

Situatedness and Diversity: Representations of Lars Levi Laestadius and Laestadianism

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ABSTRACT:

Lars Levi Laestadius (1800-1861) was a prominent revivalist and botanist with a Sámi background from northern Sweden. Even during his lifetime, there were conflicting narratives about him and the Laestadian movement, which he initiated. While he was occasionally seen as an alien element in Swedish and Norwegian nation-building, many Tornedalians, Kvens and Sámi saw him as a saviour and champion of the Tornedalian Finnish, Kven and Sámi languages. The article explores the situatedness of representations of Laestadius and Laestadianism through a discussion of pictorial and textual forms of representation produced during Laestadius' lifetime and later. The discussion is related to issues of ethnic majority versus minority status. This theme is discussed from the vantage point of postcolonial studies, indigenous studies and whiteness studies. It is connected with contemporary decolonisation among the Tornedalian minority in Sweden and the indigenous Sámi people of the North Calotte. The theme of this article is the diversity of representations and the emergence of new decolonising representations produced by the Sámi and Tornedalians themselves in opposition to colonising representations. This, however, does not imply that there is a uniform postcolonial narrative of Laestadius and Laestadianism today. On the contrary, the article concludes that present day representations of Laestadius and Laestadianism inspired by postcolonialism are contradictory, as there are both narratives of anti-colonial struggle as well as of colonial complicity.

The aim of this article is to analyse the theme of multiple contradictory narratives about Lars Levi Laestadius (1800–1861) and the Laestadian movement. The material discussed consists of pictorial and textual forms of representation, which produce narratives related to different cultural, ideological and geographical contexts. This implies that narratives attribute different

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roles to the man and the movement. It needs to be emphasised that Laestadianism is not a uniform movement. Even in the early phase various groupings were formed.

The concepts ‘worldliness’ and ‘unworldliness’ capture some of the issues that have been controversial and have resulted in diversification. Following Steinlien, Laestadianism contains prescriptions for how to behave in the religious and mundane sphere based on a refusal to split the world into a sacred and mundane sphere. This process involves a dichotomisation of values (Steinlien 1998). While some Laestadian groups have held on to an unworldly, simple way of life without the amenities of modernity, other groups have been less strict and more inclined to integrate novelties such as radio, television and bicycles into their lives. Partly, the dichotomisation of the worldview of conservative Laestadians is connected with the system of laymen preachers introduced by Laestadius. One objective of these preachers was to make people aware of traps and dangers, which would jeopardise their spiritual salvation, and for this purpose, preachers took it as their duty to warn people against sinning. In this context, a vast number of phenomena were characterised as sinful and leading to damnation. Nevertheless, as mentioned, it must be kept in mind that there are variations between groups and preachers in their view on what counts as sinful.

The first representation discussed in this article was produced during Laestadius’ lifetime and the last in recent years. From his lifetime and onwards, Laestadius and Laestadianism have been connected with the Sámi, Tornedalian and Kven minorities in the Nordic north (Minde 1998; Lindmark ed. 2016). English social anthropologist Robert Paine argues that Laestadianism had a ‘therapeutic function’, socially and psychologically, for the Norwegian Kven and Sámi. He claims that Laestadianism ‘fitted the Sámi situation like a glove’ since the Laestadians equated ‘material poverty with spiritual richness’ (Paine 1965: 7). The Sámi that Paine has in mind is the population living on the coast of Norway. During the inter-war period, living standards deteriorated for this group. Following Paine, Laestadianism came to play a positive role for the coastal Sámi in this specific context. Minde points out that ‘clearly Laestadianism was seen to create a place of refuge, a sanctuary for the minority populations, at a time – from 1870 down to World War II – when the authorities were tightening the screw of Norwegisation in the name of Social Darwinism and nationalism’ (Minde 1998: 9). The role of Laestadianism as an identity marker for the Kven and Sámi in northern Norway has also been highlighted by Ivar Bjørklund. According to Bjørklund, the Kven and Sámi engaged in opposition against the politics of Norwegisation by using their mother tongue and

practising Laestadianism (Bjørklund 1985: 320, 407–408).² As these examples show, there is an ethnic dimension in Laestadianism, which has given rise to new narratives of the movement. These highlight the vulnerable situation of ethnic and linguistic minorities in periods when these groups have been left behind economically and culturally. This was due to unevenly distributed economic growth and cultural homogenisation connected with nation-building. This kind of vulnerability is also a prominent theme in narratives produced by Sámi and Tornedalian writers and artists inspired by postcolonial theory and indigenous studies.

