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Jåstad, H. L., Viewing Ethnicity from the Perspective of Individuals and Households: Finnmark during the Late Nineteenth Century, in P. Axelsson and P. Sköld (eds.), *Indigenous Peoples and Demography. The Complex Relation between Identity and Statistics*, Berghahn Books, to be published April 2011.

(It is a peer review anthology)

Viewing Ethnicity from the Perspective of Individuals and Households: Finnmark during the Late Nineteenth Century

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In Norway, historical sources which yield first-hand information about how different ethnic groups defined themselves are scarce. Second-hand information on the other hand is available in the population censuses undertaken from 1845 onwards.¹ The first part of this article gives a brief description of the source material, and in order to evaluate the strength of the ethnicity variable given in the population censuses a comparison is carried out with J.A. Friis's population table attached to his ethnographic map of 1861 and his estimate of the Sámi population (Friis 1861: 1-5). In the second part of the article the focus will be on the instructions given to census takers and how they carried out their work in practice. There will also be a discussion of the usefulness of a reorganisation of census data into household units and how this strengthens our understanding of ethnic registration. A key finding here concerns the degrees of ethnic homogeneity and heterogeneity in households. The extent of mixed marriages, both in time and space, will also be an important issue for discussion. Mixed marriages can be a key variable in understanding social interaction between different ethnic groups.

Source Material

In contrast to the 1845 and 1855 censuses, which were founded on household units, the censuses from 1865 onwards were established on the enumeration of individuals. Based on the instructions issued to census takers between 1845 and the turn of the century, the impression is that ancestry was the most commonly used criteria for categorising ethnic identity, somewhat vaguely defined in the censuses up until 1865, but very distinct in the 1875 census. The 1855 instruction asked enumerators to record the 'Lapps or Finns and Kvens of the parish'. The 1865 census instructions were more comprehensive, specifically asking, for example, that resident Sámi and nomadic Sámi were to be reported separately. The instructions also stated that when 'mixed heritage' occurred, the parents' 'nationality' had to be reported as well. In the 1865 and 1875 censuses, a record of linguistic knowledge was also kept, whereas the census taker was instructed to specify whether or not the subject understood the Norwegian language. While there were no changes in the instructions concerning

spoken language, the instructions became more complicated when it came to ethnic markers. As an example of this, the ethnicity of each parent had to be noted, and as a result the ethnic marker in the 1875 census could be made up of as many as sixteen combinations.

Thus, it may be correct to suggest that the 1855 instructions, and partly also the 1865 instructions, followed a kind of 'nationality criteria' which was fully developed in 1875; and further, that the 1855 instructions did not specifically define this but relied on identified differences between ethnic groups. Interestingly, some important changes occurred in this period, changes which dissolved the rather simple and well-arranged ethnic categorisation displayed in the enumeration form prior to 1875. What the census takers discovered, and what caused problems both schematically and statistically, was that Sámi, Kven and Norwegians related to each other and acted together in several arenas, something which also led to mixed marriages. This 'mixture' caused a statistical challenge at the time. As early as 1855, mixed ethnicities were registered, and this was formalised in the 1865 census instructions, then fully cultivated in the earlier described sixteen combination scheme developed in 1875.

During the last part of the 1800s, the Norwegian linguist, theologian and author Jens Andreas Friis created two ethnographic maps of the two northernmost provinces in Norway, Troms and Finnmark (Friis 1861, Friis 1888). These maps show the ethnic and linguistic composition of the population in 1861 and 1888. The mapping was conducted at a household level, using three ethnic categories: Norwegian, Sámi and Kven. When categorising the population by ethnicity, linguistic knowledge seems to have been an important criterion in Friis's work, in that the map contained detailed linguistic symbols. This observation is also strengthened by the fact that Friis sent the following instruction to the priest in Vardø parish in 1887 when revising the 1861 map:

Nationality is defined by the language spoken in daily life by husband, housewife and the children in the home, unconcerned of clothing, heritage, etc. If, for example, Sámi is the daily spoken language in the house, the family shall be marked and registered as a Sámi family, even if one of the parents originally is of a different nationality. The same goes if there are other nationalities in question (cited in Hansen 1998: 47).

