

# **The Sámi Library, North of the North: colonialism, resistance and reading in a public library**

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[pre-print version of the paper to be published in *Sociologia*, Revista da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto]

## **1. Abstract:**

The Sámi in Sweden are welcomed as readers of the main language, dissatisfied by the relegated status of their culture as an ethnic minority. The Sámi Library in Jokkmokk is a library for the Sámi culture and the Sápmi. While Sámi culture is resisting and transfiguring itself, neoliberal arrangements, the privatisation of public services, new language laws and the Libraries Bill have put additional challenges to the library. The case study of this library is used to discuss what an indigenous library is.

The acknowledgement of the colonial past and the demand for respectful recognition are advanced as fundamental requirements for a democratic use of the documentary resources and a realisation of cultural rights.

Keywords: indigenous libraries, cultural rights, Sweden, public libraries

*A Biblioteca Sámi, ao norte do norte : colonialismo, resistência e leitura numa biblioteca pública*

## **Sumário:**

As pessoas sámis da Suécia, bem-vindas enquanto leitoras da língua principal, revelam-se insatisfeitas pelo estatuto relegado sua da cultura enquanto minoria étnica. A Biblioteca Sámi de

Jokkmokk é dedicada à cultura sámi e ao Sápmi. Enquanto que a cultura sámi resiste e se transfigura, os arranjos neoliberais, a privatização de serviços públicos, as leis novas da língua e o projeto de lei das bibliotecas colocaram desafios adicionais à Biblioteca Sámi. Este estudo de caso é usado para discutir o que é uma biblioteca indígena. Admitir a existência de um passado colonial e requerer um reconhecimento respeitoso são exigências fundamentais aqui avançadas para um uso democrático dos recursos documentais e a realização dos direitos culturais.

Palavras-chave: bibliotecas indígenas, direitos culturais, Suécia, bibliotecas públicas

*La Bibliothèque Sámi, au nord du nord: colonialisme, résistance et lecture dans une bibliothèque publique*

### **Sommaire:**

Les personnes sámis en Suède sont bienvenues comme lectrices de la langue principale, insatisfaites en tant que minorité ethnique par une relégation de leur culture. La Bibliothèque Sámi à Jokkmokk est dédié à la culture sámi et au Sápmi. Tandis que la culture sámi résiste et se transfigure, les arrangements néolibérales, la privatisation des services publics, les nouvelles lois de la langue et le projet de loi de bibliothèques ont mis des défis supplémentaires à la Bibliothèque Sámi. L'étude de cas est utilisée pour discuter qu'est ce qu'une bibliothèque indigène. Admettre l'existence d'un passé colonial et demander une reconnaissance respectueuse sont des exigences fondamentales proposées pour une utilisation démocratique des ressources documentaires et concrétisation des droits culturels.

Mots-clés: bibliothèques indigènes, droits culturels, Suède, bibliothèques publiques

*La Biblioteca Sámi, al norte del norte: al norte del norte: colonialismo, resistencia y lectura en una biblioteca pública*

### **Resumen:**

Las personas sámis en Suecia son bienvenidas como lectoras de la lengua principal, insatisfechas en tanto que minoría étnica por la relegación de su cultura. La Biblioteca Sámi de Jokkmokk es una biblioteca para su cultura y el Sápmi. Mientras la cultura sámi resiste y se transfigura, el régimen neoliberal, la privatización de los servicios públicos, las nuevas leyes de la lengua y el proyecto de ley de las bibliotecas han puesto retos adicionales a la Biblioteca. El estudio de caso se usa para debatir qué es una biblioteca indígena. Admitir un pasado colonial y demandar un reconocimiento respetuoso son requisitos fundamentales que se proponen hacia un uso democrático de los recursos documentales y una concretización de los derechos culturales.

Palabras-clave: bibliotecas indígenas, derechos culturales, Suecia, bibliotecas públicas

## In the pursuit of an *indigenous library* in Europe

From 1969, indigenous libraries have been a central theme in some specialised literature, (Aguilar, 2009). In 2002, the International Federation of Library Associations issued a Statement on Indigenous Traditional Knowledge (IFLA, 2010) intended to draw the attention of professionals and political leaders to the specificity of indigenous and local traditional knowledge organisations and also to the constraints that these organisations faced to ensure the preservation and transmission of their cultural heritage resources.