The Laestadian movement started in Sweden after the spiritual reorientation of Lars Levi Laestadius, which occurred when he had been a minister of the National Lutheran Swedish Church for almost 20 years. According to the legend, the spiritual awakening is connected with Laestadius' encounter with a young Sámi woman, Milla Clementsdotter, often called Maria. After this, Laestadius became an adamant, penitential preacher advocating conversion among the Sámi, Tornedalians and settlers in northern Norrland. A primary concern of Laestadius was the widespread use of alcohol and the social problems caused by this. In order to reach out to the Sámi and Finnish-speaking population in his parish he preached in Sámi and Tornedalian Finnish, today called Meänkieli. In the spring of 1846, people started gathering in the church of Karesuando to hear him preach (Larsson 2004: 83). Laestadius' reputation grew and the movement he had started attracted an ever-increasing number of followers. In his various roles as a revivalist preacher, botanist and scientist, Laestadius was active in different contexts. While the revivalist Laestadius was intent upon improving living conditions among poor people living under harsh conditions, the botanist and scientist Laestadius was engaged by the prestigious French La Recherche Expedition, 1838–1840.

Laestadius was ordained as a minister in Uppsala. However, after his spiritual awakening, he abandoned the preaching style he had learned there, when he set out to convert the parishioners of his vast, sparsely populated parish in northern Sweden. While Uppsala, during Laestadius' lifetime, was considered an old national cultural centre, northern Lappland was regarded as an uncivilised fringe of the nation state. The binary 'centre versus periphery' is central to conceptions of space developed in connection with colonialism. As a minister of the Swedish Lutheran Church, Laestadius represents the 'colonial centre'. This also applies to his capacity as an expert involved in a major scientific expedition, as well as to his role as a

² The Kven in Norway are descendants of Finnish-speaking immigrants from the Torne Valley in northern Sweden and Finland.

provider of plants and specimens of human remains to scientists in colonial centres. However, in his role as a revivalist preacher, Laestadius in many respects took a stance against the centre of the Swedish nation state, advocating conversion and temperance, in a preaching style that he developed as a form of acculturation. His aim was to reach the formally uneducated people of the northern sparsely populated areas where the majority spoke Sámi and Finnish. Laestadius' importance for the Sámi and Finno-Ugric minorities in Sweden and Norway has been highlighted in studies discussing linguistic aspects of the revival (Sivertsen 1955: 442, Elenius 2001: 85). The fact that he used Sámi and Meänkieli as *lingua sacras* has been of major importance for identity formation among the Sámi and Finno-Ugric minorities in northern Sweden and Finland (see also Larsen 2016).

The only known portrait and Biard's painting

The only known contemporary portrait of Laestadius was drawn in 1839 by Charles Giraud, a member of the French La Recherche Expedition, which Laestadius was invited to join in his capacity as an expert on local botany and Sámi mythology (Larsson 2004: 50–52). Later, a lithograph was made from the drawing by Émile Lassalle, in which Laestadius is wearing the Medal of Honour of the Legion of Honour of France. An award he received in 1841 for his contribution to the La Recherche Expedition. Another member of the expedition, François Auguste Biard, is the man behind the painting '*The Minister Laestadius preaching*', thought to have been painted in 1840 when Biard had returned to France (Aaserud 2005: 29–47).³

Today, Biard's painting belongs to Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in Tromsø, where it is displayed with other more or less exotified images of the Sámi and the northern landscape. In the painting, Lars Levi Laestadius wears a top hat of the kind worn by the higher social classes at the time the painting was made. However, it is unlikely that Laestadius would have worn a hat like that when preaching to the Sámi and Finnish-speaking people in traditional Sámi land. It is well known that Laestadius lived in great simplicity, condemning worldliness, using vernacular language in his preaching, which was seen as vulgar by the social elite. For example, Laestadius frequently used expressions like 'the devil's piss' for alcohol (Heith 2009: 342–361).⁴ Described with terminology from postcolonial and indigenous studies,

³ Reproductions of this painting and more of Laestadius preaching can be found via google images.

⁴ A Swedish encyclopedia from 1956 characterises Laestadius' language as drastic, effective and often defying all sense of propriety (*Svensk Uppslagsbok* 1956, vol. 17. Carlquist and Carlsson 1956, vol. 17: 372).

Biard's painting presents an outsider's view (Smith 2008: 60; Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2007: 154–158) of Laestadius, the Sámi and the northern landscape.