This means that in cases where the criteria of ancestry was difficult to decide – for example, when it came to mixed marriages – Friis designated the ethnic identity of a household on the basis of the actual language spoken in the house. This change of focus also led to a revision of the symbols that Friis used. An example of this is the omission of Friis’s symbol for ‘Sámi household with Norwegian husband’ in his 1888 map (Friis 1888: 6 bl). It is therefore not unreasonable to assume that Friis contributed to the later development of the census instructions, in that the linguistic criteria had its distinct breakthrough in the 1891 census with a special language-column in the questionnaire form.ⁱⁱ Support for this view also comes from a document published in 1882 by the Statistics Norway. The document, a statistical survey of the 1875 census, emphasises Friis’s thoughts on language – not only in his ethnographical maps but also from his fictional production – which were clearly used to define the ethnic composition of the northern population in the official statistics from the late nineteenth century (Kiær 1882: 144-154). In addition, the linguistic criterion was most likely politically motivated as well. Mapping linguistic knowledge was an important process in the ever-increasing political strategy of the Norwegian State aimed at weakening Sámi culture and language. As Lars Ivar Hansen also notes, emphasis on linguistic criteria presents certain challenges, both with regards to the political pressure exerted by the Norwegian government in the late 1800s, but also with regards to whether or not it actually yields a deeper understanding of ethnic identity (Hansen 1998: 47). Hansen’s view on this is that language may be a more distinct ethnic marker than ancestry, because language may define cultural identity more strongly than ancestry.

The 1855 Census and Friis’s 1861 Map

The existence of Friis’s 1861 ethnographic map provides a great opportunity for evaluating the strength of the ethnic registration in the population census, and this is done by a comparison between the population censuses before and after Friis’s investigation was done. The results are presented at a household level. It is somewhat unclear if Friis defined ‘family’ as a kin related family unit or if he also included other non-related members of the household as well. In the 1855 census, the number of individuals on each farm was reported, and thus the household seems to be an appropriated basic unit for comparison. A comparison of the 1855 census and Friis’s

table, where parishes are separated into eastern and western Finnmark, can be seen in Figure 8.1.

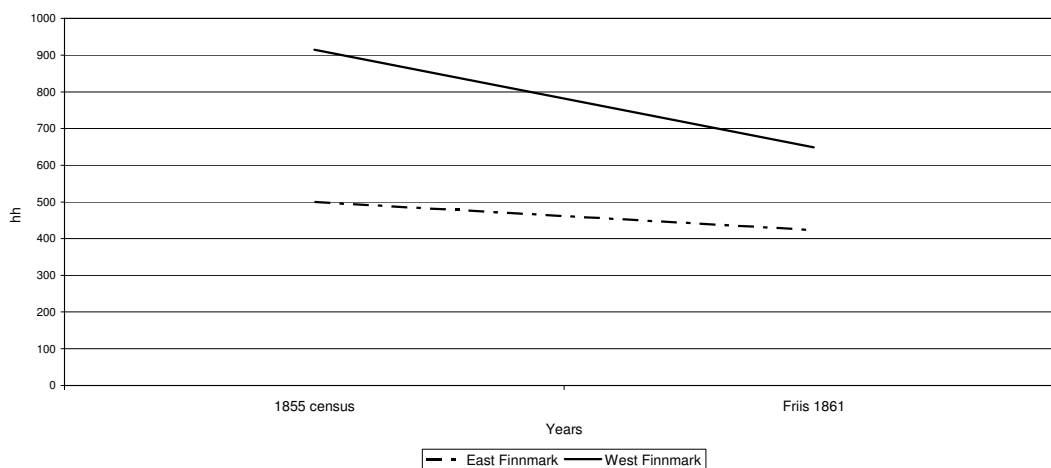


Figure 8.1: Sami population in eastern and western Finnmark in 1855 census and Friis' ethnographic maps from 1861. Number of households.