The public library is a concept that developed between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in the global North. Implemented with many nuances and singularities, the concept may be synthetically and significantly characterised by these central aims: to disseminate the practice of reading and national literature, and to promote education and shape popular leisure (Sturges, 1996; Sykes, 1978; Witmann, 1997). The history of public libraries, however, does not account for or acknowledge the libraries created to support and document the originary cultures of the ex-colonised peoples in their present and

historical expressions. Libraries for originary cultures are few, are not widely acknowledged, may not endure over time, and may fall short of originary readers' expectations. All in all, they are subject to even greater tensions than their "conventional" counterparts in the context of present day economic and financial crises (Burns, Doyle, Joseph, and Krebs, 2010; Edwards and Edwards, 2010; Canosa, 2012).

Some questions emerged during a comparative research project aimed at understanding how the modern public library concept was adapted to other cultural and social contexts. How much do we know about the so-called indigenous libraries and library policies, about collection building and holdings (oral documents or not), about their reading practices and their cultural significance? How is the model of the public library, built within the print paradigm, reconfigured to fit this other paradigm of orality and/or of a recent originary print culture?

Upon learning that there was a Sámi library in Sweden (Sarri, 2002), a project which started more than two decades ago in Jokkmokk, I selected this library for a case study to include in the aforementioned comparative project. The Sámi refer to themselves, in a representation that precedes and surpasses borders, as the originary people who inhabit the Sápmi territory which may still be known by the exonym Lapland<sup>1</sup>. Presently spread throughout several countries, they inherited several languages with similar traits. Jokkmokk is a symbolic city for the Sámi and the whole of Sápmi, as it hosts a 400-year old annual market, which still plays the role of an international convergence spot for scattered relatives and friends<sup>2</sup> and has been a thematic tourism destination for some decades.

To perform the analysis of the Sámi library and to contextualise the institution and its readers, I employed a number of different methods, including: ethnographic observation

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<sup>1</sup> the far North of Europe (Norway, Sweden, Finland) and the Kola Peninsula (Russia).

<sup>2</sup> approved by a Royal Charter since 1605.

of reading practices, library routines and social relations, document analysis of library policies, and interviews with readers, librarians, managers and other cultural agents. I visited the Centre for Sámi Research (CeSam) of the University of Umeå and stayed in Jokkmokk for a total of three months in 2013. Historical (Kuoljok, 1998; Lantto, 2000; Lindmark, 2013; Össbo and Lantto, 2011), linguistic (Hirvonen, 2008; Milani and Johnson, 2008; Milani and Jonsson, 2014; Cocq, 2008), social and post-colonial research provided a theoretical background to address issues of ethnicity (Lantto, 2000), identity, and of cultural dominance, subalternity and emancipation.

## 2. Sámi collections: understanding low use, underlining relevance

A small, glazed room in the middle of the wide reading area of Umeå's Municipal (*Kommune*) public library displays the Sámi literature collection: a few worn-out, old books, are exhibited within a space which is almost always vacant, with a half-lit, sombre micro-atmosphere. All around it, the whole library is commonly in full use and well lit, glossy, newly released books are displayed in the entrance drawing the attention of the visitors. On Saturday mornings, many accompanied children enter at all times. At the entrance, and visible from the street, lies the cafeteria, a sought-after meeting place in the city.

Further north in Jokkmokk, above the polar circle line, there is the only specialised Sámi “compound” collection in Sweden, which functions as a *de facto* national library for the Sámi culture.

The Ájtte cultural complex, alongside the Sámi Parliament house, successively housed a variety of cultural, touristic and information services in a building marked by an aesthetic of utilitarian simplicity. Ájtte is now a foundation owned and funded by the

state and also by Jokkmokk's Municipality and Norrbotten's County Council. Ájtte's ethnographic Museum was recently re-conceived as a museum of the territory and came to be officially designated as the "Swedish Mountain and Sámi Museum", but it is still commonly known as the Sámi Museum. The Sámi community partially funded the starting project by donating the compensation received from the hydroelectric company for the use of their lands and rivers. Ája (source or spring in Sámi) is a collection of books, and historical and sound archives<sup>3</sup> created from the documentation organised to support the experts and researchers working in Ájtte. Ájtte's sound archive holds approximately 3000 items of which 1500 are digitised recordings. Also open for local public lending, the bibliographic collections are available, through the Swedish interlibrary loan system, at home and abroad.

The Sámi Library, inaugurated in 1989, under the auspices of the Swedish Sámi Parliament (*Sametinget*), is also housed at Ájtte (storage cabin in Sámi), and has been since 2004. Supporting the Sámi Parliament and Ájtte's Museum as its core purpose, the Sámi Library provides the community with a bibliography in Sámi languages or about the Sámi, irrespective of the publishing languages. The Library holds about 15000 monographs and 550 periodicals. The Sámi Library's and Ája's bibliographic collections share the same physical space and some of the shelves. The two funds have, however, different catalogues and lending procedures. For users they are commonly used and thought of as a single library. The Ájtte complex also includes Ája's cultural centre.

Under the 2013 Libraries Act (Kulturdepartementet, 2013), the Sámi Library was integrated into the national network of public libraries. As a specialised, singular library it is visited by researchers of various nationalities and additionally provides public access to the general public. A noteworthy service is the extended loan during each

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<sup>3</sup> the richest *jojk* archive in Sweden, followed by the one in the National Library in Stockholm; *jojk* is a practice of remembrance in the form of a vocal solo, with or without text, describing and evoking living beings, natural elements; used as an identity symbol.

school term of “mobile” collections prepared for first grade schools with Sámi curricula in the vicinity. The library cooperates with the Commune Library, assuring them the custody and preservation of the parish archives, crucial in the search for relatives and family histories in a region historically imprinted by consecutive migrations. In recent years the allocation of librarians decreased and the initial innovative, time-consuming and expert projects, such as the development and maintenance of a list of Sámi Subject Headings - a bibliographic indexing tool - or the analytic record of articles and parts of books, were discontinued and/or disinvested.

It should be noted that the successive organisational models and designations of the Sámi bibliographic heritage appear to reflect the tensions between institutional purposes and different interests regarding the relevance of each of its components – Museum, Libraries/Archives, Cultural Centre – both in the local and national society.

As one of the few institutions where a bibliography about the Sámi in languages other than Swedish is to be found, and as a heritage institution, the Sámi Library is unanimously represented as a "treasure" by different Sámi cultural agents.

### **3. Addressing inequalities and relegation**

*I share my culture with those who understand it, if they can't understand it I don't* - Sámi photographer in Jokkmokk

It is important to note that the Sámi Library collects some bibliographic material about ancestral knowledge – regardless of the physical medium –, active or not in daily life practices today. Acknowledging that some issues remain secret, and under the tutelage of Sámi persons or non Sámi who were granted access to – such as the location of certain pure water springs – their passage from an ethnic community to the public sphere raises sensitive questions about sharing and transmission that are up to the community to resolve fairly.

As an example of a likely mismatch, the Ája cultural centre, within the Ájtte complex, once organised some publications and meetings on ethnomedicine and ethnobotany. At present, not far away, but unaware of this collection, a small company researches and produces organic cosmetics where local plants are a central component. The Friends of the library group meets in this Centre, a group that includes their published authors, and is actually the place where the Sámi Bibliography was first prepared. Sámis and Swedes – not to mention the many immigrants of diverse ethnicities and countries that have settled there in recent decades – live side by side in Jokkmokk, sometimes joined in families. Occupations, social classes and ethnic origins, physical and social spaces, religion and spirituality appear today as the product of the crossing of colonial boundaries in a mix that does not ignore the history and persistence of differences. The question of "Saminess" remains awake, even revitalised, namely by the process of the European capital of culture 2014 in Umeå, which had the Sámi culture as one of its themes (Hagerman and Sikku, 2014).

Swedish public libraries, having high levels of attendance - 60% of the population –, renovated collections and good facilities, and working closely with local associations, are often listed as examples of good practice internationally (Thomas 2010). The rarely used Sámi Room in Umeå, nonetheless, has been negatively evaluated by several Sámi, the same happening in other northern cities (Gunnare, 2012). In the small library of the commune of Jokkmokk, with a population that is largely Sámi and living under extreme weather conditions, frequent and regular visitors carry home many books and videos at a time, which may be borrowed for a week or two. Still, the literature in the originary Sámi languages, in an inner area recently developed, registers a minute amount of use. Björkman and Liljedahl have proposed several explanations for a similar situation in Östersund: the library staff did not know the Sámi languages and editions, and being



unaware of these readers' specific needs, had been developing fruitless efforts to serve the Sámi-speaking readers (2009).

