

## Marte Spangen, Tiina Äikäs & Anna-Kaisa Salmi RESPONSE TO BJØRNAR OLSEN

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In *Fennoscandia archaeologica* XXXIII, Bjørnar Olsen (2016) puts forward a defence against what he sees as a misrepresentation and devaluation of Sámi archaeology in, among other writings, the present authors' introduction to a special issue of *Arctic Anthropology* about 'Sámi archaeology and postcolonial theory' (Spangen et al. 2015). The special issue was the result of a session by the same name held at the Nordic TAG conference in Stockholm in April 2014. In the session description, the main topics for debate were stated to be 'What could a more explicit use of postcolonial theory add to Sámi archaeology? And can Sámi archaeology contribute to new theoretical developments?' (Spangen et al. 2014). Some of the papers for the session were rewritten for the subsequent publication as a result of the wide-reaching debates that took place at the conference. Olsen is critical to several of these papers. We will concentrate our response on some aspects of Olsen's criticism of our introductory text, though our comments may be relevant for his treatment of the other contributions too.

We are somewhat surprised by Olsen's framing of our introduction as an attempt to disregard the importance, quality or relevance of Sámi archaeology. This was never our intention. Indeed, our final sentence in the text calls for Sámi archaeology to explore postcolonial theory further as one possible way to develop into a 'yet more reflective, accessible, and consequential research field' (Spangen et al. 2015: 5, emphasis added), fully acknowledging that it is already so in many respects. Thus we would like to clarify that we do not see Sámi archaeology in general

as inferior to any indigenous or other archaeology around the world. Furthermore, we are aware of the self-reflexive and theoretical discussions that have taken place in research on Sámi pasts, especially in the archaeological community in Tromsø. We specifically point out in our introduction that Sámi archaeology has had 'questions about the dynamics of the past and present archaeological practices in Sámi contexts' as one among several recurring subjects that concur with important topics in postcolonial theory and critique (Spangen et al. 2015: 3).

Following Olsen's reading, we nevertheless conclude that we could have been more meticulous in our portrayal of Sámi archaeology to avoid any misunderstandings about the importance, impact and quality of the research within this field. Even a short introduction should include enough references to describe the field correctly, and our text would have benefited from some reworking to avoid possible misconceptions. We remind the reader, however, that our session and introduction aimed to discuss not the general state of theoretical debate in archaeology in northern Fennoscandia, but the *explicit* use of *postcolonial* theory in studies of Sámi archaeology. We agree with Olsen that our text omits some references that would have been relevant even to this more limited topic, including analyses of archaeological and historical representations of the Sámi (Olsen 1991a; 2000a; 2001; Baglo 2001a; 2001b; Berg 2001; Hesjedal 2001), and some attempts to use postcolonial theory in archaeological analyses of past Sámi societies (Spangen 2005; Immonen 2006; Bruun 2007; Bergstøl 2008). Still, the fact

that there has been some influence from postcolonial theory on certain researchers within Sámi archaeology, predominantly at the University of Tromsø, hardly invalidates our opinion that this theoretical complex could be employed more widely and more explicitly, and that this could contribute to develop the research field further.

Despite the criticism Olsen puts forward, we find that his article actually partly confirms this point of view. Apart from some appropriate reminders of relevant texts, Olsen includes references to a series of publications that are either not discussing Sámi archaeology (Olsen 1991b; Olsen & Svestad 1994; Falck 2000; 2003) or not making explicit use of postcolonial theory (Gjessing 1973; Kleppe 1977; Reymert 1980; Odner 1983; 1989; Schanche & Olsen 1983; Olsen 1986; 2000a; Schanche 1986; Baudou 1988; Zachrisson 1988; 1994; 1997; Storli 1994; Opedal 1996; Wallerström 1997; 2006; Bolin 1999; Carpelan 2006). These examples appear to illustrate our point exactly; while postcolonial theory has been a relatively hot topic in archaeology in general, many valuable contributions in Sámi archaeology have discussed issues that align with the main subjects of postcolonialist debates without specifically drawing on the conceptual frameworks these could offer (though partly because some of the mentioned works were published before postcolonialism was articulated as a theoretical approach).

