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Of Nations, Languages, and Bibles: Tracing Political and Cultural Change from the Monolingual Bibel 2000 to the Multilingual Sami Bible[*]

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Setting the Scene: Two Important Events in the Swedish Parliament at the Turn of the Millennium

At the turn of the millennium, two interconnected yet widely different events took place in the Swedish Parliament. These two events together shed light on the relationship between national language and minority languages in Sweden, with implications for biblical translation. In February 2000, the Parliament voted in favor of the governmental proposition 1998/99:143, suggesting that Sweden should ratify the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. This entailed legal protection for five minority languages in Sweden: Meänkieli, Romani Chib, Yiddish, Finnish, and Sami. Four months before this event, in November 1999, a copy of the new Swedish Bible, Bibel 2000, had been presented to the Speaker of the Parliament in a ceremony that included the members of the governmental committee appointed for carrying out the translation, a number of politicians, the

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Prime Minister, and several cultural celebrities. 38 years earlier, in 1961, the Parliament had voted in favor of a motion urging the Government to take measurements towards a new biblical translation into Swedish.[1] The translation that would eventually be produced was intended as a Bible for all Swedish citizens—that is, all Swedish-speaking citizens.[2] This means that what took place in the Parliament at the turn of the millennium, with only a few months apart, were two events which rested on completely different language policies or ideologies: the presentation of the genuinely monolingual "Swedish" biblical translation Bibel 2000 on the one hand, and an official recognition of the different linguistic minorities of the country on the other hand. This recognition can be connected to another translation project under way at the time when Bibel 2000 was presented: the "Sami Bible" of the Nordic Bible Societies, a translation project initiated in the 1980s, involving different translation teams and with several textual manifestations in the different Sami language varieties (North Sami, Lule Sami, South Sami).[3] In both these translation projects, language and identity played a decisive role but from widely different outsets, which is what interests me in the present article.

Arguments and Structure

The aim of the article is to investigate these two translation projects and analyze how they can be understood in relation to sociocultural change in the Swedish postwar political landscape. In the article, the translations are investigated not primarily as *texts* but rather as *phenomena*; as,

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[1] The discussion first only concerned a translation of the New Testament.

[2] Cf. Tobias Harding, *Nationalising Culture: The Reorganisation of National Culture in Swedish Cultural Policy 1970–2002* (Linköping: Linköping University, 2007), 164, on the "ethno-linguistic" directives given to the governmental committee by cabinet minister Alva Myrdal. See further below.

[3] The fact that these different translations share the same sociopolitical and cultural outsets motivates the understanding of them as *one* joint translation project, which can, accordingly, be designated by one mutual term ("the Sami Bible").

respectively, a monolingual phenomenon (Bibel 2000) and a multilingual phenomenon (the Sami Bible).[4] I argue that the initiatives towards Bibel 2000 in the early 1960s came about in a political and cultural context still marked by monolingualism and monoculturalism, which strongly impacted the arguments made on the intended readership of the translation.[5] As a consequence of the context, the biblical texts were not only translated in a certain way, linguistically speaking; the Bible itself was conceptualized in a highly time-specific way, as a "Swedish Bible" on grounds very different from those underlying earlier official translations, where "Swedish" had equaled not Swedish-speaking but Lutheran. When the historical and cultural changes had led to a situation where the national Lutheran religion no longer could function as a "source of biblical authority,"[6] national language replaced national religion as such a source of authority. The later Sami translations of the Nordic Bible Societies, on the other hand, have drawn on a gradually emerging, politically endorsed multilingual situation as their most important source of authority. Finally, not only can these political and cultural changes and their impact on the Sami Bible be investigated; the changes can themselves also be viewed through the lens of biblical translation.[7] Both the Sami Bible and Bibel 2000 can therefore be investigat-

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[4] As a *text*, the translation Bibel 2000 was of course monolingual, being a rendering of the biblical texts into *one* language (Swedish). This is equally true for each of the translations into the different Sami language varieties.

[5] It was only late during the translation project that Bibel 2000 was decided as a name for the translation that was about to be finalized and published (see Richard Pleijel, *Om Bibel 2000 och dess tillkomst: Konsensus och konflikt i översättningsprocessen inom Bibelkommissionens GT-enhet* [Skellefteå: Artos, 2018], 188, n. 543). For the sake of simplicity, I will, however, refer to this translation as Bibel 2000 also when I discuss the time predating the finalization and publication of it.

[6] Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 91.

[7] Cf. Daniel Boucher, "Straddling the Himalayas: Translating Buddhism into Chinese," in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Religion*, ed. Hephzibah Israel (London: Routledge, 2023), 367–381 (379).

ed in order to understand more broadly the relationship between monolingualism and multilingualism in Sweden (with many Nordic parallels) during the postwar period.

The article has a chronological structure. First, I discuss the historical background with emphasis on religious policy and language policy directed at the Sami people following the Protestant Reformation and onwards, with translations into the Sami language as tools in the religious standardization of the country; during this period, the parallel existence of several different languages was not perceived as a problem by the state authorities.

I then discuss how, from the late eighteenth century onwards, linguistic standardization gradually replaced religious standardization as a core interest of the Swedish nation-state. I argue that the new monolingual framework that was gradually established was an important condition for the emergence of the translation Bibel 2000, and for the arguments that were made concerning the intended readers of this translation—especially in the early phases of the project (the 1960s and early 1970s).

