

# INDIGENOUS PEOPLES ON TWO CONTINENTS

## Self-Determination Processes in Saami and First Nation Societies

Sometimes it can be challenging to be a Sámi in North America. Not only have most people never heard of the Sámi but in many cases, we remain suspect due to our relatively “White looks.” Especially in Native North America (or in “Indian Country” or “Turtle Island” as the continent is also called), Europe equals White and White equals the settler and colonizer—the well-known figure of “the white man.” Due to a common lack of knowledge of the Sámi, it is hard for some people to think that there really are indigenous people in Europe and Scandinavia, especially when the Sámi do not present what is stereotypically considered the “indigenous looks.” It is not surprising, then, that some of us resort to suggesting that the Sámi are the “White Indians of Scandinavia” (Gaski 1993). The apparent whiteness of the Sámi has, in fact, intrigued quite a few scholars throughout time. In his *The Ascent of Man*, Jacob Bronowski asks:

“Why are the Lapps white? Man began with a dark skin; the sunlight makes vitamin D in his skin, and if he had been white in Africa, it would make too much. But in the north, man needs to let in all the sunlight there is to make enough vitamin D, and natural selection therefore favored those with whiter skin” (cited in Deloria 1995: 10).

The late well-known Standing Rock Sioux lawyer and scholar Vine Deloria,

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Jr. was not, however, satisfied with this “scientific” explanation. He argued that “[t]he Lapps may have whiter skins than Africans, but they do not run around naked to absorb the sunlight’s vitamin D. Indeed, it is the Africans who are often bare in the tropical sun. The Lapps are always heavily clothed to protect themselves from the cold” (Deloria 1995: 10). Though probably more correct than Bronowski, Deloria also lapses into the stereotypical belief that the Sámi live in a permanent winter.

While the focus of this article is not the whiteness of the Sámi, two points need to be made here. First, the skin color is more or less a non-issue in Sámi land. Second and even more importantly, *it is not the skin color that makes one an indigenous people*. According to the ILO Convention dealing with indigenous rights, an individual is “regarded as Indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country ... at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions” (ILO Convention no. 169, Article 1(b)). According to another definition by UN rapporteur Jose Martinez Cobo,

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or in parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions and legal systems (Cobo 1986).

What is central in various definitions of

indigenous peoples is the *collective dimension* of their existence as well as rights. This implies that besides commonly characterized rights of individuals, we have rights as distinct peoples. In other words, indigenous peoples are not merely “groups,” “populations,” or even “ethnic minorities” but peoples with inherent right to self-determination as defined in international law. This is the reason why indigenous peoples worldwide have demanded recognition of this collective aspect in international contexts such as the United Nations.

In this paper, I consider some of the recent self-determination developments among indigenous peoples on two continents, Europe and North America, particularly in Canada. First, I discuss historical and contemporary developments in the fields of education and language, and second, I examine the current endeavors toward indigenous autonomy among the Sámi and First Nations peoples. While there is only one officially recognized indigenous people in Europe (save Greenland), there are hundreds of indigenous peoples in North America, naturally posing some serious challenges for any meaningful comparisons even within. It is however widely agreed that despite historical, geographic, political, and economic differences, indigenous peoples and cultures share certain similarities in terms of their worldviews, values both of which are reflected particularly in the special relationship of indigenous peoples with their lands and territories.

One of the factors that clearly distinguish indigenous peoples from ethnic minorities is their relationship with their territories, establishing what is commonly known as the “Aboriginal title.” For indigenous peoples, land is not only a source of livelihood but also of philosophy; fundamental cultural values and worldviews are derived from the land. As noted by the Special Rapporteur of the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations, Erica-Irene Daes,

“Throughout the life of the Working Group, indigenous peoples have emphasized the fundamental issue of their relationship to their homelands. They have done so in the context of the urgent need for understanding by non-indigenous societies of the spiritual, social, cultural, economic and political significance to indigenous societies of their lands, territories and resources for their continued survival and vitality. Indigenous peoples have explained that, because of the profound relationship that indigenous peoples have to their lands, territories and resources, there is a need for a different conceptual framework to understand this relationship and a need for recognition of the cultural differences that exist. Indigenous peoples have urged the world community to attach positive value to this distinct relationship” (Daes 1999: para. 10).

