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# The (Trans)National Mobilisation of Sámi Women in Norway

## Abstract

This article explores how the Norwegian Sámi women's movement developed at the crossroad of indigenous, anti-racist, and women's movements. How did Sámi women negotiate feminist and indigenous rights, and in what ways did they frame the three Nordic Forum conferences as opportunities for activism or threats? The article accounts for the making of the movement since the 1970s, and explores its' presence/absence during the three specific Nordic women's conferences, the Nordic Forum of 1988, 1994 and 2014. In what ways were the Nordic Forums framed as opportunities for activism, and what kind of new actors and institutional logics were produced (or not) in relation to the three events? The article illuminates how the political opportunity structures differed across time, and how Sámi feminists framed them and took advantage of them. The analysis is inspired by post-colonial and indigenous feminist theories, and firstly examines what enabled Sámi women to organise on their own, secondly it explores how alliance formations played into the movements' startling presence at the two first Nordic Forums, and its absence from the last one. The analysis draws on new empirical material, such as extensive archival work and semi-structured interviews with Sámi women, stakeholders and participants in the three conferences. Methodological considerations of insider and outsider dynamics lend support to the relevance of postcolonial and indigenous feminist theories in research practice, but also critically question indigenous epistemology.

Keywords: *indigenous rights; feminist movement; mobilisation; political opportunities; alliances*

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"The most fundamental fact about collective action is its interconnectedness, both historically and spatially."[1]

## Introduction[2]

If we want to grasp why and how the Sámi women's movement emerged and developed in Norway, we have to consider the broader context, in line with Rood Koopman's abovementioned claim. Different opportunities and constraints shaped the movement, such as the worldwide call for women's rights, and the (re)vitalisation of indigenous people's struggle for rights at the macro-level[3], the boom of campaigns, networks and organisations for racial and gender equality at the meso-level[4], and Sámi women's experiences at the micro-level.[5] When Sámi women mobilised as women in the 1970s, they were positioned at the crossroads of transnational movements, and they had to negotiate conflicting claims of solidarity and cooperation.

This article firstly explores what enabled Sámi women to mobilise on their own, and argues that a formal women's organisation depended on Sámi survival; indigenous rights overshadowed feminist issues. When Sámi rights were ensured, however, Sámi feminists organised and made use of available opportunities connected with the broader Norwegian and Nordic women's movement. Gender conflicts within Sápmi[6] came to the surface, but frictions among women within and outside of the women's movement also appeared. The article describes the development of the Sámi women's

1 Ruud Koopmans: Protest in Time and Space: The Evolution of Waves of Contention, in: David A. Snow/Sarah A. Soule/Hanspeter Kriesi (eds.): The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements, Malden/Oxford 2007, pp. 19–47, p. 19.

2 Thanks to the Sámi interviewees for spending time with me, thanks to the staff at the Sami Library, at the Sami Parliament and at the Sámi University of Applied Sciences. Thanks also to the Norwegian Non-Fiction Writers and Translators Organisation for a travel grant, and to Suvi Keskinen, Diana Mulinari, Pauline Stoltz and Christel Stormhøj for comments.

3 The United Nations International Year for Women (1975), the United Nations Decade for women (1975–1985), the World Council for Indigenous People (WCIP) 1975. The Nordic Sami Council became a member in 1976,

4 Henry Minde: The Destination and the Journey: Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations from the 1960s through 1985, in: Gáldu Čála: Journal of Indigenous Peoples Rights 4 (2007), pp. 9–38. https://www.yumpu.com/no/document/read/3985874/fns--erklaring-om-urfolks-rettigheter-politikk-galdu (accessed on 27 March 2020).

5 M. Bahati Kuumba: Gender and Social Movements, Oxford 2001. Kuumba differentiates between the study of movements in their larger sociohistorical and structural contexts (macrolevel), the study of organisations, collectivities and campaigns that served as cornerstones (mesolevel), and the study of biographies, life stories and standpoints of women (microlevel).

6 Sápmi is the area traditionally inhabited by Sámi people. See next section.

movement in broad outline, and goes into more details about how Sámi women balanced their disparate interests as Sámi and women. Three specific women's movement events serve as prisms for exploring the complicated relations to mainstream women's movements: The rallying of Nordic women's movements during the huge women's conferences called Nordic Forum in Oslo 1988, Åbo 1994, and in Malmö 2014.[7]

In 1988, Norwegian Sámi women established their own organisation, for the first time since 1910. The very same year, they were noticeably present at the Nordic Forum in Oslo. Six years later, they increased their involvement significantly during the Nordic Forum in Åbo (Finland) in 1994. In sharp contrast, they did not attend the third Nordic Forum in Malmö (Sweden) in 2014. The great mobilisation in 1988 and 1994 calls for scrutiny and so does the discrepancy between the two first Nordic Forums and the last one: What enabled Sámi women to attend noticeably in 1988 and 1994, and what prevented them from attending in 2014? How did various alliance formations, cooperation and conflicts play into Sámi women's mobilisation in the 1970's and 80's?

The analysis applies semi-structured interviews with feminist activists, stakeholders and researchers, and archival material. Notions of political opportunity structures, social movement, postcolonial and indigenous feminist theories inform the discussion: Oscillating structural and discursive political conditions affect the (de)mobilisation of social movements[8]; different social locations result in unequal access to resources which matter to the strategies of activists "on the ground".[9] New groups of participants may be included in social movements in subordinate ways, and well-meaning scholars may be guilty of colonial complicity.[10] Demands for respect and responsibility in research may seem obvious, but are not necessarily easy to fulfil.[11] According to

7 The article is part of a joint project about women's movements in relation to three huge conferences in 1888, 1994 and 2014. We conducted extensive fieldwork between 2014 and 2018, including 53 interviews in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden and archival research. Anonymised and transcribed interviews as well as printed conference programs, planning documents, evaluation reports and media articles are stored at the University of Aalborg and the University of Oslo. See Pauline Stoltz/Beatrice Halsaa/Christel Stormhøj: Generational Conflict and the Politics of Inclusion in Two Feminist Events, in: Elizabeth Evans/Eléonore Lépinard (eds.): Intersectionality in Feminist and Queer Movements: Confronting Privileges, London/New York [2019] 2020. See also http://futurefeminisms.aau.dk/ (accessed on 27 March 2020).

8 Ruud Koopmans: Protest in Time and Space.

9 Benita Roth: Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America's Second Wave, Cambridge 2004, p. 15.

10 Suvi Keskinen et al.: Complying with Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region, Burlington/Ashgate 2009.

11 Torjer A. Olsen: Responsibility, Reciprocity and Respect. On the ethics of (self-)representation and advocacy in Indigenous studies, in: Anna-Lill Drugge (ed.): Ethics in Indigenous Research: Past Experiences—Future Challenges, Umeå 2016, pp. 25–45.

Rauna Kuokkanen, white liberal feminism is dismissive "(…) in the sense of non-recognition, indifference, or plain ignorance. Nordic feminists don't openly resist Sámi perspectives on feminism, but they don't engage with them either. (…)".[12] As I am a white socialist feminist who engages with Sámi issues, this article also includes methodological reflections on (post)colonial complicity and research.

The analytical term Sámi feminism refers to the Sámi women's mobilisation for women's rights and gender equality within the larger context of Sámi and indigenous peoples' struggle for decolonisation and self-determination.[13] Some Sámi women self-identify as Sámi feminists, whereas other Sámi women's rights activists refrain from that because they see feminism as embedded in colonial tradition; blind to the crucial role of nationalism and white privilege.[14] In this article, I use Sámi feminism and Sámi women's rights movements as equivalent notions.

After a brief description of Norwegian Sámi history and the theoretical underpinnings, the discussion continues with methodological issues related to contextualising the researcher. Then, the mobilisation of Norwegian Sámi women is unfolded, followed by an analysis of their activism (or lack thereof) in relation to the Nordic Forums of 1988, 1994 and 2014. The paper concludes with a discussion of changes in the appropriation of the Nordic Forum.

