

“Awakening the Racial Spirit”: Indians, Sámi, and the Politics of Ethnographic Representation, 1930s–1940s

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***Abstract:** The article focuses on the efforts by scholars and activists in the 1930s–1940s to reinvigorate discussions of cultural preservation for indigenous peoples at the transnational level. It focuses in particular on the correspondence between, and overlap in, the efforts of ethnographers in the United States and Finland to secure homelands for the indigenous Sámi and American Indians as the cornerstone of cultural preservation efforts. The title, “awakening the racial spirit,” a term used by U.S. Commissioner of Indian Affairs John Collier (1934–1945), highlights the extent to which ethnographic representations of the time built on racialized and stereotyped images from the past to project onto indigenous peoples a distinctive future. Increasingly, both Sámi and American Indians engaged with and disrupted such representations. The impacts of the efforts to document and demarcate a distinctive indigenous past continue to underpin and inform indigenous rights discussions to this day.*

***Keywords:** Indigenous, ethnographic representation, cultural preservation, modernization*

This article assesses the extent to which politics and policies in the United States and Finland in the 1930s and 1940s reshaped the dynamics and altered the terrain of transnational indigenous politics. It focuses more on the cooperation among transnational non-indigenous scholars and how it influenced a growing sense of pan-indigenous unity than on transnational indigenous activism as such. The representations of indigenous life and

practices that circulated among non-indigenous scholars had important implications. Ethnographers of the time grappled with an important question: Are American Indians and other indigenous peoples so fundamentally different from other national groups both historically and culturally that they should always occupy a special category outside the mainstream? I argue that the questionable premise that American Indians and Sámi would be better off if protected from mainstream society, one that viewed indigenous people as a reference to the “past” and “tradition,” influenced policy. Twentieth-century ethnographic representations of the signs and symbols of “Indianness,” or “Sámi-ness,” re-inscribed special racial categories and distinctive cultural and historical ties to the land. This article looks at how visual forms of cultural representation and literary topics dealing with such matters contributed to a nascent sense of tribal internationalism among scholars, that is to say, how they contributed to the need to advocate for an awareness of global indigenous rights and issues. It explores the correspondence between activists in the United States and Finland on the similarities between the Sámi and American Indian peoples, since in both countries scholars tried to formulate their arguments within the structures of modern, capitalist nation-states. The focus is more on Finnish ethnographers looking to the United States and how ideas about American Indians impacted Sámi politics and policies in Europe.

Ethnographic representations, namely photographs and literary texts, offer multiple perspectives on cultural contact. Previous research has focused not only on how photography and supporting literary texts allowed scholars and settlers alike to assert control over indigenous peoples and lands, but also how native peoples eventually turned the technology to their own purposes.¹ Photographs in particular are part of a dynamic and fluid historical dialogue, revealing not only Western agendas but also differing cross-cultural experiences and alternative viewpoints.² The personal narratives of travel documented in photographs and literary text were a means of telling stories about “us” and “them,” thereby linking imagination and ideas

1 See, e.g., Carl J. Williams, *Framing the West: Race, Gender, and the Photographic Frontier in the Pacific Northwest* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Veli-Pekka Lehtola, “Meidän historiat muiden ottamissa kuvissa: Saamelaisia näkökulmia arkistojen valokuviin” [Our histories in photographs taken by others] in *Rajaamatta: Etnologisia Keskusteluja* [Without Borders: Conversations in Ethnology], edited by Hanneleena Hieta, Aila Nieminen, Maija Mäki, Katriina Siivonen and Timo J. Virtanen, 33–67 (Helsinki: Ethnos, 2017).

2 Elizabeth Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photographs, Anthropology and Museums* (New York: Berg, 2001).

about cultural difference in inextricable ways.³ Nonetheless, while much prior scholarship has focused on photography and literary text as bound up with colonial practices or else as part of the postcolonial turn against essentialized visions of “otherness,” far less has been written about the effects of certain academics and activists who honestly tried to understand and promote the interests of indigenous peoples, especially at the international level. Increasingly, scholars have highlighted the need to push past purely national histories to show how transnational indigenous politics have reshaped tribal cultures, though primarily from a North American standpoint and not one that generally includes Europe.⁴ This article focuses on a particular time, the 1930s and 1940s, and particular individuals, namely John Collier in the United States and Karl Nickul in Finland, who greatly influenced public policy and whose ideas anticipated and even helped advance the agendas of transnational indigenous movements in subsequent decades.

Indigenous internationalism emerged during the interwar period and again after World War II when activists demanded greater self-determination and control of material resources such as land. During the 1930s especially, cultural pluralism found a place in U.S. federal Indian policy and became a subject of debate in Europe as well. Scholars searching for origins typically date the theoretical discussions on pan-Indianism and transnational indigeneity to the Cold War period of the 1950s and 1960s,⁵ if not even the 1970s.⁶ Ronald Niezen goes so far as to argue that a new international awareness of the links between indigenous peoples and new forms of organizing did not take hold until the 1980s.⁷ My contention, though, is that the institutional and legal approach to such discussions ignores what was happening at the level of communities and the ethnographic representations of local identities, of an essential “Indian-ness” or “Sámi-ness,” rooted in a fixed cultural setting. Activists constructed and negotiated the politics of

3 Molly Andrews, *Narrative Imagination and Everyday Life* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

4 See, e.g., Shari M. Huhndorf, *Mapping the Americas: The Transnational Politics of Contemporary Native Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

5 Paul C. Rosier, “‘They Are Ancestral Homelands’: Race, Place, and Politics in Cold War Native America, 1945–1961,” *Journal of American History* 92, no. 4 (2006): 1300–1326.