Moreover, indigenous peoples worldwide are united by a set of shared and common experiences related to being colonized, marginalized, and exploited both in the past and in the present, demonstrated very clearly by the current debates on biopiracy, commercialization, and privatization of indigenous knowledges and patenting indigenous DNA, to mention only few of the new forms of the continuing colonial enterprise. My considerations thus are based on this commonly shared indigenous description being “united in our diversity.”

The top priorities and concerns among contemporary indigenous peoples worldwide have to do with decolonization and transformation of their societies—the various challenges of reclaiming their rights and responsibilities as peoples. These processes encompass issues from the personal level—such as reclaiming identities and learning the language and cultural practices—to structural and societal levels, including rebuilding educational and other institutions based on models deriving from and reflecting indigenous thinking, values, and conventions. In short, decolonization and transformation among indigenous peoples means restoring indigenous communities and recovering control over their lives according their own priorities and premises. In the following, I will take a closer look at how this has been and is done in Sámi and Native societies, focusing on two themes: language and education, and current processes of autonomy.

## Language and Education

Although the overall aspirations, issues, and goals are similar, differences in the length and intensity of the colonial history in Scandinavia and North America have led to different emphases and approaches to decolonization and self-determination among the Sámi and North American indigenous peoples. In general, the colonization of the Sámi was much subtler and arguably more perilous than the arrival of the settlers, colonizers and missionaries in North America. By the time of the early Sámi cultural reawakening in the mid-nineteenth century, much of the traditional Sámi cultural and spiritual ceremonies and practices had been replaced already several generations ago by Christianity. At that time, the Sámi language, however, had not been decimated and systematically erased as it was in many places in North America. Quite naturally, the language, which still is the strongest marker of Sáminess, became the main focus of the Sámi ethno-political movement which began in the late 1960s.

Although the Sámi language was regarded as one of the primary targets of colonization and assimilation, there is also a long history of church and, to some extent, state authorities attempting to interact with the Sámi in their own language. This history reaches back to the seventeenth century when representatives of the clergy translated Christian texts into Sámi for their missionary purposes. Behind the apparently well-intentioned idea of producing religious services and texts for the Sámi in their own language was a missionary strategy of undermining Sámi culture and religion from within. Some scholars have argued that there have always been two different approaches to Sámi language and culture by the church and surrounding kingdoms; one of assimilation and eradication and another of preservation and protection (e.g., Salvesen 1995: 120–121). It is possible, however, to consider these apparently contradictory approaches the two sides of the same coin—insidious colonial practices promoting interests of the states over the Sámi territory. Occasionally, there have also been representatives of the clergy who have candidly spoken against the assimilation of the Sámi, especially during the official assimilation policies in the nineteenth century (e.g., Niemi 1997: 74).

The active use of Sámi language by

the church was also an attempt to implement the principle of Protestantism by preaching gospel in the language of the people. While the churchmen indicated support of the Sámi language, they were very clear on their intentions of overthrowing the Sámi land-based “religion” and world view characterized by the existence of various deities and spirits of the natural world to whom human beings were required to pay respect and express gratitude.

In the nineteenth century, however, the assimilation pressures intensified as the Nordic countries sought to gain a stronger hold over their northern territories. The surrounding states justified their assimilation policies in the name of education: the only way for the Sámi to become equal with the other citizens of the state was to know the official language of the country. Laws that prohibited the use of Sámi language both in schools and at home were passed, particularly in Norway and Sweden (Aikio 1992: 209–211). At the end of the nineteenth century, the first Sámi writers and activists chose the Sámi language as the symbol of Sáminess and Sámi identity that was required for the protection of Sámi identity and self-representation. The right to one’s mother tongue became a central issue for most of the first Sámi organizations established in the first decade of the twentieth century. Up to this date, the Sámi language remains as the clearest, strongest measure of Sáminess for the majority of the Sámi. The official Sámi definitions in the three Nordic countries are all based on linguistic criteria.<sup>2</sup>

The determined effort of the Sámi to revitalize and restore their language is a significant achievement considering how many indigenous languages in the world are on the brink of extinction as a result of colonialism and more recently, pressures of globalization. Since the early 1970s, the state and status of the Sámi language—or to be precise, the Northern Sámi language which is the most widely spoken of Sámi languages while the others remain in a critical state—has gradually improved to the extent that today, there are again young parents who speak Sámi to their children.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The official definitions of the Sámi slightly vary from country to country but they are all based on linguistic criteria. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the details of the various definitions or recent developments and the implications of those definitions.

