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Elderly Sami as the “Other”

Discourses on the Elderly Care of the Sami, 1850–1930

ABSTRACT In this article, the authors have examined images of elderly Sami in relation to elderly care in Sweden between the years 1850 and 1930. What discourses can be revealed from spoken statements, written documents and everyday practices? This study has shown that the higher the degree of closeness and mutual exchange between Sami and non-Sami, the more the image of the “Other” as something “foreign” has been challenged and rejected. To be able to one-sidedly distance oneself from other people and turn them into stereotypes requires a certain amount of emotional and geographic distance. Where there has been physical distance and a lack of mutually beneficial exchange, the elderly Sami are more often described as “foreign,” “threatening” and “deviant,” a force of nature that must be tamed and controlled. The Sami dismissed as “not-quite-human” in the popular discourse were the paupers among them. A more balanced relationship existed between the Sami and the settlers in the mountains and the elderly Sami were often described as “one of the family.” The staffs of the Sami old-age homes were far more nuanced in their view of the elderly than the civil servants sent from Stockholm to report back on the Sami.

KEYWORDS Sami, elderly, elderly care, discourses, ethnicity

Introduction

A source from the early 1890s details how the auctioning of elderly Sami was conducted. Auctions of the poor were a form of entertainment for the better-situated, ethnic Swedish farmers back then. They had a few drinks and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the paupers on display in a relaxed, playful atmosphere. This auction took place on a cold winter's day in the village of Vilhelmina. Three grey-headed Sami were led to the auction block.

The poor people were lined up in a row out in the snow and cold for display. One potential buyer approached the unhappy souls and opened each of their mouths to inspect their teeth, as people do when buying a horse. This was met with raucous laughter.

One of the most drunken men succeeded in winning the bidding on all three and put them in his sleigh. As he drove away amid more laughter, the other men asked where he planned on keeping them. Not in the house with the rest of the family, he answered. I'll put them in the sauna. And that is exactly what he did (Johansson 1968: 127).

In this article, the authors will examine images of elderly Sami in relation to elderly care in Sweden between the years 1850 and 1930, a time span ranging from before to well after the establishment of retirement homes. What discourses can be revealed from spoken statements, written documents and everyday practices? The material includes recorded and transcribed interviews from DAUM,¹ the Inquiry on Poor Relief of 1924 and spoken statements from the old-age homes.

Historical Background

The indigenous Sami were until the beginning of the nineteenth century the majority population in the northern region of Sweden called *Sápmi*. The Sami culture was complex with cultural differences between the Sami in the north and in the south and between the Sami who lived a nomadic life as reindeer herders, made their living by hunting and fishing, were settled or left the reindeer herding for a more agricultural way of living (Sköld & Axelsson 2008). As the nineteenth century progressed, however, *Sápmi* underwent a major demographic change due to intense in-migration of settlers. The Swedish Government used different incentives to colonize and develop *Sápmi*. The Settlement Act was passed in 1673, according to which settlers were promised fifteen years of tax exemption (Lundmark 1998). Settlers had first arrived in the late seventeenth century, but not in significant numbers until more than a hundred years later. At that point, the colonization process began in earnest and within one hundred and fifty years the Sami became a minority in their own land.

During the colonization process, taxation, land rights allocation, the school system, and religious practice were all factors strongly affecting the living conditions of the Sami population. Colonization led to conflict between the Sami and non-Sami populations, including disputes over fishing rights and damage caused by the reindeer, though it also led to an exchange of services. To understand these conflicts better, it is essential to examine the regional policies formulated by the Swedish state (Nordin 2009). The period between 1846 and 1913 is characterized by burgeoning

scientific interest in race biology, a view of the Sami as a dying breed, and a policy of *assimilation*. In turn, the period between 1913 and 1971 is characterized by the opinion that “Lap should be Lap,” indicative of paternalism and *segregation*.

Previous Research

We possess almost no knowledge about the conditions in which elderly Sami lived and how they experienced ageing, either in the traditional nomad culture or in modern Swedish society (Olofsson 2004). While there are some fragments of research worth seeking out (cf. Amft 2000; Balto 1997; Campbell 1982: 225–240; Cocq 2008; Beach 1988; Kjellström 2003: 270; and Åhrén 2008: 116–119), there is only one single academic study entirely dedicated to the subject (Aléx 2007). Further insight can be gleaned in some ethnological works (cf. Johansson 1968: 126–133; *Sameland i förvandling* 1986) and in autobiographies (Thomasson 1994).