I then discuss the gradual emergence of multiculturalism from this point of time, with the eventual official recognition of linguistic minorities in Sweden; in the wake of this development, language yet again came to function as a "source of authority" for biblical translation, but from a widely different perspective compared to that of Bibel 2000.

This is further discussed in the final part of the article, where I also offer some general reflections on the relationship between language and identity in the context of biblical translation.

Historical Background: Linguistic Differentiation, Religious Standardization

In the seventeenth century, the Swedish state increasingly sought to establish its presence in the Northern parts of the country. The reasons were multiple: economic, agrarian, and—perhaps most importantly—

religious.[8] As Daniel Lindmark has noted, the orthodox interpretation of the Lutheran theory of governance, developing at this time, entailed that "unity in religion" was perceived as "a necessary prerequisite to a functional social order."[9] In order for societal cohesion to be achieved, all citizens needed to comprise the same religion. But all citizens apparently did not need to comprise the same language. Thus, while traditional Sami religion was aggressively opposed by the Swedish authorities,[10] this was not the case with the Sami language. The primary reason was the possibility of using different languages in order to achieve the desirable unity in religion. With the Bible as the primary basis of religion, especially in a Lutheran context, the translation of the biblical (and other Christian) texts could function as a tool in order to achieve religious, and hence also societal, cohesion. Translations of religious texts into the Sami language were accordingly published already in the early 1600s, with a missal published in 1619 as the first printed book in the Sami language.[11] New Testament translations (partial or complete) into a language that was constructed from the then dominant Ume Sami language were published in 1715 (by Lars Rangius) and 1755 (by Pehr Fjellström), with a translation of the complete Bible published in 1811.

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[8] Cf. Lars Elenius, "Minoritetsspråken i nationalistisk växelverkan: Samiska och finska som kyrkospråk och medborgarspråk," in *Gränsöverskridande kyrkohistoria: De språkliga minoriteterna på Nordkalotten*, ed. Daniel Lindmark (Umeå: Umeå University, 2016), 13–47 (26).

[9] Daniel Lindmark, "Colonial Education and Saami Resistance in Early Modern Sweden," in *Connecting Histories of Education: Transnational and Cross-Cultural Exchanges in (Post)colonial Education*, eds. Barnita Bagghi, Eckhardt Fuchs, and Kate Rousmaniere (New York: Berghahn Books, 2014), 140–155 (142).

[10] See, for example, Daniel Lindmark, "Jojk som bro och barriär mellan samiskt och kyrkligt: Perspektiv på religiöst historiebruk," in *Gränsöverskridande kyrkohistoria: De språkliga minoriteterna på Nordkalotten*, ed. Daniel Lindmark (Umeå: Umeå University, 2016), 85–114 (85–86).

[11] Along with the educational book *ABC-Book på Lappeska Tungomål*. See Tuuli Forsgren, *Samisk kyrko- och undervisningslitteratur i Sverige 1619–1850* (Scriptum, 6; Umeå: Umeå University, 1988).

State (Church) support was a necessary prerequisite for these translations to come about, even if the initiatives had been taken by individual persons and not by political or religious institutions.[12] By supporting the Sami language through translations of religious texts and as a language used in religious services, the Church contributed to the survival and development of Sami culture (even if this was not the primary aim with for example the religious translations).[13]

Several educational initiatives, such as the opening of *Skytteanska skolan* (the Skyttean School) in Lycksele in 1632, point to a generally favorable approach from the authorities to the Sami language in both the educational system and the Church. The school was primarily concerned with the education of Sami priests; instruction was generally held in Sami by Sami teachers.[14] In 1738, the Swedish Government (the King) decided on a number of measurements for strengthening the Sami language, for example by translating the Bible and other "church books." These measurements were implemented with the 1739 founding of *Lappmarkens ecklesiastikverk* (The Ecclesiastical Agency for Lappmarken). The interest for Sami language from the ecclesiastical and political authorities hence lasted throughout the eighteenth century,[15] and well into the nineteenth century: still in 1846, it was stipulated that teaching of the Sami population should be conducted in the Sami language (except in areas where a majority of the population spoke Swedish).[16]

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[12] Olavi Korhonen, "Samiskan under fyra sekel i Svenska kyrkans arbete," in *De historiska relationerna mellan Svenska kyrkan och samerna: En vetenskaplig antologi, band 2,* ed. Daniel Lindmark and Olavi Sundström (Skellefteå: Artos & Norma, 2016), 735–796 (754).

[13] See Olavi Korhonen, "Guds ord på samiska," in *Bland Sveriges samer 1971–1972* (Umeå: Svenska missionssällskapet Kyrkan och samerna, 1972), 13–17.

[14] Mienna Sjöberg, "Kristendomens historia på norsk och svensk sida av Sápmi – en översikt," *Teologisk tidsskrift* 9 (2020): 34–51 (40).

[15] *Samerna i Sverige: Stöd åt språk och kultur*, SOU 1975:99 (Stockholm: Utbildningsdepartementet, 1975), 46.

