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Indigenous Perspectives

An examination of how the post-colonial state affects Sámi
filmmaking in Sweden

Abstract

When *Sámi Blood* (dir. Amanda Kernell) came out in 2017, a debate in media in Sweden was born. This was a debate the on silenced oppression and phrenologic research faced by the indigenous Sámi people. This oppression from the Swedish state has been ongoing for centuries, and these issues were discussed in *Sámi Blood*, especially commenting eugenics and what this oppression did to the individual. Amanda Kernell is herself of Sámi descent, and this thesis examines how this insider perspective affects Sámi self-representation in the post-colonial state. This trough examinations of the Sámi norm and iconography, the position of language and the criticism of the Swedish state.

Keywords: indigenous cinema, colonialism, iconography, self-representation, stereotype, perspective

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Introduction

Sápmi, the land of the Sámi, is getting more and more attention in Sweden today. As this moment, there are two museum exhibitions in Lund (where this text is written) with connections to Sámi culture: one ethnographical exhibition at the Museum of Culture, and one art show at The Lund Art Gallery.¹ This is remarkable, considering the fact that Lund is almost as far away from Sápmi you can go in Sweden. Lund is a university town in southern Sweden, close to the urban area of Malmö and Copenhagen. Sápmi is located in the most northern parts of Sweden, stretching over mountains, lakes and forests. To me, both of these museum exhibitions are proof that the national attention towards the Sámi people in Sweden has increased.

The Sámi are an indigenous people of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Most of them reside in Sápmi, the land of the Sámi. Historically, they are a people with ties to nature, fishing, hunting and reindeer herding. Today most Sámi live just like any other people in the Nordic or Russian societies, but with a small part of the population still tied to the more traditional life of reindeer herding and hunting.

Meanwhile, despite increasing national attention, discrimination against the Sámi population in Sweden has increased, according to Isak Utsi, former head of Sáminuorra, the Swedish Sámi Youth Council. He encourages the Swedish ministers of education and culture to investigate the problems the Sámi youth face.² State-funded Swedish Radio (SR) initiated a project called "Everyday racism towards me as a Sámi", where Sámi individuals told their stories about the discrimination they face in Sweden.

In Sweden, the Sámi have been increasingly present and visible in mainstream media as well, with several TV shows about Sámi life. The audiences have been able to see the Swedish Sámi population in a different light than before - many of the new productions steer away from the familiar stereotypical depictions of Sámi life. Historically, the Sámi have been depicted as noble savages, similar to the way other indigenous peoples have been represented in mainstream films and TV shows. However, most of these shows have been produced by Swedish people in Swedish media. Hence, the Sámi have been represented in a new light, but not by themselves.

¹ Museum of Culture (Kulturen) "Fokus Sápmi", September 2018 - January 2020 and Lund Art Gallery, "History in Stitches", Britta Marakatt-Labba, November 2018 - January 2019

² Niia, Anna Karin, "Rasismen mot samer måste uppmärksammas", SR, 14 February 2016

There are several examples of this. State-financed Swedish Television (SVT) produced several different programs about persons of Sámi descent or background: *Sápmi Sessions* (2011, 2014), *Sápmi Sisters* (2015), *The Reindeer Herders* (2016- Swedish: *Renskötarna*), and *Ida's Separate Worlds* (2018, Swedish: *Idas skilda världar*). Commercial TV network TV4 produced the show *Our Big Sámi Wedding* (Swedish: *Vårt stora samiska bröllop*) in 2017. In these productions, there have been only a few persons of Sámi descent behind the camera. Most of the producers are based in Stockholm, where the Swedish cultural hegemony lies. These shows have been developed from a Swedish perspective, depicting the Sámi as the Other, despite efforts to shine new light on them and their culture. In these shows, they illustrate that these Sámi individuals are both Sámi and in some ways Swedish, but still different from the majority of the Swedes, hence exotic beings of nature.

For instance, in *The Reindeer Herders*, the production team follows three young Sámi reindeer herders, two from Sweden and one from Norway. The show is an ambitious production, containing drone shots of the mountains and forests, and with an enthusiasm to show the Sámi as individuals. However, the young Sámi people tend to get ridiculed, especially in scenes where reindeer herder Ber-Joná explains his dating life. He needs to drive to the Finnish border to use his Tinder dating app. The country music and the cutting of the scene make him look like a somewhat negative country boy stereotype. He further clarifies that he wants to date a girl that he can like as much as he likes his reindeers, a statement that would not sound so stereotypical if he was not depicted in a negative light from the start. To me, this show leaves a bitter aftertaste, as if the creators said "we tried to make them look like us Swedes, but they are just way too different from us", encouraging the idea of the noble savage. However, Sámi author Ann-Helén Laestadius describes the show to be stripped down and authentic, so the critique goes two ways, displaying that there is not one homogenous voice in Sápmi.³

The Sámi visibility in Swedish media can be traced partially to the success of the film *Sámi Blood* (Swedish: *Sameblod*) from 2017, which will be the film mainly discussed in this scholarly examination. The film was first distributed at The Venice Film Festival where it won Europa Cinemas Label Award and the Federa Award for Best Debut Director.⁴ This film is in both Swedish and South Sámi, a language spoken only by about five hundred people in the Swedish part of

³ Laestadius, Ann-Helén "Sápmi blöder fortfarande", SvD, 2017-02-27

⁴ Scarpa, Vittoria "The Venice Days Award goes to *The War Show*", Cineuropa, 9 September 2016

Sápmi.⁵ It is director Amanda Kernell's debut feature length film, and it tells the story of two young Sámi sisters suffering from oppression in Sweden. The film sparked debate in Swedish media on the treatment of the Sámi, both in historical and contemporary contexts, confronting post-colonial tendencies in contemporary Swedish society.

Another film that will be analyzed is Sámi-Norwegian film *Pathfinder* (1987). Both films are made by Sámi directors, with a mainly Sámi cast and crew. *Pathfinder* is directed by Nils Gaup, and is mainly in North Sámi, a language spoken to a greater extent than South Sámi, with about 15 000 - 17 000 speakers all over Sápmi.⁶ *Pathfinder* was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film in 1988, thus receiving great attention. *Pathfinder* is an action drama, set a thousand years ago, and it examines oppression as well as cultural identity. The film is rather picturesque and director Gaup vividly uses a Sámi iconography, with the main character skiing and marching over snowy mountains.

Purpose and relevance

The purpose of this examination is to describe how the post-colonial state in Sweden has affected the making of Sámi film, examined through *Sámi Blood*. How does the post-colonial state in Sweden affect the Sámi self-representation in film? What does the self-representation look like and why is it important? The answer to these questions can be applied to indigenous cinemas all over the world, as well as films created by other marginalized groups, both in Sweden and in other parts of the world, something that is highly relevant in a post-colonial state.

At this moment, perhaps because of *Sámi Blood*, the discrimination against the Sámi people has been openly discussed in Swedish mainstream media. Swedish-Sámi youth are approaching their Sámi cultures, which were once taken away, and are thereby forming new identities, as a form of resistance towards the Swedish oppression.

In the meantime, not much research has been done on Sámi film in Sweden, most of the research made focuses on Norwegian-Sámi films. Furthermore, a considerable amount of the research is written in either Norwegian or Finnish. This study aims to supplement other texts written on Sámi

⁵ "South Sámi", samer.se, Sámi Information Centre

⁶ "North Sámi", samer.se, Sámi Information Centre

film, adding a Swedish perspective, as well as the perspective from someone who grew up with Sámi culture close at hand.