6 Henry Minde, “The Making of an International Movement of Indigenous Peoples,” *Scandinavian Journal of History* 21, no. 3 (1996): 221–246.

7 Ronald Niezen, *The Origins of Indigenism: Human Rights and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

tribal/indigenous identification using a wide array of biological, legal, and cultural definitions. In arguing that the reservation system would best protect local tribal identities, academics in no small part collected the data for later indigenous/ethnic resurgence movements. Yet they also, however unwittingly, reinforced stereotypes of racial difference and cultural authenticity that American Indians, and others, still struggle against when voicing their identities. Though both John Collier and Karl Nickul were prolific writers and loudly championed the cause of greater sovereignty and self-governance for indigenous peoples, their ideas were being echoed elsewhere and found fertile ground for discussion.

Preserving the Past in the Present

In the United States, government officials, native intellectuals, and artists manipulated definitions and representations of Indianness to fit their own agendas, often with significant implications for decisions regarding who gets to live where, and why. For ethnographers and travelers alike, the Pueblo communities of the Southwest embodied the timeless qualities of traditional native life. Visitors habitually talked of finding the aesthetic and poetic qualities of classical antiquity magically transported to the desert. John Collier, social reformer and passionate American Indian advocate, traveled to the Southwest in 1920, meeting up with artists and writers also drawn to “exotic” native cultures as an alternative to modern American life.⁸ He perceived the Pueblo Indians as living in a Golden Age, as “citizens of nations older than Rome, who had achieved democracy, the rule of love, a social ideal of beauty, at a date before Greek thought and Christianity had begun to civilize the Aryans of Europe.”⁹ He began writing about how American Indian culture — this “Red Atlantis,”¹⁰ as he termed it — was morally and spiritually superior to modern industrial society. He worked tirelessly throughout the 1920s to convince others that American Indian communities were a national resource and must be preserved at all cost, gaining national attention by helping prevent Pueblo lands from being

8 Sherry L. Smith, *Reimagining Indians: Native Americans through Anglo Eyes, 1880–1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

9 John Collier, “The Pueblos’ Last Stand: If the Arizona and New Mexico Tribes Lose Their Land, Their Ancient Civilization Dies,” *Sunset* 50, no. 2 (February 1923): 22.

10 John Collier, “The Red Atlantis,” *Survey* 49 (October 1, 1922): 15–20, 63 and 66.

sold off by the federal government. In “The Pueblos’ Last Stand,” published in the liberal reform magazine *Sunset*, Collier focused on the international significance of preserving minority cultures. The Pueblos “are of world significance, because in them is going to be answered the question: Can races of different origins, with civilizations resting on different ideals and different mental foundations, live side by side, tolerate each other, or must they only poison and devour each other?” He concluded that, “unless that question is answered ‘yes,’ then there is no hope to putting an end to wars and not much hope for the spiritual and esthetic future of this planet.”¹¹

Ethnographer and activist John Collier effectively asked what direction the United States, and any country with colonial interests, wished to take with respect to its social and political policies. That he posed this question at a time when racial, ethnic, and political intolerance were becoming increasingly conspicuous in many circles in the United States and, in fact, throughout much of the world as a result of imperialism, underscored the urgency of its appeal and Collier’s enduring faith in the nation’s mission to enlighten the world.¹² His observations of the living Pueblo culture of the Southwest, where over ninety-five percent of the Indians were full-bloods who had had little contact with white society and who retained much of their economic and social cohesion and their traditional cultural institutions, shaped his belief that the process of white acculturation could and should be reversed and ultimately reshaped general understandings of indigenous peoples. Significant to this point in time is that cultural relativists like Collier did find a way to speak to a wider audience about the need to reconcile unity and diversity, community and difference, a Depression-era audience that was at least willing to listen to alternative visions of democracy.¹³ The nature of their objective required that the cultural relativists adopt a public language rather than esoteric academic discourse. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, often called the Indian New Deal, represented a legal attempt to improve life on the reservations, to revive tribal communities and institutions with a minimum of damage to traditional life ways.

Neither Collier nor others in government and academic circles at the

11 Collier 1923, 19.

12 Carter Jones, “‘Hope for the Race of Man’: Indians, Intellectuals and the Regeneration of Modern America, 1917–1934,” (Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1991), 214–215.

13 Richard Weiss, “Ethnicity and Reform: Minorities and the Ambience of the Depression Years,” *Journal of American History* 66, no. 3 (1979): 566–585.

time knew much about the actual structure of native political life and the extent to which it varied from one group to another. Scholars and activists nonetheless shaped discussions on the idea of blood as fundamental to identity and belonging. They introduced a blood quantum law to help define Indianness. In no small part, this decision was rooted in the long-standing Anglo-American belief that blood was fundamental to definitions of Indianness. Though no other ethnic groups in the United States had to use blood as a measure of cultural viability, for the government it served as the starting point for granting federal recognition, and hence resources, to particular tribes. Federal recognition of Indian tribes at the time, however, remained arbitrary and lacked definition. Too often the question came down to that of appearance. Do they/we look or act Indian enough? Yet, generations of intermarriage and adaptation had made American Indians increasingly difficult to define. John Collier, romantic writer and visionary, seemed the right man to solve the problem. He served as Commissioner of Indian Affairs longer than any other person in U.S. history, from 1933–1945. He spoke of the Act as providing the means for an “awakening of the racial spirit” and teaching American Indians to manage their own affairs.¹⁴ To promote his vision of Indianness, he turned to images: he posed for a publicity photo of Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes signing the Flathead Indian Constitution surrounded by tribal leaders wearing war bonnets and buckskins to promote the so-called Indian New Deal. Collier also travelled to reservations on the Great Plains to promote his ideas, posing again with American Indians in full regalia. Plains Indians wearing full regalia, while seemingly on one level to pander to white fantasies and stereotypes, was at the same time common among tribal groups at public ceremonies and events in the first half of the twentieth century, in part to counter demands for assimilation and conformity.¹⁵ American Indian intellectuals and actors wore “traditional” costumes to reassert their native identities in cities like Washington, D.C. as well as while on tour in Europe. Such visions of American Indians also reflected a European fascination with complex racial and cultural issues.

