

UDC 323.1+304.2+39

DOI: 10.17238/issn2221-2698.2017.27.143

Väinö Tanner and the discourse on racial difference



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Abstract. The article charts a previously lesser-known aspect of research on the Skolt Sami by Väinö Tanner — his ideas on the Skolt Sami as a race. Tanner's place in the scholarly field of racial theorizing and the discursive resources on which he relied are examined. One inspiring contemporaneous discourse was the Finnish hygienic discourse and the improvement of the nation's health, towards which

Tanner leaned. He reproduced aspects of the more aggressive eugenic discourse articulated by his ethnic peers, the Finland-Swedes, but the discourse on their racial superiority was unusable, given the agenda of his book, to elevate the Skolt Sami in the racial hierarchies. The economic organization of society was decisive for Tanner, rather than race, making him a Social evolutionist.

Keywords: Väinö Tanner, research on race, studies on Sami, the Skolt Sami

Introduction

At the time when Väinö Tanner (1881–1948), geologist and Professor of Geography at the University of Helsinki, was writing the seminal work on the Skolt Sami, *Antropogeografiska studier inom Petsamo-området. 1 Skoltlapparna* (Human Geographical studies in the Petsamo-region. 1 The Skolt Lapps, 1929, hereinafter *Antropogeografiska*), the intellectual life of the Nordic countries, Western Europe, North America and the British Dominions was pervaded with a discourse on racial difference. Research on race, and the discourse on which it depended, illustrated both the division of mankind into racial categories and, before its criticism, the “truths” of that time, which were measured and discussed like any scientific research results. Craniology had a reputation, prior to its scholarly dead-end, as an exact and neutral science practised by professionals using statistical methods. Eugenics had a political appeal to both the conservative right and the progressive left, not to mention the new radical political movements, all of which shared a sense of fear regarding the degeneration of society. This affected politics: fears linked to the co-existence and blending of races, as well as to the disappearance of the white race, formed a constituent part of policies on racial segregation and restrictions on immigration. Anthropology and the search for correlation between biological and cultural features were criticized from the 1890s onwards, while a more serious crisis for racial science evolved in the 1920s and 1930s. Anthropologists and biologists began to undermine the central concepts of racial thought, all the while that — and because — they were practised aggressively in Nazi Germany. The existence of

pure races was already being denied by scholars at this time [1, Kemiläinen A., p. 186 et passim; 2, Lake and Reynolds, pp. 254–255, 310–335; 3, Tydén M., pp. 24–25, 32].

The issue of race was linked to concerns regarding the survival and health of nations, as well as the competition regarding the alleged place each nation possessed in the racial hierarchies of that era. Finland was defined as a domicile to three races, including the Finnish (classified as either a Mongoloid or Eastern-Baltic race) and the Germanic, represented by the Finland-Swedes (a minority to which Tanner belonged and with which he identified). Racial status and purity was also a matter of concern and interest regarding the third racial group: the Sami population in Finland. Officials and scholars were interested in Sami kinsfolk, who were in the process of cultural and ethnic “Finnicization” or “Samification”. This process could go both ways: a Finnish kinsfolk could be in the process of adapting to Sami ways. However, the Finnish educated classes entertained ideas of “pure” Lapp and “genuine” Finnish folk, to which the lower and weaker Sami were in the process of assimilating. These classifications also had a racial angle and people were categorized according the parameters towards which the “mixed population” were inclined [4, Lehtola V-P., p. 41; 5, p. 265].

This article charts the racial thinking of Väinö Tanner. Tanner has enjoyed a reputation as a “Sami-friendly” scholar, so the racial aspect of his Skolt Sami studies has been a somewhat troubling side of his scholarly production: acknowledged but bypassed, with a lesser focus in recent studies on Tanner. Geographer Paulo Susiluoto mentions Tanner’s interest in the racial character of the Skolt Sami, but he does so in passing and claims that Tanner offered no explanatory power to race biology in his research on Skolt Sami culture and society [6, p. 16]. I shall explore Tanner’s ideas concerning the racial status of the Skolt Sami and the branch of theorizing to which he adhered in anthropological/race-biological terms, as well as ideologically. What were the provoking discourses he wrote against? The outline of the article is as follows: I shall first examine the racial discussion in the book itself, with a contextualizing side-view concerning influences upon Tanner. Thereafter I shall study the Finnish discussion on eugenics and national hygiene, a context which I claim influenced Tanner’s thinking.

Though a social construction, rather than having its foundation in biology [7, Gunaratnam Y., pp. 3–4; 8, Isaksson P., pp. 360–362], race and race research has always been constitutive to the members of the “races” as a social, categorizing fact and serving as a distancing and in-group forming, delimiting function for the researcher and the researched. Self/Other dialectics are always present in research on folk-groups; these dialectics do not always need to be racialized and they do not need to have social and political implications, but in the time of Tanner these

implications were present in the racial discourse [8, Isaksson P., pp. 55, 57]. It is not possible to go through the history of research on race and racial categorizations of the Sami in detail here, only to the extent necessary to contextualize and position Tanner's approach. This troubled history of intuitive and speculative scholarly enquiry struggling to be scientific is covered in previous works on the subject [e.g. 3, Tydén M., passim; 8, Isaksson P., passim; 9, Kyllingstad J.R., passim].