Laestadius engaged in a form of acculturation when developing a preaching style adapted to the socio-cultural background of his audience. As mentioned previously, 'unworldliness' and 'simplicity' are positive values in a Laestadian way of life. One effect of Laestadianism was the expanding catalogues of sins, which laymen preachers created in order to control people, a practice influenced by Laestadius himself. There are numerous accounts of how deviation from a traditional way of dressing in a simple fashion was condemned as worldly and sinful. Another element of exoticisation is the landscape of Biard's painting. The dramatic snow formations surrounding Laestadius and the group of Sámi he is preaching to hardly exist in the northern parts of Norway, which Biard visited (Aaserud 2005: 43). Biard's painting combines sketches of people he made on different locations with an imagined northern landscape.

The imaginative qualities of Biard's painting reflect the context of its production. In 1841, it was exhibited at the Salon in Paris.⁵ Biard's painting clearly represents an outsider's view of the Sámi, produced with a Parisian audience in mind, and as such exemplifies a form of colonising practice, which involves othering, exotification and marginalisation of groups of people in distant locations. Laestadius' role in this representation is that of a person complicit with colonialism, a gentleman whose clothing signals that he is affiliated to the colonial centre, speaking to a group of natives. The fact that Laestadius adapted his preacher persona for the purpose of improving his communication with the people he wanted to reach, does not imply that he could not communicate with academics and scientists as well. Sermons and letters that are preserved testify that Laestadius had a rhetorical competence, which allowed him to communicate with diverse categories of people, both illiterate Sámi and Finnish-speaking people in the margins of the Swedish nation state, and academics and scientists in the centre of the nation.

⁵ It was not until 2002 that Nordnorsk Kunstmuseum in Tromsø took action in order to acquire it (Aaserud 2005: 41).

Bror Hjort's version of Laestadius preaching to the Sámi

Biard's painting may be compared to another work of art on the theme of Laestadius preaching to the Sámi, namely the altarpiece in Jukkasjärvi Church in northern Sweden by the Swedish artist Bror Hjort (1958).



Illustration 1: Bror Hjort's altarpiece in Jukkasjärvi Church. Photograph from the photo library of Kiruna and Jukkasjärvi Parishes. Published by courtesy of the parishes of Kiruna and Jukkasjärvi.

The altarpiece is a triptych carved from wood and painted with bright colours. The middle piece represents Christ and the flanking pieces show scenes from the mythologised narrative about Laestadius' spiritual awakening and his preaching among the Sámi. One of the panels shows Laestadius and a young Sámi woman who, according to Laestadius himself and the Laestadian legend, planted the seed that led to the Laestadian revivalism (Østtveit Elgvin 2010: 50–66). The young woman Milla Clementsdotter, whom Laestadius called 'Mary of Lapland', was a poor servant girl with no education. Still, according to the legend, Laestadius' encounters with her had a deep impact on his spiritual reorientation (Kulonen et al. 2005: 167–169). When speculating about the reasons behind Milla Clementsdotter's importance for Laestadius, Østtveit Elgvin suggests that the answer may lie in the similarities between her life story and his own. They both had a Sámi family background and shared personal experiences of poverty and alcoholism in the family (Østtveit Elgvin 2010: 56).

The issue of whose perspective is represented in Hjort's altarpiece is quite complex. It was a gift from the Swedish mining company Luossavaara-Kiirunavaara Aktiebolag (LKAB), handed over to Jukkasjärvi Church in 1958 at the celebration of the 350th anniversary of the church. The church building, dating back to 1607–08, is the oldest preserved church in Swedish Lapland. LKAB was established in 1890. Throughout its history, it has mined iron

ore at Kiruna and Malmberget in northern Sweden. Since the 1950s, it has been 100% state-owned. Bror Hjort depicts Laestadius as a minister of the National Lutheran Swedish Church, dressed in a traditional black minister's outfit with a white collar. The Sámi, however, are dressed in traditional Sámi costumes in bright red, yellow and blue. In this way, visible distinctions operating as ethnic markers (Barth 1998: 9–38) are created between the minister and the Sámi people.

Considering the background to the commissioning of the altarpiece, it is hardly surprising that Laestadius is depicted as a representative of the established church, who successfully disseminates the gospel to the indigenous Sámi. However, the piece also acknowledges the role of Milla Celementsdotter, depicted with a halo, in the spiritual renewal of Laestadius. In this way, the altarpiece destabilises the borders between the national Lutheran Swedish Church and local characters as well as events shaping the Laestadian movement by presenting a syncretization between Swedish mainstream Lutheranism and Laestadian revivalism among the Sámi. Hjort's altarpiece is embedded in an official Swedish celebration of the church's 350 year presence in traditional Sámi land.

