

Educational history in the age of apology: The Church of Sweden's "White book" on historical relations to the Sami, the significance of education and scientific complexities in reconciling the past

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Reconciliation processes – wherein governments and other organizations examine their past institutional practices to understand contemporary problems in relation to minorities or indigenous groups – have become a widespread international phenomenon in recent decades. In Sweden, such an ongoing process is the reconciliation work between the Church of Sweden and the Sami. In this process, which recently resulted in the publication of a scholarly anthology (or a “white book”), educational history has come to play a vital part. The present article uses the Church of Sweden's White Book as an empirical object of study to examine in more detail the role and significance of knowledge of educational history for this specific reconciliation process. By focusing on various scientific complexities and epistemological tensions that tend to arise in these kinds of undertakings, this paper also aims to problematize the white book genre itself as a path to historical knowledge. By doing this, this article's overall ambition is to contribute to future scholarly work in reconciliation activities, white papers and truth commissions. This study applies a qualitative content analysis and connects theoretically to the growing field of transitional justice research.

Keywords: Church of Sweden, Educational history, Reconciliation, Sami, White book.

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Introduction, aim, and research questions

Today reconciliation processes have become a widespread international phenomenon. Under pressure from various groups and NGOs, as well as from new political legislation, it has become increasingly common for governmental agencies and other large organizations to scrutinize their own historical past more actively and seriously in order to understand contemporary problems and conflicts, for example, in relation to indigenous peoples. Such an ongoing reconciliation process is that of the Church of Sweden and the Sami. In the early spring of 2017, the final publication of the Church of Sweden's white paper project on its historical relations with the Sami was published. This publication, aiming at popularizing and synthesizing the results of the project's main publication – a “scholarly anthology” including two volumes and more than thirty research-based articles – can be seen as ending an initial phase of this reconciliation process, namely a phase of building up a body of new knowledge on the focused area. What will happen with this new and compiled knowledge is yet to be seen (Lindmark & Sundström 2018).¹

The present article has a twofold aim. First of all, it sets out to analyze the role and significance of educational history knowledge, and thus of educational historians, in this kind of reconciliation process. This aim is delimited by following question: What does this specific case tell us about the role and character of educational history in contemporary reconciliation? In order to carve out and discuss the educational aspect of the historical relations between the Church of Sweden and the Sami, this article provides a brief account of the content of the White book as a whole. With this first aim, the article's ambition is to connect and contribute to the overall theme of this special issue.

The second aim has a more general and critical epistemological stance and involves problematizing the White book genre itself as a path to historical knowledge. We will deal with this aspect by addressing the questions: Why have these reconciliation processes and projects become so central in policymaking and social practice? What kinds of scientific complexities and epistemological tensions arise in these collective efforts of creating historical knowledge, and what implications does this have for our work as researchers and for our involvement in contemporary retrospective practices? By reflecting on these questions, this article hopes to contribute to future scholarly work on reconciliation, white papers, and truth commissions.

¹ The “white paper-project” can be seen as a compilation of the scientific publications D. Lindmark & Sundström, O. (eds.), *De historiska relationerna mellan Svenska kyrkan och samerna: En vetenskaplig antologi* 1–2 (Forskning för kyrkan 33), Skellefteå: Artos & Norma bokförlag 2016, and the popular publication D. Lindmark & Sundström, O. (red.), *Samerna och Svenska kyrkan: Underlag för kyrkligt försoningsarbete*, Gidlunds förlag: Möklinta 2017. E-version: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/vitboken>. The popular publication was translated to English and published in the autumn 2018.

The White book itself is used as the prime empirical object to answer the research questions, but in addition to this secondary literature is also used to problematize the White book project on a more general level. It should be clearly stated that both authors of this article have been highly involved in this white paper project. In fact, the article expands on the practical experiences from this work as well as on critical reflections on our professional roles as historians and historians of education that have been actualized in the process.

As regards to methodology, this can best be described as a qualitative content analysis in three progressive steps. The first step was a close reading of the 35 chapters in the anthology, the second step was a synthesizing of the empirical content as a whole (with specific attention paid to knowledge connected to the field of educational history), and the third and final step was the definition of complexities and tensions embedded in the anthology on a more analytical/theoretical level. All three steps were guided by the aims and research questions.



The Historical Relations Between the Church of Sweden and the Sámi: A Scholarly Anthology, Vol. 1 and 2, or the “White book”. The two volumes constitute the main basis of knowledge for the on-going reconciliation process between the Church of Sweden and the Sami.

