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Kola Sami in the Stalinist Terror

A Quantitative Analysis

ABSTRACT The study is focused on aspects that have been understudied by previous research on the Kola Sami. First there is a quantitative analysis of the Sami victims of the Stalinist terror. Second there is a discussion of the short- and long-term roles of state violence for the affected indigenous community. Most prior studies of the ethnic aspects of the Stalinist terror have focused on the large Diaspora nationalities or post-war deportations, while this paper concentrates on a small homogenous indigenous community. The study reaches a new level of accuracy about the nature of Soviet terror, and who became victims and why.

KEYWORDS indigenous people, Stalinist terror, mass violence, Sami, Kola Peninsula

Introduction. Kola Sami in the Soviet Union¹

The Sami of the Kola Peninsula are descendants of indigenous people of Northern Russia whose roots date back to medieval times (Wheelerburg & Gutsol 2008; Sergejeva 2000). Until the imperial Russian edict of 1905, Sami reindeer herders were able to migrate freely in Fennoscandia from Sweden–Norway to the Grand Duchy of Finland and the

Arkhangelsk region. Linguistically the Russian Sami were divided into five dialect groups. The largest group was the Kildin Sami (c. 700 individuals). The smaller groups of Ter-Jokanga, Akkala, Skolt and Filman followed after them. The majority of the Kola Sami were reindeer herders. However, many of the Skolt and Filman Sami had dealt with fishery in the Barents Sea and on the lakes and rivers of the peninsula. Almost all Kola Sami (except the Filmans) belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church, spoke Eastern Sami dialects and used Russian as a language of inter-ethnic communication and written language. However, Filmans were Lutherans and spoke Northern Sami, Finnish or Norwegian (Thorvaldsen 2011: 122–128). In the 1910s, four Lutheran churches existed on the Kola Peninsula (Murmansk, Ura-Guba, Aleksandrovsk and Tsyv-Navolok).



Fig. 1. Kola Sami Ilya Barkhatov and his family, Simbozero 1910. His son Fedor Barkhatov was arrested by the NKVD and disappeared in 1940. Photo: Gustaf Hallström (courtesy of the Research Archives at Umeå University Library, Sweden).

In the Russian empire, the Sami had no native-language schools and administrative autonomy. After the 1917 October revolution, the politics of self-determination became a dominant trope for Bolsheviks expressing national aspirations for “oppressed” indigenous peoples of the tsarist regime. The Soviet government looked on the indigenous people in a good way regarding them as a “primitive socialistic social group” (Leete 2004: 28–30).

The Soviet regime in the Barents region was established only in 1920 after three years of civil war. The remote Northern area was *terra incognita* for Soviet leadership, whose personal experience was urban and linked to the

industrial milieu. Therefore, with the help of a favourable national policy, the Bolsheviks wanted to attract indigenous peoples to take their side (Toulouze 2005: 140–141). The official nomenclature of indigenous peoples was changed, and Soviet officials began to use politically correct names. Thus, instead of Lapps (Russian *lopári*) the Sami (Russian *saamy*) appeared in the Soviet law and media. In 1917, a delegation of the Kola Sami was met in the Kremlin by Joseph Stalin—Soviet Russian minister for Nationalities (Souvarine 1939: 200). In 1920, the national assembly of the Kola Sami appealed to the Soviet government of Murmansk with a requirement of political autonomy (Dashchinskiy 1999: 21).

The interwar Soviet Union was unlike many other states in Europe. This difference concerns not only the abolition of private property and the dictatorship of the Communist Party, but also a nationalities policy based on internationalism. The Soviet Union was practically the first great power in the world that systematically promoted the national consciousness of indigenous peoples and established for them institutional forms characteristic of a modern nation. While indigenous peoples faced discrimination, the Soviet Union proclaimed in 1923 a policy of self-determination, cultural and linguistic rights for all minorities (Martin 2001). The main aim of the Soviet nationalities policy in the North was “to liberate indigenous peoples from the vestiges of the past” (Slezkine 1994: 220–221). The Bolshevik party decided to overcome “backwardness of indigenous peoples” and make them “modern,” which meant to develop them in the short term at a higher level of more advanced minorities (Sundström 2007: 130–135). The fascinating experiment of early Soviet minority politics included the establishment of several national autonomies for indigenous peoples, the training and promotion of ethnic cadres, invention of new written languages and the introduction of a native system of education.

The first Soviet census of 1926 counted 1,708 Sami living in Northern Russia, 99.4 per cent of whom worked at that time with reindeer breeding, and the vast area of the Kola tundra was used by Sami reindeer (Kisilev & Kisileva 1987). The total population on the Kola Peninsula at that time was 22,858 persons. The Sami people consisted of 7.5 per cent of the total population and was a significant minority of the Barents region, exceeded in numbers only by the Russian majority.² Besides the Sami, 1,697 Finns, 715 Komi, 222 Karelians, 168 Norwegians, 108 Nenets and 12 Swedes were registered on the Kola Peninsula in 1926. Thus the Nordic and Northern minorities consisted of more than 20 per cent of the total population of the Kola Peninsula. In 1933, the majority of Russian Sami (985 persons or 54.5 per cent of the Kola Sami) were living in the western part of the peninsula in the border area to Finland. At that time, 599 Sami (or 33.2 per cent of

Kola Sami) were living in the central part of the peninsula (Lovozero) and 222 Sami (12.3 per cent) in the eastern part (*Indigenous Peoples of the Kola Peninsula* 2008).

