

# **Sami Higher Education and Research: Toward Building a Vision for the Future**

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## Introduction

In the past few decades, the presence of indigenous people in academia and the emergence of their scholarship have presented new questions and radical challenges for conventional academic scholarship and practice. Indigenous academics have contested the ways in which indigenous peoples and their cultures and societies have been studied in the past and constructed as an object of knowledge to serve colonial interests and needs. Indigenous peoples' scholarship unsettles dominant assumptions and modes of knowledge that have been assumed to be "natural" or "proper" in mainstream academic and intellectual conventions. What is distinctive about indigenous scholarship, however, is that it not only criticizes epistemological assumptions rooted in modernity, it also presents a radically different way of perceiving knowledge and also more generally, the world and our position and relationships in it. New research methods and academic practices by indigenous scholars stem from and are grounded in specific cultural, social and epistemic traditions and values that better reflect the needs and concerns of indigenous communities.<sup>1</sup>

In this chapter I consider issues of Indigenous higher education and research in the context of contemporary Sami society and scholarship. The approach in this chapter is comparative; drawing parallels from and contrasting the current situation of Sami Studies and research to recent processes and endeavors of other indigenous peoples. As a Sami scholar who has lived and studied the past several years in Canada and therefore, viewed and analyzed Sami society from a distance, my perspective has its advantages but also limitations.<sup>2</sup> The advantages include the comparative perspective that allows conspicuous recognition of some general trends in Sami society. The limitations are related to my lack of daily contact with Sami research and higher education, although my analysis also draws upon my observations of and conversations with several Sami scholars during my visits in Sápmi while I was living abroad. A particular focus is on establishment of a new program called the

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<sup>1</sup> This is of course true with dominant paradigms as well; they have attempted to obscure their rootedness in specific geographic, societal and cultural contexts and conventions that are also gendered and class-constructed.

Studies in Sami Culture at the Giellagas Institute at the University of Oulu, Finland, the leading program in Sami Studies in Finland and the Sami Studies program.<sup>3</sup> First, however, I will outline the main objectives of Indigenous higher education in Turtle Island/North America and Aotearoa/New Zealand and then I will address the preceding discussion on Sami higher education and research.

### Indigenous Higher Education: Rebuilding and Restoring Our Communities

For many indigenous peoples, higher education is considered a path to self-sufficient societies that both empower and are empowered by its own people (e.g., Barnhardt 1991). It is not surprising, then, that one of the statements most frequently heard among indigenous students and scholars is that we are not only educating ourselves and doing research for our own careers or personal advancement, but rather, for our entire communities; that is, the well-being and future of our people. As Linda Smith maintains, the work of an indigenous scholar is never limited solely to the academic world (Smith 1992). Verna Kirkness and Ray Barnhardt also argue that the aspirations of many indigenous students are often connected “with much broader collective/tribal considerations, such as exercising self-government, or bringing First Nations perspectives to bear in professional and policy-making arenas” (Kirkness and Barnhardt 1991: 5; see also Medicine and with Sue-Ellen Jacobs 2001; Garrod and Larimore 1997).

Moreover, after centuries of being studied, measured, categorized and represented to serve various colonial interests and purposes, many indigenous peoples now require that research dealing with indigenous issues has to emanate from the needs and concerns of indigenous communities, rather than those of an individual researcher or the dominant society. A central principle of indigenous philosophies, that of ‘giving back,’ forms the backbone of current research conducted by many indigenous scholars and students. It expresses a strong commitment and desire to ensure that academic knowledge, practices and research are no longer used as tools of colonization and ways of exploiting indigenous peoples by taking their

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<sup>2</sup> This chapter was written while I was working at McMaster University, Hamilton, Canada.

<sup>3</sup> Previously, the Program of Sami Language and Culture at the University of Oulu, the Giellagas Institute was established in 2001. The mandate of the Institute reads as follows: The Giellagas Institute “was given the national responsibility in the Saami language and culture. This means that the institute must give and promote

knowledge without ever giving anything back in return. Instead, indigenous research ethics expect academics to ‘give back,’ to conduct research that has a positive outcome and that has relevance for indigenous peoples themselves (e.g., Deloria 1992; Smith 1999; Battiste 2000; 2001).

Since the 1960s, critical discourses of various disciplines have seriously undermined the modernist, positivist fallacies of neutrality that derive from specific values and perceptions of the world and serve certain interests in society. It is not possible to include here a detailed discussion on the various theories and arguments which have undermined and dismantled the superiority of western and Eurocentric intellectual and epistemological canons, conventions, and legacies that were once declared universal and neutral. Only some generalizing outlines are possible. Emerging under the rubric of poststructuralism in the late 1960s—concurrent with and related to the student uprisings in both Europe and North America—the new wave of criticism signified the beginning of a crucial paradigm shift in western discourse. This led to a period of profound transition in the human and social sciences of the 1980s (see e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fisher 1986). Numerous trends in postcolonial and feminist theories and analyses, including various considerations of race and ethnicity have greatly contributed to questioning the validity of colonial, patriarchal, and capitalist ‘Master Narratives’ that have long excluded, marginalized, and oppressed vast sections of the world. Many of these theories and critiques have offered countless invaluable insights and the opening of new spaces for understanding that have also assisted indigenous issues in gaining entrance to the academic arena.

