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ETHNIC GROUPS, NAMING AND MINORITY POLICY

Naming and categorization of ethnic groups has for a long time been a field for scholarly interest. But one of the field's most important challenges, namely the crossfire between research and politics, has not always been focused.

Group names and categories are important scientific tools, necessary for research not least of ethnicity and ethnic groups and the boundaries between them. One issue in this connection which has often been discussed is the relations between in-group names (endogenous/emic names) and out-group names (exogenous/etic names), that is names invented and used by the groups itself and names invented and used by the outside world respectively. It is more often than not a complicated question how names and categories have come into being and how they have been used and viewed by the respective groups.

Out-group and in-group names

In many cases, but not always, has an out-group name been used in a derogatory way by outsiders and been regarded as discriminatory by the insiders, representing the minority group, for example the ethnonym *Kven*, the old Nordic name on the Finns who settled in Northern Norway in the 18th and 19th centuries and their descendants. In other cases has the traditional in-group name been adopted by host society authorities, as happened in Norway in the interwar period when the old Nordic names on the *Sami* people, *Finns* and *Lapps*, were replaced by "Sami." There are also examples of merging of out-group naming and in-group acceptance and use. The Norwegian Kven Association (*Norske kveners forbund*) has adopted the Kven name, in spite of the fact that the name is contested among the Kvens themselves. Not few Kvens prefer "Finns" or "Arctic Finns" (*nordnorgefinner*) or "Finnish born" (*finskætter*). Likewise there are discussions among the *Romany people* of Norway of the "right" naming. Many among them prefer

“Romany”, which also is widely used by state authorities, or Travellers (*reisende*), while others prefer “Taters” (*tatere*), the traditional out-group name on them. Actually, one of their nation wide organizations is named the National Tater Association (*Taternes landsforbund*). Thus today, in spite of the fact that the general trend internationally is that the in-group name has the priority, there is a variety of models in practical use, and in many cases flexibility and tolerance are demonstrated.

To day’s debate demonstrates that ethnonyms and group categories are not neutral terms. They are far from exclusive scholarly terms, but also political designations, used by bureaucrats and politicians, implying attitudes of values, distribution of rights and resources, even elements of stigma and rank order. The choice of a certain term can have far-reaching ideological effects, and may control thought and political action. In this way such designations may seem both like strait jackets and compasses for political behaviour. The choice of making one designation the official one may imply high of low status for the minority group in question. At the same time the growing awareness of naming and categorization today sometimes result in a kind of race for *correctness*, both in everyday life, in the media, in politics and among scholars. In many respects this is easy to understand – it also springs out of respect for minority groups and their often harsh historical experience with discrimination on ethnic and racial bases. However, this chase for being correct may turn out to be strenuous, not least because of the field’s dynamism – what seemed correct yesterday may seem dubious today.¹

Naming and minority policy

It is easy to argue in favour of constructivist theories in matters concerning ethnic naming and categorization: Names and categories are socially constructed in a constant dialectic between those defining them and those wearing them, in which ideology and political climate play important roles. However, at the same time names and categories are highly important in the lives of people worldwide. For them the terms often seem to be of essential meaning, with deep historical roots and with identity building effects. In

¹ Gullestad 2002, 42-45; Niemi 2006, 397-400.

research the trend to overestimate the constructivist approach sometimes overshadows this other side of the coin, the essential or primordial dimension.

To illustrate some of these issues, challenges and dilemmas, I will focus on Norway as case, more precisely the history of the Norwegian minority policy and its grapple with ethnic naming and categorization. The case demonstrates that categories and names have also historically been far from innocent describing terms, rather the opposite: On the one hand they reflect attitudes towards the ethnic minorities, including prejudices, and on the other hand they function as legitimacy for a certain chosen policy or even for ranking among the minorities. Minority policy and conscious use of ethnonyms and group categories are thus closely interrelated.