## Sápmi—a Brief Historical and Political Introduction

The population of Sápmi—or Sameland—is estimated at 80,000–100,000 in total, with some 50 to 65,000 in Norway. The Norwegian part of Sápmi has its stronghold in the northernmost part of the country, Finnmark, where Sámi is the prime language in several local communities. However, the greater part of the Sámi live outside of this area, in large cities all over the country. As Sápmi scholars emphasise, the population is diverse, and includes several languages and groups. Sámis are "everywhere"[15], and they come in all kinds: as "primarily Sámi, a little Sámi, sufficiently Sámi and/or Sámi in combination with one or more other ethnic identity/ies".[16]

12 Ina Knobblock/Rauna Kuokkanen: Decolonizing Feminism in the North: A Conversation with Rauna Kuokkanen, in: NORA—Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research 23:4 (2015), pp. 275–281, p. 275.

13 Ibid.

14 Suvi Keskinen et al.: Complying with Colonialism.

15 Torunn Pettersen: The Sámediggi Electoral Roll in Norway: Framework, Growth and Geographical Shifts, 1989–2009, in: Mikkel Berg-Nordlie/Jo Saglie/Ann T. Sullivan (eds.): Indigenous Politics: Institutions, Representation, Mobilisation, Colchester 2015, pp. 165–190, p. 183.

16 Ibid. p. 183.

Sápmi is inherently a transnational area. It has never been a territorially bounded polity, and it includes parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia. Sámi civil societies have 'always' participated in cross-border activities due, for instance to reindeer herding. Russian Sámis were, however, isolated from the processes of transnational co-operation on the Nordic side of the border until the 1990s.[17]

The Norwegian colonisation of Sápmi started around the 1500s, when state-initiated land regulation and construction of schools and churches encouraged people to move to Sápmi. During the Norwegian nation-building processes in the middle of the 18th century,[18] the Sámi population was subject to harsh Norwegianisation policies.[19] Natural resources and cultural practices were restricted, including the reindeer herding industry which had been crucial both in symbolic and practical terms. The Norwegian state deprived Sápmi of land and respect.[20] When the 1923 grazing convention introduced a total ban on crossing national borders, the gradual breakdown of traditional social relations and knowledge practices related to the reindeer herding industry was completed.

A Sámi ethno-political revitalisation gradually emerged in the 1950s, however, and took off from the late 1960s, challenging the Norwegianisation policy. The peak of the modern Sámi protests took place between 1978 and 1982, when an epochal event destabilised Sámi identity: the 'Alta affair', the government's huge dam project in the heart of the Norwegian Sápmi. Protesters joined forces in the campaign People's Action against the Development of the Alta/Kautokeino River, and heightened mobilisation. The local and transnational environmental movement entered the scene, so did the global indigenous movement and the Norwegian women's movement. New repertoires of protest developed, involving hunger strike, sit-down rallies, civil disobedience as well as criminal acts. The conflict rapidly escalated from being local to national to global. The cross-movement trans-national alliances gave speed, force and legitimacy to the Sámi rights movement. The international community was alarmed when the Norwegian government, in 1981, used police force and military equipment to remove hunger strikers in front of the Parliament, and to clear away protesters from

17 Mikkel Berg-Nordlie: Who Shall Represent The Sámi? Indigenous Governance in Murmansk Region and the Nordic Sámi Parliament Model, in: Mikkel Berg-Nordlie/Jo Saglie/Ann T. Sullivan (eds.): Indigenous Politics: Institutions, Representation, Mobilisation, Colchester 2015, pp. 213–252, p. 213.

18 The Danish-Norwegian monarchy dissolved in 1814. Norway was a constitutional monarchy in union with Sweden until 1905.

19 Henry Minde: The Destination and the Journey; Bjørn Bjerkli and Per Selle (eds.): Samer, makt og demokrati. Sametinget og den nye samiske offentligheten, Oslo 2003; Odd Mathis Hætta: Urfolks organisering og status 1975–2003, Alta 2003.

20 The Lapp Codicil of 1751, or the Sámi 'Magna Charta' which recognized Sámi practices and secured the nomadic reindeer husbandry, gradually diminished due to changes in trade and industry, population growth, etc.

the dam construction machinery. The World Council of Indigenous People and the International Indian Treaty Council sent resolutions of disgust, and the UN questioned the Norwegian state about the legal position of the Sami people. Despite ample opposition against the Alta project, however, the Norwegian Supreme Court decided in favour of the state, and the dam was constructed.

To restore relations and reputation, the Norwegian state launched several initiatives to improve the situation for the Sámi population, including the recognition of indigenous people on an equal footing with other people's rights.[21] The government recognized (Norwegian) Sápmi, and indigenous rights were gradually established. A new public emerged, encompassing the Sápmi parliament (1988), the Sápmi radio, the Sápmi university college, the Sápmi flag etc. The number of people who self-identify as Sámi has increased, although the numbers who actually vote in the Sámi elections is decreasing.[22] The celebration of the centenary of the first (transnational) Sápmi conference in 2017[23], with the presence of the Norwegian, Swedish and Finnish Sámi parliaments, the Norwegian Prime Minister, the Royal Family, and other prominent guests, displays contemporary respect and recognition of Sápmi.

The short story of the long Sámi struggle is that the Sámi movement gained strength since the mid-1960s when it mobilised to take back what was stolen, such as land rights, language, costumes and songs. The proliferation of numerous protest movements in Europe and elsewhere, including the emerging global discourse on indigenous rights[24], brought about inspiration and hope. Alliances and cooperation across indigenous issues, environmental issues and women's issues were crucial for the size and scale of Sámi mobilisation against the enforced 'modernisation' or marketisation of the reindeer herding industry, and other threats to Sámi rights and traditions.

At the same time, what it could mean to be Sámi was subject for debate. Also, despite formal, political recognition of Sámi as an indigenous people and regardless of attempts of setting previous injustices right, traumas and losses are a living reality

21 International law does not offer a definite meaning of "peoples", and indigenous peoples have struggled for equal standing with other peoples in international and national law. In 1988, the rights of Sámi people in Norway were recognized in a new § 108 in the Constitution: "The authorities of the state shall create conditions enabling the Sami people to preserve and develop its language, culture and way of life." In 1990, Norway was the first country to ratify the International Labour Organisation's *Convention 169* concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. Finland and Sweden did not ratify the convention. See Henry Minde: The Destination and the Journey, p. 23.

22 Torunn Pettersen: The Sámediggi Electoral Roll in Norway.

23 http://www.tråante2017.no/aktiviteter/jubileumsuken/ (accessed on 23 January 2018).

24 Mikkel Berg-Nordlie/Jo Saglie/Ann T. Sullivan (eds.): Indigenous Politics.

in Sápmi.[25] Sámi people are still subject to discrimination and marginalisation—significantly more than the Norwegian population.[26] In 2017, the Norwegian parliament decided to establish a Truth Commission to investigate the injustices against Sámi population.

## Research on Sámi Women's Activism

The growing body of academic research into Sápmi and indigenous people is criticised for being gender-blind.[27] Still, there are a number of Norwegian studies on Sámi women's everyday life; of women in the reindeer herding industry; of political participation; and on Sámi feminism.[28] Recently, there are also studies on sexuality and

25 Astri Dankertsen: Fragments of the Future. Decolonization in Sami Everyday Life, in: KULT 14 (2016), pp. 23–37.

26 Ketil Lenert Hansen et al.: Discrimination amongst Arctic Indigenous Sami and Non-Sami Populations in Norway, in: Journal of Northern Studies 10:2 (2016), pp. 45–84.