White books and the politics of the past

In the beginning of the 21st century, a series of studies were published that sought to describe and explain the great increase of truth commissions,

public apologies, and other reconciliation initiatives in the 1990s (see e.g. Barkan 2000; Olick 2007; Torpey 2006). One direct reason for this growing research interest was, of course, that most Western countries, almost every post-totalitarian country in Eastern Europe and South America, as well as several countries in Africa had initiated or conducted investigations of historical injustices in their recent pasts. The reconciliation processes in the post-totalitarian countries had as a common aim to clarify the crimes of the fallen regime, requiring accountability among the perpetrators and compensations for the victims. These processes commonly fall under the notion of “transitional justice”. In stable democratic countries, different types of reconciliation initiatives also began. In historical truth commissions, investigations started to scrutinize the unjust treatment of vulnerable groups, for example, in public childcare and in education (Barkan 2000). Extensive enquiries of the treatment of children of indigenous peoples have been conducted in Canada and Australia (Arvidsson 2016). For example, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) focused on the residential school system in Canada in which approximately 150,000 children passed through over a period of 100 years. After comprehensive historical studies and after more than 6,000 interviews with former pupils at residential schools, the TRC concluded that the system was an important part of a coherent policy to assimilate aboriginal peoples into mainstream Canadian culture and society against their will. By separating the children from their parents, the Canadian government wanted to break the link to aboriginal cultures and identities. Aboriginal parents were labeled as being indifferent to their own children’s future by the Canadian authorities – a judgment contradictory to the fact that parents often tried to keep their children out of residential schools because they saw these schools as both dangerous and harsh institutions. Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches were the central actors involved in the administration of the residential school system (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015). This example illustrates a common pattern that is important to have in mind, namely that churches in Western countries – by means of educative practices – historically have been used by various governments to impose patriarchal and often harsh policies towards indigenous peoples. In most cases, churches were also actively involved in the actual policymaking itself.

Truth commissions have thus become an established way of making past wrongs visible. Sometimes the recognition of injustice, the dissemination of knowledge, and subsequent excuses are considered to be sufficient with

regards to the outcomes of the truth commissions. However, victims of serious human rights violations might also be entitled to economic compensation (Neuman & Thompson 2015). This development can be linked to the outgrowth and impact of human rights legislation over the past decades, and claims of compensation are increasingly becoming an international standard (Levy & Sznajder 2010). In his research on redistributive and reparative justice, sociologist John Torpey argues that these contemporary expressions of dealing with politically sensitive matters are characterized by a general juridification of politics in the age of individualization. If one considers the phenomenon historically, one must conclude that Torpey is correct. Their origins and impulses are, according to him, to be found in the Nuremberg trials, the development of international law after WW II, and the countless international agreements and conventions signed by countries around the world in the wake of the war (Torpey 2015). However, the truth commissions and white paper projects of recent decades can at the same time be said to have their own trajectories that stretch far beyond the original legalistic paradigm because issues of guilt, production of evidence, and claims for liability are not in focus in the same manner as in court proceedings, etc. This more general need to handle the past is perhaps most evident in post-totalitarian countries, but even more stable democracies have seen the need for various reparative processes. This, in turn, has by some researchers been explained as a sign of a crisis of the national state and of the death of ideologies. In Sweden this is seen as having resulted in an ongoing revaluation and questioning of the grand narrative of the “caring” welfare state and in counter narratives that instead pay attention to its “darker” sides in terms of paternalism and subordination (Arvidsson 2014). In this respect, Torpey’s legalist model of explanation thus needs to be complemented. The grounds of truth commissions in stable democracies like Sweden are more closely linked to the development of a new transnational memory culture and to the growing emphasis on universal human rights (see Huyssen 2015).

The concept of memory in this trend of international memory culture, which thus includes the White book focused on in the present study, deserves some attention. In everyday language, the word “memory” is used for experienced impressions from past times, but in the memory culture context it also involves spreading the experiences of a marginalized group to a wider majority group and making them recognize the experiences as valid. In this context, memories often are said to be “unknown”, “unspoken”, or

"hidden" experiences (that are not part of the grand narrative). Acquiring knowledge about the forgotten, unknown, or hidden (and spreading this knowledge) might require working methods and skills that specialists in different academic areas possess. Therefore, it has become customary to use academic scholars in the construction of this memory culture and in challenging what is perceived as the grand narratives.

In Swedish as well as in international research, a somewhat critical attitude can be noted regarding the prerequisites and results of this kind of historical writing. A key issue is that this type of historical writing seems to be subjected to other and more extensive scientific requests than what is usually the case within academic research, and that these requests are often difficult to meet. Reasonably, the victims' experiences should be in focus, but at the same time contextualizing frameworks about the past activities should also be in place to understand specific conditions and structures. However, recognizing the victims' experiences and at the same time understanding such structures risks sending conflicting signals (Barkan 2000; Tydén 2016; Matt 2012).