[16] Sölve Anderzén, "Finska språket – Torne lappmarks *lingua sacra*: Ordets makt,

The above brief discussion has served to point out the generally favorable approach that the ecclesiastical and political authorities held towards the Sami language. While traditional Sami religion was opposed, Sami language was not. Quite the opposite: initiatives from the authorities and individual initiatives supported by the authorities helped establishing Sami as a written language, thereby in some sense promoting Sami culture. One should, however, keep in mind that this was not in all cases the outcome of an interest in Sami culture and language as such, but rather the outcome of an interest in the spread of the Lutheran religion. Marit Breie Henriksen hence claims that the Sami translations of religious texts were produced as tools in a missionary effort,[17] and while this may not have been the only intention with these translations, it seems clear that they at least were used for this end. This points to a complex situation in which Sami translations could function "as both an act of inclusion and an act of cultural and religious domination."[18]

From Unity in Religion to Unity in Language: Nationalism, Nation-States, and Monolingualism in the Nineteenth Century

The positive approach to the Sami language from the authorities hence lasted well into the nineteenth century. At the same time, however, new

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språk och undervisning vid 1800-talets mitt," in *Svenskt i Finland – finskt i Sverige 4: Ordens makt och maktens ord*, ed. Olli Kangas och Helena Kangasharju (Helsingfors: Svenska litteratursällskapet i Finland, 2007), 115–159.

[17] Marit Breie Henriksen, "Bibelen på samisk: Historisk blikk på samiske bibeloversettelser," *Kirke og kultur* 125 (2020): 68–84 (69).

[18] James Crossley, "Contextualising the Nordic Bible(s): A Response," in *The Nordic Bible: Bible Reception in Contemporary Nordic Societies*, ed. Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, Kasper Bro Larsen, and Outi Lehtipuu (SBR, 24; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2023), 275–288 (285).

cultural changes were under way which would eventually undermine the position of the Sami language, along with other non-"national" languages. Influential scholars like Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm have described how nationalism and nationalistic ideologies rose in Europe from the end of the eighteenth century onwards. Central to nationalistic ideology was (and is) the emphasis on language issues,[19] with the connection between nation and language as a core component of nationalistic thinking. The notion of "one language, one nation," often traced to Johann Gottfried Herder, was built on the idea that "nationhood was dependent on a single and exclusive language."[20] As an outcome of the spread of these ideas, the Swedish authorities actively strove to achieve a "standardized national culture" in the course of the nineteenth century, with the national language (Swedish) as a central component of such a standardized national culture.[21] This, however, also meant that other cultural features, previously considered central, were downplayed. One such feature was religion. Along with different processes of secularization, language gradually came to replace religion as the most important component of national culture.[22] In this way, the seventeenth century Lutheran orthodox catchword "unity in religion" came to be replaced by "unity in language." Language had become the primary means for achieving societal cohesion.

These developments had important political consequences in terms of official language policy. In Sweden as in the other Nordic countries, language policy (and other types of cultural policy) during this period can be described in terms of cultural assimilation, according to which cultural and linguistic minorities were supposed to assume the habits of

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[19] Maria Wingstedt, *Language Ideologies and Minority Language Policies in Sweden: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Stockholm: Stockholm University, 1998), 27.

[20] Michaela Wolf, *The Habsburg Monarchy's Many-Languaged Soul: Translating and Interpreting, 1848–1918* (trans. Kate Sturge; Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015), 36.

[21] See Lars Elenius, *Nationalstat och minoritetspolitik: Samer och finskspråkiga minoriteter i ett jämförande nordiskt perspektiv* (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2006), 137.

[22] See Elenius, "Statlig minoritetspolitik," 74.

the majoritarian population.[23] One specific form of cultural assimilation was linguistic assimilation, which entailed that the Sami people (and other linguistic minorities) were expected to assume the Swedish language as their language of use.[24] While developing from the mid-nineteenth century, the 1870s mark the breakthrough for the assimilationist language politics in Sweden. In 1876, the authorities initiated a shift towards using Swedish as the exclusive language of education.[25] At the same time, the Church of Sweden—which was still at this point of time responsible for primary education in the country—stipulated that all instruction in the so-called Nomad schools should be given in Swedish.[26] While the Church still encouraged Sami as a language for religious services, it was hence not permitted as a language of education.[27] In the helpful distinction of Lars Elenius, the Sami language was encouraged as a "church language" but discouraged as a "citizenship language."[28] As Swedish citizens, the Sami were expected to speak Swedish.

The breakthrough of this language policy in the second half of the nineteenth century was likely due to the impact of evolutionary linguistics ("Language Darwinism"), which developed in the 1860s onwards. Evolutionary linguistics was founded on the idea that languages compete with each other and that one language can, and must, spread geographically at the expense of others.[29] A struggle for "Swedishness" and

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[23] Elenius, "Minoritetsspråken"; Mienna Sjöberg, "Kristendomens historia."

[24] On linguistic assimilation, see Wingstedt, *Language ideologies*, 27–28.

[25] Anderzén, "Finska språket," 126.

[26] *Samerna i Sverige*, 46.

[27] Elenius, "Minoritetsspråken."

[28] Elenius, "Minoritetsspråken."