As Figure 8.1 shows, the number of registered Sámi household units clearly decreased, especially in western Finnmark, between 1855 and 1861. However, concerning those parishes where there were registered nomads in the 1855 census, it is fascinating to observe that the figure does not reveal the fact that the numbers Friis presented in 1861 deviate radically from the actual registration in 1855. A closer look at Kautokeino parish serves as a good example. In the 1855 census, Kautokeino contained 165 nomadic household units and 31 resident Sámi households. In 1861 Friis claimed that there were only 24 Sámi households in Kautokeino. A possible explanation to this may be that Friis, in addition to employing linguistic criteria, also categorised the population by way of dwelling type: earth hut or wooden house. Nomadic families lived in tents, and obviously did not fit into this system. Assuming that it was the priests who, to a certain extent, provided Friis with the basic material for the development of his maps (Hansen 1998: 47), it is reasonable to ask if it was the priest who forgot to report the nomads since their type of housing was a non existing option in the table, or if it was Friis who excluded them from his aggregates. In the tables which accompanied the maps, the term 'resident' was also used in parenthesis after the Sámi. It is unknown if Friis added the term 'resident' as he

finished his work on the table, or if it was a deliberate strategy to exclude the nomads from his ethnographic maps.ⁱⁱⁱ

During the period when the maps were published, the reindeer herders were victims of rather harsh public attacks. This was a consequence of several laws which benefited the Sámi in particular. However, through a series of newspaper articles published in 1865, Friis stood up as a defender of the reindeer herders (see Hansen and Niemi 2001: 366). The exclusion of the nomads in the 1861 map therefore seems like a paradox, as it stands in contrast to his subsequent defence of the Sámi. It may therefore be fruitful to visualise the map once more by adding to it the nomad household units recorded in the 1855 census (see Figure 8.2). As we can see, the registration of the Sámi population remained somewhat stable between 1855 and 1861, and it is reasonable to suggest that this stability may strengthen the validity of the source material.

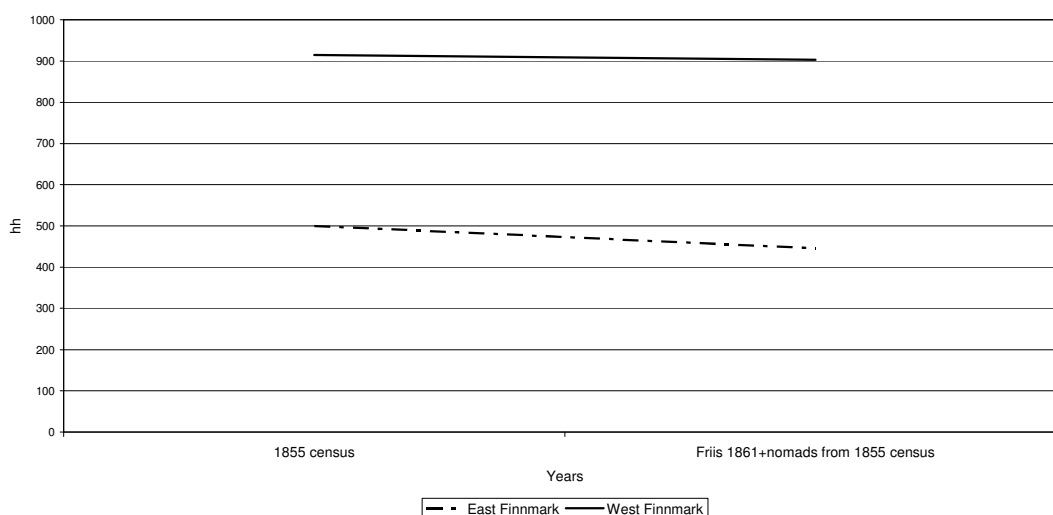


Figure 8.2: Sami population in eastern and western Finnmark in 1855 census and Friis' ethnographic maps from 1861 including nomads from the 1855 census. Number of households.

The Sámi population in the 1865 census

In contrast to the group-oriented ethnic registration of 1855, the 1865 census recorded actual individuals. The extent of ethnic registration in the 1865 census is such that ethnicity was recorded for every individual in ten of seventeenth parishes, a rate of more than 80 per cent. On the other hand, levels of recording ethnicity were rather

low in five of the parishes, between 1 per cent and nearly 30 per cent. In total, ethnicity was registered in approximately 68 per cent of the total population in Finnmark.

By comparing registration of Sámi ethnicity in the 1855 census and Friis's table from 1861 with the relevant data in the 1865 census, it is possible to get an impression of the extent of Sámi registration in the 1865 census.