In a new era of intensive field work, scholars in Europe and the United

14 *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to the Secretary of the Interior, 1934*, 78–83, cited in Francis Paul Prucha, *The Indians in American Society: From the Revolutionary War to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 67.

15 Philip Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 125.

States increasingly exchanged letters, photos, and writings with one another debating the politics and policies of cultural preservation. In Finland, a group of ethnographers meeting in Helsinki in 1932 established the Society for the Promotion of Sámi Culture to promote the cultural traditions and way of life of one of Europe's last indigenous populations. Though a number of these "friends of the Sámi" had been influenced by the long history of racial science and had travelled to Lapland to measure, photograph, and assess the physical characteristics of the Sámi,¹⁶ by the mid-to-late 1930s they avoided overtly linking questions of race to matters of cultural uniqueness, at least at an academic level. Society member Karl Nickul in particular, whose English was better than that of other Finnish ethnographers, wrote to American Indian organizations and the Office of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs to find out more about the Indian Reorganization Act and its promises of greater self-government, commercial activities, and the freedom for tribes to practice their own beliefs. In turn, he sent Collier and others publications on the Skolt Sámi of northeastern Finland.¹⁷ A geodesist for the National Land Survey of Finland, Nickul had, since 1929, traveled thousands of miles by boat and on foot surveying Skolt Sámi territory in northeastern Finland. He hired a local Skolt named Jaakko Sverloff as his assistant, who helped Nickul learn to understand the Skolt Sámi. This instilled in him a passion to help preserve Skolt Sámi culture. By the later 1930s and 1940s, Karl Nickul had become the prime motivator and initiator of actions taken by the Society for the Protection of Sámi Culture, namely that of convincing the government to establish a special area of protection for the Skolt Sámi.

Karl Nickul, similar to John Collier, sought to combine a moral passion for worthy causes with the scientist's respect for technical expertise. He hoped to convince Finns of how Sámi culture can enrich "human civilization."¹⁸ Nickul wrote an article on Finland's "Indians" for the popular magazine *Suomen Kuvalehti*. To further the comparison, the article reproduced the photo of Collier and Ickes posing with the Flathead Indians and a photo of

16 Pekka Isaksson, *Kumma Kuvajainen: Rasismi Rotututkimuksessa, Rotuteorioiden Saamelaiset ja Suomalainen Fyysinen Antropologia* [Strange Reflection: Racism in Race Research, Race Theories about the Sámi and Finnish Physical Anthropology] (Inari: Kustannus Puntsi, 2001), 390–394.

17 Karl Nickul to John Collier, 4.11.1935, Karl Nickul's Archive, National Archives, Helsinki (hereinafter KNA).

18 Karl Nickul to Willard W. Beatty, 15.5.1937, KNA.

a Navajo girl from the Southwest in traditional dress together with other photos showing Skolt Sámi in traditional dress.¹⁹ In sending a copy of the article to the director of education at the Office of Indian Affairs, Willard W. Beatty, he explained that the nomadic Sámi are such an “interesting race” that something “ought to be done for preserving their originality.”²⁰ Such racialized images highlight the ways in which particular indigenous groups can be linked across space and time and thereby affect one another. Unlike other photographers of the time, however, Nickul was not as disturbed by “modern” elements appearing in the photographs, such as a box of sugar from London in a photo of Jaakko Sverloff’s daughter Agni.²¹ His popular publications tried to combat the touristic image of the Sámi as “primitive” and a “vanishing race.” Nonetheless, the popularity of images of the Sámi as racial “other,” captured for example in a traveling exhibition of an “ancient Lapp village” in Helsinki in 1938, raised the tricky issue of how to preserve traditional practices without treating tribal peoples as a “human zoo” for mere entertainment purposes, divorcing them from shifting economic and social contexts.²² Finnish ethnographers in general were bothered by such exhibitions because they seemed designed to arouse pity among viewers more than admiration. Such exhibitions further stimulated their thinking on issues regarding cultural preservation, about the relationship between “traditional” culture and “modern” development, and how to best preserve a culture without relegating it to museum status. Nickul looked more closely to the United States for ideas on self-governance.

Sufficient Grounds

At the heart of the reform campaign in the United States was the idea that the nation should recognize the cultural traditions of tribal or communal groups and their historic rights to the land. The Indian New Deal halted the conversion of reservation land into private property, a practice resulting from the General Allotment Act of 1887 (which had diminished tribal lands

19 Karl Nickul, “Miten käy Suomeen ‘intiaanien’?” [What will happen to Finland’s “Indians?”], *Suomen Kuvalehti* 17 (1937): 630–631.

20 Nickul to Beatty, 15.5.1937, KNA.

21 Lehtola 2017, 54. Nickul was also aware of the fact that in the years before WWII, the Sámi bought the cloth for their “traditional” costumes from England; William Frederickson to Mr. M.R. Zigler, May 1, 1946, KNA.