27 Torjer A. Olsen: Kjønn og urfolksmetodologi, in: Tidsskrift for kjønnsforskning 40:2 (2016), pp. 3–29.

28 See for instance Vigdis Stordahl: Same i den moderne verden: Endring og kontinuitet i et samisk lokalsamfunn, Karasjok 1996; Vigdis Stordahl: Saamiland: Why are they so few in numbers?: Women leaders in a sample of Saami Institutions, in: Indigenous Women on the Move (IWGIA Document No. 66), Copenhagen 1990, pp. 57–77, http://www.iwgia.org/iwgia_files_publications_files/0158_66_omen.pdf (accessed on 26 November 2019). Astri Dankertsen: Samisk artikulasjon: melankoli, tap og forsoning i en (nord)norsk hverdag (Doktoravhandling), Bodø 2014; Britt Kramvig/Anne Britt Flemmen: Mangfold, likhet og likestilling i Sápmi, in: Anne-Jorunn Berg/Anne Britt Flemmen/Berit Gullikstad (eds.): Likestilte norskheter: Om kjønn og etnisitet, Trondheim 2010, pp. 167–195; Eva Josefsen: Likestilling på Sametinget gjennom 25 år, in: Sven Roald Nystø/Máret Guhttor/Steinar Pedersen (eds.): Sámediggi 25 Jagi/Sametinget 25 år: 1989–2014, Karasjok 2014, pp. 183–204; Marit Meløy Utsi: Mellom kultur og økonomi: reindrift og kvinners hverdagsliv. Tromsø 2010; Jorunn Eikjok: Indigenous Women in the North. The Struggle for Rights and Feminism, in: Indigenous Affairs 3 (2000), pp. 38–41; Idem.: Socio-Cultural Transformations and New Challenges, in: Indigenous Affairs 1-2 (2004), pp. 52–57; Idem.: Gender, Essentialism and Feminism in Sámiland, in Joyce A. Green (ed.): Making Space for Indigenous Feminism, Black Point, N.S. 2007, pp. 108–123; Olusegun Olawale Olakunle: The Road so far …? The Sarahkka and the Sámi Nisson Forum. Tromsø, 2006. Ane Hedvig Heidrunsdotter Løvold: The Silence in Sápmi—and the Queer Sami Breaking It, Tromsø 2014; Beatrice Halsaa: Mobilisering av svart og samisk feminisme, in: Beret Bråten/Cecilie Thun (eds.): Krysningspunkter. Likestillingspolitikk i det flerkulturelle Norge, Oslo 2013, pp. 209–253; Rauna Kuokkanen: Myths and Realities of Sámi Women: A Post-Colonial Feminist Analysis for the Decolonization and Transformation of Sámi Society, in: Joyce A. Green (ed.): Making Space for Indigenous Feminism, Black Point, N.S. 2007, pp. 72–92; Rauna Kuokkanen: Gendered Violence and Politics in Indigenous Communities: The Cases of Aboriginal People in Canada and the Sámi in Scandinavia, in: International Feminist

on gender violence, related to shocking reports about extensive sexual abuse in Sámi local communities. In addition, Sámi feminist movement activists have documented their struggles.[29] In her pioneering work, the scholar-activist [my characteristic] Vigdis Stordahl[30] has discussed women's situation in relation to the complex modernisation processes in Sápmi: On the negative side, Sámi women's traditional rights within the reindeer industry were removed when the Norwegian government introduced a new reindeer herding regime in the 1970s, without recognizing women's practices within the industry. On the positive side, however, women took more advantage of the new educational opportunities, qualified themselves for paid employment, and improved their living conditions relative to Sámi men.

The contribution of this article is to examine Sámi women's mobilisation at the crossroads of indigenous and feminist movements, in particular during the Nordic Forums of 1988, 1994 and 2014.

## Political Opportunities and Separate Organising

Why did Sami women in Norway mobilise distinctly as women during the 1970s, and how did they relate to the huge Nordic women's conferences later on? Theories of 'political opportunity structures' account for the importance of institutional structures—the relatively stable, formal aspects of a political system such as economic support of and regular consultation with social movement organisations. Discursive opportunity structures refer to perceptions of "who and what are considered reasonable, sensible and legitimate".[31] Both kinds of structures may enable or prevent activism, depending on whether social movements frame them as opportunities or threats.

Journal of Politics 17:2 (2015), pp. 271–288; Kari Høgden/Sylvi Høgden/Alma Helander: Den andre stemmen, in: Kvinnerommet: Vi gratulerer Krisesenterbevegelsen 30 (2008), pp. 68–72.

29 Gudrun Eriksen Lindi/Vigdis Stordahl: Sarahkka—Samisk Internasjonal Kvinnebevegelse, in: MIRA magasin: 1 (1994), pp. 24–26; Máret Sára: Samisk kvinnebevegelse, in: Ottar 2 (1990), pp. 47–55; Liv Østmo/Vigdis Stordahl: Den sámiske kvinnens situasjon før og nå, Karasjok 1979.

30 Vigdis Stordahl: Same i den moderne verden: Endring og kontinuitet i et samisk lokalsamfunn, Karasjok 1996. Also discussed in Jorunn Eikjok: Gender, Essentialism and Feminism in Sámiland; and in Rauna Kuokkanen: Indigenous Women in Traditional Economies: The Case of Sámi Reindeer Herding, in: Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 34: 3 (2009), pp. 499–504.

31 Ruud Koopmans: Migrant mobilisation and political opportunities: variation among German cities and a comparison with the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, in: Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies 30:3 (2004): pp. 449–470, p. 451.

Opportunity structures may change due to claims, campaigns and protest activities. New actors and fresh ideas may result in a different institutional logic.

'Separate organising'[32] of Sámi women is assumed to be an outcome of interpretations of interests and choices, and not a given result of inherent ethno-cultural differences. This is in line with Benita Roth's discussion of White, Black and Chicana women in the U.S. They organised along racial/ethnic lines as a response to racial/ethnic hierarchies, and in dialogue with—not as a reaction to—white feminism.[33] The feminist movements cooperated and competed, depending on the issues at stake. Thus, the question is how Sámi feminists related to different strands of feminism in Norway: In what ways did indigenous and (post)colonial issues play into dialogues and disputes during the 1970s, and how did Sámi feminists appropriate the three Nordic Forums in 1988, 1994 and 2014? Did they voice interests and concerns, and were they included on equal terms? Did cross ethnic and transnational connections—conflictual or consensual—emerge?

## Methodological Considerations

During fieldwork in Sápmi, four of the Sámi women I really wanted to interview cancelled or dismissed my request. Three of them made practical statements, including a remark about having a bad memory of long-forgotten Nordic Forums (1988 and 1994). The three cancellations/dismissals were unfortunate, but I managed partially to replace them, although the project was left with fewer memories than hoped for. The fourth woman, however, replied with an outright refusal to talk, making a post-colonial claim. This was problematic. Firstly, because I believe that she had been a key activist, and likely to be able to shed light on crucial issues. In addition, her rejection frustrated me and prompted me to reflect on the insider/outsider issue in research.

Let me position myself briefly: I am a 'Southerner' [*søring*] and a researcher-activist who has sympathised with the Sámi struggle for a long time. As a young woman, when I spent a year in the Northern part of Norway as a teacher, I experienced the minorisation of Sámi reindeer herders. I noticed how the attitudes towards the Sámi varied from outright denigration to sympathy and friendship among the majority population. Some ten years later, I took part in the protests against the Alta project, and as a teacher, I have included Sápmi during lessons on the Norwegian political system. I have used to consider myself tolerant and obliging in relation to Sápmi.

32 Benita Roth: Separate Roads to Feminism, p. 4.
33 Ibid., p. 5.

I have been concerned with minoritising processes within women's movements since the late 1990s (Predelli & Halsaa, 2012).[34] 'Listening' to black and postcolonial feminist theory has provided a reinterpretation of my own family history also: One of the honoured ancestors in my family's oral tale, General Consul Crowe, was discussed in the political science syllabus when I was a young student. He developed the Norwegian trade and mining industries in Finnmark after the Napoleonic war. He reported to the Swedish-Norwegian government what he saw as Russia's inclination to control Finnmark. He reported that the local population was quite relaxed at the prospect of Russian occupation, and thus legitimised the policy of harsh repression against any trace of Sámi revolt.[35] Revisiting Crowe's role in the colonisation of Sápmi has given the notions of innocence and complicity fresh meaning for me.

When I planned my fieldwork, I realized that some Sámi women did not respond to my request for an interview. I was not completely surprised that a 'Southerner' like me would not be welcomed in Sápmi. It was relatively easy to accept arguments about time and oblivion, but hard to acknowledge a refusal based on references to colonial complicity. This rejection was justified with a general allegation that [non-indigenous researchers] did not recognise the efforts of the actual woman or her organisation [as competent and legitimate]. Sámi women's rights to represent and speak for themselves were not respected, according to this woman. She was, however, willing to participate in a steering group and contribute her experience on the condition that she was formally included.[36] Scholars had drafted the research application, and this entailed that her organisation was not taken seriously as a competent forum, she argued: "We want to influence, to have our own voice, and that is impossible without participation in the formal structures and resources to participate," [translated by the author] she said.