From the vantage point of postcolonial and indigenous studies, both the National Lutheran Swedish Church and mining companies, exploiting natural resources in traditional Sámi territory, are agents in the colonisation of indigenous territory. According to Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith borders between centre and periphery are created through a 'spatial vocabulary of colonialism' (Smith 2008: 53). The spatial vocabulary of colonialism furthermore implies that areas remote to the centre are seen as *terra nullius*, empty space, free for exploitation (Smith 2008: 53). In various ways, Biard's painting and Hjort's altarpiece present narratives of colonial complicity. However, Hjort's work does not represent the relationship between the centre (the National Lutheran Church) and the periphery (represented by the poor, uneducated Sámi woman Milla Clementsdotter) as binary. On the contrary, Milla Clementsdotter's halo and the composition giving her an elevated position and proximity to Christ and to Laestadius, contribute to a narrative of local spirituality with a capacity to challenge the doctrines and values of the centre.

Alien and oppressive Laestadianism

While it has been acknowledged that Laestadius played a positive role in the formation of Sámi, Kven and Tornedalian identity, it does not follow from this that he appealed to the

majority population. As titles such as ‘Laestadianism as a religion for the Kven’ (Kristiansen 1998, *my translation*) and ‘Laestadianism as an arena for the formation of Kven identity in Nord-Troms and Finnmarksvidda’ (Sundelin 1998, *my translation*) indicate, the Laestadian movement was also seen as an alien element from the vantage point of the majority population in Norway and Sweden. There were instances of this conflict already during Laestadius’ lifetime.

In the post about Lars Levi Laestadius in a standard Swedish encyclopedia (Söderberg 1944: 566), the people who were attracted by the Laestadian revivalism are described as ‘den halvt förvildade lappmarksbefolkningen’ (‘the semi-uncivilised population of Lapland’, *my translation*). The narrative of a man using strong language and disregarding propriety, when preaching to uncivilised Laplanders, does acknowledge Laestadius’ role in improving the living conditions of people living in misery. However, it also establishes borders between the majority population, the civilised Swedes, on the one hand, and the coarse, uncivilised northern minorities, on the other. From the perspective of critical whiteness studies, this narrative of the relationship between the majority population and the ‘uncivilised minorities in the northern peripheries’ can be described as the establishment of a category of the population, which is seen as ‘not quite white’.⁶ While the majority is seen as modern and progressive, the encyclopaedia’s description of Laplanders indicates that their lives in poverty, reckless drinking and lack of propriety disqualify them from being valuable assets in the building of the modern welfare state. Clearly, the Laplanders described in the encyclopaedia have no control over the representations of themselves.

As the quotation from the Swedish encyclopaedia above indicates, a negative view of the population of Lapland is not alien to national knowledge-production (see also Eriksson 2010). In some cases, as in Björn-Erik Höijer’s novel *Djävulens kalsonger* from 1974, Laestadianism and Laestadians are described in altogether negative terms (Höijer 1974). Höijer, born in Malmberget in northern Sweden, repeatedly writes about the impact of Laestadianism on the lives of people in northern Sweden. A significant difference between him and Bengt Pohjanen, with a Tornedalian minority background, is that while Pohjanen presents a

⁶ Since the publication of Dyer’s pioneering book *White* (1997), Critical Race Studies and Whiteness Studies have developed and produced analyses of how whiteness functions as a norm that racialises and excludes groups of people that have been seen as deviant. In the US, for example, there are studies showing that Italian immigrants were not considered ‘quite white’ by the Immigration Authorities at a certain time in history (Guglielmo 2003, Roediger 2006). Some groups were regarded as deviant due to their low social status, poverty, and/or ethnicity (Wray 2006).

predominantly positive image of the role of Laestadianism in the Torne Valley, Höijer repeatedly highlights negative aspects (Pohjanen 2007: 134–138).

One of Höijer's most known works is the play *Isak Juntti hade många söner* [*Isak Juntti Had Many Sons*] (Höijer 1954). The play was performed at Kungliga Dramaten in Stockholm in 1954. In 1963, a movie-version directed by Keve Hjelm was shown on Swedish TV. The title refers to a Laestadian preacher, Isak Juntti, who it was believed had made a great number of women pregnant during his preaching tours.