Considering the relatively substantial amount of archaeological work concerning the Sámi that has been published since the 1970s, not only by researchers in Tromsø but also by archaeologists at other universities and museums in Norway, Sweden, Finland, Russia, and elsewhere, we stand by our claim that the examples of archaeological studies of Sámi pasts where postcolonial theory is explicitly discussed and made use of are rather few and far between. Stating this is not to deny Sámi archaeology some position and importance, but we suggest that discussing the theoretical concepts of postcolonialism in more detail could clarify important issues, methodologies and discussions on culture, identity and research ethics in a wider range of this archaeological research. It could also contribute to connect the field even better to relevant discussions on similar topics around the world and within other disciplines.

As for the latter point, Olsen seems to read this too as a devaluation of Sámi archaeology, apparently deeming references to a broader debate, and especially an Anglophone debate, as a downfall to an existing hierarchy in archaeology or science in general, where research and developments in the perceived peripheries are not granted autonomy or innovative power (cf. Olsen 2016: 216, 219). The uneven distribution of power in academia is indeed a pressing issue and an interesting debate to keep in mind. Yet, our point was not that Sámi archaeology needs Anglophone recognition in order to be interesting or valid, but rather that Sámi archaeology can both gain from and have something to contribute to such debates. Putting more issues of Sámi archaeology into interplay with other ongoing discussions of, for instance, postcolonial theory worldwide would introduce the unique and valuable results and experiences from this field to a broader audience and thus influence this ongoing debate, as well as be influenced by it.

It seems, both from our previous experience and Olsen's article, that this would require a more extensive use and discussion of *explicit* postcolonial theory in Sámi archaeology, as well as more publications that make such examples available to an international audience. Apart from his own work (Olsen 1991a; 2000b; 2001), Olsen's relevant examples are predominantly unpublished M.A. and PhD theses in Norwegian (Baglo 2001a; 2011; Berg 2001; Hesjedal 2001; Spangen 2005; Bruun 2007; Bergstøl 2008; though see Baglo 2001b; Immonen 2006). Form and language render these works somewhat limited readership, even among researchers within Sámi archaeology in neighbouring countries of Finland and Russia. Pointing this out is not to say that the mentioned theses hold little or no value. On the contrary, we agree with Olsen that these writings are generally of high quality and importance, and of interest beyond the field. Still, the lack of published work made accessible to an international audience is a plausible reason why general introductions to the topic of postcolonial theory and archaeology do not mention Sámi archaeology as a frontrunner (e.g. Lydon & Rizvi 2010; van Dommelen 2011; Gosden 2012), even if the issue of Sámi iden-

tity in Scandinavian archaeology may be noted in more general introductions to archaeological theory (e.g. Hodder 2001: 2–3).

This lack of publications and mentions of Sámi archaeology employing postcolonial theory is not necessarily a problem. Postcolonial theory is not, of course, the only way forward. As Olsen points out, other aspects of post-structural theory have impacted researchers within this field, especially in Tromsø (Olsen 2016: 216), possibly making explicit postcolonial theory superfluous. This would be a standpoint that we respect and that we would be happy to discuss further, as expressed by our wish for participants in the initial conference session to consider both what postcolonial theory can contribute to Sámi archaeology and ‘perhaps as much, what it cannot contribute’ (Spangen et al. 2014; 2015: 3).

Olsen does not, however, present a coherent opposition to a wider and more explicit use of postcolonial theory in Sámi archaeology but apparently aims to show that this has already been done. We would question this as a valid reason to forego another discussion on this constantly evolving theoretical complex, especially based on the response to our conference session, which indicated that a recapitulation is in high demand among researchers dealing with Sámi issues. According to several recent texts about Sámi pasts and postcolonial approaches that Olsen includes in his criticism (Spangen 2015; Gjerde 2016; Hakamäki 2016; Huggan & Jensen 2016; Ekeland 2017), all of which were published or made available after our conference session in 2014 and the subsequent writing of the special issue of *Arctic Anthropology*, it seems that the time is exactly right for a further discussion of this topic.

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