# NORTHERN SCANDINAVIA – A MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETY SEEN FROM AN ETHNOLOGICAL POINT OF VIEW

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## INTRODUCTION

It is generally known that within the Nordic or Fennoscandian countries the main languages, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish, are mutually intelligible, whereas Finnish is a completely different language. The first three are as close to each other as dialects in English are to Scottish dialects. The two standard forms of written Norwegian can be similarly compared, the one based on the written Danish from the time of the union between the two countries, the other based on oral dialects used in the 19th century (Einar Haugen, professor in linguistics, has given a brief but informative historical survey in English (Haugen 1965, 20-28)). To use a general term, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish can be termed Scandinavian languages in contrast to the Fenno-Ugrian languages which include Finnish and Samish (Lappish).

It is also generally known that there is a Lappish-speaking minority living in the central and northern parts of Norway and Sweden and in northern Finland, as well as the Kola Peninsula of Russia. These people prefer to be called by their own term, which is Sami.

What is less well-known is that within the Nordic countries there are also other minority groups – not only Swedish-speaking Finlanders, but also Finnish-speaking groups in Sweden and Norway who have lived there for several hundred years.

My intention with this presentation, which was first given as a lecture to the Scottish Society for Northern Studies in November 1985, is to give some information about the remote corner of Europe where I grew up. It shares with other peripheries the fact that little of its culture and history is known widely within the country to which it belongs and even less in other countries. I would like to present the variety and complexity of cultural relationships in this area. I have concentrated on the ethnic and linguistic aspect, looked at from an ethnological point of

view. However, a periphery exists in relation to a centre. Regional history is linked up with national history, and in a multi-ethnic society often with the history of several nations or states. And the past is linked up with today.

**The region as part of the whole**

I will concentrate mainly on the northernmost part of Norway. This region, which can be described as trilingual, lies east of Tromsø and consists of half of Troms county and the whole of Finnmark county. Including the town of Tromsø, with about 47,000 inhabitants, the whole region has less than 150,000 inhabitants, of which 77,000 live in Finnmark. The three languages are Norwegian, Samish and Finnish. In order to give a broader understanding of this part of Norway as a multi-ethnic region, it is appropriate to relate it to Scandinavia as a broader geographical concept, or more precisely to Fennoscandia, which originated as a physical-geographical concept comprising Norway, Sweden, Finland and adjoining areas of Russia.

South of this region there are bilingual settlements – using Norwegian and Samish – stretching as far as Hedmark county. Finnish was also spoken in southern Hedmark but died out after World War II. There are historical connections between the two Finnish settlements in Norway, but the links are through Sweden to Finland when the latter belonged to the Swedish crown in the 16th and 17th centuries (Olsen 1971 and 1985c).

**The people in the region**

I shall give a broad picture of the settlement of northernmost Norway with the focus on the minority groups – the Samis and the Finns. It will be a race through time and space, but I hope I manage to present a skeleton and not just a heap of bones. I shall begin with a brief sketch of the more well-known Norwegian history of the North. I shall also mention the contact with the Russians (cf. Selnes 1972). Although there were never any Russian-speaking settlements in Norway, individual Russian-speakers have settled in the eastern towns and Russian family names still exist. They go back partly to ethnic Russians and partly to East Samis, who were formerly Russian subjects.

**Research on ethnicity**

In multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic societies, ethnic identity and linguistic background are transferred within the family and reinforced within society at large as well as through public institutions. I shall present some general definitions of the concept ethnicity. Ethnic identity is a part of a person's total identity. I shall give examples of how identity materializes in concrete markers and symbols. These markers can be studied from the philosophical viewpoint that the humanistic researcher is studying "*traces of human activity* in a wide meaning: signs and texts and inscriptions, artisans' products and tools, art, literature and music, buildings and man-made changes in the landscape ... . The humanistic researcher pre-supposes that actions and traces of actions have a meaning and can be understood"(Gullvåg 1982, 149: present author's translation).

**Linking past and present**

History and historical research have two interesting dimensions. First, we obtain new knowledge about certain people or societies, which adds to our general knowledge about man. Second, we pose questions about the past from our position *here* and *now* and link the facts we discover to ourselves as individuals or members of social groups. We use information from the past to reinforce our status or situation today – or to give us arguments to change our situation (Olsen 1985 c, 80-81).

Folk-life studies, like other studies of man in local society, take into consideration the influence that political institutions have on people's everyday life (cf. Olsen 1985b). One tends to see this influence as impersonal or anonymous in local studies. It is regarded as a force or source of power from outside which people can accept or react against (expressed for example in the form of laws, regulations, formal education system, religious system, etc.). This institutional influence can also be depicted as consisting of "black boxes". There is, however, a two-way connection. The decision-makers in a national society are also private persons. What they have in common with ordinary people without public positions is that they all have their own biography or life story and also their own cultural traditions.

## THE NORWEGIAN COASTAL SETTLEMENT IN THE LIGHT OF PLACE-NAME RESEARCH

From the tale which Ottar or Othere from Hålogaland told King Alfred of England sometime around 900 (or after 870), we know that Norwegians were making their "*finneferder*", that is journeys to collect taxes from the Sami, all the way to the White Sea (cf. Ottars beretning 1984).

Ottar was the northernmost Norwegian chieftain. His estate was somewhere in the vicinity of Tromsø, south of the region which in recent years has been trilingual. Ottar went to the White Sea. The later saga literature refers quite often to the region of Bjarmeland somewhere on the coast of the White Sea. Norwegians continued to use the northern route to the White Sea through the 14th and 15th centuries according to Russian sources. The new Norwegian place-names from Ottar's time and through to the 14th century in the present Finnmark county leads one place-name researcher to draw the following conclusions:

> "It is difficult to picture any large-scale Norwegian colonization of these northern areas before the latter half of the 1400s. The building of a church (most surely a very modern wooden structure, no traces are left) in Vardø 1307 remains a single event, a political indication of the outer limit of the area of Norwegian interests" (Frette 1984, 68).

The author is quoting the historian Halvdan Koht, who wrote in 1921 that the 14th and 15th centuries are the "emptiest" time in Norwegian history, and that Finnmark also slips back into darkness because of absent or silent sources. For the place-name researcher, "the problem is indeed greater than that. Here we have a coastline extending approximately 1500 kilometres, along which Norwegian-speaking people sailed more or less regularly during a period of 650 years (c. 870-1520), and we are unable to find out anything about the place-names they used" (Frette 1984, 70).

The Norwegians probably had their own names for sailing marks along the coast. Then when the Norwegian settlements or fishing villages were established, the settlers took existing Samish names from the coastal Sami population, who migrated seasonally from the inner to

the outer fjord districts following fixed spatial patterns.

The Norwegian population which settled on the outer mainland and outer islands of Finnmark from about 1450 was not a stable one up until the end of the 18th century. In addition to the trade with and taxation of the Samis, the Norwegian interest was in fishing. Norwegian peasants were brought from the south to fish for merchants from Bergen and Trondheim. They inhabited the outer coast and islands and moved along the coast with the fisheries (Figure 1). They were completely dependent on the merchants, who furnished them with boats and fishing gear and were obliged to supply them with grain and other goods (although they did not always do that every year in time).

The Coast Sami population in the fjords had better natural conditions for their existence. They were less dependent on supplies from Norwegian merchants. They also had their contacts with the reindeer-herding Samis and with traders from the Gulf of Bothnia.

A record from the parish of Hammerfest in 1727 tells us that there were among the Norwegians some who had "moved 7 times in 16 years, 5 times in 10 years, 3 times in 5 years; these same people became slacker and more slovenly in their habits each year" (quoted in Paine 1957, 32).

Geographical and climatic factors as well as economic dependence made existence marginal for the Norwegian fishing peasants as an ethnic group well into the 19th century.

**Norwegian-Sami contacts**

The conclusion drawn by the place-name researcher concerning the thousands of Norwegian-Samish name pairs in Finnmark today is that they provide evidence of close connections, not only economical but also cultural:

> "The colonizers (the Norwegians) have adapted/translated the names they found in the area when they came there, and more seldomly created new names. ... The usual "technique" from the Norwegian side seems to have been (1) full translation into Norwegian of the Samish names, or (2) a) translation of the last part of the Samish name, or b) adaptation of the first part of the

