

# **Retrospect on The Sami Nation. Text, Context, Field, Symbolic Violence Confessions of a Bordering Actor<sup>1</sup>**

*Per Otnes*

Research takes time. Sometimes a  
period of decades is necessary to  
assess even small changes in  
culture and environment

*A. I. Keskitalo (1994)*

Non, je ne regrette rien

*E. Piaf*

## **Flashback**

I wrote a book (1970) of the Sami, formerly known as the Lapps, the People of Eight Seasons. The Polar Circle divides their territory roughly in half, measured as distance, although the bulk of its area is up north – way up north, almost as far north as people can adapt. Divided between four nation states, the bulk of it once more is within Norwegian borders, a region known as Finnmark, the Finns being another old name of the Sami. The coasts here have sparse agriculture but are mostly barren, high mountains and glaziers in the west, lower hills and moors to the east. Inland, vast stretches of more moors, until the coniferous and deciduous forests start, going all the way east, across Northern Europe and Asia to the easternmost shores of the Pacific Ocean. Sami territory however does not extend east beyond the Kola Peninsula within the Russian border.

I remember finishing the text in March 1969, late at night in a small hotel room in Madrid, writing in a frenzy, accompanied by my wife complaining that she could not sleep for the rattling of the portable typewriter which had a small FNL Vietnamese flag glued on top of it. The following day, cold and clear, after posting the MS back to Oslo from the main post office by the Puerta del Sol, we left for La Habana, Cuba, where I was to make a study of coastal fishing co-operatives, supported by the Norwegian Research Council.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Professors Nils Oskal, Henry Minde, Kirsti Strøm Bull and to Doctors Vigdis Stordahl and Richard Daly for valuable comments to previous versions. As usual full responsibility for any possible shortcomings remains with yours truly.

Lamentably, neither story found a happy ending. The manuscript turned book was read all right, but young aspiring Sami leaders had had their fill and more of being lectured by outsiders and so dismissed it – and harshly at that (Keskitalo 1973). Eventually others followed suit as we shall see. As for the Cubans they had a hard time telling whether I was a sympathetic sociologist or some sort of an agent in disguise (despite the FNL flag, only too easy a fake), so following months of indecision, I relieved them of their problem, gave up the project and went home, wife, typewriter and all. Back home the research council was furious and considered legal action. And I was discouraged, more due to earlier outcomes than to the Council's ire. But despite the setback, not many months later I managed to win a position at Oslo University's Department of Sociology – my employer ever since – a scholarship at first, and a (tenured) professor since 1985.

I never went back to Cuba<sup>2</sup>, but today, one score and sixteen years later, things have changed somewhat regarding the Sami book. Long out of print and succeeded if not surpassed by later texts, it is now being remembered (or should I say re-remembered?) and even re-read by a few. For one thing, the young pretenders of yore are by now mostly well established, a few even on the global scene. Moreover, a full 36 years is a long stretch for an aging mousquetaire to try to stage a comeback, but in what follows I do.

## **The text-context-field tool-kit**

Bourdieu and his followers have advanced this procedure for analysing the activities within and between fields (champs), semi-autonomous sets of agents personal and institutional agreeing as to what is at stake but disagreeing over preferred outcomes; likewise partly agreeing and disagreeing as to who shall gain admittance to the field, i.e. favouring or opposing admitting new or excluding old agencies, which typically leaves a 'limbo' zone of bordering actors and issues (Otnes 2004:76). In Bourdieu's own words

“Je dis que pour comprendre une production culturelle ... il ne suffit pas de se référer au contenu textuel de cette production, mais il ne suffit pas davantage de se référer au contexte social en se contentant d'une mise en relation du texte et du contexte. ... (E)ntre ces deux pôles, très éloignés... il existe un univers intermédiaire, que j'appelle le champ ... dans lequel sont insérés les agents et les institutions qui (les) produisent, reproduisent ou diffusent (1997 :14, PO addition: ou reçoivent).”

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<sup>2</sup> I did go on writing of Norwegian coastal fishing co-operatives though, Otnes 1980.

Of course most modern fields produce texts, results of their *modus operandi* or mode of operation. In objectivised, received and more or less accepted form these very texts etc. next metamorphose, in part at least, into parts of that field's *opus operatum* or produced results, a textual (or more broadly mediatic) body of doctrine, records, experience, *doxa* etc.

Bearing in mind the work of Michel Pollak (1986), and Bourdieu, (1997, 1992) we may sketch the two dismissed approaches, the purely textual versus purely contextual analyses. The first or textual, typical for example of much of literary theory and of philosophy, limits itself to studying, very thoroughly and sometimes ingenuously, written records, and practically nothing else. It is of course possible to analyse a text with no regard to its context and field, in which case one comes close to Derrida's "il n'y a pas de hors-texte", "there is nothing outside of the texts"<sup>3</sup>. Or better, close to the tradition of all sorts of scribes, imams, pandits, jurists etc., who seek answers in traded, presumably venerable text and nothing much else, 'text fetishism', says Bourdieu linking it to French semiology.

On the other hand the contextual approach pays less attention to the words and phrases, art or commands of texts but endeavours to trace their form and contents entirely back to the social or economic world in which they appeared (1997:13). In literary theory this used to be known e.g. as 'historicism', such as tracing Ibsen's dramas mainly to events of his personal history, his juvenile affair resulting in an 'illegitimate' child, the father's bankruptcy, or his brief affiliation with the first spontaneous labour movement in Norway of the 1850s, his affairs with much younger women late in life etc. (his Master Builder, say no more).

In typical style Bourdieu and followers attempt to transcend or reconcile this conflict of opposite approaches. Both the textual and the contextual view have much to offer, but combined. The influence of external factors, a text's contemporary social and economic 'world', is never direct, always mediated – exactly, by a *field* of agencies and institutions, agreeing and disagreeing e.g. over the value of textual contributions. Similarly, for the texts viewed internally, one can trace not the direct influence of social, economic etc. impersonal 'factors', but that, too, through the eyes and minds, the agencies, of the text's field or fields of production and reception, oblivion and recuperation, readers, reviewers, theorists etc.

This combined or rather transcended approach juxtaposes text and context, claiming the same amount of thoroughness, acumen etc. for both, mediated by the fields; what follows being an effort in that direction.

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<sup>3</sup> Yet Derrida should be credited for the great efforts he made, not only his close reading of single texts, but his linking of numerous distinct texts, links intended or not by their authors, intertextuality or *la déconstruction* if you please.

## **A rupture of text from context**

So generally, a text of today may become part of tomorrow's context – if it fares well in the field or fields that go into it; which implies it may serve to eradicate or at least phase out or modify older texts. Conversely, a text of today will enter stage (or fields) against the background of previous received contexts, texts etc. already more or less consecrated by field agencies, a rather intricate interplay. So instead of separate and consecutive analyses, I shall present my text and its preceding contexts simultaneously, focussing not so much on the detailed wording and structure of the text, but dialectically, highlighting a number of crucial texts stands intended to break with the earlier context. We will return to the spaces or fields of both in due course, but first, this little deviance from strict Bourdieuvian ways is required as an exposition of a text so old, and unknown by all foreign readers.

### ***1. A nation, not a tribe or picturesque curiosity***

The book was entitled *The Sami Nation. Interest Organisations in Sami Political History* (1970, henceforth abbreviated TSN), a Norwegian text, never translated, not even a summary. Some paparazzi read it as a call for a sovereign Sami state across borders in the North. It was, and is, definitely not<sup>4</sup>. But, it endeavoured to demonstrate that the Sami, long thought by some<sup>5</sup> to be 'doomed to' extinction by the 'law of evolution', i.e. victims of Social Darwinism<sup>6</sup> had in fact all the characteristics of a people and a stateless nation: their own language, territory, culture, including a history not only of culture but no less of politics. That much was known in advance but very largely repressed or neglected in the given antecedent context, i.e. of pre-1970.