Beyond a likely cultural estrangement or unfamiliarity with Sámi culture, deeper reasons for this relegated status, deriving from cultural policies, are worth considering. Educated exclusively or predominantly in the Swedish language, the Sámi are frequent readers of Swedish language content. In the library of Jokkmokk, classic literature titles were being discarded, the little vacant space being filled by commercially successful titles, a trend actually observed in many other European libraries. The library workers, with an ever-reducing staff and working hours, due to cuts in recent years, were overburdened with the production of managerial information; their time for assisting readers was centred on loan processing, with no or little opportunity for advice. Furthermore, just as in Östersund, the city of Jokkmokk and the neighbouring villages were no longer served by the mobile library carrying Sámi languages content, incoming from Norway in the latter case, because, allegedly, the Sámi corner had made it redundant. However, I observed that the documents in the Sámi corner were rarely used. A deeper explanation was required to account for this apparent lack of interest.

#### **4. The first public library in Jokkmokk**

The history of the first library built in Jokkmokk speaks of yet other times and contexts. A forgotten history that this research, most fortunately, allowed to emerge, following the guidance of some collaborating inhabitants. According to oral and written sources (Jokkmokks SK, 1993), I could conclude that the first public library was created in the Old Church, following its deconsecration, at an uncertain date by the action of Eigil Högström, a Sámi who came to Jokkmokk in the early 1900's<sup>4</sup>. A communist partisan

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<sup>4</sup> he confirmedly resided there since 1918, at the latest.

and a member of a temperance league<sup>5</sup>, Högström was a primary school teacher, who also created study circles, engaged in social causes and promoted sports, and became a leader of the local Ski Club.

These study circles, created by Swedish grassroots organisations dedicated to the promotion of literacy and popular consciousness, and self-declaredly committed to the emancipation of labour and political organisation, were precisely the origin of many of the Swedish public libraries and had a singular history in Europe (Möhlenbrock, 1993). Before them, and from 1830/40, there were parish libraries supporting religious education and catechesis (Möhlenbrock, 1993), holding predominantly moralising and confessional books, and books on agriculture and household care (Thomas 2010). In contrast, the autonomously managed circles created and organised materials purposefully designed for adult learning and fiction, and essays oriented to social improvement and prophylaxis, especially to address alcoholism issues, a concern which grew in parallel to the industrialisation and the displacement of the populations in the region. After the first Libraries Act, dated from 1905, a debate took place in society about the need to develop public libraries, under State control, focusing on the proclaimed objectives of popular education and awareness – especially of the young – qualifying for jobs, for voting and for political intervention. The circles came to be financed and controlled by the State in 1912, while it agreed to keep libraries open to the general public. These libraries were formally dissolved in 1949 upon the creation of a national education system. Many of the existing popular libraries – including those of the circles – the outcomes of workers' organisations over which Liberals and Social Democrats vied for leadership, would be integrated, following the new Libraries Act of 1912, into the Association for the Education of Workers (ABF), which had strong Social

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<sup>5</sup> according to an oral source, the Godtemplare - The Good Templars -, campaigned against alcohol abuse and created several study circles in Sweden.

Democrat influence (Möhlenbrock, 1993; Torstensson, 2008; Thomas, 2010). Taking all these realities into account, it seems reasonable to me to place the creation of this first library of Jokkmokk in the 1920's, coinciding with the migratory wave raised by the newly settled industries (Össbo and Lantto, 2011) in adjacent areas.

## **5. To Exist**

The Sápmi shows traces of human occupation dating back about 10,000 years. The oldest Sámi artefacts indicate the existence of this culture for about 8000 years (Kuoljok, 1998), an occupation that extended far below the Arctic Circle until the settlements of colonists from regions farther south forced the originary population to move.

The story of the Sámi is one that is woven in and between some powerful and influential countries, empires, and events in the history of Europe.

The Swedish crown begins the exploration of the territory in the far north of Europe from the 15th to the 16th centuries, constantly redrawing the borders, competing with other states for natural resources (Lindmark, 2013). Tax exploitation had already begun in the 14th century. From the Middle Ages the Sámis "paid tax to three crowns" - Sweden, Norway and Finland -, in different places and moments during their journeys, according to the report by the Portuguese scholar Damião de Góis (1544), who introduced the Sámi to his contemporary Central and Southern Europe (Hirsch 1987). In the second half of the 16th century, the Sámi are displaced by waves of Norwegian settlers, and by incursions of the crowns of Holland, England and Denmark. Russian Orthodox missionaries and monks occupy and subjugate parts farther east (Storfjell, 2013). In the mid-17th century, Sámi land neither cultivated nor built upon is appropriated by the Swedish crown in a process of "discovery" and effective occupation fostered by the settlements (Lindmark, 2013). The Sámi are further hindered from

pursuing their various and often cumulative economic activities – hunting, fishing, gathering, agriculture – leading a large number of families to concentrate on reindeer grazing alone.