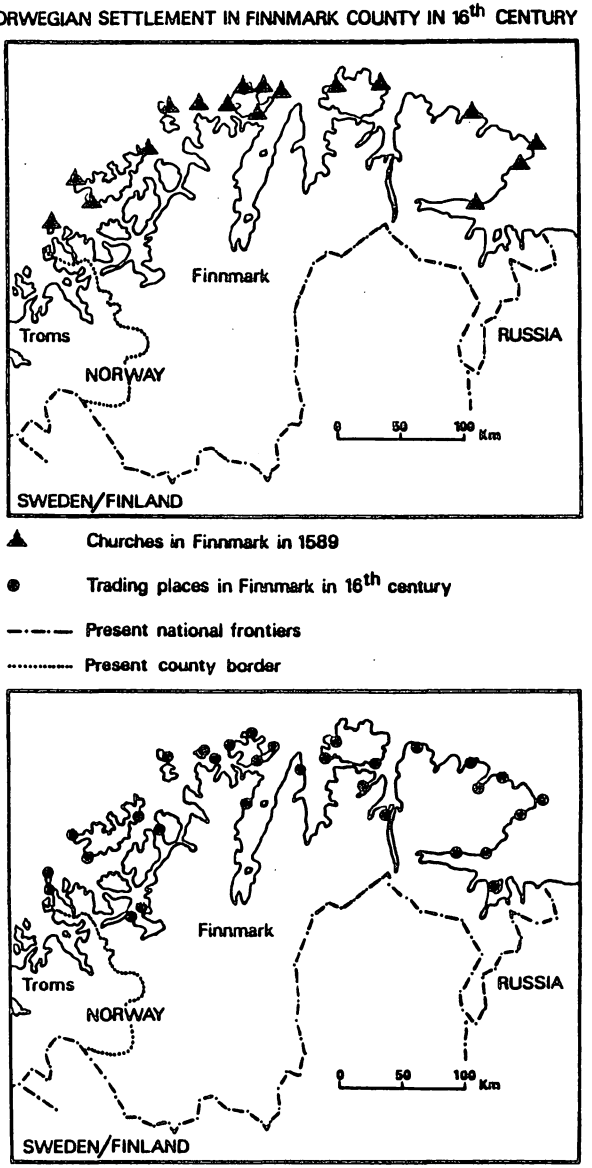


**Figure 1.** Norwegian settlement in Finnmark county in the 16th century.

Source: Niemi et al. 1976, 32, 34.

Samish name" (Frette 1984, 70-71).

There may also be reason to ask whether the Norwegian name forms are translations and adaptations made in the first place by bilingual Samis rather than by bilingual Norwegians. *Someone* must have known both languages. There is even a hypothetical possibility that there were trilingual persons, for example messengers for the Swedish king, who were often Finnish-speaking in the northern regions, and could cope with Samish in their relations with the Sami and with Swedish through their formal education (as priests, lawyers, merchants, etc.).

An interesting point is that many Norwegian names for Sami settlements in North Norway end with *by*, e.g. Lebesby, Nesseby. It was observed in the 18th century that the Sami settlments ("*Finne-Sædene*" were referred to by their inhabitants as Sami towns ("*Finne-bye*"), even where there were only one or two habitations (Schnitler 1962, I, 222). *By* is "town" in Norwegian. In Swedish, *by* means "village" and is equivalent to the Finnish *kylä*. The concept *by* has connections with the Sami socio-cultural unit of organization, the *sii'da* (Hætta 1980b, 62; Aarseth 1981).

There could be a certain Swedish linguistic influence through the political-economic interest of the Swedish crown and its officials. Written evidence of translations of place-names is found on maps and in documents from negotiations between Denmark-Norway and Sweden-Finland. It might have been convenient for a Danish or south Norwegian official to take over Scandinavian translations from Samish – or even Finnish.

## THE RUSSIAN TAXATION AND TRADE

In the 14th and 15th centuries, the Norwegians taxed the Samis on the coast of the Kola Peninsula as far as the White Sea – or more precisely to Svatoj Nos. At the same time, the Russians taxed the Samis on the Norwegian coast as far as Lyngstuva, Lyngenfjord, i.e. almost as far west as Tromsø. Every year from 1612 to 1813, a Norwegian bailiff from Vardø went to the town of Kola (Malmis) to collect the tax from the Samis through the Russian official in Kola. However, the bailiff never got the tax, nor did the Russians get the Sami tax from Norway after 1612. These annual tax-collecting journeys ended up with parties

and exchange of gifts (Niemi *et al.* 1976, 51). (From an ethnological point of view, it is also interesting to note how this almost anecdotal historical event functions to illustrate the peaceful relations on the borderlands of Russia and Norway through the centuries up to the Cold War period in our time).

The northern Russian corn and fish trade, known as the Pomor trade, was of great economic importance for the coastal population of Northern Norway until the Revolution in 1917 (Hansen 1977). Though it lasted for several hundred years, it was not legalized until the end of the 18th century. The Russian traders competed with the merchants of Bergen and Trondheim, who had a legal monopoly of trade in the north. The Norwegian peasants were especially dependent on the South Norwegian merchants. Living on the bare outer coast and islands, with marginal grazing possibilities, the fishing peasants were completely dependent on imported corn, equipment and other consumer goods. The Russian trading ships were regular and thus reliable. They brought grain, rope, household wares, bark and other goods from the river valleys leading out to the White Sea. As soon as the ice on the White Sea broke up, they set off on their voyages. Since the Russians were Greek Orthodox, they offered a large market for fish. They even bought summer fish, which was of inferior quality because of flies in the warmer season. The ending of this trade after the Revolution meant the loss of an important market for the fishing communities.

The Pomor trade had a special impact on the hamlets of the Coast Sami in the inner fjords, who based their livelihood on several ecological niches through the year using simple technology (Paine 1957 and 1965).

The trade with the Russians also led to the development of a lingua franca, known as "*russenorsk*" (Russian-Norwegian), which disappeared before World War II (see under "Language and speech style").

## NATIONAL FRONTIERS IN NORTHERN FENNOSCANDIA

The border between Norway(-Denmark) and Sweden(-Finland) had been demarcated in 1751. It went through Samiland all the way from Røros in the south to the old Russian border in Varanger in the north. Investigations of the borderland were made during the 1740s by both the

Norwegian and Swedish authorities. Most of the witnesses were Samis. In Troms, some of the most central witnesses were Finns. In Finnmark, too, along the Karasjok-Tana valley, there were witnesses from Finnish settlements. The testimony of the witnesses and the accompanying topographical descriptions were not published until the present century. They provide a major source on Sami conditions in Northern and Central Norway, as well as a source on early Finnish settlements in the north (Schnitler 1929, 1962, 1985).

In 1809, Finland was separated from Sweden and became an autonomous Grand Duchy in personal union with Russia through the Russian emperor. The new frontier followed the Torne and Muonio rivers and divided Finnish villages and parishes into two. The political border of 1809 has since developed into a cultural border between the two nations. However, the language border lies still further west in Sweden (Figure 7). It was observed by Carl Linneus in August 1732: "Came in the afternoon to Sangis ... . When I lost Sangis I also lost my mother tongue; in Säivis were pure Finns, whom I did not understand" [quoted in Slunga 1965, 13-14: present author's translation).

John Francis Campbell of Islay also noted the change of language when he travelled westwards along the coastal road from Haparanda, on the Torne river, on Tuesday, September 18th, 1849: "We got off at 1 pm in a pour of rain. Travelled to Calix Elv 8 Miles by 8½ pm. first 2 stations Finsk is spoken, after that Swedish" (from J.F. Campbell's journals in the National Library of Scotland).

The demarcation of the frontier between Norway and Russia in 1826 is known as a peaceful, friendly and rather sociable event in the history books. In 1944, the Soviet army crossed this border from Petsamo when the German army withdrew westwards. (The Petsamo region was Finnish territory from 1920 to 1944.) The "Russian soldiers" were hailed as an army of liberation by the local population (no harm being done to the civilians or to Norwegian soldiers). Thus the tradition in people's minds about the peaceful historical relations with Russian was carried on.

## THE SAMIS

### The present-day situation

The Sami people are an indigenous ethnic group. Their ethno-political aim is to be internationally accepted as a people, on the same lines as other small nations in the north such as the Faroese, with political rights of their own. They want to protect their language and to develop it as a tool for coping with a complex modern world – on Sami premisses. In this connection, it is interesting to think back to a statement from Finland in 1845, made by a Swedish-speaking scientist who was in opposition to the development of the written Finnish language. Jakob Nervander wrote in a letter to Johan Snellmann that Finnish, as a language of education and literature, could not produce other than ABC-literature; and that if he believed in the possibility of a Finnish literature, then he even believed in the possibility of the foundation of an Estonian and a Lappish nation and literature.

It is estimated that there are about 20,000 Samish-speakers in Norway, 5,000 in Sweden, 3,000 in Finland and 2,000 in Russia. Perhaps a similar number of persons in addition do not speak the language but have a Sami identity (Forskningsnytt 1985).

### The question of origins

"Where did the Samis come from?" This question is a common one in the ethno-political debate, as well as in party conversations. The theories are many, but none of them stands proven as fact. An important issue in today's political discussion is that the Samis are an indigenous people, meaning that they were living in Fennoscandia, had their own language and were considered a separate ethnic group, different from other groups, at a time before any of the national states in the north, such as Norway and Sweden, were founded.

The other aspect of the question of origin is racial. Were they aboriginals living there before any Indo-European or Finno-Ugric tribe settled in what later became Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia? Or were they an unknown tribe coming from the east to settled regions in the west? Last century, Aryan theory and biological evolution theory were used to rank humanity into inferior and superior races. Different

cultures (i.e. ways of livelihood) were also classified scientifically. The Samis, with their assumed Mongolic connections, were ranked as inferior human beings in relation to the Scandinavians, who got the top score. The latter, as farmers tilling the soil, also gained the top score on the cultural ranking list. The Samis came out with a low score; they were a nomadic people, moving around with their animals, which were not even cattle and sheep but reindeer (Olsen 1983a).