22 Minutes, 2.2.1939, Lapin Sivistysseura Archive, National Archives, Helsinki (hereinafter LSA).

by two-thirds, or 90 million acres, in less than 50 years). Collier referred to the allotment policy as “the greatest single practical evil” ever committed against the American Indian.²³ He summed up his ideas as follows: “So intimately is all of Indian life tied up with the land and its utilization that to think of Indians is to think of land. The two are inseparable. Upon the land and its intelligent use depends the main future of the American Indian.”²⁴ He believed that reservations offered American Indians the best hope of preserving their cultures and race throughout the twentieth century. He was instrumental in ending the loss of reservation land held by Indians and in helping many tribal nations re-institute self-government and preserve their traditional culture. Though highly regarded by many tribes at the time, he was vilified by others. Not all American Indians wanted to reclaim some “pristine” cultural inheritance or surrender local autonomy to federal bureaucratic expertise, which could oftentimes be condescending. Collier has been criticized for his romantic racialism,²⁵ for seemingly committing the assimilationist’s error in reverse by assuming, in the words of historian Brian Dippie, “that inside every Indian, no matter how assimilated, there lurked a Pueblo waiting to be freed, a communal being eager to shuck off the trappings of individualistic, materialistic white civilization in order to recapture a long-lost communal past.”²⁶ In many instances, the regional and national Indian Service only expanded its powers under the Act and worked to impose corporate, business-style governance onto tribes at odds with long-standing traditions of decision making. Tribal governments imposed by the government and managed by the Bureau of Indian Affairs often did not represent or speak for the majority of the population on a reservation.²⁷

23 Janet A. McDonnell, *The Dispossession of the American Indian 1887–1934* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1991), 24.

24 *Annual Report of the Secretary of the Interior for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1938* (Washington, D.C., 1938), 209–211, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5058> (accessed June 2017).

25 See, e.g., Stephen J. Kunitz, “The Social Philosophy of John Collier,” *Ethnohistory* 18, No. 3 (1971): 213–229.

26 Brian W. Dippie, *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and U.S. Indian Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1982), 312.

27 For criticisms of Collier’s efforts, see, e.g., Kenneth R. Philp, *John Collier’s Crusade for Indian Reform, 1920–1954* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977); Graham D. Taylor, *The New Deal and American Indian Tribalism: The Administration of the Indian Reorganization Act, 1934–45* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980); Lawrence Kelly, *The Assault on Assimilation: John Collier and the Origins of American Indian Reform* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983).

Still, while not always acknowledging the difficulties of equating racially based sovereignty with principles of democracy and citizenship, and while sometimes invoking a cultural uniqueness that had all the hallmarks of essentialism, ethnographers such as Collier nonetheless did much to reinvigorate discussions about indigenous peoples as viable groups.

Ethnography's contradictory sense of indigenous peoples existing outside history, with living informants who were simultaneously representatives of a primitive past, at once masked colonial relationships and yet made such stories of exoticism and difference key sites for political struggle. Even as a new generation of scientific researchers tried to convince audiences of the more exotic racial and cultural features of American Indians and Sámi, they and many of their native informants often glossed over the modernist contradiction of ethnography as travel, of lives lived in the spaces between the metropole and the rural hinterland.²⁸ The Swiss writer Robert Crottet traveled to Lapland and the Skolt Sámi in the 1930s to learn from the "ancient inhabitants" and their "plea for a life closer to nature and the heart,"²⁹ a life that was an escape from and, once again, a means for regenerating a fallen, over-civilized Western world. Crottet collected and later published 19 legends recorded from a woman named Kaisa in the Skolt village of Suenjel. He and Scottish writer Norah Gourlie worked in collaboration with ethnographers to document "authentic" Skolt Sámi traditions that had supposedly disappeared in other parts of Lapland.³⁰ They thrilled to the idea of counting themselves among "only a few people who have really lived with them."³¹ The romantic ethnographic representations of the Skolt Sámi did have positive elements, too. Literary stories, however romanticized, and the visual expressions of indigenous knowledge circulated in photographs and maps, such as the Skolt Sámi place names and stories collected by Karl Nickul for Finnish maps as part of his job as surveyor for the region, helped provide the narrative structure for raising questions about the ownership and occupation of land.³² His article on the topic was a radical political

28 James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

29 Robert Crottet, *Maouno*, trans. Janet Teissier du Cros and Ronald Ormerod (London: George Rutledge & Sons Ltd., 1941), vii.

30 Correspondence, Lapland 1938–1939, KNA.

31 General notices 1937–1950, LSA.

32 Karl Nickul, "Petsamon eteläosan koltankieliset paikannimet kartografiselta kannalta" [Skolt language place names in the southern part of Petsamo from a cartographic point of view], *Fennia* 60, no. 1 (1934):

statement, refuting the Finnish view of the region as an unsettled wilderness and arguing that the Skolts had the right to give their own names to the environment in which they lived. Like-minded ethnographers quickly came to the conclusion that the proposed Skolt Sámi homeland should be created along the lines of the re-invigorated reservation system in the United States. They believed that such efforts offered tribal peoples the best opportunity to cope in their own way with the effects of the modern industrial world.

The reservation system, motivated by an ostensible rejection of Western paradigms of progress, simultaneously challenged and rearticulated values and practices integral to the colonial project. Finnish ethnographers aimed to make the general public more aware of the “successful measures that had been applied in the United States to preserve the special conditions of the American Indian.”³³ The articles that Karl Nickul sent to John Collier informed U.S. officials that no individual owned private land in Suenjel; rather, the community as a whole held the land in common, with the male heads of families making decisions on fishing and hunting rights.³⁴ Collier, for his part, requested more information on the Sámi and had books and journals on the American Indian sent to Nickul in subsequent years.³⁵ Nickul and the Society also sent scholars in the United States and Europe copies of a pictorial collection on the Skolt Sámi, published in four languages in cooperation with the Finnish National Museum to generate international support for the idea of protecting their nomadic way of life.³⁶ The Finnish government did express interest in the idea of creating a reservation system to protect such an economic and social system. The idea also awoke international interest. Nickul, for instance, wrote to Henry Balfour, president of the Royal Geographical Society in London, who shared Nickul’s worries about the “disastrous results of degeneration” should the Skolt Sámi not have a reservation of their own.³⁷ Nickul’s writings and letters at once struggle with ideas of cultural degeneration and yet suggest that neither he nor the Society wanted to cut the Skolt off from outside influences. But the local

1–81. He sent a copy of the publication to John Collier; Nickul to Collier, 4.11.1935, KNA.