Moreover, various theories and practices in the field of critical, anti-racist pedagogy and critical race theory have, in particular, contributed to the development of indigenous scholarship, a great portion of which focuses on reclaiming and creating space for indigenous people as well as further elaborating indigenous pedagogies and educational practices. These paradigms and discourses that are critical of conventional Eurocentric epistemic and methodological conventions and canons, however, have not gained much attention in Sami

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teaching at the MA and Ph.D. levels and carry out the highest research in these fields. The institute receives its funding directly from the Ministry of Education” (<<http://www oulu.fi/giellagas/englindex.htm>>).

scholarship and higher education at large.<sup>4</sup> Why does it seem that quite a few Sami scholars, junior and senior, are more skeptical of indigenous research paradigms and epistemologies than those of the West?<sup>5</sup> Could it reflect the level of internalization of the colonial understanding and perspectives of knowledge? There are no immediate answers to these questions but perhaps if there is an interest in finding them, this would make an important research topic on epistemological positions of Sami discourse. It is clear that there is a visible lack of recognition that the production of knowledge is always political and situated in time and place. The almost impermeable faith in ‘objectivity’ is so conspicuous and ever-present that it can be overwhelming for those who have any awareness of the degree of criticism the assumption of ‘neutral, objective and value-free research’ has garnered in the past three decades. As Sandra Harding and Kathryn Norberg note, value-free research is not only an unachievable ideal but it is also an undesirable one (Harding and Norberg 2005: 2010). Likewise, there is a common desire and demand to present ‘all sides,’ which is a comment and criticism often heard in Sami research contexts; but one must also ask the necessary question of ‘why’? Has mainstream research cared about this kind of objectivity? As Robin May Schott argues: “objectivity is not jeopardized but strengthened by the contextualization of the practices of knowledge and its norms of justification” (Schott 2003: 56).

### Previous Considerations on Sami Research and Higher Education

Some of the concerns raised almost thirty years ago by Sami researchers such as Alf-Isak Keskitalo (1976) continue to be valid and timely today (for non-Sami engagements in challenges posed by Keskitalo, see Larson 1988; Müller-Wille 1991). Keskitalo addresses the various asymmetries (including linguistic, power, financial) in what he calls “inter-ethnic” research, that is, Nordic (non-Sami) “ethno-scientists” (ethnographers and anthropologists in

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<sup>4</sup> This does not imply that there are no Sami scholars who are engaging with critical theory in their work, especially literary scholars such as Gaski (2000), Lehtola (1997), Hirvonen (1999) and myself (Kuokkanen 1996; 1997; 2001; 2007a; 2007b) have employed critical theory approaches, mainly postcolonial and feminist theories.

<sup>5</sup> Epistemology is commonly defined as a study of knowledge or (philosophical) theories, definitions and identifications of knowledge. Further, it is often used to denote a system of knowledge or a way of knowing which may or may not include value systems, ontologies and understanding of the universe – none of which can really be separated from knowing (Fay and Tiblier 1967). There is a difference, for instance, between the ways in which western philosophical discourses and indigenous discourses employ the concept of epistemology. In the former, epistemology is usually applied to denote a (theoretical) study of knowledge, while in the latter, the application is much wider; it is commonly used as a synonym for system of knowledge, way of thinking, worldview, traditional philosophy etc.

particular) conducting research in Sami communities. He is also critical of the tendency of these scholars to often focus on archaic aspects of Sami society “and thus underestimate its complexity and differentiation” (Keskitalo 1994: 12). In his postscript to the 1994 printing of his article, he notes: “Whether small ethnic minority groups can, in fact, develop a system of scientific institutionalization, at least to some degree, remains to be seen” (Keskitalo 1994: 31). This is a striking remark for two reasons. First, it is surprising that Keskitalo should refer to the Sami as a “small ethnic minority group” rather than an indigenous people (on the topic, see, e.g., Henriksen 1999; Sami Council 2002). Second, the idea of developing “a system of scientific institutionalization” for Sami research (Keskitalo does not elaborate on this) gives the impression of a desire to model Sami research after mainstream structures and notions of knowledge and knowledge production. Considering how the problems of “scientific institutionalization” of indigenous systems of knowledge have been discussed by numerous indigenous scholars in the past three decades, it is clearly an issue that needs to be addressed by contemporary Sami scholarship as well.