Elderly Care. From Family Matter to Municipal Policy

As early as the seventeenth century, some parish regulations dictated that the community take care of its own poor (Holgersson 2008). An act of the Swedish Parliament in 1763 clarified how the burden was to be shared between the state and the local community (Engberg 2005). Poor relief in each parish would be financed primarily through voluntary charitable donations and administered by the local clergyman and his church council (Andersson 1996). Parish meetings were decision-making events where clergy and parishioners discussed and determined affairs of parish policy, such as who was eligible to receive poor relief. Thus the self-governance imposed by the state resulted in a growing need to define the limits of “belongingness” to the local community (Lees 1998).

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, no poor relief was specifically earmarked for the Sami. Care of the elderly was primarily a private, family matter. If an individual grew too weak to undertake the trek to the settlement, he was placed on the shores of a lake where he could make a living fishing and hunting (Kjellström 2003). The Poor Law of 1847 further clarified the financial and administrative responsibilities assigned to the parishes. Each was instructed to establish its own social welfare board and levy a tariff on every member of the parish to finance poor relief (Engberg 2005). The social issue was therewith brought to the fore and the poor were now the object of national instead of local attention. Philanthropists began concentrating their efforts on particular poverty-stricken groups (Nilsson Ranta 2008). Thus at this point in time, care of elderly Sami was transformed from

a family matter to an activity practised and administered by the Church (Andersson 1996).

At the same time, a public discussion about poor relief and the Sami began, mainly at the initiative of the church. During a session of the Swedish Parliament in 1851, Bishop Israel Bergman raised the question of specific poor relief for the Sami (SOU 1924:58). Bishop Bergman had lived close to the Sami and noted the harsh conditions to which the elderly were subjected. His question was formulated in a motion and resulted in a fund-gathering campaign aimed at finding appropriate homes for those Sami who were too old to travel. In the South Sami parishes of Jämtland, social welfare boards manned by Swedish representatives were created.

The passing of the Municipal Laws of 1862 established poor relief as a tax-funded municipal responsibility (Engberg 2005). Historically, this period is considered restrictive financially speaking (Holgersson 2008). While the Swedish state increased its interest in the care of elderly Sami, the clergy proved most active. Bishop Olof Bergqvist, for example, began collecting money to build old-age homes for the Sami, the first of which was opened in Jokkmokk in 1911.

Before a new Poor Law was enacted in 1918, the Church had been the main practitioner of poor relief. From the mid-nineteenth century until the new Poor Law the elderly care in rural areas included: accommodations, auctions, poorhouses and begging among different farmers (Edebalk & Lindgren 1996: 138–139; Engberg 2005: 184–186). In the poorhouses, it was not unusual to mix elderly with chronically sick and mentally disabled persons and orphans (Edebalk & Lindgren 1996: 139). The refurbished law obligated municipalities to establish county-supervised homes for the elderly (Holgersson 2008), which effectively ended the influence exercised by the clergy in this field (SOU 1924:58: 5). The law also inhibited the use of auctions and begging. The law embraced every inhabitant of Sweden, but many opined that a certain group existed beyond the scope of the law. That group was the Sami.

So in 1919, a commission was convened to determine how best to provide poor relief to Sami in need. A committee travelled throughout Sápmi discussing the question of poor relief with Sami and settlers alike (SOU 1924:58). One of the tasks of this fact-finding mission was to determine whether it was economically feasible to hand over elderly care to local communities. Since legally the Sami population did not belong to any municipality and did not pay local taxes, some felt that the state should assume responsibility (SOU 1924:58). The committee concluded that the best solution would be for the state to finance poor relief, while the municipality assumed the task of supervision and administration (SOU 1924:58). Social

and humanitarian arguments were emphasized, due to the unusual lifestyle and habits of the Sami.

The committee thought it would be preferable for the Sami to have their own, separate old-age homes, the better to deal with possible problems concerning the particular living and eating habits of the Sami. As a consequence, a government subsidy was established in 1927 and legislation drafted to insure that every Sami parish have its own old folk's home. By the end of the 1940s, care of the elderly was in local hands. However, an elderly care study conducted in 1952 concluded that special funds earmarked for the Sami had failed to put the Sami on an equal footing with the non-Sami. A year later, the Swedish Parliament voted to curtail the public funding of special old-age homes for the Sami (Andersson 1996).