Before we look more closely at the policy as such and its use of group terms, let us approach the theme principally and theoretically. What minority policy alternatives have existed and been discussed? Actually, there have existed alternative models which were debated, partly as early as the 18th century, but more in since the 1830s and 40s. In the main four alternatives were discussed, alternatives we also recognize from our own days' political debate on minorities, immigrants and integration.²

Minority policy models

The first alternative model could be named *acculturation*, though I am aware of the contested interpretation of the term. However, in my use here acculturation represents a kind of border position in which openness to social pluralistic processes is a core attitude, and in which diffusion between ethnic groups and cultures is accepted and where change, adaptation and accommodation constantly take place. Politically acculturation means relaxed attitudes towards the minority groups, though not fully non-policy attitudes. Until the middle of the 19th century in large acculturation was the Nordic minority policy in the northern borderland, towards all groups in question. The explanation is manifold. First, there was the heritage from the dynastic state system, with its imbedded cultural and

² Eriksen & Niemi 1981, 22-25; Niemi 2004, 94-99.

ethnic pluralism and ideas of the strong state: loyalty to the state father figure of the king was far more important than cultural and ethnic homogeneity. Second, the Age of Enlightenment ideologies merged with early Romanticism, praising the “noble savage”, among which the Sami sometimes were depicted. In fact, as modern studies of Sami rights have documented, Sami indigenous rights were to a large extent respected and accepted by the Nordic states in this period. Likewise the rational ideology of Physiocratism with its focus on the natural resources and the primary trades was to the benefit of the northern minorities and their specialized economic niches, like the Sami reindeer herding and the Kven and Finn agriculture. There are, however, exceptions to this rather harmonious picture, for example the state policy towards the Gypsies and the Romany, who at times and in some regions suffered persecution and expulsion.³

The second alternative was that of *segregation*, a model well known from old for example in encounters between Jews and city authorities, in the ghetto policy, and in the US policy towards the Indians from the second half of the 19th century, in the reservation policy. Though the model was launched and debated in the Nordic countries, we find only one case here in which the model was put into operation, namely in the Swedish policy towards the Sami from the early years of the 20th century, the policy named “Lap should be Lap-policy” (*lapp skall vara lapp-politikken*), meaning, first, that the Sami in Sweden were defined as reindeer herders, second, that the reindeer herds’ grazing land was segregated to the mountain areas.⁴ This policy was partly a product of the increasing collisions between farming and reindeer herding, partly of paternalistic and Romantic attitudes towards the Sami – they ought to be protected against modern society, only as reindeer nomads would they survive as a nomadic “nature” people.

The third alternative was that of *multiculturalism* or *pluralistic integration*, an alternative discussed in Norway early in the post-Napoleonic age, with the pastor and linguist Nils Vibe Stockfleth as one of the main spokesmen. The model was of course stimulated by German Romanticism and philosophy based on the “nation” term. However, the

³ Sogner 2003, 256-371.

⁴ Lanto 2000, 42-44.

arguments in favour of the model sound modern to us today, familiar with the multicultural concept. Stockfleth's arguments cover principle reflections on minority rights, in addition to well known Romantic ideas: Pluralism is depicted as "natural" and as a value in itself for the larger society as well as for the minority group, and identity is linked to and human self respect. Not surprisingly, this early multiculturalism was strongly supported first and foremost by scholars and some radical pastors and politicians, while the majority of the pastors voted against it, as did the vast majority of national politicians.⁵

This was demonstrated in the National Assembly (*Stortinget*) when the question of minority policy came on the agenda here in the 1850s. The Assembly turned down Stockfleth's model, and decided a fourth model, namely that of *assimilation*, meaning integration of the minorities on the premises of the nation state's culture. Very soon the chosen policy got the apt name of the "policy of Norwegianization" (*fornorskningspolitikk*). Not until the last two decades of the 20th century did multiculturalism stand forth once again as a minority policy model in Norway.⁶

The policy of assimilation

Thus by the middle of the 1800s the authorities decided that the official minority policy should be assimilatory, in other words that integration should take place according to the majority society's goal: the loss of the minority culture and full transition to Norwegian culture and language. The policy was gradually escalated, covering more and more areas of society, applying an increasing number of means. It started first and foremost as a language policy in primary school, but developed step by step into a broad and extremely resource consuming policy, in which minority, defence, security, foreign and northern regional policy merged. As a defined and formally decided state policy it actually lasted until well after World War II, though it turned more lenient after the war. In other words, the policy of Norwegianization covered a time span of around one hundred years.

⁵ Niemi 2003, 133-134.

⁶ Eriksen & Niemi 1981, passim; Niemi 1995, 329-336; Myhre 2003, passim; Niemi 2006, 406-410; Minde 2003.