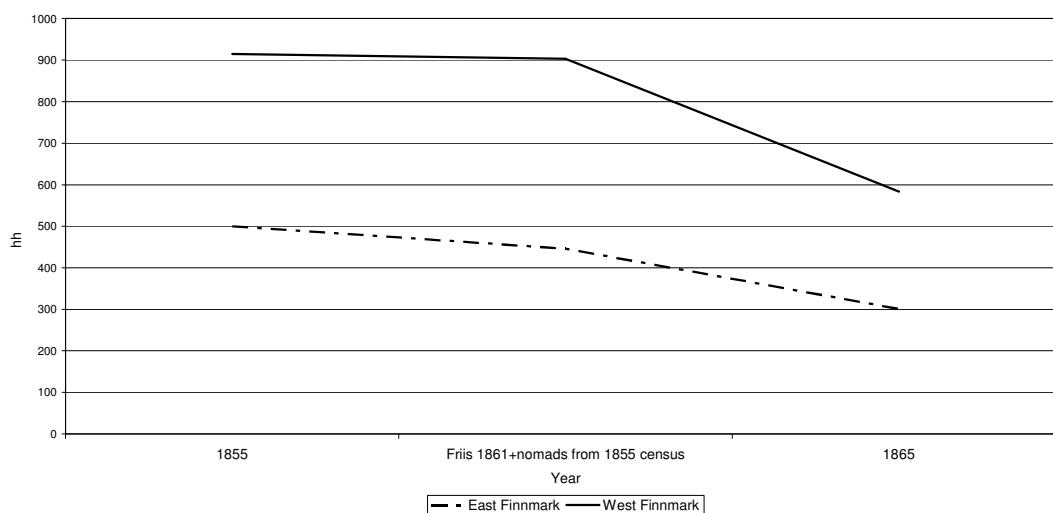


Figure 8.3: The 1855 census, Friis' ethnographic maps from 1861 and the 1865 census. Extent of Sámi registration in eastern and western Finnmark. Number of households.

Figure 8.3 shows that the number of Sámi households declined, especially in west Finnmark between 1861 and 1865. One way to interpret this is that the decrease was a result of the aforementioned missing ethnic markers in the 1865 census. Even if this is a fact which cannot be ignored, one must also keep in mind that the missing markers are quite equally distributed between parishes in east and west Finnmark.

Furthermore, a comparison of Norwegian households between 1861 and 1865 shows a similar development: a decrease of 38 per cent. As discussed later, there was an increase in the number of mixed-marriages households between 1865 and 1875, combined with a more complex system of registering ethnicity at the individual level. This may also explain the decrease in the number of registered Sámi households. A sensible strategy will therefore be to examine the practice of the census takers in

1865, looking at whether or not this practice can in any way explain the downward tendency in the registration of the Sámi households.

Three Different Criteria

Seen from a household perspective, the 1865 census was heavily influenced by a distinct ancestry criterion, and this is typically found in mixed-marriages households where several different combinations were used to express the children's heritage and ethnicity. A look at many examples reveals that a given person's complex genealogy could yield a rather complex ethnic marker. An interesting question in this context is how to identify the ethnicity of Elen Hansdatter, daughter of Kven Hanno Person and Gaia Olsdatter, who was half-Norwegian and half-Sámi. In the census she and her siblings were marked as half-Kven, a quarter Norwegian and a quarter Sámi. Use of the ancestry criteria is especially clear here, and it was fully employed in some parishes, though apparently less so in others.

In some parishes it seems that genealogy was less preferred to a system of registration that employed what one might call a cultural criterion. In the 1865 census from Tana parish, John Jakobsen, a Norwegian, was registered as married to a Sámi woman. Despite this mixed marriage, the children were recorded as having Norwegian ethnicity. It is also interesting to observe a note recorded in the census concerning the housewife: 'Sámi, but changed to Norwegian' (*lap, men gaaen over til norsk*). Does this registration suggest a kind of ethnic patriarchy, whereby the household head defined the ethnicity of the rest of the household? It is also interesting to ask if women who married men from different ethnic backgrounds were assimilated into their husbands' own ethnicity and culture. From a gender perspective there is no information which points in this direction, and there are in fact some examples which reveal an opposite tendency, whereby Arne Nilsen marked as 'Norwegian, but changed to Sámi' and the children of his marriage with a Sámi woman are marked as Sámi.