### ***2. Victims of internal colonialism, not 'backward'***

The book was in the tradition of research and reflection about neo-colonialism, still a global fact of life political and quotidian on several con-

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<sup>4</sup> Although becoming something of an autonomous region in the not too distant future cannot be ruled out; this was not advocated in TSN however.

<sup>5</sup> As late as in the 1970s there were voices, cited in the book, identifying as Sami yet advocating their people's total, traceless assimilation. That rumour had even reached the ETA, whose 'foreign minister' I met briefly in Bruxelles just before Madrid and Cuba (they were not as notorious then as today; rather, they were only another indigenous people's organisation). The man found it encouraging to learn that these were single isolated voices, not settled general Sami opinion, then – or now.

<sup>6</sup> The belief, erroneously based on Darwin's theories, that evolution too had its chosen peoples (white, industrialised, colonists) as against its peoples of decline and eventual doom (coloured, 'primitive', colonised), cf. Lundmark 2005.

tinents in the late 1960ies and early 1970ies etc. I did not read Kwame Nkrumah (1965) then; I read his and Sartre's (1964) extended treatment only much later. I did however read Franz Fanon, *Les damnés de la terre* and *Peau noire, masques blancs*; later Fanon was woven into a newer, post-colonial tradition, called even 'post-development' by some. Yet including Europe, 'our' Western Europe, among continents practicing neo-colonialism, was provocative at the time – and very likely worse today, cf. the Balkans, Eastern Europe, ETA, IRA etc<sup>7</sup>. A basic thesis in what follows is that the transition from neo-colonial to post-colonial theories has perhaps been somewhat too much of a clean break with a past still with us, despite the path-breaking insights of Edward Saïd and others into the impersonal mechanisms of high culture also subjugating ex-colonial peoples. Criticising the work and influence of a Flaubert is all well and fine, but much less at risk than criticising leading TNCs such as the Rio Tinto plc, Haliburton, or Nestlé.

So *The Sami Nation* tells a story of internal colonialism, much in the same vein as Hechter's somewhat later study (1976) of the British Celtic fringe. But while Hechter worked largely with regional statistics and cultural data such as language use, I relied on the written sources of political history, tracing forerunners and present attempts of organising Sami self-defences against discrimination, Social Darwinism etc.

In retrospect I can see that I overrated the influence of left-leaning forces in the anti-colonialism struggles, to the neglect of forces on the centre or right, perhaps due to my being influenced by Fanon/Sartre. I should have known better, I had encountered Vietnamese who favoured a middle course between puppet regime and FNL socialism. In turn these middle or right positions play an important role in explaining post-liberation, post-colonial internal conflicts, i.e. of competing elites, of which more later.

### ***3. Totalisation, not 'holism'***

The standard earlier view had without much reflection pigeonholed the Sami as something of an isolate, a people of no connections and little change – no history, that is. Or as reflected in the question of a young North American student exposed to my lecture 'aren't they rather a family of tribes, loosely connected?' My book is obviously dated regarding all post-1970 events; that and more has been redone much more thoroughly later (Berg 2000, Hætta 1994, 2002, Hansen & Olsen 2004, Minde et al., due by 2007, Solbakk 1994, 1997, Stordahl 1996), yet my 1970 text was in its more sketchy way a rather definite turn towards a totalising approach, as distinct from earlier, mainly ethnographic 'holistic' views, such as Paine's (1957); eminent fieldwork yet

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<sup>7</sup> Allard's (1979) little-read analysis lists 46 linguistic minorities in Western Europe alone, not all of them indigenous peoples, though, such as his own Swedish-speaking Finns.

strictly within local holism. The holistic pattern of Paine and others places all relevant facts in a system, but mind you, only all ‘local’ and contemporary facts, which makes the ‘holistic’ strictly bounded, borné. Whereas the totalising view places such systems always in their wider historical, open, political, may I say ‘inter-popular’ perspective. There are no isolate peoples, only skewed images. Some problems of the totalising approach will be dealt with shortly. However the totalising-holistic contrast is better not thought of as a dichotomy, rather as a dialogue, a synthesis, like text and context best viewed together, joined by a field or fields<sup>8</sup>.

#### ***4. A rich, not a poor territory***

The earlier standard view pictured the Sami as the widely scattered population of an extremely poor, semi-polar region. Small wonder that manifestations, movements and organizations were few, met obstacles, and as a consequence remained weak. Or so went the conventional ‘old-speak’. Widening and lifting the focus gave altogether different results. The region may seem barren yet was flowing with riches such as ore and mineral resources, fishing grounds, both among the richest in the world, plus year-round harbour facilities, and today, a promise of rich offshore oilfields. And it was, and remains even after the ‘Cold War’, a border area of national and international political conflicts, often but not always latent or tacit.

‘Naturally’, some would say, ‘what do reindeer herding nomads have to do with mining and fishing?’ Yet there are today as low a proportion of reindeer-herders among present Sami as there are agriculturalists among the British, i.e. minuscule percentages. And the richest mines tend to have Sami names, Kirunavara e.g. means ptarmigan mountain. As for fishing, the fiord- or sea-Sami went at it around the year while southerners came mainly for the spring high season, or for trawling way off shore. The richest resources, briefly, were taken over by wealthy in-migrants, in classic colonialist fashion.

#### ***5. Global simultaneity of protest movements***

My text also pointed out that even if the Sami organizations of pre-1970 were not strong, there had been predecessors, mostly limited movements yet with a notable simultaneity with popular upheavals on the global level. First and most obvious among them was the Kautokeino insurrection of 1852, which saw a local protestant sect of Samis preaching insubordination to local Norwegian authorities, to the point even of killing the sheriff and trader, while the vicar got away with a bad beating. Other hypotheses have been advanced (e.g. Zorgdrager 1997) but I still hold similar events unthinkable were it not for the tumultuous times following 1848 in central and even

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<sup>8</sup> We will return to anthropologist Fredrik Barth’s opposite views on this count.

northern Europe. And for the next major Sami movement, that developing up to and following the 1917 revolutions, there is a direct connection; leading Sami activists were admirers of social-democrat leaders such as August Bebel. So a third wave of activism was not unexpectedly following WW2, the formal independence of colonies 1947–62 etc., and the prolonged Vietnam wars ending only in 1975. Like its predecessors, the wave arrived somewhat delayed in Sabme; distance or periphery does have their costs.

Such were, in doubly sketched form, the activism ‘ups’. But there were certainly ‘downs’ as well, long, miserable years where Sami activism faded nearly to the vanishing point. There is no guarantee but also no telling that these cannot return, a fourth in the succession of waves, with its own ups – and possible downs.

### ***6. Collective rights in land, not mere tolerated usufruct rights***

To this day the question of land rights remains the perhaps most hotly disputed issue, excepting only that of national self-determination. We have alluded to the earlier view that the Sami were ‘doomed to extinction’ by ‘the law of evolution’ or Social Darwinism. But from the last few decades of the 19th century, and especially in Norway, this gave rise to, or was combined with, the view that the Sami had no legal property rights, collective or individual, to the lands they had inhabited for centuries. The dominant non-Sami view came to be, for decades to come – it can still be traced – that whatever rights they might possess were at most tolerated usufruct rights, meaning that a non-Sami landowner, most often the Norwegian State, could expropriate Sami land without recompense at any time. In distinction to such ideas my book was among the first to point out that these views just cannot be reconciled with the fact that other ex-nomad, ex-colonised peoples had won collective rights to their land over most of Africa and much of Asia, as an obvious national privilege. Very much deserving of mention here is also the book of Sverre Tønnesen (1972), a police superintendent writing his juridical doctoral thesis on Sami rights to land in Finnmark, later followed up by decades of deliberations of various government Sami committees (NOU 1984:18, 1993:34, 1997:4-5, 2001:34), of which more later.

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Today of course most of these six points are ‘old news’ – we will return to a few more still burning after presenting the fields. But they certainly were not ‘old’ in the 1970s; they were largely seen as provocative, and even more so those that follow. For example, in the largely supportive words of Gjessing (1971, cf. below).