Both Norway and Finland have passed Sámi Language Acts in 1992, making the Sámi language official together with the dominant languages in the northernmost municipalities of both countries. This has meant, among other things, that road signs and places names are required to be in Sámi as well in the officially defined "Sámi home area." These language acts guarantee the Sámi a right to use their own language at courts and with the authorities. Applying first and foremost to local and regional authorities working in the "Sámi home area," the Act does not, however, obligate the authorities to know Sámi but the rights are guaranteed through translation and interpretation. The Sámi Language Act was revised in 2003 but its implementation remains inadequate and incomplete.

Compared to many Native languages in Canada and the United States, the situation of the Sámi language, however, is remarkably better. For example, the First Nations situation in British Columbia, where indigenous languages were always relatively small in terms of numbers of speakers. A relatively short but very destructive colonial era characterized by generations of assimilative schooling and decimation of Native population by imported diseases have seriously undermined the vitality of First Nations languages. Today, a number of West Coast First Nations languages are in a state of emergency with only a handful of speakers left, usually elderly people who will soon pass away. In this critical stage, many First Nations educators and scholars have started language revival programs some of which have already produced promising results and a change in the trend of the apparent language loss. Yet on the other hand, unlike among the Sámi, many other First Nations' cultural and spiritual practices remain strongly manifested not only in tradi-

tional ceremonies, such as the potlatch, but often also as a part of individuals' work and daily activities.

While it is essential to emphasize the central role of the language in cultural revitalization, it may not be enough to speak the language if it is not closely connected to other dimensions of culture such as the different set of values, systems of knowledge, and worldviews. Particularly in a situation where a language is in a minority position and under a heavy influence of dominant, majority languages, there is a serious danger that everyday language starts reflecting more the values and world view of dominant societies than of its own. In other words, we can also colonize ourselves in our very own language if we are not aware of the subtle and more insidious forms of colonization and assimilation some of which we may have internalized as part of our thinking.

Differences in policies and experiences of colonial educational institutions have also resulted in a situation, where the Sámi have perhaps always been less distrustful of formal education imposed by the governments. The focus of Sámi education has been in creating and offering education for Sámi children in their own language. Only recently more attention is being paid to the contents and curriculum of Sámi education as well as the hidden values and norms delivered through text books of dominant societies, some of which have been directly translated into Sámi (see Hirvonen 2004). Native Americans and First Nations, on the other hand, have since the 1970s focused on incorporating their own approaches and concepts to education and redefining education in a way that would take into account their own philosophies, values, and traditional ways of learning such as oral tradition and various cultural practices (see Barman et al. 1986, 1987, Battiste and Barman 1995, Castellano et al. 2000, Swisher and Tipperconnic 1999).

There are also slight differences in purposes of education in Sámi and Native American societies. For Native Americans, education is often considered "at the heart of the struggle ... to regain control over their lives as communities and nations" (Castellano et al. 2000: xi). For Sámi, the emphasis has been on being able to be educated in their own mother tongue, and in cases where Sámi children have not learned Sámi as their mother tongue, be able to learn to speak Sámi. While

Native education has been seeking to establish education on its own terms and models such as the widely used figure of the medicine wheel which aims at holistically attend to various dimensions of learning, Sámi education has established a strong basis for the Sámi language, reflected in the fact, for example, that in certain Nordic universities, it is possible to receive university education in our own language.

### Processes of Indigenous Autonomy

For most indigenous peoples, self-governance or self-determination does not imply secession but reclaiming the right to freely determine their political status and pursue their own economic, social, and cultural development. Effective governance is considered an essential factor in enhancing economic development of Native American communities. According to the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (1992), effective governance is characterized as "(1) having power to make decisions about a community's own future; (2) exercising power through effective institutions; and (3) choosing economic policies and projects that fit with values and priorities, that is, the culture of the community" (cited in Erasmus 2002: 120).