**Linguistic research on origins from a Sami viewpoint**

Against this background, there is reason to give the official Sami view regarding their origin and language, as it is presented in a recent government report on the legal position of the Samis in Norway. The report states that the connection between the Samish language and Finnish is clear and well-founded on the basis of linguistic research:

> "Because Samis and Finns are meant to be physical-anthropologically very different, the theory arose that the Samis might have changed their language from so-called proto-Lappish to a Finno-Ugric language (i.e. the present Samish). This idea, which goes back to K.B. Wiklund (1896), must be called pure speculation. It is indeed not an unsolvable problem that physical-anthropological (racial) characteristics and linguistic relations diverge. While the biological heritage (the genes) are inherited simultaneously from both parents, the language is as a rule only inherited from one of the parents, depending on outer social conditions as well as social status of the languages" (NOU 1984:18, 100: present author's translation).

There is reason to note the formulation "Samis and Finns *are meant to be*" (*"er ment å være*" in Norwegian). The report does not state that they *are* racially different, but that *somebody has meant* or *is meaning* that they are different. The Sami view is that dialect research and historical linguistic research have contributed to knowledge about the Sami languages, but that some of the research has reflected the chauvinism of the neighbouring peoples. The theory about proto-Lappish was a result of this chauvinism, since the Finns did not really want to be closely related to the Samis in spite of the linguistic similarities.

"So the theory that the Samis once changed their language was launched, though there is not the slightest evidence of such a language change. Today this theory is considered pure speculation. However, the era of theories is not over. Recently the idea was launched of an original South Sami group, of which there is equally little evidence. One could probably find much more if one investigated the connections between present-day South Samis and the population groups of South-West Finland. It is commonly known that there are traits in the South Samish language which cannot be explained satisfactorily as due to connections with Finns through North Sami links" (Magga 1985, 10-11: present author's translation).

The author is probably thinking of recent archaeological, historical and linguistic research in northern Finland and Sweden, especially at Oulu University. Jouko Vahtola's large place-name thesis from 1980 points at links between Finnish-speaking traders from the Gulf of Bothnia and Samis in the central and western regions of Sweden and on the coast of Norway. These date from around 600, when Ostrobothnia was a flourishing centre of trade (Vahtola 1980).

**Archaeological and historical research**

Archaeologically it is difficult to find special cultural traits which can be called specifically Sami traits before the birth of Christ. However, that does not provide proof to eliminate the idea of the earlier existence of Samis as organized groups of people before Christ in the same way as one would talk about groups of Germanic-speaking people or other Indo-European groups in Europe before the birth of Christ. An accepted Sami view is that the Samis are descended from the first post-glacial population of Finland (cf. Hætta 1979, 31, and 1980a, 7, 104-105).

The first written evidence of a *named* group considered to be Samis is in Tacitus' *Germania* in the year 98. He talked about "Fenni" – Finns – as a poor and wild hunting people based on small family units, both men and women hunting while the babies were left at home; the older people stayed at home while the younger ones hunted. Nothing was said directly about their relations to neighbouring people, though Tacitus mentioned that they thought their existence to be better than toiling the

land and building houses, and better than uncertain exchange of property (obviously a reference to trading). They felt secure in their real relationship both to humans and gods. They had thus achieved the most difficult of all and did not need to wish for more, said Tacitus.

The Samis are later mentioned by Ptolemy in the second century, by Procopius and Jordanes in the sixth century and by Paulus Diaconus in the eighth century. The first person who told about his own contact with the Samis was Ottar of Hålogaland (Hætta 1980, III).

The fur trade and taxation from Norway, Sweden-Finland and Russia meant the exploitation of the Samis through the centuries. The Samis were organized in small hunting and nomadic societies inland. These were based on family groups, who had individual use of certain land areas for part of the year and common villages in winter. Along the Norwegian coast, animal husbandry and fishing were basic livelihoods (cf. Aarseth 1981).

The Swedish Crown taxed and traded with the Samis with the help of Finnish-speaking traders from the towns along the inner Gulf of Bothnia. The Swedish "*lappmarker*" (Sami lands) included parts of present Norway until the beginning of the 17th century (the Treaty of Knærød of 1613 between Denmark-Norway and Sweden). The traders from Sweden lost their taxation privileges during the reign of King Gustav Vasa in the 16th century. In newer Scandinavian history, they are known as "*Birkarler*", who probably originated from groups of organized traders among the Finnish-speaking groups along the Gulf of Bothnia (cf. Vahtola, 1980). They were trading at the same time as the Norwegians were trading along the coastline and the Russians were coming from the east. The Sami population paid taxes to several rulers, up to three at one time, until the end of the 18th century, when state frontiers began to be established (cf. Hansen 1984).

From the reign of Gustav Vasa, a centralised colonization began in Sweden and Finland, including Samiland. In Finland there was also a more rapid spontaneous settlement by burn-beat cultivators from South-East Finland. These Finns were also encouraged by the King to come over to southern Sweden, where they settled the vast spruce forest areas as a buffer zone against Norwegian territory. His intention was also to increase the number of taxation units in Sweden (and

Finland) by increasing the number of farmsteads. This was the origin of the southern Finnish settlement in Sweden, which spread over the border into Norway in the 17th century (Olsen 1971).

## THE FINNISH MINORITY

### The present situation

A rough estimate accounts for more than 5,000 people who actively speak Finnish or understand it in Northern Norway. This figure includes new Finnish immigrants and trilingual Samis. (In Sweden, there are roughly estimated about 30,000 Finnish-speakers in the north.) No proper linguistic-statistical survey has been done after World War II. Apart from the political dimension regarding the status of a minority group, the traditional Norwegian and Swedish attitude to Finns in general has subtle racial undertones, regarding the Finns as a non-Germanic group. The racial aspect is more accentuated in the attitude to Samis, while the political aspect has until recently here been more in the background (Olsen 1983a).

During the post-war period, language has until recently been kept out of public discussion in Norway, although there was a strong political suppression in both Norway and Sweden in the inter-war period (cf. Eriksen & Niemi 1981). From a Norwegian political point of view, Northern Norway and especially the eastern part of the region is strategically important. Cultural unity is easier to handle than cultural diversity in a stressed international situation. The region adjoins the Russian frontier, which here constitutes the borderline of Eastern Europe, as well as adjoining Finland, which itself is a borderland between East and West. Two aspects of Finland's position as a neighbour and as a source of emigration to Norway are involved in the Norwegian attitude towards its Finnish-speaking population. One is the country's geographical and politicial-historical closeness to the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. Another is the nation-building which occurred within Finland in the 19th and 20th centuries.

### A historical-political review

Expressed briefly, Norway in the 18th century was afraid of Sweden, which then included the province of Finland. The Samis were

regarded as an unstable population politically, since they crossed the frontiers with their reindeer from the winter villages in Sweden-Finland to summer pastures on the Norwegian coast, where they also fished. Similarly, the Finnish-speaking merchants from the town of Torneå crossed the frontier in winter to markets where they sold goods to the coastal population, both Sami and Norwegian, and bought up furs, fish and other products of the sea. They were seen as an economic threat to the trade monopoly of the South Norwegian merchants in North Norway. Finnish immigration was at this time small, but this was the period when the first immigrant communities were established. Since farming was an important part of their ecological pattern, the Finns were encouraged to settle.

In the 19th century, Norway was afraid of Russia, since Finland was in personal union with the Russian tsar from 1809. Sweden was also afraid that Russia had designs on the Finnish-speaking areas west of the Torne river, along which the new frontier with the Grand Duchy of Finland ran (cf.Figure 7).

In the 20th century, after Finland's independence in 1917, there was fear and suspicion in Norway and Sweden of right-wing Finnish extremists, who wanted to expand the territory of the young state to include especially Russian Carelia but also areas in Norway and Sweden with a Finnish-speaking population. The Åland question between Sweden and Finland created further antagonism between the Scandinavian and the Finnish camps. This concerned not only the island population of Åland, but also the Swedish-speaking population on the mainland of Finland as well as the Finnish minorities in Sweden and Norway. In the Sami areas of central and northern Norway, opinions differed depending on the degree of geographical closeness to Finland and economic and social connections with that country (cf. Slunga 1965; Eriksen & Niemi 1981).