The scholarly anthology, or the “White book”

The empirical study object for this analysis is, as mentioned, the scholarly anthology. It constitutes the main scientific source for understanding the historical relations between the Church of Sweden and the Sami within this specific reconciliation process. It consists of more than eleven hundred pages and it is published in two separate volumes, including the five parts Perspectives of Reconciliation, Mission and School, Church and Sami Cultural Expressions, Sami and Church as a State Authority, and Church and Sami Outside of the Church of Sweden. These five parts contain 35 chapters written by scholars from the disciplines of history, religious studies and theology, language studies, and ethnology. In other words, it is quite difficult to sum up the results of this project in an easy and comprehensive way. The main purpose of the project was then again not to produce specific results on previously defined areas, but rather to establish a broad foundation of knowledge that would be apt for the deeper understanding of historical processes and contemporary problems in many different areas and that could be used for any future reconciliation activities that might take place. The end result is therefore also a very broad and organic compilation of knowledge that – often in empirical detail – addresses problematic areas in the historical

meeting between the state church and the Sami (cf. Norlin & Sjögren 2017ab; Lindmark & Sundström 2018). As such a “product”, it also provides an interesting source for investigating the areas and questions posed above. Before moving on to these questions, we will provide a brief account of the content of the White book.

Perspectives of reconciliation: Looking to the past to understand contemporary injustice

The first part of the White book addresses the contemporary context within which this project has emerged. The articles in this part link the White book to the broader international trend of reconciliation and to so-called regret politics going on in different parts of the world since a few decades back and which has just been accounted for in the previous pages. As already mentioned, this discussion has also come to include the activities of churches because their role in the history of colonialism, and their historical impact on the religions and cultures of the peoples subjected to colonialism, is perceived as having been very prominent (Drugge 2016; Fur 2016; Sjögren 2016). To acknowledge this and to start to seek knowledge about churches’ roles in colonialism was, for example, part of a general plea sent out to various state churches at the Lutheran world congress in Brazil in 1990 and in the following year by the World Council of Churches in 1991 (Tyrberg 2016). In other words, the articles in this first section can be seen as placing the White book within an overall colonial and post-colonial framework. In order to understand contemporary problems and conflicts, one must acknowledge past injustices connected to a colonial past.²

Besides situating the White book in this broader international trend and within a colonial framework, the articles in this part also connect the theme of reconciliation to the Church practice itself. Acknowledging misdoings and striving for redemption and personal improvement also naturally has a profound theological background anchored within the church tradition. But, instead of being individuals acknowledging their misdoings and trying to do better, it is in the present case the church as a collective organization that is looking for forgiveness from an indigenous group in order to facilitate better conditions for future relations (Nordbäck 2016).

² It is also a national chain of events that made the White book possible. Activities arranged by the theological committee and the Sami council within the Church of Sweden can be seen as crucial parts of this, for example, the organization of the conference Sáagastallamat in Kiruna in 2011. This conference can be seen as the national starting point of the white paper project (Tyrberg 2016).

Finally, the articles in this first section also address ethical issues in research directed towards indigenous peoples and the importance that scholars acknowledge that researchers and the universities are also a problematic part of the historical relations between the majority society and the Sami. Research and knowledge production have, historically, been very central parts of the relation between the Sami and Swedish authorities, as well as important tools for oppression. Research on the Sami conducted in the spirit of social Darwinism and race biology is highlighted as a well-known example of this in Sweden (Drugge 2016), and the Church and Church representatives are furthermore emphasized as historically having had a very prominent overall role in dispersing various knowledge about the Sami for a broader public as well as for governmental agencies (Norlin & Sjögren 2016).

In this sense the Church's White book, as yet another knowledge generating project, thus falls back on a long and solid tradition, but with the quite significant difference that it this time is not the Sami that constitute the main object of interest, but rather the consequences of the Church's actions for the group.

Mission and school: The long history of Sami education

The second part of the White book gives a chronological account of the gradual establishment of an infrastructure for missionary work and church administration in Sami areas from the Middle Ages up until the mid-20th century. The articles deal with the first known missionary efforts to educate and Christianize the Sami around the year 1000, the Reformation and the establishment of an Evangelical-Lutheran state church in the 16th century, the founding of Church Parishes and formal church practice in traditional Sami areas in the 17th and 18th centuries, the creation of the first stationary Sami schools by the Church, and soon also a separately designed school system for the Sami in the same period (Lundmark 2016; Rydving 2016; Fur 2016; Lindmark 2016). It also focuses on the new waves of missionary activity that occurred in the 19th century and the creation of missionary (boarding) schools, as well as the coming to be of the nowadays more or less notorious nomad school in the early 20th century, with its vast cultural and social impact on the Sami as a collective group (Anderzén 2016; Norlin & Sjögren 2016). This reorganization of Sami education in the early 20th century also meant a shift of governance of Sami schooling from the Church to the state (Norlin & Sjögren 2016). Finally, the efforts of establishing a

separate college education for the Sami in mid-20th century are dealt with (Hansson 2016).