The setting of Höijer's novel, *Djävulens kalsonger*, is a small village in a mining-district in northern Sweden. The villagers have become Laestadians with a strict view on morals and sexuality. The title of the novel refers to a Laestadian expression used for curtains, which were called 'the devil's long underpants'. The followers of this version of Laestadianism claimed that putting up curtains in front of the windows implied people doing so had something to hide. The idea that having curtains is a sin, is one example of the influence of laymen preachers in the establishment of criteria for distinguishing between 'worldly' and 'unworldly' behaviour. One of the men in the village challenges the prevailing code of behaviour by marrying a cheerful woman from Finland. She has no experience of what it is like to live in a small village, where elderly misogynist, hypocritical men are in charge. Of course, conflicts arise. The novel ends with the couple embarking on a quest for freedom they cannot have among the narrow-minded Laestadians in the village.

Feminist Responses to Laestadianism

The themes of Höijer's novel are also prominent in studies inspired by feminist theory. Ester Cullblom has highlighted the lives of Tornedalian women in debates, investigations and as a fiction-writer (Cullblom 1997, Cullblom 2004, Cullblom 2006, Cullblom 2007, Heith 2009b). Her novels and short stories set in the Torne Valley give a sombre picture of the lives and opportunities of women in traditional villages dominated by patriarchal values and traditions. This view of the Torne Valley as conservative when seen from a gender perspective is supported by feminist research (Juntti-Henriksson 2008).

Another female writer who portrays Laestadianism in a predominantly negative light is Sara Ranta-Rönnlund who made her debut as a writer at the age of 68. She was born and raised in a reindeer-herding Sámi family. Both parents were western Laestadians, a branch that is more

strict and concerned with issues of sin than the eastern branch. The title of Sara Ranta-Rönnlund's first book, *Nådevalpar*, is an expression used by Laestadius to denominate new followers. Ranta-Rönnlund published four books which include several portraits of dictatorial, hypocritical preachers (Ranta-Rönnlund 1971; 1972; 1973; 1978). Vuokko Hirvonen points out that 'on the basis of the opinions expressed in these books, the work and thoughts of Sara Ranta-Rönnlund can be described as showing women's consciousness and even feminist consciousness to some extent, as she also tried to change and break the hierarchies between the genders' (Hirvonen 2008: 177). When analysed from a feminist vantage point Laestadianism is often connected with patriarchal structures. However, there are also alternative vantage points emphasising the central role of women in the revivalist movement, for example in narratives about Milla Clementsdotter and Mathilda Fogman, who played a central role in the early phase of the revival (Nilsson 1988, Palo 2007).

Celebrating Laestadius and Laestadianism

The positive view of the role of Laestadius in the Sámi and Finno-Ugric minorities' struggle was emphasised in the year 2000, when the 200th anniversary of Laestadius' birth was celebrated in the parts of the North Calotte affected by the Laestadian revivalist movement. In Norway, a stamp with a portrait of Laestadius was issued as a token of recognition.



Illustration 2: Stamp issued in 2000 in connection with the 200th anniversary of Laestadius' birth.

The portrait is framed by a Sámi Noaidi drum, which is flanked by plants from the northern fauna, thus acknowledging Laestadius' Sámi background and his expertise in the fields of

Sámi mythology and botany. The image reproduced is based on Giraud's portrait of Laestadius made during the La Recherche Expedition in 1839.

In 2000, Lars Levi Laestadius was also commemorated through seminars and publications. In the publication *Vekkelse og vitenskap. Lars Levi Laestadius 200 år* [*Revivalism and Science: Lars Levi Laestadius 200 Years*], connections between Laestadianism, Sámi ethnicity and a Sámi cultural landscape are highlighted in contributions discussing the appeal of Laestadianism for the Sámi in northern Norway (Drivenes and Niemi 2000, Nergård 2000).⁷ In the Swedish Torne Valley, there were both seminars and events in honour of Laestadius. In this context, the Swedish Tornedalian writer, Bengt Pohjanen, wrote a text celebrating Lars Levi Laestadius in the form of an Orthodox Christian Akathistos hymn (Heith 2009: 355–359; Heith 2010b: 24–43). The text was performed in Pajala Church as part of the celebrations and later it was published in *På ett litet men vilar ett helt millenium. Andliga tal och privatfilosofisk mottagning* [*On a Small but Rests an Entire Millennium. Spiritual Speeches and Private Philosophical Reception*]. This is a collection of texts about individuals and events that have shaped the cultural landscape of the Tornedalians in the Swedish-Finnish borderlands (Pohjanen 2000).