**Finnish settlement in Fennoscandia**

The historical development of agricultural settlement within Finland is illustrated in Figure 2. The expansion of settlement was based on a farm economy with cattle and corn at the permanent dwelling and privately owned hunting and fishing grounds up to 300 km away. The latter were used seasonally by the men, and often

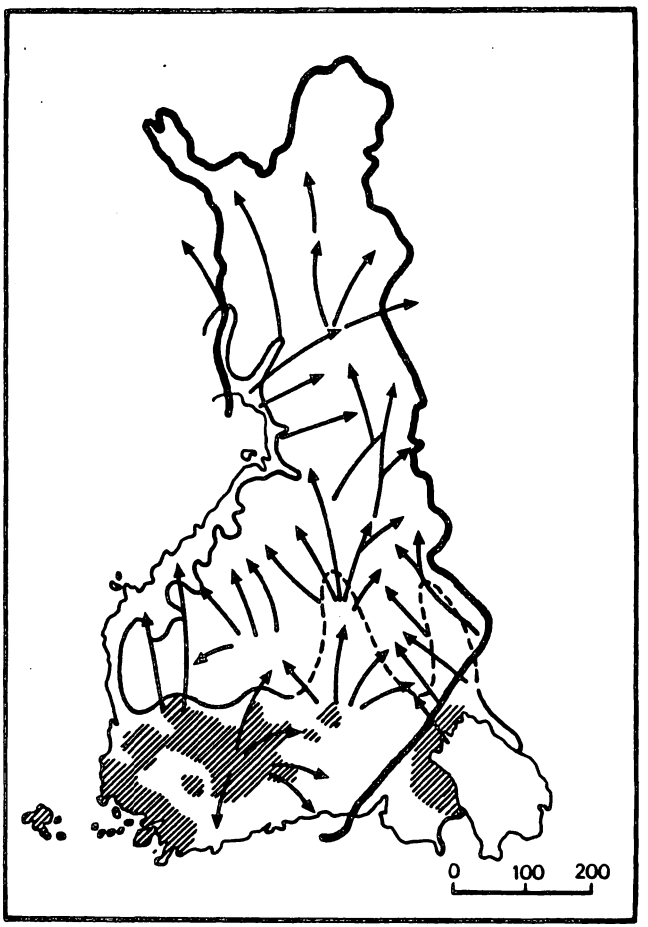


**Figure 2.** Agricultural settlement in Finland. Source: Talve 1979, 15 (a-b).

provided the next stage of permanent settlement through colonization from expanding villages. The south-eastern Finns, who practised burn-beat shifting cultivation, needed large forest areas for their expansion.

The expanding Finnish settlement also exploited the hunting and fishing grounds of the Sami population, not only through cultivation but by competing with the Samis for the same resources of game and fish (Olsen 1971). In Sweden, Norway and the eastern part of Torne Lappmark in Finland, the transition to a reindeer-herding economy was an earlier development that in Kemi Lappmark in Finland. In Finnmark (Norway), an increase in the number of large domesticated reindeer herds occurred before 1600 after two hundred years of intensive hunting of wild reindeer. In Finland, smallholder farming and reindeer herding in combination developed as an occupation for both Finns and Samis, unlike in Sweden and Norway, where reindeer-herding was primarily a Sami occupation (Vorren & Manker 1962).

Finnish immigration to Norway began from the Torne valley area around 1700, although for centuries individuals had been crossing and seasonal market journeys had been made from the Gulf of Bothnia to the Norwegian coast. In the early 18th century, however, small Finnish-speaking communities were founded as the first of many which are still identified as Finnish settlements in oral tradition, even in cases where the language itself has disappeared today.

Figure 3 shows the population development in Finnmark country from 1845 to 1900. The distribution of ethnic groups is partly based on persons' descent and partly on the use of language. This is the period when modern fishing with new technology was starting in Norway. From the 1860s, Svend Foyn was based in Varanger with his whaling station, although the whalers came mainly from southern Norway (cf. Solhaug 1977).

Immigration from Finland to North Norway has continued into the 20th century. Postwar immigration, especially to fishing communities, has resulted in an increase in the numbers speaking Finnish and given a stimulus to the language after a period of strong assimilation in the 1930s. Furthermore, tourism and trade are not without importance. (In 1984, there were registered 760 persons in Finnmark with Finnish citizenship. In Finnmark, Troms and Nordland

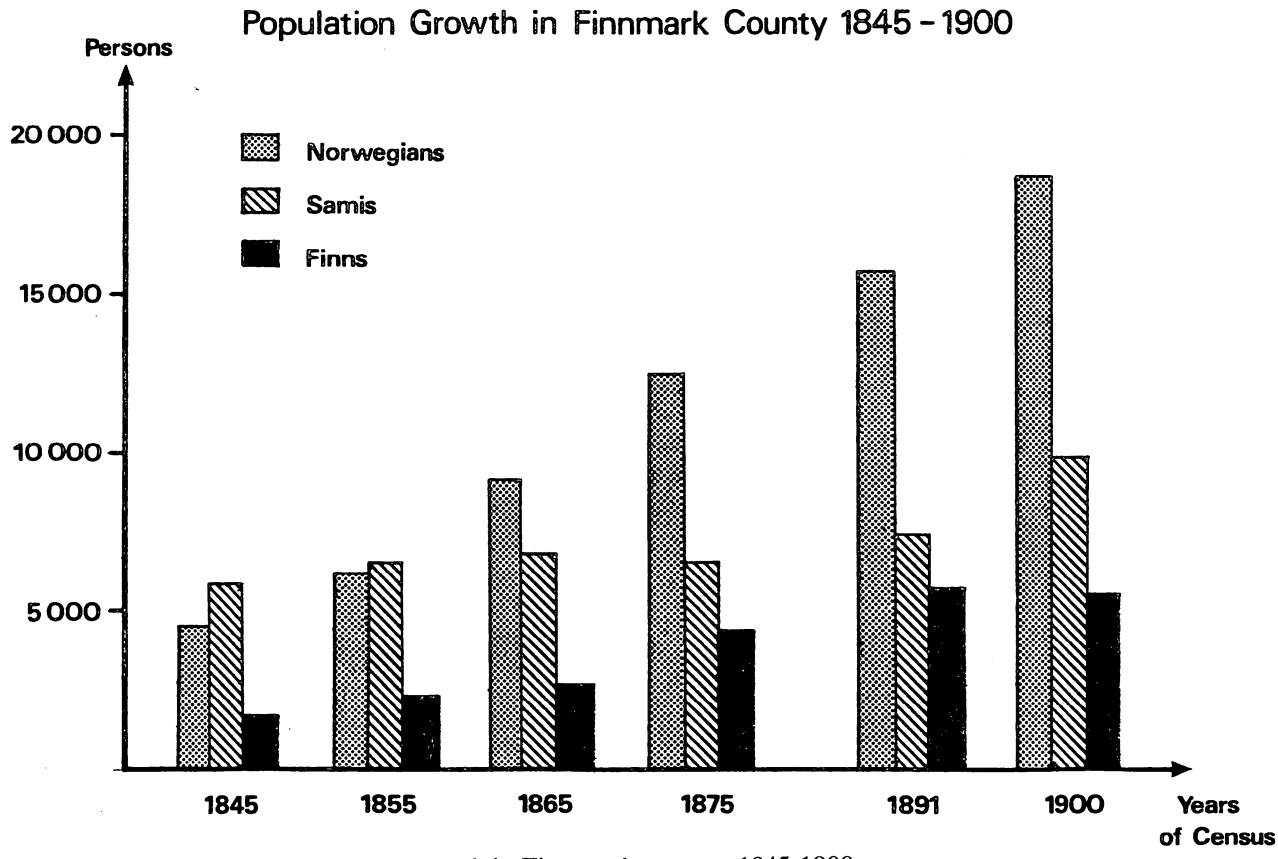


**Figure 3.** Population growth in Finnmark country 1845-1900.
Source: NOU 1984:18, 83.

counties, there were altogether 1100 Finnish citizens according to the newspaper *Finnmarken*, 4 July 1986).

From the early period of immigration, the Finns based much of their livelihood on animal husbandry, as did the Coastal Samis and Norwegians. However, the Finns tended to keep more cattle and attain higher productivity. They chose to settle near river mouths with grassland. They also harvested fodder from bogland, as was common practice in the broad river valleys of Finland and Sweden. Otherwise, their livelihood was much the same as that of Norwegians and those Samis who did not keep reindeer. Fishing was basic for all ethnic groups.

The geographical distribution of Finns in Northern Norway can be illustrated by a map (Figure 4) based on J.A. Friis' ethnographic mapping from the 1880s, a time when Finnish immigrants and their descendents made up 20% of the population of Finnmark. In the censuses of 1890 and 1900 and 1910, individual Finnish speakers were registered not only in all local authority districts (communes) in Finnmark, but also in all districts in Troms except one (i.e. they were not only registered in northern Troms). Ethnic differences in the settlement pattern are illustrated for Kåfjord in Alta in 1840 (Figure 5). The Norwegians lived near the coppermines, while the Finns lived near the river and fodderlands.

A similar pattern is evident today on the northern side of the Varanger fjord. The Finnish-speaking communities are situated close to river mouths, while the Norwegian fishing villages are not (cf. Bratrein 1975).

Incidentally, the first Finnish settlers in the copper-mining belt of the Great Lakes district in the USA came from the Alta copperworks in the 1860s. They were hired by an American agent. Also later in the century North Norway became an intermediate state for emigrating Finns, who earned money for their tickets in the spring and summer fisheries (Alanen 1983; Olsen 1983b).