Besides giving an account of the very deep historical roots of educational practices in ambulatory and institutionalized forms – specifically designed for the Sami population and organized by the Church – the articles in this part also recurrently highlight the close relationship between church and state interests in the process of expanding the administrative structure in traditional Sami areas, as well as the Church as a very important actor in the colonization of such areas. Due to the Reformation, the Church of Sweden became a state church, and thus a subordinated part of the state, but it also gained a strong ideological mandate to work within the framework of the state. By this, the Church came to have a major impact on the population, especially concerning the domain of education. In the case of the Sami, this educational mandate thus included various instructive activities connected to church and local parish practice, ambulatory mission work among the group, as well as the organization of stationary schooling specifically designed for the Sami population (cf. Elenius 2016; Norlin 2017a). As regards to the seemingly intertwined relation between the state and the Church, we will return to this question shortly.

The Church and Sami cultural expressions: The cultural consequences of missionary and educational enforcement

The third part of the White book more specifically investigates the concrete consequences of missionary and educative activities for Sami religious, social, and cultural practices. Specific attention is given to the overall views on Sami religion among Church representatives during different time periods (Sundström 2016; Bäckman 2016) and how the Church produced teaching aids in different Sami languages and dialects, as well as created a Sami written language (Korhonen 2016). It also highlights how priests, especially in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, were very dedicated in banning and punishing Sami use of sacred places and objects (such as holy stone formations, wooden figurines, and alters for sacrifices to the Sami gods), prohibiting and destroying ceremonial drums, and forbidding the Sami *jojk* as well as shamanism (Westman Kuhmunen 2016; Christoffersson 2016; Mebius 2016; Stoor 2016). During this period, death sentences were directed towards Sami for not subjecting to the Church's will (although only one execution is known), and the Church worked actively to replace Sami religious and cultural practices with Christian counterparts; for example,

forcing Sami to baptize their children, go to church, adapt Christian marriage traditions, bury their dead at church sites, and so on.

Another aspect that is addressed is the Church's influence over Sami name tradition, as the Church systematically replaced Sami personal names with official Scandinavian names, creating a double name tradition, or a double identity, where Sami individuals had their own unofficial name in their home environment but a totally different name in an official context and in the meeting with local authorities (Frändén 2016; Marainen 2016). Thus, via missionary work and enforced educative practices, the Church of Sweden is seen as being highly involved in successively dismantling Sami culture, religion, and various social practices (also encompassing the established knowledge systems that they depended on), and instead imposing views, customs, and practices apt to a Swedish Christian perspective. This, in turn, is seen as having caused tensions that are still today present in local church life (Norlin 2017b).

The Sami and the Church as a state authority

The fourth part of the book focuses on the Church as a state authority from the early 17th century up until the 1930s, an authority not only with the responsibility to educate the population and make it conform to a Christian way of life, but also with a much broader social responsibility to handle various aspects of local life such as poor-relief, taking care of the elderly, solving legal issues and disputes, heading the local administration board, and keeping official records of people (date of birth, name, marriage, death, moral stance, etc.) – in other words, a highly important state function supplying the state with population statistics and knowledge (Sjögren 2017). This is also seen as having caused the Sami problems, for example, as the Church achieved the very powerful role of getting to officially define who was Sami and who was not, and thus gained huge bureaucratic power over Sami cultural and collective identity (Axelsson 2016).

In this part, two central and very crucial topics are addressed. The first is the issue of land ownership and the transfer of land and forest traditionally used by Sami villages into Church ownership (Norstedt 2016). Secondly, articles in this the fourth part also address another crucial issue of the White book, namely the Church's support of social Darwinism, anthropology, and race biology research from the universities, especially in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Oscarsson 2016; Hagerman 2016; Ojala 2016). The articles here show that Church representatives were actively involved in

assisting the collection of Sami skeletal remains and in some known cases even in grave plundering for scientific purposes or indirectly to supply museums with collections. Local clergymen were working as guides and mediators, and later on also in facilitating race biology research among Sami school children and others, letting the scientists into the nomad schools. Still today, the question of repatriation of Sami skeletal remains that were collected with the help of priests is an open and unsolved issue (cf. Sparrock 2017), and the scientific affairs surrounding the nomad school hold a central position within the contemporary Sami community as symbols for governmental abuse of the group.

The Church and Sami outside of Sweden

The last part of the White book deals with Sami outside of the Church of Sweden. The articles in this part focus on the independent church denominations in Sweden³ and their roles during the 19th century in the Christianization of the Sami. These denominations, working outside of the Church, occasionally recruited Sami representatives and seem to have had a somewhat closer relationship to Sami culture and social questions relating to Sami day-to-day life than the state church (Lundmark 2016). This part also highlights mission work among the Sami in Norway and Finland – the neighboring countries with very close historical ties to Sweden – and the relation between the state churches' overall missionary policies in Norway and Finland during different time periods, the processes of modernization and nationalization in these countries, and the treatment of the Sami populations within these processes (Kristiansen 2016; Lehtola 2016).