The debate on the roles and objectives of Sami research and higher education remains fairly limited. Thus far, the focus has mainly been on definitions of Sami research and the relations of Sami scholars to their own society as well as to that of dominant, mainstream societies. In the following, I consider some of the contributions by Sami scholars. Siv Kvernmo and Vigdis Stordahl discuss what it means to be a Sami academic in their aptly titled article “From Sami to an Academic = From Participant to an Observer?” (Kvernmo and Stordahl 1991). The sentiments considered by Kvernmo and Stordahl, that Sami academics are often viewed as suspect in their society and even in the Sami movement, are widely shared by other indigenous academics worldwide (see, e.g., Mihesuah 1998; Smith 1999) and continue to be timely today. According to their article, Sami academics can and must simultaneously be both participants and observers, especially in the sense of being able to critically examine cultural assumptions one takes for granted. In discussing their own field, Sami health services, they emphasize the role of culture but also point out cultural blind spots of Sami people themselves, not least of which is due to heterogeneity within the Sami society.

Harald Gaski (1991) considers the expectations placed on academics as “the conscience of society” and the failures of Sami scholars to fulfill these roles. In his view, one of the main reasons for Sami academics’ lack of participation in public debates in Sami

society is their own involvement in advocacy, politics, and shaping policies. If they were to critically engage in debates on current issues, they would be, in many cases, “barking at themselves” (Gaski 1991). Gaski introduces Bourdieu’s adaptation of the concept of doxa—“the unsaid in the field of cultural possibilities, making it seem as if there are not multiple, but only a single possibility” (Bourdieu 1977: 164)—and urges Sami academics to reconsider their positions in relation to it: Who are the defenders of the ‘doxa’ and who are ruled by it (without realizing it themselves) in Sami society?<sup>6</sup>

Stordahl (1996) has also analyzed the tensions between Sami society and anthropologists, particularly concerning the production of knowledge, the translation of cultures and the purpose of Sami studies. She maintains that the tensions and the debates that follow are a good example of the challenges that the Fourth World brings to the academy and that they need to be taken into account in order to be able to move forward in ways that are also productive for Sami society and its aspirations (Stordahl 1996). Further, Stordahl addresses the role of education as a central means to encounter the contemporary challenges of Sami society, such as the crisis in the reindeer herding industry in Northern Norway. She suggests: “education is the key to the ‘good life,’ be it in the Norwegian or the Sami society” (Stordahl 1997: 152). Education provides economic security, social status, and for the Sami in particular, it is a way of reclaiming their history, culture, and language.

However, it seems problematic that, for instance, the “problem of overgrazing” is not examined in a more critical light in her article. Questions such as what the factors are that have created this ‘problem’ are not raised and the fact that whatever the reasons are (development projects, failed policies, the interference of the government, the non-recognition of Sami land title, the modernization of reindeer herding, etc.), by establishing and discussing the issue in terms of it being a ‘problem’ not only dispossesses younger Sami people of their traditional livelihoods (and thus, severing their cultural ties) but also fails to acknowledge that the trend encouraging them to turn away from their livelihoods violates the very rights of the

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<sup>6</sup> In his otherwise illuminating article, Gaski, however, offers a reductionist interpretation of postmodernism’s central tenets. Even if done in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, I find his remarks problematic considering how little Sami scholarly circles have engaged with (and assumedly, knows about) postmodern criticism. According to Pauline Rosenau, “there are various interpretations and manifestations of what is meant by ‘postmodernism’ but what is relevant here is the way the discourse has rejected universalist claims of objective truth and knowledge and regarded them more as products of Western, ethnocentric ideologies” (Rosenau 1992: 78). According to

Sami as recognized by the Constitution of Norway to their culture, in which reindeer herding is a central part (both economically and culturally).

Also related to the question of reindeer herding, the article does not critically analyze the gender question raised briefly at the end of the article. Stordahl notes how the large majority of the students at the Sami high school in Kárásjohka and teacher trainees at the Sami University College in Guovdageaidnu are women. She suggests that “modernization” in Sami society has resulted in Sami girls having greater confidence to acquire competence and skills outside the traditional livelihoods (Stordahl 1997). What is not mentioned, again, is the way in which the processes of modernization, such as the restructuring of Sami livelihoods, have made it difficult, if not impossible, for Sami women to earn their living in traditional livelihoods (Joks 2001; Sárá 2003; Vuolab 1994). As a result, seeking higher education remains the only viable option for many Sami women.

Vuokko Hirvonen has addressed the invisibility of Sami women, especially in the earlier research on Sami people. Until very recently, ethnographers have limited their representations of Sami culture to the activities of men, which have been generalized to apply to all Sami people.<sup>7</sup> Hirvonen calls for advancing Sami women’s studies with goals “to gather, visualize and mediate knowledge about Sami women’s lives, history and visions and try to influence the development of the Sami region” (Hirvonen 1996: 10). What is needed in this regard is new approaches and perspectives in understanding and addressing power relations in society as they related to the multiple realities of women (Kuokkanen 2007a).