Theory, Method and Material

Our study is mainly based on discourse analysis (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000) and the ideas of the literary critic Edward Said (1993) on the Western, colonial construction of the "Other," the primitive savage located lower down on the Darwinian evolutionary scale than the white man. While the "Other" is feared as a strange, alien, impure being, he is also fascinating due to the natural state in which he lives and his perceived authenticity.

The taboo theory of anthropologists Mary Douglas (1995 [1966]) and Edmund Leach (1964) is another source of inspiration. This theory can be fruitfully linked with Said's idea about our tendency to think in terms of the "Other," whereby those who are different are assumed to display characteristics we do not want to find in ourselves. According to Douglas and Leach, there is a universally basic way of thinking whereby the world is divided into pure and impure, accepted and taboo. Each culture has its own way of defining what is pure or impure.

The present analysis combines the view of elderly Sami expressed directly in oral or written statements with those stated indirectly through the reception and care of the elderly. In analyzing written statements, we are inspired by Michel Foucault's definition of the term *discourse*, that is, the written form of utterance which shapes scholarship and exerts power by defining certain points of view as legitimate and others as illegitimate (Foucault 1987). This definition of discourse we have combined with the term *popular discourse* (cf. Sabeen 1984), which is used to describe non-written, oral utterances. Oral discourse is influenced by written discourse, though they are separate entities in many other respects.

Both actions and material reality are discursive and expressed in the institutions of society (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000). Foucault's term

practitioner is used when focusing on the treatment received by the elderly Sami in their encounters with elderly care in varying contexts. What utterances about elderly Sami could be identified in the material? What values are indirectly expressed in these utterances and in the actual care of the elderly? How do the Sami react and how do the practitioners responsible for their care define them? What dominating discourses could these identified utterances be connected with? Discourse analysis is both theoretical and methodical, aimed at analyzing how reality is constructed through language. We also note the consequences of the use of discourse in the form of inequitable relationships. We have searched for nodal points in the source material, central signs around which other meanings evolve (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips 2000).

The present analysis of the oral discourse is based on material housed in the archives of the Department of Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research (DAUM) in Umeå, while the official, written discourse has been recorded by the Government's Poor Relief Inquiry of 1924, with additional accounts coming from residents of old-age homes. The archive material from DAUM concerning Sami seniors from the 1880s up until the establishment of the first old-age homes is mainly found in the Southern Sami region. The sources consist of recorded and transcribed interviews where the settlers are telling about the elderly Sami. The voices of the Sami are not to be found. Some of the written stories cannot be used as sources in this study and are rather to be seen as legends. There is also a lack of material concerning the practice at the Sami old-age homes. The few sources found will be used as examples about how the elderly Sami were treated and conceived of at these homes.

The image of the Sami in Oral Culture

Ageing Sami participated in reindeer herding for as long as possible. Elderly reindeer owners often had servants to help with the heaviest tasks (Beach 1988: 222). As mentioned above, when they became too old and weak for the nomadic life, they often set up camps on the shores of a lake and made a scant living from fishing (Kjellström 2003: 278). The same goes for the elderly Sami who had lost their reindeer or never owned any in the first place (Amft 2000: 39).

They are Just like Us

When the elderly settlers were retiring, they gave away their farms to the eldest son, thereby in return getting food and housing for the rest of their lives (Kjellman 1981). When no longer capable of managing on her or his

own, a retired Sami could find accommodation in the home of a settler, for a price (Kjellström 2003: 270). Ethnologist Åke Campbell and folklorist Levi Johansson have both written about mutual exchange between the Sami and the settlers. Settlers offered migrating Sami room and board and might also house the sick and elderly or small children who had difficulty making the long treks (Johansson 1967: 336–337; Campbell 1982: 225–230, 236–240). Sometimes a Sami purchased a settlement in preparation for retirement. Until then, he could lease the settlement to someone else.²

By the end of the eighteenth century, a number of Forest Sami had become home owners (Ruong 1975: 157) and thus could care for the elderly in their own houses.³ Before that, they too placed their elderly in the homes of local settlers or farmers. Sixten Engelmark, born in Risträsk, Gällivare, in 1908, tells this story.