Moreover, *Sámi Blood* is when this is written still a relatively new film, released only about one and a half years ago. Therefore the debate around it is currently visible, even if toned down. A lot has been written about it in the media, and not only reviews. Since the film sparked a debate, articles on colonialism and discrimination of the Sámi in the Swedish society were written, and as previously stated, the Sámi issues are still visible in Swedish media.

Theory and method

I will in this scholarly examination first define what "post-colonial" means, as the discourse on post-colonialism is broad. Furthermore, I will explain Swedish colonialism and exploitation in Sápmi, which concern both natural resources and racism. This, in order to compare real-life events to the events in *Sámi Blood*, which will be the film mainly examined in this text.

Then, the questions posed in the last section will be examined, through application of texts and ideas on post-colonialism, which will be Frantz Fanon's ideas of the psychology of the oppressed, Michelle K. Raheja's notion of visual sovereignty, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discussion on the subaltern and Paulo Freires' text on the pedagogy of the oppressed.

Thus, the film will be broken down artistically: the mise-en-scène and the narrative will both be examined in a post-colonial context. In this way, the Sámi norm and iconography will be discussed.

However, it is also crucial to examine the social and cultural discourse of *Sámi Blood*, since it sparked debate and can be considered important in a societal context. To do this, I will examine the narrative and cinematography, as well as the effect of it. The film is in both Swedish and South Sámi, and the significance of language will be examined in the same section. Accordingly, the text will contain both a formal and cultural analysis.

Despite not exclusively being a comparative analysis, *Sámi Blood* will be compared to *Pathfinder*, as they both are films directed by Sámi directors and actors, and with Sámi languages spoken. Also, a lot of the written material on Sámi film centers around *Pathfinder*, so its importance in Sámi cinema will be discussed, although not to the same extent as *Sámi Blood*.

Research overview

One can easily find research on indigenous filmmaking and on colonialism in Sápmi, but the research on Sámi film is limited. Two scholarly texts regarding Sámi film what will be referred to in this examination can be found in *Films on Ice: Cinema of the Arctic*. The first text is Pietari Kääpä's text "Northern Exposures and Marginal Critiques: The Politics of Sovereignty in Sámi Cinema" and the second one is "Cultural Stereotypes and Negotiations in Sámi Cinema" by Monica Kim Mecsei. They will both be used as a point of departure for this examination, as both texts concern self-representation, colonialism and post-colonialism in Sámi film. However, these texts focus more on the Norwegian and Finnish parts of Sápmi. This examination will supplement earlier research and add a Swedish-Sámi perspective. Also, most texts written on this subject are not in English, so writing this in English will encourage reading across the national borders in Sápmi.

Furthermore, Anne-Kari Skarðhamar has done research on colonialism in Sámi film. In "Changes in Film Representations of Sami Culture and Identity", she compares two different Sámi film from different eras in order to see how the Sámi are and have been represented. She compares *Laila* (1929) with *Pathfinder*, both of these also Norwegian films.

Houston Wood also writes about Sámi film in *Native Features: Indigenous Films from Around the World*. This book focuses on indigenous films from all over the globe, but Wood presents several ideas and notions that will be useful in this text. However, he states that the book embraces an "appreciative criticism" and it is, therefore, more of a celebration of indigenous films rather than a versatile analysis of the subject.⁷

Defining colonialism and post-colonialism

Post-colonialism is a notion that can have several meanings in various discourses. Hence, it is important to define it before commencing the examination. Post-colonialism is a state after colonialism, where the official means of colonialism are abolished, but when the people who suffered from colonialism still need to face and counter problems similar to the ones they faced during colonialism.⁸ Some of these problems include prejudice, stereotyping, silencing and violence. Post-colonialism will be therefore be referred to as a political state that affects Sweden, where *Sámi Blood* was made.

⁷ Wood, Houston *Native Features: Indigenous Films from Around the World*, Continuum, New York, 2008 p. 3

⁸ Doughty, Ruth & Etherington-Wright, Christine, *Understanding Film Theory*, Second edition, Palgrave, London, 2018 p. 247

Two scholarly texts treating post-colonialism that will be referred to are the article "Can the subaltern speak?" by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the book *Black Skin, White Masks* by Franz Fanon. Spivak talks on the voices of the colonized, while Fanon speaks about the psychology of the colonized. However, it is important to point out that these texts refer to colonialism in other countries and contexts. Fanon writes about Black people in the Antilles, and how their psyches are affected by colonialism. His general ideas can be applied to the Sámi, however, as the Sámi can pass as Swedish (which is the main theme of *Sámi Blood*), they are in a position of power when it comes to Fanon's notion of passing privilege, and these texts will, therefore, be applied carefully in the Swedish/Sámi context.

What is Sámi film?

In Sweden, there is a loud debate taking place regarding a simple but severe question: who is Sámi? The Sámi Parliament of Sweden has one definition: you have or have had Sámi languages in your home and you define yourself as a Sámi.⁹ However, there are people born into Sámi society who have left their Sámi life due to assimilation politics, and some people have in the same way retaken their Sámi identities. Therefore, it is also difficult to know who is Sámi and who is not when examining indigenous perspectives in film production.

This also makes it rather difficult defining Sámi film. Just as there are challenges in defining national cinema, there can be several definitions of Sámi or indigenous film. Some consider *Pathfinder* to be the first Sámi film, as it is made by a Sámi, with Sámi actors, in Sámi, and with Sámi iconography.¹⁰ And if one wants to make a film and apply for funding from The International Sámi Film Institute, the film needs to be in one of the Sámi languages, and two of three key positions (producer, director and writer) need to speak Sámi or be of Sámi descent. On the other hand, according to Kim Mecsei, there can be dangers with The Sámi Film Institute's definition, due to the dilemma of big parts of the Sámi population not speaking Sámi, as a result of assimilation politics.¹¹ The definition of Sámi film in this text will thus be slightly more liberal. Here, the definition of Sámi film will be films where two of three key positions speak Sámi or have a Sámi background, with a Sámi main character, and with Sámi spoken in the film.

⁹ "Vem är same?", samer.se, Sámi Information Centre

¹⁰ Mecsei Kim, Monica, MacKenzie, Scott & Stenport, Anna Westerståhl (red.), "Cultural Stereotypes and Negotiations in Sámi Cinema", *Films on ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2015 p. 75

¹¹ Ibid. p. 82

Explaining Visual Sovereignty

Michelle K. Raheja writes in several of her texts about the concept of 'visual sovereignty'. She suggests confronting the spectator with the "often absurd assumptions that circulate around visual representations of Native Americans, while also flagging their involvement and, to some degree, complicity in these often disempowering structures of cinematic dominance and stereotype".¹²

Raheja further illustrates that this strategy in filmmaking deconstructs the White, settler and Western depictions of Native Americans, but also intervenes in the discourse on indigenous rights and political sovereignty.¹³

Raheja uses the notion of visual sovereignty exclusively on Native American films and iconography, but it can be applied to other indigenous cinemas as well, and it will be applied to Sámi cinema in this examination. Nonetheless, it is important to point out that oppression against indigenous peoples looks different all over the globe, and that the discourse on sovereignty in Sweden and Sápmi will look different from the discourse on Native American sovereignty. The Native Americans have been exploited and stereotyped in the Western film genre to a bigger extent than the Sámi have been in Swedish film, and the need for visual sovereignty in Sápmi can be considered more recent than the need for it in the Native American nations.