Census registrations such as the one above were found in connection with every population group, independent of sex and ethnicity. What is interesting about these examples is the fact that they show us the cultural profile of the family, and that the cultural identity of the parents had quite a strong effect on the ethnicity of the next generation.

As I mentioned earlier, the use of the ancestry criterion reached its height in the 1875 census, and thus it is interesting to ask what then happened to individuals who, for example, were categorised as ‘Norwegian, but changed to Sámi’. In the 1875 census, Arne Nilsen appeared once again, and it is obvious that the cultural profile had disappeared from the registration, as he was recorded as having a Norwegian mother and father, and his children from his marriage with a Sámi woman were recorded as having a Norwegian father and Sámi mother. To what extent this also applies for the rest of the material remains to be seen.

Language is generally viewed as a strong marker of ethnicity, and it is therefore reasonable to ask to what extent a linguistic criterion was used in the 1865 census. However, no examples have been found which suggest that census takers, priest or other officials used the note concerning knowledge of the Norwegian language to determine ethnic identity. The general impression is that Sámi ethnicity was registered independent of notes such as ‘can speak Norwegian’ or ‘can speak some Norwegian’. Linguistic knowledge as a marker of ethnicity has not been found, even in mixed marriages, as we can see from the marriage of Sámi fisherman Elias Mortensen and his Norwegian wife Sophie Sørensdatter: there are no notes concerning linguistic knowledge pertaining to Elias, but Sophie, who was Norwegian, ‘does not speak Norwegian, lives like a Sámi’. This despite of the fact that she kept her Norwegian ethnicity and that her children were registered as half-Sámi and half-Norwegian.

The 1865 and 1875 Population Censuses

As has already been mentioned, the number of different ethnic categories defined in the census instructions reached their zenith in 1875 with sixteen different markers. However, the difference between what the formal instructions stipulated and what was actually registered by the census takers is significant. In the 1865 census fifty-five different ethnic markers were employed, while in 1875 this number increased to an astonishing seventy-one.^{iv} The fact that the registration practice challenged the boundaries of the registration scheme to such an extent is in itself interesting. The foregoing analysis showed clearly that in some wards census takers not only neglected the given instructions but also constructed their own systems of registration. These figures illustrates clearly that Finnmark was indeed quite a mixed ethnic society and that the construction of one common classificatory system may have

seemed almost impossible. In what way is the registration complexity displayed when we organise individuals into household units?

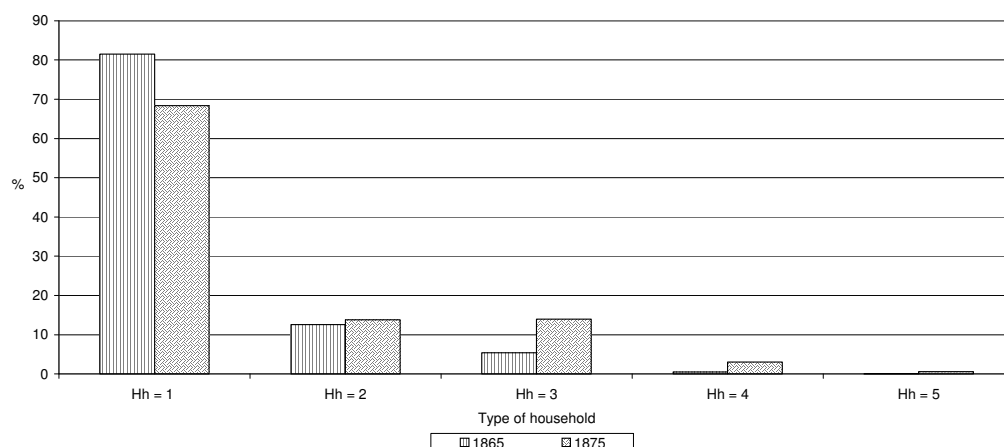


Figure 8.4: Amount of ethnic markers in each household. Percentage of total households. Finnmark 1865 (n=4,076) and 1875 (n=5,369).