The policy was especially aimed at the northern minorities in the Norwegian border towards Russia and Finland, but included also the Romany and the Forest Finns in the border area towards Sweden in south-eastern Norway; the Forest Finns' history in Norway was rooted in migration from Finland via the landscape of Värmland in Sweden in the 17th century. A special fund, the "Finn fund" (*Finnfondet*), was established by the National Assembly as the economic backbone of the assimilation of the Kvens and the Sami. A parallel fund, the "Tater fund", was established to integrate – or "civilize" as it was said – the Romany.

However, there is no doubt that the northern minorities got far more political attention than the southern minorities. The main explanation is that the challenges for the young Norwegian nation state were regarded as even greater in the north than in the south. In the north nation building tasks were even more needed than in the south, due to the recent border agreements here, the ethnically and culturally mixed border population, and not least the Scandinavian versions of the European "belief system" related to the almost xenophobic idea of the "Russian menace." The idea was that Russia after the collapse of the European power balance system from the days of the Vienna congress represented a potential expansionistic threat towards the west, possibly with the northern coastal region as the primary channel of invasion. Finland's status as Russian Grand Duchy after 1809 added the concept the "Finnish menace" to that of the Russian. Still at the middle of the 19th century 50 per cent of the population of Norway's northernmost county, Finnmark, were Sami, and in 1875 about 25 per cent of the population in the county were Kvens. Not without reasons the area north and east of the Lyngen, covering the northernmost part of Troms and the whole of Finnmark, was defined as "the vulnerable border districts in the North." This area was also in the Norwegianization schemes defined as the language mixed "transition area", meaning that in particular here the policy aims of assimilation should be pursued. The outcome was a rather aggressive minority policy.

It should be mentioned, though, that assimilation was the rather normal western minority policy variant at the time, including the same political vocabulary, as in the case of Prussia, in many aspects a model country for the Nordic nation states, with central

concepts like “Übergangsdistrict” (transition district) und “Germanisierung.” In Sweden the assimilation policy towards the Torne Valley Finns was launched in the 1860s, legitimized more or less in the same way as the Norwegian policy, though the policy turned into a more lenient direction earlier than the Kven policy did in Norway, even if many of the concrete regulations lived their strenuous life for a very long time.⁷

Naming and categorization: new implications

The minority policy shift introduced changes in the categorization of the minorities and in the terms applied on them. One example is the term “nation.” Until the middle of the 19th century, and especially in the 18th century, “nation” was the most common term used on the all the minorities in question, reflecting recognition of peoples in their own rights. During the 1800s “nation” was increasingly reserved for “the Norwegian people” – “The People” – and decreasingly used in relation to the minorities, as “the peoples.” If “nation” was now used in relation to ethnic minorities, it was usually in comments about “the foreign nations” (*de fremmede nationer*), which signalled that the Kvens and the Sami, did not “really” belong in Norway: They were *immigrants* or “original immigrants.” To support such terms and the views they represented it was referred to immigration theories launched by scholars, which, by the way, probably was more linked to nation building endeavours than to scientific curiosity. One of these theories was that the Sami as well as the Kvens had Mongol roots and that their physiognomy as well as their mentality still disclosed this “foreign” background.

However, there were also elements of continuity in the minority policy debate, as well as opposition to the policy. The Age of Enlightenment’s perception and acceptance of the Sami as an indigenous people did partly survive thorough the era of assimilation. The concrete term “indigenous” was of course not applied – it is a later invention – but terms implying the same contents and meaning flourished in use about the Sami, like “the natives” (*de innfødte*), “the oldest people of the land” (*de ældste der i landet*), etc. Time and time again the state authorities were reminded, in particular by academics, of the

⁷ Elenius 2001, 244-299; Elenius 2006, *passim*.

Sami as an indigenous people with inborn rights, culturally as well as materially, keeping for example land title rights.

One of the most engaged spokesmen in the latter part of the 19th century for a change in the policy, was professor in the Sami and Kven languages at the University of Oslo, Jens Andreas Friis, pupil and successor of Stockfleth. To start with he wanted a multicultural policy including both the Sami and the Kvens, like his mentor and teacher, based on the classic idea of “tres faciunt collegium,” a harmonious theory of the assumed positive aspects of an equal encounter between Norwegians, Sami and Kvens. However, when Friis realized that the assimilation policy definitely would not be abandoned, he changed his tactics, in which the sole aim became to protect the reindeer herding Sami, based on several of the same arguments which should be used to legitimize the “Lap should be Lap-policy.” The reindeer herding Sami, or Mountain Sami (*ffjellsamer*) which they most often were named, were the purest among the Sami, the last people in Western Europe living as “noble wilds”, he maintained. In the new strategy Friis in his endeavors to save the reindeer herding Sami actually sacrificed other Sami groups, like the coast Sami, due to their lack of ethnic “pureness,” and the Kvens, due to their status as immigrants and their racial features, which he found not always sympathetic or fit for a idealized Norwegian life style.⁸