[29] Elenius, *Nationalstat och minoritetspolitik*, 110–113. See also Leena Huss, *Reversing Language Shift in the Far North: Linguistic Revitalization in Northern Scandinavia and Finland* (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1999), 71–72, on the more general Social Darwinistic thinking underlying Swedish cultural policy in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. Cf. on the so-called Norwegianization politics ("fornorskingspolitikken") Per Kjølaas, *Bibelen på samisk: En bok om samisk bibeloversettelse* (Oslo: Det Norske Bibelselskap, 1995), 34–35.

for the Swedish nation-state, which importantly included the Swedish language, could therefore only take place at the expense of other (minority) cultures and languages. A sociopolitical factor that should be taken into account is the dismantling in 1905 of the union between Sweden and Norway; as an outcome of this event, both Swedish and Norwegian nationalism was amplified, along with cultural homogenization and standardization. This means that state authorities (in both countries) placed an even greater emphasis on linguistic assimilation.[30] The first half of the twentieth century is the period when we find the assimilationist politics at its peak, with a consistent suppression of the use of the Sami language. In the 1940s, however, this was slowly starting to come to an end with a gradual reevaluation of the place of Sami (and Finnish) in the Swedish school system. Elenius contends that it is at the end of the 1950s that the assimilation politics actually comes to an end.[31] Patrik Lantto and Ulf Mörkestam trace these changes to the end of the Second World War, with the experiences from the war heavily undermining the credibility of the earlier public discourse.[32] Finally, Lovisa Mienna Sjöberg claims that assimilation politics was fully abandoned only in the 1970s.[33]

An "Ethno-Linguistic" Project: Taking the First Steps Towards a New "Swedish" Bible

The assimilationist politics was thus starting to be questioned in the 1940s. As suggested above, however, there would still be at least a couple of decades before it was officially abandoned. This is significant

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[30] Elenius, *Nationalstat och minoritetspolitik*, 149.

[31] Elenius, *Nationalstat och minoritetspolitik*, 25.

[32] Patrik Lantto and Ulf Mörkenstam, "Sami Rights and Sami Challenges: The Modernization Process and the Swedish Sami Movement, 1886–2008." *Scandinavian Journal of History* 33 (2008): 26–51 (28).

[33] Mienna Sjöberg, "Kristendomens historia," 47.

when I now turn to the initiatives in the 1960s and early 1970s towards a translation of the biblical texts into Swedish, a translation that would eventually bear the name of Bibel 2000. I argue that the temporal context is decisive in order to understand this translation and its specific characteristics, and not least the arguments that underpinned it and functioned as its "source of biblical authority."[34] As the debate on the new translation unfolded in the wake of the original initiative in 1961, a new Swedish Bible was consistently framed as a "general cultural interest." In what follows, I will argue that the concept of culture at play in this discourse clearly equaled national culture (i.e., the culture of the nation-state), with the national language Swedish as its most important component. In the arguments surrounding the making of the translation, language hence came to function as an integral part of the definition of "national" in the concept of national culture. The translation was, directly or indirectly, framed as a Bible for all Swedish-speaking citizens, and in this way the function of language, not only in but also for the translation, was emphasized in an unprecedented way. Thus, even while earlier majoritarian translations had, obviously, been translations of the biblical texts into the Swedish language, language had not been an important, or at least not the most important, "source of biblical authority" for them. These translations had drawn on other sources of authority, most importantly the national Lutheran religion.

The translation was initiated in 1961 through a private parliamentary motion, placed by one Manne Ståhl.[35] The motion framed the Bible as a national, Christian interest, which suggests that Ståhl considered the Bible as primarily a Christian scripture. Ståhl even suggested that a new translation, whereby the people could better apprehend the mes-

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[34] Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 91.

[35] See Richard Pleijel, "The 1960s Bible: Investigating Discourse on a Swedish Translation of the New Testament," *Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice* (2023): 1–15. Ståhl's motion primarily concerned a translation of the New Testament, which suggests that he primarily saw the Bible ("the Bible" and "the New Testament" were used interchangeably in the motion) as a Christian scripture.

sage of the Bible, had the potential of resisting the ongoing secularization process; in this line of thinking, language was placed in the service of the national religion.[36] Irrespective of how language was imagined as a tool for this or other purposes, one may thus note that language itself did play a central role in the arguments of the motion. [37] When the motion was debated in the second (lower) chamber in 1961, all four MPs debating the motion pointed to developments of the Swedish language since the most recent biblical translation (the 1917 Church Bible).[38] This was also mentioned as an important argument in the directives to the committee appointed in 1963 for investigating the possibility of a new translation.[39] What was furthermore clear in the debate was that the Bible, even if being of interest to different religious groups in the country, was no longer considered an exclusive property of the national church (the Church of Sweden). The new translation would not become a new Church Bible.[40] Since the national Lutheran religion could no longer function as a "source of biblical authority," something else had to fill its place. This something else was, it would turn out, *culture*. In the 1961 debate and in the 1963 directives referred to above, the new translation was accordingly framed as a "general cultural interest."[41] This was also highlighted in the directives issued in 1972 by cabinet minister Alva Myrdal, who appointed the translation committee (the Bible Com-

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[36] This suggests a situation in which "religious nationalism" and "linguistic nationalism" overlapped (cf. Elenius, "Minoritetsspråken").

[37] *Bihang till Riksdagens protokoll år 1961, fjärde samlingen, första bandet*, 11–14.