Figure 8.4 shows households categorised in terms of the number of ethnic markers in each household; households with one ethnic marker dominated the picture with approximately 80 per cent in 1865. Looking at the 1875 census, homogeneous ethnic households still dominated, though one can also see that this group showed a downward tendency, and there was an increase in households with three different ethnic markers.

When comparing this figure with ethnic markers at an individual level, what becomes clear is that chaos gives way to order – despite there being 60 to 70 different ethnic markers, 70 to 80 per cent of households are ethnically homogeneous. In this context one may ask if this order was the result of the census takers' practices. Perhaps the census takers preferred to categorise households using just one ethnic marker? However, the number of different ethnic markers of each inhabitant is an obvious argument against this. When the census takers' enumeration was completed, census returns were looked over and authorized by higher authorities – such as the police or a priest – and ethnicity was one of four specific areas emphasised in this supplementary work. It is also worth mentioning that census takers in districts of mixed ethnic populations received higher salaries, which may have resulted in a more accurate registration in these areas.

The analyses presented above seem to indicate that household units maintained the characteristics of each ethnic group, unaffected by the ethnicity of each individual within the household. One wonders, therefore, whether or not this suggests that interaction between ethnic groups was not conducted or affected by individuals as such but by households, and that households were the basis by which ethnic markers – such as way of life, traditions, customs, habits, and so on – were maintained.

Mixed Marriages

Out of the approximately 2,700 households with known ethnic markers in Finnmark in 1865, 10 per cent contained mixed marriages. Comparing the extent of mixed marriages between the censuses, there was an increase to 15 per cent in 1875. In this context it would be important to identify any patterns concerning who married whom, and if some ethnic groups were more frequently involved in mixed marriages than others.

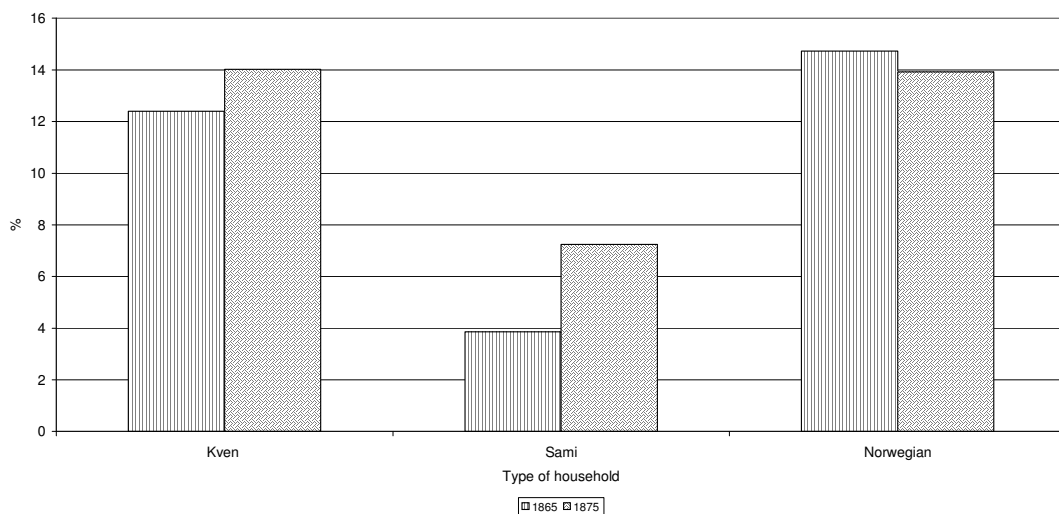


Figure 8.5: Mixed marriages categorized after housefathers ethnicity. Percentage of each ethnic household. Finnmark 1865 (Kven n=734, Sami n=1,219, Norwegian n=754) and 1875 (Kven n=1,198, Sami n=1,546, Norwegian n=1,982).

By categorising mixed-marriage households in terms of the ethnic marker of the household head, we find that 13 per cent of all Kven households and 15 per cent of all Norwegian households were mixed in 1865. Compared to these figures it is

interesting to observe that only 4 per cent of Sámi households contained mixed marriages in 1865. Comparing the two censuses also reveals another interesting pattern. That is, while the numbers of mixed marriages in Norwegian and Kven households were remarkably stable, the number of mixed marriages in Sámi households doubled from 1865 to 1875.