It should be added that throughout the assimilation policy period Friis’ opposition was followed up, by the early Sami ethno-political mobilization, by radical pastors in the State Church and in the newly organized Sami mission, by the protestant-pietistic religious movement the Læstadianism, and by scholars. Early Kven mobilization failed, and extremely few outside the Læstadian circles were spokesmen for the Kvens.

Though in the practical minority policy the Kvens and the Sami were to a large extent lumped together, more and more throughout the assimilation policy period categorization was politicized and split. The category “immigrant” was increasingly applied about the Kvens, actually stigmatizing them, especially in periods with labour market stress.

⁸ Niemi 2006, 411-413.

“Immigrant” associated a people with weaker roots in the region of settlement, and the concept was exploited to the extreme as argument in favour of stricter claims for adaption: After all the Kvens were guests in the country of destination, they had come here of their own free will, and if they were not satisfied with their fate here, they ought to return to their “home” country.

Ambivalence and forces of change

Gradually at the same time a new acceptance of the Sami as an indigenous people with inherited rights developed. In the interwar period the official ethnonym on them changed, as mentioned, from the out-group names of Laps or Finns to their own old in-group name, Sami. Elements of lenient attitudes towards them also appeared in laws and regulations, as in the Primary School Law of 1936 which opened up for extra coaching (*hjelpundervisning*) in the Sami language, while such actions were refused for the Kvens.

There were, however, on the other hand several examples of political decisions and laws and regulations which were not fully implemented. One example is the notorious Land Sales Act of Finnmark of 1902 with its infamous Language Instruction.⁹ According to this, land in Finnmark should solely be allotted to persons of Norwegian heritage knowing and using the Norwegian language on daily basis. In literature the law and its instruction have been presented as one of the harshest, most racist and most discriminating of all the Norwegianization policy enterprises. The fact is, which recent research has shown, that only to a very limited degree was the law and the instruction put into operation. Another example more often than not linked to assumed suppressing effects of the Norwegianization policy, is the state boarding school system in the “transition area”, built from the early years of the 20th century. First, there were mixed arguments for the boarding schools, also general pedagogical and social arguments. Second, in spite of their formal language program, the schools did not turn into Norwegianization instruments to the degree often maintained. Many of the school

⁹ Jernsletten 1986.

inspectors did not always bother to watch over the pupils' language use, and outside the classroom the oral communication between the pupils was of course in their mother tongue. On the other hand there are examples of masters and inspectors who pursued the defined language policy strictly still after World War II.

Of course there were also other forces than politics that inflicted on the fate of the minorities, not least *modernization* in general. The assimilation policy era concurred with the introductions of modernization within a wide spectrum of societal areas in the north, including ideas and mentalities. One example is that the Sami reindeer herding was not only pressed from the surrounding society, but also from within. In a detailed report as early as the end of the 1850s on the situation of the reindeer herding older herders complain of the young herders who do not herd the flock in the old intensive way. The young herders were tempted by the boom in the modern commercial fisheries and life in the fishing villages during the summer season.¹⁰

“Indigenous” as lever for a new Sami policy

After the Second World War there was almost complete minority policy silence of the Kvens, in clear contrast to the pre-war period. One possible reason was the diminishing Finnish threat dimension after the war. There are also indications that the Norwegian authorities saw it possible to “silence the Kvens to death”: If there was no attention to them, the “Kven problem” would be solved “by itself,” the Kvens would integrate “naturally” as a result of the new Welfare State Programme and increasing modernization in the north.