“Otnes does not do much to accommodate such social researchers as support ‘establishment’ positions, and gives spunky characterisations of the behaviour of both capitalists and state authorities towards the Sami” (1971:86).

### **Assessing the power of ‘world events’**

Now, in reference mainly to point 5 above, the trouble with theories of parallelisms and simultaneities is of course that they may approach a reified ‘General Mood of the Times’, even a Hegelian *Weltgeist* concept, and so serve as ‘explanations’ of those very facts that by induction gave rise to the same totalizing concepts.<sup>9</sup> Circular reasoning is a very real danger, yet all historiography has to outline distinct periods or epochs. Though dangers remain named periods and epochs long or shorter are constantly being distinguished, even teeming<sup>10</sup>. Another danger lies in the fact that wannabe epoch changes are always conflict-ridden: ‘Whoever will count battles lost on victory’s day’ to quote the poet (Bjørnson). To which the obvious answer is, ‘those who won them’. As the saying goes ‘history is being written by the conquerors’ yet regularly the conquered will also have their say in the longer or shorter run. But of course, however lamentably, lasting subjugation, even extinction, do occur; the case for bio-diversity being rather more clearly stated than for ethno-diversity.

We will return to the agencies that mediated, some seemingly ‘impersonal world events’ in terms of me and my work. For myself and my times I certainly do claim to have been influenced by epochal changes, such as the ‘left wave’, ‘students unrest’, or as the French have it ‘les événements du mai (1968)’. One can of course not claim to have been caused by such events and ideas, for their influences are often partial – some regularly ignore, overlook, disdain or even militate against them just as others are more or less carried away by them. Yet waves of change do come and go, opposed by some, supported by others, not of course in the manner of any ‘natural law’ of social waves<sup>11</sup>. But such irregular waves of varying amplitudes and

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<sup>9</sup> Recently, the term ‘globalisation’ is not infrequently used to such effect, as well as possibly terms such as discourse, narrative, episteme, regime, system. Conservative historian Ferguson (2004) even claims that globalisation is only a euphemism for continued imperialism, the only fault of the leading empire being its weak dedication; in his opinion it should strike harder.

<sup>10</sup> On the near frivolous side, remember e.g. the numerous ‘Generation X, XTC’ etc., wannabe conceptualisations of successive cohorts of (ex-)contemporary western youth. However superficial, they do seem to have some impact on the cohorts themselves: ‘we, the the rockers, the punk, the X etc. generations’

<sup>11</sup> Hence sociology’s conception of ‘social diffusion’ is perhaps too much of an allusion to the processes of nature.



wavelengths sometimes leave their indubitable marks on, even constitute, history: ‘The whole is more than the sum of its parts’ yet some ‘parts’ do have more impact than others. And not only do they ‘leave marks’, some, notably leading ideologists, today perhaps better known as ‘spin doctors’, try and sometimes succeed in putting their marks on the waves. As a metaphor, ‘marking a wave’ may sound utterly futile, yet not only single persons but substantial organisations, no less, are set up with similar tasks, ‘think-tanks’ for example. So agencies, fields as yet unnamed re-enter stage.

## **The field of reception**

Return now to TSN, the book published 35 years ago. Not exactly a success, but its modest edition did sell out in a few years. Commercially it never earned me a penny, nor was it meant to. It did however give rise to a debate and was reviewed, in professional periodicals as well as in some daily and weekly newspapers, most intensely up north (Bratrein 1970, Berntsen 1971, Dahl 1971, Gjessing 1971, plus the mentioned Keskitalo 1973; for the newspaper debate cf. Nordlys, Tromsø, from October 1969 etc.). Not too bad for an author’s first book. With the exception of Keskitalo, who reviewed six books together and singled out mainly Gjessing’s (1973) for his criticisms, these early reviews were generally positive. Among those mentioned, Bratrein was a young historian specialising in northern history; Berntsen then a history student and leading student activist on the left, today an independent historian; Dahl a young yet established Oslo university historian on the center-left; Gjessing an aging, somewhat secluded radical colleague in ethnography; and Keskitalo a young philosophy student, today museum director, himself Sami.

The latter’s review may however well be read as harbinger of a coming change of general mood, of waves, counter-waves to come. For increasingly, after the mid-1970s, applause for anti-colonialism and like left-leaning movements subsided, whether brought about by grand conscious ‘spin’ efforts or not<sup>12</sup>. So the positive reviews ceased or were forgotten, There were new, negative appraisals too, but these were however rarely openly voiced. In the words of Sami University College (NSI) professor Nils Oskal:

“In Karasjok Grammar School during the 1970s we read two books, that of Otnes and that of Gjessing (1973). But when we arrived at the

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<sup>12</sup> To which should be added growing second thoughts, an amount of ‘repentance’ among a growing number of early left activists, partly stimulated by, partly stimulating further ‘spin’ efforts. In Habermas’ words (1992) ‘the student revolt provoked the neo-conservative reaction’. So did regard to moderation as well, not spoiling future career prospects etc.

University of Tromsø (UiT) these two were absent from the required reading lists” (Oskal, in conversation 2001).

Contemporary colleagues at the UiT have indicated that this was not invariably so; it appears that some departments had my book on their lists for a decade or more. Yet said colleagues do not hesitate to dub the emerging, largely tacit negative appraisals no less than a fatwa<sup>13</sup>, initiated by elite opponents, university colleagues and others.

According to Hobsbawm (1994), synthesising historian of the period, ‘The Crisis Years’ is a fitting term for all years from c.1970 until 1991, i.e. the dissolution of the Soviet system. I do like his much read book, yet a Marxist of his ‘basis-superstructure’ type may have been led to underrate the upsurge of neo-liberal ideas (i.e. superstructure, not basis) from the 1980ies on. True, Thatcher or Reagan in their respective budgeting did not in fact practice the teachings of liberalism (1994:412) but they nevertheless did go on teaching them, as doctrine as well as ideology, and forcefully at that. And as for agencies, no need to mention the Beckers, Friedmans, Hayeks etc. underpinning that increasing force. We could make a travesty of Marxism and say, ironically, that ‘theory becomes a material force once it has caught – the elites’.

Anyhow Keskitalo alone had the courage to put his name to the dissociation. For others it was more of a faceless fatwa. I suppose that is what you do when you have no face to lose. Of course, doxic contents are regularly faceless, as are collective consciences, discourses etc. One makes efforts, often overly obvious – symbolic super-conformity if you please – of siding with ‘right’ and eschewing ‘wrong’ others. Or one hides behind ‘the Great We’ (Helge Krog), or das Man (Heidegger) etc. in order to avoid being held personally responsible; cravenness institutionalised.

## **The field of production**

### *A sketch of the establishment pre-text protofield*

Forty years ago one could hardly speak of one coherent field of Sami expertise. That has slowly come into existence in recent decades. Around 1970 what existed was, in Bourdieu’s terms, a more diffuse ‘social space’

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<sup>13</sup> The fatwa metaphor is (as so many metaphors) exaggerated, of course; no physical violence at all was involved. The infamous Rushdie case has made us think otherwise, but in Arabic fatwa means any legal report or judgement, not only a death sentence. What really took place was more like a limbo or ‘ice-house’, unpleasant, yes, yet what really made a difference was retaining some freedom of choice of new research problems – the ancient tradition of ‘academic freedom’, threatened however today.

which had yet to cohere into a field proper. Attaining coherence and autonomy took place exactly through the struggles of years to come. So by c. 1970 what was traceable was more like a loose family of sub- or proto-fields, varying according to the standard classification of types of issues – the Sami vis-à-vis reindeer-herding (of course), and (other) agriculture, vis-à-vis mining, waterpower, fisheries, media and culture, not forgetting Academe's various specialists such as ethnologists and anthropologists, folklorists, museum conservators, linguists, educationalists, and a few jurists and sociologists.