The Concept of the Swede

In Sweden, there is a clear concept of what it means to be Swedish, despite Sweden nowadays being a diverse country. I have friends who were born and raised in Sweden to immigrant parents, many from countries in western Asia, who always get their Swedishness questioned. When they declare that they are Swedish, many people do not take that for an answer and the question that follows is always: "Where are you *really* from?". This is a question that often asked in Sweden but also abroad. This is all due to the fact that there is a fixed image of what a Swede looks like, an image that is not easily negotiated or questioned, and this image exists both in and outside of Sweden. This image affirms the Swede as blonde, tall and blue eyed, something which is not a truth in contemporary Sweden.

I will in this examination mention the notion of the Swede and its position in *Sámi Blood*. When I refer to the Swede I will mention a person who has their roots in Sweden and whose family has

¹² Raheja, Michelle, "Reading Nanook's Smile: Visual Sovereignty, Indigenous Revisions of Ethnography, and Atanarjuat (The Fast Runner)." *American Quarterly*, vol. 59 no. 4, 2007 p. 1161

¹³ Ibid, p. 1162

been based in Sweden for generations and generations: someone who fits the fixed image of what it means to be Swedish.

Demarcations and subjectiveness

This examination will focus on *Sámi Blood* and its relationship to the post-colonial state of Sweden. I will only use the notions of colonialism and post-colonialism (rather than postcolonial theory), and therefore not speak on decolonialism, neocolonialism and anti-colonialism. Furthermore, I will compare *Sámi Blood* to *Pathfinder*, but without writing a complete comparison, as the two films share several themes and iconography. Also, most of the other Sámi films and TV shows mentioned will mostly be an indication of the vastness of Sámi culture being presented in Swedish media, but without any deeper analysis of the content.

I also need to address my own subjectiveness and prejudices, as I myself have grown up in a Swedish family, but with a Sámi background. I do not possess the perspective of an insider, but neither the one of an outsider, since my family has faced both institutionalized and direct discrimination in Sweden. However, I will not speak on behalf of anyone in the Sámi communities, and I will use indigenous and local sources concerning Sámi life and other indigenous cinemas.

Outline

Chapter one will commence with a thorough synopsis of *Sámi Blood*, necessary to understand later sections and chapters. The rest of the chapter will mostly contain historical facts and focus on *Sámi Blood* and Sweden's colonial history in Sápmi. There will also be an explanation and a brief discussion on the Sámi film wave in Sweden.

The content of chapter two will be more analytical. Here, I will answer the questions posed in the previous section through a formal analysis. The first section will focus on the Sámi perspective the norm of *Sámi Blood*, the second section focuses on the Sámi iconography and aesthetic, and the third one will discuss the dramaturgy and the mise-en-scène of the film.

Chapter three will concentrate more on the cultural context of *Sámi Blood*, with one section examining the criticism of the Swedish state and racial biology in *Sámi Blood*, and the second section will discuss the film in the light of the oppressor/oppressed mimic. The importance of language will also be discussed and analyzed. The questions posed will be answered in each chapter, and after chapter two I will summarize and later conclude the examination.

Chapter 1: Explaining *Sámi Blood*, scientific racism and colonialism in Sápmi

Sámi Blood and the Sámi film wave in Sweden

In *Sámi Blood* director Amanda Kernell tells the story of the South Sámi teenage girl Elle Marja, who lives with her reindeer herding family, consisting of her younger sister Njenna, her mother and her grandparents. Elle Marja and Njenna soon leave them to go to a school for nomads with other Sámi children, where they are taught by a Swedish teacher. In the school, the children are forced to speak Swedish and to sing Swedish hymns, and are flogged when speaking their native Sámi languages. In the beginning, Elle Marja likes the school and teacher, as she already masters the Swedish language. This makes her want to become a teacher herself. However, her teacher later explains to her that Sámi children do not know the same things as Swedish children, and that she belongs in nature and is needed there.

Later on, the school children are visited by researchers from Uppsala University. They perform phrenologic examinations on the children and force them to strip naked as they take photographs of them. Afterward, Elle Marja is called "circus animal" by a group of Swedish boys as she passes them by, and as she stands up for her self they abuse her by cutting her ear in the same manner as the Sámi cut reindeer ears (when labeling them). Sometime after, Elle Marja steals a dress from her teacher, hides her kolt (traditional Sámi clothing) and goes to a dance. Njenna asks her where she is going, but Elle Marja forces her to hide. She encounters a boy called Niclas, a student from Uppsala. She tells him that her name is Christina, hence hiding her cultural identity, as Christina is a Swedish name. However, Njenna shows up and looks for her but Elle Marja calls her "lappjävel" (Swedish degrading term for Sámi) and insinuates that she does not know her.

Elle Marja is now fed up with her Sámi identity and the oppression she faces. She decides to leave everything behind and to move to Uppsala. She murders a reindeer in order to show her mother the seriousness of her sentiments and later demands her to give her the late father's silver belt which she sells in order to pay tuition. In Uppsala Elle Marja burns her kolt and tries to assimilate to Swedish life, completely leaving her Sámi family and identity behind. As an epilogue, we also follow Elle Marja as an old woman, visiting Njenna's funeral and there struggling with being confronted by her Sámi relatives. However, the film ends with the old Elle Marja walking to her native grounds.

Despite the film being fictional, it represents the legitimate Swedish history of scientific racism and colonial assault on indigenous bodies. Director Amanda Kernell explained that some of her own Sámi relatives' identity inspired her making the film.¹⁴ She stated that it was more than just a film, due to the reality of the thematics, and that she before making the film had interviewed Sámi persons in positions similar to Elle Marja's.¹⁵ This demonstrates the director's ambitions to loudly announce this story, which even in a post-colonial state can be regarded as rather controversial.

Sámi Blood is a Sámi film, as it is by a Sámi, in South Sámi and with a Sámi cast, but perhaps most importantly it is made from a Sámi perspective, showing a rather unapologetic view of the depicted events. This sparked a debate in Swedish media, and in February 2017 it was stated in an article that there was a Sámi film wave in the Swedish cultural domain.¹⁶ In the article, the Sámi culture is described as "hip", as fourteen Sámi films were screened at the Gothenburg film festival.¹⁷

Moreover, Finnish-Sámi director Katja Gauriloff stated that due to The Sámi Film Institute it has been easier for Sámi filmmakers to get film projects financed.¹⁸ However, there are other Sámi voices to be heard on the subject. Sámi author Ann-Hélen Laestadius also commented the Sámi visibility, stating that it leaves her a bitter aftertaste. Why now, she asks.¹⁹ She discusses *Sámi Blood* and the Swedish oppression of the Sámi and questions why nobody in Sweden knows about the loss of the Sámi languages, the prohibition of the joik (traditional Sámi chanting), the relocating of Sámi groups, and the enforcement of Christianity. She also refers to recent studies and states that suicide among Sámi youth is high and that, despite the increasing media attention, the Swedes only see what they want to see: an "exotic", "mystic" and "down to earth" picture of the Sámi.²⁰ Regarding the efforts made by both the Swedish state and the national media, it is clear that there is no distinct or homogenous voice on the subject, and that there are both positives and negatives concerning a Sámi wave in both film and popular media.