They will later be described in scholarly circles, in analogy with other colonial conditions, as pagans, primitives, impulsive and childish. Linnæus, an 18th century Swedish scientist, travelling through an area contiguous to Jokkmokk, in this very region, writes his taxonomies for Botany, Zoology and also for humans. He thus creates the categories *Homo Europaeus*, *Homo Africanus*, *Homo Asiaticus* and *Americanus*, and the remainder *Homo Monstrosus*, where he included the Sámi (Koerner, 1999). Ironically referring to the well-known allegory, Storfjell comments that "[i]f Sápmi is an Edenic paradise, then Linnæus is its Adam, invested with the power to name its plants and animals" (2013:568).

The Swedish modern monarchy, which simultaneously headed the Lutheran Church, will pursue the shamanic practices of the Sámi shortly after the occupation. A forced conversion to Christianity begins, the churches in the new Lapp Marks are used as a compulsory convergence point, profiting from the seasonal travelling of the Sámi to the market cities, such as Jokkmokk. There they would be judged, collected, and catechised (Kuoljok, 1998). During the 17th and 18th centuries, there is intense missionary activity, blending literacy with conversion, and creating future missionaries of Sámi ethnicity (Lindmark, 2013). Claiming that shamanism threatened the national unity, the Monarch established Lapp Schools in 1735, with a reduced and evangelising curriculum, removing children from family contact and keeping them under the vigilance of a Lutheran pietism moral. Speaking in Sámi would be discouraged and even persecuted. From 1925, the State imposes the Swedish language in all schools (Cocq, 2008). In Sápmi too (apud Mudimbe, Lindmark, 2013) the colonial boarding school served both to indoctrinate and to acculturate. It is this social, political and religious context, that

parochial libraries end up fitting into, on a path parallel to that of education. The processes of assimilation of the Sámi programmed by Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, and of cultural suppression end just after World War II.

At present there are Sámi Schools in five Northern localities, serving students from kindergarten to the end of their compulsory education. Elsewhere, optional subjects in Sámi culture and optional curricula with Sámi programs after the seventh grade, regardless of the ethnicity of origin, are designed by the state (Green, 2009). In Jokkmokk lies the only secondary school with a Sámi Arts and Crafts integrated curriculum.

## 6. To remember

"I don't understand why the Sámi are always talking about history!"  
(A young Swedish student, staying in Jokkmokk).

Extended family-based communities, or *siida*, that used common goods while internally negotiating the demarcations and divisions of territory, were threatened by the borders – indicative of private property and nation-states, concepts foreign to the Sámi – drawn by the dominant powers (Kuoljok, 1998). From the end of the 19th to the first half of the 20th century, the law prescribes new territorial units and the exclusiveness of reindeer husbandry to the Sámi (Össbo and Lantto, 2011). “Lapp shall remain Lapp”, was the refrain of this colonial ideology. So a metonymy was legitimised: an ethnic group was reduced to reindeer husbandry, on the assumption of their inability to live civilly away from colonial tutelage (Lantto, 2000). Even today a large part of Sápmi is owned by the crown: with no private property nor land records, the Sámi have rarely seen their ancestral ownership of land legally recognised.

From the late 19th century until 1935, racist theories permeated the anthropometric surveys and the photography of the Swedish Institute for Racial Biology<sup>6</sup>. Used in widely printed books in the 20s and in the Stockholm Exhibition in the 30s, these documents have left painful marks on the Sámi social memory (Kvarfordt, Sikku and Teilus, 2009), a memory impregnated with history, and marks which today's art often stumbles upon and raises. As Katarina Pirak Sikku claims "pain may be inherited" (2014).

From the 20th century on, the main clashes arose from hydropower (Össbo and Lantto, 2011) and mining interests. Intensive iron ore mining, consented to by the State, forced the recent decision to move the whole town of Giron/Kiruna to another place, due to the uncontrollable cracks that were opening (Kinder 2014). A new mining operation in Gállok/Kallak, near Jokkmokk, has been the object of protests in the streets and in the Sámediggi/Sametinget, the Sámi Parliament (Samiskt Informationscentrum, 2013). On top of this, alongside truly vast parks and natural reserves (Green 2009), the military zone is being expanded for testing with drones, according to one Sámi landowner.