Pohjanen's 'Lovsång till Lars Levi Laestadius' ['Song of praise to Lars Levi Laestadius'] is provided with a subtitle: 'Kiruna-Lasse in memoriam. 'Kiruna-Lasse' is the nickname of the skier Erik Larsson, born in 1912 in Kurravaara, ten kilometres north of Kiruna. He unexpectedly won a gold and bronze medal at the Olympics in Garmisch Partenkirchen in 1936. When he was 26 years old, he became a Laestadian, left competitive skiing and became a miner. Pohjanen's text juxtaposes the reorientation of Kiruna-Lasse with the workings of Laestadianism and the significance of the movement's originator. While the classical, Byzantine Akathistos hymn is a song of praise to the Mother of God, Pohjanen's Tornedalian version praises the revivalist Laestadius. This involves a hybridisation of the idiom of the Orthodox Christian hymn and the idiom of the Laestadian popular revivalism. 'Lovsång till Lars Levi Laestadius' can be seen to exemplify postcolonial hybridisation, merging elements from two religious traditions alien to the National Lutheran Swedish Church. The most prominent trait of Byzantine hymnography, the repetitions of the chairetismos 'rejoice' is repeated in Pohjanen's text in a chain of expressions of joy praising Laestadius. By using

⁷ Previously a similar perspective was used in analyses of the appeal of Laestadianism for the Kven, Finno-Ugric minority in northern Norway (Kristiansen 1998: 155–166; Sundelin 1998: 104–114).

specific Laestadian idioms, Pohjanen transforms the content of the Byzantine form, situating the Akathistos in a Tornedalian cultural landscape where elements from diverse cultural traditions merge: ‘Rejoice thou, who smilingly saw Ies-Pieti pour out the piss of the devil [that is alcohol]’ (*my translation*; Heith 2009: 358).⁸

Anticolonial perspectives on Laestadius and Laestadianism

The theme of the colonisation of northern Scandinavia has been approached from various theoretical points of departure. While Sámi researchers, such as Vuokko Hirvonen and Harald Gaski, have examined colonisation from the vantage point of indigenous studies, social scientists and cultural geographers have examined it from the perspective of rural studies and studies of areas seen as peripheries (Hirvonen 2008, Gaski 1987, Eriksson 2010). The theme of colonisation is furthermore addressed in art and imaginative writing, for example in texts by the Sámi writer and artist Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001) and the contemporary Swedish Tornedalian writers Bengt Pohjanen and Mikael Niemi (Heith 2010: 335–350; 2012a: 71–85; 2012b: 85–108; 2014: 41–58). The role of Laestadius in present day anticolonial and postcolonial narratives varies widely. As the terms indicate, the issue of whether colonialism has come to an end is not yet resolved. Among present day Sámi artists in Sweden there is a strong focus on an ongoing colonisation of Sápmi. Singer Sofia Jannok frequently addresses this theme in her performances, as do Katarina Pirak Sikku and Anders Sunna in their art (Heith 2015a, 2015b).

Laestadius’ commitment to improve the living conditions of the people of the north by taking a stand against the widespread alcoholism is a theme addressed in Mikael Gaup’s movie, *The Kautokeino Rebellion*, from 2008. The representation of co-existence found in Hjort’s altarpiece in Jukkasjärvi Church differs significantly from the narrative presented in the anticolonial movie in which the Laestadian revival among the Sámi is presented as one of the catalysts of the rebellion in 1852. The movie depicts an antagonistic relationship between the National Lutheran Norwegian Church and the rebelling Sámi. It is a historical fact that the minister Fredrik Waldemar Hvoslef in Kautokeino was physically attacked by Sámi rebels. In the movie, the Laestadian revivalism provides the spark, which ignites the rebellion against

⁸ ‘Gläd dig, som leende såg Ies-Pieti hälla ut djävulens piss’ (Pohjanen 2000: 112).

the representatives of the colonising state – the minister of the National Lutheran Church, the local policeman and the tradesman.⁹

The movie is based on real events, which occurred in 1852. In the movie, as well as in real life, the Norwegian state retaliated and the Sámi uprising was subdued. Two Sámi, Mons Somy and Aslak Hætta, were executed. The outline of these events has undergone transformations as it has become embedded in narratives coloured by anticolonial struggle among the Sámi, and influenced by postcolonial theory and perspectives from indigenous studies. In Gaup's movie, the Laestadian movement works as a positive, anticolonial force strengthening the Sámi in their struggle against the colonising oppressors. This perspective also prevails in Nelljet Zorgdrager's thesis from 1997, *De rettferdiges strid Kautokeino 1852. Samisk motstand mot norsk kolonialisme [The Struggle of the Righteous Kautokeino 1852. Sámi Resistance Against Norwegian Colonialism]*. Zorgdrager devotes a chapter entirely to the life and ideas of Laestadius, highlighting the circumstance that while Laestadius' social work inspired appreciation, he also had adversaries who blamed him for encouraging disobedience and lack of respect for the authorities (Zorgdrager 1997: 203). Zorgdrager's thesis and Gaup's movie both contribute to the shaping of an anticolonial narrative in which Lars Levi Laestadius has a prominent role in the Sámi's struggle against colonial oppression.