The first Soviet administrative reform of Russian Lapland was based on ethnic criteria. Sami, Finnish and Norwegian national units were established on the Kola Peninsula. Two special Sami districts were established in 1930, and the Sami enjoyed considerable political autonomy. The politics of the indigenization was provided in 1924–1935 under the control of the specially created State Committee of the North (*Komitet Severa*) with a section in Murmansk.

During the collectivization of 1930–1932, twenty-nine Sami national reindeer kolkhozes were established in the tundra (Ruotsala 2005). After the collectivization, the Sami combined the maintenance of basic elements of collective reindeer keeping, while at the same time there were a varying number of privately owned animals (Konstantinov 2005). Each Sami kolkhoz received a specific grazing area to use in perpetuity. The map of grazing lands was sealed by the act between the state and Sami kolkhozes, which guaranteed by law land-use for reindeer herding (Kisilev & Kiseleva 1987; Volkov 1996). Thus, in the 1930s administrative and agrarian reforms retained the Kola Sami rights to work with reindeer husbandry on traditional grazing areas. A group of Soviet scholars was sent to the Sami area in order to learn their dialects and culture and create a research-based written language (Eidlitz Kuoljok 1985). In 1929, teacher training for Sami native cadres was started in Murmansk pedagogical college and in Leningrad at the Institute for Peoples of the North. In 1933, a written Sami language was created using Latin script, and textbooks were published for Sami schools.³

Therefore, the Sami benefited from Soviet nationalities politics (Kisilev & Kiseleva 1987; Volkov 1996; Ruotsala 2005). As Eva Toulouze points out, the Soviet authorities needed to have educated mediators who would be able to ensure communication between the state and indigenous peoples in order to transmit new Soviet values (Toulouze 2005: 141).

However, the situation changed dramatically when in 1937 the NKVD (the security service) started a mass operation in order to execute members of the Sami community. 68 Sami were arrested and accused of being members of a fictitious underground organization, the aim of which would be to establish an independent Sami state. In 1938, the Sami national districts were dismissed and native schools closed (Kisilev 1999). The favourable policy of support of Sami rights had now been changed by state-run violence.

Previous Research and Sources

In 1999, professor Aleksei Kiselev published the first article about the mass operation of the NKVD against Sami (Kiselev 1999). The same year journalist Stanislav Dashchinskiy published an essay about Vasiliy Alymov, Aleksandr Salazkin and other leaders of the Sami cultural movement executed by the NKVD in 1937–1938 (Dashchinskiy 1999: 23–30). A number of documents about and interviews with Skolt Sami about their life under Stalin were prepared for publishing by the Murmansk journalist Aleksandr Stepanenko (Stepanenko 2002). In 2006, the Finnish linguist Leif Rantala prepared an anthology on the Soviet history of the Kola Sami, which includes a number of documents translated from Russian into Swedish (Rantala (ed.) 2006). In an article about the modern history of Northern Sami (Filmans) on the Kola Peninsula, Marja Leinonen discussed briefly the Great Terror and stressed the role of family ties in the purges (Leinonen 2007). In 2010, geographers Sergey Lar'kov and Fedor Romanenko published a collection of articles including general data on victims of Stalinist terror among the indigenous peoples of the Russian North (Lar'kov & Romanenko 2010).

However, the explanation of the Soviet terror made by previous researchers does not work with respect to the studies of mass violence, and the question is still in need of explanation. The quantitative analysis of Stalinist terror against Sami has still not been a subject for thorough academic study, and scholars do not have a clear picture of what happened with the Sami community during the rule of Stalin. The micro historical approach allows reducing the scale of observations and provides an intensive study of limited data. The aim of this study is to analyse the Sami victims of mass violence in order to reach a new level of accuracy about the purpose of the Stalinist terror, and who became victims and why.

The data of this study is based on the published and digital databases of the victims of the Soviet terror, where ethnicity and place of residence are mandatory criteria. The first data on the Sami people arrested and executed during the Stalinist terror was published in Murmansk (*Kniga pamyati* 1997). The other digital databases which were used are the Memorial database with over 2.6 million names of victims of the Stalinist terror (<http://lists.memo.ru>), the regional database of North-Western Russia "Recovered Names" (<http://vizz.nlr.ru>) and the database "Repressed Russia" with over 1.4 million names (<http://rosagr.natm.ru/memorybook.php>).

As a rule, each entry in these databases contains the following information about the victims of the terror: full name, date of birth, ethnicity, residence, place of work and occupation, education, political background (where relevant), class origin, date of arrest, date of trial, statute of criminal

code, sentence and date of execution. This data is used in comparison with the data sets of the 1926, 1937 and 1939 All-Soviet censuses and the reports of the ethnographic expeditions to the Kola Peninsula. The database collected by the author includes 96 names of Sami victims of Stalinist terror. Several Sami were arrested twice, some of them classified by the NKVD as Russians or Finns.