There may or may not have been something of a nucleus or core field to all this; I remember that then Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Nærstad was mentioned with some awe at the time, agriculture including reindeer-herding being a basic sector of interest for some inhabitants of Sami core regions. Not much place for the 'real' ethnic, Sami-speaking Sami at that time, which gave rise to paradoxes such as the top experts of Sami linguistics being unable to speak the languages they were researching and teaching. And of course with rare exceptions this went for the sociologists etc. as well, myself being no exception; we could not speak or read Sami.

So this social field or space then comprised some senior and junior civil servants of the Ministries of Agriculture, Municipalities, Education etc., and (as it turned out) of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for as mentioned the Sami has always been a border people, their territories being cut by the borders of several nation states. For example Jens Evensen, of deserved fame as Norwegian law of the sea negotiator, played a dismal role in renegotiating reindeer-herding conventions with Sweden in 1972 (cf. Bull 2005). These were the established field agencies of the day, in many ways distant from, if not 'above', the daily lives of most 'genuine' Sami. But of course, the ministries were not without local contacts, most notably among whom were probably a rough handful of municipality mayors etc. from Sami core areas.

And of course, all these proto-fields were distant also from what became in 1967 my professional field or workplace, Oslo's Institute of Social Research, co-located with the university Institute of the Sociology of Law and Public Administration.

### ***The personal field of the author***

What became TSN started as part of a research project led by professor Vilhelm Aubert. I had been located at his research institute as a student, finishing a master's (magister) thesis analysing the Norwegian fishermen's professional association. Much of our fishing is located up north, so my field-work (Otnes 1972, English version 1975) and interviewing brought me in contact with northern districts and their populations; however none of those I encountered were Sami as I can remember. So I had some knowledge about

organisations and northern affairs, but very little about Sami issues, for which I had only a diffuse and general sympathy when the work started.

Aubert was the leading figure, somewhat aloof but more from shyness than arrogance. The issue of extending public welfare was a major concern he, and the bulk of his colleagues, were concerned with, notably helping to eradicate or at least alleviate poverty. So his interest seems to have originated there; poverty was then more frequent in rural districts and marginal regions than in urban areas. And some core Sami municipalities had record low figures of annual cash income then<sup>14</sup>. His plan for a general Norwegian poverty survey never got the support it deserved<sup>15</sup>, but two lesser projects, one on marginal regions and another on the Sami were manned, carried out, and largely published.

Other colleagues included educationist Anton Hoëm, later professor, single Sami-speaker of the team. Further, Lina Homme, sociologist and eminent fieldworker, and Per Mathiesen, geographer, later Tromsø professor of anthropology<sup>16</sup>. These colleagues were full-time staff, but four frequent guests also deserve mention: Tomas Cramér, Swedish top jurist and his country's Ombudsman for Sami affairs; Paul Fjellheim, veterinarian and then chairman of the Norwegian reindeer-herder's organisation, later married to Homme; Hans J. Henriksen, a slightly aging brilliant interpreter, and Odd Mathis Hætta, then a student of Sami linguistics in Oslo, today professor in Alta, Finnmark.

Only the latter three were 'genuine' Sami. And only Cramér and Henriksen were 'in', i.e. considered competent – to some extent – by the established field members just mentioned. All the others were comparative newcomers to that field – pretenders or bordering players striving to get 'in', to have a say, find ears for their research reports etc. During the three years I was associated we had lots of cordial, collegial, supportive discussions and I, as the youngest member, certainly had most to learn. However, the cordial tone turned down or disappeared rather soon after TSN was published, giving

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<sup>14</sup> About as low by the way as that of my family of origin. – Glancing through present income statistics, that situation would seem to have improved; for the poorest municipality up to c. 70% now as against 45% of the national average 40 years ago. Now all sociologists know that averages should be compared with great caution. The more important cultural question, however, is whether it really feels 20% better to be 30% behind in a very rich country, than over 50% behind in a much poorer one. Further, today's unemployment is about double the national average in some Same municipalities.

<sup>15</sup> Much later Bourdieu et al.'s great *La misère du monde* (1993) was supported and carried through, receiving lots of media etc. attention when it appeared. Yet when it comes to political results, new actual measures alleviating the misery of the poor and outcast, its success is not well traceable, cf. current 'events' (Nov 05) in the Parisian banlieues.

<sup>16</sup> I remain deeply grateful to Mathiesen, today emeritus professor, for, as sub-project leader starting me with fieldwork in Finnmark for the very first time back in 1964. His is the honour of starting it all.

rise to quasi-arguments like ‘how can a radical such as you be a fan of courtly Renaissance music?’

Anyhow, my commission was Sami organisations, why they were so weak. There were hypotheses of distance, isolation, language difficulties (there are several very dissimilar dialects), poor schools, poverty etc. Cramér was first in introducing me to another track, the historical. Later I traced written sources in contemporary media, but for a start, Cramér told me that back in 1918 when Svenska Samernas Riksförbund (Swedish Sami National Federation) was to be established, the Sami guests from across the Norwegian border were hailed as pioneers. The reason was that the Sami founding national congress had been held in Trondheim the year before, on February 6th 1917, the date established much later for celebrating Sami national day. From pioneers to dunces in just a few decades? Impossible, and that given it became imperative to propose other explanations than weakness or internal problems alone.

Possible external countermeasures effectively opposing or delaying efforts of Sami organisation had to be investigated as well, and relied on as causal factors if or when verifiable, which they were, cf. TSN. For further verification of official discouragement, see the analysis of Gjengset (2004, notably ch. 19, plus several recent works on Sami history, Berg, Hætta etc, cf. the listing on p. 8 above).

### ***Disclosing symbolic violence starts polemics***

The diffusely committed researcher of the outset gradually became indignant over the numerous sources indicating Norwegian and Nordic discouraging of the Sami cause and organising efforts. Most measures were diffuse and general, based notably in ‘the spirit of the times’ yet one issue was direct and obvious, the long-lasting conflict over Sami rights in land and water, where the opposing forces, based originally in Social Darwinist reasoning – ‘doomed victims of Evolution’, remember – triggered attempts to eliminate gradually all Sami reindeer-herding. This never came about, yet simply voicing the intent would fall clearly under Bourdieu’s concept symbolic violence. At the time this term had not even been coined. The concept implies countermeasures, constraints etc., after a while hardly recognisable as such, neither by their initiators nor their victims.

Uncovering such facts contributed to giving the text a crisper, more polemical as well as possibly a more self-opinionated form than the standard research report. But these were the days of widely practiced opposition to Weber’s ideal wertefreie Wissenschaft, ‘value-free science’. Internationally Howard Becker published ‘Whose side are we on?’ (1967), later criticised in Alvin Goulder’s *For Sociology* (1973) for not going far enough towards the latter’s ideal of partisan research, a debate well summed up in Hammersley

(2000)<sup>17</sup>. Locally, the names and reports of researchers such as Ottar Brox and Yngvar Løchen, and philosophers, notably Hans Skjervheim and Dag Østerberg, gave telling examples pointing in similar directions. All contributed to launching the long and heated debates over committed research, ‘action research’, and above all, about ‘positivism’ (Slagstad 1976).

Regarding the Sami project, one commentator, Keskitalo (1973), blamed us for mixing analyses of fact with considerations over Sami strategies:

“(W)e [...] cannot accept outsiders’ [...] efforts of setting a limit for our universe of thought [...] The non-Sami who understands this will keep silent, and that silence will be a criterion of understanding”

I for one took his advice; I really hate intruding, although rare perhaps for a social scientist. I have never regretted that nor do I retain hard feelings (well, almost). And I would never have written what I do right now were it not for recent Sami instigations.

But none of this means that Keskitalo’s argument holds (cf. Larson 1988). It is not the first time that assertions of autonomy give rise to efforts of silencing divergent voices, external or internal. Those who share his views are of course free to not listen, or better, to propose their counterarguments. But just as obviously, external opponents are as free to voice well considered opposite stands. Keskitalo’s stand risks excluding competent participants<sup>18</sup> from a Habermasian herrschaftsfreie Diskussion, unconstrained discussion, hardly the practice one would expect from a philosophy graduate. Had that been his opinion, Wittgenstein’s conclusion would have been ‘wovon man schweigen muss, darüber kann man nicht sprechen’, not the much quoted vice versa.

