Images of the North: A Minority in North Norway

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The Finnish author Samuli Paulaharju, who is best known for his research on Finnish folk culture, was also a dedicated photographer. The photo archive at Tromsø Museum contains his unique collection of photographs from the 1920s and 1930s, the period of his research in North Norway. Earlier research has focused on Paulaharju’s collection of folk culture. However, his photographs have been the object of analysis or discussion to only a minor extent, even though these pictures have been used for the purposes of documentation and illustration to a considerable extent, both by Paulaharju himself and by later authors. When Paulaharju was taking photographs in North Norway, the intention was that his documentation project should contribute to the building of the Finnish nation. He also used the photographs to visualize Finnish history and folk culture in his books. These same photographs have been used in Norway to revitalize Kven culture and to illustrate Norwegian culture, in local studies as well as in regional and general studies. Paulaharju’s main project was to create an image of what was left of “authentic” Finnish culture. My assumption is that these photographs, even today, are used as images that show the “authentic” past of the Kven culture. Kven culture is understood to be distinct from Finnish culture, within the ongoing ethnic revitalization process amongst the Kven in North Norway, as an ethnic minority culture that has developed from the meeting of Finnish, Norwegian and Sami cultural impulses.

In this lecture, my aim is to set in focus the extent to which, and how, these photographs are used as illustrations today. What story or contexts are the photographs given? In other words – do the photographs express the same meaning in changing contexts?

1 See Olsen 1984 and Harju 1989.
Samuli Paulaharju's main project

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Finnish-speaking peasants and fishermen emigrated from the northern parts of Sweden and Finland to North Norway, or Ruija, as it was known in Finnish. The immigrants who settled in this area were known as the Kven. By the 1920s, this area was viewed in Finland as a place where traces of “authentic” Finnish culture and language still existed. Samuli Paulaharju and his wife Jenny visited North Norway on five occasions between 1925 and 1934² (Figure 1). During these summertime visits they gathered a huge amount of ethnographic, linguistic and historical material, which later formed the basis of two publications: *Ruijan Suomalaisia* (Finns of Ruija), published in 1928, and *Ruijan äärimmäisillä* (On the most distant islands of Ruija), published in 1934. In addition, Paulaharju took almost 1,200 photographs in North Norway. Samuli Paulaharju’s travels in North Norway, and the publications based on these journeys, may be viewed as the continuation of a long tradition of Finnish nationalist cultural research in the north.³

Paulaharju’s photographs played an important role in his books and he was also involved in designing their layout. Photographs and text are closely connected and it seems plausible to draw the conclusion that the pictures were an important part of Paulaharju’s main project, which was to document traces of the old Finnish culture of the high north that by now was more or less lost in Finland itself.

The historian Teemu Ryymin has analysed the kind of images or representations of the Kven that are to be found in Paulaharju’s main publications from North Norway.⁴ In order to assess these, he has looked at three different elements in Paulaharju’s books: the character of the Kven as pioneers of civilization, their “ethnic virtuosity” and their relationship with Norwegian society. Ryymin finds that the images of the Kven, created by Paulaharju in the books about North Norway, were highly idealized. According to Paulaharju, the Kven were pioneers of civilization in the area and this was made possible by their “ethnic virtuosity”. Like Finnish farmers, they were perceived as tough, capable and morally upstanding. Compared to the Sami, the Kven were depicted as vital and strong; compared to the Norwegians, brave and able. I would say that the photographs reflect these images to some extent, and as visual

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² Ryymin 2004.
⁴ Ryymin 2004.
expressions they contribute to the shaping and reshaping of the ongoing discourse concerning Kven culture.\footnote{Ryymin 2004.}

The photographs are, as we shall see, still frequently used as illustrations for different texts and publications today. There are probably many reasons why these pictures have become so popular. The main reason why these pictures have this force of attraction lies, I think, in the character of the material. The material contains a lot of really good motifs of high quality. Paulaharju regarded the people among whom he travelled with respect and empathy; this also applied when he was taking pictures. Nearly one-third of Paulaharju’s photographs are portraits, or show people in everyday life. He was also preoccupied with children, photographing them when they were playing, working, at school and in groups. Within Paulaharju’s project, it was important to him to document working life, primary forms of industry and the settlements by means of photographs. His photographs also indicate that he was inspired by the natural surroundings through which he travelled (Figures 2, 3 and 4).

**Paulaharju’s photographs as forms of illustration and documentation**

The photographs that Paulaharju has passed on continue their existence through new publications, and in other contexts. Posterity’s use and presentation of these photographs has had a great impact on perceptions of Kven culture. It is therefore important to discuss how these photographs have been used and interpreted in the form of documentation and illustration.