The sources for this article are Tanner's *Antropogeografiska* text itself, and the notes and manuscripts collected by Tanner in his personal archive. From the point of view of method, the approach is indebted to a typical approach from the history of ideas, identifying influential segments of scholarship and authorship that affected Tanner, and positioning him in the scholarly field. My approach and reading of the sources is also discursive — the interest lies in the way scholars and Tanner positioned, hierarchized and coded different folk groups. Which discourses did he echo and which did he write against? Research is a discursive practice: rather than reflecting reality, science is entangled with social and political relations, and involves an ideological and discursive construction of the object of its enquiry. These relations can be traced historically and studied as context-specific to the research. Research actively produces its subject, e.g. the racial difference between the colonizer and colonized. Knowledge produced is not mere facts, but emergent property between and among differently-positioned individuals, including the researcher, which can be used discursively and analysed [7, Gunaratnam Y., pp. 7–9]. The subject of my study is therefore not Skolt Sami ethnicity as such, but the discursive process of its construction, as well as its contestation by Tanner.

Before we embark on Tanner, it may be noted that the Sami were neither unaware of nor untouched by the numerous down-grading opinions held by and behaviour of the majority folk in the encounters in which their racial position was in some way explicated. Reactions varied from unease and a sense of unsafety to general mistrust and agitated pride [10, Rosberg J.E., pp. 158–159, 191–192]. However, this side of the issue falls outside the scope of this study. Another thing is that the Finnish political thinking of the era was permeated by ideas of differences between nationalities as well as of opinions about Russians/Soviets. The text that follows contains contemporaneous ideas of the "Other" of the Finnish, the Russians. These ideas, sharpened by the racial characterizations, are to be read contextually as historical statements, not as those held by the author of this article.

Tanner and the race problem — were the Skolt Sami a blended race?

Discourse on racial difference was articulated by both amateurs and scholars intent on serious research. Tanner made no effort to escape this, but used and modified the existing,

racializing scholarly tools. The main agenda of *Antropogeografiska*, Tanner's great synthesis of Skolt Sami adaptation and societal form, and the history and geography of the Skolt Sami *siida* (Sami village), was his endeavour to elevate the Skolt Sami within the existing categories, by scholarly means that were taken to be legitimate and within the limits that the racial discourse allowed. Another agenda on Tanner's part was to establish a foundation for his own expert position, which was evident in his paternalistic advice to the Skolt Sami on the adaptation form best suited to them, that of semi-nomadic reindeer herding; that these agendas may seem to contradict one another is one of the many internal contradictions from which his book suffers. The book is actually unfinished, something of which Tanner himself was aware.

Nineteenth-century writings on the Sami included numerous ponderings about the Sami as an assimilating and oppressed people and copious lists of the character of the Sami folk ("they are in every respect grown-up children, curious, thoughtless, vain..."¹). Tanner was sparing in his provision of such lists in his book and there is a scientific foundation for his choice: he might have found the lists insufficient from the perspective of method and scientific accuracy. Lists of folk characteristics had begun to appear out of date and received (deserved) criticism during the 1920s: they lacked hard empirical foundation; they were unverifiable, contaminated and subjective; they had earlier been used in a confusing manner as a synonym for race and were an indication of amateurish conceptual and scientific apparatus. Among physical anthropologists, these measurements had been taken to a new level of accuracy and stringency. The new branch of science was measuring visible, somatic variables, on the basis of which scholars were making more controlled estimations of the capabilities and character of different peoples as seemingly hard scientific facts [1, Kemiläinen A., pp. 88ff, 184–185, 202, 224–225, 238, 242; 11, Cvetkovski R., p. 11]. Advanced, avant-garde research had provided tools for study of peoples in a more scientific manner, through measurable variables concerning race. Tanner had chosen to upgrade his study on the Skolt Sami, relying on this paradigmatic transformation.

Tanner used racial reasoning and terminology such as *type*, originating from racial studies in several other passages in the book, as well. Early on in the book Tanner assumes that the Sami were originally an agglomeration of different racial elements. The oldest foundation was the Arctic stone-age culture, through which Tanner constructs a lengthy first-comer history. This culture adopted other Eastern-Baltic and Nordic elements, which were strengthened or consolidated into a culture around the tame reindeer (*tamrenkulturen*), constituting a Lapp, or Sami, culture. This

¹ ATUM (Archive of Tromsø University Museum), AVT (Archive of Väinö Tanner), box 2, folder 1e, notes. Undated notes on Vahl (1866). Tanner quotes I. Vahl's *Lapperne og den lappske mission* (Kjøbenhavn 1866).

had already taken place during prehistoric times. Tame reindeer would have served to gather together the “peuplades” (*Fr.*, here signifying small, isolated groups of Sami) as a culturally unified people [12, Tanner V., p. 28].² This may be seen as a comment on the racializing and diffusionist discourse on the Sami; instead of becoming a separate race and a people capable of receiving cultural elements only by diffusion, the Sami had absorbed various racial elements and actively adopted cultural elements. This complicated the hierarchization, more so than under the presumption of classical physical anthropology that races were separate entities and race-blending produced only degenerate forms. It was most likely also a comment on Norwegian and Swedish studies concerned with racial purity and the Germanic origin of the Scandinavians. Both Norwegian (race eugenic Jon Mjøen) and Swedish (Herman Lundborg) researchers warned aggressively and repeatedly against the dangers of race-blending — the Sami appearing as a factor worsening the racial stock. This was especially true of the writings of Uppsala professor and, until 1936, head of the Swedish State Institute for Race Biology, anti-Semite and Nazi-sympathizer Herman Lundborg, whose race biological texts propagating racial hygiene are well known for their racism [3, Tydén M., p. 29; 8, Isaksson P., pp. 55–64, 147–148; 9, Kyllingstad J.R., pp. 82–85]. Tanner had read and borrowed some basic terminology from Lundborg, but not from Mjøen.³

