (A Matter of Life or Death, our translation) has not yet lost its relevance. Daniel Mortenson’s words, ‘(...) I feel like an oppressed man without legal rights. I often feel an urge to blame God for being born a Lap<sup>3</sup> (...)’,<sup>4</sup> could sound familiar to Saami presently involved in land-right disputes. The political work of these pioneers culminated with the first Saami congress in Trondheim, Norway in 1917. The first day of the congress was 6 February, a date now celebrated as the Saami national day.

In several ways, Elsa Laula Renberg and Daniel Mortenson reflect Saami unity and difference through their local bonds in the south and their trips into other parts

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<sup>2</sup>Elsa Laula Renberg was born Elsa Laula. She and her husband took the last name Renberg when they married.

<sup>3</sup>Lap is a derogatory word today. The quote is from 1917 when Lap (and ‘Find’) were the common words for Saami in Swedish and Norwegian.

<sup>4</sup>Quotation in Norwegian (...) jeg føler mig som en undertrykt mand uten lov og rætt. Jeg føler ofte trang til at bebreide Gud at jeg blev født som Lap. (...), from the newspaper Trondhjems Folkeblad 10 February 1917 at <https://www.nb.no/items/8597f51c13d01fac5f7eb76723852c62?page=0&searchText=Daniel%20Mortenson%20bebreide%20Gud>. Retrieved on 23 March 2018.

of Saepmie to rally political support. Their personal biographies and family ties also exemplify the significance of the state border between Norway and Sweden. That border influenced their lives, their family bonds and economy.

## 1.2 The Challenges of Maps—Historically and Politically

Saepmie—the traditional Saami land—covers the northern part of Fennoscandia. During late medieval times, the Swedish and Danish kings and the Russian tsars started to impose borders on their respective realms across Saepmie. They also fought several wars. These borders acquired their present political status in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the map (Fig. 1.1), we see the state borders of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, whereas the shaded area marks Saepmie. As there has never been a Saami state, there are no strict borders between the traditional Saami land, as it is conceived today, and the adjacent areas. Moreover, there is no consensus among historians and archaeologists as to the historic extent of the Saami settlements.

Drawing maps is an act of highly political and hegemonic significance, not least in the period of European colonialism, whether in other parts of the world or within Europe, as was the case for the monarchies of Denmark–Norway, Sweden–Finland and Russia and their respective interests in Saepmie from late medieval up to modern times. The colonial and political implications of the mapping of Saepmie through history are discussed by Anna Lydia Svalastog in ‘Mapping Sami Life and Culture’ (2015).

Drawing a border to show the South Saami area is no less a political act. For one thing, the present-day South Saami area, as shown in many contemporary maps, also encompasses the traditional areas of the Ume and Pite Saami. Second, the borders, or rather frontiers, between groups of people who have interacted are dynamic and not fixed. However, in the 1880s and 1890s, the Swedish and Norwegian states introduced administrative measures to control and restrict the Saami reindeer husbandry in favour of agricultural interests.<sup>5</sup> One result was that reindeer herders were organized into Reindeer Herding Districts whose borders were drawn by the Swedish and Norwegian governments. These, the only existing political borders, are then frequently used to show the contemporary South Saami area. The problem is that these borders were originally imposed on the Saami reindeer herders by the governments of Sweden and Norway; they were not the result of the Saami people’s own organization of their land, the traditional *sijte* (*siida* in North Saami) (*samer.se* [b]; Allard 2011; Allard and Funderud Skogvang 2016). With these reservations taken into consideration, the map we present in this chapter (Fig. 1.1) gives a general idea of what today

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<sup>5</sup>The so-called Common Lap Law (Norway and Sweden), 1883 and 1886, respectively, and later regulations in both countries throughout the twentieth century (Jernsletten 1998; Lundmark 2008; Ravna 2011).