[38] *Riksdagens protokoll år 1961, andra kammaren, tredje bandet*, 135–139.

[39] *1964 års riksdagsberättelse*, 292.

[40] A report by the 1963 Bible Committee, published in 1968, did suggest a translation called "church bible" (along with a second translation called "people's bible"). The "church bible" was, however, consistently denounced by the organizations and groups responding to the report. Neither had a translation with this designation been the object of debate in the parliamentary chamber following the initiative in 1961. See Pleijel, "The 1960s Bible."

[41] Pleijel, "The 1960s Bible."

mission).[42] The "general cultural interest" never received any more substantial definition, but the underlying concept of culture clearly equaled national culture: it was something that united, or at least had the potential of uniting, all Swedes. Indeed, once finalized, the translation would be framed as something that had been "undertaken on behalf of the Swedish people."[43]

In the directives of Alva Myrdal, the new translation was framed as "a matter for the whole nation, as defined by its common language and cultural history."[44] Underlying this definition on finds, according to Tobias Harding, "an ethnic concept of the nation."[45] This definition of the nation did not include everyone living within the borders of the Swedish territory: "the Bible was considered part of a Swedish cultural heritage from which immigrant churches and non-Christians were excluded, while Swedish atheists were included."[46] Harding furthermore contends that the directives voiced an "ethno-linguistic opinion," which suggests a mutual connection between the people (*ethnos*) and their common language. It was to this people that the Bible belonged.[47] This

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[42] Pleijel, "The 1960s Bible," 9

[43] Marianne Bjelland Kartzow and Karin Neutel, "'God Speaks our Language': Recent Scandinavian Bible Translations and the Heritagization of Christianity," in *The Nordic Bible: Bible Reception in Contemporary Nordic Societies*, ed. Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, Kasper Bro Larsen, and Outi Lehtipuu (SBR, 24; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2023), 163–178 (172).

[44] Harding, *Nationalising Culture*, 163. This was visible not least in Myrdal's contention that once published, the new translation should have the possibility of functioning as "main text in the Swedish language area" (see Pleijel, *Om Bibel 2000*). It should however be noted that there was no complete overlap between national language and nation-state, since "the Swedish language area" also comprised the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland. Still, this shows that language was indeed considered the most important attribute of the intended readership, an argument that was only possible following the shift from religious to linguistic nationalism in the late nineteenth century onwards.

[45] Harding, *Nationalising Culture*, 163.

[46] Harding, *Nationalising Culture*, 164.

[47] See Harding, *Nationalising Culture*, 356, 360.

is one possible explanation why immigrant churches were exluded: they (originally) stemmed from areas with maternal languages other than Swedish, which was also the case with some of the non-Christian groups (most notably Muslims).[48] Swedish atheists, however, belonged to the intended readers of a new translation—simply because they spoke Swedish. In this way, the notion of a "Swedish Bible" came to denote a Bible in the language of the nation-state, as opposed to the Bible for Sweden as a Lutheran nation in previous centuries. The "Swedish Bible" had come to equal "the Bible in Swedish."[49]

Ethno-Political Mobilization Among the Sami People: Language as an Identity Marker

I have suggested above that "the Bible in Swedish" was not only a concept that encompassed the language that the biblical texts were translated into, but also a concept that drew on a monocultural and monolingual context where language over time had emerged as one of the most important tools for societal cohesion. The Swedish language, and its

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[48] The board of the Bible Commission included representatives from the Roman Catholic Church from the start (1973), but a representative for the Orthodox churches was not included until 1997. This fact possibly confirms Harding's contention, but also points to a more pluralistic situation in the 1990s compared to the early 1970s.

[49] The same (implicit) definition can be detected in a number of works on Swedish biblical translation; for example, in the volume *Den svenska bibeln: ett 450-års jubileum* (The Swedish Bible: A 450 Years Anniversary [Stockholm: Proprius, 1991]), "the Swedish Bible" equals the Bible in Swedish (with one notable exception; see Walter Persson, "Översättning i missionen," 378–394). This is also the case with Birger Olsson's book *Från Birgitta till Bibel 2000: Den svenska bibelns historia* (From St. Bridget to Bibel 2000: The History of the Swedish Bible [Stockholm: Verbum, 2001]), which despite the title concerns only translations into Swedish. Of course, an overwhelming majority of biblical translations used in Sweden—a territory that has varied substantially over the centuries—have been translations into Swedish, but translations into a number of other languages (for example Sami) have existed and been used, and should therefore also be considered part of "the Swedish Bible."

connection to national culture, had become an important source of authority for the biblical translation, which also motivated the public (state and governmental) interest in the translation. It is highly significant that the arguments concerning the translation and its intended readers (that is, the Swedish population as defined by its common culture and language) were articulated in the 1960s and early 1970s, as the cultural monolingualism was still during this period of time perceived as a given in public discourse and in cultural policy. And yet, as already suggested, things had started to change. The assimilation politics against the Sami people, which had largely drawn on monoculturalism and monolingualism, was gradually being more and more questioned. Eventually, it would be completely abandoned as official policy, but at that point of time, the new "Swedish" translation Bibel 2000 was already well under its way. In what follows, I will discuss more in-depth how the assimilation politics of the Swedish state was challenged by different actors within the Sami community, with a focus on how these framed the importance of language for the construction of Sami identity.