33 Annual report 7.4.1935–29.3.1936, LSA.

34 Karl Nickul, “Suenjel, kolttain maa” [Suenjel, land of the Skolts], *Terra* 45, no. 2 (1933): 68–86.

35 For example, John Collier to Karl Nickul, Feb. 14, 1947, John Collier Papers, Part III: 1945–1956, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University. While Collier sent several letters, this one is the most interesting for the purposes of the article.

36 T.I. Itkonen and Karl Nickul, *Suenjel: Kuvia Kolttaisten Maasta, Bilder Från Skoltlapparnas Land, Pictures from the Country of the Skolt Lapps, Maht Suenjelest Jiellet* (Helsinki: Lapin Sivistyssseura, 1936).

37 Karl Nickul to Henry Balfour, 22 April 1937, KNA.

population in northern Finland was firmly against the proposal. Opponents in fact did not hesitate in criticizing Nickul and the Society for wanting to isolate Sámi culture and relegate it to museum status, with the Skolt Sámi in particular becoming an “ethnographical showcase” to enhance the reputations of self-serving researchers.³⁸ The criticisms echoed those leveled against Collier and the Indian Reorganization Act: that indigenous peoples did not know how to look after their own affairs and that reservation life would lead to dependence on the government.

Paradoxically, the Indian New Deal in the United States and cultural preservation efforts in Finland, which sought to organize American Indian and Sámi communities on the basis of tribal loyalties, contributed most significantly to the development of pan-tribal affiliations, a sense of shared problems and potentialities that transcended tribal and reservation boundaries. Nickul’s exchanges, writings, and talks helped stimulate further scholarly interest in the United States in the Sámi. Collier sent Nickul a recent article he had published on “United States Indian Administration as a Laboratory of Ethnic Relations” in the journal *Social Research* (1945) to help inform Nickul’s ideas on cultural pluralism.³⁹ Scholars, too, increasingly took note of the international nature of such debates with respect to indigenous peoples. UC Berkeley Professor Robert Lowie, known for his studies of the Plains Indians, penned “A Note on Lapp Culture History” in the *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* in 1945, in which he challenged Nordic scholars to provide a synthesis of knowledge on the Sámi based on both literary sources and recent fieldwork. Nickul wrote to Lowie, informing him that the ethnographer T.I. Itkonen was just then working on such a compilation, a two-volume set on Sámi history until 1945, though he criticized Itkonen for overlooking the sociological point of view.⁴⁰ His own first significant publication in English a few years later on the “Skolt Lapp Community” further established his reputation at the international level as an expert on Skolt culture and advocate for indigenous rights. Corresponding ever more energetically with scholars in the United States, Nickul eagerly read

38 Veli-Pekka Lehtola, “Research and Activism in Sámi Politics: The Ideas and Achievements of Karl Nickul towards Securing Governance for the Sámi,” *Acta Borealia* 1 (2005): 159.

39 John Collier to Karl Nickul, Feb. 14, 1947, John Collier Papers.

40 Karl Nickul to Robert H. Lowie, 9.2.1947, KNA; T.I. Itkonen, *Suomen Lappalaiset Vuoteen 1945* [Finland’s Sámi until the year 1945], vol. 1–2 (Helsinki & Porvoo: Werner Söderstöm Osakeyhtiö, 1948). Several years later, Itkonen published a condensed version of his findings in the United States: “The Lapps of Finland,” *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1951): 32–68.

in particular about tribal constitutions, by-laws, and governments among tribes in the Southwest to clarify his ideas about the prospects for Sámi self-governance.⁴¹ He also took an interest in *Felix S. Cohen's Handbook of Federal Indian Law* to inform his evolving ideas on self-governance. In addition to his writings, Nickul had taken a number of photographs of the Skolt Sámi in the 1930s engaged in “traditional” activities, many of which were reproduced as postcards in the years after WWII and sold at exhibitions organized by the Society for the Promotion of Sámi Culture to raise awareness about the uniqueness of indigenous lifestyles in general and the Sámi in particular.

Transnational Representations of Indigeneity

From an ethnographic standpoint, the struggle to displace stereotypes increasingly played out in globalized contexts in the years after the Second World War. The Society for the Promotion of Sámi Culture focused its attention on English-language publications and public lectures aimed at an international audience, warning of the continuing need to preserve Skolt Sámi culture. Ethnographers began coordinating relief efforts on behalf of the Sámi already during the war years. Nickul's old friend Robert Crottet organized a special Skolt Relief Fund, and he and Nickul tirelessly promoted their cause in lectures, radio broadcasts, and popular writings for general European and American audiences on the similarities between “Red Indians” and “Lapps.”⁴² Hoping to capitalize on such romantic notions, Crottet toured the United States with such famous Finnish cultural figures as the classical composer Jean Sibelius, architect Vainö Aaltonen, and writer and former first lady Ester Ståhlberg to raise money.⁴³ He gave interviews in England and Canada, repeating his tales and stories of the Skolt Sámi people's close relationship to nature. Finnish American periodicals took up the cause as well, informing readers of the “Lappish Crisis” and warning of the impending “extinction of the race,” underscoring the need for cultural pres-

41 John H. Provinse, Assistant Commissioner, Office of Indian Affairs, to Karl Nickul, March 22, 1948, KNA; U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, *Constitution, By-Laws and Ordinances of the Colorado River Indian Tribes of the Colorado River Reservation Arizona and California* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Indian Affairs, 1947).

