

Nomadising Sami Collections

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This paper outlines the background of a project including three national museums in Stockholm: the Nordiska Museet, the National Historical Museum (Historiska Museet), and the Museum of Ethnography (Etnografiska Museet). My part of the project covers museum artefacts related to the Sami, an indigenous people. Most of these artefacts are counted as cultural historical, but there are also human remains. The aim of my study is to investigate how these collections have been acquired, named, classified, displayed, and moved between the museums, thereby defining the Sami as a part of Us or the Other. One theoretical starting point is that the artefacts have become significant actors in networks, constituted by museums, scholars, and the Sami, and that museum collections are today a strong sociomaterial force in the current global indigenous discourse. A later point of departure will be based on how the artefacts’ biographies and trajectories can be used to analyse social systems of value, power, and aesthetics.

NOMADISING SAMI COLLECTIONS

This paper is a part of “The sociomaterial dynamics of museum collections”, an overarching research program, connecting three separate projects, with the aim of creating new knowledge about the role of collections and collecting in the shaping of culture and society. The program includes three national museums which have been decisive in defining Sweden, Swedishness and the surrounding world: the Nordiska Museet (Swedish cultural history), the National Historical Museum (history, archaeology), and the Museum of Ethnography (non-Western, third/fourth world). In one study each, two ethnologists (Lotten Gustafsson Reinius, me) and one archeologist (Fredrik Svanberg) will focus on objects and issues that in some way have been disputed or handled as problematic: Sami collections, human remains, and so called repatriations. The studies will be intertwined through three theoretical themes: mobility, networks, and ritualisation. The dynamic interplay between material practices and social processes of change will be analysed with emphasis on turning points in collecting, classification, display, and storage, as well as the movement of objects to, from and between the museums. Our underlying idea is that museum objects have a strong ability to define identity and social relations, and to create both conflict and reconciliation.

My part of the program is about the Sami-related collections in the three museums. The Sami are an indigenous people with their traditional lands in northern Scandinavia and the Kola peninsula, historically nomadising and making their living from hunting, fishing, and reindeer herding. (Today most Sami are urbanised.) From the 19th century onwards, there has been an intense circulation of Sami material heritage outside the Sami society, involving both museums and private hands. One theoretical point of departure is that the physical objects have become significant actors in social networks, together with museums, scholarly fields, the Sami society, and private collectors (e.g. Latour 1998, 2005). A later point of departure will be based on how “the cultural biography of things” and the method of “following the object” – focusing on collections as well as single artefacts – can be used to analyse materiality’s role in shaping social systems of value, power, and aesthetics (Kopytoff 1986, Czarniawska 2007).

My initial focus lies on how the three national museums in Stockholm, mainly during the 20th century, have transferred the Sami material heritage between them, thereby defining the Sami as a part of Sweden’s cultural history, as a historical/archaeological phenomenon, or as an ethnographic, non-Western one. In my coming research I will investigate in greater depth how Sami-related artefacts and collections have been selected, acquired, named, classified, displayed, and exchanged between the three museums – and to a certain extent also including other actors – and how these practices have identified the Sami and defined their role in the museum-based images of Sweden and the world.

“A LAPPISH CENTRAL MUSEUM”

This study also forms a part of my ongoing research project about the construction of a Sami cultural heritage at the Nordiska Museet (Riksbankens Jubileumsfond 2009–2011). In this project, the main character is a man called Ernst Manker (1893–1972), ethnographer and museum curator (Silvén 2010). In the 1920s he studied ethnography in Gothenburg, thereafter he started working with the (African) collections of the Ethnographic Museum in the same city. He then moved to Stockholm and the Ethnographic Department of the Museum of Natural History, which in 1935 became the Museum of Ethnography.¹ There he continued his

¹ From the beginning, the ethnographic artefacts at the Museum of Natural History formed a part of the Vertebrate Collections, this also being a way of ordering the Sami and other indigenous peoples in a scholarly scheme.