Her points about the unequal positioning of researchers and research participants, and the importance of having their own voice, make sense to me. Few 'Southern' gender research scholars have paid attention to indigenous women.[37] I remember how women's studies made claims of a similar kind against male scholars, and I am well aware that migrant women are fed up with being researched by White mainstream feminists. But I was unprepared for the rejection, since I thought I had a friendly and confident relationship with this particular woman. She gave me a lesson in power

34 Line Nyhagen Predelli/Beatrice Halsaa: Majority-Minority Relations in Contemporary Women's Movements: Strategic Sisterhood, Basingstoke 2012; Line Nyhagen/Beatrice Halsaa: Religion, Gender and Citizenship: Women of Faith, Gender Equality and Feminism, Basingstoke 2016.

35 Britt Kramvig/Anne Britt Flemmen: Mangfold, likhet og likestilling i Sápmi, p. 171.

36 The organisation was actually invited to participate, with all costs covered, in line with indigenous or decolonising methodology http://future-feminisms.aau.dk/ (accessed on 27 March 2020).

37 Not even Keskinen et al.: Complying with Colonialism, refer to indigenous people.

structures when she dismissed my wish to include her voice and criticised the terms of cooperation. While her rejection hurt my self-perception of being decent and trustworthy, it also triggered epistemological reflections. I realise that I expected Sámi feminists to appreciate my efforts to be inclusive. In retrospect, I appreciate this woman's readiness to justify her decline, and I wonder if some of the three activist who gave pragmatic reasons in fact were of the same opinion without stating so.

The rejections and evasions are a grim reminder of Linda Tuhiwa Smith's allegation that "Research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary,"[38] and Rauna Kuokkanen's claim that "[…]. Nordic feminists don't openly resist Sámi perspectives on feminism, but they don't engage with them either."[39] They make sense in the context of ongoing de/re-colonialisation processes in research and politics, of past losses of land and culture as living realities in present negotiations of what it means to be a Sámi, of the traumas of inner colonisation. Contests over claims to be recognized are painful for the claimant and the addressee, and yet they are crucial in the struggle for justice.

## The Making of a Movement: Sápmi Feminism

The modern Sámi women's movement emerged during the 1970s, as women and men struggled together in a gender-integrated ethno-political revitalisation process.[40] Women were engaged in the Sámi Resistance Group, they contributed to the Sámi Magazine *Charta 79* (inspired by the Charta 77 movement in Czechoslovakia).[41] Women joined the civil disobedience protests during the peak of Alta the struggle, such as the dramatic hunger strike in front of Parliament in 1979.

Gradually, however, Sámi women also established 'a room of their own', to address their particular situation as Sámi women. Regardless of the joint struggle for survival, Sámi women had special concerns: Changes in the reindeer industry were a key women's issue, and so was the protection of Sámi language, the socialisation of children, recognition of women's handicraft etc. While the Alta struggle was about the survival of (Norwegian) Sápmi, including land rights and reindeer herding, the issues were not gender innocent. Sámi women were afraid of losing their traditional ownership rights to reindeer marks. In fact, recognition of women's contribution to Sámi reindeer households, and their ownership rights, were at risk when the government transformed the reindeer industry from a self-support economy to a profit-based market

38 Linda Tuhiwai Smith: Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples, London 1999, p. 1.

39 Ina Knobblock/Rauna Kuokkanen: Decolonizing Feminism in the North, pp. 275–281.

40 Jorunn Eikjok: Socio-Cultural Transformations and New Challenges, pp. 52–57.

41 The 'newspaper' was published three times during the Alta struggle.

economy.[42] When this happened in Sweden, Sámi women protested and called for a cross-national Sámi women's seminar in Kiruna in 1975. The heading of the seminar 'The Sámi women's situation in the Sámi society'[43] [translated by the author] indicates a wide scope of interests, and a modest gender framing. The gathering addressed serious concerns, such as women's position in the reindeer herding industry, marriage and divorce problems within the reindeer herding society, including women's risk of losing rights if she married a non-Sámi, or if a non-Sámi woman divorced a Sámi reindeer herder.

The timing of the Kiruna seminar is significant: 1975 was the United Nations *International Year for Women* (IYW), which the Nordic states had enthusiastically endorsed. The IWY (and the succeeding UN *Decade for Women*) contributed to the already increased legitimacy of women's issues, and public funding was available for women's networks and organisations who wanted to celebrate the IYW. Numerous activities emerged, including the mentioned seminar in Kiruna, the same year as the founding of the *World Council of Indigenous Peoples* (WCIP).[44]

The further development substantiated Norwegian reindeer women's fear of losing rights: In 1978, the Norwegian state introduced a new reindeer husbandry regime. Consequently, official records placed reindeer-owning Sámi women under their husbands, and erased their access to allocation of subsidies and grants.[45] Women protested, but in vain, and without full support from Sámi organisations.[46] This prompted some women to question the narrative of Sámi culture as being more gender equal than the Norwegian, and that patriarchy was a product of (neo)-colonialism. (This narrative was firmly established during the ethno-political awakening addressed above.)[47] Feminist ideas grew stronger, a gender-independent movement was slowly emerging, and the seminar in Kiruna in 1975 resulted in a new institutional logic: New actors and networks emerged as Sámi women continued to organise transnational women's seminars, the second took place in 1978. Before the third seminar in 1982, the Sámi women had joined forces in an epoch-making protest: They 'occupied' the newly appointed female Prime Minister's office in 1981, in full Sámi costumes, in a desperate effort to convince her to stop the Alta project. The protesters made international headlines when the police carried them out. Although their specific appeal to sisterhood across the Sámi-Norwegian divide was unsuccessful, ethnic Norwegian

42 Rauna Kuokkanen: Indigenous Women in Traditional Economies, pp. 499–504.
43 Liv Østmo/Vigdis Stordahl: Den samiske kvinnens situasjon før og nå, Karasjok 1979.
44 Henry Minde: The Destination and the Journey.
45 The Reindeer Herding Act of 1978.
46 Mariann Komissar/Mari Møystad/Kate Rognlie: Kvinnens stilling i reindriftsnæringen, Oslo 1987, pp. 50.
47 Jorunn Eikjok: Socio-Cultural Transformations and New Challenges, pp. 52–57.

feminists hailed their actions, and the event presumably invigorated Sámi women's identity as Sámi women.

Subsequent women's seminars took place in 1985 and 1988; more opportunities to discuss practical and profound normative Sámi women's problems, including economics, language and cultural rights, motherhood and the socialisation of children.[48] Gradually, Sámi women struggled for "achieving collective rights for the self-determination of indigenous peoples to exist as well as individual rights for us as women", to cite Jorunn Eikjok.[49]

The Sámi activists fostered and invigorated a sense of transnational and postcolonial community among women as their efforts and struggle intersected with black and other indigenous people, as well as transnational feminist movements on all levels. They took advantage of the new institutional and discursive opportunities formed when the Norwegian, the Nordic and the UN political agendas opened up to include Sámi rights and women's rights during the 1970s and 80s. The joint struggle against the Alta river project had pushed men and women to join forces in a gender-integrated Sámi movement. As long as Sámi survival was framed as the overriding issue, ethnic belonging was dominant, and women's particular interests were downplayed. Gradually, however, gender aspects came to the fore, levered by opportunities related to feminist movements and gender equality policies. They yielded 'new glasses' to Sámi women,[50] and gradually formed opportunities to frame Sámi gender identity and gender issues as equally important as ethnic ones.

## Separate Organisations

Sámi women had in fact, discussed the question of a separate organisation during the first women's seminar in Kiruna in 1975. At that time, however, the Alta struggle overshadowed everything, and required all resources. Hence, no opportunity for a formal organisation for Sámi women.