42 Ideas fleshed out, for example, in the unpublished article “Finnish Lapps Need Help,” p. 3. Correspondence, Lapland 1940–1941, KNA.

43 Correspondence, Lapland XI–XII 1948, KNA.

ervation by including an 1890 photo of Matti Ponku and his family standing in traditional costumes outside a kota, a Sámi-style teepee,⁴⁴ originally taken by the geographer J.E. Rosberg. The photo, while engaging, erased half a century of progress and overlooked the complexities of the modernization process. Nonetheless, Karl Nickul made a point of directing John Collier's attention to the article.⁴⁵ In an address to the British people, Nickul could not help returning to the familiar point that the Skolt Sámi are "an ancient and poetical race," who "are at the same time our ancestors and our children" and in need of protection.⁴⁶ In private correspondence, Nickul and Crottet made reference to "our lovely Skolt paradise,"⁴⁷ treating Lapland as a literary and geographic borderland. The theme of an innocent "people of nature" devastated by a war not of their own making touched a chord and the fund raised hundreds of thousands of dollars in Europe, Canada, and the United States for new dwellings, a school, a church, reindeer, and sheep (vitally important, in Nickul's opinion, so the women could continue making Sámi "national costumes" and handicrafts).

The international attention prompted Finnish authorities to treat the resettlement of the Skolt Sámi as a special issue. The war had forced the evacuation of Sámi peoples from their communities in Lapland to places farther south and west in Sweden and the central coastal region of Ostrobothnia. Authorities consciously tried to keep the Skolt community together and to find a place for them to settle near Lake Inari in northeastern Finland. Despite the efforts, the economic and political prospects of the Sámi changed dramatically after the war, not always to the liking of individual ethnographers. The importance of a monetary economy increased among the Sámi because of the loss of livestock and traditional fishing sites. Sámi adopted new clothing, foods, games, linguistic expressions, and employment patterns from Finnish culture and the agricultural community.⁴⁸ Skolt society changed radically and they decided not to rebuild their collective winter village, despite a group of volunteers travelling from Denmark to help rebuild

44 Paul Sjöblom, "Lappish Crisis," *Finlandia Pictorial: American Supplement of the Finnish Weekly Suomen Kivalehti* 3, no. 41 (October 9, 1948), 3.

45 Correspondence, Lapland III–IV 1949, KNA.

46 General notices 1937–1950, LSA.

47 Robert Crottet to Karl Nickul, 25.6.1948, KNA.

48 Veli-Pekka Lehtola, "Second World War as a Trigger for Transcultural Changes among Sámi People in Finland," *Acta Borealia* 32, no. 2 (2015): 133–134.

it for them.⁴⁹ For his part, Nickul at times toed a thin line between being publicly aware of long-standing cultural contacts,⁵⁰ while privately expressing the desire to keep the “innocent” Sámi isolated from more excessive cultural contacts, thereby preventing them from making “fatal mistakes” in their contacts with “modern society.”⁵¹ He was troubled by the fact that many younger Skolt Sámi did not want ethnographers to re-create the traditional Suenjel community. They had come to “cherish the Finnish modes” of habitation and lifestyle, and Nickul did not think they understood the significance of their own future. He blamed such individuals for being “short-sighted” and not understanding that they were doing a “disservice for themselves, their tribe, and for Finland also.”⁵² Attitudes among the Sámi varied tremendously, which Nickul and the Society did not always recognize in their writings. Many Sámi wanted to adopt new influences as a sign of modernity and fashion as well as to improve their living standards and future prospects. Many other traditionalist views either ignored new influences or, in the case of certain Laestadian communities, resisted them.⁵³ Yet Nickul’s and the Society’s ideas continued to evolve in step with the increasing international focus on human rights and indigenous peoples.

Through the project of preserving Skolt Sámi culture, the central idea of Sámi self-governance took hold throughout the region. While a tragic rupture of cultural practices and livelihoods for ethnographers and Sámi alike, the post-war years provided Sámi peoples from different communities the opportunity to form new connections. Matti Sarmela speaks of a “post-local phase” characterized by intense international, technological, and economic development.⁵⁴ Improved communications and information networks led to growing feelings of solidarity and the birth of a more general Sámi identity; it provided Sámi with new possibilities to influence majority society both as individuals and as ethno-political actors.⁵⁵ While in Ostrobothnia,

49 Lapin Sivistysseura to Lapin Maatalousseuran Asutustoimikunta, 29.10.1946, KNA.

50 Karl Nickul, *The Skolt Lapp Community Suenjelsijd during the Year 1938* (Nordiska Museet: Uppsala, 1948).

51 Karl Nickul to Robert Crottet, 17.6.1946, KNA.

52 Nickul to Crottet, 17.6.1946, KNA.

53 Lehtola 2015, 133–137.

54 Matti Sarmela, “Ekologia ja kulttuuri” [Ecology and culture], in *Näköaloja kulttuureihin: Antropologian historiaa ja nykysuuntauksia* [Viewpoints into cultures: Anthropological history and modern directions], edited by Tapio Nisula, 108 (Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 1994).