Jan Henry Keskitalo is one of the few Sami academics thus far to consider Sami higher education and its challenges. He points out how mainstream educational programs and vocational training do not prepare students for working in Sami society, resulting in a situation where the education of Sami students does not necessarily increase the number of Sami professionals in Sami society but often only benefits individual careers. Keskitalo also considers some of the objectives and future goals of Sami education established by some Sami institutions (Keskitalo 1997). The Sami Parliament in Norway, for example, maintains that “post-secondary education and research on Sami matters are central instruments in the

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North American Native scholars Yvonne Dion-Buffalo and John Mohawk, postmodernism “should be seen as a consequence of the halt of five hundred years of European expansion” (Dion-Buffalo and Mohawk 1992: 17)

<sup>7</sup> This, of course, has been a common concern for most “othered” cultures studied by ethnographers and anthropologists. Trinh T. Minh-ha calls this “the scientific conversation of man with man” (Trinh 1989).

maintenance and improvement of a Sami society based on Sami premises” (cited in Keskitalo 1997: 161). One of the places where this is carried out the furthest is the Sami University College that was established in 1989 to train Sami teachers. It has since broadened its focus to also facilitate Sami capacity building in the fields of journalism, indigenous knowledge, multiculturalism, economic development, traditional Sami crafts, indigenous art history, and other fields.

In Keskitalo’s view, some of the primary needs of Sami higher education and research include the establishment of a Sami research policy-making body to guarantee that the Sami themselves have a central role in defining and conducting Sami research. Second, Sami research must be based on a more formal collaboration between various Sami institutions as well as indigenous research institutions elsewhere. In this way, he argues, it is possible to ensure that research serves the needs of the Sami people.

#### Cultural Studies or Indigenous Scholarship?

In the fall of 2004, the Giellagas Institute at the University of Oulu launched Studies on Sami Culture as a new major in addition to the existing curriculum that focuses on linguistics.<sup>8</sup> Unlike many other Indigenous Studies programs worldwide, however, the proposed Sami culture curriculum did not emphasize the needs of contemporary Sami society or Sami community advancement by means of research and higher education. Instead, the mission statement is limited to increasing knowledge and understanding about Sami culture and contemporary realities at large.<sup>9</sup>

If the proposed curriculum places an emphasis on training individuals for “intercultural communication,” one may ask whether we are allowing the concerns and agendas deriving from the interests of dominant societies to dictate and govern our intentions

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<sup>8</sup> The mandate for the Sami Language Program reads as follows: “It is our aim to educate competent professionals for various needs of Saami society. This is done by offering the students many-sided teaching based on competent research. The students will be introduced to do research in many interesting fields of linguistics. Our institute is renowned especially in educating the students to be concerned for the purity of the Saami language” (<http://www oulu fi/giellagas/language.htm>, Accessed in 25 May 2005).

<sup>9</sup> The goal of the newly established Sami culture is to offer “teaching in Saami knowledge and culture, but in a wider northern and indigenous context. This is because the language and culture of the Saami is tightly connected to the history, society and legal conditions of the Nordic countries. It is our aim to offer many-sided general information about the Saami traditions and various sides of Saami society, and in doing this to add interest in these matters. On the other hand we try to equip the future teachers, civil servants, media workers and researchers with good practical facilities in cultural questions” (<http://www oulu fi/giellagas/culture.htm>).

and plans. One of the responses for appeals to learn from and model the new curriculum according to the examples of successful Indigenous Studies programs was that Sami Studies cannot rely too heavily on indigenous discourse and that instead, we need to ground ourselves in disciplines such as contemporary Cultural Studies.<sup>10</sup> Whether this reflects a lack of knowledge and understanding of indigenous scholarship and higher education, including the emphases, objectives, and long-term visions of Indigenous Studies programs in other countries or something else, we need to consider the idea of employing Cultural Studies as the foundation for studies in Sami culture more closely. In their introduction to *Native American Studies in Higher Education, Models for Collaboration between Universities and Indigenous Nations*, Duane Champagne and Jay Stauss argue for the increasing need to “distinguish Indigenous studies from race, ethnic, cultural and multicultural studies. None of the latter approaches fully appreciates or emphasizes Indigenous rights of self-government, land, and negotiated relations to state governments” (Champagne and Stauss 2002: 12).<sup>11</sup>

Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary field of study that draws upon sociology, literary theory and cultural anthropology to study cultural phenomena, particularly in industrial societies. Cultural Studies considers the way in which a phenomenon relates to matters of power, ideology, race, social class, and/or gender. In its non-anthropological tradition, it examines issues related to the politics of identity and difference but also to mass media and popular culture. Considering its focus and approaches, it is apparent that Cultural Studies neither promotes nor includes understandings of culture, history, and society that are grounded in perceptions of the world that are not necessarily compatible with the liberalism and individualism prevalent in western, mainstream societies.

Cultural Studies does not address the specific concerns of indigenous peoples that emerge from being encroached on by those very same western, industrial (and colonial) societies and their specific ideologies and interests. It does not have the analytical or conceptual tools to make sense of the specific contexts of indigenous peoples where they attempt to assert their rights, maintain their cultural integrity and status as distinct peoples and

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, the opposite seems to be the case with Native studies in North America: “Unable to bring academic knowledge to its proper unity, more and more students are supplementing the shortcoming of Western thought by placing it in the context of their own tribal traditions” (Deloria 1999> 152).