National Operations of NKVD

The study of mass killing took a major turn in the post-Second World War period because of the Holocaust. However, it has taken a rather long time for researchers to get involved in the ethnic aspects of Soviet terror. Robert Conquest, who popularized the term *Great Terror* in his classic account of Stalin's terror, depicts these events as repressions first of all against political, cultural and military elites (Conquest 1968). The pioneer study of Aleksandr Nekrich was devoted to the post-war deportations of Soviet Crimean and Caucasian minorities (Nekrich 1978). The access in the 1990s to previously inaccessible sources from the Soviet archives has shed light on the ethnic aspects of the Great Terror (Samuelson & Sorokin 2007: 739–756). At a meeting of the Politburo on 20 July, 1937, Stalin initiated the German operation by writing “a proposal” that “*all* Germans working in our military and chemical factories, electrical stations and building construction in *all* regions, *all* must be arrested” (Okhotin & Roginskiy 1999: 35). In all 56,787 ethnic Germans were arrested, of which 41,898 were shot. Only 820 of them were citizens of the Reich. The next operation was “Polish” in terms of which 139,815 Soviet Poles were arrested and 111,071 were executed (*Repressii protiv polyakov i pol'skikh grazhdan* 1997). A number of smaller national operations were organized by the central government according to the Polish model. Among them were: the Greek, Iranian, Afghan, Bulgarian, Korean and Finnish operations (Takala 1998: 161–200; Nikolskiy 2001: 74–88). Moreover, the Latvian operation was initiated by the local NKVD of Smolensk. During this operation, which started 3 December, 1937, 17,851 Soviet citizens, mainly of Latvian origin, were arrested and 13,444 were shot (Platonau & Shashkevich 1993). Altogether, 335,513 people were arrested in the national operations and 247,157 of them were shot (Werth 2003: 232).

A number of features separate the national operations of the NKVD from other parts of the Great Terror, making them similar to genocide. The suspicious ethnicity was the determining criterion for arrests. The terror against national minorities was top-secret unlike, for example, the open Moscow trials against “old Bolsheviks.” The murders were conducted on a mass scale without a trial. Victims were killed under cover of the night in

special places protected by the security service, who then sought to conceal all traces. Today, the national operations of NKVD are seen by scholars as a central theme of the Great Terror (Martin 1998: 813–861; Werth 2003: 215–239; Morris 2004: 751–766).

The role of ethnicity and/or class in the Soviet Great Terror is still a questionable issue for contemporary historiography. Scholars have put forward many different explanations for the mass murders committed in 1937–1938 in minority areas (Savin 2012: 40–61). Two main approaches deserve special attention. Most scholars focus on the Diaspora nationalities (so called “Western minorities”) and security dilemma and explain that this part of the Soviet terror was based not on ethnic origin but on security reasons. The key factor was the attempt of the Kremlin to clean the Soviet borderlands from the “problematic minorities” in order to stop their contacts with neighbouring hostile countries (Werth 2003: 215–239; Mann 2005: 318–328; Kuromiya 2007: 141–143). Some scholars argue that Soviet terror against minorities was actually mass murder based first of all on an ethnic criterion (Nahaylo & Swoboda 1990: 79–80; Jones 2006: 124–140; Kostiaainen 1996: 332–341; Baberowski 2003: 195–197; Snyder 2010: 89–118; Kotljarchuk 2012: 122–179). The Sami operation was actually not a “national operation” and the majority of Sami victims were exterminated as “anti-Soviet elements” by the NKVD order no. 00447. However the state-run violence against the Sami population was designed by the NKVD investigators in accordance with the principles of national operations.

Kola Sami in Stalin’s purges

The demarcation made in 1920 in Tartu forcibly divided Eastern Sami by the unique straight-line boundary under Finnish and Soviet control. For the first time in Sami history, a well-guarded border between two hostile states isolated Kola Sami from their western kinsmen (Ylikoski 2007: 87–88). The new border broke family ties of Skolt and Filman Sami (Nickul 1948: 14–15). Stalin’s xenophobia was given an additional institutional embodiment when in the end of the 1920s a special security zone (Russian *pogranzona*) was established (Martin 1998: 830). On the Kola Peninsula this zone included a high security 22 kilometre area where only border guards and locals could act and a 90 kilometre security zone that required special permission from the NKVD for Soviet citizens and was a prohibited area for all foreigners.

During the second five-year plan for the national economy of the Soviet Union (1932–1937), a number of large strategically important factories, objects and towns were built on the Kola tundra. Among them was the final stage of the Murmansk Railway construction, the joint stock company