Some critical reflections on the White book as a knowledge project

This is not the proper forum for a customary and critical scientific review of the White book, and we would obviously not be the appropriate persons to write such a review.⁴ Towards the background of the brief overview we have just provided, we would nevertheless like to formulate a few critical reflections concerning this kind of collective work based on our experiences

³ Svenska Missionsförbundet, Evangeliska Fosterlandsstiftelsen, Frälsningsarmén (The Salvation Army), and some other minor movements.

⁴ For such a scientific review, see Kortekangas (2017).

of working with it.⁵ However, we will start by addressing what we see as the benefits. It is undoubtedly so that the white paper project has managed to create a new and multidisciplinary body of knowledge on the specific area of interest that has not existed before. This appears to be a significant contribution to the field. It hands the reader both a comprehensive and multifaceted insight into what the historical meeting between a big governmental organization can lead to for a group of people that culturally, socially, religiously, geographically, economically, and linguistically was positioned very far from the agenda that was advocated for and enforced by the former. As such a compilation, it also works as an updated overview of the state of the art on the present area, which can be seen as both vital and helpful for future research. There are also good reasons to think that the knowledge presented in the White book is in fact enough to establish the most fundamental question at stake, namely that the Church has historically come to uphold an enormous power position over the Sami and that the ways of exercising this power has led to many negative consequences for the Sami. The White book provides many detailed examples to support such a statement.

As an historian, it is almost inevitable that one also finds problems and weaknesses in this kind of grand knowledge-generating project. We will here stick to questions about the content and general narrative structures, and we will address epistemologically grounded complexities later in this article. Although the scholarly anthology has the ambition to cover important parts of the history that it sets out to describe, vital areas are of course still missing. These include, for instance, how the Church became such a prominent landowner in the north, the role of the Church in establishing Swedish place names as well as the more concrete role of the Church in the language change process regarding the different Sami language varieties, and how the Church's internal interests and administrative expansion linked to the establishment of (other) economic enterprises in the region. This, in turn, also connects to questions about the Church's relation to the activities of the state and the crown during different time periods, a relation that all in all remains quite obscure in the White book. The same goes for various acts of Sami resistance towards the Church's expansion and activities in the north, and also concerning the role of the Sami themselves in aiding the Church's colonial endeavors. Yet another topic that is not addressed in the

⁵ The following section is a condensed discussion of a more extended and in-depth critical reflection regarding the scholarly anthology published in Norlin & Sjögren (2017b).

anthology are various “positive” sides of the Church's involvement in Sami issues, for instance the work with philanthropy or in preventing hunger and poverty among the Sami. It thus appears that there is plenty more for researchers to examine in various areas.

In addition to this, the long time span dealt with in the White book causes some problems. On the one hand, this approach can be seen as necessary to achieve a more in-depth understanding of colonialism as a long-term process and the longstanding impact and consequences of Church activities on the Sami. On the other hand, it centers this understanding on linearity and continuity rather than change. The result is that the Church, its societal role, and its organization during different time periods therefore appear as very monolithic. This is also the case when it comes to handling the Sami as a group, which appear to be quite homogenous throughout the period. The main actors and agents constructed in the White book narrative – the Church and the Sami – thus remain quite fixed and unproblematic.

Another aspect that needs to be highlighted is the difficulty of distinguishing the Church's activities from those of the state and the crown (and partly also those of the universities), as well as of individual Church representatives' actions in relation to the Church as a whole. Such distinctions might be seen as quite important for more specific discussions about liability. One of the reasons for these somewhat obscure borders between, for instance, state and church is probably that the Church of Sweden, in the role of a state church, had an organization highly intertwined with government agencies and that Church representatives moved quite unobtrusively between government and Church bodies. Consequently, finding clear demarcation lines between state and church is very difficult in the present context.

The role of educational history in the White book

We will move on to more directly touch upon the joint topic for this thematic issue, namely the history of education. So, what scientific role and character can knowledge related to the field of educational history be claimed to have in the White book? Against the background of the content in the scholarly anthology – and with the risk of being slightly biased and normative – we would like to address at least four facets of this. Firstly, whether one has a broad or a narrow definition of what actually counts as educational history – spanning from a view that in principle all past activities related to the

production and spread of knowledge in society can be included, to a view that primarily connects educational history to official and organized efforts to arrange schooling (for a discussion on this, cf. Norlin & Sjögren 2014) – it appears accurate to claim that such knowledge holds a highly central place in the White book. Out of the 35 chapters in the scholarly anthology, more than 10 directly deal with education and/or school-related issues – often on an institutional level – and several other chapters more indirectly refer to educational activities or make use of educational elements as illustrative examples in more general argumentation. Most of these chapters are found in the two parts "Mission and school" and "Church and Sami cultural expressions". The first of these parts deals, as already been described, with the establishment of missionary and educational practices as well as stationary school institutions in Sami areas from the Middle Ages up to the mid-20th century. The second part focuses on Church representatives' various efforts in implementing Christian knowledge and traditions – via preaching in churches, ambulatory missions, the creation of teaching material, and so on – and the consequences of these educative practices for the Sami's traditional way of life. Furthermore, articles in the third part, "The Sami and the church as a state authority", handles issues of social Darwinism and race biology and these issues' close relation to the schooling of Sami children and teens in the nomad school.