The 1950s saw an increased ethno-political mobilization within the Sami community, with the founding of *Svenska samernas riksförbund* (National Association of Swedish Sami, 1950) as an important event.[50] The ethno-political mobilization was explicitly connected to questions of language revitalization.[51] With ethnic mobilization as a form of resistance to the political project of the nation-state,[52] it was only natural that the Sami mobilization took issue with one of the most obvious features of Swedish cultural policy, namely the national language, and more specifically the expansion of this language that had taken place at the expense of the Sami language. Just as language had been the aspect of minority culture *par préference* targeted by the Swedish authorities in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so language now began to

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[50] For a background, see Elenius, *Nationalstat och minoritetspolitik*, 214–217.

[51] See Huss, *Reversing Language Shift*.

[52] Björn Hettne, Sverker Sörlin, and Uffe Østergård, *Den globala nationalismen: Nationalstatens historia och framtid* (2nd ed.; Stockholm: SNS, 2006), 370.

emerge as the main marker of Sami identity.[53] When at the end of the 1950s a joint conference was arranged by the Nordic Council and the Nordic Sami Council (instated in 1953), it was suggested that language should define who was to be considered a Sami person. This must be understood in contrast to the Swedish legislation of the 1880s and 1890s, where Samihood had been defined solely in terms of reindeer herding, thereby "establishing a specific conception of Sami identity."[54] Now, this conception began to change, as reindeer herding was replaced by language as the most important identity marker and as a main feature of Sami culture.[55]

The governmental report *Samerätt och samiskt språk* (Sami Rights and Sami Language), published in 1990, marks an important event in the official Swedish cultural policy towards the Sami language; the report argued that "the Sami language should be protected as a part of the Swedish cultural heritage."[56] No longer was Swedish culture officially equated with the Swedish language. The monocultural and monolingual conception of cultural heritage, which could be detected in the arguments on the new biblical translation into Swedish in the 1960s and early 1970s (see above), had given way to a more multicultural conception of cultural heritage. As a response to the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, the "Minority Language Committee" was formed in 1995. Its report was published in 1997,[57] and this report, in turn, prepared the way for the governmental

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[53] Harding, *Nationalising Culture*, 95; Lantto and Mörkenstam, "Sami Rights," 40.

[54] Ulf Mörkenstam, "Group-Specific Rights as Political Practice," in *The Politics of Group Rights: The State and Multiculturalism*, ed. Ishtiaq Ahmed (Lanham: University Press of America, 2005) 35–59 (46).

[55] Cf. Olavi Korhonen, "Språk och kultur i det lulesamiska området," *Svenska bibelsällskapets årsskrift* (1997), 23–25.

[56] Harding, *Nationalising Culture*, 183 n. 476. See SOU 1990:91, *Samerätt och samiskt språk: slutbetänkande*.

[57] SOU 1997:93, *Steg mot en minoritetspolitik: Europarådets konvention för skydd av nationella minoriteter*.

proposition mentioned in the introduction of this article. By voting in favor of the proposition, in February 2000 the Swedish Parliament ratified the framework convention. The Swedish Bible Society reacted to the new political reality, with representatives stating that "of course, a national Bible Society needs to ensure that there are translations of the Bible to the official languages of the country."[58] In other words, the fact that the Swedish state had acknowledged the existence of linguistic minorities became an important impetus for the production of new translations. The developments described above can be summarized by the term *recognition*.[59] The official authorities had recognized the existence of cultural and linguistic minorities. In other words, official policy no longer aimed at ignoring or opposing the existence of these minorities.

On a general level, the recognition of national minority rights means that the Swedish state accepted different types of nationalisms within its borders,[60] instead of trying to evoke *one* official nationalism—whether linguistic, as had been the case since the latter half of the nineteenth cenury, or religious, as in more distant historical periods. These larger cultural and political processes are vital for understanding how and why the Sami translation project of the Nordic Bible Societies came about in the mid-1980s, to which I now turn. As I will show, the question of language played a decisive role in this project, as it had in the arguments on a new "Swedish" Bible in the 1960s and early 1970s, but in a very different sense and against the background of a rapidly and radically changing cultural context. I focus first on the question of language in

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[58] Anders Ruuth, Anders Alberius, and Krister Wos Andersson, *Bibeln till Sverige och världen: Svenska bibelsällskapets historia 1815–2015* (Uppsala: Svenska Bibelsällskapet, 2015), 102 (my translation).

[59] See, for example, Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25–74.

[60] Lars Elenius, "Nationella minoriteters symboliska nationsbyggande: Föreställningen om Kvänland och Sápmi som nya former av etnopolitik bland finskspråkiga och samiskspråkiga minoriteter," *Historisk tidskrift* 138 (2018): 480–509 (487).

the Sami translation project, and then on the importance of this translation project for Sami identity formation.