While Keskitalo’s stand squares poorly with philosophy, it does square perfectly with the Bourdieuvian field model, according to which a standard procedure is acting the gatekeeper, i.e. striving to keep outsiders out<sup>19</sup>. If

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<sup>17</sup> Thanks to Becker for tipping me by mail of Hammersley’s work. Hammersley speaks in passing about ‘...Leninist forms of Marxism, where intellectual work is subordinated to the demands of practical politics’ (p. 114, cf. p 40). True, yet if so there exists a ‘Leninism of the centre-right’ as well, for centre-right authorities too commission social research, and for researchers breaching with commissioner demands, rarely new commissions. Even general declarations of loyalty or submission from research institute leaders have appeared recently, cited in Otnes (2002:272-3). Yet in the words of my late professor Lysgaard ‘they may commission research but not results’. Truth should override power in research.

<sup>18</sup> In the film *La sociologie est un sport de combat*, Bourdieu faces challenges from militant banlieue youth accusing his team of observing ghetto misery, not really helping, and thereby promoting own researcher careers etc. To which, visibly stressed, he repeatedly answers ‘my advice is that it is not a good idea to breach with the intellectuals’.

<sup>19</sup> Interestingly on this point Bourdieu’s views also square very well with Becker’s (1967:240), according to which social scientists should expect reactions – anger,

successful, this very conveniently relieves insiders of finding answers to difficult counterarguments.

Of course in this case too, there were those who held that indignation, commitment etc. have no place in research reports. I could say with Adorno, 'der Wert eines Gedankes mißt sich an seiner Distanz von der Kontinuität des Bekannten' (1987/51:99). Or better, the advice of the method of historians, according to which indignation etc. is not unequivocally a danger; it may be an asset, a sharpening of observation, intensifying of research effort and logic etc., for example because committed researchers know that opponents will be combing their reports for errors. So those who claim that indignation is bad have no point unless they can point to real errors resulting from it.

I was very conscious of having written a personal and of course a controversial research report, yet professionally done. And certainly an outsider's contribution; I realised clearly that I did not speak on anybody's behalf, Sami or other. It was a fresh move, research findings or hints of further such awaiting final confirmation, or refutation. For others, those involved, to apply or ignore this, to take stands old or revised, although my personal, outsider's stand was clearly stated, based mainly on my impression of the experience of other peoples' struggles against neo-colonialism. Imposing a stand was never an issue, only breaking the 'sonic barrier' of previous context, to which I think I made a contribution. However as symptom, not influence, TSN was indeed a local forerunner: when geographer Thrift (1996) uses the Sami to illustrate the concept 'place' his earliest reference is from 1976, the bulk however only from the late 80ies and early 90ies.

### ***The international field***

We have sketched in some detail the national, established field and the personal field to which I belonged. There is however another, more distant field, that of 'world events' anno 1967-70. Despite all conceptual difficulties, converting it from a pure context to a field requires that I personally enter the scene, as a somewhat random yet highly motivated mediator, one among many as of then<sup>20</sup>. For example, I had the good luck to experience in person more or less major celebrities such as Stokely Carmichael, Fidel Castro, John Gerassi, Allen Ginsberg, Herbert Marcuse during 1967, and I did read Che Guevara's posthumous diary as soon as it appeared the following year. I

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opposition, neglect, accusations of bias – to the extent that 'the research gives credence, in any serious way, to the subordinate group in some hierarchical relationship'. Further more intensely so 'when the parties to the hierarchical relationship engage in organized conflict (:241).

<sup>20</sup> Bourdieu's autobiography (2004) discloses that much of his thinking took form during his years in pre-liberation Algeria, only much earlier and in much closer contact with that local-global struggle and its parties.

never encountered student leaders such as Cohn-Bendit or Dutschke, but lots of their followers right off the streets of Paris in May-June 1968. I do not claim to have participated in such fields, not even as a bordering player. Nevertheless, these great events were mediated by an ambiance of local colleagues and students, none of them very well known names<sup>21</sup>, who by meeting and discussing maintained a shared commitment – the while. And of course we were reading a lot too, texts such as Fanon's and for a start Isaiah Berlin's (1966/63) Karl Marx. We were, without yet knowing the term and its implications, veritable soixante-huitards.

The most portentous issue at the time was the prolonged Vietnam war, by 1975 won by the Vietnamese: A small ex-colonial people had conquered in sequence two leading world powers, the last of them the leading superpower, today allegedly the one and only. That was bound to make an impact, on the winners and their followers, other dominated states and peoples who gained courage. But the losers, the USA, too were quick to open new fronts of deterrence, such as the CIA-Kissinger-Pinochet coup in Chile 1973.

The background here is an older victory, that over fascism in WW2 1945. Many have held that that the Allies might have lost that struggle were it not for the supporting efforts of their colonies. As Thrift (1996:189) has it "...this change of tack was a result of the general collapse of the colonial impulse in most parts of the world, and of the evolutionary schemes that had helped to sustain it". In brief, metonymic as well as counterfactual expression, France for decades could have become another Spain with Pétain as its Franco, had De Gaulle not had Algeria and other colonies in support towards the end of WW2. Which made the colonies' claim to political independence inescapable after 1945. It was not a question of if, but of when. So, most French African colonies received formal autonomy in 1962, and fresh British such as Zambia 1964 and Zimbabwe as late as 1979-80. Colonialism, even neo-colonialism, was over. Or?

Finally, 'the invisible field', exemplified by one of its very discrete agents. Disclosing his name, where and when I met him might be a criminal offence in the USA, so let us say his name was Al, about ten years my senior and that we met in the late sixties somewhere in Northern Sweden. We were both observers to a Sami congress, both among a few for which the congress dinner had no extra seats. So Al and I alone sat chatting for hours, sharing his whisky, a very nice and sociable fellow indeed, colleague from a neighbouring field of social science. He mentioned in passing that he had entered that field following an earlier army career. A friendship lasting for a while followed, as some months later he came to visit me, family and colleagues in Oslo. Then, next time I met him he looked distressed and complained that unforeseen events made it imperative that he returned to the USA. Not much later, after he had left, I chanced to glance through a new book entitled "Who

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<sup>21</sup> Some of those who still are would probably dislike being mentioned today.



is who in the CIA”. I had suspected nothing before, but now, on looking up Al’s name, there he was, together with information, scant but squaring well with the subjects of our chats.

One can never know for certain, of course, but the point is, in the terms of Orwell, or Foucault/Bentham, you never know if or when Big Brother sees you, however unimportant you – or your cause, Sami or other – may think you are.

## Three most controversial ruptures

### 1. *Handicap or hallmark?*

Let us now return now to the impact de-colonisation made on TSN. As one of three most controversial ruptures of my text I launched a very simple sketch typology of organisations, their having a choice between presenting themselves, promoting their cause, either as an organisation for the handicapped: ‘Poor us, we’ve done nothing wrong, please help us’. Or alternatively as a front of liberation: ‘You’ve suppressed us and discriminated against us for decades, about time you make up for your wrongdoings!’ Or in another expression (1970:29), ‘being Sami, handicap or hallmark?’

Of course this was in danger, especially at the time, of being misrepresented as a call for armed struggle. It was not, I never did recommend physical violence<sup>22</sup>. So when Sartre in his preface to Fanon’s *Les damnés...*<sup>23</sup> – speaks of violence as ‘Achilles’ lance’ whose blunt end allegedly is capable of healing the wounds it inflicts – in retrospect this is a mistake, even a grave one. With a better metaphor, that lance is as sharp, as lethal at both ends, and nobody is entirely invulnerable.