Sami research with field-work and collecting in Lapland (initiated in the late 1920s), and in parallel he worked part-time for the Nordiska Museet.

From the end of the 19th century, the Nordiska Museet held large Sami collections, as a result of a series of expeditions sent out by Artur Hazelius, the founder of the Nordiska Museet and the open-air museum Skansen. Hazelius' ambition was both to create a picture of the nation and to rescue traditional objects from the threat of industrialisation and modernisation, as he saw it. In his context the Sami were a part of the Swedish nation and Swedish cultural history, but still something different. Manker also was affected by the consequences of modernisation, which became a driving force behind his research and collecting work. However, Manker did not necessarily wish to oppose changing times. Instead he hoped to safeguard memories and objects from earlier forms of Sami domestic life and reindeer herding, as an asset for future research and for Sami identity. Unlike Hazelius, Manker's aim was not to depict the Swedish nation, instead he wanted to describe the life of a people, from an ethnographer's point of view. For that reason he did not only collect artefacts but used a wide range of methods, such as field research, narratives, photographs, art, and exhibitions.

Manker took up a vision that had been launched already in the late 1800s, namely to create an "ethnographic memorial, mainly dedicated to Lappish peculiarities" or a "Lappish central museum" (Hammarlund-Larsson 2008). This idea was brought back to life by several actors in the 1930s, but it was carried out most energetically by Manker. As before, the arguments were that the ethnographic research among the Sami ought to get more attention, considering the resources that were spent on research and acquisitions from "exotic but often far more insignificant cultures" (Manker in *Frågor rörande...* 1934). During several years of lobbying, there were three alternative locations for this "Lappish central museum": the Nordiska Museet, the Museum of Ethnography, or an independent institution – which indicates that the Sami's position in the museum landscape was ambiguous.

In 1939 Manker achieved a post as curator for the Sami collections at the Nordiska Museet, financed by a special grant from the government. Manker himself was both the midwife of this curatorial appointment and the presumed holder. When the post was set up, Manker believed that he had established this "central museum", and he argued that the location was correct, as it manifested that the Sami belong to the Swedish cultural history. He soon organised the Lappish Department and the Lappish Archive, where he brought together all Sami-related material in the museum and to which he himself contributed a great deal during his active years. But Manker did not only rely on the holdings of the Nordiska Museet. His aim was to transfer the Sami artefacts at the National Historical Museum and the Museum of Ethnography to the Nordiska Museet, in order to build an even more solid material base for his "central museum".

MATTERS OF EXCHANGE

Beginning in the late 19th century the National Historical Museum and the Nordiska Museet had exchanged artefacts, in order to make the collections compatible with the shifting ideas of the museums' respective profiles and areas of responsibility, according to time, subject, and type of materia. In 1919 a chronological border was established, with 1523 as a demarcation line, the year Gustav Vasa was crowned and a new historical era began (Hillström 2006). According to that distinction and Manker's "Lappish central museum", a group of artefacts was transferred to the Nordiska Museet in 1943, mainly 25 ceremonial drums. They had a long history of being kept in governmental custody since they were taken from the Sami during the Christian mission in the 18th century. The transfer in 1943 was significant; from symbolising state superiority over Sami culture and identity, the drums were now turned into a representation of Sami pre-Christian religion in a foundation for Swedish cultural history, the Nordiska Museet. Beside the chronological demarcation and the subject (in this case Sami-

related artefacts), the type of physical material formed a third, and often most decisive, category. Archeological and osteological findings are in general kept at the National Historical Museum, as well as earlier acquisitions of human remains.

Beside the drums from the Historical Museum, Manker aimed at getting hold of the Sami collections in the Museum of Ethnography, comprising around 500 objects, among them 200 collected by Manker himself. Like many other Sami collections the main part was related to everyday life – living, housing, cooking, clothing, handicraft, hunting, reindeer herding, etc. However, for some reason I haven't yet figured out, this was not realised, although a collection of Inuit objects already had been transferred from the Nordiska Museet to the Museum of Ethnography, as a part of the transaction.