In contrast there was, as early as the 1940s and 1950s, an emerging acceptance by the authorities that the Sami were an indigenous people whose culture should be protected and given the possibility for further development on its own terms. The background to this included international trends, in the wake of Holocaust and the problems of displaced minorities and, not least, the resumption of older domestic indigenous ideas. Though

¹⁰ Niemi 2000, 117.

there were adherents of the welfare state integration-idea also for the Sami, central state authorities now seemed ready to revise the policy towards this minority group – at least for the Sami a revision of the old policy appeared as unavoidable. The early post-war organisation of the Sami reindeer herders and of study groups and publishing societies contributed to this.¹¹ Actually, the central authorities seemed positively oriented towards making a break with the previous assimilation policies.¹² That this didn't happen that early can be related first of all to resistance in the north, not least from the political party in government locally and regionally. Remnants of ideas from race ideology and development theory together with the results of generations of assimilation policies are most likely the main explanation: there were “lost generations” who had been taught to believe in the idea that the road to the future went through Norwegianization.

From about 1970 the Sami Movement was radicalized, in all Nordic countries.¹³ Impulses from the growing international indigenous peoples' movement together with new research results, not the least within legal history, added to this radicalisation.¹⁴ Actually, globalization theories serve well as framework for analyzing the Sami mobilization in this phase. The conflict around 1980 in Norway over the damming of the Alta-Kautokeino River, for hydro electric purposes, had enormous symbolic meaning for the “Sami case” and became a lever in demands for a new Sami policy based on ideas of specific indigenous people's rights. The government appointed two large committees to consider Sami conditions – the Sami Rights Commission (*Samerettsutvalget*) and the Sami Cultural Commission (*Samekulturutvalget*). Both delivered extensive reports within their fields, which formed the basis of a new Sami policy from the second half of the 1980s, based on multiculturalism and an acknowledgement that the Sami were a defined people with indigenous rights. Norway's ratification in 1990 of the ILO Convention nr. 169, 1989, on indigenous and tribal peoples, was a definitive expression that the category “indigenous” had received important legal status and that the category was accepted as a legitimization of minority demands.

¹¹ Jernsletten 2002, 151-152.

¹² Tjelmeland 2003, 124

¹³ Minde 2005, 13-34; Minde 2003, 75-106; Thuen 1995, 41-54; Brantenberg 1985, 23-48.

¹⁴ Minde 2003a; Minde 1995.

Minority policy hierarchy I: Indigenous people and immigrants

Around 1990 the contours of a simple *minority policy hierarchy* emerged, with the Sami as an indigenous people at the top followed by the rest of the minorities, with an unclear status but referred to generally as “immigrants.” It may seem that the authorities were worried about a more finely-meshed categorization: they had enough with the new Sami policy; meeting minority-policy demands from other groups would involve “sand in the machinery.” This binary minority policy hierarchy was hardly an expression of a well thought through and principle-based comprehensive minority policy, but rather an expression of a situation in which the new Sami policy was finally agreed on, while policies towards the other minorities were still on ice. Possibly also the old dream of the homogenous nation state had not been smashed – homogeneity with one inevitable exception, the indigenous people the Sami.¹⁵

An increasing *ethno-political awareness* emerged amongst the Kven in the early 1980s, without question inspired by the Sami political rising in addition to impulses from the mobilisation among the Torne Valley Finns in Sweden, a regional minority group of people with many historical parallels to the Kvens. In 1987 the Norwegian Kven Association (*Norske kveners forbund*) was founded. But even in the beginning of the 1990s all demands by the Kvens for a new minority policy and an assurance of minority status not linked to the term “immigrant” were refused. The two-part hierarchy had as such still only these two categories – indigenous people and immigrants. At a seminar at the University of Tromsø in 1994 the question arose about this clearly and openly: How long could an ethnic group be categorised as immigrants? The question was actually aimed at a representative for the government at the seminar, a political advisor in the Ministry for Local Government and Employment. The answer was very illustrative for both the “tyranny of categories” and the government policies of the time: He told the audience that he could not care whether the Kvens had immigrated in the 1800s or the 1600s; they *were* immigrants, because that is what the government had decided! At the

¹⁵ Niemi 2006, 420-424.

same time he confirmed that the new and positive minority policy towards the Sami were based on the Sami's status as an indigenous people and the obligations that Norway had thus taken on both nationally and internationally.¹⁶

Minority policy hierarchy II: Indigenous people, national minorities and immigrants

The final breakthrough in Norway for a more differentiated thinking about the categories, however, had its basis in impulses from outside, namely the *European Council* invitation to sign and ratify the Council's framework convention for the protection of national minorities.¹⁷

The Convention was the first international agreement for "national minorities," with clear implications regarding international law and a clear European outcome of the then prevailing multiculturalism. It came into effect on the 1st of February 1998 after a sufficient amount of states had ratified it. Norway's ratification came the year after with effect the same year, 1999. "National minority" is the same term which was applied by the League of Nations in its efforts for the minorities in the wake of World War I. The short definition of "national minority" is the following: A minority with "historical presence" within the territory of a given state. "Historical presence" means at least the last hundred years.