**Fig. 1.1** Map of Saepmie—the traditional Saami land. The darker shading of Southern Saepmie is based on the borders of the reindeer herding districts on both sides of the national borders of Norway and Sweden. The slanted and unshaded lines to the south and west represent the current scholarly re-negotiation and investigation of archaeological and historical sources

is considered to be the main South Saami land. Therefore, the darker shading of Southern Saepmie is based on the borders of the reindeer herding districts on both sides of the national borders of Norway and Sweden. The slanted and unshaded lines to the south and west represent the current scholarly re-negotiation and investigation of archaeological and historical sources. Recent scholarship questions and possibly even widens the limits of Saami presence on the Scandinavian Peninsula.

### 1.3 Ethnonyms and Geographical Names

The spelling of the Saami ethnonym varies in the various sources; this is also the case with the spelling of the name of the land of the Saami. We have chosen to use the following spelling of the ethnonym and the land: Saami and Saepmie. In English, we see three variants of the ethnonym, Sami, Sámi and Saami. The first, 'Sami', is frequently used, especially by non-Saami writers; in the second, we have the North Saami 'á'. The two latter alternatives both express the long Saami vowel sound. Some writers find the double 'aa' easier in English where the diacritical signs are unfamiliar. In this book, both alternatives are used, the double 'aa' or the 'á'. In North Saami, which is the majority Saami language, the name of the land is spelt 'Sápmi', and in this book we have chosen to use the South Saami spelling, 'Saepmie'.

On the map (Fig. 1.1), we have chosen to use Saami names as well as names in the respective majority languages of municipalities, towns and cities within Saepmie. Within the South Saami area, from Mo i Rana/Måahvie and southwards, the names are in Norwegian/Swedish and South Saami.

Saami is the ethnonym used by the Saami people themselves, but in the various forms depending on language/dialect. As is often the case, the ethnonyms used by the others, especially the majority populations or the people in power, are different from the ethnonym used by the people themselves. Throughout history, the Saami have been called Finns, Laps, even Finnlaps ('Finlapper') or Lapfinns ('Lapfinnerne') (Ravna 2011). In earlier English texts, the Saami have frequently been called Laplanders. Lap and Finn are today considered derogatory. In this book, these ethnonyms are only used when appearing in quoted sources. Traditionally, the Finn ethnonym, stemming from Old Norse 'finnr', has mostly been used in Norway, whereas Lap has been used in Sweden, Finland and to a certain degree also in Norway, particularly in northern Norway. In Norway, the Saami ethnonym (same/samer/samisk) replaced the Lap and Finn ethnonyms in the 1950s and 60s, at least in official documents and in the media (as is also commented on in Kolberg's chapter in this volume).

### 1.4 The Field of Research, Positioning and Context

The Saami in both Sweden and Norway have been heavily pressured to assimilate with the Swedish and Norwegian majority populations. This has not only contributed to a loss of ethnic identity, language competency, culture and religion, but also to disadvantages in socio-economic status, discrimination and prejudice (Kvernmo 2004; Spein 2008; Hirvonen 2008). A positive identity as a member of an indigenous population is linked with conversational knowledge of the indigenous culture. The revitalization of indigenous cultures and languages interacts with the quality of life and is a driving force in the maintenance of a strong and vital indigenous culture. The links between language, culture, history and identity are close. However, in spite of the importance of language, and its importance for sustainable quality of life,

language has been neglected and until recently ignored for the South Saami population (Todal 2007). South Saami is a severely endangered language with around 500 speakers (UNESCO, see also Huss 2008). The low number of speakers and the decrease in language proficiency severely threaten the intergenerational transfer of the language.

A crucial part of the Saami identity is the common history of colonization and discrimination by the nation states that have set up their borders across the Saami land since medieval times. The historical process of South Saami identity formation is a crucial source of information and understanding of the current situation. In research and science, the Saami (and other minorities) have suffered under various highly unethical practices (Hagerman 2016; Niemi and Semb 2009). Within academia, the current situation has roots in an early subjugation of Saami topics. In its earliest forms, this meant excluding Saami topics from academic disciplines and putting them into their own field of Lappology (Hansen and Olsen 2014).