By the end of the 1980s, when the state had recognised Sámi rights, the discourse clearly turned and a gender independent Sámi women's movement arose. A hotline was opened in 1987, when problems of sexual assaults in Sápmi were apparent. A number of reports of sexual assaults had been submitted to the district sheriff, but the charges were dismissed and the mayor spoke about them as "false rubbish" [translated by the author].[51] In 1989, the Sámi municipality of Karasjok rejected further funding

48 Odd Mathis Hætta: Urfolks organisering og status 1975–2003; Máret Sára: Samisk Kvinnebevegelse, pp. 47–55.

49 Jorunn Eikjok: Indigenous Women in the North, pp. 38–41.

50 Vigdis Stordahl: Same i den moderne verden, p. 120.

51 Jan Erik Henriksen, the seminar Vold i nære relasjoner i Sameland, 2.–3. mars 2007.

of the hotline, and the activists closed it down, in protest.[52] In between, a group of women had secretly decided to suggest the foundation of a women's organisation. They launched the initiative immediately after the closure of the fifth Sámi women's seminar in Kiruna, where they had prepared the forthcoming Nordic Sámi conference as well as the Nordic Forum in Oslo. The proposal to establish the Sáráhkká Sami Women's Organisation[53], and to elect an interim board, came as a total surprise to most of the participants in the seminar. It was a contested initiative, and it produced a lot of anger. Adversaries described it as "a coup", and accused the founders of betraying the Sámi people, and of being "gender fascists".[54] The Sáráhkká leadership had an indisputable record in the joint Sámi struggle, however, and their 'Sáminess' was unquestionable in contrast to the combination of 'Sámi' and 'feminist' which was questioned across the gender divide.

Soon, gender conflicts escalated again. This time, due to protests against the nomination of a woman as the first candidate on a common list of nominees to the Sámi parliament election. Adversaries discarded the female candidate as too young and radical, and they questioned her ethnic loyalty as well as her womanliness, and called for a new nomination meeting. Unexpectedly, a group of voters took advantage of the new institutional opportunities and set up a 'Women's list' for the election.[55] The list actually won a seat, but the dispute left profound traces in the community. Feminists were furious, and ready to take further organisational initiatives. A cross-movement feminist alliance came to the rescue: In 1989, Norwegian women's organisations organised the yearly fund-raising campaign[56] targeting women in the 'Third World'. Sámi women successfully applied for financial support, and set up the interim board of the World Council of Indigenous Women (WCIW) — Fourth World women. They also got funding for the second International Indigenous Women's Conference (to be arranged in Karasjok), during which the International Indigenous Women's Council was established.

Sámi feminists reinforced cross-movement and transnational alliances during the 1980s. Their movement flourished, but organisational splits also occurred: Some dis-

52 Kari Høgden et al.: Den andre stemmen, pp. 68–72.

53 Sáráhkká was/is transnational with departments in Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia (since 1991).

54 Jorunn Eikjok: Indigenous Women in the North.

55 Vigdis Stordahl: Same i den moderne verden, p. 115–118; Vigdis Stordahl: Sametinget — Kvinner begrenset adgang? Refleksjoner over debatten om kvinnerepresentasjon på Sametinget, in: Bjørn Bjerkli/Per Selle (eds.): Samer, makt og demokrati, Oslo 2003; Chandra K. Roy: Indigenous Women: A Gender Perspective, in: Gáldu Čála 1 (2005), https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1250&context=aprci (accessed on 26 November 2019).

56 'TV-aksjonen' is an annual charity campaign set up by the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation since 1974, in cooperation with selected organisations.

appointed Sárahkká members set up Sámi Nisson Forum (SNF)—as a local network in 1993, and as an all-Sápmi organisation from 1998.

When borders to Russia reopened in 1991, new opportunities for cross-movement alliances emerged. Prostitution and trafficking mobilised protests, and in 1997 another transnational-cross-ethnic network was established: the Northern Network against Prostitution and Violence.[57] In the same year, women also formed a Network for Women in the Reindeer Industry. Gender issues were still prominent in this symbolically laden Sámi industry.[58]

Looking back, the 1970's, 1980s and 1990s stand out as a peak in Sámi women's mobilisation, with a throng of activities, networks and organisations. Timing is crucial: Women had prioritised the Sámi survival, engaged in a gender-integrated Sámi movement and contributed in every aspect to stopping the Alta river project. The battle ended with different political opportunity structures. Transnational movements offered new channels of influence; there was competition over winning seats in the Sámi parliament, there was new funding for Sámi activities, and there were new ways of cooperating or disagreeing within Norwegian Sápmi. It was time to address women's issues and gender equality in Sápmi head on.

During the gender-integrated struggle, female activists had mobilised protest campaigns, published texts, participated in media debates, and had acquired organisational skills, networks and leadership experience. They had developed some alliances with the majority Norwegian women's movement, and extensive transnational collaboration with the indigenous women's movement. Finally, when the Alta struggle ended, and the Sámi institutions emerged, women took the opportunity to frame issues in the name of Sámi women and to organise on their own. At that point, they had the necessary resources to establish a gender-independent movement (Kuumba 2001).[59] Institutional and discursive opportunities were a product of the ethno-political struggle, since the Sámi parliament firmly institutionalised the right to struggle for diverse Sámi interests.[60] The response to women's organising and to self-identified

57 Marit Smuk Solbakk: Fuorraoasti ja demonstranttat Samis—Horekunder og demonstranter i Sameland, in: Trine Rogg Korsvik/Ane Stø (eds.): Nei til kjøp av sex og kropp!, Oslo 2010, pp. 72–82.

58 Women's situation in the reindeer herding industry have, however, had less attention in government papers, and are left out in the last official policy document [thanks to Bente Kramvig for sharing this information].

59 I have applied Kuumba's notions of gender-independent movements (where genders are separate and operate autonomously both structurally and ideologically), gender-integrated movements (that engage both women and men pursuing a single objective which is usually not gender related) and gender-parallel structures (auxiliary groups which usually link women and their separate structures to a single or set of male-dominated movement organisations). M. Bahati Kuumba: Gender and Social Movements, p. 17.

60 Torunn Pettersen: The Sámediggi Electoral Roll in Norway, p. 167.

feminists—accusations of being ridiculous, Norwegianised, of being divisive and of breaking the unity of Sápmi—made visible that certain issues, arguments and actors were considered to be less legitimate than others.[61] The negative reactions to Sámi women's separate organising resemble the reception of white, Norwegian feminists in the 1970s, but had an additional dimension: the ethno-political struggle over rights to land and water, language and culture—the fundamental survival issues.

In what ways did the Nordic Forum play into Sámi women's organising? The following sections address how Sámi feminists appropriated the Nordic Forum differently in 1988, 1994 and 2014, and how intersections between ethno-political and gendered conflicts played into this.

## The Nordic Forums of 1988, 1994 and 2014

The women's conference named Nordic Forum (NF) attracted huge numbers of women—10,000 women and some men met in 1988, 16,000 in 1994 and 20,000 in 2014. The Forums were in different ways responses to UN initiatives, each with a comprehensive women's movements program—with seminars, workshops, stands for organisations and stakeholders, and cultural events—and a formal conference for the Nordic governments. The Nordic Forum attracted participants from the local to the global women's movements, and offered opportunities to reinforce feminist activism and to form new alliances. Each Nordic Forum facilitated informal and formal interactions with national governments, with the Nordic Council, and to some extent, with the UN and the international community. Thus, the Nordic Forum furnished women's movements with mobilising structures, spaces to meet and join forces, and to sharpen their visions and demands.

They also differed: In 1988 and 1994,[62] the Nordic Council of Ministers initiated and funded the Nordic Forum, closely related to the UN's International Decade for Women and the concurrent women's tribunals in 1985 and 1995. NF in 1988 was organised to assess the implementation of the UN *Forward-looking strategies*[63] adopted in Nairobi in 1985. In 1994, the motivation was to prepare the Nordic initiatives to the UN Beijing *Platform for Action* in 1995. Despite the top-down initiative, the NF 1988 and 1994 were in fact organised by autonomous women's committees, and were truly bottom-up events in many respects. The mix of top-down and bottom-up

61 Jorunn Eikjok: Gender, Essentialism and Feminism in Sámiland, p. 115; Jorunn Eikjok: Socio-Cultural Transformations and New Challenges; Ina Knobblock/Rauna Kuokkanen: Decolonizing Feminism in the North, p. 244.

62 The motto in 1988 was *Women will form tomorrow*, and in 1994 *Women's lives and work—joy and freedom.*

63 https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/173939 (accessed on 27 March 2020).

features make them perfect examples of the particular "Nordic state feminism"[64] that prevailed in the 1980s and 1990s.