The persistent consequences of Chernobyl and climate change have had a strong local impact, making the soil retreat, endangering natural goods, and threatening subsistence and small-scale economic activities (Mustonen and Syrjämäki, 2013).

The Sámediggi, a Swedish State administrative agency and advisory body created in 1993 and elected by the Sámi, often see their advice ignored. In February 2014 it decided that a Nordic-Sámi Convention, with representatives of the three Sámi parliaments and of the Nordic governments should be held (Sametinget, 2014)<sup>7</sup>, 2016 being the expected time for the completion of their work. The Sámi spokesperson expressed the expectation that the States would ratify the definition of minimum

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<sup>6</sup> photos archived by University Library of Uppsala which recently gave way to a wide polemic upon being exhibited online; see <http://www.samer.se/4308>.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sametinget.se/1110>.

standards within civil and international law, including the right to self-determination, to land and water, in addition to the already, although informally, accepted right to knowledge and cultural expressions.

## 7. To Speak, To Write, To Edit

The Sámi population is currently estimated at 60,000, 17,000 of which have Swedish citizenship. (Axelsson and Sköld, 2006; Green, 2009). Of the total, only about 20,000 speak an originary language.

The Sámi languages belong to the Finno-Ugric linguistic branch, nine being alive, six of which have a standardised orthography and literary printed works (Hirvonen, 2008). It is believed that there are 6,000 speakers of Northern Sámi in Sweden, and that the Lule and the South Sámi speakers count for about 500 each and that Ume Sámi is spoken by only a few. Each language has its own latin alphabet with additional special characters for unique phonemes. North Sámi had three orthographies (Skutnabb-Kangas and Magga, 2001) until a standardisation was agreed between Sweden and Finland in the 70s (Samiskt Informationscentrum, 2014).

"But we only started to have a way of writing so late!" (Sámi Parliament representative).

The issues of language and writing, as well as editing, deserve some detail in this brief consideration of what was and is the context for the existence of libraries in Sápmi within Swedish borders.

After a heated public controversy, the legal status of minority language was acquired by the Sámi language in 2005, along with other languages spoken in Sweden (Meänkieli,

Finnish-Swedish, Romani-Chib and Yiddish). Five national minorities - Sámi, Tornedalian, Finnish-Swedish, Roma and Jew — are also recognised.

Since, until then, Swedish was a *de facto* predominant language (Milani and Johnson, 2008), in 2009, under the centre-right Alliance, the claim that a main language is necessary to consolidate democracy (Leissner, 2012) and prevent globalisation was signed into law (Milani and Johnson 2014). The term “mother tongue” is used instead of “native tongue”, thus reinforcing the ideology of an ethnic and cultural homogeneity in Sweden (Milani and Johnson, 2008).

It should be noted that the government steered the discourse on colonialism toward that of multiculturalism, in line with the “tolerance” that the Swedish State has claimed in recent decades. An extended education in English, on the other hand, necessary for a desired integration in the new world order, an official, while contradictory, claim was thoroughly implemented by central and local measures of formal and informal education. It should also be noted that Sweden has not yet signed the Convention 169 – ILO, 1989 – only underwriting the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a non-binding instrument. After many long years of contestation, the Constitution received an amendment, in 2011, recognising the Sámi as a people of Sweden. However, an Act on Sámi matters remained unapproved, given the opposition to regulating core issues like rights over land and natural resources both by the Swedish Parliament and by the not previously consulted Sámi Parliament (United Nations, Human Rights Council, 2011).

Furthermore, it should also be noted that the privatisation of services, and public sector cuts had an especially negative impact, in the last decade, on secondary education, railway transportation, health and elderly care, as well as cultural programs.

At present, much of the population speaks English fluently, while teaching Sámi is seldom implemented, in spite of the amendment. The fact is that Sámi is not spoken in