<sup>11</sup> See also Guerrero who discusses why multiculturalism is an inadequate approach to indigenous peoples and to the establishment of Indigenous Studies Programs (Guerrero 1996).

address the contemporary, cumulative effects of colonization. In addition, Cultural Studies tends to focus on culture and identity to the exclusion of economics and thus, overlooking contemporary forms of exploitation. As Gayatri Spivak contends, “‘a culturalism’ that disavows the economic in its global operations cannot get a grip on the concomitant production of barbarism” (Spivak 1987: 168).

This does not mean that Cultural Studies, or many other analytical/theoretical approaches, for that matter, could not play an important role in bringing much needed critical and self-reflective analysis to previous ethnographic approaches of studying cultures and supplementing and fostering indigenous studies discourses and scholarship. As Yvonne Dion-Buffalo and John C. Mohawk contend, “Cultural studies might be seen as the discourse about what must be conceived or constructed to replace and accelerate the demystification of the dominant ideologies” (Dion-Buffalo and Mohawk 1992: 17).<sup>12</sup> Further, whereas “identity politics can distract from structural problems and resource constraints” (Brysk 2000, 287), they do not have to always be mutually exclusive (see Eschle 2005). But in order to be productive, an analysis must go beyond merely creating spaces to express ourselves; it also needs to pay attention to both internal and external hierarchies and various forms of domination and privilege (Bannerji 1991; Razack 1998).

However, the foundation of any Sami studies program must be rooted in and reflect the goals, interests, premises and institutions of Sami communities. Like other Indigenous Studies Programs, there is no need for Sami Studies Programs to try to fit into the intellectual specializations and categories of mainstream academia and scholarship. Champagne and Stauss suggest:

Applying the Western intellectual experience and categories of discourse and analysis to the study of Indigenous Nations puts the prospective scholars or Indian life at an initial disadvantage. ... The focus of Native American studies must move out of efforts to mimic mainstream disciplines and find its own organization and purpose through analysis, research, policymaking, and participation in Indian communities. Just as Western civilization is the focus and center of most mainstream academic work, American Indian communities, traditions, and values must be the focus of Native American/Indian studies and the center of its scholarship, teaching, and community outreach. (Champagne and Stauss 2002: 8)

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<sup>12</sup> The writers note, however, that Cultural Studies is not alone in this process of demystification but there are other important discourses such as critical theory (Dion-Buffalo and Mohawk 1992: 21). See also a discussion of the convergence of postmodern thought and indigenous worldviews by Wilmer (Wilmer 1996).

In the academy, indigenous people and indigenous scholarship are confined within limiting, often oppressive structures and dominant western or Eurocentric canons, standards and notions of knowledge and research which serve certain values and interests and marginalize and exclude others (Hampton 2000). Many indigenous scholars also argue that the intellectual and epistemological basis of the academy is profoundly saturated by colonial, patriarchal and racist assumptions and practices which define and characterize the conditions of academic and intellectual endeavours (Battiste 1986; Graveline 1995; 2002; Green 2002; Monture-OKanee 1995; Irwin 1988; LaRocque 1996a).

Further, indigenous scholars criticize the Eurocentric bias which results in questioning and undervaluing the validity of indigenous research by other departments and colleagues. Research by indigenous scholars is often deemed irrelevant or “revisionist” because, in many cases, it either falls outside “mainstream” research or focuses on personal experiences as a member of a “minority group” (Stein 1994; Smith 1992; Black-Connor Cleary 2002; Mihesuah 1996). Indigenous research conducted on their own communities and issues may also be assumed to be subjective and biased and consequently dismissed as self-serving (Deloria 1987; Dorris 1987; LaRocque 1996b). The great irony, of course, is that it does not occur to us to similarly criticize mainstream academics who conduct research on their own cultures—including Cultural Studies’ focus on industrial societies.

These and other examples of systemic and institutional discrimination demonstrate the continued colonial mentality present in academic institutions. As first pointed out by Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, colonialism does not only signify the occupation of territories but also a certain type of relationship between the colonizer and the colonized in which the latter is considered inherently inferior (variously called ‘uncivilized,’ ‘savage,’ or ‘primitive’). Although the categorical dichotomy between the colonizer and the colonized has been challenged, the fact nevertheless is that the legacy of that relationship remains.

