

Tore Andersson Hjulman

PhD student

Department of Business Administration,

Technology and Social sciences

Luleå University of Technology, Luleå, Sweden

tore.andersson@ltu.se

Growing up in Umeå in northern Sweden, I began studies in human geography at Umeå University in 2004. After finishing a BA focusing on Barents region building, I moved to Uppsala and made a total about-face. Under the guidance of the well-known specialist on Nietzsche, Thomas Brobjer at the University of Uppsala, I became seduced by the discipline of intellectual history. Initially it gave me tools to reflect specifically on the tension I felt between my West Bothnian identity and yet striking unfamiliarity with the Sámi community and the colonial history that undoubtedly has shaped the region I had left. My bachelor's and master's theses, on the other hand, investigated various aspects of the national movements of nature conservation. When I was offered a position as a doctoral student in the field of nature conservation and indigenous rights, I was able to combine both interests.


My current work as a doctoral student in Luleå began in 2010 as part of a multi-disciplinary project financed by the Swedish Research Council Formas. Through a number of case studies, I focus on the complicated relationship between the national preservation movement and Sámi reindeer herding during the first half of the 20th century. From a deeper theoretical perspective my aim is to contribute to an understanding of how the separation of "nature" from "culture" was used and negotiated in this relationship. I am doing so with a humble appreciation of both the theoretical advancements in the framework of post-constructionism and the increasing number of studies that have made the colonialist traits of Swedish-Sámi history visible.

With the advent of the modern era, the concept of nature gained interpretative content by representing a baseline in the constructions of time as universal schemes of development. Based on the binary concepts of "primitive" and "civilized", the category of "nature people" came to function as a mirroring Other in modern nationalism and social transformation. This is the background to why a conceptual break with nature

“The Sámi
became naturized
in the wake of
the territorial
colonization”



Photo credit: Maria Ollikainen



has been a key agenda in many anti-colonial movements during the 20th century. Advancing on the modern scale from nature to culture has, for indigenous peoples, meant challenging colonial structures and establishing a voice to which governments and majority populations have to pay heed. This has, for one thing, resulted in what were formerly portrayed as untouched and natural landscapes now, to an increasing extent, being recognized as cultural ones that are shaped by the practices of the long-standing traditions of indigenous groups.

The Sámi became, to use a well-fitting term, naturized in the wake of the territorial colonization that escalated in the 19th century. That is, they were identified as a nature people, a conceptual intervention which had a substantial impact on Swedish policy-making. To be naturized means to be conceptually bound up with nature, and nature in this case is imagined as something that lacks agency and is external to society, mainly as a surrounding base of resources. This conceptual platform created a basis not only for domination and resource exploitation but also for counter movements of nature romanticism and preservation. For example, it is noticeable that the distinction between Indians and the more general concept of wilderness was, in large part, obscured in the early American preservation movement.

Naturization also meant that the reindeer herding Sámi could be excluded from most regulations when the first National Parks were established in Sweden in 1909. They were said to be complementary to nature and even to increase the interest of the parks. My interest lies mainly in the process of denaturization. Why was the Sámi identity as a nature people problematized among leading preservationists during the 1930's? What links were there between Swedish Sámi policy and nature preservation? How did the Sámi handle the tension between rights based on an identity as a nature people and rights associated with equal citizenship?