¹⁴ "Regissören om Sameblod: "Mer än en film" - Nyhetsmorgon (TV4)", interview TV 4 Nyhetsmorgon (News Morning), 2017-03-01

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Lundberg, Rebecca "Sápmi-våg i filmvärlden: "Vi bearbetar trauman", SVT, 2017-02-02

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Laestadius, Ann-Helén "Sápmi blöder fortfarande", SvD, 2017-02-27

²⁰ In January 2019, recent research showed that the Sámi suicide rates are not higher in relation to other Swedes. Heikki, Jörgen, Boström, Anders "Samer löper inte större risk för självmord än andra i Sverige", SR, 2019-01-14

Another indication of the Sámi visibility in Swedish film is the fact that *Sámi Blood* won three Guldbagge awards at the Guldbagge Award ceremony in January 2018. The Guldbagge Award ceremony is a Swedish award show that can be compared to the Academy Awards, as mostly commercial films with often rather artistic and political ambitions are awarded. Amanda Kernell won a Guldbagge for Best Screenplay, Lene Cecilia Sparrok, who plays the main character Elle Marja, won for Best Actress, and the film itself won the Price of the Audience. The latter award highly indicates the success of the film as it is a popularity price, where the Swedish people vote on which film they consider to be the best. *Sámi Blood* beat, among others *Solsidan* (2017), a film based on a commercial hit TV show. This, despite *Sámi Blood* confronting the country's colonial and discriminatory past and telling an uncomfortable tale.

Scientific racism, eugenics and The State Institute for Racial Biology

In 1922, The State Institute for Racial Biology was founded, and scholar Herman Lundborg was appointed as head. In 1926 they released the book *The Racial Characters of the Swedish nation*, where they categorized different peoples in Sweden by racial characteristics.²¹ He had done so-called eugenic research and wrote about the Nordic "race" as superior to other races. Between 1922 and 1958, the institute took 12 123 pictures, which were placed in different albums categorized by the "race" or group the person depicted belonged to. Some of the categories were "Nordic types, East-Baltic/Finnish types, Lapps and Lapp-mixed, Jews, Gypsies, different mixed types, twins and triplets, criminals and unfamiliar races."²² Lundborg strongly believed in eugenics, which in Swedish is translated to "rashygien", literally meaning racial hygiene. Lundborg and The State Institute for Racial Biology performed their so-called research in northern Sweden, especially on the Sámi.

The events of *Sámi Blood* refer to the real-life examinations performed by The State Institute for Racial Biology. Not only did they do phrenologic measurements of the skulls and the noses, they also applied characteristics on the different "races". This type of research is now regarded as nonsense, and scholar Gunnar Broberg explains that they manipulated results in order to support Nazi ideas.²³

²¹ Linders, Frans Josua & Lundborg, Herman (red.), *The racial characters of the Swedish nation: Anthropologia suecica 1926*, Almqvist & Wiksell, Uppsala, 1926

²² "The State Institute for Racial Biology - record of the archive of photographs in Uppsala University Library", uu.ub.se

²³ Hansson, Kristoffer "Rasbiologiska institutet", P3 Documentary, 2009-12-06

Colonialism and post-colonialism in Sápmi

There have been numerous discussions on Sápmi being colonized by the Swedes for centuries. In "Mining Sápmi: Colonial Histories, Sámi Archaeology, and the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Northern Sweden", the authors Ojala and Nordin describe Swedish colonization of both Sápmi and other parts of the world, but emphasizing its relation to the mining in northern Sweden. They begin by explaining how Sweden's colonial past long has been neglected:

"The colonial history in Sápmi is in general little recognized, and the knowledge about this history is very limited among the public in Sweden. However, it is a history with great consequences to many people today. It is also, in many ways, a controversial history, with connections to present-day conflicts over land rights and cultural rights. The understanding of this history is connected with the more general understanding of the relationship between Swedish and Sámi history and the notion of indigeneity in Sweden."²⁴

This summarizes the overall discourse of the Swedish colonialism in Sápmi rather well. They further explain how Swedish mining has had an impact on Sámi territory and reindeer husbandry both historically and in a contemporary context.²⁵ The mining has been supported by the Swedish state, which has sparked an extensive debate and protest among different Sámi groups, such as Sámi politicians and reindeer herders.²⁶

Furthermore, Sweden has not yet ratified the ILO 169 Convention (Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention).²⁷ However, the government has ratified UNDRIP (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).²⁸ Both of them highlight the importance of indigenous self-determination, but UNDRIP is less binding, not being binding in the same way as the ILO 169 Convention.²⁹ Several

²⁴ Ojala, Carl-Gösta, Nordin M., Jonas "Mining Sápmi: Colonial Histories, Sámi Archaeology, and the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Northern Sweden" *Arctic Anthro.* February 2015

²⁵ Ibid, p. 2

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ International Labour Organization, "C169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989"

²⁸ United Nations, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples"

²⁹ Ojala, Carl-Gösta, Nordin M., Jonas "Mining Sápmi: Colonial Histories, Sámi Archaeology, and the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Northern Sweden" *Arctic Anthro.* February 2015 p. 9

organizations working with human rights have criticized Sweden for not ratifying ILO 169, urging them to do it.³⁰

Ojala and Nordin also point out how the various Sámi peoples were Christianized during the 17th century. This was also when the extractions of metals in Sápmi commenced.³¹ The steel extracted from the mines were used by the Swedish De Geer family to make tools and to use in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Much of the iron was used directly as a commodity to buy African enslaved people.³² In 2013, Swedish researchers examined old documents regarding the Swedish justice system in the colonized Saint Barthélemy, and it was then stated that the Swedish colonization of the Caribbean island was similar to the way the French colonized islands in the same area. However, Sweden is a country still in need of confronting the colonial past and the trade of enslaved people, as well as its self-righteous image.³³

The mining conflict in Sápmi is further investigated in the documentary film *Gállok* (2018). The documentary team follows Sámi person Tor L. Tuorda and his daughter as they protest and work against a new mine opening in their part of Sápmi. The documentary treats both environmental problems affecting indigenous people, and issues regarding cultural identity. Tor L. Tuorda was not raised in a Sámi household but instead approached his grandmother's repressed culture as an adult. Therefore, he also emphasizes and discusses the questions regarding who counts as Sámi in Sweden while debating the mining policies. Later on in the documentary, an elderly reindeer herding Sámi woman expresses her concern with individuals retaking their Sámi culture, exclaiming that when she was a child she always asked herself why she was born a "Lapp", and that now everybody wants to be one. Evidently, the debate is polyphonous in Sápmi.

Gállok shows ambitions of broadening a debate that generally is limited to the north of Sweden. We see that there is a group of people demonstrating against the new mine, and later on celebrating when they receive the information that the mining project will not develop any further. *Gállok* also highlights the fact that colonial issues are still very much alive in Sweden today, and voices several Sámi perspectives, establishing a nuanced image of the debate.

³⁰ Heikki, Jörgen "Kräver åtgärder för samiska rättigheter", Sameradion & SVT Sápmi, 2016-02-15

³¹ Ojala, Carl-Gösta, Nordin M., Jonas "Mining Sápmi: Colonial Histories, Sámi Archaeology, and the Exploitation of Natural Resources in Northern Sweden" *Arctic Anthro*. February 2015 p. 11

³² Ibid.

