



Breaking the Ice: Conflicts of Heritage in the West Nordic Regions

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Abstract

Of all the Nordic countries, only two have ratified the ILO convention 169 on indigenous peoples on behalf of a minority group: Norway in 1990, and Denmark in 1996. The minorities in question are the Norwegian Sámi and the Greenlandic Inuit. These two peoples share a history of cultural and political discrimination, but also a growing awareness of their cultural and indigenous identity from the 1970s onwards. Cultural historical museums were established in both areas during the following decades, yet the oldest and largest collections of Sámi and Greenlandic material were to be found in the institutions of their former suppressors. This paper compares Norwegian/Sámi repatriation processes to those of Denmark/Greenland.

In 1981, a huge collection of watercolours was handed over to the Greenlandic Home Rule Government as a first step in the process of repatriating 35 000 items from the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen to Greenland's National Museum in Nuuk. The process was completed in 2001 and is acknowledged by UNESCO as an exemplary one, providing general guidelines for cooperation on the subject of repatriation. The earlier and more conflictual cases of reacquisition of Icelandic and Faroese cultural heritage, demonstrates however that successful Danish repatriation strategies have developed only gradually. Repatriation of Sámi heritage from Norwegian institutions has not been an equally smooth process as the Greenlandic one, and is mainly connected to human remains. The return of the skulls of two beheaded leaders of a social-religious revolt taking place in Kautokeino in 1852 became a symbolic victory. The Norwegian Museum of Cultural History (*Norsk Folkemuseum*) is in these days about to transfer half of its collection to Sámi museum institutions, and in 2011 a delegation of Norwegian and Sámi museum professionals went to Nuuk in search of inspiration for the work that lies ahead.

Introduction

Over the past decades Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark have come to terms with their own history of colonial endeavours, revealing the discrimination of minority groups (Katherine Goodnow 2008:ix). International conventions have been ratified, and political schemes developed, with the aim of righting the wrongs of the past. Yet, of all the Nordic countries, only two have ratified the ILO (International Labour Organisation) convention 169 on indigenous peoples on behalf of a minority group: Norway in 1990, and Denmark in 1996 (www.ilo.org). The minorities in question are the Norwegian Sámi and the Greenlandic Inuit.

The Sámi people represent one of a small number of European indigenous cultures and have their historical residence in the multi-state area of *Sápmi*, which reaches across the northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula in Russia. Greenland, in contrast, is an island, in fact the *world's biggest* island, situated far from its former colonial mainland, in the Arctic areas between Canada and Scandinavia (Utimit-return 2004:39; www.eu.nanoq.gl).

From the 1950s onwards influence from international anti-colonialist and indigenous peoples' movements contributed to gradually improving the political situation of both the Sámi and Greenlanders. The ILO Convention has proven useful in preserving and promoting their respective cultures, and in particular their languages (UN, PFII/2008/EMGI/14). Thus, after centuries of political suppression, governmental assimilation and missionary projects, these indigenous peoples are once more permitted to appreciate and cultivate their own respective cultures. As a part of their cultural ambitions and nation building strategies, they manage their own museums in which they display their cultural heritage. Yet the similarities between their situations have proved to be superficial.

Taking a view of the museum situation of Sámi and Greenlanders, I aim to demonstrate how repatriation processes are likely to reflect the political will of *both* majority and minority groups to come to an agreement on how to address and deal with a difficult past. Even if the repatriation of cultural heritage material and human remains may serve as a vehicle for “breaking the ice” between an emergent nation and its former suppressor, this is not necessarily what happens. The cases under consideration are interesting in this respect, since the repatriation issue has been met with very different strategies from the Danish and the Norwegian authorities, and not least from their respective indigenous peoples. The repossession of Sámi material from Norwegian institutions to Sápmi has not been an equally smooth process as in the Greenlandic case, and I will argue that the differences between those processes are partly dependent on the political situations of the Sámi and the Greenlanders, as well as on a divergent conception of *nation building*.

But heritage conflicts in the West Nordic regions are not exclusively connected to the nation building processes of *indigenous* peoples. Denmark has a long lasting and complicated colonial history including both the race for land in Africa, India and America during the seventh and eighteenth centuries, as well as the continued rule over Norway's former North Atlantic possessions (Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands) following the dissolution of the Dano-Norwegian union in 1814. Denmark's colonial period came to an end in 1979, with Greenland's acquisition of home rule (some would say it ended with the Greenlanders gaining access to the Danish Parliament in 1953). Yet, in spite of their governmental independence, Greenland and the Faroe Islands are still part of the Danish Kingdom. Iceland achieved full sovereignty in 1944.

Common to all former Danish colonies in the West-Nordic area, the focus of the present report is the decisive role played by their respective national museums in shaping distinct national identities, along with the appeal to representations of a pre-colonial past.