In Canada, the Indian Act of 1876 has been the main piece of federal legislation controlling "Status Indians" and the reserve system. Despite the colonial piece of legislation that remains in place, many Native communities have a more extensive autonomy over some of their affairs than the Sámi. Many of the First Nations have maintained their original treaties with the Crown, while some have been successful in negotiating a contemporary treaty with the federal government. For example, the Supreme Court of Canada's *Delgamuukw* decision of 1997 established Aboriginal title to traditional land has marked a significant watershed in Native rights (see, e.g., Cassidy 1998; Mills 1994).

The Nisga'a in British Columbia and the Cree in Quebec are among the First Nations who, in the past years, have reached a modern-day self-government agreement with the Canadian government. In 2002, the James Bay Cree voted in favor of an agreement, which includes \$3.4 billion in payments for the next 50 years, more control over their community and economy, more power over logging,

<sup>3</sup> In some Sámi areas, there are kindergartens and schools where the language of instruction is Sámi. In those places, Sámi is often used as a daily language of communication. At certain universities, there are Sámi studies programs where it is possible to study and graduate in the Sámi language. There are also newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts, and more recently, TV programs available in Sámi. Although insufficient in many ways, the Sámi language acts in Finland and Norway passed in the early 1990s have contributed to the recognition of the Sámi language.

and more jobs. In return, the Cree have promised to drop the several billion environmental lawsuits against the government and agreed to accept hydropower installations in their territory. The agreement also settles forestry disputes between the Cree and Quebec (Environment News Service 2002). Praised by many, others still consider it a monumental mistake and view the James Bay Cree as sell-outs. By granting access to the resources in their territory, some Crees are concerned of the fact the Quebec government will have the last say in the future projects (Di Matteo 2002).

The agreement may well be problematic and contested among the Cree themselves, but it nevertheless gives the James Bay Cree a much stronger position and control over their own lives and futures than previously. The duty to properly consult and accommodate the interests of First Nations where their rights may be affected is also recognized as part of the British Columbia treaty negotiation principles (B.C. Treaty Commission 2003: 6). However, Canada's land claim policy and its premises have been criticized for several reasons. The policy requires the extinguishment of Aboriginal rights, including Aboriginal title, in exchange for the rights included in the new settlement or agreement, reflecting the surrender provisions of post-Confederation treaties. There is also a tendency to achieve an agreement "only when the federal government [is] eager to facilitate an economic development project" (Coolican 1986: 13).

The Sámi, on the other hand, have chosen a more modest path in which cultural adaptation is commonly considered one of the corner stones of the survival of Sámi culture and society. Sámi scholar Veli-Pekka Lehtola, for instance, argues that,

"In the face of new influences, new models of government, new restrictions and new abuses and drawbacks, the Sámi never rushed to an uprising and resistance. Instead, they have always given way, receded and retreated but yet held their own and integrated changes as an integral part of their own culture" (Lehtola 1996: 17–18).

It is suggested that the ability of Sámi culture to adapt both to the natural environment and societal changes is one of the most fundamental and important factors of Sámi history; that despite the long period of colonization, the Sámi have successfully

adapted into new changes without losing their integrity. On the political and societal level, this successful adaptation is usually measured by the establishment of a political structure with bodies such as Sámi Parliaments and the Sámi Council, and by the Sámi capability of "adjusting" to the demands of the modern world (see Gaski 1997; Stordahl 1993). Furthermore, as J. K. Gibson-Graham point out, the production of "a narrative of local adaptability and accommodation" can easily lead to "inadvertently establishing the dominance of global economic restructuring over local social and cultural life" (Gibson-Graham, 1996 #561: vii).

When considered more closely, one may ask whether these Sámi achievements are merely limited to one Sámi dimension (usually language) while they otherwise do not reflect traditional Sámi modes of organization or cultural practices. Clearly the current Sámi institutional structures and political agendas and practices are very similar, if not the same as their Nordic counterparts—even the Sámi Parliaments, the elected national bodies and official representatives of the Sámi, are structured and administered according to Nordic models. Moreover, while possessing limited decision-making power over issues such as allocating funds to Sámi organizations and initiatives, these institutions and political bodies have no control whatsoever over Sámi territory or its resource use—even the right to be consulted is repeatedly neglected by national governments. This is a fact that comes as a surprise to many outsiders, indigenous and non-indigenous alike, who have understood the Sámi Parliaments as true self-governing bodies while in reality, beyond symbolic recognition they have achieved relatively little in terms of safeguarding the rights of the Sámi as an indigenous people.