Largely focused on linguistics<sup>13</sup> and descriptive considerations of history, culture and society (aspects that could be considered ‘non-threatening’ from the perspective of

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<sup>13</sup> Here one could point out the critique of Western language sciences that at least used to be the foundation and starting point of studies in Sami language in Sami Studies at the University of Oulu from the early to mid- 1990s. Born out of the nominalist philosophical tradition, general linguistics tends to treat language as an arbitrary system of signs with little or no relation to the “real world.” As Jeffrey Wollock notes, such a view is a threat to

mainstream societies?), Sami scholarship, by and large, tends to lack a critical analysis of the more subtle forms of colonization such as what Spivak calls ‘epistemic violence’; the imposition and internalization of a foreign set of codes and values (e.g., Spivak 1990). This type of subtle violence has gone mostly unnoticed in contemporary Sami society and also in Sami research, which further contributes to its unconscious reproduction. However, in order to put an end to various forms of reproduction of epistemic violence or internalized colonialism, it is necessary to become more aware of the subtle forms of colonization which have become internalized during the hundreds of years of colonization and which today affect much of our basic (and often unconscious) assumptions and thinking. Lacking a critique of discursive practices of colonialism in particular, the dominant Sami discourse has thus far not paid adequate attention to the gradual displacement and erasure of the Sami episteme—the deeper structures of Sami values, worldviews, and their underlying assumptions and principles.<sup>14</sup>

Sami scholars need to critically engage in examining the cumulative effects of colonial processes on us and in our communities in order to have a shared, common vision for our future society. We need to ‘study up’—research that examines “the powerful, their institutions, policies, and practices instead of focusing only on those whom the powerful govern” (Harding and Norberg 2005: 2011). We also need ‘socially engaged research’—“research that holds itself ethically and politically accountable for its social consequences” (Harding and Norberg 2005: 2010) and research that advances social transformation and assists us in finding new ways and models of being in relation to existing racist, sexist, neoliberal, neocolonial constructions of privilege. We need to elaborate methodologies and modes of research based on and drawing upon Sami cultural, social and intellectual conventions and not merely follow Western practices. Sami scholarship needs to resist the definitions of the world that derive from western scholarly tradition and instead, name it according to Sami systems of thought as well as integrate cultural structures which emphasize the ‘collective’ rather than the ‘individual’ (Smith 2000a).

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biodiversity because it does not take into account that “language is the main guide to action” (Wollock 2001: 255).

<sup>14</sup> Vine Deloria, Jr. points out: “No one is suggesting that Indians ‘revert’ to the old days or old ways. Rather we must be able to understand what those old days and ways really were and model our present actions and beliefs

This does not imply a wholesale rejection of all ‘outside’ theories, thinking and research methodologies. Instead, it implies an active engagement and negotiation between mainstream and indigenous intellectual traditions and heedful application and adoption of mainstream academic knowledge and methodologies into our thinking and academic practices. Indigenous methodologies are not a prescription to essentialism, but rather a way of grounding our research on who we are (Weber-Pillwax 2001).<sup>15</sup> This implies the adoption of what is commonly referred to as an indigenous perspective in research. Simply put, an indigenous perspective is an internal perspective, a perspective that places indigenous peoples (in this case, the Sami) and their research questions, methodologies, priorities and protocols at the center of the inquiry. It is an attempt to consider, interpret and understand processes and phenomena from a perspective of indigenous people and in this way validate and make indigenous knowledge and values more visible.

Gaining awareness of the subtle forms of assimilation also requires putting an end to what Graham Smith calls ‘the politics of distraction’<sup>16</sup> imposed by liberal ideologies of mainstream societies or the various demands of being native informants (Spivak 1999; Razack 2001) and starting to prioritize our own societal needs and community development. The Sami academics who remain fearful of potential charges of discrimination if they focus on their own people and their own concerns need to be reminded that it is exactly what mainstream societies have always done—even at the expense of indigenous peoples and others.

Moreover, and contrary to what some have suggested,<sup>17</sup> we are not upsetting democracy if we become more proactive in advancing our own concerns and by attending to

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within that tradition” (Deloria 1992: 16). He particularly recognizes the responsibility of scholars in this process of renegotiation.

<sup>15</sup> It is clear that indigenous epistemologies, methodologies or theories do not imply what Gayatri Spivak calls the “impossible ahistorical quest for purist positions” but instead, it is a process of constant negotiation with the structures of cultural imperialism (Spivak 1990: 150). Recognizing the tension and need for negotiation in the intersection of western and indigenous ‘domains,’ Australian Aboriginal scholar Martin Nakata calls this space a ‘cultural interface’ and acknowledging how the boundaries between the two domains are never clear-cut or definite (Nakata 2002).

<sup>16</sup> The “politics of distraction” refers to concerns of secondary significance to indigenous people stemming from the interests of the mainstream academy and society (Smith 2000b). Engaging in the politics of distraction implies that we allow issues that are of lesser importance and relevance to us to control our agendas. In that way, we get distracted from the larger picture of long-term objectives and more urgent and real concerns that would need our firsthand attention. Smith notes how, in recent years, Maori have transgressed the politics of distraction fostered by dominant white interests and “stopped feeling guilty about serving our own interests first” (Smith 2000b: 211).