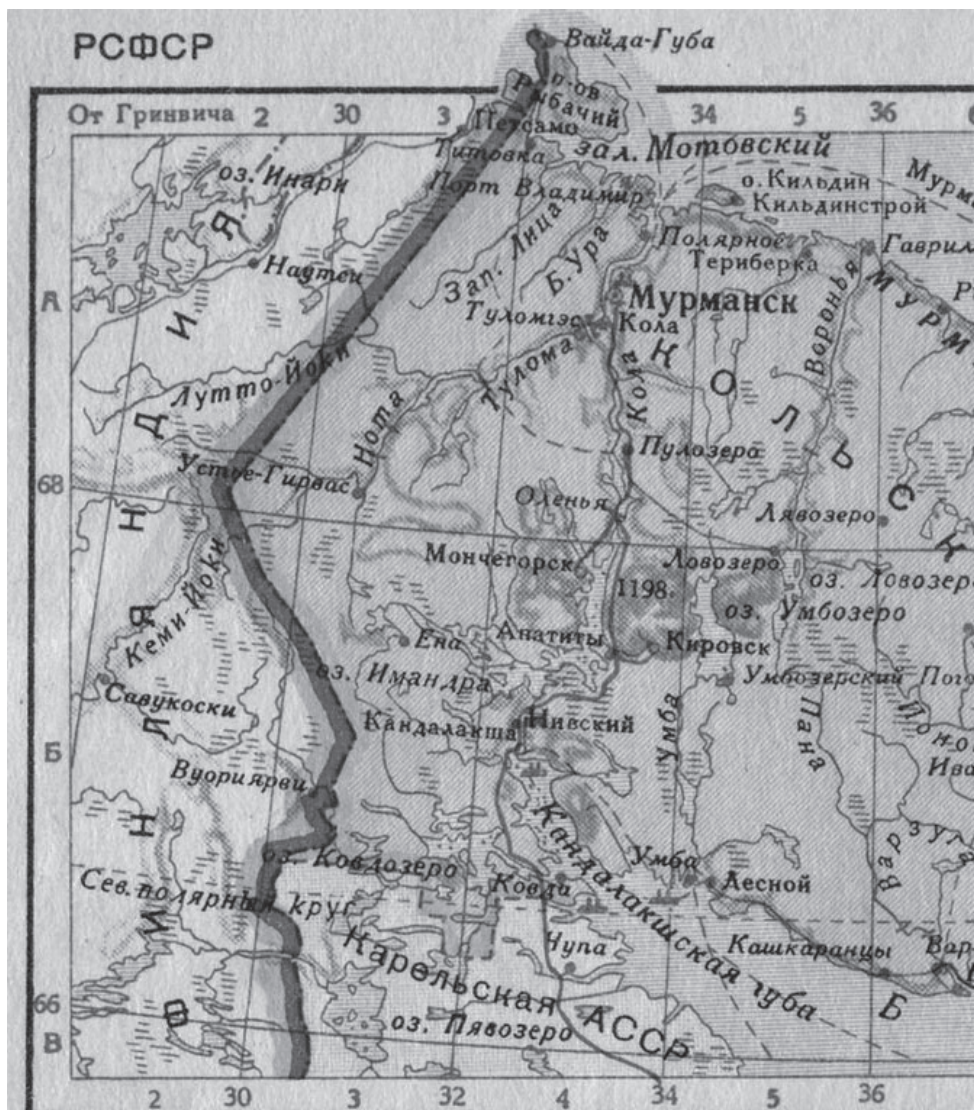


Fig. 2. Murmansk region. From *Karmanny atlas SSSR* ['Pocket atlas of the USSR'] (Moscow 1939).

Apatit in Khibinogorsk, the Severo-Nickel plant in Monchegorsk and the Nizhnetulomskaya hydroelectric plant. In the mid-1930s, the Kola Peninsula became a place for camps and special settlements of the Gulag (Shashkov 2000; Mikolyuk 2003). In July 1933, Joseph Stalin visited the Kola Peninsula. By his decision the Northern Fleet with its central base in Polyarny was established in 1933. The militarization and "gulagization" of the Pen-



insula led to decreasing of the local NKVD staff. On 28 May 1938 a separate Murmansk region was established (previously the Murmansk district was part of the Leningrad region). As a result, the local district NKVD was transformed into a regional NKVD with a large security staff. Thus, in the mid-1930s in the sparsely populated and remote peninsula four different NKVD staffs operated simultaneously (regional, military, border guard and

the Gulag). Each of the departments had its own plan for the arrests. For instance, many Skolt Sami were arrested and persecuted by the officers of the 35th Murmansk border guard detachment (Stepanenko 2002: 136–137). This factor also led to the intensification of the terror on the Kola Peninsula.

Therefore, over a short period of time the Sami territory on the Kola Peninsula turned from a nature reserve to a high military and security area. From this point of view it could be interesting to analyse the statistical data on the victims of the Stalinist terror among Kola Sami. Did Sami living on the Finnish-Russian borderland suffer more from the Stalinist terror? One of the other working hypotheses is that the representatives of the educated strata of Sami became a primary target for mass repressions.

The first arrest in the Kola tundra took place in 1930 and was connected to the forced collectivization of reindeer husbandry. The arrests involved those Sami who resisted collectivization. Altogether in 1930–1936 eleven Sami who resisted collectivization were arrested. The majority of them were sentenced to five-year imprisonment. In 1934, the leading Soviet expert on the Kola Sami, professor David Zolotarev (1885–1935), Russian by descent, was arrested and died in the Gulag.

The climax of the terror occurred in 1937–1938. In 1937, the Murmansk NKVD fabricated the so-called “Sami Complot.” Dozens of Sami were accused of being spies for Finland and members of the fictitious underground organization the alleged aim of which was to rebel against the USSR in order to establish an independent Sami republic. Free-moving Sami who had weapons posed a threat to the totalitarian state, whose aim was to maximize control over its citizens.

However, low-educated Sami were not well suited to the role of separatist leaders. Therefore, this role was assigned to Russian scholars. The director of the Murmansk regional museum Vasiliy Alymov was accused by the NKVD of being the president of the future Sami republic.⁴ The NKVD used his correspondence with Nordic scholars as evidence of the contacts of “the Sami underground organization.” The policemen confiscated the correspondence of Alymov with Karl Bernhard Wiklund, Allan Wallenius, Just Knud Qvigstad and Toivo Immanuel Itkonen (Shabalina 2005: 47–50; Rantala (ed.) 2006: 19–21, 61–65, 77–125).⁵ The wife of Alymov, Sofia Alymova, was also arrested and shot by the NKVD. The head of the “Sami insurgent army” was, according to the NKVD, Aleksandr Salazkin, who was supposed to be a future Defence Minister of the Sami republic.⁶ The Sami plot was a great mystification for the NKVD and already in 1940 a number of Murmansk policemen were arrested and sentenced to prison for “violations of socialist legality” during the investigation of the Sami case (Kiselev 1999). Einar Laidinen and Sergey Verigin—authors of the monograph on the activity of the

Finnish intelligence service in the northern regions of the interwar USSR found out names of 179 Finnish agents, of whom 89 people were natives of the Soviet borderland. Among them there were no Sami (Laidinen & Verigin 2004: 168–169).⁷

Altogether 68 Kola Sami were arrested in 1937–1938. The majority of them were executed. The executions were decided out of court on a mass scale by a so-called *troika* (a three-man meeting of the local chief for the NKVD, the party secretary and the local prosecutor). Moreover, 22 Sami were arrested in 1939–1947 for different “political crimes.” However, no one of them was sentenced to death. In my opinion, the Second World War contributed to the mitigation of repressions against the Sami. For the first time in history, Sami youth were called upon to the Red Army.⁸ The Sami were recruited into the special reindeer brigades (Gorter & Suprun 2007: 163–182). In just one district of Kola, 24 Sami fell on the Northern front in the battles against Finland (*Voiny-saamy* 2011). The Kola Sami did not collaborate with the Finnish state;⁹ and unlike Finns of Ingria, they avoided deportation from their native territory after the war (Matley 1979: 1–16).