public, and rarely in private. Intergenerational communication remains hampered by the very recency of promotion measures: children educated in present day, re-created Sámi are not understood by grandparents who speak vernacular, which was rarely transmitted to children out of the fear generated by many decades of stigma and exclusion. The knowledge of the originary languages is often insufficient to enjoy literature in Sámi. The story of the first book authored by a Sámi and written in Sámi, *Muitalus sámiid birra*, (A narrative on the Sámi), is singularly significant. Published in 1910, in Danish and in North Sámi, it elaborates on the oral tales, manuscripts and illustrations of Johan Turi (1854-1936)<sup>89</sup> a self-taught wolf hunter and guide. Writing about the origins and customs, the worldview, beliefs and traditional cures (Paltto, 2010), Turi expresses his regret for the oppression of the Nordic States and the ensuing invisibility of his people. Only the initially positive public reception drove him to mention shamanism in a later edition. On *Muitalus*, critics underline how a politically skilful Turi resorted to the ancestral vision of proximity between animal species, human or not, and their reciprocal transmutation to build the metaphor about those unknown *animals* who live a difficult life in their own land (Svonni, 2011). The seduction and wisdom of the teller attracted persons from other cultures to produce the book: the literary edition and translation were undertaken by Emilie Demant Hatt, a Danish painter, traveller, and ethnologist; the financing by Hjalmar Lundbohm, formerly an artist, who came to Giron as the administrator of an iron mine where he was confronted with the unequal work conditions the Sámi faced. The life of Turi, measured by anthropometry, a guide to anthropologists and a subject for artistic photographers, reflects the tensions between discrimination, and curiosity about the “Other” in Sweden. In 1918 Turi contributed to the creation of a Sámi association, and later on became a political activist (Cocq, 2008).

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<sup>8</sup> born in Kautokeino, Norway, worked from childhood in a *siida* near Giron/Kiruna and died in Čohkkirasjávri/Jukkasjärvi, Sweden.

During the 50s, Sámi publishing became more well-known through the emergence of newspapers in Sámi. Initially assumed by the Sámi Council, formed in 1956 and aggregating the Sámi organisations of the four States – Sweden, Norway, Finland and Russia – the promotion of literature had as specific purposes the protection and recognition of Sámi interests, both individual and collective, and the respect for economic, social and cultural rights<sup>9</sup> (Paltto, 2010). This impulse ended in 2000 with the cuts in funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers<sup>10</sup>. Publishing is now a dispersed sector, with newly-formed small publishers in Norway, which depend on activist support, and occasional grants from the Norwegian and Finnish Parliaments. At present, some elderly Sámi, now skilful in their own writing, are producing life narratives as a generational legacy (Paltto, 2010).

While such a form of internal colonialism, exercised over a European people, has been kept “indoors” until recently, the analysis of its consequences appears to be still confined to Sweden - and to Europe's - “backyards”. With Turi in mind, addressing those “unknown” beings demands the acknowledgement of their condition, past and present, and the recognition of their culture.

## 8. Questioning and concluding

My sojourn in Jokkmokk, from April to May 2013, was aimed at understanding what an “indigenous library” is, how it works, its significance as a contemporary institution, in this case within the space of Europe. To understand this, it became important to also consider the role of the *Kommune* library as well as the experiences of the insertion of Sámi corners in this and other public libraries under the control of the Swedish State. Another important realization I gained from my work was that the now defunct

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.samer.se/1089>; <http://www.saamicouncil.net/?deptid=1116>.

<sup>10</sup> <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Nordic+Council>.

*bibliobus* service in Sweden – though still operating in Norway and Finland – was appreciated by Sámi people, and very important to small villages and people who live permanently in isolation.

In an apparent paradox, the Sámi spaces in Swedish libraries are not contributing to a respectful recognition of their culture, making comparatively patent the shortcomings and weaknesses of these special areas instead. However, the constraints and inequalities in education and publishing and the specifically targeted cuts have not yet garnered public scrutiny nor investigation of their deeper causes.

The Sámi, though disconnected from their own languages by colonial oppression, maintain and recreate forms of knowledge construction and transmission, and forms of artistic expression parallel and diverse from the normative literate knowledge or canonical art and literature. It is the knowledge and artistic expressions which are closer to orality and more distant from commodified expressions, or based on learning-by-doing and practical knowledge, that are markedly absent in Swedish libraries in their epistemic, emotional and social integrity.

Literacy policies can, counter-intuitively, produce the stigmatisation of illiterate groups and people (Lahire, 2005), thus the awareness of being a culture without a writing system of their own - although many Sámi were literate in and resorted to writing in Swedish or to the Runic calendars, for example – may lead to stigmatising judgements in a country renowned for its high literacy rates.

On the other hand, in the global North new technologies are strongly oriented towards commodification of cultural goods and implemented in the transmission of ideas such as a-historicity, immediacy and competitive individualism. In addition to this, the development of technologies that appropriately address the complexities of oral language and imagistic and aural expressions (McKenzie, 1999) set demands that go beyond the already developed applications for the dominant print-based paradigm.