In my village my great-grandfather Erik Hansson cared for a Forest Sami in his old age. In return the son of the Forest Sami gave my great-grandfather some meat. Every time the reindeer herd passed by and left, the old Forest Sami cried, I am told. My great-grandfather even built a cabin for the old man.⁴

In an interview recorded in Tallberg, in the parish of Jörn in Västerbotten, Jonas Wikman recalls an elderly Sami woman who lived in his parent's home during his childhood in the 1920s. She used to sit and sew Lapp shoes and now and then she would take a pinch of snuff. She taught the children to speak Sami and as proof he recites the prayer Our Father in Sami. Jonas says that she believed in all manner of superstition, which she also taught the children. This gives us a picture of a close and confidential relationship between the Sami woman and the children of the house; she comes across as an old, cherished relative. Jonas concludes his account with an emphatic "they are just ordinary people like us!"⁵

They are Filthy and Rude

In Lapland, where settlers and Sami lived together in mutually advantageous cooperation, there was nothing of the distanced and contemptuous attitude one can find in rural farming communities. The popular utterances among settlers who lived in commercial symbiosis with the Sami presuppose that the Sami are just like everyone else. The statements about the Sami as "Others" originated in the more established farm villages. Levi Johansson, who himself grew up in the settlement of Raukasjö, Jämtland, where the settlers lived in perfect harmony with their Sami neighbours, was shocked when, as an eleven-year-old goat herder, he entered service as a farmhand and became

aware of the abundant racial hatred. "The word 'Finn' [Sami, author's note] did not sound much better here than 'Jew' in Nazi Germany" (Johansson 1967: 337). He suggests that attitudes were most hostile in parishes the Sami had abandoned long ago. Johansson traces the main source of this contempt to legal disputes between Sami and settlers over grazing land, the most suitable of which the Sami had been forced off. Hostile attitudes originated in competition for natural resources, he concludes. Thus when the number of settlers was maintained at a level leaving plenty of resources available to all, cooperation and friendship resulted. But wherever the arable land was too small to support both economies, conflict arose and the Sami were inevitably forced out of the area (Johansson 1967: 333–337). Racism was evident in characterizations of the Sami as "filthy" and "rude." A man describing his childhood in Vargträsk, in the parish of Örträsk, at the beginning of the twentieth century, recalled an old, destitute Sami who lived in a cabin on the farm. He was made fun of because of his strange habits, like relieving himself just outside the door.⁶ From the parish of Gällivare there is the story about

a poor Forest Sami who couldn't manage to follow the wanderings. He sat stiffly on a chair, stiffly and toothless, in the home of some settlers. The children told him to open his mouth and took turns tossing pieces of sugar into his mouth.⁷

Not Quite Human

Some penurious seniors had no relatives who could or would pay for their care and supervision. What happened when they no longer could support themselves? In the minutes of a parish meeting held in Vilhelmina in 1845, it is stated that the majority of the "Lapp" elderly are so poor they cannot all be accommodated with the residential population. As a result, it is decided that four "Lapp paupers" will "be taken in by the parish." Included among them was "the poor Lapp widow Christina Zackris D:r [who] has been left here in Kyrkovallen, by request of relatives because of her inability to support herself due to her old age" (*Vilhelmina. En lappmarksbygd på väg mot framtiden* 2006: 153).

The oldest system of elderly care meant that paupers were compelled to switch between different farms for food and lodging. There is evidence from throughout the country that paupers in general were often subjected to humiliating treatment and that the families responsible for their care tried to get away with laying out as little as possible. From the parish of Vilhelmina it is told that the food for the paupers was the worst imaginable. Usually the pauper was served small dried fish, which was neither cleaned nor scaled. Some farmers expecting paupers for dinner merely scraped

leftovers into poorly washed bowls, caked with dried food. Few caregivers laundered or mended their clothes. The number of days a guest had to be tolerated depended on the size of the farm. In those cases where the responsible farm only had to provide one meal, the pauper was sometimes forced to leave even though it was late at night and more than ten kilometres to the next farm (Johansson 1968: 123–133).