55 Lehtola 2015, 126–127.

the Sámi formed their own organization. In May 1947, a Sámi deputation visited Helsinki and, together with Society members, presented a memorandum to the president and parliament. The delegation wore traditional Sámi costumes, resulting in many publicity photos. As a result of the visit, the government formed a state committee to suggest measures for ensuring Sámi livelihoods and cultural practices. Both the Society for the Promotion of Sámi Culture and the Samii Litto (Sámi League) organization took the opportunity to push the government to adopt a consistent Sámi policy.⁵⁶ Nickul wanted it to create a “Commissioner of Sámi Affairs” position modeled on U.S. policy. He welcomed the efforts of the Samii Litto organization as evidence of inter-ethnic solidarity between the Sámi, with different groups forgetting their differences in a new situation.⁵⁷ He wrote to Norah Gourlie, expressing excitement over the fact that “interest in their own matters is gradually developing and we co-operate very well.”⁵⁸ But he also had lingering concerns regarding the politics of cultural preservation.

Ethnographers like Nickul continued to play a strong role in managing the representations and the politics of cultural preservation even as indigenous peoples increasingly claimed opportunities to speak for themselves. For Nickul, education was the key. He eagerly read through issues of the journals *Progressive Education*, *Indian Education*, and *Indians at Work* that he received from the Education Division of the Department of Indian Affairs for ideas on how best to organize schooling in the Sámi language to develop “a good national feeling.”⁵⁹ It did not always go as planned. A “radical wing” consisting of several younger members of the Samii Litto became aggressive in its dealings with Finns. Nickul privately told Collier that such radicalism had “a very chauvinistic tendency, very interesting, but also very dangerous.”⁶⁰ He even went so far as to accuse some of not truly representing Sámi interests, but just borrowing from Finnish reaction-

56 The committee submitted a report on its findings to the government in 1952, making progressive, even radical, proposals for Sámi self-governance, but the report was ignored.

57 Lehtola 2005, 160.

58 Karl Nickul to Norah Gourlie, Dec. 16th 1950, KNA.

59 Nickul to Collier, April 13th, 1949, KNA. Throughout much of the 20th century, many American Indian and Sámi children were taken from their families and home communities and sent to boarding schools. Both Collier and Nickul disapproved of such harsh assimilation measures and the loss of language and cultural traditions. In fact, changes in official U.S. policy in the 1930s brought changes to Indian schools, with teachers and students forming clubs to value and encourage tribal culture, such as traditional music, songs, and dances. This is no doubt what interested Nickul.

60 Nickul to Collier, April 13th, 1949, KNA.

ary nationalism of the 1930s.⁶¹ For their part, younger Sámi activists such as Nilla Outakoski blamed Nickul and others in the Society for trying to dictate how the Sámi should think.⁶² Despite his private concerns, Nickul tried to reconcile the differences. He began corresponding much more actively with his Skolt friends regarding future prospects. Nickul also increasingly directed his efforts across the borders to Sweden and Norway. He had formed close ties with Swedish ethnographer Ernst Manker during the war years and, working with others, they helped establish cross-border conferences and cooperation efforts.

The post-World War II focus on human rights reawakened questions about establishing a special area of protection for the Sámi or treating their situation merely as a matter of guaranteeing minority rights. In a series of radio broadcasts, Nickul continued to emphasize the connections between American Indians and the Sámi peoples, moving easily between such terms as “people of nature” and “indigenous peoples.”⁶³ Nickul wrote to Collier even more frequently in the years after the war to gain a more international perspective on such matters. Continuing to pursue the racial angle, Collier likewise broadened his vision to suggest that the Sámi and Finns were related to American Indians in *Indians of the Americas*, which he sent to Nickul.⁶⁴ Finnish ethnographers were somewhat more inclined to distance themselves from racial questions at this point, especially as they pertained to the supposed Asian origins of both Finns and Sámi. Nickul, though, still readily employed the term “Redskin” in a radio broadcast on the connections between American Indians and Sámi peoples.⁶⁵ He sent Collier transcripts of this talk as well as his talks on “The Challenge of Primitive People to Democracy” and “The United Nations and World Citizenship.” Collier, too, increasingly turned his attention to international affairs. With his son’s help, Collier took photographs of indigenous peoples (e.g., indigenous Peruvians) seemingly existing outside modernity, applying captions such as

61 Nickul to Collier, April 13th, 1949, KNA.

62 Nickul to Crottet, 18th April 1948, KNA.

63 Manuscripts, 1945–1947, KNA.

64 John Collier, *Indians of the Americas* (New York: Mentor Books, 1947), 18.

65 “Punanahat ja Nykyaika” [Redskins and Modern Times], Manuscripts 1945–1947, KNA. In previous decades, Finnish scholars had argued strongly for the “whiteness” of Finns and projected questions of “non-whiteness” onto the Sámi (see Isaksson 2001; Veli-Pekka Lehtola, “Alempi rotu, katoava kansa? Saamelaiset ja sosiaalidarwinismi 1920- ja 1930-luvun kirjallisuudessa” [A lower race, a disappearing people? Sámi and social Darwinism in 1920s and 1930s literature], *Faravid* 17 (1995): 233–258).

“a time sense different than ours, and happier.”⁶⁶ He also continued to reinforce in his writings the perspective that the Pueblo and other Indians of the American Southwest had much to teach the world. The efforts ultimately backfired at home, as conservatives repealed the Indian Reorganization Act and invoked a policy of termination and relocation in the 1950s to force tribal peoples off the reservations and move them into cities. The efforts, though, did seemingly have greater effect at the international level, with the term “indigenous peoples” increasingly employed as a political term by the United Nations and other transnational actors and organizations.