## THE LANGUAGES

At this point, it is worth taking a closer look at the differences and

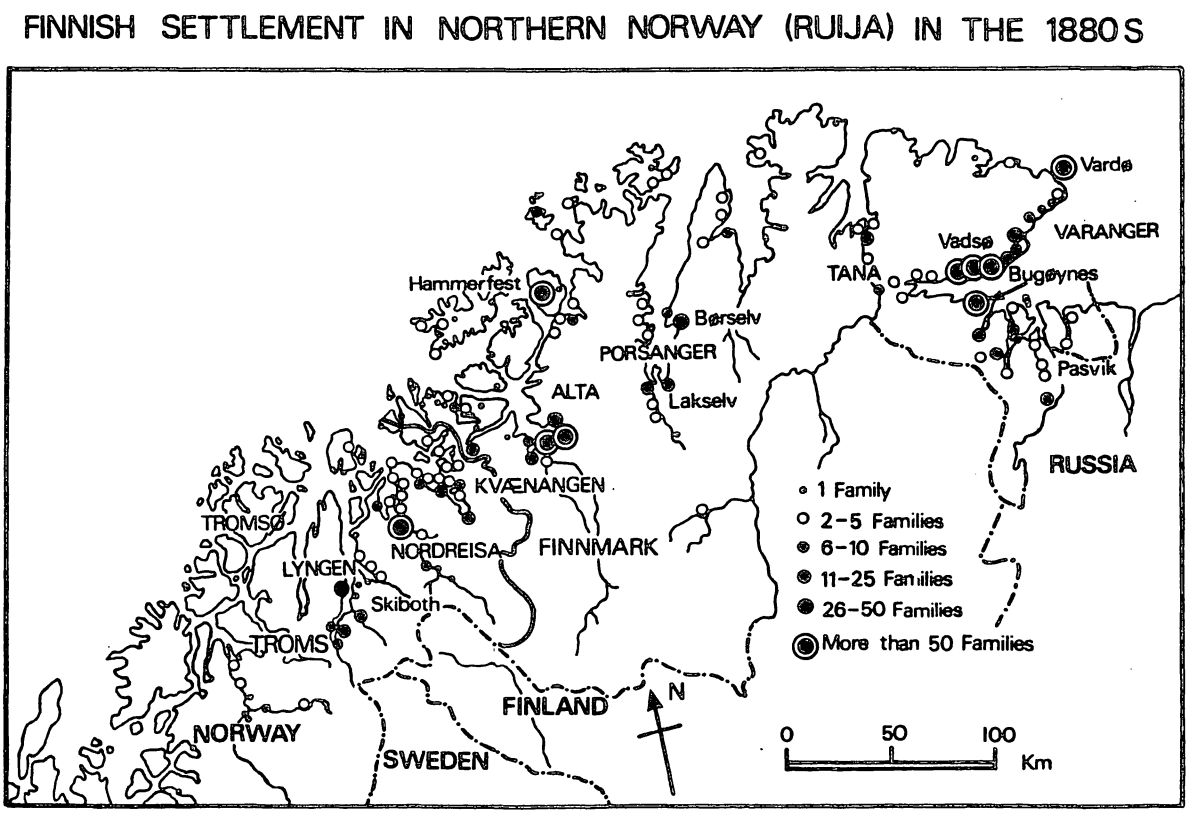


**Figure 4.** Finnish settlement in Northern Norway (Ruija) in the 1880s
Source: Jokipii 1982, 45.

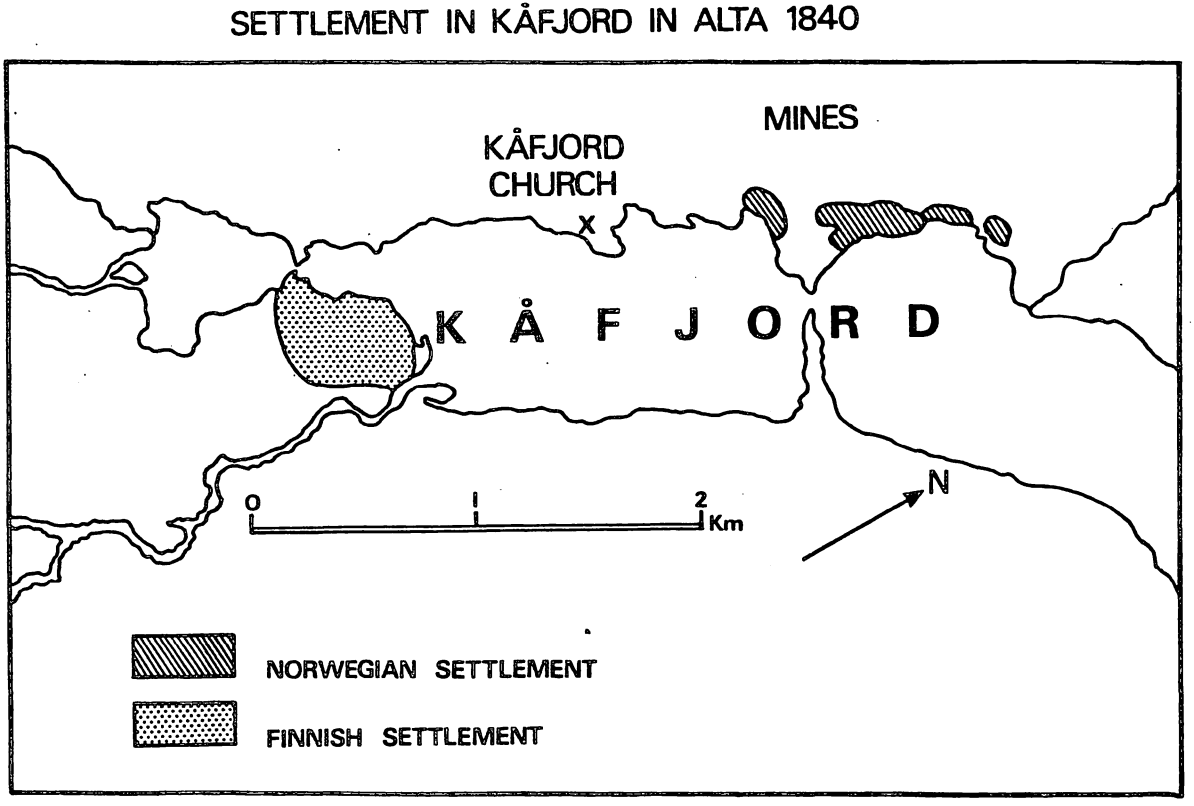


**Figure 5.** Settlement in Kåfjord in Alta 1840.
Source: Ofstad 1979, 14.

similarities between the languages of Fennoscandia. Norwegian and Swedish are Indo-European languages, while Finnish and Samish are Uralic languages. Norwegian and Swedish are mutually understandable. Finnish and Samish are not. However, speakers of different Finnish dialects understand one another across national borders without difficulty.

**The Samish language – a wide concept**

The following orientation about the Samish language is based on the Norwegian government report mentioned previously (NOU 1984:18, 97-113). Some linguists have operated with several languages. According to the present official Sami view, there is one language divided into ten main dialects (Figure 6). Traditionally the dialects are grouped into two, the Eastern and the Western dialect groups. To the Eastern dialects belong those in Russia as well as the Inari dialect in Finland, while the remainder belong to the Western dialect group. Linguists in Sweden divide the dialects into three groups: East, Central and South Samish dialects. The East Samish dialects are the same as the Eastern dialects in the earlier mentioned classification. The Central Samish dialects are the northern group of dialects in Norway, Finland and Sweden (North, Lule and Pite dialects). The South Samish dialects are the two southernmost dialects in Norway and Sweden (Ume and South dialects). Geographically distant dialects are not mutually understandable. According to the Sami view they are as different as Norwegian and Icelandic. Dialects in close geographical proximity are, however, like Norwegian and Swedish, mutually comprehensible.

In short, traditional Sami occupations, contact with neighbouring peoples and international politics have influenced the language, both main dialect groups and local dialects, affecting their distribution and the borders between them.

**The Finnish-speaking communities**

Finnish dialects in Finland and northern Fennoscandia are shown in Figure 7. The dialects in Sweden and Norway are classified as the North Finnish dialect group, although some scholars distinguish between North Finnish dialects in Sweden and Quain (*kven*) dialects in

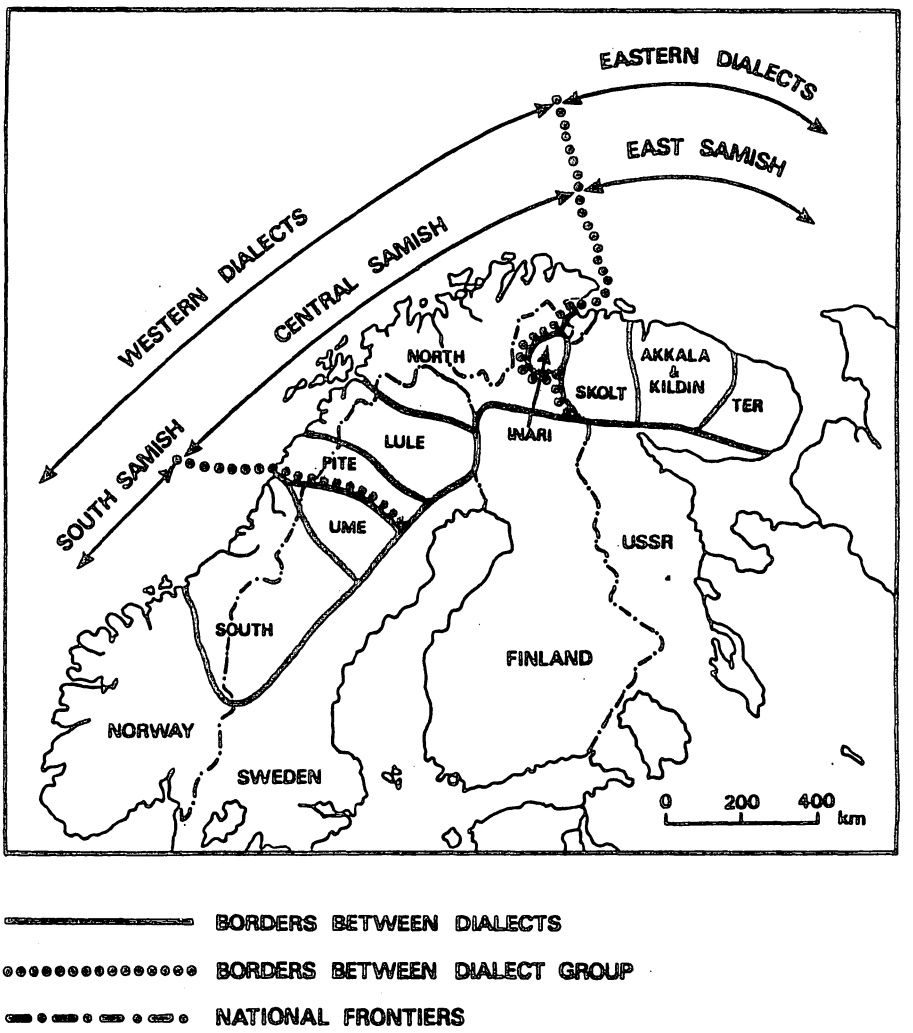


**Figure 6.** Samish dialect regions.
Source: NOU 1984:18, 97-99.

Norway. The latter are also referred to as *Ruijan suomi* (North-Norwegian Finnish). According to the Norwegian census of 1875, the Finnish immigrants came from Sweden and from Finland as far south as beyond a line from Vasa to Kuopio. This census is an important source of information, since it is the first to register the parishes in Sweden and Finland (not only the countries) where the immigrants were born or from where they came.

Recent linguistic research in Finland, supported by the Norwegian authorities, illustrates the spread of dialects in northern Scandinavia. The dialects in Norway are divided into a Western, a Central and an Eastern group (Lindgren 1985). If the settlement map for the 1880s (Figure 4) is compared with the dialect map of today (Figure 7), a relationship can be discerned between the larger clusters of families in the 19th century and the survival of Finnish-speaking communities today. The Finnish villages in Varanger, the stronghold of the Finnish language today (7-9 in Figure 7), were not founded until the last century (individual settlers excepted), although the district was well known to merchants from Torneå, who had traded there for centuries.

The main factors behind the early Finnish settlement in North Norway were over-exploitation of fishing waters and hunting grounds due to the colonization of Samiland and the wars between Sweden-Finland and Russia. Finnish settlement in Alta (no. 4 in Figure 7) began in the 17th century with salmon trappers ordered there by the Swedish king. It continued through the 18th century. The settlements of Troms (1-3 in Figure 7) and in the vicinity of Porsanger fjord (5 and 6) are also from the 18th century. The established settlements have continued to attract new immigrants.

The language situation in the 20th century, according to recent research by the linguist Anna-Riitta Lindgren, is as follows. In the east – Varanger and Tana – monolingual Finns were common before the 1940s. In the west, individual bilingualism and trilingualism were quite common, i.e. Finnish and Norwegian together, or Finnish, Samish and Norwegian. Today eastern Finnish speakers are more bilingual than western Finnish speakers. Central Finnish speakers (5 and 6 in Figure 7) are often trilingual. Individual trilingualism became common when both Norwegians and Finns settled down in earlier Samish-speaking

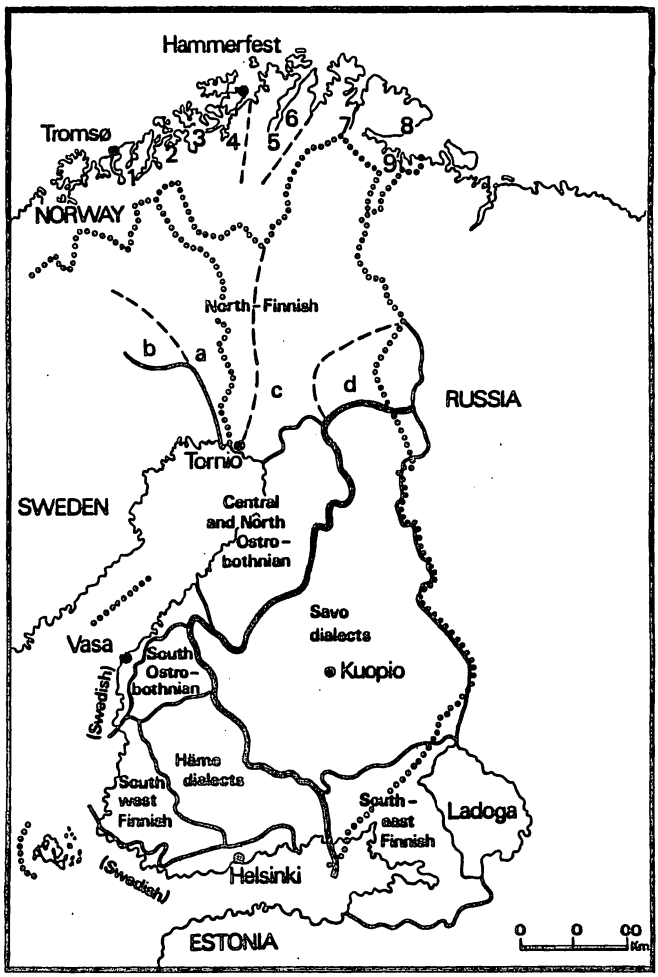


**Figure 7.** Finnish dialect regions.
Source: Virtaranta 1982, 178; Lindgren 1985, 45.

areas. Børselv in Porsanger (6) was an example of a bilingual Finnish-Samish village before the assimilation period of the 1930s. Now people in the central district are bilingual Finnish-Norwegian or Samish-Norwegian, if they are not trilingual (Lindgren 1985).

I have myself interviewed a Samish-speaking woman in this district in Norwegian, which she spoke fluently. Her husband's first language was Finnish and that was the language the two of them mostly used. However, both spoke in Norwegian to their children and grandchildren. She spoke Samish with her neighbour, which her husband understood but did not speak so much. His Norwegian was not as phonetically fluent as his wife's Norwegian, which was the typical Norwegian for the district.

In Nordreisa in Troms county (2 in Figure 7), Samish disappeared when Norwegians and Finns settled. Before the Norwegianization of the 1930s, there were monolingual Finns in the upper valley. Fairly common were bilingual Norwegians who also spoke Finnish and Finns who spoke Norwegian. The reindeer-herding Samis who came regularly down to the coast were often bilingual Samish-Finnish speakers or trilingual Samish-Finnish-Norwegian (Lindgren 1985).

**Linguistic connections between Finnish and Samish**

Linguistic-historical connections between Finnish and Samish are shown in Figure 8. They developed from a common proto-language, Early Proto-Finnic, three thousand years ago. The link with Hungarian goes five thousand years back. The relation between Finnish and Hungarian languages is generally well-known in Europe. The diagram shows the very close connection of Finnish with Estonian and other languages around the Baltic Sea and a fairly close connection with Samish. Could it be said that Finnish and Hungarian are linguistically less related that Norwegian and Greek or Russian? Or is it a question of trying to compare something which cannot be compared? Nonetheless, the language relationship between Finnish and Hungarian has led to close academic and cultural links between Finland and Hungary.

How close are Samish and Finnish today? They are not close enough to be mutually comprehensible. I would suggest they are

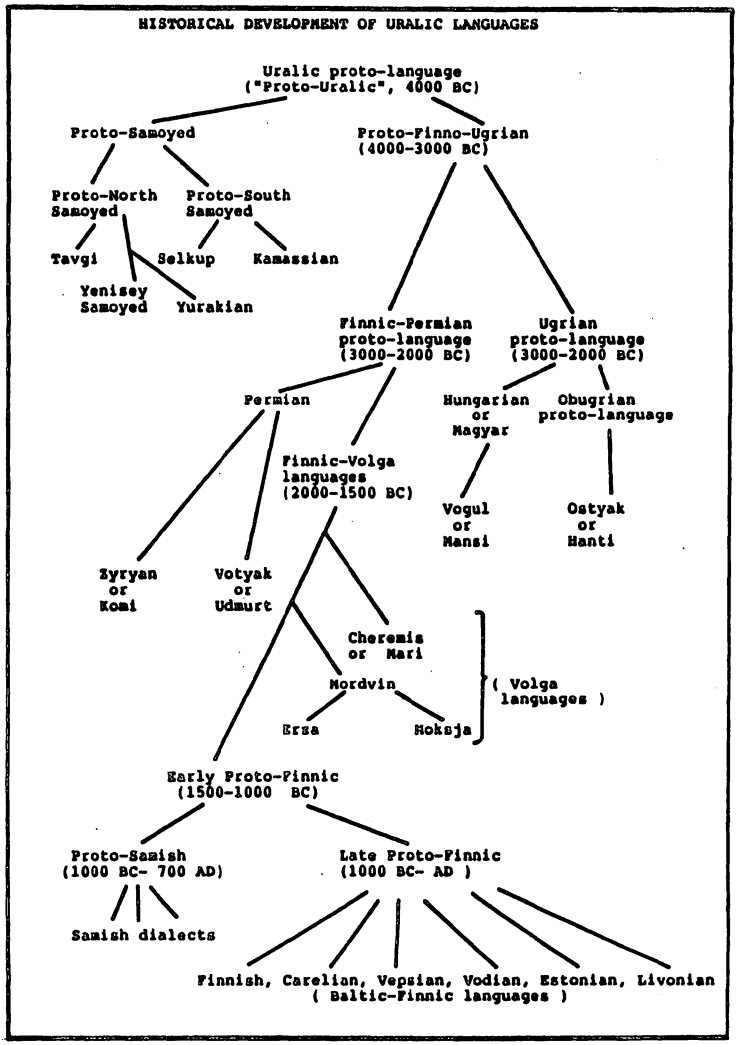


**Figure 8.** Historical development of the Uralic languages. Source: NOU 1984:18, 101. (The translation from Norwegian into English is after Hajdu 1975.)

comparable in relation to English and French, or even English and Norwegian in some cases. One must take into account what is being compared. Is it the most distant dialects in each language which are being compared, or dialects in closer geographical proximity?

The structure of the language is closely related. The syntax and the grammar of the languages are closely related as well as etymology and semantics. I have picked out some topographical appellatives from place-name studies in North Norway as examples of words with identical origin and meaning in Samish and Finnish (Søderholm 1985, 255):

| English | Finnish | Samish |
|---|---|---|
| lake | järvi | jávri |
| waterfall | koski | guoika |
| hill | vaara | várri |
| fjord | vuono | vuonna/vuotna |
| river | joki | johka |

Finnish speakers and Samish speakers who are in close and regular contact can fairly easily pick up the other language (if they are motivated). Norwegian and Swedish will on the other hand be as difficult for Finnish and Samish speakers as their languages are for Norwegian and Swedish speakers. The situation is in many respects analogous to the language situation in Britain and Ireland. A Gaelic-speaking Scot can, for example, more easily pick up another Celtic language than a person who only has a knowledge of English or Scots.

From another viewpoint, one should also be aware of the cultural-historical similarities within Fennoscandia, such as religious and political institutions, administrative organization, ecological conditions, social structure, education systems, technological innovation etc. This provides a basis for easy translation from one language to another as far as the question of meaning or content of words and phrases is concerned.

## ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC MARKERS

### Ethnopolitical trends in the Nordic countries today

"Nordic co-operation functions at its best amongst the Samis." This was a headline on the front page in a newspaper article about the permanent body *The Nordic Sami Council*, which is based in northern Finland close to the Tana river on the Norwegian border. The report was in *Hufvudstadsbladet*, the daily Swedish-language newspaper in Helsingfors (Helsinki), on 25th March 1984. It is perhaps not surprising that this report was written in the main daily of the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. It is relevant in the ethnic context to say a few words about this group.

The Swedish-speaking population in Finland comprises about 300,000 persons, representing about 6% of the total population. They are located in western and southern Finland, so it is not relevant to deal with their history or territory in the context of this article. However, the Finland-Swedes have an important impact on ethnopolitical strategies in the Nordic countries, a social factor to take into account when giving an ethnological presentation of Scandinavia as a multi-ethnic society. Their impact is not least due to their research in bilingualism, minority/majority relationships, ethnic identity, the importance of ethnic organizations for the maintenance of ethnic identity in modern society, and other related themes. It is also worth mentioning that there continually occur open debates in their own newspapers about their minority situation. Since these are in a Scandinavian language, the articles are as easily read in Sweden and Norway (as well as Denmark) as within their own society.

The Finland Swedes have a positive and strong ethnic self-image in interaction with others. They also provide a positive example of a satisfactory minority situation, one which is not in a politically dominating or ruling position in relation to the numerical majority (Olsen 1985a, 56-57).

### Names reflecting cultural-historical processes

In the above-mentioned newspaper article about the Nordic Sami Council, the readers are introduced to the members of the Council's

permanent staff in two group pictures, given their full names. In the introductory ingress, we read that "the secretary is a genuine Finland Swede from southern Finland and speaks both Samish, Swedish and Finnish, the chairman is a genuine Norwegian Sami with a Finnish surname who does not speak Finnish, the adviser for cultural matters is Finnish with a Swedish surname and does not speak Swedish...". In the background we notice a signpost telling us in three languages that this is the way to the Sami Council: *Samiratti/Saamelaisneuvosto/ Samerådet*. The members are as follows: Leif Halonen (1), Veikko Holmberg (2), Leif Rantala (3) and Leena Aikio (4). We can arrange formal or external criteria of social identity in a table to show the point the newspaper was making by looking at the complex variety of languages, names and nationalities (F = Finnish, N = Norwegian, S = Samish, Sw = Swedish, FSw = Finland-Swedish):

| Person no. | Citizen-ship | Own ethnic identity | Languages spoken | Names 1st name | Surname |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | N | S | S N Sw | N | F |
| 2 | F | S | S F | F | Sw |
| 3 | F | FSw | S N F Sw | Sw | F |
| 4 | F | S | S F | F | S |

The first of them has Norwegian citizenship. Ethnically he identifies himself as a Sami. He is bilingual. He speaks Sami and in addition fluent Norwegian. This means he copes without difficulty with Swedish (and even better with written Danish). His Christian name is Norwegian or Scandinavian. However, his surname is a very Finnish type of family name, historically associated with the east and south-east (Savolax and Carelia). In a similar way the names of the other three persons can be explained in a cultural-linguistic context.

The names are markers, clues or cues to events in the past which in some way or the other led to significant links between different cultural groups. On the other hand, the markers do not explain why the individuals have adopted the ethnic identity which they feel expresses what they are themselves (Olsen 1985a, 96-107).

**What is ethnicity? Some definitions**

Einar Haugen, Professor of Scandinavian Linguistics at Harvard University, described ethnicity in 1975 in contemporary North America. He said that ethnicity was something swinging uncertainly between two poles – kinship and nationalism. Ethnicity is part of the continuum holding the two together. At one end are the bonds that keep the family together. This is the type of bond that makes so many people start investigating their family history. At the other end is the ideology which maintains a nation and its culture, and to which the individual citizen is expected to give her or his loyalty. Ethnicity shares with both of them a sort of loyalty to one's own group which is wider than kinship but less wide than nationalism. We may call ethnicity an *extended* kinship and a *diluted* nationalism, according to Haugen (Haugen MS 1975, cf. Olsen 1982, 4, 37).

Later research with the problematical field of ethnicity includes a social-pedagogical work from Sweden by Anders Lange and Charles Westin, which sums up theoretical work in several disciplines and sketches a general definition of ethnicity. According to them, ethnicity has to do with membership in a group, or with being the offspring of such a group. Group is here a very wide and general concept. The members share the same culture and identity themselves or are identified by others as belonging to this group. A main point is that membership is not voluntary. The involuntary aspect is that one does not choose oneself the cultural group which gives one as a child the first basic care and training as a member of society. Connections between the members are associated with ethnic affinity. These relationships are characterized by sympathy, solidarity and loyalty. Such feelings are the basis for what is experienced and described as being special for the group – as seen by the group itself. All groups base their feelings of distinctiveness in a similar way. Ethnic identity is the result of one's own picture of oneself *and* the picture that others have of the group in question. This interaction between "us" and "them" or in other words between the in-group and the out-group is an on-going process. Thus ethnic groups are not primarily biological groups, though members often marry each other and reproduce themselves. Ethnic groups are cultural groups. Language is not for example inherited through the genes, but normally from one of the parents if there are two languages or more in question. The solidarity or social cohesion, the loyalty and

sympathy among group members are often expressed in material cultural forms, which can be called ethnic symbols and ethnic markers (Lange & Westin 1981; cf. Olsen 1985a, 9-12).

**A schoolbook reflecting ethnic diversity**

The illustrations in Figures 9-11 are from a schoolbook. They reflect how ethnicity is part of everyday life and how it is consciously expressed in the enculturation and socialization of children which also take place in school. The title of the book translates as "People furthest north." The first part deals with the Stone Age in Finnmark (c. 9000 B.C. – c. A.D.). The second part is called "Samiland" and deals both with the period known as the Sami Iron Age (c. A.D. – C. 1500) and the time up until today's society. Geographically, it focuses on Nesseby and the Varanger-fjord region. The book is meant for children aged 10-12. It was written in 1983. It is available to all schools in Finnmark from the county school authority and is meant to serve as a regional supplement to the national school books in history and geography.

This book is written in Norwegian by a teacher in a Sami local authority district. Nesseby commune is one of five in Finnmark where it has been proposed to make Samish the main official language. A sixth commune (Kåfjord) lies in Troms county. The six communes are as follows (with population in January 1983 in brackets): Nesseby (1061), Tana (3337), Karasjok (2685), Porsanger (4553), Kautokeino (2908) and Kåfjord (3043).