NF 2014 was different. This time, the event was strictly a bottom-up initiative: The Swedish Women's Lobby (SWL) conceived of the idea and took the lead. The motivation was that the UN failed to call for a fifth global women's conference, and SWL's aim was to foreground renewed global initiatives for women. The funding in 2014 turned out to be difficult; this was a time of feminist backlash, neo-liberal policies and economic decline. The economic role of the Nordic Council was limited, and there no longer were Nordic ministers eager to strengthen women's movements—irrespective of the Nordic self-praise of gender equality. There was scant interest from the Nordic states in organising a Nordic Forum, except for Sweden. In contrast to the previous NFs, Nordic Forum 2014 did not emerge from new opportunities, but surfaced because of perceived threats of worsening conditions for women.

Lack of funding in Denmark, Finland, Iceland and Norway hampered the mobilising of women's movements in 2014.[65] The demise of state feminism was manifest in the stingy funding, with the exception of Sweden. In addition, the organisers of NF 2014 failed to attract more recently mobilised groups of women,[66] and set up an 'all-white' planning and coordinating structure. Feminist, anti-racist and lgbtqi organisations, particularly in Sweden, protested harshly. There had been contestations as to the composition of the previous NF's also, whether they were inclusive and whether all concerned groups had the possibility to participate on equal terms. The amount of critique and public debate after NF 2014 was, however, different from the previous NFs, and it was only in Malmö that the protests resulted in an alternative event, the Feminist Festival.

What about Sámi women—how did they appropriate the different Nordic Forums? Did they frame them as opportunities, or not? The next section addresses this question.

64 Helga Maria Hernes: Welfare State and Woman Power: Essays in State Feminism, Oslo 1987.

65 The motto in 2014 was *New Actions on Women's Rights.*

66 Beatrice Halsaa/Pauline Stoltz/Christel Stormhøj: Generational Conflict and the Politics of Inclusion in Two Feminist Events, in: Elizabeth Evans/Éléonore Lépinard (eds.): Intersectionality in Feminist and Queer Movements: Confronting Privileges, Abingdon/New York 2020.

## Sámi Feminists and Nordic Forum 1988

The Sámi presence in Oslo 1988 was significant, with a delegation of 34, dressed up in traditional costumes. Their agenda was distinct: to present Sámi culture and inform the public about Sámi women's situation. The Nordic Sámi Councils Women's Commission seminar in Kiruna, when Sáráhkká was formed, appointed the delegation and also used the seminar as an opportunity to plan for NF in Oslo. The funding from the Nordic Council via the Nordic Sámi Council enabled the women to hire a project co-ordinator for three months. They also met with the Nordic Forum planning committee twice and let their wish to contribute to all parts of the NF be known.

The delegation was successful: Sámi artists performed during the spectacular opening ceremony, and Sámi women presented lectures titled: 'The Sámi women's situation', 'Women and leadership—why so few', 'The consequences of the reindeer herding legislation', 'Reindeer herding outside of the areas covered by the reindeer herding legislation', 'Girls' opportunities of education', 'The socialisation of girls and boys', 'Language, how parents build up the language of children', and 'The kindergarten as arena for socialisation' [translated by the author].[67] These were vital topics in Sápmi.

Sámi women were present in the stand area with several exhibitions of Sámi art, photos and handicraft, and there was an additional Sámi concert. A brochure produced by the Nordic Sámi Institute, "The position of Sámi women", was distributed. Also, during the formal Nordic Council's 'Nordic Gender Equality Conference'[68] at the end of the Forum, the leader of the Sámi Councils Women's Commission participated. The Sámi program disclosed the width and depth of Sámi women's agenda, their intention to put the finger on urgent issues, and to take advantage of the opportunity to alert the wider audience to (re)colonialisation processes and rights claims.

Sámi women's presence did not come without strife, however. As previously mentioned, the organisation Sáráhkká was contested, and feminist activists were publicly accused of betraying the Sámi people. Gender was still secondary to ethnicity within Sápmi, and the feminists who went to the Nordic Forum in Oslo had been perceived as 'extremely provocative'[69] within the Sámi community. They did not always move at ease within the larger mainstream Nordic feminist society, either. Jorunn Eikjok describes the vulnerable and uneasy positioning between Sámi men and 'Norwegian' women: "We were unpopular among our Sámi brothers for introducing women's

67 Nordisk Samerås kvinneutvalg. Rapport Fra Nordisk Forum 30.07.–07.08.1988, Oslo. Utsjoki: Nordiska Samerådet, 1988. p. 11.

68 The conference addressed women's role in economic development, and work-family relations.

69 Jorunn Eikjok: Indigenous Women in the North, p. 39.

cause into the struggle for our rights. We were unpopular among our fellow sisters in the wider community for bringing in our ethnic and cultural identity as women."[70]

The transnational character of Sápmi, covering parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia, implied extra costs of travelling and linguistics, and was probably not recognised and sufficiently addressed by the NF organisers. In addition, Sámi women's request for a seat on the main NF coordinating committee was denied,[71] but they were admitted as observers to some of the main meetings of the committee. They also met with the Nordic coordinator of NF and were included in the Nordic working group.

Despite difficulties, NF 1988 offered new institutional and discursive opportunities, like funding, access to new spaces, legitimacy to voice claims, and disclose Sámi culture. The inclusion of Sámi artists and speakers in the NF program is indicative. The Alta conflict had produced sympathy with Sámi issues, and recognition was manifest in the Sámi Act (1987) and the new clause in the Constitution (1988). The state was obliged to remedy past injustices. The public at large, however, hardly understood the scale of wounds and losses inflicted upon the Sámi population. There was a lot of anger among Sámi people, and resistance against ongoing (re)colonisation of Sápmi. One trace of this was the strong reaction from Sámi women against what they framed as the exotification of their culture during the Nordic Forum. They also strongly rejected the comparison of their situation to immigrant women, as some media did. Instead, they demanded recognition of their indigenous history and status.

Generally, however, the Sámi participants in Oslo were quite content. According to their own evaluation, they had successfully disseminated crucial information and displayed the diversity and richness of Sámi culture. They had made numerous connections with women's movements, including other minority women's groups. A foundation for further cooperation and alliances was born. Reporting to the Sámi Council, the Sámi Council's Women's Commission described their participation as "very successful", and among other things referred to the positive response from the audience.[72] In a press release, they confirmed that the Nordic Forum had been valuable, and then added:

> Sámi culture is completely dependent upon what the Nordic governments do or do not do in relation to Sápmi. The Women's Committee is pleased about the economic support from Nordic governments […]. Because of this, Sámi women on the Nordic level have, for the first time, been able to demonstrate as a separate group.[73] [translated by the author]

70 Ibid. p. 39.

71 There may have been formal reasons due to the lack of a proper Sámi women's organisation at the time when the organisational structure of NF was set up.

72 Nordisk Samerås kvinneutvalg. Rapport Fra Nordisk Forum 30.07.–07.08.1988, p. 11.

73 Ibid.

They also emphasised the "(…) invaluable experiences in how to organise women's issues in the future." This was important, they claimed, "because Sámi women do not yet have a Sámi women's organisation that can coordinate issues of concern for Sámi women." Thus, the Sámi women used the opportunity to counteract the critique against Sámi feminists. They tried to improve the discursive opportunity structure within Sápmi; *who* were framed as reasonable, sensible and legitimate agents—*what* was perceived as reasonable, sensible and legitimate demands, and *how* should politics be played out?

Sámi feminists appropriated Nordic Forum 1988 as an opportunity, and the result was new agents, new issues and new ways of organising. When returning home, Sáráhkká was formally established. Soon after, with funding from the mentioned Norwegian women's movements joint fund-raising campaign for Third World women in 1989, Sámi feminists were deeply involved in the global indigenous women's movement. Within a short time, more organisations were to come. Sáráhkká was a tool to (re)establish and strengthen transnational alliances.

## Sámi Feminists and Nordic Forum 1994

The Nordic Council, under the impression of the positive evaluation of NF 1988, recommended a second NF in Åbo, Finland. The Nordic governments were determined to use the UN Fourth World Conference on Women, and the women's alternative Forum, in Beijing 1995, as an arena to promote practices and images of Nordic gender equality.[74] How did Sámi women fit into this?