In other words, the articles in the White book make it evident that knowledge connected to the field of educational history and historical perspectives on education are quite decisive for this specific reconciliation process. Missionary work, schooling, and other educational activities administrated by the Church, the state, municipalities, or private actors seem to have formed the most prominent social interfaces in the meeting between the Sami and the Swedish society and authorities, thus also becoming very prominent conflict areas. Parallels can here be drawn to the Swedish government's White Paper on the Roma, where education also belongs to one of the main defined areas in which the group has historically and structurally been discriminated against, as well as to similar international reconciliation processes in Canada and Australia where educational history, as previously mentioned, has come to play a very significant role (*Bringing Them Home: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* 1997; *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, part I origin to 1939*; *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, part II 1939–2000*). Furthermore, a potential future

governmental truth commission on state-Sami relations will most certainly be dependent on even more in-depth knowledge and studies of Sami educational history.

Secondly, it seems obvious that the knowledge that is seen as relevant for understanding the Church's relation to the Sami within the educational area in the past is not linked to a single scientific discipline, but instead to many different disciplines. One of the main facets of the White book is in fact that it integrates knowledge from so many disciplines – religious studies, language studies, ethnology, history, etc. – and by doing so provides a very extensive, multifaceted, and joint body of knowledge in the area of education. Educational history is obviously a multidisciplinary field, but this kind of book project also underscores the certain fruitfulness of gathering such otherwise quite disciplinarily isolated existing research around a single and common area. However, this multidisciplinary also appears to create some tensions, which we will return to soon.

Thirdly, the present case also emphasizes the importance of not only modern history and contemporary-historical perspectives on education – which easily tends to be the case when attitudes towards scientific usefulness and relevance of such research are too tightly linked to a contemporary school context – but also older history. The case of the White book demonstrates how knowledge about the relations between the Sami and the Church must take its point of departure at least in the early modern period and in the Reformation era to become relevant and understandable. Political initiatives made already in the late 16th century paved the way for the expansion of the Church as well as missionary and educational activities in northern areas already in the first half of the 17th century, and missionary campaigns during the late 17th and early 18th centuries are defined as crucial in the White book for understanding the Church's impact on Sami cultural life. In order to understand colonial contexts, including the forces and consequences of colonialism, it is not enough to just go back to reforms and developments in the educational area during the past decades or even the past century. This kind of reconciliation process instead requires deeper historical perspectives combined with researchers' ability to handle the process of state formation and the role of the Church, missions, and the school in this process.⁶

⁶ Something that is interesting in the White book – and which underpins the close historical relation between the school and the church as organizational units – is that historians working with early modern education often have more in common with researchers from religious studies than with their fellow historians studying, for example, post-war school reforms.

Finally, the White book also actualizes the importance of establishing more elaborated Nordic comparative perspectives in this kind of context. It becomes very clear that the field of educational history is still very nationally orientated in character and that this is a specific disadvantage when it comes to an area like the present concerns of a cross-border indigenous people. How the historical processes and events described in the White book relate to those in Norway and Finland is only fragmentarily addressed, although such a comparison would have been very fruitful.

Historians in reconciliation processes: The past for its own sake or the past in the present?

The White book also forms a prism for more general analytical reflections on the roles of historians, what we do in research, and of our potential to contribute to contemporary societal processes. On the one hand, this is a clear example of how present conflicts cannot be fully understood without taking the past into account and without getting help from professional historians. On the other hand, when entering this important field of work as historians we are also entering a somewhat unfamiliar space where political and moral issues are at the top of the agenda. This also actualizes very profound questions about our trade as historians: What is the relation between science and the moral and political judgments in the context that the White book represents?

In order to discuss these questions, we would first like to broaden the perspective and make some general remarks on the nature of historians' work in reconciliation processes. From a theoretical perspective, there is a traditional epistemological divide between scholars who perceive historical writing as an objective, distant, and value-neutral trade and researchers who treat historical writing as inevitably linked to, and constructed in, a contemporary context, and thus also often relating to political, social, and moral circumstances. This polarity is obviously a simplification, but it is nonetheless of use when it comes to clarifying individual historians' epistemological positioning in a white paper project like the present, as well as in their ways of valuating past events. In an essay to Hayden White, the historian David Harlan points out that historians traditionally have been occupied with what is perceived as actual descriptions and explanations of the past *per se*, and thus have obligated themselves to understanding history and historical agency in its own right. Other claims have hardly been

possible within traditional historical writing. Due to the linguistic and moral turns, and the introduction of more marked metahistorical approaches, this attitude toward history has gradually come to shift, transforming the historians' trade to become more explicitly reliant on contemporary experiences (Harlan 2009). The past as research object thus means different things in these two approaches: in the first case it means "the past for its own sake", and in the second it means "the past in the present" (see also Elgabsi 2016). Understood against this background, it seems like reconciliation motives, and the kind of historical writing that the Church of Sweden's White book is a part of, by their nature stand in a certain opposition to a traditional way of understanding the historian's task. Writing history with the purpose of reconciliation is to *a priori* set the target of research on past political events that gave rise to crime and injustice or on revising known knowledge in accordance with political aspirations in the present.