Evidence of marriages between Sámi and non-Sámi is known from folk literature, the old sagas, as well as from archaeological findings. Historians and archaeologists have for instance argued that relations between different groups of people during earlier times were maintained through marriages and trade (Hansen and Olsen 2004: 60). From the mid 1850s, however, this system of inter-ethnic relations was seen as a hindrance to the construction of the nation-state of Norway, and consequently the process of ‘Norwegianisation’ led to a ranking of ethnic identity (Mathisen 1993: 42).

When external conditions generated rank as an important element in inter-ethnic relationships, one’s forbears’ ethnicity – in particular, the ‘Norwegianness’ of one’s genealogy – became part of each individual’s assimilation strategies. Isolating ‘Norwegian’ forbears gave a person a ‘factual’ basis for appropriating Norwegian status, which they could not have done had marriage patterns been endogamous (Thuen 1989: 52–71). It is therefore important to ask if it is possible that the observed increase in mixed-marriages was a result of the Norwegianisation process. That is, was it part of people’s strategies for obtaining national rather than a minority identity?

Given the assimilation theory described above, it should be of interest to look at actual marriage patterns and choices. For example, Norwegian men would be regarded a ‘solid’ choice for marriage by both Kven and Sámi women; contrary, a Norwegian woman would seldom marry a Sámi or Kven man.

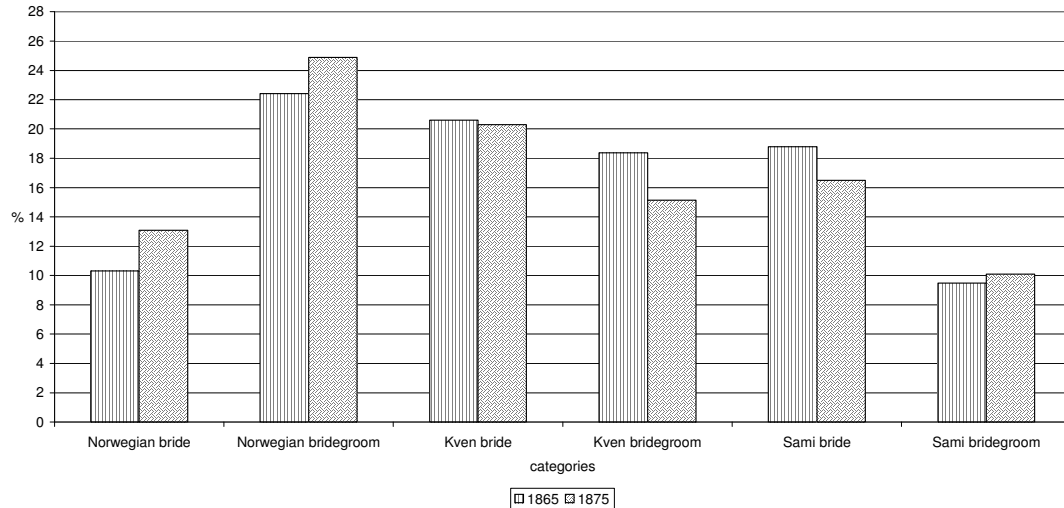


Figure 8.6: Amount of brides and bridegrooms distributed on ethnic categories. Finnmark 1865 (n=495) and 1875 (n=1,109).

Figure 8.6 shows the percentage of brides and bridegrooms in mixed marriages, by ethnic affiliation. Relatively to Sámi and Norwegian brides and bridegrooms, we see that mixed marriages involving Kven, men and women are somewhat similarly represented, especially in the 1865 census. Contrary, a more diverge pattern is revealed when studying mixed marriages involving Sámi and Norwegians: in 1865 there was approximately twice as many Norwegian husbands as there were Norwegian wives; and twice as many Sámi brides as Sámi husbands. This pattern is even more visible among mixed marriages that involved Norwegians in 1875.