The Sami pauper was treated with even more contempt. From the parish of Malå it is said that

an old and weak pair of Lapps, supporting themselves on sticks, asked the provider for a few kilos of coarse rye flour to cook some porridge, but the answer was NO, the sooner the old Lapps died the better it would be for the parish.⁸

The same source speaks of an elderly Sami who, upon finishing a meal provided by a local farmer was told, “Now, you snuff-snorting Lapp, you have had enough, so you can go home and be lazy!” The chronicler suggests that the only protection the Sami had against the hostility of the Swedes was their fear of Sami witchcraft.⁹

After the system of being shuttled between farms had been abolished, those in need of care were auctioned off publicly, which could lead to elderly spouses being separated.¹⁰ The people of Vilhelmina had a popular term for this form of care: “to feed until death.” Since the winning bidder was the one demanding the lowest compensation from the parish, the shorter the pauper lived the bigger the profit. Circumstances were the same as before, except that lodgers were housed permanently in one single home. They often had to work hard for as long as they could, and when they no longer managed to keep themselves clean they had to move into the barn or the sauna (a building where they dried the corn) (Liliequist 1994).¹¹

Lisa Johansson of Vilhelmina tells a story about a wealthy farmer who made money taking in elderly Sami no one else would bid on.

He used to take on old Sami for a lump sum and lock them up in some shed. Often the shed or the sauna became their living space and ultimately the place where they died. Now Nils Lars had gotten some “Lapps” from Vilhelmina. According to the story it was two old men and a woman. They were said to be dangerous since they practised witchcraft. But the farmer Lars laughed and said that he would cure them of that. When he received the agreed compensation, he went off with his “witchcraft practising Lapps.” They were tired and sick people who were brought home to Lars in Nordansjö while showered with jokes and ridicule. When Lars arrived home with his “Lapps” he fixed up the sauna. They had to lie on the corn-drying shelves, which would be just the right place for “Lapps.” The food was the

worst imaginable. It didn't take long before the "Lapps" were too exhausted to get up or keep themselves clean. There was a terrible reek from the sauna. Three old people who couldn't manage to go out. They would lie there and crawl around as much as they could in the dark sauna. Nobody heard their complaints, nobody heard their cries for water when they were thirsty or for food when they were hungry. They were witchcraft practising Lapps, so it was dangerous to go near them. The poor people were treated like creatures from the underworld, not like people.¹²

This story reveals that the distancing and dehumanization to which all the poor were subjected was even more inimical when it came to the Sami. They were not quite human, they looked like trolls in their rags and they smelled bad. They spoke some kind of troll language and were known to be harmful since they could cast a spell on a person. Thus their reputed mastery of witchcraft provided the Sami with no defence here. Instead, superstition among the peasants led to the Sami being categorized as supernatural, non-human beings, permitting the farmer to stow them away out of sight and thereby making the elderly extra vulnerable.

Two Contrasting Discourses

In the period ranging from 1880 to the establishment of old-age homes for the Sami, two contrasting images of elder care and the attitudes of "the Swedes" towards the elderly Sami can be discerned in the material we have studied. The most basic explanation of the divergence in these discourses lies in financial and social conditions. Equality between the caregivers and their charges is a decisive factor. In the example from Tallberg, where the Sami woman enjoyed the same status as the household's own elders, the relationship between Sami and Swede is equitable. In return for taking care of seniors, the farm household received reindeer meat from the Sami in accordance with a system of reciprocity, the mutual exchange of goods, gifts and services (Campbell 1982). But in the case of the auctions and in compelling the elderly to move from farm to farm, reciprocity is absent. Poverty-stricken seniors ended up outside the bounds of the system. They could neither afford to pay for their own care nor had relatives who could pay for them (Kjellman 1981). Elderly Sami were even more vulnerable due to discrimination, the fact that they were the "Other," they were not like us.

The Image of the Sami in Public Discussion of Old-Age Homes

In 1924, the committee charged with investigating poor relief among the Sami submitted its final report. It makes for interesting reading insofar as it

provides invaluable insight into the view of the Sami as expressed by official representatives of the Swedish Government. Furthermore, the investigation influenced the development of old-age homes specifically designed for the Sami. The driving forces behind the establishment of these facilities were often private citizens affiliated with church groups or missionary societies, which indicates that they were constructed on religious and philanthropic foundations. In other words, the aim was not only to care for the health and welfare of the elderly but also to shape their moral and religious beliefs. This involved time-consuming negotiation in order to choose the best locations and to identify exactly who was qualified to receive benefits. At the same time, the question was asked as to whether the Sami would actually feel at home in these controlled environments. The process reflects the perception of the Sami as a group with special characteristics and special needs, which in turn influenced both legislation and the everyday lives of the elderly. While ideological forces were influencing and designing poor relief for the Sami, local practice and attitudes shaped everyday poor relief on the ground.

Upon meeting representatives of the Sami community during their fact-finding mission in Sápmi, they broached the idea of old-age homes specifically designed for their needs. According to this proposal, the homes would be designed to resemble a settlement, featuring a main building, several smaller outbuildings, a permanent staff made up of a nurse and a housekeeper and an infirmary. Residents would be free to go hunting and fishing and to visit friends and relatives, since the homes would be built close to existing Sami settlements. They would also have access to a physician and a priest, and would live in surroundings designed to incorporate Sami culture and tradition. With only the odd reservation about the best location for these homes, the Sami approved of the proposal (Riksarkivet: YK 193:2).

However, the report also admitted that the Sami were poorly represented in the process and encouraged their increased participation, while at the same time enumerating reasons why it might be difficult

to determine the number of Lapps that should be included on the board [...] the difficulty of finding Lapps who were suitable and willing to join the board or dedicate the time necessary to the task (SOU 1924:58: 89).

The Sami as “Peculiar”

The early twentieth century witnessed scientific, political and ideological efforts to separate and categorize ethnic groups according to their perceived special characteristics and peculiar natures (Furuhagen 2007). In Sweden, this was the era of the “Lapps should be Lapps” policy, expressed by the will

to protect the Sami by preserving their nomadic, reindeer-herding lifestyle (Lundmark 1998). This policy of keeping the Sami separate from the majority population and different groups of Sami from one another was in fact expressed by the Poor Relief Inquiry, which at the same time conversely stressed the similarities between the Sami and settler populations. In its report, "real" Sami appear to be synonymous with living the nomadic life. Thus the question of defining who was a Sami was important. The committee intended the old-folks home to house Mountain Sami over sixty years of age, with any vacancies to be filled by needy Forest Sami. And yet ambivalent attitudes and mixed signals abound in the report's attempt at definition.

Those in most pressing need of institutional care are the nomadic Lapps [...] But it ought not be ruled out, but rather intended, that other Sami, who have maintained the traditional customs and not adopted or assimilated the customs, clothing, etcetera of the domiciled population, be admitted and receive the available care as space allows (SOU 1924:58: 96).

The report thus distinguishes between Mountain Sami and Forest Sami, reindeer-herding Sami and Sami who did not make their living from reindeer herding. It also made a distinction between Sami living in North Sápmi and Sami living in the south. For the Sami in South Sápmi, in Jämtland, the old-age homes were free to resemble the homes of the settlers, whereas special attention was needed for the Sami population of Norrbotten, due to their "peculiar" living conditions and unique habits (SOU 1924:58). The group most sorely lacking these positive attributes were the poor, aged, non-reindeer herding Sami of South Sápmi.

The overall image portrayed by the public discourse about the Sami is that they comprised a group with a "peculiar nature," which consisted not only of their nomadic life style and their living apart from the settler population, but also of specific, inherent character traits. The willingness to separate different groups within the Sami population and protect the "right" kind of Sami was informed by images of which characteristics were the "right" ones and which were not. The report also reveals traces of race biology, commonplace in the early twentieth century, in its reference to their "peculiar living habits and characteristics, at least partly engendered by their profession but also by their origins and natural gifts, so very different from the rest of the Swedish population" (SOU 1924:58: 14). Desired and undesirable characteristics are described throughout this document.

The Sami as Quarrelsome and Unmanageable

The Sami are consistently portrayed as quarrelsome, troublesome and incapable of adhering to the precepts of "good manners." Freedom of move-

ment and the flexible enforcement of house rules were seen as necessary to prevent the Sami elderly from causing trouble and disturbing domestic peace, “since the Lapps take such liberties and constantly violate clear instructions, causing discord and discomfort” (SOU 1924:58: 97). It was feared that the old folks would escape from the homes and follow their relatives to the settlement if regulations were formulated too strictly. This perception also influenced everyday practice, as is evident in a report from the home in Jokkmokk, where one particular group were seen as particularly bellicose.

[D]isorderliness between antagonistic parties has been difficult to prevent, especially as the subject of contention has often been of a religious nature. The Laestadians, as they purport to be, have been liberal with their oaths and have told off the matron in no uncertain terms on more than one occasion (Ahlfort 1924: 20).

The Sami as Lazy and Greedy

Other characteristics attributed to the Sami population in the report include greediness and laziness. They are accused of snatching any public relief they can get their hands on, making them stagnant and no longer willing to contribute to society. This is particularly evident in discussing the non-reindeer herding Sami.