Additional theoretical tools for understanding historians' work in reconciliation processes can be borrowed from the growing field of transitional justice research. Scholars in this field claim that one of the problems with history in reconciliation is that it often makes truth-claims on many different levels at the same time (see Heyner 2001; Nagy 2012). These various truth-claims stem from the condition that a reconciliation process almost always has many different purposes, namely to give voice to personal experiences, to create forums where these experiences can be articulated, to establish what actually has happened, to identify someone – or something – that can be held accountable and, in particular, to arrange all of this in forms that are accessible to the public. In other words, objectivist and constructivist truth-claims exist side by side, and the use of well-established traditional historical sources (such as legislative decisions, committee reports, official reports, and meeting minutes) is mixed with the use of memories and individual personal experiences (which are often crucial for understanding the perceived victim's side, but which many historians are inexperienced in working with). These different truth-claims are often recognized and accepted by individual scholars because they are seen to correspond to ordinary differences in traditions and methods in their field, but this is never communicated and discussed openly.

The variety of purposes and truth-claims in reconciliation projects makes even other divergences understandable. In most humanistic disciplines, making generalizations, identifying patterns, and finding groups of themes are the traditional ways of analyzing material. This phenomenological

hermeneutic approach is in general not used in reconciliation projects with victim-centered scrutiny (which means focusing on individual victims' stories of abuse). In such projects, the victims must have their say without the claims of generalizations and systematics. Critics of such projects claim that this simplifies – or at worst hides – the perpetrators' motives and that the lack of generalizations and systematizations muddles an overall understanding of the nature of the experiences (Crocker 2000; James 2012). In this regard the Church of Sweden's White book is, as mentioned, closely linked to a traditional academic narrative. It is actors well-known to historians, e.g. representatives of state, church, and civil society, who figure prominently in the anthology, and the chronology does not contravene what historians traditionally work with. Most of the articles work with well-known hermeneutical methods (even though not explicitly) and present conclusions in the form of generalizations and themes extracted from the source material.

The complexity of different truth-claims in reconciliation projects also causes the historian to end up in other dilemmas. One such dilemma relates to the relationship between critical distance and empathy (or recognition). In this regard, we can relate to the key division between traditional academic history writing and historical writing as “the past in the present”. The traditional ethos of historical writing includes critical distance to the study objects as an indispensable tool, while historical writing based on the past in the present includes empathy, moral attitude, and recognition among its working tools. The difficulty lies in combining these starting points in a balanced way (see also LaCapra 2001).

Scientific complexities and epistemological tensions in the White book

From this general theoretical backdrop, we will move on to more specifically discussing some of the scientific complexities in the White book. One thing that appears evident is that these huge joint projects – where academics meet and cooperate with representatives from external organizations and representatives from indigenous groups – demand a common ground in narrating history and that this common ground tends to originate from quite a traditional (epistemological) way of perceiving and writing history. From this, at least three tensions or disharmonies seem to arise.

Firstly, tensions tend to arise between the main traditional framework of narrating history – with a linear chronology and a focus on the nation and governmental agency (the Church) and its individual representatives in a

top-down power structure – and parallel narratives at a more individual chapter level that do not appear to connect to this main narrative structure and its set chronology. In some cases there is also an ambition to present rival and contradictory histories or other ways of perceiving chronology, or even other ways of structuring narrative (Hagerman 2016; Norlin & Sjögren).

Secondly, there seems to be a tension between on the one hand a constructivist approach of perceiving ethnicity and, on the other hand, a more or less essentialist approach. By a constructivist approach, we mean that ethnicity is perceived as something that is being continuously constructed and negotiated between different groups of people, institutions, and agencies of power and thus subjected to historical change. With an essentialist approach we mean that ethnicity is being handled as a more historically static and culturally intrinsic condition that is bound to a certain group of people.