<sup>17</sup> A suggestion that was recently posed to me by a Sami scholar from Norway.

needs that will be not addressed by others. Instead, we need to remain critical of liberal notions of democracy that “tend to reproduce the interests of dominant groups” (Smith 2000b: 212). As Jacques Derrida pointed out, western liberal democracies have been “secured through colonial exploitation and capitalist expansion in other parts of the world” (cited in Morton 2003: 29). ‘Democratic’ processes, therefore, do not necessarily recognize or support indigenous peoples’ issues and rights—not to mention how the concept has been corrupted in recent world politics.

Abandoning our participation in the politics of distraction implies centering our concerns in a way that attends to structural concerns rather than settling for mere surface, decorative or cosmetic changes, what Graham Smith calls the “bag of tricks” approach (Smith 2000a). Surface changes will not address the more foundational epistemic and ontological questions that are at issue with the production of knowledge, research, and higher education. Building critical consciousness in Sami scholarship also means asking ourselves some important questions: As Sami people, what is the future that we envision? Do we choose to accept and comply with the current status quo and its covert mechanisms of assimilation (such as cooptation into mainstream ideology, allowing Western modes of understanding to occupy our research, and not recognizing how ‘incorporation’ is a subtle means of assimilation)? Do we conform to liberal ideas and ideals of equality of individuals and ‘responsible citizenship’ at the cost of limiting our collective rights as the Sami people?<sup>18</sup> In short, the first step that is needed is to engage in a broad and open discussion of the needs, perspectives and visions of the Sami people and society.

One of the concepts in Sami discourse and research that requires reconsideration and scrutiny is ‘nation-building.’ Too often it is understood narrowly to refer only to those conventional political processes that we see in the politics and structures of the dominant (Nordic) societies. We tend to understand ‘nation’ and ‘nation-building’ only in mainstream, hegemonic political terms and thus not consider them as multifaceted, complex, social, economic, cultural, intellectual and legal processes. In the context of indigenous research and higher education, discussing ‘nation-building’ is not to submit to the interests and agendas of indigenous political organizations and leadership but rather, to engage in intellectual self-

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<sup>18</sup> See Cathryn McConaghy on how the notion of citizenship has been applied to “civilize” Aboriginals in Australia (McConaghy 2000).

determination (Warrior 1995; Forbes 1998). As Andrea Smith argues, we need to conceptualize alternative models of nation that are not based on domination and hegemonic nation-state models (Smith 2005).

### A Vision for Sami Scholarship: Initial Considerations

A shared, collective vision for the advancement of Sami society and epistemological foundation would not only guide Sami academics in their work and enhance the intellectual, theoretical and disciplinary diversity in Sami research, it would also encourage and enable educated Sami people to return to their communities to not only work as experts on language and culture, but also as educators, lawyers, counselors, engineers, architects, physicians, biologists, political scientists, economists, experts on environmental and policy issues, geographers, historians, administrators, business managers, among other professions.

Below, I will propose some thoughts that I consider timely and important when considering the future of Sami scholarship. They emerge from discussions with other Sami academics and students and observations of the accomplishments and aspirations of other indigenous people in places like Turtle Island/North America and Aotearoa/New Zealand. The ideas and suggestions that I present here are by no means a prescription for a fixed, single model. Rather than providing ready answers, my intention is to outline some issues that I consider central, to give some examples of concrete goals for further consideration and ultimately, to inspire others to envision the future of Sami scholarship and society. Obviously, a shared, collective vision and philosophy necessitates a comprehensive and far-reaching debate within Sami scholarship by all interested parties; academics, educators, students and others.

As far as I am concerned, the main objective of Sami higher education and research has to be creating conditions for a meaningful and appropriate Sami self-determination. This goal is advanced by an approach that critically looks to both the past and the future in order to assist us and our work in the present. The approach consists of the following aspects:

**Looking to the past.** (1) A critical understanding of doing research in Sami communities. We need to carefully examine the earlier research practices: what are they, how have they impacted the Sami people and our lives, what are their strengths and shortcomings, as well as how and what we can learn from them in our current scholarship? (2) An in-depth analysis of

colonial discourses and processes that continue to affect the Sami people, society and scholarship. Questions that require consideration include: How has a colonial mentality been internalized and what are its contemporary consequences? What are the subtle mechanisms of assimilation and integration that continue to play a role in Sami communities? This analysis is essential in the Sami aspirations to move forward—without an understanding of these discourses and mechanisms we will not be able to establish strategies that would counter the problems and assist our current endeavors. (3) A systematic process of reclaiming our worldviews, philosophies and values upon which Sami research principles and methodologies can be established. Once we have a solid foundation reflecting who we are, we can start supplementing it according to our respective needs, disciplines and interests while staying aware of the “colonizing” potential of theories that may distort our realities and epistemologies.

**Looking to the future.** (1) A strong commitment to conduct research and analysis on contemporary Sami realities and conditions. There is a need to recognize the leadership role of Sami academics in order to enable the changes that are imperative along the path of creating a self-sufficient, viable Sami society. (2) A determined and proactive stance to issues and concerns of contemporary Sami society which will remain unaddressed without our attention. With the privilege that formal higher education accords academics, Sami scholars must take initiative and espouse our collective responsibility toward contributing to the well-being of our people. We cannot look to the future as privatized academics but as scholars whose work is related and has relevance to our communities. We also must ensure that the knowledge we have and generate is shared with other members of Sami society who may not have access to it otherwise. (3) An active engagement with new fields of research, including questions related to theory and methodology. What, for example, is the role of Sami knowledge and values in politics, legal processes and health care and also, how can that role be strengthened in the future?