This is also suggested by Peter Jull who, in his comparative analysis, contends that although the postwar Sámi movement developed somewhat earlier than Native movements in Canada and although the Sámi appear among "the best educated, the most work-skilled, and the greatest participants in mainstream politics" of all indigenous peoples in the world, the Sámi seem "to have achieved less of what Canada's indigenous peoples regard as the main indigenous political agenda" (Jull 1995: 131). This could be at least partly explained by the trusting approach to governments, well

reflected in the establishment of the Sámi Parliaments. Jull's inquiries to Sámi associated with the Norwegian Sámi Parliament "revealed little or no serious thought to structures, staffing, program management, etc." (Jull 1995: 132). In other words, whereas indigenous peoples in Canada strive toward replacing and rebuilding the governing structures from the bottom up, Sámi politicians have joined the existing system, hoping to be consulted with on Sámi issues.

The more trusting approach of the Sámi can, at least partly, be explained by their postwar integration into the Nordic welfare state system. As a result, the socio-political status quo has not been as detrimental to the Sámi as a people as for many other indigenous peoples. Poverty, unemployment and the lack of proper housing, health care, and other social services do not characterize Sámi society to the same extent as it does many First Nations and Native American communities. Therefore, the Nordic welfare system can be credited for the relative social well-being that many indigenous peoples lack even in the First World. The integration of the Sámi into the welfare system is not, however, entirely unproblematic.

In an analysis of the compatibility of welfare ideology and indigenous rights, it has been suggested that the principles of the Nordic welfare system are often in direct contradiction to the notions of indigenous collective rights (see Olsson and Lewis 1995).<sup>4</sup> The ideology behind the Nordic welfare system is constituted by principles of egalitarianism and social equality on the one hand, and individualism and an orientation toward the whole on the other. It is argued that,

"These competing influences have represented fundamental obstacles to the development of Sámi cultural autonomy, for they have each contributed to the limited perspective of Sámi minority rights held by non-Sámi, Scandinavian policy-makers and society at large. ... In essence, the Nordic welfare states have provided social security to Sámi individuals with the intent of ensuring them a parallel standard of living to that of the Scandinavian majority while, simultaneously, *tending to diminish both the importance and realization of the Sámi's collective*

<sup>4</sup> For "welfare colonialism" in other indigenous societies, see Robert Paine (1977) and Cathryn McConaghy (2000 #928)

*rights to protect their culture*" (Olson and Lewis 1995:177–178; emphasis added)).

In other words, individualism and social equality that underpin the ideology of the commonly praised Nordic welfare system have tended to ignore and curtail the collective dimension of the Sámi as a separate people with distinct rights within the state, making also many Sámi themselves to pay inadequate attention to this crucial aspect in defending their rights. It could be argued, then, that the apparently beneficial system intended to offer high quality social services to everybody, the Sámi included, has in fact functioned as an insidious tool of further assimilating and integrating the Sámi people into dominant, mainstream society—insidious for this has gone mostly unnoticed even among the Sámi many of whom have economically benefited from this system.

This is not to suggest that there are no achievements in claiming and reclaiming Sámi self-determination. The most recent achievements include the Finnmark Act in Norway and the Nordic Sámi Convention proposal that would harmonize the legislation and policies dealing with the Sámi in the Nordic countries in order to better protect the Sámi rights. According to the draft Convention, these include the right to Sámi language and culture, the protection of Sámi livelihoods and development of Sámi society in such a way that the nation-state borders will not hinder this process. It urges the Nordic nation-states to take special measures to guarantee the Sámi the rights indicated in the Convention. The draft Convention was released in November 2005 and given to the three Sámi Parliaments for consideration and acceptance. If the Nordic governments ratify the Convention, it will become part of national legislation.