³³ Zachrisson, Niklas "Sveriges slavhistoria avslöjad", SVT, 2013-10-07

To summarize this section, we can state that Sweden is a post-colonial country. The reindeer husbandry and Sámi territories are still threatened by mining policies, affecting the overall environment in Sweden and especially Swedish Sápmi. However, there are opposing voices to be heard on the subject, with protest against the new mines, especially among the Sámi and other local groups.

Sámi cinema in the political landscape

The year is 1988 and Sámi actor Mikkel Gaup visits the Academy Awards, and he walks the red carpet dressed in his Kautokeino/Guovdageaidnu kolt. He plays the main character in perhaps the most famous Sámi film up until now: *Pathfinder* (1987, Norwegian: *Veiviseren*, North Sámi: *Ofelaš*). Directed by Nils Gaup, it can be regarded as the first Sámi film, being directed by a Sámi and with and an almost exclusively Sámi crew and cast. It was nominated for an Academy Award for Best foreign language film in 1988.³⁴ In *Pathfinder*, the plot centers around a young Sámi man, Áigin, whose family is brutally murdered by the "Chudees", a group resembling either Norwegians, Swedes, Finns or Russians. To prevent them from killing another Sámi group, Áigin leads them over a cliff where they all die but he miraculously survives. Nils Gaup uses a Sámi iconography in this ambitious production. *Pathfinder* is, however, not as political as *Sámi Blood*.

There is, one significant issue when it comes to defining Sámi cinema. *Sámi Blood* is a film financed by The International Sámi Film Institute, but also the Swedish, Danish and Norwegian film institutes as well as Swedish state-funded SVT. This relocates the discussion to the discourse on national and indigenous cinema, and it is necessary to throughout this study keep in mind that the making of *Sámi Blood* and *Pathfinder* will have been affected by Scandinavian film politics. Sámi cinema is therefore not explicitly Sámi, just as most indigenous cinemas around the world seldom are explicitly indigenous. It is also of great importance to note that the various cultural identities do not necessarily oppose each other and are not binary opposites. Historically, the Sámi might not have been regarded as Swedes by other Swedes, but today one can define oneself as both Sámi and Swedish, Norwegian, Finnish or Russian.

³⁴ "Experience over eight decades of the Oscars from 1927 to 2018", Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science, 2015, academy.org

Before commencing chapter two, it is required to explain that the Sámi are not a homogenous group. There are several different Sámi cultures with a variety of Sámi languages and customs, and homogenizing them as one group will be a result of the colonial Swedish method of thinking. *Sámi Blood* is not only a Sámi film but is also the first South Sámi film, and a perhaps also a South Sámi film with feminist ambitions. One must not forget these intersections, and that each filmmaker has their own way of interpreting and representing their culture and the obstacles they face. Therefore, the post-colonial state will perhaps affect different films in many different ways, and be depicted differently, depending on the filmmaker and their aims.

Chapter 2: Self-representation in the post-colonial Sweden

Establishing the Sámi perspective as the norm

Elle Marja is the main character of *Sámi Blood*, and it is from her perspective the audience follows the narrative, as her gaze is set as the standard. This can be seen as a clear post-colonial tendency as we now do not follow the oppressor's point of view. In "Cultural Stereotypes and Negotiations in Sámi Cinema" Monica Kim Mecsei summarizes this trend in Sámi cinema:

"During the past decades, representations of Sámi culture in cinema in Norway have changed from emphasizing the perspective of an outsider to emphasizing that of an insider. This transition is related to a process of cultural revitalization, which, as in a postcolonial framework positions Sámi cinema practice, production and funding as a negotiating field for establishing a collective identity."³⁵

This applies well to the context of *Sámi Blood*, but to Sweden rather than Norway. The first time we see Elle Marja in the film she is an old woman in contemporary society. She is smoking a cigarette and is later on riding in a car to her sister's funeral. She is dressed in pearls and a skirt, looking like any Swedish urban woman, passing as a Swede. Her son plays a joik on the car stereo, and when asked if she understands what they sing she says that she does not and that the Sámi only steal and complain. At the funeral she is depicted as alone and bitter - there is a clear visual gap between her and the other Sámi. She wears more urban clothes while many of the other guests wear kolts.

The first time we see teenage Elle Marja she is labeling a reindeer out on the fell with her sister. It is sunny, and their faces are filmed close up. The close up shots of their faces expose their feelings, the labeling is depicted as a sensitive and ceremonial event. The close up shots are not exclusive to this scene, they form a pattern visible throughout the film. Elle Marja's face is often in focus, showing her emotions and expressions rather than her body and her traditional clothes, which also indicate her identity. She is in this manner depicted as a human being, as a girl in agony the majority of the audience of the film will not comprehend. She is not reduced to her cultural background.

³⁵ Mecsei Kim, Monica, MacKenzie, Scott & Stenport, Anna Westerståhl (red.), "Cultural Stereotypes and Negotiations in Sámi Cinema", *Films on ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2015 p. 72

Previously, the Sámi have been represented as the villain or mystical forces of nature, at least in Finnish cinema, according to Pietari Kääpä.³⁶ He explains that the focus has been on conceptualizing Lapland as an "untamed territory especially threatening to the young women whose gendered otherness acts as a suitable cause by which to establish white masculine dominance over the region as the men have to act as heroes containing the threat posed by Sámi mysticism."³⁷ Kääpä also mentions that contemporary Sámi directors focus more on indigenous rights in their films, very different from earlier Finnish depictions of Sámi.³⁸ The kind of self-representation of the Sámi in *Sámi Blood* shows the importance of humanizing the Sámi rather than depicting them as noble savages, homogenous and as the Other.

There are several examples of Amanda Kernell establishing the Sámi perspective and gaze as the norm. In one scene right before she goes to the dance, Elle Marja spots three young Swedish military men as they ride past her on their bikes in the distance. Elle Marja is wearing her teacher's dress so the young men do not know about her being Sámi. As they call on her and ask her to join them, we follow Elle Marja's gaze. The three Swedish men all look the same from a distance, and they are all alien to her, and in thus also to the viewer. In this way, the Sámi perspective is established as the norm, and the viewer will also get a sense of how unreachable the Swedes are for Elle Marja. The Sámi norm works similarly right when she arrives at the dance. The camera follows her curious gaze close-up as she admires the Swedes, but we can also sense her feeling like an outsider. She later on dances with Niclas, the Uppsala student, and once again we follow Elle Marja's gaze on him, as he is still alien to her, as well as the audience.

Elle Marja enjoys her night with Niclas and almost fully passes as a Swede. She sees Swedish life as superior to her own and as something to strive for. However, Niclas sees her as rather mystic, he asks her about her name and exclaims that it has to be an exotic one. Niclas represents the Swedishness Elle Marja strives for, and she literally looks up to him when they speak. This way of Sámi self-representation critiques the traditional way of seeing the Sámi as the exotic and the Swede as superior, as we later on can see the negative impacts of this behavior when Elle Marja distances herself from her family. Kernell's aim is for the audience to be judgmental to every bit of Swedish behavior in this film, and what it does to the Sámi individual, in this case, Elle Marja.