The list of the origins of the borrowed racial elements (Nordic, Eastern-Baltic) is different from that of an earlier manuscript, which lists the sources as “Finnish, Nordic and Slavic”.⁴ “Nordic” most likely refers to the Scandinavian races. “Finnish” was substituted by a proper and recent anthropological term, the “Eastern-Baltic”, which had emerged in Swedish race studies early in the twentieth century; it was depicted as a race in its own right in the Baltic region, dominant in Finland and slightly less cultured than the Swedish. Finnish scholars adopted the idea, partly because the new term distanced the Finns from undesirable categorization as one of the Mongoloid races. Rolf Nordenstreng, originally from Finland, and Kaarlo Hildén were the main advocates of this theory [1, Kemiläinen A., pp. 234–252]. The latter is also listed in the *Antropogeografiska* references. The term Slavic was simply removed. Tanner had problems accepting cultural and racial loans from this direction.

Later in the book, in the chapter on the (physical) anthropology of the Skolt Sami, Tanner commented on the most extreme findings by German scholars that placed the Skolt Sami as a

² ATUM, AVT, box 5, folder 6a: Notater om samer, Manuskript (delvis): Nordlapparna och deras differentiering: manuscript with the same title.

³ ATUM, AVT, box 2, folder 6b, diverse antäckningar, undated notes on Lundborg H. & Linders, F.J.: The racial character of the Swedish nation (1926) and Backman, G.: Ett standardverk över svenska folkets antropologi, *Ymer* XLVII, 2, 1927.

⁴ ATUM, AVT, box 2, folder 6a: Notater om samer, Manuskript (delvis): Nordlapparna och deras differentiering.

pathological race (with the potential connotation of threatening the life and vitality of the stronger race) because of race-blending; Tanner did not wish to see the Skolt Sami positioned too low in the racial hierarchies. Another aspect that he denied, or in the first phase declared himself not competent to discuss, was the Mongoloid features of the Skolt Sami, a typical categorization of the racial affinity of the Sami [8, Isaksson P., p. 46].

In Tanner's eyes, the Skolt Sami were not a Mongoloid race, nor did they have any greater genetic contact with them: they did not possess the typical physical distinctive marks, neither the Mongoloid, or epicanthic fold (mongolvecket) nor the Mongolian spot (mongolfläcket), and therefore they were not genetically connected to the Samoyed people. Tanner defined the Skolt Sami as a racially separate, isolated proto-Lapp people, as a "semi-pygmic" (halvpygmeisk) and hyperbrachycephalic folk, that is, low on the cephalic index [8, Isaksson P., pp. 69, footnote 5, 323–324; 9, Kyllingstad J.R., pp. 20–25, 134], who had survived the last ice-age in some isolated area of Central Europe, from where they followed the melting ice to the inner parts of Fennoscandia. Tanner used parallels between the rock carvings in paleolithic settlement areas and certain areas populated by Central European hunting people. Tanner suddenly omits any reference to racial and cultural loans (see above) in this passage. Because of the specificity of the natural environment in which the Sami found themselves they would have sustained the genetic isolation, the genotype, as well as the features of the original culture, including the strength created by a special stability characteristic to the subarctic regions, which Tanner coded positively, and not as stagnation [12, Tanner V., p. 287].

Even though Tanner's reasoning shows, if anything, the intellectual handicaps inherent in anthropological reasoning, he also reveals his agenda, that of positioning the Skolt Sami away from troubled, stigmatized categories like the Mongoloid race, considered degenerate. The discussion also demonstrates a programmatic following of his thesis of the mismatch between racial and cultural borders [12, Tanner V., p. 16]. Having said this, all the classical race categorizations — Mongoloid and Lappish/hyperborean — placed the Sami lower than the Caucasian, ideal race. So did the categorizations that Tanner used: "semi-pygmic", which in the earlier literature at least referred only to the short height of the Sami [13, Rosberg J.E., pp. 2–5], and "hyperbrachycephalic", short-headed. Either Tanner had no trouble with these categorizations or he could not solve the problem of their inbuilt hierarchies. However that may be, Tanner displayed another kind of racial bias: the Sami were elevated through their genetic separateness from the Finnish and the Slavic people, constituting a group in their own right.

Instead of building hierarchies, race studies could also study degrees of kinship and types of interaction [14, Mogilner M., pp. 94–95, 106–107]. It was the Karelian people with whom Tanner wished to establish a genetic bond and kinship. Even though the Karelians found themselves in the eastern sphere and were on many occasions presented as being blended with the Russians [e.g. 15, Friis, J.A., p. 291], they constituted a less burdened choice for Tanner, bearing in mind the Karelianism of the era. The Karelian element had been present from medieval times onwards, as the few roamers were totally assimilated and “Lapponized” (“lapponiserad”) into the Skolt Sami culture. Karelians were also present on the Arctic sea-coast, enjoying a marital preference among the Skolt Sami women, at least in the Paatsjoki and Petsamo *siidas* [12, p. 288]. The Karelians could also be used, as many Finland-Swedish scholars did, as a contrast to the unfavourable portrayal of the (ancient) Finns as the lowest of the folk groups residing in Fennoscandia.