The Finnmark Act can be seen as one of the outcomes of the well-known Alta River conflict in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when Sámis opposed the government of Norway's plans to build a hydroelectric dam in one of the large salmon rivers located in the heart of reindeer herding region in northern Norway (see Brantenberg 1985, Paine 1982, Parmann 1980, Sanders 1980). The dispute highlighted the need to resolve the ownership of the land in the Sámi region and the Sámi Rights Committee was established to address the issue. Finnmark is the northernmost county in Norway and the newly passed legislation

establishes a co-management body to oversee and decide the use of the county's resources and land base. Hailed as an indication of Sámi self-determination by some, the Finnmark Act, however, is only a co-management arrangement between the Sámi and the non-Sámi in the county. A new body called the Finnmark Estate will be established to own the land and resources on behalf of the county's inhabitants. The Estate will be run by a six-member board, half of which are elected by the Sámi Parliament. Moreover, the Act contains provisions that allow the Sámi Parliament to ensure that Sámi interests and needs are taken into consideration in the land use and planning. The Finnmark Act enters into force in July 2006.

In Finland, there is a long history of state committees (since 1952) proposing that the Sámi land and water rights need to be resolved with a separate law. In 1995, under the increased pressures to resolve the "Sámi question," the Finnish Constitution was amended so that it now recognizes the Sámi as an indigenous people. In the same year, the Sámi Cultural Autonomy Act was passed. The irony of these Sámi Acts is that by and large, they are restricted to Sámi culture and language and thus do not include rights to land and water, thus arguably replicating the already existing basic human rights to one's culture and language encoded, for example, in the Convention of the Civic and Political Rights. Moreover, as Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez argues, separating indigenous self-government from land base not only transforms "the identity of Indigenous peoples from peoples to other minority groups that do not have a territorial/homeland attachment" but also "denies Indigenous communal ownership" (Altamirano-Jimenez 2004: 354). This, in turn, reflects the neoliberal agenda and approach to indigenous rights that seeks to reduce and redefine indigenous rights to fit into a new model of market citizenship with a focus on economic development.

More recently, the Finnish government has agreed to meet the minimum requirements needed to ratify the ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous Peoples—a Convention already ratified by Norway in 1989. The required changes in Finnish legislation include addressing the question of Sámi land rights which was shelved in the 1995 Sámi Act legislation. Since 2000, there have been a number of various committees by different con-

stituents (the Finnish government, Sámi Parliament, the province of Lapland, appointed researchers) seeking to find an acceptable solution. However, it seems that what is "acceptable" has more to do with politics than historical facts. As the recent research by legal scholar Kaisa Korpijaakko-Labba clearly demonstrates, Finland never gained a legal ownership over the Sámi territories. The Sámi land rights were just conveniently "forgotten" in the early twentieth century in the new laws of independent Finland (Korpijaakko-Labba 2000). This history, however, is hard to swallow for the Finnish state, which has set up a new research consortium of hand-picked, more compliant researchers. Initially, the consortium was expected to present its final results and recommendations in 2004, but the research project has been repeatedly given extension, reflecting the great unwillingness of the Finnish government to tackle the issue of Sámi autonomy beyond cultural and linguistic rights.

Many indigenous scholars and politicians have criticized the state attempts to limit indigenous rights to cultural dimensions only. Maori scholar Linda Smith, for example, contends that the cultural dimension is only one aspect of the overall objective of the dismantling of hegemonic structures in society. Cultural rights are often relatively easily recognized and guaranteed by governments for they are considered non-threatening to the overall status quo and the economy of the state. It is clear, however, that the reconstructing of viable indigenous societies remains insufficient without a strong and vital economic and resource base. As long as indigenous peoples are not in control of their territories, they will not be control of their lives and future as a people.

While the overall objectives of indigenous peoples worldwide remain similar—strong and viable self-governments and the right to make decisions about the future as a people—there are, however, clear differences in emphases and approaches to these goals as the examples above have illustrated. First Nations in Canada have been relatively successful in drawing public attention to their collective rights and their status as distinct nations. Many successful legal cases and treaty negotiation processes have also guaranteed land settlements and self-governance agreements. The Sámi, on the other hand, have achieved a relatively strong sta-

tus for their language and established a political structure upon which it would be possible to build a meaningful self-governance as in the current state, it desperately lacks political power and means of implementation of already existing laws and policies. There is no doubt that the future of any indigenous people depends on the ability of taking a proactive stance and of recognizing that these processes must take place in multiple sites.

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