There occurred a single event of Sami sabotage by bombing, hurting the bombers much more gravely than their target, a bridge. But the Sami or their cause probably never were closer to being a liberation front than during the Alta demonstrations 1978-81 (cf. Lindal & Sunde 1981)<sup>24</sup>, culminating in hundreds of police carrying away non-violent demonstrators, Sami and other, after protesting for months a big waterpower dam project. The government and their police force won in the short run, yet the media attention put Sami issues on the national political agenda. Decades later this resulted in policy changes. The Sami received a Constitution paragraph in support of their

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<sup>22</sup> Another matter that outsiders are in no position to eliminate its possibility should insiders think otherwise.

<sup>23</sup> Title taken from the opening stance of the Internationale in its original French. In effect Fanon’s title says *ouvriers oui, mais d’abord colonisé(e)s*.

<sup>24</sup> Their book *Altabilder* has pictures and narrative of the events; parallel Norwegian-Sami-English texts.

rights as a people, and their own Parliament, sort of, in 1989. And this year (2005) has seen the Norwegian Parliament's voting the first 'Finnmark Law' rendering rights to the land to a commission composed of county locals, with some hotly disputed special rights to the Sami.

Over time I have come to realise that there is room for a third organisation type, placed perhaps between 'handicap' and 'liberation front', that of being a regular, accepted negotiating party to 'the powers that be', a form of corporatism. Before 1970 the Sami experience of such efforts were ambiguous to say the least, overrun rather than negotiating, very much reduced to a role of 'yes-wo/men', hence my omission in TSN.

We may conceptualise by using Sartre's (1960) dialectical concepts, (1) group in fusion, (2) the sworn body, and finally (3) the entirely routinised series. The first (e.g. liberation front) gives maximum freedom, autonomy and spontaneity but uncertain outcomes. The second (negotiating party), the emerging series, will give more results but somewhat less spontaneity etc., while the last (handicap), the established series, is set, routinised and bureaucratised, lacking the group's freedom, spontaneity, and achieving stereotyped results. If this analysis is valid, the middle, the negotiating type is constantly in danger of drifting in either direction, towards spontaneity, or towards non-innovative ways, the latter, however, is the most regular course.

## ***2. Historical materialism***

TSN was based on historical materialism, or so I thought at the time. Looking back this proves to be something of an exaggeration. For some, historical materialism is tantamount to Marxism or Communism, implying political affiliation. But that is not necessarily the case. As pointed out by many, among Norwegian historians it is the conservatives who have researched material, economic history – today notably Francis Sejerstedt<sup>25</sup> – while left-leaning colleagues have gone rather for political and social history. I, myself a historian by inclination rather than by profession, may be something of an exception here (too): It is no secret that as a private citizen I have remained, in the words of Gayatri Spivak's (cf. footnote 30 below) self-presentation 'an old-fashioned socialist', and a member of the Left Socialist Parties, SF/SV<sup>26</sup> since my student days, yet in fact working with material history at the time.

With time I have come to slightly different conclusions on this issue. On the one hand I remain deeply impressed by the works of Eric Hobsbawm (2000 etc.), how they defend and employ Marxist historical materialism. On

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<sup>25</sup> Probably better known abroad for having chaired the Nobel Peace Prize Committee for some years.

<sup>26</sup> With the exception of a short entracte, July 1969 to January 1971 to be exact, as an activist in what became shortly after, AKP(m-l), 'The Norwegian Workers' Communist Party (marxist-leninists)'. So the text of TSN was largely finished before said period.

the other, working with issues in cultural sociology for years has made me surmise that the contradiction between ‘matter’ and ‘spirit’, materialism and idealism, may be what Bourdieu would call a false dichotomy capable of being transcended over time. And as for conservative studies of material history, they soon risk becoming trivial, boring. Often losing track of critical theory, they easily change into a hagiography of an industry or a firm, the genre company jubilee chronicle being only too well known a guest of coffee tables. Hobsbawm, however, while appreciating Bourdieu’s oeuvre, criticises his field or champ concept as too rigid<sup>27</sup>, a token perhaps of his not realising that Bourdieuvian analyses are not restricted to set fields.

The Sami opposition to TSN was far from unanimous. Yet it appears that the critical voices were based on what I see as a misreading of the text, allegedly advocating the joining of parties on the left. That was provocative for some. Reindeer-herding Sami are (mostly) owners, not proletarians for one thing. Kautokeino, the largest municipality, had been under Conservative mayors for decades<sup>28</sup>. And the others, the majority even there, the non-reindeer herders, were sceptical of the left out of dissatisfaction with Sami policies as maintained by governments under the two decades of Social Democrat rule 1945-65. So naturally, being seen as an advocate of leftist ways, I and my views were opposed.

Whether they were ‘right’ in so doing, whether Sami issues are better advanced as distinct from party politics, is another question. Perhaps yes, perhaps no. The better course nowadays at least would seem to be trying both, party organisations as well as ‘neutral’ efforts, which indeed seems to be a present strategy of the Sami Parliament. Or in the words of philosopher A J Vetlesen (2005): ‘When the unequal power of sides is obvious, a position of impartiality ‘in principle’ may become the stronger side’s best ally and the weaker side’s second most dangerous enemy’.

### ***3. A nation by linguistics, or by interactions across borders?***

Chapter two of TSN is entitled The Sami – a Suppressed Stateless Nation (pp. 45-60), a section that I think has travelled well. It discusses a number of possible or valid diacritical marks of what could count as being a Sami, race<sup>29</sup>, language, name customs, types of dress etc., occupations etc. The conclusion is that as a concept the Sami are a national group, of historical

<sup>27</sup> Hobsbawm’s lecture to a Collège de France seminar in memory of Bourdieu 27th June 2003. He voiced his reservations to other concepts as well, habitus allegedly not well adapted to pre-1900 settings (one wonders if he has read ‘Le Flaubert de Bourdieu?’ (1992); and reservations to symbolic violence, for which he proposed substitute ‘clandestine persuasion’.

<sup>28</sup> Named e.g. Keskitalo.

<sup>29</sup> A loaded term, not left out here because some biologists claim that the genetically Sami can be singled out by comparing blood group frequencies.

origin and liable to future historical changes comprising all marks mentioned and more.

Some may perhaps worry that such an approach can open for a ‘constructivism’, viz. that virtually any mark can come to count as being distinctively ‘ethnic’. Time now to invoke Bourdieu’s (yes, I am tiring too) concept of habitus, a ‘structured and structuring structure’, i.e. embodied habits or action patterns always capable of being changed yet in the shorter run sort of ‘set’, in the body or discourse, modes of thinking or talking, so that changes most often do not come easily. A habitus is ‘group or community within us’. Given that ethnicities too may count as habitus it is better seen as a most basic type, not impossible to change yet more difficult to change away from, or for outsiders to change into.

Thus viewed the most basic single element of a national group, an ethnicity, is that they have a language of their own, or that traces of such a language remains, a language not (easily) understood by outsiders. Languages change, grow or fade, some even disappear entirely, yet always slowly, at least from the point of view of the single language user. Learning fluency in a completely foreign language is for most people a project of the very long term, feasible, yes, yet requiring a tenacity not many possess. And not least, one requires a long-term contact with native language speakers, easy neither to establish nor to maintain.

This on the surface innocent stand breaks strikingly with an ‘in’ school of anthropology as of then, a school having Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (Barth 1969) as their motto. Their position was, and remains for some, that just any border may become the basis of ‘ethnic’ difference; what matters are only the frequencies of contact across any border. I hold that such a view is misleading. The atmosphere turned almost bristly in a discussion with Tromsø anthropologist Trond Thuen when I asked him to provide one single example of an ethnic conflict where language differences played no role. After a long pause he proposed – Northern Ireland. Not at all appropriate, that conflict would hardly have been so heated were it not for the largely Catholic, republican North Irish knowing at least about the old Irish language, not spoken by many now yet progressing lately. And there is the Gaeltacht, Irish speaking regions of the west both north and south of that miserable border. Irish may be well known by some Northern Irish anti-republican Protestants as well, but hardly many – they celebrate mainly their British or even Orange-Nasseauvian background.