A page towards the end of the book takes up two main themes which have featured in discussions about ethnicity in general. One is "the melting together of folk groups" and the other concerns "ignorance and discrimination." The two themes are illustrated with pictures in cartoon style, which constitute an independent source of information in themselves. The text to the drawing of a puzzled fellow (Figure 9) translates as follows (Gustavsen 1983, 63):

> "Study this drawing for a while. Many cultures have met up here. Customs and ways of life from many groups of people have mixed with one another. People with very different background have become related to each other. If we take an ordinary family from


**Figure 9.** Ethnic markers.
Illustration from Gustavsen 1983, 63.


**Figure 10.** In-groups and out-groups I.
Picture texts:
"The Sami Troll-figure STALLO probably goes back to Nordic Vikings who plundered the Samis."
The Man's Comment: "Stallo is a giant and goes into iron armour. He eats Sami children!!!"
Illustration from Gustavsen 1983, 63.


Det gamle norske ordet „seidemann" (en som kan trolldomskunst), kommer muligens av det samiske : siei'di

**Figure 11.** In-groups and out-groups II.
Picture text:
"The old Norwegian word 'seidemann' (one who knows the art of magic) is probably from Samish siei'di."
The persons' comments:
Left: "The Samis live in caves under the ground."
Right: "The Samis can make stormy weather. They are magicians."
Illustration from Gustavsen 1983, 63.

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> Varanger, you will see that the family has relations in many directions. It is impossible to say that one is only Norwegian or only of Finnish descent or only Sami. One cannot talk either about a pure race. There are no pure Swedes nor pure peoples at all."

The final paragraph on the same page deals with what I call ethnonyms, that is names of ethnic groups:

> "Through time it has been common to name people by one of the words you can see up on the left. Some words were intended to

hurt while some words have a nice meaning. Try yourself. What do you think in connection with the different words? If some are nice, why is this so? If some are not so nice – why? Very often the lack of knowledge is the reason for the way we think of other people. This has led to very many misunderstandings through time. People knew too little about each other and so they made up the rest themselves. One group which has been unfairly treated is the Sami people."

It can be noticed that the Vikings in the illustration (Figure 11) are using the in-group name "*samene*" and not "*finnene*" or "*lappene*" when they are speaking with each other. From a Sami point of view, this is a logical solution. It underlines the Sami perspective on the historical presentation of a multi-ethnic society.

Ethnonyms are cultural elements which have an impact on people's behaviour in social interaction. They are criteria of ethnic self-identity. They are cues, markers or signs. They can be divided into in-group names and out-group names, i.e. according to whether an ethnic group is labelled by the name they use among themselves, or whether it is a name used by others to label the group in question. As words, they can be termed verbal markers to distinguish them from other markers such as material (or physical) markers. The latter include clothing, buildings or other cultural elements which have a form or function which is or is considered to be typical of a social group, in our context an ethnic group (Olsen 1983a, 1985a, 1985b).

**Language and speech style**

Ethnic groups are often linguistic groups and ethnic minorities are often linguistic minorities. However, an ethnic minority may use the language of the ethnic majority. Nonetheless, they frequently develop a way of talking or expressing themselves verbally through what linguists call *ethnic speech style*. This may find its expression in pronunciation, idioms and phrases, syntax etc. (Giles *et al.* 1977,327). In the same way as a dialect has characteristics which are cues to the district of origin of the speaker, an ethnic speech style has characteristics which are cues to the group in question (Olsen 1982, 9-10; 1985a). Although for instance Samis form a linguistic group, there are many who identify themselves as Samis although they only speak

the majority language (Norwegian in Norway, Finnish in Finland, Swedish in Sweden). To my knowledge, ethnic speech styles have not yet been studied in Norway.

In multi-ethnic societies, mixed languages can develop, for example Pidgin English, which is spoken in former British colonies in East Asia and the Pacific. The nearest parallel in northern Fennoscandia was "*russenorsk*", a mixture of Russian and Norwegian. It was also called "Kakspreck" and the "on-language" (since the Norwegian preposition "*på*" meaning "on", was used so much). The users themselves had their in-group name: they were talking "*moja-på-tvoja*" (moya-paw-tvoya . mine-on-yours) (Broch 1927, 92). It was a trading language. A Norwegian would base his speech on Norwegian and a Russian similarly his on Russian, each of them interlacing it with as many "foreign" words as he was able to. There were also words of Dutch, Low German, English, Swedish, Samish and Finnish origin. The grammar was simple. Commercial concepts tended to be Russian. Body-language was an essential addition. There might have been an earlier Russian-Samish trading language before Russian-Norwegian took over. *Russenorsk* disappeared when the trade with Russians ended with the Russian Revolution.

**Objects as ethnic markers and symbols**

Although languages, objects and ways of organizing work or celebrating events may become ethnic markers or even symbols for a group, this does not mean that these phenomena are not found in other groups. However, the significance of a cultural trait may be emphasized as a common value for a particular group in order to create solidarity and to stress that it is different from other groups. In general, the minimization of differences may entail confusion between social categories, while the accentuation of differences may promote collectively shared aims for the survival of cultural distinctiveness.

The *sauna*, or steambath, is an ethnic symbol for the Finnish, even though it is also used locally among Norwegians and Samis. The special Finnish aspect is oftern underlined through bathing rituals and extra equipment. The Finns use a sort of whisk, a bunch of fresh twigs with leaves on, to beat themselves with in the bath. It is part of traditional knowledge in Finnish villages as to when is the right time to make the

whisks and how to preserve and store them. In the Norwegian villages, people have not bothered with the whisks. The Finns generally follow a sequence in which the men go first into the sauna, when it is hottest, and the women and small children come afterwards, while the men have coffee and chat. If there are people present without affinity to the Finnish, they may be "tested". How much heat do they tolerate before they have to run out of the sauna? Even within the Finnish group, there may be heat competitions. Non-Finns tend to call these competitive aspects "silly" or "foolish" (Olsen 1980).

Another example of an ethnic symbol is the Sami dress. It functions as an ethnic marker for its wearers, since others, both Samis and non-Samis, will recognize them as Sami people when they see them. The dress also functions as an ethnic symbol in the larger Norwegian society, for instance in political negotiations or other official occasions when it is desired to emphasize Sami identity. Many people still wear Sami dress daily for practical reasons as self-evident everyday clothing (Skavhaug 1975).

In this context it is tempting to quote the first collector of Gaelic folk tales, John Francis Campbell, who wrote about Highland dress in 1862:

> "It is commonly worn by boys in the Highlands till they grow up to be striplings. It is hardly ever now worn by labourers, boatmen, or farmers. It is the dress of individuals of all classes – gamekeepers, deerstalkers, peers, pipers. It is worn by Highland regiments, and occasionally by all classes of the community as a gala dress, when they attend Highland demonstrations, or go to court; but it can no longer be called the common dress of the country, though there is not a Highlander it, or out of it, whose heart does not "warm to the tartan" (Campbell 1862, 347-348).

In most Sami negotiations with the majorities in Fennoscandia, the Sami dress is a dominating trait as it also is in Sami conferences on the national or multi-national levels. However, non-Samis have also used Sami clothes. Part of the household economy has been based on skin products made by women, for example fur shoes (*skaller* in Norwegian), which were sold at the big winter markets. Fur gloves, fur coats and small bags were Sami products bought from the reindeer

herders by non-Samis as well as Coast Samis. Summer shoes (called *komager* in Norwegian) were used by Norwegians and Finns as well as Samis. The Finns traditionally used light boots of a similar form, but with hard soles. Nowadays, Samis tend to use Finnish-type boots (*pieksut*), which are not tightened around the ankles with woven ribbons, but have ordinary bootlegs. A long fur coat (*pesk* in Norwegian) was used by non-Samis when working, for instance when sitting on a sledge transporting timber in the forest or undertaking other types of transport over long distances on open sledges. Going to church would be an official occasion when the Samis would wear their best *pesk*. When the Finns or Norwegians wanted to express their collective identity, they did not wear *pesk* to church but coats of cloth with or without fur collars in a Scandinavian or European style, influenced by the forms and fashions of the upper or urban classes rather than those of the peasant or rural style.

When doing historical research on ethnic groups, we have to be aware of these non-verbal signs. They are cues to past ways of living, to resource use within groups and to contacts between groups. They may serve as markers identifying ethnic groups for the researcher who knows the material cultural traits well. They may also be ethnic symbols demonstrating distinctiveness and independence, or even opposition. The markers need to be seen in a greater context.

**Reflections on ethnicity research in the humanities**

The researcher in the humanities is studying things and events as tracks of human activity in a broad sense. The researcher takes for granted that actions and traces of actions have meaning and can be interpreted, i.e. signs, texts, inscriptions, craft products, tools, art, literature, music, buildings, the human impact on the landscape etc. All cultural elements constitute such human tracks or traces. Items in museums are cultural elements. Words and names are cultural elements. Ethnonyms are cultural elements along with other ethnic markers.

Humanistic research has to do with contexts and structures which make human activities and traces of such activities understandable, meaningful, even "normal" and "logical" or "natural". I have attempted to link pieces together in meaningful contexts – local and

central, present and past – in this presentation of a remote and for many an unknown corner of the world. More than thirty years ago Sigurd Erixon said that folk-life research or Nordic ethnology should be "a comparative culture research on a regional basis, with a sociological and historical orientation and with certain psychological aspects" (Erixon 1950, 15). I have tried to approach the study of ethnicity and multi-ethnic society in this way.

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