Lack of memory environments is a threat to the South Saami culture, and awareness and knowledge will be an important contribution to vitalizing and sharing values with the South Saami community itself, as well as to the general public. Language, identity, history and culture are in this respect connected to how the South Saami community has been represented in the majority society. In order to rework the relations between the South Saami identity and the identity of the majority population in the Saami territories, this volume has as its ambition to disseminate information about and an understanding of how this relationship has been historically constructed and is currently practised. A reflection on these practices must be spurred both within and, not least, outside the Saami community. Therefore, the main objective of this book is to enhance awareness of the South Saami culture and history, and to deepen the understanding of how the South Saami and non-Saami identities are formed in a dynamic interaction and negotiation process with each other.

## 1.5 Negotiations, Indigeneity and Indigenous Methodology

The term indigenous or indigeneity is not an unproblematic one, as it is rooted deeply in colonial discourse and practice. Etymologically, it stems from the Late Latin term *indigenus* (born in a country, native), and the Oxford English Dictionary denotes the primary meaning to be ‘Born or produced naturally in a land or region; native or belonging naturally to (the soil, region, etc.)’. Using this meaning in a Fennoscandinavian context might be seen as more problematic than in reference to parts of the world that have undergone a colonizing process more recently. However, a term is needed that distinguishes between cultural groups of different ancestries within one territory, and a term is also needed that recognizes the possibility not only of identities but also of power. Furthermore, there is a need for a term that recognizes that all across the globe, peoples of regions colonized by new arrivals experience many of the same difficulties in preserving their language, way of life and even physical

existence. Therefore, we will in this volume speak of indigeneity and indigenous peoples.

Questions of indigenous identities are complex and must be approached through a negotiation of different perspectives. In these negotiations, no one can assume absolute power in determining identity. To a certain extent, any group or individual must be allowed to determine one's own identity. It must be acknowledged, however, that identities are in flux and are constantly being revised and reworked more or less consciously in relation to a context, where the identity of others is a vital part. No group can have a final say in how one's identity is construed. However, a key obligation, especially for majority groups or groups with hegemony, must be to be finely tuned into the perspectives of others in order to work their perspectives and self-conceptions into one's own. The crux of the matter is one of ethics, and of social consciousness. We as non-Saami scholars must check ourselves through due scholarly processes, and we must acknowledge our positions as outsiders and as representatives of certain power structures. This point, which applies universally to any study of group identity, is all the more important in questions of indigenous identity in the aftermath of colonialism. Linda Tuhivai Smith has pointed out how indigenous peoples systematically have been oppressed, marginalized and made invisible as a consequence of colonial structures in politics, science and research. In her work, she refers to Edward Said (Smith 2012) and his book *Orientalism* in which he analysed how academic tradition and literature produced power through knowledge, and thus defined how Europeans viewed and identified The Others (Kohn 2014).

Research ethics, indigenous theories and decolonizing methodologies are interconnected. The criticism against Euro-American research has a clear ethical content. The development of indigenous guidelines for research is examples of this. Such guidelines reflect the philosophical, methodological and theoretical questions that researchers need to consider and reconsider. There are examples of such ethical standards and guidelines, for example, in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Canada (Olsen 2016, p. 29). The San people in South Africa have also developed their own ethical guidelines (Torp 2017). Lars Jacobson argues that one should aim for trust and reciprocity, and move from considering people as objects to seeing them rather as partners in research (Jacobson 2016, p. 55).

The methodological consequence of this for the non-indigenous scholar will be to de-centre oneself, putting oneself outside the privileged position of the defining authority, and to acknowledge the indigenous privilege to set the terms and the agenda (Olsen 2017, p. 7). We agree with Land (2015, p. 27) that there are issues that non-indigenous scholars have to pursue with care. In some aspects of identity, an internal perspective is necessary. As such, both the project and this volume represent a stance where no one should have the power to determine the identity of others. The Saami identity, as any other, is never fixed nor final, but rather constantly in flux. It is a joint effort of insiders and outsiders, and a matter of constant reworking, through words, practice and omissions.