The Nordic Bible Societies and the Time Frame for the Multilingual Sami Bible

In 1984, the Norwegian Bible Society decided to carry out a translation of the biblical texts into North Sami. As a consequence of new rules for orthography, it had been decided in the 1970s to "transcribe" the 1895 North Sami translation into the new orthography; these texts were published in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[61] This was, however, considered an unsatisfactory solution, and it was therefore eventually decided that a translation proper should be carried out. In 1987, the project turned into a collaboration between the Bible Societies in Norway, Finland, and Sweden, which was only natural given the fact that North Sami is spoken in all three of these countries (and to some extent also in Russia). The complete translation was published in 2019 as *Biibbal*.[62]

In the early 1990s, the Swedish Bible Society had decided on a New Testament translation into Lule Sami; the translation was published in 2003 (a translation of the complete Bible is expected to be published in the latter half of the 2020s).[63] Also this project has turned into a Nordic collaboration, with the Swedish and Norwegian Bible Societies working together on the translation. A South Sami translation of the New Testament is underway, coordinated by the Swedish Bible Society; the finalized translation was presented in August 2024. Already the fact that the translations are the outcome of Nordic collaboration can be connected to the new multicultural situation, which, along with trends of globalization, entails an undermining of the nation-state as a given political and cultural framework. After all, earlier Sami translations of (parts of)

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[61] Kjølaas, *Bibelen på samisk*, 99–101.

[62] See Bjelland Kartzow and Neutel, "God Speaks our Language," 170.

[63] See Korhonen, "Språk och kultur," 24.

the Bible were all national—Swedish or Norwegian/Danish-Norwegian[64]—projects, and not transnational collabo-rations.[65]

The time frame for these translations, with the earliest (into North Sami) initiated in the 1970s and 1980s, suggests that they not only followed a change in cultural policy of the Nordic countries, but also to some extent came about *along* these changes—and perhaps also contributed to them. In this sense, the translations have functioned as contributions to the development of Sami identity through language standardization. I now turn to these two aspects of the contemporary Sami Bible.

Language

What unites the translations, especially the North Sami and Lule Sami translations, is that they are explicitly presented as a contribution to new standardized forms of the respective language varieties.[66] Earlier translations, with the 1811 Bible as perhaps the foremost example, had put forth a constructed form of Sami language based on Ume Sami, while the Northern form of the language came to dominate later on in the nineteenth century. A different, but related, problem was that the 1895 Norwegian translation into North Sami had been based on Danish-Norwegian texts, which means that the specifically Danish-Norwegian biblical language was carried over in the 1895 translation. It has also been noted that the Lule Sami New Testament translation from 1903 was strongly influenced by Swedish, to the point that the language of this translation, according to one observer, "cannot be regarded as correct Sami."[67] The same contention has been made when it comes to

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[64] Up until 1814, the dual monarchy Norway-Denmark effectively functioned as one state.

[65] Henriksen, "Bibelen på samisk," 70–78.

[66] See, for example, Lotta Ring, "Nordsamiskt bibelsläpp," *Bibel* 3 (2019): 8.

[67] Susanna Angéus Kuoljok, "Samiskan har ingen krubba åt Jesus: Funderingar kring den lulesamiska bibelöversättningen," in *Samisk kyrka: Nu är rätt tid för praktisk solidaritet med samerna* (Uppsala: Svenska kyrkan, 2003): 113–122 (115).

influences of the Norwegian and Swedish languages on the 1895 translation.[68] These features of the old translations have hence been perceived as a problem, and the new translations are supposed to achieve an establishing of more correct forms of the language varieties. But this is no mere return to a correct version of the written form of, for example, Lule Sami, but to a large extent a *construction* of such a "correct" form. The Sami translation project of the Nordic Bible Societies is therefore a project where biblical translation is used as a tool in the service of language standardization. This, however, should not only be understood as a linguistic operation, as the establishment of a correct language form, but also as an indication of the importance of language itself as a contribution to Sami identity formation.

Identity

The contribution to a standardization of the Sami language hence also pertains to Sami culture more broadly. Above, it was noted that *language* and *culture* were seen as closely connected, and that language emerged as a core part of Sami identity in the wake of the ethnopolitical mobilization in the 1950s onwards. In this sense, we could speak of the current Sami translations as tools in the construction of a "we."[69] Thus, while we clearly find notions of national identity underlying the arguments on Bibel 2000 in the 1960s and 1970s, the Sami translations can also be connected to a question of national identity: that of the Sami people and their "symbolic" nation, Sápmi.[70] In the first case, the trans-

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[68] See Endre Mørch and Thomas Magga, eds., *Samiska i ett nytt årtusende* (Copenhagen: Nordic Council of Ministers, 2002), 129. These features of the Sami translations discussed can be connected to the fact that they were all *indirect* translations, that is, translations of translations (for this definition, see Yves Gambier, "La retraduction, retour et détour," *Meta* 39 [1994]: 413–417).

[69] Bjelland Kartzow and Neutel, "God Speaks our Language," 178.