³⁶ Kääpä, Pietari, MacKenzie, Scott & Stenport, Anna Westerståhl (red.), "Northern Exposures and Marginal Critiques: The Politics of Sovereignty in Sámi Cinema", *Films on ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2015 p. 45

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 46

Accordingly, there are numerous tendencies of the post-colonial state in Sweden to be seen, as the director Kernell aims to establish a Sámi perspective and of events that previously only have been told from a Swedish perspective, and that also rarely. The way of self-representation allows the indigenous filmmaker to voice concerns on the colonial issues, as well as establishing visual sovereignty through the Sámi gaze.

Sámi iconography and stereotyping

The reindeer and other icons of Sámi life have been and are still very central to Sámi film and in depictions of the Sámi. Monica Kim Mecsei examines the use of Sámi iconography in *Pathfinder* and *The Kautokeino Rebellion* and establishes the use of reindeer, nature and snow as examples of Sámi iconography.³⁹ She explains Gaup's depictions: "Gaup's repetition of Sámi iconography might be understood as a challenge to stereotypical colonial images of othering by transferring such images into a discourse of authentic self-representation that is able to encourage pride and self-esteem."⁴⁰ Sámi iconography has always been used in films where the Sámi has been present, historically romanticizing Sápmi, depicting it as exotic and mystic.⁴¹

In *Sámi Blood*, the kolt is used as an important piece of Sámi iconography. The kolt looks different in every area of Sápmi and each family uses their own variation of local patterns. Today, wearing a kolt is, most of the time, the only way someone can tell if you are Sámi or not, something that is explored in *Sámi Blood*. When Elle Marja wears a kolt she is seen as the Other by the Swedes, and is accordingly reduced to a homogenized picture of her culture. When she wears her teacher's dress she is treated like a human being. When she first goes to Uppsala, she burns her kolt and instead wears a black dress. In this manner, she also burns her cultural identity and family ties. This comments on the discourse of whiteness, white passing and passing as a Swede. The Sámi relation to whiteness is complex, as most Sámi are white and will pass as Swedes as long as they do not wear kolts. This privilege is however easily negotiated. Historically, there have been bodily features directly associated with the Sámi, features that differentiate them from the Swedes. Those features include dark hair, high cheekbones and narrow shaped eyes. The phrenologists further stated that

³⁹ Mecsei Kim, Monica, MacKenzie, Scott & Stenport, Anna Westerståhl (red.), "Cultural Stereotypes and Negotiations in Sámi Cinema", *Films on ice: Cinemas of the Arctic*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2015 p. 76

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 77

⁴¹ Ibid.

the Sámi were all short-headed and inferior to the Nordic race, as previously stated.⁴² Nowadays, in the post-colonial state, it is almost impossible to separate a Sámi from a Swede, due to assimilation politics and a willingness to blend into Swedish society. However, despite being able to pass as Swedes at first sight, there are other indications of Sáminess, as many Sámi do not have Swedish as their native tongue and therefore might have an accent. These circumstances are considered in *Sámi Blood*, stating that if you pass as a Swede, you will get better treatment in Swedish society, both in the 1930s and in contemporary Sweden.

While wearing the black dress, no one can tell that Elle Marja is a Sámi at first, however, Niclas' parents realize that she is hiding her background and the rumor spreads in the rather homogenized 1930s Uppsala, where Herman Lundborg was based. Elle Marja is, once again, quickly reduced to her cultural identity and othered by Niclas' parents and friends. Thus, Kernell shows that no matter how well one can pass as a Swede, people will always treat you in a certain way once they find out your Sámi identity.

Njenna wearing a kolt reveals and confronts the colonial gaze of the Swede as she arrives at the dance, looking for Elle Marja. The Swedes stop dancing and stare at her as she passes them by. We then see a close up shot of Njenna's face as she expresses discomfort, being a victim of their gaze. A Swede looks the same way at Elle Marja at the train to Uppsala, and her reaction is the same. Perhaps this is also a way to confront the Swedish spectator of the film, who might have a similar way of spectating the Sámi and other marginalized groups.

In both *Pathfinder* and *Sámi Blood* the reindeer is central to the main character, not necessarily throughout the intrigue, but as symbols for Sámi spiritualism. In *Pathfinder* the main character Áigin sees a reindeer in a vision right before he miraculously survives falling from a cliff, and the reindeer constantly circulate the nomadic group of Sámi he follows. In *Sámi Blood* the reindeer symbolizes something similar: Elle Marja's Sámi identity. At the beginning of the film, Elle Marja labels a reindeer, handling it with care and stroking it. She tells Njenna that in this way, the reindeer belongs to her. Later on, when she decides to abandon Sámi life, she brutally murders a reindeer. This because her mother refuses to help her get the money she needs to study in Uppsala. Between those two events Elle Marja shoots a group of reindeer, she does not want to be near them. Thus, the reindeer is used to establish the Sámi iconography and culture, but also to directly show the rejection of it, as Elle Marja dismisses the animal. In this way, the character Elle Marja rejects the

⁴² Hansson, Kristoffer "Rasbiologiska institutet", P3 Documentary, 2009-12-06

reindeer because of the colonialist oppression she suffers from, and at the same time the director Kernell recentralizes the reindeer in a post-colonial context, as she is neither reluctant nor afraid to use the reindeer as a symbol of the Sámi. When Elle Marja is old and visits Njenna's funeral, a man tells her that she handled all of Elle Marja's reindeer after she left, as to symbolize that Njenna always cared for her sister and her Sámi identity.

Through the reindeer and the kolt, Kernell plays with the Sámi iconography, which differs from the use of it in Gaup's films. In *Pathfinder* the kolt, reindeer and the snow are set as the standard, it is a film with the Sámi iconography as the norm. In *Sámi Blood*, however, the Sámi iconography is used more vividly, representing Elle Marja's Sámi identity and emphasizing a discussion on colonial stereotypes. It is used to create contrast between the Swedish and the Sámi identities and societies. This way of both playing with the iconography or using it to establish a norm is a forceful way of creating visual sovereignty, by approaching and retaking their own Sámi iconography. It seems both Kernell and Gaup are aware of earlier portraits of the Sámi as noble savages, living romanticized and mystic lives.

The availability of Sámi cinema

Sámi Blood is a film with commercial ambitions. The commercial success of a film can be a method of reaching out and telling stories that earlier have been silenced or even forbidden, perhaps by tabu or by the state. This also allows filmmakers to through entertainment make political points in an efficient manner. Accordingly, *Sámi Blood* is an entertaining film, with a tangible narrative and conventional dramaturgy. For instance, Kernell uses comic relieves during the story - Elle Marja's imitation of her teacher and her also placing cheese in Niclas' coffee can be deemed as such. Thus, the fashion in which the story is told is neither experimental nor provocative. However, the story told is in itself provocative, and furthermore confronts and challenges the Swedish audience regarding their stereotyping and discrimination of the Sámi. Making the narrative more clear cut and digestible for the viewer is hence a method of exhibiting the story for a more large scale audience. We, the audience, will be confronted but also entertained as we are told a grasping tale. The story is, moreover, not only a tale of oppression and violence, but also addresses other subjects, such as sisterly love, romance and the dilemmas of being a teenager. Kernell has elaborated a domain where everyone can relate to a character depicted, be it the mother of Elle Marja, Niclas, the teacher or one of the Sámi children.