Repatriation of cultural historical and archaeological material collected by Danish officials has carried on since 1971, initially as a result of tough political negotiations (e.g. in the case of Iceland), and later on in the shape of peaceful cooperative projects (e.g. in the case of Greenland). Before I delve into Denmark's handling of the Greenlandic heritage conflict and compare it to that of the Norwegian Sámi repatriation issues, I wish to shed light on the gradual development of Danish repatriation strategies by presenting the more conflictual cases of reacquisition of Icelandic and Faroese cultural heritage.

The Icelandic manuscripts: a hard-won match of restitution

Between 1971 and 1997, 1,807 Norse Mediaeval manuscripts – *Sagas* concerning local history and families, heroes and kings, mythology, skaldic literature, religious texts, legal documents and manuscripts documenting the Icelandic law – were returned to Iceland as a gift from Denmark. This was however not a process *initiated* by the Danes, but rather a result of “several generations of discussions, two legal cases, seemingly endless negotiations and 25 years of restitution agreements” (Nielsen 2002:2-3, 68th IFLA). An important reason for the conflict was that both countries regarded the contested material as their own national and cultural heritage. A quick brief on the history of Iceland and its relation to the Danish empire will make it easier to understand how and why.

Due to the strong tradition of Icelandic writing, Iceland is one of few European countries whose origins we know with a great amount of certainty. *Islendingabók* – an early book on the Icelanders – was written by the Icelandic Priest *Ari Fróði Þorgilsson* in the late 1100s, as was probably *Landnámabók*, a book concerning the first settlers (Ødegård 1998:30-34). Within the literature of the *Sagas*, the period between 870 and 930 is referred to as the *landnam* period – the age of the settlers. The settlers arrived mostly from Norway (and from Norse settlements in the British Isles), where the high standard of shipbuilding made it possible to travel great distances at sea. They established a national parliament (the Old *Alþingi*), and adopted Christianity ca. 1000 AD. Two bishoprics were set up, and the country divided into parishes. The Icelanders were taught to use the Latin alphabet, but retained their own language in spoken and written form. When, in the 13th Century, a civil war erupted between a number of powerful petty kings, the Icelanders had long since begun their production of the valuable *Saga* manuscripts (Making of a nation 2008:16-19; Nielsen 2002:3). By the time of the Old Covenant of 1262-1264, Iceland was incorporated into the Mediaeval Norwegian Empire, and the civil strife ended under the legal code of the Norwegian king. In 1380, King *Håkon VI Magnusson* died, leaving the Norwegian throne to his Danish wife, *Queen Margrethe I*. Norway entered into a union with Denmark, bringing Iceland with it, and in 1397, Margrethe introduced the Kalmar Union between the Nordic kingdoms, which ended with Sweden's secession in 1523. Norway, Iceland, Greenland and the Faroe Islands remained subjects of the Danish king, who soon forced the Icelandic church to become Lutheran. Danish royal power over Iceland was extended in the years to follow, with the imposition of a trade monopoly in 1602, and the introduction of absolutism in 1662. The Monarch's power was however exercised by officials, mostly represented by Icelanders

(www.thjodminjasafn.is). As a consequence of the Kiel Treaty of 1814, Denmark lost Norway to Sweden, whereas Iceland remained under Danish rule (Nielsen 2002:2).

De facto Copenhagen served as capital of Iceland for almost 400 years. This meant for example that, the Danish empire's only university was situated there¹ until 1911 when Iceland acquired its own institution (Thór 2007:72). Prior to this, Icelandic scholars and priests received their education at the Danish Royal University. An accord dating back to 1579 allowed less affluent Icelanders to study in Copenhagen, granting a scholarship and three years of free accommodation after they passed their matriculation exam² (Thór 2007:72 -74). Not surprisingly, Icelanders collected many of the Saga manuscripts themselves. The famous Icelandic philologist, *Árni Magnússon* (1663 - 1730), collected thousands of manuscripts from all over the island, bequeathing them at his death to the Arnamagnean Foundation of the University of Copenhagen. The foundation has remained under the particular management of the Arnamagnean Commission (*Den Arnamagnaanske Kommission*) since 1772 (Nielsen 2002:3; www.arnamagnaanskekommission.ku.dk).