And as far as the Lapps are concerned [...] it is difficult not to note that as soon as any temporary need occurs, they have become used to turning to public poor relief and asking for assistance rather than trying to work things out for themselves (SOU 1924:58: 68).

At the same time, a completely contradictory perception of the Sami as happy to pay their way existed, which emerged when describing elderly Sami in care whose relatives commonly paid in kind. The report mentions that they delivered not just any reindeer, but “really good reindeer,” since the Sami were eager to give only the best (SOU 1924:58: 98).

The Sami as Dirty and Childlike

Another recurring complaint is that the Sami were unhygienic. The report urges the need to make allowance for the way of living traditional to the Sami, but not to the extent that it “compromises the cleanliness and tidiness of the home, nor degenerates into indulgence of unwarranted whims” (SOU 1924:58: 97). The solution proffered was to allow the residents a degree of freedom, though not enough for it to spiral out of control. It turned out that the Sami were more pliable than was expected.

At first, the matron's biggest concern was how to go about teaching her charges clean habits. The Lapps are not renowned for their excessive cleanliness. However, it turned out that these fears were unfounded. Nothing proved easier than getting them to appreciate the advantages of cleanliness. They were of course unused to sleeping on clean sheets, but now they rejoice, and furthermore, have realized that proper hygiene is essential to their well being, something they were not aware of before (Berlin 1914: 38–39).

This paternalistic view of the necessity to teach them "proper" behaviour and "proper" hygiene engendered an attendant, ambiguous image of the elderly Sami as childlike, in need of extra care and comfort, discipline and patience.

[The matron] has, with infinite patience and forbearance, as should be, viewed her pensioners as great, big children, to whom one must show tolerance [...] Indeed, they are big children, these old Lapps (Ahlfort 1924: 20).

The view of the elderly Sami as children was not exclusively unique for the Sami population. Instead, the view of elderly in need of discipline and protection was part of a greater discourse of elderly with care needs at this point in time (Edebalk 1991; Qvarsell 1993).

The Sami as Imaginative, Wise and in Harmony with Nature

The Sami lifestyle is portrayed as hard, demanding considerable effort and skill to master a life in an extremely harsh and unforgiving climate. This is complemented with a perception of the people as wise and imaginative by nature. After visiting a Sami woman named *Kristina* at one of the old-age homes, Bishop Olof Bergqvist wrote: "We discussed life's supreme questions and she shared a lifetime of profound spiritual depth with me... a wise expression rested in her weathered features, like a reflection of inner peace" (Bergqvist 1924: 34). However, a lifetime of hard work in a harsh climate seems to have a downside. According to reports, the Sami were a heavy-hearted people who often suffered from mental illness (SOU 1924:58: 79–80).

The Sami in Public Discourse

There is no single public discourse about the elderly Sami. Instead, a series of competing, even contrary discourses was conducted simultaneously. The dominant discourse is ambiguous, too, as it paints two different images. On the one hand, we have the "problematic" Sami, characterized as lazy, primitive and contentious. These seniors were considered quarrelsome and diffi-

cult to deal with. On the other, we have the “well-behaved” Sami, said to be gentle and wise, “frozen sparrows” deserving warmth and attention. In general, the “problematic” point of view dominated public perceptions, while the “well-behaved” one informed everyday practice. This dual discourse also led to differentiated practices and patterns of behaviour by the staff of the old-age homes.

Popular and Official Discourses. Differences and Similarities

Both discourses on the Sami as the “Other” in Swedish society were dominated by images of the primitive savage, uncivilized and naïve but also authentic and at one with nature. The “official” discourse expressed in government inquiries is fraught with Social-Darwinist perceptions of the Sami as savages who need to be elevated and educated to become civilized. These perceptions were widely embraced in the West at the time, which reinforced the supremacy of the white man and his responsibility to educate the races further down the evolutionary ladder. From the view of the Western and European culture as superior to other cultures, a more pronounced biologically determined racism culminated in the early twentieth century (Furuhagen 2007). In Sweden, interest in race biological science was highly intensified during the 1910s and 1920s with the establishment of the State Institute for Race Biology in the year 1922 (Furuhagen 2007). The official committee report on the Sami is permeated with ambivalence and fear of what was perceived as “foreign” and is clearly representative of the times in which it was composed. Issued in 1924, it features obvious traces of race biology influence, while at the same time indicating an ambivalent attitude toward race biology itself. Biological heritage explained typical Sami characteristics (“characteristics depending on natural predisposition”), which made it essential to determine who exactly was Sami and differentiate between “full Lapps” and “half-Lapps.” At the same time, government policy put the Sami on equal footing with the rest of the population, and access to old-age homes was to be based on the extent to which an individual lived in accordance with Sami tradition.