Despite the film having a realistic approach in its criticism of the Swedish society, the cinematography and mise-en-scène create a more romantic and picturesque image of Sámi life, as earlier discussed in the section on Sámi iconography. In a post-colonial context, this is not only a sign of self-representation, but can also be a way to make the Swedish producers, distributors and audience willing to receive the film more openly. The aesthetic does not challenge the earlier romanticized and exotic stereotypes of the Sámi. When Elle Marja is with her Sámi family, she is often shot in backlight, exhibiting the green surroundings, as well as the reindeer and the lavvús (traditional Sámi tents). Elle Marja and Njenna walk through the green summer forests and row over the quiet lakes. They swim together in the river, hug each other and joik. This image does not challenge the Swedish stereotypical picture of the Sámi, and their bond to nature. Whether Amanda Kernell uses a romanticized aesthetic because she aims to reach out to a large audience, or due to the fact that it is expected of her in a post-colonial domain, we cannot know. It can, however, also indicate a love for something that has been. Elle Marja sentimentally looks back at her Sámi life as something beautiful, and as something worth missing, despite her fate.

Considering the distribution of *Sámi Blood*, we see that it is a film aimed towards the national audience in Sweden. It was first shown at only six cinemas, but after criticism, it was distributed to a larger number of cinemas.⁴³ The distributors stated that they only anticipated 6000 cinema visits, while *Sámi Blood* in fact generated over 100 000 visits.⁴⁴ This is at least what the distributors explain to SR, there is however no official figures in terms of cinema-goers in Sweden.⁴⁵ The aim towards national distribution shows ambitions of broadening of the audience. The film is shown to Sámi, Swedes and international audiences at film festivals. This amplifies the Kernell's ambitions to educate the audiences and to shine a light on the story of *Sámi Blood*. This is not a new phenomenon. Many indigenous filmmakers aspire to expand the audiences in order to enlighten settlers and to play with stereotypes that still exist, according to Houston Wood. However, he further explains the risks of depicting indigenous iconography and customs on film, considering that settler audiences might mistake these portraits as some indisputable truth, while in fact, indigenous lifestyles are diverse.⁴⁶ Wood sets *Pathfinder*, among others, as an example for

⁴³ "Sameblod-succén väcker frågor om feltänk på svensk bio", SR, 2017-04-07

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Wood, Houston *Native Features: Indigenous Films from Around the World*, Continuum, New York, 2008 p. 65

this, as the audience might see the skiing over snow-covered landscapes as the real and only way of Sámi life, especially when there are no other films to supplement or disprove these depictions.⁴⁷ This also means that the creation of visual sovereignty might hurt indigenous groups, as the stereotypes are confirmed. This also opens up for further discussion regarding the Swedish society. Indigenous filmmakers might use these stereotypes because they subconsciously know that is the only thing that will be accepted in the post-colonial society.

This post-colonial discourse is also discussed by Spivak. She explains that in order to tell their own stories, indigenous groups need to adapt the manners of the West.⁴⁸ This is exactly what Amanda Kernell does when directing *Sámi Blood*. She adopts a non-Sámi way of storytelling, to make her voice heard. She uses the film camera, editing, music and acting to convey a story she might not have been able to share in any other form, as the Sámi traditionally have practiced a collective storytelling tradition.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Wood, Houston *Native Features: Indigenous Films from Around the World*, Continuum, New York, 2008 p. 65

⁴⁸ Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Can the subaltern speak?", Gothenburg University, Gothenburg, 2014

⁴⁹ Cocq, Coppélie "Polophony in Sámi Narratives", *Journal of Folklore Research*, Vol. 45, No. 2 (May - Aug., 2008) Indiana University Press, p. 194

Chapter 3: The cultural context of *Sámi Blood*

The criticism of the Swedish state

For about two years, I worked as a substitute teacher in Lund, southern Sweden. In 2017, Lund was number seventeen on the list of municipalities in Sweden with the best schools.⁵⁰ I worked at a smaller school with children who were around seven years old, mostly coming from academic middle-class families, quite similar to myself. I noticed that their main teacher had encouraged them to learn about the Sámi, to my surprise. I was pleased, considering that when I was still in school, very few of the children knew about the Sámi, and accordingly, I always had to explain my own cultural background. I told one of the children I was teaching that I was pleased to see that they learned about the Sámi, and that I was of Sámi descent. He did not believe me, none of the children did. This left me a bitter aftertaste. I thought that despite efforts of teaching the children about the Sámi and other marginalized groups in Sweden, the Sámi were considered to be something distant, mystical and magical.

Sámi Blood is definite in its criticism of the Swedish state, its history and its educational system. It is the first film commenting on the subject of racial biology in Sweden. Not only does it criticize the schools for nomadic Sámi children which Elle Marja and Njenna attend, but also the contemporary school system, in which the Swedes do not learn about the Sámi, and in which the Sámi do not learn about themselves. The film is not only critical towards the past, but also educational and a confrontation of the Swedish audience. Ođđasat, the Sámi branch of state-funded SR, wrote in April 2017 about the lack of education regarding the Sámi in Swedish schools.⁵¹ I cannot personally remember ever being taught about the Sámi or The State Institute for Racial Biology during my thirteen years as a pupil in the Swedish school system. *Sámi Blood* is in this way educational, providing information on Sámi culture and lifestyle many Swedes lack, despite several years in Swedish schools.

Moreover, *Sámi Blood* also challenges the picture of Sweden as a perfect welfare state that was neutral during World War II. In the film, we see how the Swedes operated in a way similar to the Nazis, celebrating eugenics and thinking some races were superior to others. The criticism towards

⁵⁰ "Bästa skolkommun - rankning som fokuserar och inspirerar", Lärarförbundet, lararforbundet.se, 2017

⁵¹ Andersson, Monica, Poggats, Tobias, "Högstadiel elever får inte lära sig om samernas historia", SR, 2017-04-17

The State Institute of Racial Biology is, therefore, more explicit than the criticism towards the Swedish educational system.

Commenting on Swedish nazism, education and racial biology, Amanda Kernell demonstrates what the institute did to the individual rather than what it did to the mass. This goes in line with Frantz Fanon's texts on the psychology of the colonized person, and their growing up with the assumption that they are inferior to the colonizer. Every Sámi person will have reacted differently to this type of oppression, and Kernell shows what this oppression does to a teenage girl growing into a woman, which can be a vulnerable state in life. In this manner, the post-colonial state in Sweden allows Amanda Kernell to, through her filmmaking, make transparent statements against the Swedish state and its history. This is something that would not have been possible during a colonial state. Kernell is in this way able to show through her film that the problems in *Sámi Blood* still exists in the post-colonial state of Swedish Sápmi.

The position of language in *Sámi Blood*

Scholar Franz Fanon writes in *Black Skin, White Masks* about the value and influence of language. He was himself from the French Antilles, and explains in his book how mastering French and denying Creole makes the Black man more acceptable in White society.⁵² The complex relationship between Swedish and the Sámi languages exists in a different context, but Fanon's ideas apply to the conflict of language in Sweden and in *Sámi Blood*. The Sámi in Sweden have been forced to speak Swedish, resulting in many of them never getting the opportunity to learn their native tongues.⁵³ However, young Sámi are now approaching and relearning their mother tongues and to counter the results of colonialism.