## 1.6 Research Questions and Topics

Our approach to this study of South Saami identity has been based on the concept of ‘negotiations’. By using this concept, our intention has been to bring to mind a dynamic process of interchange, in this particular instance, of meaning, between two or more parties. In this interchange, there is no stable, immovable or unchangeable centre, rather we are dealing with a highly complex structure of positions and relations that are evolving, the one always affecting the other. In the words of cultural historian Helge Jordheim: ‘In a process of negotiations, no one can avoid re-evaluating and changing their positions in answer to impulses and suggestions from others—hence, no one and nothing remains exactly the same, exactly identical’ (2009, p. 15). Jordheim points out that the different parties do not necessarily have to be physical objects. For instance, our use of the concept will encompass a social group’s dialogue, interpretation and confrontation with their own history as this is represented in the present through narratives, objects and landscapes, as well as the expectations of other groups. The process of negotiation by implication entails difference of interest, at least initially. Although these interests do not need to be in conflict, they often are, and one always has to keep an eye on the power structures that underpin the positions and frame the proceedings.

We have strived to identify arenas where different ideas of South Saami identity are expressed, questioned, discussed and refined. What we want to highlight in doing this is the dynamic and plastic nature of the indigenous identity.

This collection of studies is the final result of a 3-year project. The mixture of cases, of perspectives and of contexts, transnational and indigenous/non-indigenous, should also be seen as a methodological tool. The different studies are not only studies of negotiations, historical and contemporary. They are also bids in ongoing negotiations themselves, within the project and within the political/societal discourse of indigenous and Saami identity. As such, they express what we as non-indigenous scholars and editors see as a methodological necessity: to check our own concepts, processes and results, engaging in discussions and keeping questions of identity, of power and privilege constantly under debate.

Based on both historical material, such as archaeological evidence, twentieth-century newspapers and postcard motifs, and contemporary sources, such as ongoing land-right disputes and trials, and recent works of historiography, the chapters highlight the culture and living conditions of the South Saami. One important goal has been to highlight how the negotiations of different identities have taken place through the interaction of South Saami and non-Saami people through the ages. This book will focus on aspects related to the need to increase research-based knowledge about the South Saami history and formation of identity. The studies include both South Saami self-expression and the majority society’s changing attitudes, not only to the South Saami as an indigenous people with certain rights but also to how knowledge about South Saami culture, language and history is paramount for developing a society based on equal opportunities and inter-cultural education (Lile 2009, p. 31). While this research is focused on the South Saami, it is vital to study this

identity formation and assimilation of an indigenous people as an example of a global phenomenon.

The following aspects are presented in separate chapters organized into parts II–V, following Part I. Part II focuses on the socio-linguistic aspects of the modern South Saami language. In these chapters, questions of language survival are addressed. A key concern for the South Saami community is the preservation and growth of the South Saami language, despite more than a century of assimilation policy conducted by the Norwegian and Swedish authorities. In recent decades, a revitalization movement has led to a strengthening of the language, a growing number of families are using South Saami as the language of the home and the number of young speakers is rising.

Part III analyses and discusses key historical and archaeological issues relating to prehistory and historic research questions within the South Saami sphere. Furthermore, investigation of ethnic processes in prehistoric times, as well as a critical examination of historical sources and the use of non-indigenous sources in writing indigenous history, will be discussed in these chapters.

Part IV will focus on the extent to which and how the South Saami people and South Saami affairs are represented, and to what extent and how the South Saami voices take part in the public general discourse. Incorporated into these perspectives, the research questions focus on the relationship between the South Saami and the majority non-Saami population in Norway and how this is negotiated in the public domain. In this chapter, negotiations and representation are important elements, as well as self-expressions, indigenous identities and the majority society's popular perception of the South Saami.

Part V discusses some contemporary policies in Norway. Questions of how land disputes and the South Saami use of history, culture and traditions play a role in the identity processes and the struggle for the South Saami land is one aspect examined in this chapter, in addition to negotiations between indigenous groups and majority societies.

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