Local indigenous cultures increasingly became the focus of coordinated transnational activities. Nickul wrote to Collier, asking for more information on transnational organizations like the Institute of Ethnic Affairs, founded by Collier, Felix Cohen, and others after the war to advocate on behalf of indigenous populations around the world. He also inquired about the Inter-American Indian Institute, founded to promote the coordination of indigenous policies in the different North and South American nations. Nickul could not help but celebrate “how things have developed into a worldwide movement” and voiced the sincere hope that “no political or other event will stop the ball rolling.”⁶⁷ But he wanted to know if such organizations appealed more to feelings of responsibility and humanitarianism in white people or if they actually strengthened “national feelings” among indigenous peoples.⁶⁸ Collier certainly believed he was promoting the latter and promised to publish information on the Sámi in the journal put out by the Institute of Ethnic Affairs.⁶⁹ Ultimately, despite often lacking political power at local and national levels, especially in the early 1950s, the groundwork laid by such figures as Karl Nickul and John Collier in the 1930s and 1940s paved the way for a growing recognition of common interests and shared colonial histories at the international level.

Conclusion

There is a growing tendency in indigenous studies to dispute the concept of modernization. Philip Deloria argues that some tribal groups leapt into

66 John Collier, *On the Gleaming Way: Navajos, Eastern Pueblos, Zuñis, Hopis, Apaches and Their Land and Their Meanings to the World* (Chicago: Sage Books, 1949), 19.

67 Nickul to Collier, 17.4.1947, KNA.

68 Nickul to Collier, 9.2.1947, KNA.

69 Collier to Nickul, Feb. 14, 1947, John Collier Papers.

“modernity” quickly out of their own free will and interest, while others made calculated choices to preserve alternative cultural practices. In rewriting the story of American Indian encounters with modernity, he provides accounts of numerous “Indians in unexpected places,” engaging with the same forces of change that led non-natives to re-evaluate their understandings of themselves and their society. He uses the word “anomaly” to describe the cultural dissonance of viewers responding to the “primitive” images of Indians in buckskins and feathered war bonnets who at the same time were not strangers to urbanity and modern technology.⁷⁰ Sámi travelers, too, had long exhibited agency when participating in live exhibitions in larger cities in Europe and North America in the first half of the twentieth century, highlighting the complexities of being indigenous in public spaces.⁷¹ For his part, Sámi informant Jaakko Sverloff spoke to Nickul in Finnish (he also spoke Russian and Skolt fluently), emphasizing his role as a transnational and transcultural actor. Though still largely insignificant political actors in the reform efforts of the 1930s, indigenous peoples and the ethnographers trying to represent them increasingly engaged with questions of modernity, urbanism, and boundary crossing during the war years and directly afterwards. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, scholars and reformers in the United States and Europe continued to correspond with one another and collaborate on how best to preserve indigenous cultures, or even how to define them, whether by race and ethnicity or by allegiance to particular traditions and lifestyles. Though the notion of “awakening the racial spirit” invokes a framing of indigenous peoples as mere anthropological objects and seemingly elides local agency, it highlights the complex maneuverings between heavy-handed paternalism on the one hand and an honest desire to help local tribal peoples on the other. This has resulted in lingering tensions over what one must do to look or act indigenous enough, whether in appearance, dress, or behavior, in relation to lingering stereotypes of indigenous peoples as a reference to the past.

The layered meanings in texts and photographs illustrate the way in which the experience of colonization continues to impact in complex ways the making of contemporary indigenous cultural identities. Ethnographers

70 Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 3–4.

71 Cathrine Baglo, “Rethinking Sámi Agency during Living Exhibitions: From the Age of Empire to the Post-war World,” in *Performing Indigeneity: Global Histories and Contemporary Experiences*, edited by Laura R. Graham and H. Glenn Penny, 136–168 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

in the United States and Europe, by basing their assumptions of community on romantic ideals of harmony and integration, often failed to recognize the fact that gradual integration might well mean the diminishing of conventional notions of tribal traditions, but it might also bring many new opportunities, calculated compromises, and deliberately chosen risks for individuals and groups continually remaking themselves in order to survive.⁷² Even as so-called indigenous people moved into cities, intermarried, and participated in wage labor economies, broadening the scope of implied boundary crossing between modern and traditional lifestyles, they and the scholars who studied them once again confronted the anthropological trope of disappearing culture. More positively, the effort to apply a new scientific image to tribal peoples ensured that tribes would survive, but as stronger and more problematic entities. It had a revolutionary effect on the future of indigenous political and cultural development.⁷³ Increasing collaboration between ethnographers and indigenous people, even if hampered by a strong sense of paternalism on the part of ethnographers, stimulated new routes of communication across local and national boundaries. Ethnographers often did record information from the last surviving members of a particular group, enhancing the importance of particular cultures and individuals that would otherwise have been ignored by history. Indeed, the long-term value of such field studies ensured that indigenous peoples can recover a considerable body of knowledge about their tribal roots not only from their own people but also from the ethnographic records.⁷⁴ Even as native peoples rejected, mimicked, or subverted the ethnographic representations, they have still been able to turn to such records for cultural revitalization efforts. The very openness of the visual signifiers and literary narratives has meant that scholars and activists can use them to disrupt as well as produce new discourses of power that resonate at the international level.

72 Fergus M. Bordewich, *Killing the White Man's Indian: Reinventing Native Americans at the End of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Anchor Books, 1996), 332–333.

73 See, e.g., Stephen Cornell, *The Return of the Native: American Indian Political Resurgence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 87–148; Vine Deloria, Jr. and Clifford Lytle, *The Nations Within: The Past and Future of American Indian Sovereignty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 55–79; Veli-Pekka Lehtola, *Saamelaiset Suomalaiset: Kohtaamista 1896–1953* [Sámi Finns: Encounters 1896–1953] (Helsinki: SKS, 2012), 330–347.

74 Karl Kroeber, “Native American Resistance and Renewal,” in *American Indian Persistence and Resurgence*, ed. Karl Kroeber (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 15.