When the decision to organise the second Nordic Forum in 1994 was made, Sámi women immediately appropriated the forthcoming event as an opportunity. This time, they were better equipped than in 1988, with the Nordic Sámi Women's Commission, Sáráhkká and the World Council of Indigenous Women as structures for planning, co-ordinating and fund-raising. The motivation was solid, due to anger and bitterness in the aftermath of elections to the Sámi parliament; the negative reactions to the Women's List, and the general lack of attention to their issues in Sámi communities. Activists were also fuelled by discussions of sexual violence. Gender troubles within Sápmi were indisputable.

The geo-political context in 1994 was different from that of 1988, firstly because of the formal recognition of Norwegian Sápmi, and secondly because of the fall of the Soviet Union. From 1989–90 on, Sámi activists were free to travel across the Russian

74 The title of the Nordic publication made for Beijing is illustrative: Brit Fougner/Mona Larsen-Asp (eds.): The Nordic Countries—A Paradise for Women? (Nordic Council of Ministers), Copenhagen 1994.

border to meet with allies on the Kola Peninsula. Sáráhkká defined itself as a trans-national organisation and set out to reach Russian-Sámi women. A subgroup developed to reach this aim.

The relationship among the Sámi feminist activists was strained, however, as signs of disagreements and strife among the pioneers emerged. The tiny number of movement activists involved, within an already small and vulnerable community, calls for attention. The founding of *S*ámi Nísson Forum (SNF)[75] in 1993 is indicative of disagreements among the activists.[76] SNF was a local network founded by activists behind the controversial Women's List; women who wanted to be engaged in local politics 'on women's premises'. Some women had left Sáráhkká for SNF, but for a while, the two women's groups existed in relative peace, and both of them appropriated Nordic Forum 1994 as an opportunity for their goals.

On the macro level, the institutional and the discursive opportunity structures were favourable in 1994: The formal mandate of the Nordic Forum named Sámi women as a prioritised group, along with youth, immigrant women and women with disabilities. Consequently, they were included and represented on an equal basis in the Norwegian working committee during the 1994 preparations. Also, the Nordic Coordinating Committee set up a Nordic Forum Sámi working group. More important, however, was the generous funding of a Sámi co-ordinator: Jorunn Eikjok, firmly established in the ethno-political struggle for Sápmi, was hired for two and a half years. Her efforts to inform, to mobilise and to organise Sámi women transnationally, enabled a number of Sámi women from Norway, Sweden, Finland *and* Russia to meet in Åbo. Some 60–70 Nordic Sámi women participated, plus 20 from Russia.

Many women in the Sámi delegation were completely unfamiliar with travelling abroad, had not been to a large city and did not speak a foreign language. In Åbo, they were well taken care of in 'the Sámi house' which was also close to the delegation from Greenland. Here, indigenous women could share the kitchen and cook together, exchange recipes and life stories, and this enabled cooperation and alliances. According to one interviewee, the Sámi house—proudly decorated with the brand new Sápmi flag—was a crucial gathering place during the whole NF week; a place to explore the revitalisation of Sámi and indigenous identities. Because of de/re-colonisation, several women did not identify with the larger 'white' society and experienced the 'house of their own' as being of vital importance.

According to the Norwegian evaluation report, Nordic Forum in Åbo was the largest manifestation of Sámi women's culture and lives ever. During the actual event, Sámi women had an extensive program every day, including exhibitions of *duodjii* (handicrafts), photos—of Sámi cooking of herbs—shows, street theatre and concerts

75 http://www.saminissonforum.org/norsk/?page_id=2 (accessed on 22 March 2017).

76 Olusegun Olawale Olakunle: The Road so far…?, p. 81.

(*joik*, Sámi chanting). They arranged seminars, separately or in co-operation with women from Greenland. They discussed topics such as the situation of young people in Sápmi and Greenland; motherhood in the four states of Sápmi; young people's rights, of young authors, indigenous women's joy and freedom, women and resource management, and finally: the Sámi women's movement, an event which actually had the subtitle "*pioneers or extremists*".[77] Compared to 1988, the range of topics was broader, more transnational, and addressed resource management instead of solely concerning reindeer herding. In addition to problems, the program also examined 'joy and freedom', and included the contested issue of women's separate organising. The content signalled optimism.

Sámi women made the most of the Nordic Forum. Overall, their cause was accepted as reasonable, sensible and legitimate by national Norwegian, Nordic and international actors. One incident during the opening ceremony, however, demonstrated unresolved recognition issues: The flags of the five Nordic nation states and the three autonomous regions were decorating the stage, but when Sámi women wanted to add the Sámi flag, they were rejected.[78] The very fact that they did have a flag and took steps to present it, however, indicates that Sámi women were much more confident than during the previous Nordic Forum.

New institutional structures developed after Åbo. The timing was good: Sáráhkká was invited to join the Norwegian delegation to the UN Women's conference in Beijing 1995, which also happened to take place during the UN's Indigenous People's Decade (1994–2004). The Barents Cooperation Program[79] encompassed opportunities for women's projects (until 1999), an opportunity not missed. Sáráhkka and SNF initiated and hosted a series of joint Nordic-Russia projects. For Russian Sámi women, the Nordic Forum in Åbo was a totally new and positive experience, and for the first time, they had an opportunity to formulate their own agenda.

During the preparations for the Nordic Forum of 1994, however, disagreements among Sámi feminists had surfaced, and the key members of Sáráhkká actually refrained from going to Åbo. I have not been able to acquire details regarding the contestations involved, but the organisational split was definitive when Sámi Nisson Forum (SNF), in 1998, presented itself as a formal (transnational) organisation, with statutes and an elected board. As discussed earlier, Sáráhkká was perceived as old-fashioned, and members left for SNF, or chose double membership. The organisational split must have been painful and disappointing, given the number and positioning of the Sámi feminists.

77 There were 2000 announced and 1500 implemented events in Åbo, compared to 1000 events in Oslo.

78 Information from the Nordic research co-ordinator Solveig Bergman.

79 The Barents cooperation (last updated on 28 April 2015), https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/high-north/barents-cooperation/id2008480/ (accessed on 15 March 2017).

Irrespective of this, NF 1994 was a boost for SNF activists. They returned with new ideas and tools, and soon affiliated with the Norwegian Forum for Women and Development (FOKUS).[80] Affiliation across ethnic lines worked well for some years. NF was discontent, however, with FOKUS's north-south platform from the outset because it did not facilitate Sámi women's north-north tradition and co-operation projects with Russia. In 2011, SNF withdrew from FOKUS, disappointed that their competencies were not recognised.[81]

The results of Åbo for the Sámi feminist movement are complex. NF 1994 was a destabilising event resulting in the mobilisation of new activists, new institutional opportunity structures and improved discursive opportunities in the public at large. At the same time, however, internal disagreements and new issues developed. More research is needed in order to clarify how these re- or demotivated activism in the succeeding years.

## Sámi Feminists and the Nordic Forum 2014

The third Nordic Forum took place in Malmö, Sweden in 2014, initiated by the Swedish Women's Lobby's (SWL). The SWL was determined to put pressure on the international community. Despite the meagre hope of a Fifth UN World Conference on Women, and a fear that such a conference could result in a grave backlash for women, SWL began the task of organising a third Nordic Women's Forum in 2011. SWL described it as "a continuation of the Nordic conferences" held in Oslo and Åbo.[82] Contrary to the previous ones, there were neither promises of Nordic financial support, nor genuine engagement from the Nordic governments. Nordic Forum 2014 was truly a bottom-up process, demonstrating that Nordic state feminism had vanished.

The third NF presented itself as "a progressive joint effort to manifest our determination to work together towards an equal society where women have full human rights, in the Nordic region, in Europe and internationally".[83] The aims were familiar, including the wish to "strengthen the Nordic Women's Movement organisations and efficiency"[84], but they also mirrored change. For instance, the notion of gender

80 FOKUS' history goes back to 1989 when a structure was set up to manage the result of the 1989 fundraising campaign.

81 SNF withdraws from FOKUS (4 November 2011), http://www.saminissonforum.org/norsk/?p=797 (accessed on 15 February 2018).

82 Background, in: Nordiskt Forum Malmö: New Action on Women's Rights 12-15:6 (2014), http://nf2014.org/en/welcome/bakgrund/ (accessed on 16 February 2018).

83 Ibid. (accessed on 27 November 2019).

84 Ibid. (accessed on 27 March 2020).

equality has replaced women/women's rights; various UN decisions are emphasised, 'industry' is included among the relevant agents of 'experience-sharing', and the 'new generation' is emphasised.