[70] On Sápmi as a "symbolic" nation, see Lars Elenius, "Nationella minoriteters symboliska nationsbyggande."

lation was being connected to national (that is, nation-state) identity, with national language as a primary component. This means that Bibel 2000—or rather the discourse on this translation—played a part in the othering of groups that were not considered part of that identity. In the case of the Sami translations, translation plays a positive role in the construction and maintenance of a national identity that could not fit within the nation-state project Bibel 2000, in which the "Swedish Bible" equaled the Bible in Swedish.[71]

The connection between language and identity formation, and the role that translations can play in this process, has been explicated by a number of actors in the Sami translation project of the Nordic Bible Societies. Recently, Hans Olav Mørk of the Norwegian Bible Society has underlined the importance of the translations for Sami identity.[72] In 1996, the then director of the Swedish Bible Society stated that the translation project was "a part of the growing pursuit of the Sami people in safeguarding their language and strengthening their identity" (and, vice versa, that the previous suppression of the Sami language had entailed a suppression of Sami identity).[73] Similarly, when the then bishop of Luleå spoke at the presentation of the Lule Sami New Testament translation in Jokkmokk in 2000, he stated that as an outcome of the earlier ban to speak Sami in schools, many Sami children had "started to suppress their language and their Sami identity."[74] More examples could be given. In this discourse surrounding the Sami translations, we thus

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[71] On the role of translation in constructing national identities and in othering groups that are not perceived as part of this national identity, see Sandra Bermann, "Introduction," in *Nation, Language, and the Ethics of Translation*, ed. Sandra Bermann and Michael Wood (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 1–10; see also, more generally, Michael Cronin, *Translation and Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[72] https://sverigesradio.se/artikel/an-drojer-bibeln-pa-lulesamiska.

[73] Lester Wikström, "Bibeln på samiska," *Svenska bibelsällskapets årsbok* (1996): 43–47 (43, my translation).

[74] Katarina Hällgren, "Ådå Testamennta överlämnades till samerna," *Samefolket* 11 (2000): 2–4 (my translation).

see a close connection between Sami language and Sami identity, with an acknowledgment of the role that translation has to play in Sami identity formation.

In the following, concluding section, I will broaden the discussion of the questions of language and identity in relation to biblical translation. I will offer some reflections on these questions in the light of Jonathan Sheehan's concept of sources of biblical authority, placing both translation projects investigated (Bibel 2000 and the Sami Bible) in their time-specific contexts. Ultimately, this sheds light on the contexts themselves and on the sociocultural and political changes that have occurred between the two translation projects.

Conclusion: Monolingualism vs. Multilingualism as Sources of Biblical Authority

In his book *The Enlightenment Bible*, Jonathan Sheehan paints a picture of the changes that "the Bible" underwent during the Enlightenment era. As the traditional "theological truth" was undermined in the wake of different religious and intellectual processes, often termed secularization, the old question "What is the ultimate source of biblical authority?" was given new answers.[75] The pre-Enlightenment Bible had rested on one single source of authority: its divine origin, its status as the Word of God; the (post-)Enlightenment Bible, however, "was ineluctably *plural* in its character," since the Bible was now being distributed over a number of practices, genres, and disciplines.[76] The new sources of biblical authority included history, scholarship, philology, and political institutions (patronage).[77] The new answers to the old question of biblical authority derived from these different sources enabled the Bible to survive as a vital part of the public space in late modern Europe.

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[75] Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 91.

[76] Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 91.

[77] Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible*, 11–12, 12–15, 48–50, 185.

Sheehan's argument is applicable also to the case of biblical translation.[78] In the case of Sweden, historical translations/versions (such as those of 1526/1541, 1618, and 1703) had all been produced on the basis of "theological truth."[79] The translation published in 1917 indicates a changing but not completely changed situation; "secular" exegetical scholarship clearly influenced the work of the translators,[80] but the translation was still explicitly designated "Church Bible." However, in the 1960s and early 1970s, the Church would have largely lost its function as a source of biblical authority. Instead, national language had come to replace it as an important such source of authority. The production of an official Swedish Bible was motivated on this basis, and not on the basis of the (former) Lutheran religion of the nation-state. This can also be framed in terms of societal cohesion as a source of authority; if the Bible was to function as a means of societal cohesion, for the society at large, it was as a cultural document in the language of the nation-state, and not as the Word of God for a religiously homogenous people.

Above, I have suggested that the arguments on the new translation should be understood against a monocultural and monolingual framework that was still in the early 1960s to a large extent a political and cultural reality. Yet, at precisely this time, forceful sociopolitical changes were on their way. The Sami ethnopolitical mobilization in the 1950s onwards was as much a reflection of as a contribution to these developments. Eventually, a new multicultural and postnational framework would largely have replaced the old monocultural framework, and it is

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[78] Indeed, translation is one of the survival forms of the (post-)Enlightenment Bible that Sheehan extensively discusses.

[79] There was another important source of authority that should be acknowledged, namely the royal patronage of all of these translations/versions. However, the royal patronage itself rested on the notion of the divine king, which means that "theological truth" was a presupposition for royal patronage.

[80] See Rebecca Idestrom, *From Biblical Theology to Biblical Criticism: Old Testament Scholarship at Uppsala University 1866–1922* (CBOT, 47; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2000).

in light of these changes that the Sami translation project of the Nordic Bible Societies should be understood. This, however, not only has to do with this specific translation project and the translations which are the outcome of it; it also more generally concerns how "the Bible" is being imagined, conceptualized, and produced in specific contexts. From being conceptualized as a tool in the service of societal cohesion in the framework of the nation-state, the Bible was instead being imagined as a vital part of the identity formation of a linguistic and ethnic minority in a multinational state. In the Sami Bible, we thus see yet another biblical metamorphosis, drawing on multiculturalism and postnationalism as sources of authority, enabling "the Bible" to survive in a new era and a new context.