What is significant of the targeted ethnic group? At least three points can explain the focus of this study on the Sami. First, they did not represent foreign colonists or Diaspora nationalities, but belonged to the historical minority of Russia, which was well integrated into society. Second, unlike Soviet Germans or Poles they were not among “problematic” minorities. Third, the majority of Sami victims did not represent members of the political elite or urban population. They belonged to the rural population that was fairly easy to control, especially in times of peace. From this perspective, the study can serve as a complement to previous academic research on the ethnic aspects of the Stalinist terror, which has often focused on the large minorities/Diaspora nationalities, security dilemma and highest decision-makers.

Quantitative Analysis of Sami victims of the Stalinist terror

As we see from Diagram 1 and 2, the death rate of the Sami victims peaked during the Great Terror. The death rate at that time is 64.7 per cent, which is lower than the death rate of Soviet Latvians (75.3 per cent) but comparable with the average of national operations of NKVD (73.8 per cent). We should take into consideration that those Sami who had been officially sentenced by a *troika* to “ten years incommunicado” were most probably also murdered (Leinonen 2007: 158). Thus, the final death rate of the Sami victims could be even higher.

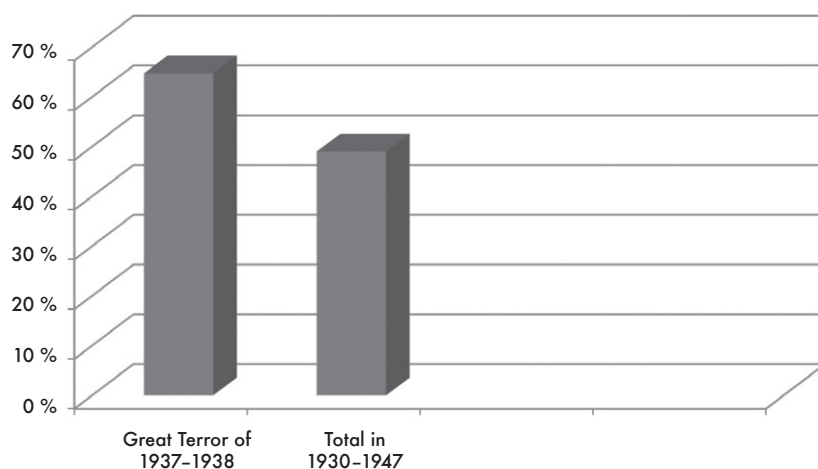


Diagram 1. The death rate, in per cent, among Kola Sami in the 1930s and 1940s.

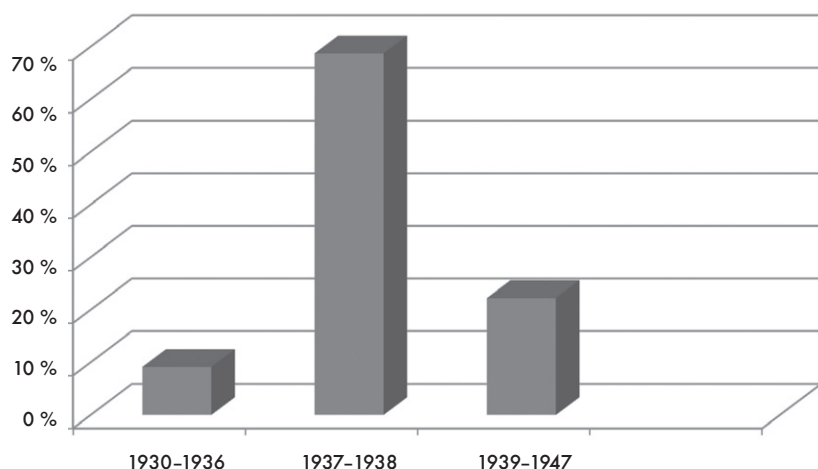


Diagram 2. Dispersion, in per cent, of the total amount of the arrested Kola Sami 1930-1947.

The Sami victims of the Stalinist terror were overwhelmingly male, as can be seen from Table 1. Apparently this is due to the fact that it was the male reindeer herders that traditionally had firearms. Possession of arms was a strong argument for the NKVD to accuse Sami of insurgency (Kiselev 1999). Nevertheless, it seems that the proportion of female victims of the Stalinist terror among Sami (7.2 per cent) was above the national average. For example, only c. 4 per cent of those who were executed during the Great Terror in the city of Leningrad were women (Ilic 2000: 1518).

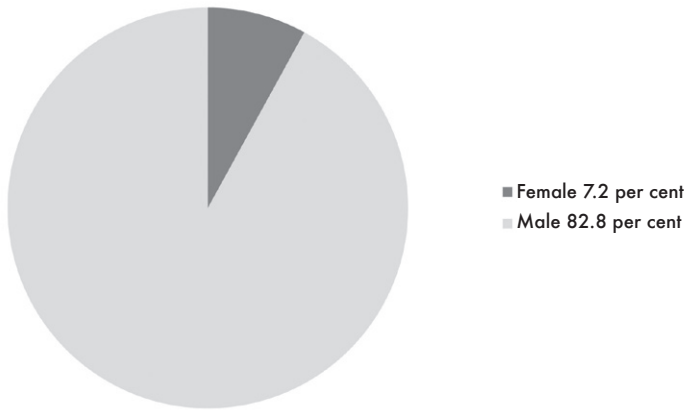


Table 1. Gender of Sami victims in 1937–1938.