This is not the place to describe the NF 2014 at length, but the event was impressive in terms of participants, and speakers.[85] What about the Sámi presence, did they perceive it as an opportunity?

Despite the magnitude of NF 2014, there are few traces of Sámi activism. There were no Sámi women among the Nordic organisers,[86] and none among the staff of the NF secretariat in Stockholm.[87] The result of scrutinising the extensive Åbo program—divided into the Arena program, the Open program, and the Nordic program[88], was meagre: Two seminar slots included Sámi issues: One presentation in a workshop on political participation, and one contribution in a workshop on environment, climate and sustainable development.[89] In both workshops, the same women from Sweden participated.[90]

There were absolutely no traces of (Norwegian) Sámi women. They arranged no cultural, political or academic events—they simply did not participate. Their absence is striking, compared to the two previous Nordic Forums. We did not find applications for travel grants to go to Malmö, and no indications or documentation of ideas or plans for activities related to the Nordic Forum. There was no indication in archives, newspapers or interviews that Norwegian Sámi feminists had wanted to attend. Most likely, Norwegian Sámi women did not try to go to Malmö.

Compared to the outcome of the previous NF, this is surprising. Why did Sámi women not take advantage of the opportunity, given the potential to mobilise, consolidate and strengthen their rights? Did they rather frame NF 2014 as contrary to their interests? Only the Sámi activists themselves know, but in the final section, I suggest some interpretations of their absence.

85 See Beatrice Halsaa/Pauline Stoltz/Christel Stormhøj: Generational Conflict and the Politics of Inclusion in Two Feminist Events.

86 The organising committee consisted of two umbrella organisations from each country.

87 The umbrella organisations were FOKUS with no Sámi women's organisation among their membership and the Shelter Movement Secretariat, which does include the Sámi Shelter and Incest Centre.

88 Program, in: Nordiskt Forum Malmö: New Action on Women's Rights 12-15:6 (2014), https://nf2014.org/program/ (accessed on 27 November 2019).

89 "Experiences from indigenous women's advocacy", https://issuu.com/nf2014/docs/nf2014_programtidning_inlaga_200dpi (accessed on 30 March 2020).

90 Josefina Skerk, presented as environmental activist, Greenpeace, member of the Swedish Sámi parliament, and ambassador for Sámi youth.

## Sámi Activism and the Nordic Forum—from Presence to Absence?

Sámi women obviously did not appropriate Nordic Forum 2014 as a possibility for activism. One suggestion is that they did not know about NF 2014, or maybe were informed too late to be able to mobilise. This may seem unlikely at first glance, since huge umbrella organisations were supposed to spread information about the NF and to urge their member organisations to participate. There have been, however, comments and critique against the organisers for not disseminating calls for participation widely. The organising committees outside of Sweden complained about insufficient funding. The apparatus for mobilising to NF 2014 was considerably weaker than the previous NF's with respect to funding.

Also, to the extent that information about NF in Norway was distributed mainly by the FOKUS[91], Sami Nisson Forum may have overlooked such calls. Since they actively chose to leave FOKUS, they may not have paid (sufficient) attention to whatever came from FOKUS. Paradoxically also, maybe the two professional umbrella organisations (FOKUS and *Krisesentersekretariatet*) were less well equipped to motivate grassroots activists in Sápmi, compared to all the small grassroots organisations that were involved in 1988 and 1994. The gender equality officer of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament turned out to be unaware of NF[92], and if she was not informed, why should grassroots activists have been?

Another interpretation is that Sámi activist women knew about NF, but found the Malmö event insufficiently relevant. Their organisations are small in terms of membership and other resources, which mean that Sáráhkká and SNF had to select their activities carefully. Maybe they simply decided not prioritise the NF in 2014? Was 'not attending' a silent protest against their exclusion from the organising, 'white' committee? Did they find the aims of the 'white' feminist agenda unworthy of their attention? It would not be surprising if activists had been fed up with initiatives coming from the mainstream women's movement, would it?

A third interpretation is that the feminist activists knew about the NF, and that they would have liked to attend if they could have afforded to do so. If so, they may have remained at home simply because they lacked economic resources. This exposi-

91 This is indicated by some of the activists that were interviewed.

92 Based on interview. The Sámi Parliament has been part of the Norwegian delegation to the UN Women's Commission since 2012. Lack of attention to indigenous people in the UN millennium goals has been addressed, resulting in the theme 'Empowerment of Indigenous Women' as a side event during the UN Commission on the Status of Women 61 https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/side-events (accessed on 30 March 2020).

tion is less likely than the previous one, however, since they probably did not apply for grants for the NF.[93]

A fourth, and related, possible reason for not going to Malmö is that the established Sámi activists may have been tired and might not have had the energy to plan and to mobilise. Some of the core feminists have had leadership roles since the beginning of the movement, and it seems difficult to recruit new generations of women. Decades of steady, dedicated activism have a cost, and established activists may be frustrated or bewildered by lack of attention and support among young Sámi. Maybe the organisations were short of mobilising structures, such as energy and leadership resources? This was a period in time during which they could not profit from vivid social mobilisation of protests in Sápmi. There were no recent gender related scandals of political harassment or negligence of sexual violence against women, and no new opportunities such as the annual funding campaign or the opening of the Russian border, in contrast to 1988 and 1994.

Although some of the institutional opportunity structures for Sámi activists have been improved since the 1970s, other aspects have not. The focus on gender equality issues in the Sámi parliament, the increased number of women in Sámi politics and administration, and the general improvements of Sámi women's educational and economic status have contributed to delegitimising the older feminist activists. As a consequence, their discursive opportunities have deteriorated. Expertification or professionalisation, projectification and the mainstreaming of gender equality[94]—in Sápmi as elsewhere—have altered the perception of who and what are sensible, reasonable and legitimate agents and claims. The category of 'woman' no longer calls for sympathy as it did during the 1970s and 1980s. Women and girls are less visible today than they used to be in policy documents on the reindeer herding industry, for example—although the barriers against their participation are considerable.[95] Instead of 'women' and 'gender' as prioritised statuses, the new anti-discrimination policy is gender neutral, or emphases 'new' categories, such as boys and men, and sexual minorities. Sápmi is no exception, and the established feminist organisations are faced with much the same challenges as the mainstream feminist movement.

Comparisons of Norwegian Sámi women's participation in the Nordic Forums of 1988, 1994 and 2014 displayed striking differences. There was a strong will to be present in Oslo; to educate the majority population about Sámi ways of living; to articulate demands and aims. The mobilisation in Åbo marked an increased scale

93 Based on my interviews and also my archive research.

94 Johanna Kantola/Judith Squires: From state feminism to market feminism?, in: International Political Science Review 33:4 (2012), pp. 382–400.

95 See the latest Green paper on reindeer herding industry (Meld. St. 32 (2016/17) Reindrift—Lang tradisjon—unike muligheter. https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/meld.-st.-32-20162017/id2547907/ (accessed on 30 March 2020).

of activism, both with respect to the number of Sámi women, the presence of Sámi women from Russia and the global indigenous movement. In 2014, Sámi absence was striking, but hardly because Sámi claims and demands had been fulfilled. Natural resources, reindeer, ethnic discrimination, language right, violence against women etc. are still urgent issues. Actually, the reindeer herding industry is in a critical stage and women in the industry are struggling alongside their men to protect their interests. Gender is likely to be less relevant than family interests in this context.

This article has documented how Sámi feminism appropriated the Nordic Forums in 1988 and 1994, bringing about new actors and activities. In 2014, however, nothing happened, on the surface at least. Does this mean that Sámi feminism is a matter of the past? Hardly, because new groups and topics are surfacing among young Sámi, such as the transnational Niejda-Chicks in Sápmi[96] and the Queering Sápmi project,[97] with social media as new tools. Whether the 'old' feminist organisations perceive these changes as opportunities or constraints, is an open question.

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96 This organisation started in 2015, but the activities go back to 2011.

97 Sara Lindquist/Elfrida Bergman (Project manager for Queering Sápmi): Queering Sápmi (18 October 2011), https://noereh.wordpress.com/2011/10/18/queering-sapmi/ (accessed on 16 February 2018).