By looking at the ethnic identity of partners in mixed marriages in 1865 (figure not shown here), the results show that Norwegian men married Kven women twice as often as Sámi women. Kven men, meanwhile, did not have quite as clear an ethnic preference in cases of mixed marriage: 40 per cent of marriages were with Sámi women, and 33 per cent were with Norwegian women. Sámi men, on the other hand, were only found in about 5 per cent of all mixed marriages. In 36 per cent of these, Sámi men married Kven women, and in 21 per cent of cases they married a Norwegian; in the remaining 43 per cent of cases the woman was of part-Sámi ethnicity. This pattern is repeated in 1875 as well. However, the 1875 census also shows that only 11 per cent of Sámi mixed marriages were with Norwegian women, and that in as many as half of the mixed marriages involving Sámi men the women involved were part Sámi.

This mixed-marriage patterns of twice as many Norwegian bridegrooms than Norwegian brides and twice as many Sámi brides than Sámi bridegrooms can be described as an inverse image and one can ask if it reflects the set of cultural preferences involving the choice of marriage partner operating at the time. Could it be that Norwegian men were the most attractive choice in marriage, and that the observed increase in mixed marriages in the Sámi population was a result of an increasing number of Sámi women marrying Norwegian or Kven men? Following this, one can also ask if it is possible that the observed increase in mixed marriages was a result of the Norwegianisation process. The Statistics Norway voiced similar thoughts in 1882:

The Norwegians are the dominant people, as they are richer and more educated ... Thus a woman, when she receives a proposal of marriage from a man belonging to a nationality regarded inferior to that of her own, will reject the proposal in fear of decreasing her reputation among her own people. But it is also obvious that the situation is completely different if a man seeks for himself a wife from lower-ranking nationalities. This will not be a matter of him stepping down the social ladder, but rather a case of her stepping upwards (Kiær 1882: 148).

Analysing mixed marriages gives us an interesting insight into social interaction between ethnic groups, and perhaps the different patterns of marriage we have identified also reflect the fact that interaction was to some extent affected by the emphasised placed on ethnic relations by the authorities. However, if the pattern of mixed marriages observed can be considered a result of the Norwegianisation process initiated by the authorities, and that marital choices were made on the basis of appropriating Norwegian status, this does not explain why between 80 and 90 per cent of the inhabitants of Finnmark were registered as living in homogeneous ethnic households. The analysis of Sámi mixed marriages might seem to indicate that some Sámi employed marriage as a means of gaining Norwegian status. However, when one compares Norwegian, Kven and Sámi marriage practices, and given the fact only 4 per cent of Sámi marriages in 1865, and 7 per cent in 1875, were of the mixed kind, it becomes clear that 'becoming Norwegian' was not something that involved the majority of the Sámi population.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the instructions given to Norway's census takers in Finnmark were not always carried out in the act of registration, and that registration practices varied between parishes. In some parishes it seems that an ancestry criterion was extensively used to record ethnic identity, while in other parishes one gets the impression that census takers used a cultural criterion as well as the ancestry criterion.

It is easy to imagine that the instructions issued by the authorities did not fit the population to be enumerated, and that census takers found it difficult to record information on ethnicity using either/or categories. This suggestion is strengthened by looking at registration practices on a parish level. It would seem that some parishes contained 'pure' Sámi populations, while other parishes contained a large number of mixed marriages and ethnically mixed households.

Due to different registration practices and the continually changing registration instructions, this chapter has argued that it may be fruitful to define an understanding of ethnicity within an area or region by analysing the ethnic marker on different levels. By reorganising the censuses to show information on households units, and analysing the extent of ethnically homogeneous and heterogeneous households respectively, one can obtain a better understanding of ethnic interaction. In this context it was also important to discuss the practice of mixed marriage.

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Notes

- ⁱ Both population censuses from 1845 and 1855 contain information about ethnicity, though at the household/farm level. Sometimes there is also some information in church registers, but this was not fixed by law.
- ⁱⁱ The instructions for 1875 told census takers to register which language Finns, Sámi, and people of mixed ethnicity usually spoke. This registration was done in an additional comment field. See Norges Offisielle Statistikk (1875).
- ⁱⁱⁱ However, in the revisions of his 1861 work, Friis mapped the routes between the winter and summer pastures of Sámi nomads, and also included an approximation of the number of families and reindeer. These figures are not summarised in the attached population table (see Friis 1888: 6 B1).
- ^{iv} These numbers include other foreign nationalities as well.