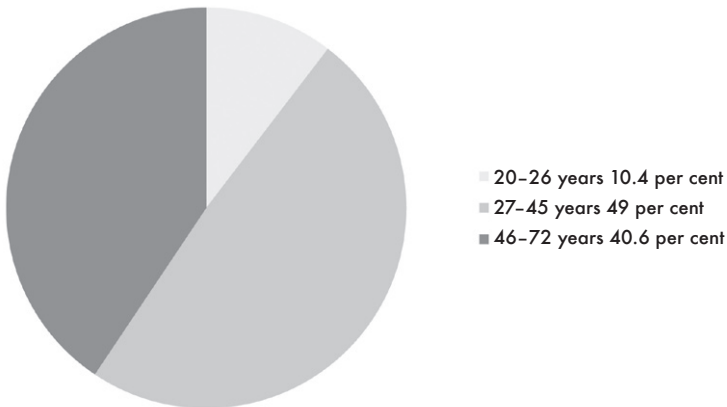


Table 2. Age profile of Sami victims in 1937–1938.

In relation to the Sami population, the Stalinist terror had a disproportional impact on those over 27 years of age, as can be seen from Table 2. The brunt of repression was directed against the Sami in the age of sexual reproduction, which in turn contributed to the vulnerability of the Sami population (Axelsson & Sköld 2006). The age profile of the Sami victims may reflect the fact that older Sami who traditionally occupied the leading position in the local community suffered most from the terror. The great impact of the terror on men in the age group of 46–72 years of age can be explained by

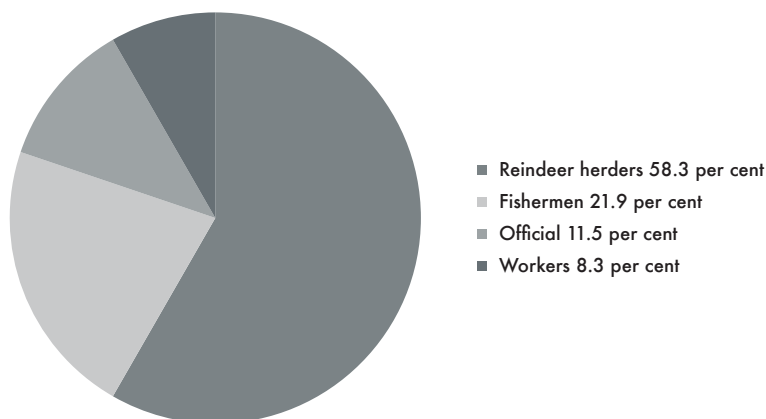


Table 3. Occupation of Sami victims in 1937-1938.

the fact that all of them reached adulthood before 1920 when the Bolsheviks seized power on the Kola Peninsula. These people belonged to *l'ancien régime* and therefore were seen as potential enemies of the Soviet government.

The absolute majority of Sami victims (80.2 per cent), as can be seen from Table 3, had been occupied with the traditional lifestyle (reindeer herding or fishery). It should be noted that a significant proportion of victims (11.5 per cent) were representatives of the educated Sami strata. Among the victims of the state-sponsored terror against Sami were four chairmen of the Sami national kolkhozes, a judge, a native language schoolteacher, and a head of the Sami national district. This very thin layer of Sami intelligentsia was actually created by the Soviet authorities in the late 1920s and then eliminated in the Great Terror. Among the victims were: Fedor Zakharov, the chairman of the Sami kolkhoz "Arsjok;" Vasiliy Kiprianov, the chairman of the Sami kolkhoz "Lutto;" Nikita Matrekhin, the chairman of the Sami kolkhoz "Avt-Varre;" Aleksey Moshnikov, the chairman of the Sami kolkhoz "Nivankylä;" Yakov Osipov, the judge of the Polar district, who was the first Sami who received a law degree; Aleksandr Gerasimov, the teacher of the Sami elementary school in the village of Ristkent; his brother Nikon Gerasimov, the head of staff of the district executive committee of the Sami national district; Andrian Gerasimov, the head of the Kola fur procurement office (*Kolskaya zagotkontora pushniny*); Nikonor Kostylev, the accountant of the Sami kolkhoz "Vosmus;" Aleksandr Yakovlev, the postman of the Sami village of Voronya; and Fedor Arkhipov, the major keeper of the Lapland national reserve.

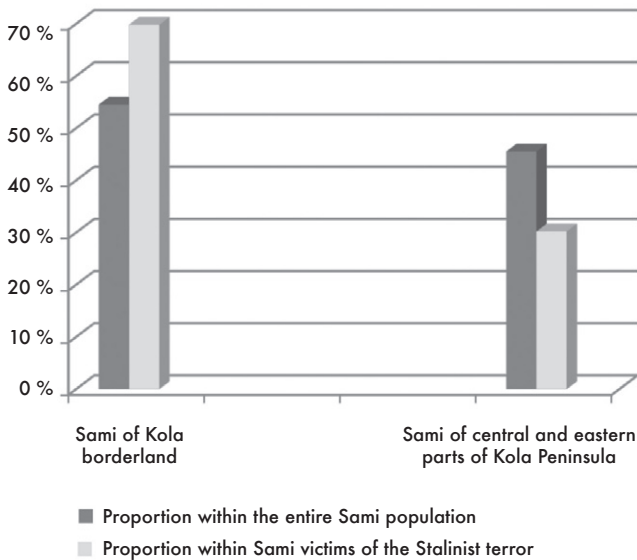


Diagram 3. Residency and proportion of victimized Kola Sami.

As we can see from Diagram 3, the Sami of the borderland were a primary goal for the Stalinist terror. As a result, small-numbered groups of Sami (Skolt and Filmans) living in the border area suffered most of the terror. The results of quantitative studies show that the security dilemma played an important role in political decision-making defining the direction of mass violence.

Conclusions

Terry Martin drew attention to the connection between the Great Terror and the liquidation of the national system of administration, national schools and the expanding educational sphere of the Russian language (Martin 2001: 422–429). Indeed in 1938, the Sami national districts were abolished (Gatagova 2005: 310–313). In 1937 the Latin script of the Sami language was replaced by the Cyrillic alphabet.¹⁰ However, in 1938, all native-language textbooks in both scripts were confiscated, and all Sami schools were closed and replaced later by Russian schools. The promotion of Sami culture in Russia was fully stopped simultaneously until the Perestroika. The mass violence was followed by the 1940 deportation when the Skolt Sami were forcibly relocated from the border area to the inland of the Russian Barents Sea region (Stepanenko 2002) together with other minorities of the North (Laine 2001: 155–164; Tkachenko 2002: 58–65).



Fig. 3. Pelageya and Fekla Chaporova with a mourning ribbon in the Sami language dedicated to their father Petr G. Chaporov (executed in 1937 by the NKVD in Leningrad). Levashovo Memorial Cemetery, St. Petersburg 2000. Photo: Aleksandr Stepanenko.

In a short period of time the Sami minority decreased from 1,841 individuals in 1937 to 1,755 persons in 1939. These population losses may reflect the purges of the Great Terror. Altogether, 96 Sami were arrested during the Stalinist terror. This means that c. 15 per cent of the adult Sami population suffered directly from the state-run terror, which possibly gives this crime against humanity a genocidal character. The Sami were shot under cover of the night in special places protected by the security service, who then sought to conceal all traces. The children of victims did not know what really happened to their disappeared parents until the 1990s. The burial places of Sami victims of Soviet terror are still unknown.

The death rate of Sami victims of the Great Terror (64.7 per cent) was one of the highest in the history of Soviet reprisals. The indigenous peoples of the Murmansk region (Sami, Komi and Nenets) amounted to 2.3 per cent of the victims of the Great Terror, whereas among the entire province population, they amounted in 1939 to only 0.9 per cent (Mikolyuk 2003: 66). However, among those arrested as members of the Sami insurgency there were also Russians and Karelians. This fact makes it difficult to prove that the main intent of the Soviet government was to destroy, in whole or in part, the Sami ethnic group.

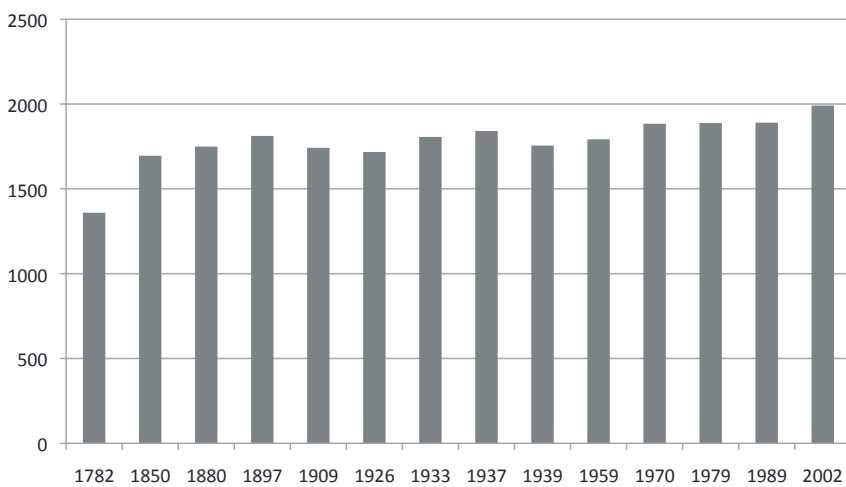


Diagram 4. Kola Sami population estimates from 1782 to 2002, based on the Russian and Soviet censuses.

The small-numbered groups of Filman, Ter-Jokanga and Akkala Sami were never able to recover from such massive terror and deportations and simply became extinct. The groups of Filman and Akkala Sami have practically disappeared. At present, there are only two native speakers of the Ter-Jokanga Sami dialect. There are only 25 Skolt Sami left in Russia. Practically, only the largest group, the Kildin Sami, survived the Stalinist terror without significant losses, but even they were seriously weakened. As a result of the growing militarization and hydroelectricity construction, the nomadic Sami population was deported in the 1950s from the western to the central part of the peninsula (the Lovozero district). The western Sami *pogosts* (villages) do not exist anymore. Since the 1960s, more than 90 per cent of the Russian Sami have been concentrated in the Lovozero area. There the Sami of different dialect origin lived, and they worked together with Komi and Russians and had to use Russian as a language of everyday communication.

About 80 per cent of the Kola Sami born after the Second World War grew up in mixed families. In 1989, 40 per cent of the Kola Sami were urban dwellers and only 42 per cent of the Russian Sami could speak the native language (Luk'yanchenko 1994: 310–312; Khelimskiy 2002: 155–157). Today, the Russian Sami are the most assimilated group within the Sami popula-

tion. The 2002 census registered 1,991 Sami in Russia. A mere 13 per cent of them work with reindeer breeding and only 25 per cent can speak their native language (the 2002 Russian census). Nowadays, reindeer husbandry on the Kola Peninsula is conducted on a limited scale in small collective and individual farms, which are concentrated mostly in the Lovozero area (Prakhova 2002).

Stalin's terror against the Sami people was a taboo subject for Soviet historiography and commemoration efforts. This memory was uncomfortable for the state, probably because it could be a starting-point for the construction of a strong Sami identity. Until the late 1990s, knowledge of the Stalinist terror against Sami people in Russia was almost unknown outside the Sami group. The situation within the group at that time could be described by a formula: remembering without commemoration (Gustavsen 2001: 36–37). The first article on this issue was published in 1999. In 2006, a memorial cross was erected in Lovozero dedicated to the victims of the Stalinist terror. Mass murder, deportations and removal to the reservation led to widespread mortality and assimilation of the Kola Sami. The decades of state-run mass violence had become a major cause for the contemporary crisis of the Kola Sami national identity and subsistence lifestyle. The results of this study show that the security dilemma had a more important role than ethnicity defining the direction and magnitude of state-run mass violence. The mass terror against Sami could be explained by the geographical position. The Sami people are the only indigenous group of European Russia that lives along a state border. For further research it will be interesting to compare the extent of Soviet terror against Kola Sami with state-run violence against the internal indigenous population of the Russian North and the situation in the indigenous territory of the Far East alongside the border to China and Japan.



Fig. 4. Memorial cross erected in 2006 in Lovozero and dedicated to all local victims of the Stalinist terror.

NOTES

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² Calculated from the 1926 All-Soviet census; <http://demoscope.ru>; access date 1 November 2011.

³ See Cherniakov, Z., *Saam Bukvar* (Leningrad 1933); Zulev, P. N., *Kniga logkäm gvejka* (Leningrad 1934); *Men antij Oktabr Revolucia robtusdadb saamit* (Leningrad 1933); Valerstejn, L. M., *Mi lij mogka industrializacija jemnest* (Leningrad 1934); Saveljev, L., *Koht jemne milt vñjet* (Leningrad 1934); Carušin, E., *Jeljes poak jemnen* (Leningrad 1935); Popova, N. S., *Arifmetika* (Leningrad 1934).

- ⁴ Vasilij K. Alymov (1883–1938) was born in Ingria, in the village of Ruch'i near Tosno/Tusina. In 1924–1935 he was a head of the Murmansk branch of the governmental “Committee for Assistance to the Peoples of Northern Frontiers” (*Komitet Severa*). In 1937–1938 he was director of the Murmansk regional museum. He was arrested by the NKVD on 27 March 1938 and shot on 22 October 1938. Rehabilitated in 1957.
- ⁵ Karl Bernhard Wiklund (1868–1934)—professor of Finno-Ugric languages at Uppsala University (1905–1933) with special interest in the Sami language, member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences (since 1930). Allan Wallenius (1890–1942)—Swedish-speaking Finn, one of the most prominent leftist intellectuals of Scandinavia, in 1930–1935 the director of the Komintern library at Lenin’s party school in Moscow, arrested in 1935, died in the Gulag. Just Knud Qvigstad (1853–1957)—Norwegian philologist and ethnographer, researcher of Norwegian minority populations in Finland and Russia, minister of Education and Church Affairs of Norway. Toivo Immanuel Itkonen (1891–1968)—Finnish historian and linguist specializing in the Sami language and culture, head of the Ethnographic Department at the National museum of Finland (1935–1955).
- ⁶ Aleksandr S. Salazkin (1894–1938) was born in the town of Kasimov in an ethnic Russian family. He was the son of professor Sergey Salazkin—Minister of Education in the Russian government of Aleksandr Kerensky. Aleksandr Salazkin was a graduate of the Geographical Faculty of St. Petersburg State University. In 1933–1938 he was a senior researcher at the Murmansk experimental reindeer farm in Lovozero. He was arrested by the NKVD on 2 March 1938 and shot 22 October 1938. Rehabilitated in 1957.
- ⁷ After the mass operation of the NKVD in the borderland Sami kolkhoz “Tundra” a reindeer herder, Peter Alekseev (Karelian by descent), fled to Finland. His brother Fedor Alekseev was arrested by the NKVD and shot together with other Sami in August 1937. In Finland Peter Alekseev was recruited by Harry Broms—the head of the intelligence service department in Rovaniemi (Laidinen & Verigin 2004: 150, 239).
- ⁸ Sami as an indigenous group of the North was exempt in tsarist Russia from military conscription.
- ⁹ Leif Rantala notes that Maksim Antonov (1919–1983) was a single Kola Sami recruited to the Finnish army during the Second World War. Antonov was drafted into the Red Army and presumed dead in 1941 on the Murmansk front. In fact, he was captured by Finnish soldiers and joined in 1942 the Finnish *heimopataljoona*, which was made up of Soviet citizens of Finno-Ugric origin. In 1943, Antonov was temporarily withdrawn from the front to work with a Finnish scholar, Toivo Immanuel Itkonen, see note 5. After the Second World War Antonov moved to Sweden (Rantala (ed.) 2006: 129–140).
- ¹⁰ See for example the new schoolbooks published in 1937 in Sami with Cyrillic letters: Endyukovskiy, A. G/Эндюковский А. Г. *Саамь букварь* [‘A Sami primer’] (Leningrad 1937); Popova, N. S/Попова, Н. С. *Олхэи школа варас арифметика оннуввэм книга* [‘Arithmetic textbook for elementary schools’] (Leningrad 1937).

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