The statements made by the ethnic minorities during the official discussions and following the ratification are interesting expressions both of historical experiences and of the organisations' differing degree of strength and consolidation, and not least of the implication and political meaning of categories. The Norwegian Sami Parliament's statement is a particular example of the last point: The Parliament did not want the Convention to embrace the Sami, who could only accept *one* minority-political category, namely *indigenous people*, and it wished to continue to "defend the status they had as an

¹⁶ Megard 1999, 83; Niemi 2006, 423.

¹⁷ St.meld. nr 80 (1997-98).

indigenous people and the strengthened legal position which has been attained as an indigenous people,” to quote the Parliament’s plenary decision.¹⁸ The Sami Parliaments of Sweden and Finland, however, accepted the Convention and thus the category “national minority” for the Sami, in addition to the category “indigenous people.” The five groups in Norway covered by the Convention are the Forest Finns, the Gypsies, the Jews, the Kvens and the Romani.

The Convention requires that the states have to report regularly and that the European Council has an “expert committee” that monitors the Convention. So far Norway has delivered two reports and the expert committee has given three “Opinions on Norway.” The expert committee has commended Norwegian Sami policies, though the Sami are not included by the Convention as ratified by Norway, but have strongly asked for more rapid follow up of concrete obligations towards the national minorities, particularly within language, media and education, in particular for the Kvens.

Naming, categories and organisation of the minority policy field

As a conclusion I will return to the categories and their implications for this turn in Norwegian minority policies. It is possible to see a number of concrete *effects* of the *categories’ new entry* into politics, also related to the Convention.

One example is the *reorganisation of the administration of the field*. In the Ministry for Local and Regional Government (*Kommunal- og regiondepartementet*), formerly Ministry for Local Government and Employment (*Kommunal- og arbeidsdepartementet*), the work with these issues was organised in one office, the office of “Sami, minority and immigration questions” (*Avdeling for same-, minoritets- og innvandringsaker*), with the Undersecretary of State for Sami issues as political leader. From the position of the national minorities a certain disgruntlement was expressed that the Sami dossier was put together with the dossier that dealt with the national minorities. They noted that the Sami Parliament had turned down the Convention. From the minorities’ position there was also

¹⁸ Ibid., 13.

concern that Sami issues would dominate to the detriment of issues related to the national minorities as there were far greater government obligations towards the Sami and an asymmetry in funding with dramatically more going to the Sami.

The changes in administration show clearly that it was the Convention that had lifted the five minorities from the immigration category to the new category and the new group status. As a result of the change in government in 2005 and changes to the organization of the Ministries, these cases were moved over to the newly created Ministry for Labour and Integration (*Arbeids- og integrasjonsdepartementet*) which established two separate offices for these matters, namely the office for Sami and minority questions and the office for immigration questions respectively. Still the Undersecretary for Sami issues, always a Sami in person, is the political leader of the office for Sami and minority matters. In fact often the Minister is called and also names himself the “Sami Minister.”

The historical perspective: From a uniform minority policy to a minority policy hierarchy

Thus Norwegian minority policy has become strict *hierarchical*, probably more comprehensively so than in most other Western countries, possibly with Canada as an exception. While *ideas* as early as the 1800s and far into the 1900s allowed for differentiation between the groups, the *policy* was basically uniform: All groups were to be assimilated, all represented in one or another form “the other”, “the foreign”, real or “original” immigrants”. After the Second World War the *Sami* came forth as a special category with the term *indigenous* as an ethno-political lever and legitimisation of a new policy. The status of all the other minority groups was diffuse, often placed under the label of “immigrants.” After about 1990 a three-tiered hierarchy has taken form with the indigenous people on the top and the national minorities “discovered” basically overnight as they took the step up from an unclear immigrant category and placed themselves between the “new immigrants” and the indigenous people, the Sami. This can be expressed in Orwellian terms: “All are equal but some are more equal than others.”

Eventually, though a historian should refrain from prophecies, ethnic hierarchies as well as multiculturalism in today's wrapping will probably be more and more questioned, in the Nordic world as it already in many European countries, under the crossfire from liberal normative theory and from right wing political trends.