Colonial complicity

One of the expressions of joy of Bengt Pohjanen's 'Song of Praise to Lars Levi Laestadius', discussed above, praises Laestadius for selling skulls from Sámi burial sites in order to raise money: 'Rejoice thou who sold plants and skulls to the rich in order to give food to the poor' (Pohjanen 2000: 118, *my translation*).¹⁰ It is documented that Laestadius was involved in the selling of Sámi skulls and other specimens of human remains that had been plundered from graves and burial sites. In present day Sámi activism and cultural mobilisation, this way of handling human remains is connected with colonial violence and dehumanisation. Historically the State Institute for Race Biology, located in Uppsala, played a central role for establishing hierarchies between various groups such as 'the Nordic racial character', 'the Baltic type' and 'Lapps' (Heith 2013: 76-77). In connection with this type of research, there was a demand for

⁹ Gaup's depiction of the retaliation of the Norwegian authorities in connection with the Kautokeino uprising is embedded in a narrative of a conflict between a colonising power and the colonised Sámi. There are other accounts of the same incident, which do not emphasise the authorities' retaliation as emphatically as Gaup does. Rolf Inge Larsen, for example, points out that the first retaliation came from Sámi and Laestadian people from the neighbouring village Avzzi (Larsen 2012: 101).

¹⁰ 'Gläd dig, som sålde växter och kranier till de rika för att ge de fattiga mat' (Pohjanen 2000, 118).

human body parts, therefore race biologists travelled to Lapland. Recent studies suggest that representatives of the National Swedish Lutheran Church played a central role in aiding the researchers in their pursuits (Hagerman 2016, Oscarsson 2016).

Today there is a struggle among the Sámi, as among other indigenous peoples, to retrieve human remains from museum collections and relocate them in their traditional homeland (Ojala 2016). This history has also become a theme of contemporary Sámi art (Heith 2015 b). Thus, the pain caused by race biologists is a prominent theme in works of the Swedish Sámi artist Katarina Pirak Sikku. Her exhibition *Nammaláhpán* which was commissioned for the series *Eight Sámi Artists* at Bildmuséet Umeå, in 2014, explores whether sorrow can be inherited (Heith 2015a, 2015b). Anders Sunna, another Sámi artist and activist, also deals with this theme in the exhibition *Area Infected*, his contribution to Umeå's year as a European Capital of Culture in 2014 (Heith 2015b). In this work, Sunna uses images of skulls and pictures of Sámi people from race biological collections.

Race biology and colonialism are also central themes in Sunna's exhibition *Maadtoe*, which was shown at the *Museum of World Culture* in Gothenburg 2014-15. The title is a South Sámi term meaning 'origin'. On Sunna's webpage, *Maadtoe* is described as a project, which is performed together with the documentary photographer Michiel Brouwer 'about racial institution and its consequences, and racism' (Sunna 20 January 2016). *Maadtoe* as well as *Area Infected* use subject matter from Sámi history in general and Sunna's family history in particular (Heith 2015b). In the painting 'Racial Comment' from *Maadtoe*, Anders Sunna makes explicit connections between Lars Levi Laestadius and Swedish race biology by integrating a modification of Giraud's portrait from 1839. The painting also contains a modification of an image of Herman Lundborg, Sweden's most (in)famous race biologist in the twentieth century.

Through the use of the portraits of Laestadius and Lundborg, 'Racial Comment' strongly emphasises the theme of colonial complicity. Lundborg was the officially sanctioned scientist who came from the colonial centre to Sápmi to document Sámi and Finnish 'racial characters'. They were distinguished from the 'Nordic racial character', the term Lundborg used to denominate 'ethnic Swedes'. Although Laestadius had long since passed away when Lundborg came to Sápmi, Sunna places him in a narrative about colonial complicity, as a

person who contributed to Swedish race biology and examinations of Sámi people.¹¹ One of the scientists Laestadius was in touch with was Anders Retzius (1796–1860), a pioneer in the field of anthropological race classification. Various studies confirm that Laestadius was involved in the plundering of Sámi burial sites. From a contemporary standpoint, he had an extremely callous view of skull collecting (Broberg 1982: 55; Franzén 1973: 212–215; Lundmark 2010: 145–147).¹² Franzén draws the conclusion that the issue of collecting skulls and human remains was not particularly controversial during Laestadius’ lifetime, since Laestadius was open about his grave plundering, making no attempts to hide information about his expeditions and endeavours.¹³