CHANGING ACTORS AND NETWORKS

Despite this setback, Manker and the Nordiska Museet managed to claim the position as the “Lappish central museum”, by force of its own collections, Manker's post and his intense activities as field researcher, photographer, collector, author, editor, as well as the permanent exhibition “Lapparna” (“The Lapps”), which was set up in 1947 and remained on display for more than thirty years. In relation to the regional museums, which at that time were small and scattered, the capital's museums still had the preferential right of interpretation when it came to national heritage issues. The Sami themselves didn't yet have any national political organisation, although there were some strong actors when it came to questions concerning history and heritage. Otherwise, the non-Sami academics in museums and universities of central Sweden had for a long time been the legitimate interpreters of Sami issues, keeping up with the tradition of “lappologists” – experts on Sami culture, language, and history.

This was profoundly changed in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, after Manker's retirement and then death. The period was characterised by a growing Sami political activism and a strengthening of the regional museums in northern Sweden, as well as the establishment of regional colleges and universities. An increasing Sami collaboration with corresponding organisations and institutions on the Norwegian side of the border contributed to breaking up the national and centralised frame and to extending the former periphery into a new centre. Step by step this centre grew into a node in a new global indigenous community. Now the earlier friendly cooperation between the Sami and the Nordiska Museet came to an end, manifested in a multi-faceted conflict during the making of a new Sami permanent exhibition, inaugurated in 1981 (Silvén 2009). Some years later, in 1989, a new museum opened in northern Sweden: Ájtte, the Swedish Mountain and Sami Museum (Svenskt fjäll- och samemuseum) in Jokkmokk. Ájtte became the main Swedish museum for Sami culture, with the aim of becoming a voice for the Sami and presenting Sami perspectives. At the Nordiska Museet, the accession of Sami objects slowed dramatically, while the Museum of Ethnography chose to deposit its Sami collections at Ájtte. Thereby new actors – Ájtte, its collections and activities, as well as different Sami political bodies – were added to the earlier network, and the basis for today's postcolonial heritage situation was founded during these decades.

The transfer of the Sami collections from the Museum of Ethnography to Ájtte was interpreted as an act of repatriation to Sápmi, the traditional Sami areas. In the 1930s and 40s this was not an issue; at that time the principal idea was to keep the collections in a central museum in the capital, not to spread them out in the margins. Currently there are few claims for repatriation, mainly concerning human remains kept by the National Historical Museum. Half of the drums at the Nordiska Museet, including those that were transferred from the Historical Museum in 1943, are today lent on long-term conditions to other museums, mainly Ájtte, which could be viewed as a kind of informal deposition. Another way for the Sami society to take some control over its heritage is to locate all objects of Sami origin kept in museums and other institutions, and enter them into a database. Ájtte has contributed to sev-

eral inventories of that kind, presented as a way to repatriate information about the heritage, but possibly this could also work as a first step of a more concrete repatriation process (Recalling...; Harlin 2008). Both the physical collections at Ájtte and the digital registers are examples of how museum collections have become a strong sociomaterial force in defining the Sami in relation to Swedish history and heritage as well as to the contemporary global indigenous discourse on power and identity.

CONCLUSION

During more than hundred years Sami representation in heritage and museums has contributed to defining Sami identity and the position of Sami in society. The museums' Sami-related collections and exhibitions correspond to changes in ideas and politics, but they also form a dynamic power that itself creates and reinforces change. My overview also shows how different museums and their collections are intertwined and can only be understood together, in a network. A network that has expanded during the recent decades, with both the Sami and their material heritage as important actors.

These aspects will be developed more deeply in the future part of my study, together with my second focus on the biographies and trajectories also of single artefacts. Special interest will be directed towards objects which after a long period of sleep are activated in different ways. Sacred Sami artefacts (*sieidis*, ceremonial drums) and human remains illustrate this process particularly well, based on both new ethical considerations and new claims from indigenous peoples.

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