

PREFACE

This book is a compilation of five individual contributions that highlight the gender equality perspectives of the indigenous peoples of the Arctic region, with a special focus on the Sámi communities. While the book offers an understanding of gender disparities, it specifically emphasises the reindeer-herding Sámi indigenous communities. It was prepared as one of the deliverables of a project entitled “Deconstructing Structural Inequality: Gender Equality in Reindeer-Herding Sámi Communities,” which was hosted at the Northern Institute for Environmental and Minority Law at the Arctic Centre of the University of Lapland and was funded by the Nordic Gender Equality Fund (NIKK) for two years, from 2018 to 2021. The project’s primary purpose was to build a network of scholars and stakeholders, including the Sámi female reindeer herders, to promote a dialogue on issues of gender inequality, particularly in the context of Finland, Norway and Sweden. However, the project also included participants from the Russian North and Greenland to examine gender equality issues connected to the project’s central theme. The project gathered relevant background knowledge from the existing literature, policy documents and legislation on gender equality that may apply to the Sámi and their reindeer-herding communities, which eventually facilitated dialogues amongst the participants.

The dialogues took place in two intensive workshops organised by the project, whose purpose was to develop a set of possible policy perspectives to help promote an understanding of gender (in)equality and to offer some groundwork for possible policy measures to improve gender equality amongst the reindeer-herding Sámi communities in the three Nordic countries. The first workshop was a physical meeting held in January 2020 in Stockholm, and the second was organised online (due to COVID-19 travel restrictions). The workshops stimulated dialogues on issues that could have direct or indirect effects on gender equality in the Sámi reindeer-herding communities. The project’s participating institutions included the University of Lapland (Finland), the University of Oulu (Finland), Nord University (Norway), Luleå University of Technology (Sweden), the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, (Sweden), the University of Greenland (Greenland) and Northern Arctic Federal University, NArFU (Russia).

Four of the five contributing authors to the book participated as partners in the project, and all five have brought interesting insights related to several crucial aspects that affect gender equality amongst the indigenous communities of the North. The first chapter presents studies concerning concepts, practices and ascribed roles that either limit or promote indigenous women and their expectations and that reinforce colonial gender divisions. This chapter encourages careful consideration of the context of predatory capitalism and male privilege.

The second chapter provides a historical overview of gender equality amongst the Sámi in the area that is nowadays known as Finnish Lapland. The study focuses on the populations of Utsjoki, the northernmost Sámi parish of Finnish Lapland, and Inari, situated on the south side of Utsjoki. The chapter compares the Sámi area of northernmost Finland with Sweden and the rest of northernmost Fennoscandia. It has been argued that, due to their inherited reindeer stock, the reindeer-herding Sámi women have often been economically independent and that there have been many outstanding female reindeer herders in Utsjoki and Inari in past centuries. However, according to the author, there were also certain limitations in women's lives, and the Sámi women of the past were marginalised in a number of ways. The women were usually unable to participate in the social and professional activities of Finnish society, and, though men and women had many similar kinds of duties in reindeer-herding Sámi families, there are historical examples of imbalances in the division of labour. The chapter suggests that, although labour divisions within the reindeer-herding families were sometimes very gendered, the gender roles of Sámi men and women also complemented each other. It further recognises that, despite their heavy domestic workloads, Sámi women often held acknowledged positions in their own communities (reindeer villages) and families.

The third chapter provides an overview of gender research on Sámi reindeer herding in Sweden from the perspective of the gender literature on family farms and agricultural transformation. The study focuses on three topics that have been central to the field: property transfer and succession; gender division of labour; and gendered identities. With a point of departure in (post)colonial perspectives, the chapter highlights how Sámi reindeer herders' experiences emerge at the intersection of (post)colonial and gendered inequalities. It explores how gender and (post)colonial norms and identities are reproduced and challenged and how they constitute and are constituted by structural inequalities. The analysis thus treats (post)colonial gender relations as the outcome of ongoing agentic processes.

The fourth chapter addresses the perspectives of women reindeer herders from the Russian North. The chapter offers several recommendations: to encourage women to establish an official self-employed status in order to support cooperative forms of reindeer-herding husbandry in which women can be employed as reindeer herders; to encourage the semi-nomadic lifestyle of indigenous women; to promote the development of facilities for processing reindeer-herding products managed by reindeer herders' families in the settlements; and to organise production cooperatives of reindeer herders to develop facilities for deep processing of reindeer products and thus increase the profitability of reindeer herding. Finally, the fifth chapter evokes Greenlandic perspectives on reindeer herding. The chapter provides a short history of reindeer husbandry in both mid-west Greenland and southern Greenland, which represents a contrast in that reindeer herding in Greenland is a male-dominated livelihood.

These contributions are not peer-reviewed, and the opinions expressed in the chapters are those of the individual authors. I am grateful to all the contributors for their insightful thoughts and deliberations.

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March 31, 2021