Mitigating interpretations of the implications of taking human remains from burial sites is in stark contrast to contemporary Sámi responses. Ojala points out that the term ‘collect’ in itself is inappropriate, since skulls and body parts were stolen, often in secret and in opposition to the local population (Ojala 2016). The shift in attitudes is also reflected in a recent study about the historical relationships between the National Lutheran Swedish Church and the Sámi (Lindmark & Sundström ed. 2016). In the preface of the first volume of the study, Archbishop Antje Jackelén emphasises the need to critically scrutinize the historical relationship between the church and the Sámi in order to achieve reconciliation (Jackelén 2016: 11). The description of the effects of the relationship for the Sámi reads as follows: ‘The wounds, pain, shame, self-contempt, anger and all hard memories [of the Sámi in Sweden] are real. They cannot be ignored by a church that wishes to live in the imitation of Jesus Christ.’ (Jackelén 2016: 11, *my translation*).¹⁴ This clearly puts Laestadius on the side of the abusers when it comes to the issue of a traumatic Sámi history, which continues to cause sorrow and pain.

¹¹ In an e-mail conversation, Sunna explicitly wrote that he wanted to establish a connection between Lundborg’s race biological research and the minister Laestadius, representing the National Lutheran Swedish Church. Sunna emphasised that Laestadius contributed to colonialism by showing and plundering Sámi burial sites, and by enforcing Christianity upon the Sámi (Heith 2015d).

¹² Physicians and ministers seem to have been the most active suppliers of skulls to scientists (Lundmark 2010: 145). Broberg, Franzén and Lundmark all comment upon Laestadius’ insensitive and callous manner of discussing the pursuit of skulls, documented in letters, his personal diary and newspaper articles (Broberg 1982: 55; Franzén 1973: 212–214; Lundmark 2010: 146–147). On one occasion, Laestadius complains in a letter about the difficulties of getting a skull from a newborn child and he speculates about whether the physician in Haparanda might cut the head off a buried infant.

¹³ As a comparison, Franzén mentions that mass graves around Kalmar in south-eastern Sweden were commercially exploited in the 1830s and that the director of economics, Fröberg, made a fortune by producing bone meal from thousands of Swedish and Danish skeletons. This made him both rich and esteemed (Franzén 1973: 214).

¹⁴ ‘Såren, smärtan, skammen, självföraktet, vreden och alla svåra minnen är verkliga. De kan inte nonchaleras av en kyrka som vill leva i Jesu Kristi efterföljd.’ (Jackelén 2016: 11).

Conclusion: New Sámi representations presenting Laestadianism as a radical force, and Laestadius as an accomplice of colonialism

As is shown in my analysis of Charles Giraud's drawing from 1839 and François Auguste Biard's painting 'The Minister Laestadius preaching' from 1840, Laestadius was embedded in diverse narratives already during his lifetime. In contrast to Biard's painting, Bror Hjort's altarpiece places Laestadius in a visual narrative about spirituality and exchange between religious traditions thus producing a narrative of syncretisation. The Sámi woman, Milla Clementsdotter, plays a central role in this narrative. Contradicting this story of a woman's importance for Laestadius' spiritual reorientation, feminist narratives from the 1970s onwards tend to portray Laestadianism as patriarchal and misogynist, leaving little influence to women. However, there are also studies that highlight the central role of women in Laestadianism (Nilsson 1988; Palo ed. 2007).

Today, the tradition of producing knowledge in the geographical and cultural centres of the nation state is challenged by anticolonial and postcolonial counter-narratives. The change implies that Laestadius and his followers may be transformed from uncivilised aliens within the nation, to bearers of local culture, history and traditions, as exemplified in the celebrations in 2000. There are earlier studies of Laestadianism that highlight the role of the movement for the creation of ethnic identities in opposition to Swedish and Norwegian nation-building. However, it is a new trend that the Sámi and the Tornedalian minority in Sweden produce anticolonial and postcolonial representations of Laestadius and Laestadianism as a response to their narrative of colonial subjugation. However, there is no uniform view of the man or the movement. As the Sámi director Gaup's movie *The Kautokeino Rebellion* shows, Laestadianism may be represented as a radical force in anticolonial struggle. As a contrast to this, the Sámi artist Sunna's painting 'Racial Comment' represents the initiator of the movement, Lars Levi Laestadius, as an accomplice in the exercising of colonial violence.

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