In contrast to Susiluoto, it appears that racial blending was a definite problem for Tanner, as numerous positions taken in the next passage of the book show. To begin with, Tanner sympathized with a passage on racial blending written by German race theorist Rudolf Virchow. For Virchow, racial blending was a factor that worsened the race and Tanner comes very close to defining the Sami as a people with less capacity for development (elsewhere in the book, Tanner denied the notion expressed by Virchow of the Sami being a pathological, i.e. degenerate race, the result of race-blending [12, p. 289]). Tanner discusses a hypothesis that the race blending had been stronger in Petsamo than in other regions populated by the Sami. The “racial starting-point material” of the Petsamo Skolt Sami is then hypothesized as not Lappish, but Karelian. This Karelian “racial core”, lesser adapted to the extreme conditions in the Arctic, would constitute the reason why the Skolt Sami were so repressed in their environment. Tanner comments on Amund Helland’s notion of the Skolt Sami as a lower and dying race as a fable (Helland wrote in 1906: “The ‘Skolts’ are a race low in the hierarchy, without life-force or future.” “‘Skolterne’ er en lavstaaende race, uden livskraft og uden fremtid.”) and hastened to include the Skolt Sami — with a positive reference to Norwegian historian and geographer Yngvar Nielsen — with the Norwegian Lapps, who could not be taken as a degenerate race. For Tanner, the Sami were physically and culturally developing group; the fact that they were physically shorter than the “Western Lapps” was due to dietary reasons and the acute poverty from which the Skolt Sami suffered [12, Tanner V., pp. 290–291; 16, Helland A., p. 6]. Tanner’s literature included early environmentalists, such as

Carl von Linné, who correlated the shortness of the Lapp with the small amount of food consumed.⁵

By stressing the Skolt Sami potential for development, Tanner positioned himself in the ranks of the Lamarckian school of non-deterministic racial reasoning, though without any direct reference. The Sami were not pre-destined to their low standing because of race or biology, as numerous schools inspired by the foundational theorizing of Joseph Arthur de Gobineau believed. But the passage shows that Tanner was not in control of the writing process or the analysis: the way the racial blending and its results are coded appears to contradict numerous previous passages in the text, and to be following Tanner's favoured literature (Virchow, Nielsen). Environment has now become a factor that does not elevate, but which binds the Skolt Sami to their originality. This passage in the book can be used with the greatest certainty as evidence of the speculative method of race research: the lack of empirical material, which would most likely only have confused the discussion further, resulted in a text, where earlier, speculative scholarly stances guide the reasoning, the choice between them is presented in a self-contradictory manner and the resulting chaos is exacerbated by Tanner's own biases. The passage also shows how deeply Tanner was immersed in the racial discourses, where the variables studied were social and everyday facts and scientific variables worthy and in need of discussion.

Levels of hygiene and the Skolt Sami condition

The chapter on the anthropology of the Skolt Sami in *Antropogeografiska* forms part of a larger discussion concerning the viability of the Skolt Sami, a topical aspect of scholarly and political enquiry of the time. As Tanner set out to investigate the Skolt Sami "anthropological type", he categorized the task ahead as being one aspect of charting the "condition of the population". This chapter had the outspoken function of defying the notion of the Skolt Sami as a disappearing or dying people, a widely-held view among Scandinavian researchers. Tanner joined forces with updated research: the Skolt Sami were sinking in numbers only in relative terms, in terms of the percentage of the total population, verified with positive reference to K.B. Wiklund; also J.E. Rosberg stressed the same [13, Rosberg J.E., pp. 38–54; 17, Wiklund K.B., p. 149]. Tanner proved in great detail, with reference to various Russian and Finnish-Swedish original sources and literature, that their total number was in fact slowly increasing. The factors that stunted their population growth included epidemics and high infant mortality. Tanner does not point to any hierarchizing or biological explanations for this, instead the explanation arises from the social conditions: Skolt Sami women now make a rare appearance in the book, weakened by constant

⁵ ATUM, AVT, box 5, folder 6b, notes, undated notes on Iter Lapponicum, by Linné.

toil and by periods of having to support a great many children on their own by means of lake fishing, while husbands were fishing out at sea. This led to many miscarriages and fatal accidents in the household, because the children were left alone [12, pp. 293–325].

Tanner was of the opinion that the overall health situation of the Skolt Sami was better than that of other Sami groups, while their record on hygiene was mixed: there were many aspects of handling waste that left room for improvement in household hygiene, but Tanner depicted personal hygiene as being better among the Skolt Sami than among many other populations (M.A. Castrén and J.A. Friis [15, p. 296] had made observations pointing in the same direction). Tanner opens his discussion by referring directly to variations according to the “climatic and cultural latitude”, which interprets levels of development according to a more northern level of climate correlating to a less cultured level of development. Hygiene — physical/personal, as well as mental — were perceived by Tanner as very relative terms, but the text does not escape the hierarchies established at the beginning. Tanner refers to improvements that took place following the example of the settlers who had recently moved into the area — this concerned old “prejudices”, and particularly superstitions of spiritual impurity, once again defining the Skolt Sami as receivers of higher cultural impulses [12, Tanner V., pp. 280, 325–328].

From another point of view, the discussion on the anthropology of the Skolt Sami, and on race biology, was part of a section devoted to disproving doubts about the physical foundation of possibilities for development among the Skolt Sami. After taking the trouble to go through the research and include his own rather minor contribution, Tanner diminished the worth of the race-biological evidence in “our age of practicality” (“vårt praktiska tidevarv”). “For our age it would be illogical to judge the feasibility of the physical development of a folk only according to outdated numerical material, since in the age of eugenics one does not allow free rein to the powers of nature and chance, as was usual in the past. Our age requires knowledge of the quality of all the elements that determine the progress of the amount of population, and the people’s capacity for administrative powers, according to the indications that the nature of these elements empowers and invites them to.” This quotation indicates a mild sense of distrust towards eugenics and race biology, especially when conducted on a poor empirical foundation [12, Tanner V., p. 328].