I can only regret the fact that not knowing the Sami language I can not go into what Spivak advocates, with reference to linguist Alton Becker (2000), ‘we have to go into the lingual memory of a people’<sup>30</sup> if we are to truly understand it. Sound advice, if combined as is Spivak’s practice with the

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<sup>30</sup> Spivak’s lecture at NTNU 4th Aug 2005. Becker’s people and language here is notably the Burmese, yet his stand merits generalisation.

totalising perspective above as well. Even today, I regret having to admit linguistic defeat. I do of course appreciate their formidable cultural revival of recent years, world names such as singer Mari Boine and movie director Nils Gaup ('The Pathfinder'), plus festivals such as Riddu Riddu of Kåfjord. 'World music', world multi-ethnic cultures has gained immensely in recent years, yet competition is intense and the attention of publics shifting. My personal favourite<sup>31</sup>, though, remains Sami NRK TV show Kakaos, hilariously funny self-irony, now lamentably discontinued.

Here we have neither space nor place to go into the classic pro-colonial role of mainly British anthropology, but cf. Radcliffe-Brown (1930) and Evans-Pritchard (1951), both claiming that their anthropology could in the future predict and help solve problems with colonial peoples. Such stands were counterweighted for a period by the works of Worsley (1968) and Gunder Frank (1969), but later pro-colonial views regained positions, until new countering waves rose, notably Spivak's (cf. Landry & MacLean 1996) and adherents' subaltern studies, post-colonialism etc. Yet I fear that rising frequencies of anthropological fieldwork inside what used to be 'the Eastern Bloc' will strengthen a new blend of pro- and post-colonial approaches, mainly pro-neo-liberal this time. Lots of erudite work, but somehow, tacitly, colonialism and its metamorphoses have become anathema, which amounts to largely excluding categories such as TNCs, Big Business and their exploitation of people and resources, i.e. the totalisation perspective. Respect and deep understanding of tribal peoples is propounded, rarely however their situation of being formed, in part, by distant external forces.

So when Barth (2005) is quoted as pronouncing that 'all politics are local' it is tempting to counter 'better to have two eyes than one', referring back to my section on never forgetting the totalising perspective – preferably combined though with the locally holistic, the two approaches being seen as joined, like text and context by a field or fields.

## **Post-Colonialism and new waves, up or down?**

Which brings us to the last point, present totalisation, and the 'world situation' of today. Given that the colonial and de-colonising model of parallelisms holds to an extent for smaller ethnicities, indigenous peoples etc. as well, what consequences may we then, not predict but foresee, or tentatively anticipate? Now that Iron Curtains and Socialist Blocs are things of the past, commanding neither fear, nor aggression nor enthusiasm, and

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<sup>31</sup> I do appreciate Sami culture, yet must admit that as a person I feel closer to other ethnic cultures such as North Indian traditional music, Carribean trova, and ghetto jazz –and yes, although not really ethnic, Baroque and Renaissance lute music, courtly and popular.

now that nearly all colonies as of before 1947-62 have been granted<sup>32</sup> formal political independence, may we sketch a picture capable of anticipating what the futures may bring?

The situation of ex-colonies, the ‘New Nations’, the ‘Third World’<sup>33</sup> as of today can hardly be pictured as bright and promising. The immediate post-WW2 situation is largely forgotten, the commitment to make up for wartime support is largely seen as fulfilled, over and done with. Yet rare are such Third World countries where peace, and growth, economic and cultural, reign supreme. Rather, many are bothered if not devastated by internal conflicts, at most full-scale civil war, otherwise burdened by armed gangs, tribes or warlords, and in any case, conflicts, often grave, between competing elites, right, left or only selfish. In one phrase prolonged crises of legitimacy for many new regimes, and the Sami can hardly expect to be a total exception. We can only speculate that this may have been a tacit but conscious policy of major world powers, *divide et impera*, though the present state of the ex ‘Soviet bloc’ supports continued speculation. And further with that bloc’s exit, repeating the policies of countries such as Afghanistan, Angola, Cuba, Congo, Ethiopia is now impossible, i.e. soliciting the support of ‘the other superpower’ should serious conflicts with ‘the one’ arise.

Despite efforts of development aid, the results to date have not been very promising. In quite a few countries TNCs – full or near international neo-liberal monopolies of oil, coffee, diamonds, copper etc. – are more or less discretely in command or near it, leaving the bulk of the common people in misery. Whether the leading political elites cooperate (at a price) or try to remain independent the general impression is that growth remains sluggish if not lacking.

Which is one hypothesis for what contributes most to the massive rise of religious fundamentalisms in such countries. When a population recently turned optimistic over prospects – not for economic growth in general perhaps, but for more openings for paid employment, rising family income, welfare and well-being – is disappointed for years, they may turn to seeking in deities, holy scriptures and their promised hereafters that which the here and now seems unable to provide. Even the Sami has seen something of a revival of Læstadianism, a Protestant sect, successors of the Kautokeino rioters of 1852, except today they are strictly non-violent, pietistic and ascetic.

In sum then, although exceptions exist, the experience of post-colonial countries can be summed up as sluggish or no growth, widespread poverty,

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<sup>32</sup> Granted indeed, only more rarely won or conquered.

<sup>33</sup> I recently overheard an interview with Africanist Georges Balandier claiming to have coined that expression as a conscious choice among alternatives. What they had in mind by *Le troisième monde* was alluding to France, 1789 and *Le troisième état*, the (then) revolutionary third estate. Origins of term *The Fourth World* seem uncertain.

near permanent crises of legitimacy, corruption, and a formal political autonomy which has proved to count for little compared to the largely foreign Big Money, i.e. TNCs and similar agencies, cf. e.g. Meredith (2005), Robertson (2003).

Can an indigenous people such as the Sami hope to steer clear of all that? The Finnmark Law granting an amount of local land management is yet to be seen in practice, it was passed in Parliament only last June (2005). The older Sami parliament is a counselling body (cf. the negotiating type above). It does not have much scope for economic, only some administrative autonomy. Satisfaction has been widespread but now critical voices are increasingly being heard. The gender quota was too low, yet much improved after the last election; the first rumours of Parliament corruption have occurred. The position of a Sami as leader of the UN permanent council for indigenous peoples (UNPCII) was a most promising fact, and the person in question no doubt did fill his boots. Nevertheless, under him and his successor the council is up against formidable opponents, so outcomes are uncertain no matter how perseverant its efforts.

But in addition to no growth, internal conflict, corruption, enduring dependency only in changed, less evident forms, no more 'second super-power' support etc. there are further difficulties: Should one distinguish between 'good' i.e. non-violent and 'bad' i.e. more or less violent colonised or indigenous peoples (e.g. Corsicans, Basques, Kurds, Sri Lankan Tamils, Zapatistas, banlieue youth etc.)? And if so, to what effect? What about regions, most notably the Middle East, where competing 'indigenous peoples' have succeeded each other for centuries if not millennia, most notably Palestine vs. Israel? What if growing numbers of autonomous minor regions, peoples or states<sup>34</sup> serve, mainly, the great power interest in continued divide et impera? And what about regions where immigrant settlers for decades or centuries have outnumbered the indigenous (Australia, Northern Ireland, USA and Canada, Latin America)? The present, in-migrant settler majority population of Finnmark still maintains attitudes close to the Social Darwinism of a hundred years ago; they hold that in the name of 'justice and equal rights' the Sami should not be granted any special rights, no privileges to land etc. whatsoever<sup>35</sup>. Instead of the 'clean breaks' suggested by the Foucauldian *Archéologie du savoir*, here the declining side retains its positions, discredited officially yet unofficially alive and 'well' – as if ship-of-fools and asylum, galère and prison were to be juxtaposed indefinitely. There have even been voices threatening 'another Kosovo' in Finnmark, probably empty yet nasty threats.

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<sup>34</sup> I do not hold the Norwegian state an exception, cf. Otnes (2005).