By the 1930s, race biology and race hygiene were subjected to harsher criticism. The discourse of hygienization, with its roots in nineteenth-century medicine, focused on dirt and impurity, something characteristic of the “Other” (Frykman & Löfgren 1979). To the Oscarian middle-class, farmers, workers and Sami were dirty, while the settlers and farmers considered the Sami dirty. But hygiene and biology are not enough to explain attitudes towards elderly Sami. Since the authorities invariably supported

settlers in land disputes between settlers and the Sami, the settlers came into indirect contact with contemporary official attitudes toward the Sami and understood that they were more highly valued than the Sami. However, the most direct ideological influence exercised on the population came via the pulpits of the Lutheran Church (Liliequist 1994). The church's unmitigated condemnation and oppression of the shamanic faith of the Sami surrounded the latter with a supernatural aura.

There are similarities and differences between the popular, oral discourse and the official, written one when it comes to the characterization of the Sami differentness. Both are rife with perceptions of the Sami as filthy, ill mannered, rude and lazy. But in the popular discourse this does not lead to calls for their education and improvement. People just want to have as little as possible to do with them. The popular discourse also contains an element of superstition. The Sami are attributed supernatural powers, and an elderly Sami pauper is often seen as not quite human, a creature of the underworld capable of casting evil spells and should thus best be avoided.

Proximity has significance for how a discourse on the "Other" manifests itself. This study has shown that the higher the degree of closeness and mutual exchange between Sami and non-Sami, the more the image of the "Other" as something "foreign" has been challenged and rejected. To be able to one-sidedly distance oneself from other people and turn them into stereotypes requires a certain amount of emotional and geographic distance. Where there has been physical distance and a lack of mutually beneficial exchange, the elderly Sami are more often described as "foreign," "threatening" and "deviant," a force of nature that must be tamed and controlled. The latter is clearly evident in the Poor Relief report, which is permeated by fears that the "deviant" Sami will take unfair advantage of social services, commit infringements on public mores and generally create an unpleasant atmosphere in the proposed old-age facilities. But the stereotypes did not hold up in practical reality. Closeness breeds tolerance, which is evident in the fact that the staff of the homes were far more nuanced in their view of the elderly than the civil servants sent from Stockholm to report back on the Sami.

In fact, an air of equanimity among Sami residents and non-Sami caregivers pervades the popular discourse. The Sami dismissed as "not-quite-human" were the paupers among them. A more balanced relationship existed between the Sami and the settlers in the mountains. The social and economic circumstances the small number of settlers in that region found themselves in meant that they lived in close cooperation with the Sami. Both were dependent on each other, which effectively counteracted the effects of the dominant discourse. Reciprocity bred equality and the elderly

Sami were treated the same way as the settlers' own elders and often described as "one of the family."

Over the period under investigation, practices toward the Sami changed radically. Auctions of the poor were abolished and old-age homes became mandatory in every Sami parish. Our study has shown that external change was not always a direct consequence of changes in points of view and values. The care of elderly Sami became official public business, mostly through the good offices of individual clergymen. Retirement homes meant that in their dotage, the Sami were no longer dependent on the local community, though the dominant discourse of the Sami as "Others" would follow them all the way into their corridors.

NOTES

- ¹ Dialekt-, ortnamns- och folkminnesarkivet i Umeå/Department of Dialectology, Onomastics and Folklore Research in Umeå.
- ² DAUM, Bd 50:2, Tärna; Bd 53:1 Tärna.
- ³ DAUM, acc 9862, Malå.
- ⁴ DAUM, acc 4685, Gällivare.
- ⁵ DAUM, Bd 1267, Jörn.
- ⁶ DAUM, Bd 4961, Örträsk.
- ⁷ DAUM, acc 4685, Gällivare.
- ⁸ DAUM, acc 9862, Malå.
- ⁹ DAUM, acc 9862, Malå.
- ¹⁰ DAUM, acc 9862, Malå.
- ¹¹ DAUM, acc 9862, Malå; DAUM, acc 1010, Vilhelmina.
- ¹² DAUM (FFÖN), acc 1010, Vilhelmina.

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