Accordingly, it was not necessary to improve the gene pool, but instead, levels of hygiene and health could be administered. A need for improvement was evident in the poor quality of housing, nourishment and garments, as well as “helplessness against acute diseases”, overstrain, etc., all of which encroached on the physical condition of the people and limited their growth. The biggest curse was an exceptionally high infant mortality — this was attributed, according to an

unnamed “Russian physician”, to a low quality of care, which resulted in the death of healthy babies, due to weakening in their early years. Tanner turned down the usage value of eugenics and race hygiene: the rest of his concluding chapter proposed hygienic, but not race-hygienic measures of improvement to the health of the Skolt Sami society. He suggested systematic enlightenment in the general hygiene and child care most devotedly given by an “educated holder of a scholarship” (“fackligt skolad stipendiat”, Tanner wishing to underline this point). The Skolt Sami had hope and vitality, due to their receptive minds and their subsistence inherited from their forefathers, which was healthy as such (a notion backed by a reference to another Russian physician, Schmakoff) [12, pp. 328–329]. In the actual historical setting, the Skolt Sami were connected to the national health project: district physician Lauri Halonen began to visit the Suonikylä winter village and vaccinate babies, and school children received a medical examination once a year; there was also a small store of medicines and dressings at the school [18, Nickul K., p. 57].

Tanner returned to the main agenda of his book, the poverty caused by giving up the old Skolt Sami form of subsistence, semi-nomadic reindeer herding, resulting in the disintegration of the northern society. Tanner added a new element to the scheme, the way in which no new settled subsistence had yet replaced the old one and the Skolt Sami had not yet entered the phase typical in the development of a ‘natural’ people in contact with the more ‘advanced’ cultures: well-being first sinking drastically, but slowly rising again once the value of the new subsistence was grasped and the natural people learned to take advantage of it, and when the individual and collective benefits of the new subsistence revealed themselves. The key would be the improvement of the economic situation of the Skolt Sami, enabling them to attain a happy life sometime in the future. Tanner added that the Finnish state should not be a hindrance in this. If the economic situation were to improve, then *“we do not at all have to be afraid that the orthodox Petsamo-Lapps either become extinct or degenerate, as has been asserted”* (italics in the original) [12, Isaksson P., p. 329]. Tanner’s stance in relation to race biology and the most racist writing of the Sami finally becomes clear — the Skolt Sami are a folk capable of development. But hierarchies still taint the text, due to the position in which the Skolt Sami found themselves, on the lower rungs of the ladders of development and culture, as defined by Tanner. There is no contradiction between Tanner’s positive coding of semi-nomadism and the new position he took regarding the poor state in which its abandonment had resulted: the semi-nomadic option was now lost and the folk was progressing on a scale set by Tanner. This was, in addition, an implied criticism of Finland’s unsuccessful state policies.

It may be said, as a preliminary conclusion, that Tanner did not have a problem placing the Sami at a low level of cultural evolution (wildness-hunting-pastoralist-agrarian-industrial/urban), like many other scholars who were becoming increasingly social evolutionistic and theorizing about Aryan and other stronger races pushing the Lappish ur-folk to the fringes of Scandinavia. Concerning Scandinavian nation-building projects, this idea had a good resonance and the role of the Sami was fixed as lower [8, Isaksson P., pp. 99–104; 9, Kyllingstad J.R., pp. 23–25]. Finnish theorizing about the Sami was equally triumphalist and (the most racist) Finnish literature was loaded with remarks concerning the low origin of the Skolt Sami, which provoked Tanner [12, Tanner V., pp. 281–282]. These ideas of evolutionary schemes, or historical matrixes, were naturalized in the world-view of the people of those times, but what Tanner did was to code in positive terms the long pastoralist phase in which the Sami had been living. In this discussion he could not control the effect that the environment had on the status of the Sami throughout the book. Concerning Sami capabilities and the aptness of choice, Tanner displayed traits, which are at least paternalistic, but he made an effort to comment on the most aggressive hierarchizations. Tanner showed no willingness to get rid of race as a functioning, normative and constitutive category: one that was obvious to the eye, a psychologically pleasant position to adopt by those higher in the hierarchies, and definitely a part of the accepted beliefs of the scholarly traditions of the time. Tanner was most consistent in his negativity towards race hygiene.

The Swedish-Finnish racial and hygienic discourse

Three of the discourses, which provoked Tanner have been traced: the Scandinavian and Finnish discourses on the lower Sami, the way to locate the Skolt Sami in the Russian sphere, and a dislike of eugenics. Which positive influences and contextual factors might be said to be decisive in Tanner's hygienic salvage program? The levels of hygiene and the health of the nations were a debated issue in the young republic of Finland and this discussion provides a way of locating Tanner in the ideological field. First, a short inquiry into Finland-Swedish reasoning concerning racial hierarchies and after that, a discussion on Finnish and Swedish-Finnish debates concerning national and racial hygiene is undertaken.

The Finland-Swedish ideologists and politicians had a tradition of referring to Germanic racial superiority which they, in contrast to the Finns and Russians, possessed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The idea of two nationalities residing in Finland originates from the Svecoman, Finland-Swedish nationalist movement's reaction to Finnish nationalism, Fennomania. The difference between the two nationalities was racialized by Axel Olof Freudenthal during the 1850s and 1860s. The idea of the Swedes being a Germanic/Aryan race,

capable of state-building and higher up the ladder of culture in comparison to the Finns, received wide resonance among Finland-Swedes from the latter part of the nineteenth century onwards. In these vernacular hierarchies the Finns were placed alongside the Russians, while Swedish and Germans stood highest as the idealized standard [1, Kemiläinen A., pp. 144–150]. The Finnish originally belonged to the primitive, Turanic, Asian or Mongoloid races (according to various scholars). The Mongoloid characteristics were in a process of vanishing, however, because of a blending between the Finns and European races [19, Molarius P., pp. 94–97]. One of the groups to stress the racial difference between the Finns and the Swedes was that of Swedish-speaking physicians. This, together with the eugenic movement, was a matter of scholarly debate and only later was the notion of two folk-groups denied following research into blood-types [1, Kemiläinen A., pp.151–183; 20, Hakosalo H., p. 44].