<sup>35</sup> As a life-long SV party member I feel deeply ashamed over our Parliamentary Group's voting, all 11 of them, for their own, anti-Sami alternative than that which was passed, the majority's. Luckily though that 'SV alternative' received only their own votes.

Of course my indication of shared fates between the world's ex colonised and indigenous peoples may be mistaken, or if not so, denied by some among them, aiming instead to further own interest even at the cost of other peoples. Tempting, perhaps, yet probably playing into the hands of continued divide et impera, divide and rule.

My impression is that in sum these last few years on balance have seen a minor 'down' wave for Sami issues and organisations. As for future 'up' waves, my guess – not my lecture or instigation, mind you – is that this 'down' is liable to continue until new protest movements, by all means non-violent yet approaching the liberation front category above, can find new forms and gain renewed momentum.

## **Final re-retrospect**

Yes, I wrote a book about the Sami, yet now at the end of the retrospect about time to say perhaps not entirely so. I mean opting for totalisation rather than holism does have its advantages, and its costs: The book is in no way a complete overview of Sami life and culture. It covers, partly and tentatively a single aspect only, that of Sami political and organisational culture during a specified period. Of other aspects I do not claim to have, or to have had, any special expertise. But in addition, opponents of the Sami were analysed and criticised too, relevant parts of their political and organisational culture.

I think Keskitalo (1973) saw that TSN etc. did indeed 'deliver a historical and critical analysis of our own (i.e. central Norwegian) society's attitudes to the Sami'. But the criticism he added was that TSN, by not limiting itself to that alone, 'commits the grave structural error of giving us advice about (Sami) strategy and tactics'. For such a view anything coming from the non-Sami side is contaminated and not to be trusted. True, such contamination is hiding in many seemingly innocent quarters, cf. Bernal's (1991) thorough albeit controversial demonstration that traces of racism are hiding in 'innocent' disciplines such as linguistics, archaeology, classical studies and palaeo-history. Still, true anti-racist commitment is also present, such as Bernal's own analysis. If that is rejected summarily, it may amount to saying 'don't rock the boat while I'm among the helmsmen'. I did, in the belief that any people, any nation large or small, is better served by varying rather than permanent, traditional leadership. Heated, even permanent conflicts are known to thrive even in settings as small as a nuclear family. No less so in any nation, large or small. The idea that 'the Sami cause is one and entire in itself' is mistaken, as are all other 'national causes'; internal divisions do exist everywhere. Which is why external support is not often a disadvantage – for some of the local parties at least. Or as Heraclitus had it,



‘if conflict disappears, the entire universe would disappear with it’. Better then to continue arguing.

### **More theorists’ limits**

Foucault’s limits were mentioned. But this is where even a Bourdieu encounters his limits, in so far as he has held that ‘dominated groups’ tend to adopt the evaluations of their ‘superiors’, the dominant groups. That is indeed one tendency but not invariably. The more or less organised opposition of any dominated group may suffer setbacks yet is regularly if not invariably bound to rise again.

Habermas encounters a limit as well. I entirely share his idea of herrschaftsfreie Diskussion, with the addition that this noble ideal is sometimes easy to circumvent, cf. on the ‘fatwa’ above. Another example to the point here: I vividly remember my only encounter with one of the old Sami mayors, in a meeting attended by a rough score of young Sami students in Oslo decades ago. Discussion before his arrival was lively and friendly, but then he arrived, slightly tipsy, acting it or for real is hard to tell. For each new Sami statement his innocent, smiling comment was “Whose boy are you?” (Norw. “kæm du e sin guten?”). At first I took him for a mere heckler but soon his calculation was evident. He wanted to map his surroundings, pigeon-hole those present. The smiling question’s real meaning was ‘to what family, clan, community etc. do you belong? Are you the kind of person I must honour with a substantial statement?’ An outsider acting the gatekeeper, and succeeding in so doing is a rare achievement. And shortly after, having found out that I was not worthy of his serious attention and sensing that I first held him to be heckling, he countered, voicing the allusion and turning it against me, accusing me of hinting that he, venerable old pillar of society, was indeed heckling. A master of perlocution, a case challenging the Habermasian ideal above.

Seen as sociology, philosophy, or ideal, Habermas’ ideas are mostly valid and tenable. Not so as real political science, or practice, as a glance at texts of the type ‘How nations/companies negotiate’ will convince you of. Not less so for local, ‘life-world-close’ contexts, as in our last instance.

One other old Sami mayor I interviewed in his home, the two of us alone. My feeling was that of a polite, quite friendly informal conversation. When I was about to leave, however, he opened a drawer producing a very beautifully carved Sami knife in its horn sheath. I truly admired the work, but then he replaced it in the drawer saying ‘yes, I make these as gifts to my friends’.

Point made for sure. Not that I had expected any gift, not at all. I do think however that these two episodes are symptomatic of traditional leadership

and established hierarchies being wary of anything liable to destabilise their positions<sup>36</sup>.

For balance I should mention that these are my only less than pleasant encounters with Sami. All others were polite, friendly, often cordial, a few even high-spirited. I especially remember a party where among a dozen guests were notably artist Iver Jåks and pioneer among pioneers, Per Fokstad. As the spirits were rising and the evening turned night the apex was attained when octogenarian Fokstad, small and slim of build, rose and gave us his enthusiastic, eloquent homage to Woman, to the Feminine as the bearing principle and guiding star of his entire life. Almost an aging Tannhäuser, though he recited rather than sung, in praise of Eros, to the applause of all those present. Élan vital indeed, he had listened to Bergson in Paris as a young man. A memorable event!

### **Whose side are we on now?**

The four worlds of yore are shrinking. Briefly, the second world has been carved, its new smaller states largely joining the old third or developing world. Simultaneously, the fourth or indigenous world would seem to have moved in the same direction, for better or worse. Which includes Finnmark and other Sami territory, claims, issues etc. Take e.g. Melkøya right outside the town of Hammerfest, where a first giant oil terminal is now under construction, soon operative. All the while, the first world, notably its leading power, is permanently terror-stricken, as a glance at any US embassy will confirm. In power too of course, they certainly can 'strike and awe' but with dubious lasting effect. The Iraqi war is a colonial war, over the same oil as that of the Barents Sea and Melkøya.

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There is a limit even to totalisation, a limit after which researchers should mind Kierkegaard's advice and "not busy themselves with World History". But even so the question remains what are the likely consequences for (social) science. Whose side are we on now? Becker's stand, remember, is expect trouble if 'the research gives credence, in any serious way, to the subordinate group in some hierarchical relationship'. But hierarchies are not what they used to be, especially not in Sami or indigenous affairs, more a tangle of competing hierarchies each with its pretenders, protectors – and sappers. Then, who to support, and from whom else expect trouble? And

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<sup>36</sup> Nothing special for the Sami though, examples are found in Norwegian top politics as well, most notable within the Labour Party, which has examples of familism in succession phases, 'clans' named e.g. Gerhardsen, Harlem, Stoltenberg, Faremo, Treholt.

there is the question, not explicitly mentioned by Becker, that is inverting him, giving discredit ‘in any serious way’ to the superordinate group in some hierarchical relationship. Becker’s well known paper provides analysis but scant advice on which side to support, apart from a hint that ‘subordinates’, perhaps such as his ‘outsiders’, may sometimes be in the right even if conflicting with superiors, order or law etc. My advice would be ‘never overlook the higher levels’. Else we may remain ‘neutrals’ of Vetlesen’s type, ‘the stronger side’s best ally and the weaker side’s second most dangerous enemy’. Or else, applying Gjengset’s (2004) title, we may stand in the end ‘doubly homeless’<sup>37</sup>.

Luckily, a bordering actor such as I need not worry unduly. I have taken flak (‘faceless flak’ and other) before and can take more should it arrive. And I still hate being the intruder. But in case my pro-Sami acquaintances should see any value in my continued working with them, or on their continued instigation, I probably will, flak or no flak.

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<sup>37</sup> Gjengset’s subject is Sami novelist pioneer Matti Aikio.

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