The use of the South Sámi language in *Sámi Blood* is complex. Before Elle Marja leaves for school, she answers her mother in Swedish when spoken to, to which her mother exclaims "speak Sámi". At school, the children are flogged when speaking Sámi, and when Elle Marja tells her Njenna that they have to speak Swedish, Njenna angrily walks away. This represents the sisters' different attitudes towards their native language very well. Elle Marja is from the start more open to the Swedish language, which she masters, but we can only hear Njenna say one word in Swedish during the whole film. Elle Marja's mastering of Swedish makes her popular with her teacher, and she gets

⁵² Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks* [Online source], [New ed.], Pluto Press, London, 2008 [1968] p. 11

⁵³ "Hotade språk", samer.se, Sámi Information Centre

the honor of greeting the scientists from Uppsala. When she practices the speech she is going to perform in front of the Uppsala scientists, Njenna lovingly mocks her for speaking Swedish, and the other children laugh. However, despite speaking Swedish, the teacher still regards Elle Marja as less of a human being, and less worthy of the privileges of Swedish society. Franz Fanon cleverly describes the colonized's relationship to language: "Every colonized people—in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality—finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country."⁵⁴ One can choose to embrace the language of the civilizing nation, in this case Swedish, and one can also disregard it. Elle Marja speaks Swedish because she thinks it will make her more acceptable, closer to Swedishness and move her away from the oppression she so often faces. However, Elle Marja's Swedish differs from the one they speak in Uppsala, which makes it easy for Niclas' family to distinguish that Elle Marja is an imposter in their Swedish household.

At the beginning of the film, when she is an old woman, Elle Marja denies her knowledge of the South Sámi language. Her son asks her if she understands the Sámi music they listen to, and she replies that she does not. Later on, when a Sámi man approaches her at Njenna's funeral, she pretends not to understand him when he speaks to her in South Sámi, but the man exclaims that he knows she does understand him. Elle Marja's approach to Swedishness does not only mean mastering the Swedish language, but also the dismissal of her native tongue. She did not teach her son her native language, which is brutally exposed when he tries to rhyme in South Sámi and fails. Furthermore, he mentions the existence of his mother's culture several times and also displays his lack of knowledge about it, but at the same time he possesses curiosity and a willingness to embrace it as he wants to join the rest of the Sámi group at the calf labeling, thus representing the younger generation of Sámi who strive to learn about their repressed culture.

In this way, Amanda Kernell demonstrates how the languages play a big part in the life of the colonized, and that in the Swedish post-colonial state, there are possibilities to retake and learn the languages. There is a massive need to display the Sámi languages, which is made clear by The International Sámi Film Institute and their ambitions to exclusively promote films with Sámi spoken.⁵⁵ Thus, it seems like the display of the Sámi languages is important when it comes to Sámi self-representation.

⁵⁴ Fanon, Frantz, *Black Skin, White Masks* [Online resource], [New ed.], Pluto Press, London, 2008 [1968] p. 9

⁵⁵ "About the International Sámi Film Institute (ISFI)", International Sámi Film Institute, isfi.no/en, 2018

When the Oppressed mimics the Oppressor

Paulo Freire writes about the oppressed/oppressor relationship in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This summarizes his ideas rather well: "During the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors." [...] Under these circumstances they cannot "consider" him sufficiently clearly to objectivize him—to discover him "outside" themselves."⁵⁶ After facing oppression and assault from the Swedish scientist and the boys who cut her ears, Elle Marja tries to imitate and assimilate to their way of being, she herself becomes a sub-oppressor. While in the teacher's dress she calls her sister "lappjäväl", literally posing as a Swede, adopting the behavior of her oppressor.

There is one scene where this behavior is exclusively depicted. Elle Marja spies on her Swedish teacher, Christina, who asks her to accompany her drinking coffee. Elle Marja sees that Christina is reading about the Sámi in a book, containing eugenic research and photographs. When Christina sips her coffee, Elle Marja does it in exactly the same manner, which generates an almost comic effect - she literally mimics her oppressor. She further implies that she desires to become a teacher herself. Elle Marja changes her name when she travels to Uppsala to become a teacher, her new name is Christina. Her new and Swedish identity is directly based on the original Christina, who directly and structurally oppressed Elle Marja.

In one scene which takes place right before Elle Marja leaves, she confronts Njenna, who tells Elle Marja that none of the other children likes her, and that no-one wants her to be there. Elle Marja tells Njenna that she is the stupid "Lapp", who does not understand anything, that they have small brains, and cannot think for themselves. She changes the pronoun from 'you' to 'us' during her speech, not quite distancing herself from Njenna and the Sámi yet, as she still wears the kolt and as she still finds herself trapped in her Sámi body and at the school. This distancing behavior is exhibited even more clearly when Elle Marja is old. She denies her language and joins discriminatory discussions on the Sámi. For instance, when she stays at a hotel after the funeral, three younger women discuss the manner of Sámi people they met at the mountains, and state that those reindeer herders disturbed their peaceful stay in nature. They exclaim that they expected the Sámi to be a "people of nature", and that they should not be allowed to drive around on their dirt bikes everywhere in the nature reserve. Elle Marja agrees, she also thinks that they disturb the peaceful area. In order to pass as a Swede, Elle Marja must not only dress as one or act as one, but

⁵⁶ Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [Online source], Continuum, New York, 2000 p. 45

also embrace their racist and discriminatory behavior. Instead of fighting her oppressors, she feels as she has no other choice than joining them in order to flee from their treatment of her.

Displaying these tendencies on film is a result of the post-colonial state. It is a statement, showing that in Sweden you cannot overthrow the oppressor, instead you must join them and assimilate in order to be treated like a human being. This relocates the discussion from the Sámi to the more general discussions on indigeneity and immigration in Sweden and in other countries as well.

Conclusion

First of all, in order to conclude this examination, we need to go back and consider the question regarding what Sámi self-representation looks like. Evidently, Sámi self-representation differs from the way the Swedes depict the Sámi in film and on TV. While Swedish film and TV teams have made attempts to reconstruct narratives about the Sámi way of living, asserting that they have similarities with the urban Swede, the Sámi have themselves approached a traditional Sámi iconography, openly playing with romanticism and classical iconography as well enacting visual sovereignty. Sámi visual sovereignty centers around the reindeer, the kolt and the environment in Sápmi, and Sámi directors Amanda Kernell and Nils Gaup illustrate picturesque landscapes and sentimentality. The Sámi perspective is set as the norm, and the stories are told from an insider perspective. In addition, Kernell chooses to educate the audience as the Swedish state has failed in giving the people a genuine picture of the Swedish participation in the maltreatment of the Sámi and other marginalized groups, across the nation and overseas.

The post-colonial state in Sweden has given Sámi filmmakers access to tell their own stories, but they still possess a need for processing the complications of colonialism. This is why Amanda Kernell chooses to exhibit the story of Elle Marja and her sister, condemning the Swedish state and shining a new light on the dehumanizing oppression the Sámi have suffered and still suffer from. However, she does not counter the cultural hegemony in Sweden, but instead joins the status quo narrative in order to voice her concerns.

Kernell further questions the image of the Swede as superior, and announces that the Swedish education system has failed in educating the people on the colonial and oppressive history (and present) of Sweden. Self-representation is hence important, and even crucial, considering the fact that many earlier silenced stories now are told, and that from the perspective of an insider. Kernell also emphasizes the psychology of the individual as the story is told from the Sámi lens of Elle

Marja. The audience explicitly sees what impact colonialism has on the psyche of the oppressed, and thus confronts the viewer and their colonial mindset.

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