The Germanic racial features of the Swedish-speaking population were said to include stamina, activity and other positive characteristics. Smaller, big-headed, oblique-eyed, serious and melancholic Finns were more prone to depression, passivity, collectivity, a tendency to mass-suggestion and other characteristics signifying primitiveness. This doctrine was backed up by a Scandinavian orientation and was advocated by, amongst others, the Swedish people's party (est. 1906). The dispute was about the possession of cultural and political power, since racial characteristics according to Gobineau, for example, were thought to determine societal relations and cultural potential. According to Hippolyte Taine's theories, humans were bound to their biological foundation, but a rise in cultural hierarchy was possible if taken gradually — too great a step up the socio-cultural-racial ladder would lead to tragedy and mismatches between character and the new environment. Taine's theories were applied in, for example, the literature of Finland-Swedes and are also visible in Tanner's ponderings on the Skolt Sami finding themselves in an unhappy phase of their development. One aspect of this was the fear of racial blending and the degeneration of the Swedish-speaking population, as well as fears concerning the threat that lower and more brutal racial characteristics posed to societal order. Culture was a force taming these primordial impulses in people [19, Molarius P., pp. 97–112].

In Finland-Swedish texts published at the turn of the century the racial status of the Finns was insecure: the position varied in different studies, but in many cases the Finns were categorized as Mongoloid; during the "Russification period" (1899 onwards), the Mongol race was affiliated to the Russian sphere and was further contaminated by Russophobic notions that flourished at the time concerning cultural stagnation, political instability and communism. The eastern connotations of Mongol-blame became a growing problem for the Finns as well, because

of increasing Russophobia and anti-Russian sentiments on the Finnish side [1, Kemiläinen A., pp. 112–114; 8, Isaksson P., pp. 261–270].

The racializing discourse about Russia and the Russians grew increasingly hostile during the 1910s and parts of the Swedish-speaking elite developed highly chauvinistic and anti-Russian attitudes. The battle for the Swedish language and culture also took on a societal-political dimension: a racial and cultural battle was being fought for independent Finland. The war of 1918 sharpened this discussion: the elite pointed out how during the war the Swedish-speaking population had shown greater immunity to Russian influence and Bolshevism. A racially healthy, Swedish-speaking population was a guarantee for Finland's independence within the parameters defined by the victorious White army [21, Knapas R., p. 142; 22, Mattila M., p. 121]. In race studies of that time, Finland appeared to be divided into Germanic and Mongoloid races, while the Swedish were safely and firmly in the highest Germanic ranks, or part of the "Nordic race" [1, Kemiläinen A., pp. 168–183; 8, pp. 270–281, 284, 297].

Tanner's book is mostly silent on the discourse on the racial superiority of the Germanic/Swedes, but there are quite a few passages that show a Scandinavian bias: the list of the gene pools of the Skolt Sami, dealt with above, and the way in which Tanner placed the Nordic race ahead of the Eastern-Baltic are explications of this. In an archived manuscript Tanner depicted Finnish settlers as less capable than Scandinavian peasants in adapting reindeer-herding as part of their multiple economy, but instead assimilating to Sami reindeer-herding, with an implication of collapsing downwards in the cultural hierarchies.⁶ This shows an indebtedness to the discourse on Swedish superiority, with which Tanner had an ambivalent relationship: it was an idea easy to adapt, but unusable, since the triumphalist stress on the superiority of the Germanic races cemented the low position of the Skolt Sami in the hierarchies and in the book. One undeniable inspiration is the troubled relationship with all things Russian — a discourse shared on the other hand by the nationalist Finns as well.

Tanner and the debate on national hygiene

In Finnish-Sami encounters, the most typical way in which the hygienic discourse is detectable is in the numerous assessments of the Sami level of hygiene provided by scholars and tourists in their travel accounts. Among the first things the tourists reported were the cleanliness of the clothing, personal hygiene and the hygiene of their housing; without much variation, the Sami ranked lower than the Finns or the Norwegians [23, Nyysönen J., p. 47]. Tanner reproduced

⁶ ATUM, AVT, box 3, folder 6a: Notater om samer, Manuskript (delvis): Nordlapparna och deras differentiering: manuscript with the same title.

this literary tradition as well in the section on the Sea Sami, where Tanner depicted their housing as clean, praising the way the Sea Sami detested vermin [12, pp. 68–69]. The *national* hygienic discourse, in its turn, was the site of debates aimed at finding ways to improve the situation encountered in Lapland and Petsamo. In Finland, the hygienic level of the nation needed to be elevated, as well as the national health and prosperity. The hygienic project had the patronizing task of elevating the morals of the lower classes to match those of the rising middle-classes: the ideals were thriftiness, industriousness, a high moral sense and high ethics [24, Halmesvirta A., pp. 13ff.].