If the solutions implemented in Ájtte may be short of the expected in the context of the Swedish State, the lack of visitors - inherent in specialised collections, due to the rarity of Sámi speakers and the recency and deficiency of the investment in Sámi education - can be erected as an argument to obscure the responsibility of the custodian powers within the neoliberal managerialism frame, a risk that I sensed the existence of as much as the opposition to. Beyond technical issues, other issues arise, less perceptible and possibly more political, with solutions already tested or implemented in this case and in others, such as alternative author attribution norms or non-hegemonic bibliographic classifications and document typologies, and the questioning of architectural solutions beyond the Western norm. The need to address cultural practices of the global South highlights the sensitivity of the acquisition, production and treatment of bibliography, and demands, first of all, the active involvement of Sámi professionals and Sámi organisations (Roy and Hogan, 2010). Second, it requires the preservation of cultural heritage in the territory and among the society that created it, and which persists to be the privileged subject of meaning attribution.

A fundamental question, although perhaps less evident, is that of the different concepts of culture for Sámi leaders and cultural agents, and for State officials, Swedes or not. Several Sámi persons I talked with referred to their culture as a whole non-amenable to sectorisation which they realise and recreate in their varied everyday practices – often not professionalised nor competitive – learned within the Sámi cultural circle. These may go from the traditional arts to *jojk*<sup>11</sup>, from photography to video or to guidance and survival out in natural landscapes, extending to contemporary theatre, romance and dance. Neoliberal policies bet on the concept of (financial) efficiency, the devaluation of history(ies), in the touristisation and commodification of culture as a static, folkloric, object. During my stay in Sápmi, these policies were embodied in a marketing of the

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<sup>11</sup> see note 3

region, occasionally surfacing on the ideological space of Ájtte's museum with the evocation of an “uncorrupted Nature” and of an “exotic culture”. A Sámi library, a heritage but also a loan library, does not seem so prone to this exploitation, nor to expectations of financial gains, providing instead enjoyment and unique services, valuable but not measurable by the same gauge that highlights their costs.

On the other hand, countering the ideology of an information society where knowledge supposedly flows equitably and without barriers, it is important to recognise that access to knowledge should be considered from the perspective of the originary people who have produced it, live by it, and cast the future with it. The debate on the concepts of intellectual self-determination and of intellectual sovereignty may give substantial contributions on this matter (Sleeper-Smith, 2009; Edwards and Edwards, 2010). Dialogues and cultural exchanges among equals in rights, which promote a respect for difference and diversity, require at the same time the refusal of coloniality and of a stigmatising alterity. A Sámi Library should primarily be about and for the Sámi people. The decolonisation of the library institution and its redesign by and for the cultures of the counter-hegemonic South, even if the South may, surprisingly, be situated North of the North is a fundamental requirement. From such a positioning we may rethink the right to reading, re-signified by the originary cultures both inherited and lived. Resisting the clashes and silencing which were imposed upon them, these cultures emerge more valued. In this context I envisage the right to “public reading”<sup>12</sup> as a component of collective, cultural rights (Souza Filho, 2014), closely linked to linguistic rights, which are a current demand of cultural minorities and originary peoples (Roy and Kristen, 2010). This right, as I envisage it, is also a part of the alter-globalist claim of *buen-vivir*, the good life, in its pleasant and fruitful dimension even if non-productivist.

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<sup>12</sup> Public reading is a term, used in some European countries, to refer to the reading done within the scope of the public libraries.

I feel that we still need to reflect on a careful “translation work” (Santos, 2002) that integrates a possible Sámi library on the network of alter-global interests and desires. The history of the production of *Muitalus* may be an inspiring metaphor (Haraway, 1991) in the transmutation of “unknown beings” into a recognised people who shall have many tales to read and tell as a subject with a History.

If the language is a battle field, the library can be a symbolic place where the contending narratives, discursive maps, and tools are kept in “reserve”. A doubly symbolic reserve then, a static content of documents from a preserved past, enabling the revitalisation of languages and the re-creation of cultures, and a source for present and future dynamic. A “treasure”, made publicly available, may be “disenchanted” by an emancipatory usage.

**FCT** Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia  
MINISTÉRIO DA EDUCAÇÃO E CIÊNCIA



## **Acknowledgments**

This work had the financial support of the Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT/MEC) and was co-financed by FEDER, through the POPH within the frame of the reference SFRH/BPD/82215/2011.

CeSam, University of Umeå, received me as a visiting researcher. My gratitude to The Sámi Library in Ájtte, Jokkmokk in the persons of Peter Sárrí and Birgitta Edeborg.

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