In the White book, the term Sami is first of all not explained by any definitions. Neither is there any discussion about whether the term "Sami" has the same meaning when talking about late-medieval times as it does in the 20th century. The consequence is that the term – and the people it denotes – in some articles is given a more or less homogeneous and consistent meaning over time. Other articles that more clearly depart from a constructivist view instead pay attention to the issue, for example, by relating to how the state, through census taking, developed criteria for who would count as Sami (Axelsson 2016) or how the perception of "Saminess" among Church representatives was masculinized (Fur 2016). Worth noting in this context is that Church representatives themselves helped to develop (for a certain purpose) sustainable criteria. The meaning of the term in use was thus constructed by the state, and it was based primarily according to origin or birth (later also to languages). The question is whether it is this meaning of Sami, initially designed by the state, which is in use in the White book or if it is a wider, more inclusive, and present day use of the term, which also includes belonging to an imagined community of Sami.

Thirdly, one can note a tension between articles with more explicit theoretical colonial conflict perspectives (for example, Fur 2016) and other articles that do not make use of any explicit theoretical perspectives at all (for example, Hansson 2016). There are three aspects of this sort of tension. One aspect is that the articles based on a colonial conflict perspective allow the theory to predetermine what the entire project wants to bring knowledge

about, namely if and how the Church committed different forms of abuse and repression against the Sami people. The theory is based on the fact that the relationship was of a certain kind and that the forms of subordination were predetermined with firm positions in theory. The possibility of findings that do not fit into the theory is here quite limited. Another aspect occurs in the articles that explicitly lack overall theoretical perspectives. In these cases, new knowledge of abuse and repression is only suggested descriptively and is open to interpretation. Naturally, these articles contribute to significant aspects of the relationship between the Church and the Sami, but they sometimes fail to qualify or describe the nature of this relationship. A third aspect arises when these two starting points exist side by side in one and the same study without harmony.

Conclusion

In this article we have used the White book project that the Church of Sweden recently completed regarding the Church's historical relations to the Sami minority in Sweden as an object for study. The project resulted in a two-volume scholarly anthology published in 2016, followed by a popular science synthesis a year later. Through this project, the Church of Sweden has become a part of a much broader international and societal phenomenon that has evolved in recent decades where organizations and states have come to scrutinize their historical treatment of vulnerable groups. These kinds of projects have all been characterized by reconciliation aims and by having regarded knowledge about historical injustices as vital to “healing” or correcting present day conditions.

In this article we have focused on two main aspects of this White book project. Firstly, we have used it for reflecting on the specific role and significance of educational history knowledge in this type of project, and secondly to discuss various complexities in writing history for reconciliation purposes that seem to emerge in this kind of collective scientific work. In order to do this, we started by giving an account of the main content of the White book and especially the parts connected to the field of educational history.

Regarding the role of educational history in the White book, we have first of all emphasized that knowledge connected to this research field, and historical perspectives on education in general, in fact appear to hold a very central position. This resembles similar projects in, for example, Canada and

Australia. It seems clear that various educational practices and institutions for schooling have formed crucial and often problematic social interfaces or conflict areas also in the case of the Church of Sweden and the Sami. As such, these practices also serve as important lenses to deepen our understanding of historical power structures and means of dominance between state actors and indigenous peoples. This, in turn, implies that the overall knowledge and skills of educational historians are quite essential in these kinds of projects. In fact, it is quite hard to see how these contemporary projects could transpire without taking educational history into account.

We have also highlighted how educational history knowledge in the White book is not linked to a single scientific discipline but instead to many different disciplines – religious studies, language studies, ethnology, history, etc. – and that this has benefits in the sense that a broad and multifaceted scientific understanding of education is achieved. We have also emphasized the apparent importance of pre-modern educational history knowledge in various areas – and not just knowledge about the most recent historical past regarding education – because this appears to be crucial for the understanding of colonial contexts in the sense of long-term processes. Finally, we have noted the importance for establishing more elaborate comparative perspectives in educational history between different national contexts in the handling of cross-border indigenous peoples.

In this article we have also discussed more general scientific complexities and challenges that historians – and other researchers – might encounter when engaging in collective projects like the Church's White book. The overall purpose of historical writing in these projects often differs from what usually justifies traditional historical investigations. This is also the case when it comes to dimensions such as truth claims and requirements for evidence. Furthermore, these projects also tend to become a scientific "melting pot" for scholars from many different disciplinary domiciles. From this general circumstance, we have highlighted what we see as related complexities and epistemological tensions embedded in the White book. These include different interpretations and link-ups to the general narrative of the project among scholars, tensions between a constructivist and essentialist approach to ethnicity – and thus in defining the Sami as a group in relation to the Church, i.e. the key actors of the project – and tensions between colonial and post-colonial conflict perspectives and contributions without any apparent long-term conflict perspective. On the one hand, this

can be seen as a very natural outcome because so many scholars are involved in the project, but on the other hand it nevertheless creates analytical disharmonies and sometimes conflicting narratives that the reader needs to handle.

By raising and discussing these issues, we hope that this article can make a small contribution to any future scientific dialogue on the White book genre and contemporary reconciliation, and in particular on the role of educational history and educational historians in such processes.

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