The young nation was the object of numerous gathering projects. These projects built on the belief of the existence of a folk character, shared (in an essentializing way) by the whole group. This, like the shared culture of the nation, was prone to degeneration or regeneration, to decay or elevation, but could be moulded by the different national projects. The intrusion into the sphere of life was possibly deepest in the case of the hygienic project, known also from imperial policies, which elevated some aspects of the life quality of the objectified people at the cost of losing several of their cultural traits and subjecting the objects to cultural violence, through definition as lower, as uncivilized, as indigenes [24, Halmesvirta A., pp. 13ff; 25, Thuesen S., pp. 118, 128]. In nineteenth and early twentieth-century Finland, the elite bracketed wastefulness and poverty with a low level of hygiene, all of which were taken as the sign of a lack of culture among the lower classes [26, Heinonen V., pp. 137–138]. The priests of northern Lapland struggled with the culture shock of encountering levels of hygiene, the best that could be maintained in the living conditions of the nineteenth-century nomad Lapps, often living in turf huts. Ritva Kylli has also detected indications that priests engaged in enlightenment projects directed at the Sami, intended to elevate them closer to Finnish standards [27, Kylli R., pp. 312–314].

As elsewhere, where a “higher race” was confronted or existed and procreated in the same society as a “lower race”, the health and vitality of the higher race was perceived as threatened. The fear of degeneration, especially strong among Finland-Swedish physicians, lurked behind the dutiful attitude of the middle class. The racial hygienic discussion was initiated by Finland-Swedish physicians, who received inspiration from Sweden. The era was marked by debates between Swedish-speaking practitioners of medicine in favour of active eugenic measures of negative racial hygiene; these included the active prevention of reproduction among the Finnish-speaking lower classes, as well as among many other groups deemed biologically ‘useless’ from a physical, psychological, moral and social standpoint. The intended means included the denial of welfare measures and the right to marriage; sterilization and institutionalization; even castration [24, p. 139].

Some of the Finnish-speaking physicians took the view that eugenic reasoning was uncivilized; a truly civilized nation would allow even its weakest members to procreate. This principle of a love for mankind continued, for example, in Finnish medicine after the First World War. The task of medicine and elevated hygiene levels was to “democratize” the Finnish folk: instead of marginalizing the weakest and banning them from procreation, they were to be made stronger and fit, to become active citizens of the nation. The idea of a caring nation was thus introduced. Early in the twentieth century, the great majority of the Finnish-speaking hygienists felt that the good of the nation would not be served by eugenics and restrictions concerning marriage and reproduction in a thinly-populated country such as Finland. Reproductive effort was needed from everybody and rehabilitation was stressed as a means of improving and generating the working capacity of “degenerate” people. Finnish hygienists were more concerned about the pre-conditions of health, including both mental and physical factors. However, there was a small minority among Finnish-speaking hygienists who supported ideas of social and racial hygiene, and the war of 1918 led to a radicalization of this project during the 1920s and 1930s [24, Halmesvirta A., pp.13–23, 26, 30, 35, 41, 86, 142, 279–281; 28, Halmesvirta A., p. 219].

Given Tanner’s views on the hygiene and health of the Skolt Sami, his position concerning the national debate on (racial) hygiene was clearly that of opposing Finland-Swedish physicians and was almost identical to that of the Finnish debaters. Whether he was directly influenced by the debate or by Finnish arguments has been impossible to verify — Tanner made no reference to the debate, so one has to be open to the view that Tanner’s position and his programme of improvements to the national health of the Skolt Sami had other sources. He did refer, however, to the need for intervention on the part of medical experts, which may hint that he was aware of the discourse.

Having said that, some characterizations place Tanner in troubled areas of race research. The hygienic discourse addressed both individual morals and the collective health of the nation. Tanner sometimes added a moral element to his texts: in *Antropogeografiska* he mentioned syphilis among the threats and showed a tendency to represent the Skolt Sami as people with high sexual morals — a lack of which would constitute a serious risk to the health of the nation in the eugenic discourse [12, Tanner V., p. 329; 29, Tanninen M., p. 160].

A long literary and (often amateurish and repetitive) scholarly tradition had existed for over a millennium concerning depictions of the Sami which, some hundred years before Tanner’s career, had stopped comparing the Sami to monkeys in their appearance and sexual behaviour. Monkeys did figure in the racial discourse, however, in the way in which certain groups of people

of small posture were categorized as a group in-between a monkey and a man. This category was called the pygmy people. The biggest group to be categorized as this missing link were the blacks, who were sometimes considered to be akin to primates [8, Isaksson P., pp. 40–44; 9, Kyllingstad J.R., p. 119]. Note the categorization of the imaginary proto-Lapps, on Tanner's part, as semi-pygmy. The intertextual sources for this term are potentially numerous, but they do not differ in the position of pygmy races in evolutionary terms, where they rank lowest⁷. The discourse concerning racial difference had a strong appeal for Tanner, at times resulting in identifications that positioned him in a dubious corner of race studies.

In *Antropogeografiska*, Tanner employed several methods of physical anthropology. Tanner determined that the Skolt Sami were a blended race on the basis of a method deriving from amateur physiognomics, an analysis made on the basis of the first impressions gained by looking at the facial characters of the Skolt Sami he met [12, pp. 282–286]. Tanner also expressed a hope for a study on psychic anthropology, the thought and emotional life of the Skolt Sami. This last-mentioned demonstrates some level of readiness on Tanner's part to glide from a purely quantitative interpretation of the races in a more socio-biological direction, drawing analogies from racial measurements to the spheres of culture and social characteristics. Race psychology and the study of mental characteristics of groups of people was a debated field, criticized for its use of subjective, unverifiable data by, for example, Halfdan Bryn (even though he used it in his studies), by Kristian Schreiner (ditto, in his popular scientific production) and by Herman Lundborg (who thought this scientific aspect would require more detailed observation) [9, Kyllingstad J.R., pp. 88–90, 133, 152]. Tanner remained mostly on the quantitative side, however, avoiding normative-descriptive passages of the races.

Conclusions — Tanner the Social evolutionist

As mentioned, Paulo Susiluoto was of the opinion that Tanner did not lend any explanatory power to race biology in his interpretation of Skolt Sami society and culture [6, p. 16]. The key term here is race biology, the most aggressive results of which Tanner disputed. He appears to have shared the racial paradigm, but racial discussion in his book was a discussion of the 'facts', the results of current scientific research, proof (desired) of the Karelian origin of the Sami. These were legitimate elements of the scientific discourse at that time, which could be discussed in a scientific manner and, in Tanner's case, could be and were chosen to transform the negative image of the Skolt Sami. The problem was that the very scheme and discourse, which Tanner used

⁷ This term might originate from Bryn, Halfdan: *Menneskerasene og deres utviklingshistorie*, Olaf Norli forlag, Oslo 1925, on the reference list in *Antropogeografiska*.

to elevate and halt groups of people on the ladders of rationality and adaptation, still positioned the Skolt Sami as the lowest on the racial and societal ladders.

A decisive question in deciding Tanner's position in the field of racial thinking is whether he distinguished between and acknowledged a racial variation of mental abilities. *Explicit* ponderings on the alleged superiority of the Germanic race are absent, and he did not use the term "Aryan race" in the book. However, Tanner perception of western as a stronger cultural and economic form is visible in coding the Sami as eastern group, and Tanner's perception of Slavic impulses: both entities were coded as lower. On the other hand, Tanner's way of dealing with reindeer-herding does demonstrate a sensitivity to different kinds, contexts or environmentally-specific rationalities. This kind of cultural relativity became the rule only after the ideological collapse of physical anthropology after the Second World War.

If race did not determine the Skolt Sami culture, then what did? Tanner was more blatantly a social evolutionist, in stressing the role of the economy: he showed how the ideal subsistence economy would have to give way to economic forms that resonated better with the needs of the current time. This was already taking place among the semi-nomads of the region, and would also be the fate of the peasants, if the region or wilderness was modernized "suddenly". Tanner stressed the role of modern transport and the road reaching the Skolt Sami domicile, which would lead to an influx of cheaper food, which would in turn render subsistence farming unprofitable. Cultural impulses would label the old means of subsistence unwanted, in the face of the benefits of modern life. Tanner coded modernization as positive and referred to the strong modernization already taking place due to impulses from cultivated areas. The risk was that modernization might make living conditions so easy that this would attract a loose and idle population to the region. This would make the "natural selection" among the "strongest characters" ("voimakkaimmat luonteet") more difficult, highlighting the social evolutionist traits in Tanner's thinking [30, Tanner V., pp. 79–80, 83, 90].

During the 1920s, Tanner wrote an outline paper about the semi-nomadism of the Skolt Sami, in which he credited nature and the environment as an elementary force in building the material and the semi-nomadic culture. The foundations of the semi-nomadic way of management were laid early on in history during times of natural self-subsistence. The foundations comprised nature and the environment, the driving force was the economy, a way of organizing the economic foundation of life, which then moulded the cultural form. The last two mentioned are in dialectical relation with each other, adding a materialistic vein to Tanner's ideas. The culture was consequently nature-given, a typical way of thinking about layers of culture among the

bourgeoisie, who found themselves safe on the upper ladders of ideal, higher forms of culture [e.g. 9, Kyllingstad J.R., p. 184]. Intellectual culture could also be developed through cultural loans, but it was a function of the material culture for Tanner [compare Halvdan Bryn, for whom cultural evolution was a by-product of the biological evolution of mankind, quoted in 9, p. 127], which offers a clue concerning the possibility, at least, of a capability for internal development within a culture.⁸

What is remarkable is that Tanner did not lean towards the Finland-Swedish eugenic discourse, but to the Finnish hygienic discourse and to his own scheme of economy as the founding element of the culture. On this point Tanner shows his independence as a scholar, capable of dissociating himself from the racial discourses. Susiluoto is right, that Tanner sought order in the Skolt Sami society from societal practices, as well as from nature, and not so much from the perspective of race [6, Susiluoto P., p. 16]. Tanner used racial studies for their ability to elevate the Skolt Sami in those categories, and in addition, the concept of “type” does return in some passages of the book as an explanatory category. The number of variables resulted in ruptures in their prioritization: sometimes race was awarded the grand role it received in, retrospectively, more dubious segments of scholarship on race. This chapter is among the passages in the book that is unfinished, as Tanner obviously ran out of time to streamline the order of the variables, which expands Tanner’s reasoning in numerous partially contradictory directions.

In the same way as in archaeology and history, physical anthropology may be used to construct a new image of the past and national identity by homogenizing, diversifying or redefining the ethnicity of archaeological cultures [31, Okkonen J., pp. 65, 68]. Tanner took part in these struggles concerning pasts and contemporaneous presences, from a racial point of view as well, by constructing a race and settlement history where the main point appeared to be one of a distinct first-comer racial unit that began to assimilate with other peoples only later. In spite of a partial failure in producing coherent pre-histories in the book, the race studies were for Tanner not only avant-garde science but normal science, to use the typology coined by Thomas S. Kuhn; they were a legitimate branch of science in the quest to try to understand a folk and their future. Race studies were also a legitimate means in Tanner’s effort to convince the academic world of his research skills, and that *he* was avant-garde.

⁸ ATUM, AVT, box 4, folder 4, Notater om samiska forhold, undated manuscript.

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