**Documentation**

Paulaharju’s photographs have been used as a basis for the revitalization of Kven culture on several occasions. In Norway there is a long tradition of national costume in both the Norwegian and Sami cultures. In 1995 the Norwegian Kven national association decided to create their own, separate folk costume. In the process it became important to find and reveal authentic clothes worn by the Kven. One important basis of this project was Paulaharju’s descriptions and photographs, and the inclusion of stripes in the costume is based on this material (Figure 5). In addition, when a monument in memory of the Finnish immigrants was erected in Vadsø in 1977, the artist based his design details on Paulaharju’s photographs (Figure 6).

**Illustration**
The most comprehensive use of Paulaharju’s photographs remains as publication illustrations. In order to demonstrate how Paulaharju’s photographs have been used as illustrations, I have studied 21 different publications dealing with various aspects of the history of North Norway. These publications display 182 photographs taken by Paulaharju. The variations in how the pictures are presented in these books are almost identical to the number of books, but it is possible to identify some common features. History books dealing with local history tend to use photographs when the motif is from the same location as the text. For instance, the local history of Nordkapp (1991) contains 81 of the 301 photographs Paulaharju took in this area. The photographs as a whole in this book are closely connected to the locality mentioned in the text. Books that are more thematically orientated tend to use the photographs when the motif tells the same story as the text. Women carrying water, washing clothes and taking care of their children are motifs in a book about women in coastal Norway (Kystkvinner i Norge, 2004). In these types of books, there are seldom any references to ethnicity. The people portrayed are generally perceived as a representative cross-section of the public. But when Kven history is narrated, the motifs are often labelled as “Kven”. One of Paulaharju’s pictures (Figure 7), showing two girls playing, is entitled thus: “The Kven children are playing” (Kvenbarna leker). In order to offer a closer insight as to how Paulaharju’s photographs are used as illustrations, I shall give a few examples.

*Seven brothers in Vadso*
Paulaharju’s portraits of children are popular and there are numerous examples where children’s portraits are used as illustrations. Perhaps the best known and most frequently used is this picture from Vadso (Figure 8). Aurora Harila gave birth to ten sons and in 1928 Paulaharju photographed the first seven of them. This picture was hardly a product of coincidence. Paulaharju was greatly influenced by the second wave of Finnish national romantism, and he was presumably inspired by the Finnish author Aleksis Kivi (1837-1872) and his novel “Seven Brothers” (1870). In one book about cultural history in Northern Norway (Nordnorsk kulturhistorie, 1994), this picture illustrates the headline “Demographic explosion”. In this context, the picture may be seen as a visual example of demographic increase in general, both the decrease in mortality and the increase in fertility. The same photograph is used as an illustration in another book, a kind of journey through cultural history in North

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7 For instance, Guttormsen 1997.
8 Drivenes, Hauan & Wold 1994:94.
In this book, the seven brothers are intended to depict the first immigrant ghetto in Norway, the Kven “village” within Vadso. This example indicates how shifting contexts influence the meaning of the photographs. The seven brothers are perceived both as an example of demographic development in general and as Kven boys from the ghetto.

A woman, a child and milk preservation
Sometimes the photographs are attached to completely different stories (Figure 9). In 1934, Paulaharju photographed a woman and a child in a house in Børselv, in Porsanger. In one instance this picture has been used to support the knowledge that drinking fermented milk was common among the Kven (Porsanger bygdebok, Volume 1, 1986). In another book (Lyngen regionhistorie, 2005), this picture is supposed to illustrate the fear that people felt during the war between Russia and Sweden in 1741-43, when people fled to North Norway. This example shows how the same picture can be used to tell completely different stories.

The man and the pole
(Figure 10) Five of the 21 publications that are included in this study use this picture of Nils Jakobsen Nutti as an illustration. They have been published over a period of almost 20 years (1986-2005). In each of them, this photograph has been used to illustrate the narrative about a trade market in Skibotn in Troms that existed during the period between 1550 and 1950. All five books tell the same story about this person, and the five captions convey information about Nils Jakobsen Nutti and his participation in this market in different ways. A lot of Paulaharju’s photographs have been recycled, but none of the others to this extent. The repeated use of the motif, showing “Nutti” at the market, makes the photograph almost a symbol or icon of this local historical event. This example clearly shows the wide range of use to which Paulaharju’s photographs have been put, and how the same picture has been used to tell the same story over and over again.

Conclusion
Samuli Paulaharju’s photographs have been, and still are, used as a source to tell many different stories. While Paulaharju’s intention was to use his photographs to

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illustrate Finnish culture and history, the photographs have been used in Norway to illustrate Kven history and North Norwegian cultural history. Several other photographers’ work has been included in these books, but none of them have been used to illustrate books to the same extent as Paulaharju, nor have they achieved the same status. Whenever Paulaharju’s photographs are used as illustrations, his main project is seldom referred to. The extensive use of his photographs over an extended period of time indicates that they occupy a position of proof of authenticity. One might speculate whether Paulaharju’s photographs could be interpreted as a guarantee of genuineness and authenticity in the final product: this might apply equally to a book about the Kven, about local history or about North Norwegian cultural history.
Bibliography:


