

Imagined Nordic Communities: Critical Conversations about Race in Nordic Language Studies

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2 December 2022

Module 2 – Sápmi**

Objectives:

1. Think about the ways indigeneity challenges assumptions about borders and race and pushes us to think critically about “imagined communities.”
2. Learn briefly about and engage critically with the history and current lived lives of Sámi peoples in Northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia.
3. Reflect on issues of race, land, art, nature, and language in the Nordic Region.

Background: In this module, you will see three short videos about the indigenous people of the Nordic region who inhabit the land called Sápmi, an area that overlaps with and preceded the nation states of Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway. Take a look at the map of Sápmi below to get a sense of the region and the ways it challenges the borders that have been built between the modern nation states. There are approximately 100,000 Sámi people who currently live in Sápmi and who have lived there for thousands of years. There are nine Sámi languages, more typically broken down into three main language groups: East Sámi, Central Sámi, and South Sámi. The Sámi people historically and currently herd and own reindeer, yet as you will see in the videos in this module, this is a stereotype that is complex for Sámi people today.

In the following videos, you will reflect on the history as well as the current lived realities of Sámi people and engage with Sámi art. As the land of Sápmi is not constructed within the borders of modern nation states, so too will the voices you hear in these videos come from different locations throughout the Nordic region.



Image 1: Map of Sápmi, the land of the Sámi

Instructions:

1. Watch the following three videos:
 - “Vi får aldrig glömma” [We Must Never Forget] from UR Play. This is a short video about Máridjá, a 19-year-old who lives in Stockholm and is discovering her own Sámi heritage and the racial past of the nation of Sweden. Link to video here: <https://urplay.se/program/204023-min-samiska-historia-vi-far-aldrig-glomma>
 - “I am Sámi” is a short documentary about Niklas Sarri, a person who lives in the part of Sápmi that is now part of Northern Sweden. Sarri describes his work as an artist as well as how his Sámi identity is questioned by his lack of reindeer. Link to video here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-c18xNxFUSY>
 - “Eatnanvuloš lottit – Birds in the Earth” is a short film directed by Marja Helander, a Sámi film director and photographer working in Finland. This short film features two Sámi dancers dancing through Sámi villages and lands as well as Finnish government buildings. It was chosen for the Sundance Film Festival in 2019, the highly prestigious and largest US film festival for American and international independent filmmakers. First, you will watch a short clip from Marja Helander talking about her film here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=chpO7hE8oXU>. Then you will watch the whole dance, which can be found by scrolling down to the very bottom of the page here: <https://mediataidekasvattaa.fi/teos-marja-helander-eatnanvulos-lottit-maan-sisalla-linnut/>.
2. Keep the following questions in mind as you watch:
 - Pick a theme brought up in these videos. Some ideas include land, art, state, language, nature, animals, etc. How do the Sámi people in these videos see themselves in relationship with one/multiple of these themes? How do these relationships differ from mainstream assumptions?
 - How do you think about borders? Borders between humans and nature? Borders between humans and other humans? Or other types of borders?
 - What did you learn about “race” and how it functions?
 - How does what you learn about Sápmi change or challenge your original or current “imagined Nordic community”?
3. After you have watched the videos, write a reflection of 1.5-2 double spaced pages in English (or create a drawing or substantive video discussing your thoughts) on **one or more** of the question groups above as well as your impressions and remaining questions.

Submit your assignment on _____.

Teacher notes and optional in-class activities:

1. Make sure all of the links are still active since there is a possibility access to the videos could change over time.

2. After the students have completed this assignment, you could discuss further details, history, and experiences of Sámi people in your particular country of study. The above videos were chosen both for their excellent content and resistance to tokenizing the Sámi people as well as access to English for beginning language learners. This module admittedly prioritizes information and cultural engagement with Sápmi over language learning. If you know of other resources or videos in your language with English subtitles, please feel free to include them in class or outside of class as part of this or other assignments.
3. Based on the questions students may have after this assignment, you may find it useful to discuss this material with them in class. Feel free to share further links or resources to material and information that can help them learn more.
4. As an in-class activity, you could include more words to your list in the target language of “imagined communities,” adding these to your word cloud (or creating a new one) from Module 1 if desired.
5. Another media option: “The Sámi Pavilion - La Biennale di Venezia 2022” is a brief overview of the 2022 Sámi Pavilion art exhibition at the art show entitled *Venice Biennale* in Italy. The *Venice Biennale* is often referred to as the “the art Olympics” and is an important international contemporary art event. The event usually includes a Nordic Pavilion, but the 2022 year was transformed into a Sámi Pavilion featuring Sámi artists exclusively. The artists included Pauliina Feodoroff, an artist from the Finnish part of Sápmi, Máret Anne Sara from the Norwegian part of Sápmi, and Anders Sunna from the Swedish part of Sápmi. Link to video here: <https://vimeo.com/656943707>. For more information about the event and the artists, visit this website: <https://oca.no/thesamipavilion>. You might need to check if this link is still active before passing it along to your students. Additionally, there are some insertions in this video that would be worth discussing with your students. For example, why do you think they “correct” the English of the people speaking in the subtitles? What kind of harm does this impose? There is also the presence of the authoritative-seeming person who discusses Sámi issues every few minutes. What does her presence do to the film? And how can that get in the way of letting the artists speak for themselves?

** This module was developed in conjunction with Natalya Nielsen’s Fall 2022 Berkeley Language Center fellows project.