Besides the overall principles and vision for Sami scholarship, we also need concrete goals. Conversations with Sami researchers and educators at both the Sami College and Sami Institute as well as at Sami Studies programs at the Universities of Oulu and Tromsø demonstrate that there is a clear need and desire for a center of Sami higher learning and research located in the heart of the Sami region. The idea of a Sami University is not new—it

is a prospect that has been addressed time to time by Sami academic and political leaders at various meetings and conferences for decades.<sup>19</sup>

In February 2005, the Sami University College made the groundbreaking decision to gradually start developing the College into a University and called for the responsibility and input of the governments of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia to ensure the implementation of this initiative. Besides this pro-active first step, there are other factors that most likely will contribute to the realization of the long-term dream, such as moving the Sami University College and Sami Institute in the near future to Diehtosiida, a new building that will house also other Sami institutions in Guovdageaidnu.<sup>20</sup>

After the significant decision to begin the transformation of Sami higher education and research to a Sami University, it is crucial that we as Sami scholars and academics are able to put our personal preferences and disagreements aside and commit ourselves to working together to strengthen our intellectual self-determination and transformation of Sami society. Now is the time to be more concerned about our collective academic and intellectual development rather than the possible changes in our individual positions and academic security.

The Sami University has a central role, both as a part of Sami advancement and as a means to it. Rather than getting distracted by the challenges and potential obstacles, we have to engage in a constructive and creative dialogue about the underlying philosophy and foundation as well as actual structures, funding, staffing, questions concerning disciplines and faculties and other practical matters related to establishing an academic institution. There is a need to form a working group of dedicated individuals to draft a blueprint based on existing Sami institutions and resources. Several invaluable lessons could also be drawn, for example, from Vuokko Hirvonen's detailed evaluation of the Sami Curriculum for comprehensive schools in Norway which were first introduced in 1997 (Hirvonen 2003).

In her analysis which was based on interviews with Sami teachers, Hirvonen points out the difficulties of implementing the Sami Curriculum as experienced by teachers

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<sup>19</sup> For example, the Sami Conference that convenes every fourth year and represents many Sami organizations from all four countries where the Sami currently live has issued twice in the past few years (in 1989 and 2004) a statement on transforming the Sami College into a Sami University.

themselves in their everyday practice. The needs and challenges that the teachers referred to should form one of the starting points when considering the priorities of the Sami University. As Hirvonen notes, the Sami Curriculum is not just about switching from one plan to another, but about a much more profound societal and political transformation, particularly as it relates to multicultural encounters. In short, the future Sami University must not become “a mainstream university translated into Sami” as is currently the case with many so-called Sami schools (Hirvonen 2003). We cannot lose sight of today’s Sami students who are our future leaders and it is our collective responsibility to give them the necessary tools and understanding to foster the development of Sami society.<sup>21</sup>

In short, making the vision of the Sami University a reality requires educating a critical mass of indigenous intellectuals who have a consciousness about their heritage and responsibilities (cf. Smith 2003). To paraphrase Champagne and Stauss, we need to teach Sami students analytical skills, Nordic-Sami history and policy, and an appreciation and understanding of Sami self-governance models and culture to enable them to become critical, informed, and active participants in Sami community life as well as in Sami issues at the regional and national levels. Sami Studies programs must be in a good position to assist Sami communities with issues of law, policy, the environment, repatriation, recognition, state-Sami relations, and other concerns. The advantage of direct engagement with Sami communities is that the separation of academic and community life is broken down, and students and scholars learn firsthand about a Sami community and its important issues and have an opportunity to work directly within the community (cf. Champagne and Stauss 2002: 9).

There is no doubt that we can do this and much more if we together commit ourselves to envisioning and building Sami higher education and research for the benefit of future Sami generations. It is also important that Sami academics participate in the broader, global process of indigenous transformation and decolonization. The principle of sharing and learning from

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<sup>20</sup> The Sami Institute has recently been reorganized into “an independent Nordic institution” in connection with the Sami College. The new shared facilities, that will also accommodate the Sami Archives and others, are expected to be complete in 2009 (<http://www.nsi.no/>).

<sup>21</sup> As Hirvonen indicates, one of the obstacles in reaching the goals of the Sami Curriculum is the very education of the Sami teachers themselves (of whom only 15 % have been trained at the Sami College) which has imposed the powerful ideology of assimilation on several Sami generations. Due to this ideology, it is difficult to depart from the official interpretations of the nation (Hirvonen 2003).

others is one of the central aspects of many indigenous epistemologies, including that of the Sami. We can and must put it into practice in our scholarship and teaching.

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