The Icelandic Saga literature preserves a written language that is closer to modern Icelandic than Shakespeare is to modern English (Greenfield 1989:4). Naturally, its myths, folklore and historical information have provided symbolic elements to the development of national cultural identity in Iceland, and historical manuscripts and documents retained in Denmark's Royal Library and in the privately founded Arnamagnean Collection have consequently served as both inspiration and justification during the Icelandic struggle for independence from the very start. The first claims to the Saga manuscripts were raised as early as the 1830s by Icelandic authorities. In 1843, the Icelandic *Alþingi* was re-established, at this time just as an advisory organ, yet reflecting a growing nationalism among Icelanders. *Jón Sigurðsson* (1811 - 1879), an Icelandic scholar working with the Arnamagnean Collections' of old Saga literature, as well as The Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries (*Det Kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab*) and the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters (*Det Kongelige Danske Videnskaberne Selskab*), attended the *Alþingi* in 1845, presenting national ambitions on behalf of his people. Residing in Copenhagen, he exerted political influence on the Danish government and fronted an Icelandic independence movement beginning in the 1850s that ended with Denmark granting Iceland a constitution and limited home rule, in 1874. In a renewed exhibition that opened in June 2011 in his childhood home in Hrafnseyri, Arnarfjörður, to mark the bicentenary of his birth, Sigurðsson's discovery and publication of old documents and records on Icelandic governmental history is presented as a key contribution to the Icelandic campaign for self-determination (Friðriksson 2011:11-16).

The Icelanders had to wait until 1925, seven years after Iceland became a sovereign state, before a minor 'repatriation' of historical *administrative* archives and documents actually took place. When the Republic of Iceland was founded in 1944, the Icelandic Parliament, *Alþingi*, decided on the construction of a new building to house the National Museum of Iceland (at that time located within the National Library) as a gift to the nation, spurring the first official request for those manuscripts deemed a part of the Icelandic *cultural* heritage (Making of a Nation 2008:7; Greenfield 1989). The request caused intense public debate in Denmark in the 1950s and 1960s, especially since the claim included manuscripts from the privately founded Arnamagnean Collection, and objections against the Icelandic repossession of the manuscripts were raised by academics as well as by members of the general public (Nielsen 2002:3). Nevertheless a law

referring to the expropriation conditions in Section 73 of the Danish Constitution was passed in 1961, dividing the Arnamagnean Collection into two, thus granting in accordance with the foundation's charter, the University of Iceland administrative authority over manuscripts and other archival material considered part of Iceland's cultural heritage. However, the enactment of the law was deferred for four years by the votes of one third of the Danish parliament and finally passed again on 26 May 1965. The law, and its relevance to the Danish Constitution, were then questioned once more, this time during legal proceedings brought before the Danish Supreme Court, but the plaintiffs lost the case in 1967. A treaty on the restitution of the manuscripts was finally made in 1970, and ratified in 1971. The manuscripts were restored and photographed for reproduction beforehand, in order to secure continued research and publications in Denmark (Nielsen 2002:3-4). The law outlined which parts of the material were considered part of the Icelandic cultural heritage, and which should thus be returned: "all diplomas concerning Iceland, either in the original version or in transcript, and other archive material rightly belonging to local and private Icelandic archives" (Section 1, subsection 2 – cited in Nielsen 2002:4). Manuscripts written or translated by Icelanders on the subject of Iceland or Icelandic conditions were included, as well as Icelandic literature, both transcripts and originals, from the late Middle Ages (Section 1, subsection 3 cited in Nielsen 2002:4). As for the manuscripts retained in the Royal Library, the law states as follows: "in addition, the Flatøbogen and the Codex Regius of the Eddic poems (by the Elder Edda) are to be restituted" (Section 2 cited in Nielsen 2002:4). The 1971 committee constituted by representatives from the Universities of Iceland and of Copenhagen also sorted out and recommended documents, presenting 11 restitution lists to the Prime Minister. 141 manuscripts were released from The Royal Library during the period of repatriation, and 1 666 manuscripts and 76 fascicles from the Arnamagnean Collection that included 980 Norse manuscripts – about 700 Icelandic and 280 Norwegian, but also manuscripts of Danish, Latin, Swedish and other European origins. The Icelandic manuscripts, which remain in the two institutions in Copenhagen comprise mainly non-Icelandic materials, such as histories of the Danish and Norwegian monarchies.

Today, the repossessed Saga manuscripts physically constitute exhibitions or parts of exhibitions in a wide range of Icelandic museums and national institutions. Several of these manuscripts, those regarded as culturally and historically the most valuable, are exhibited in the National Library in Reykjavík, but the National Museum, appointed "guardian of the nation's heritage" (Hallgrímsdóttir 2007), also has certain essential manuscripts on display. So do the National Archive and the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies established in 1972 (Sigurðsson & Ólason 2004; www.arnastofnun.is). But the role of the Saga manuscript in preserving and promoting an Icelandic cultural identity *today* is perhaps most strongly attested by the selection of mediaeval penmanship on permanent display in the exhibition *Mediaeval Manuscripts – Eddas and Sagas* in the public Culture House, inaugurated in 2000 as "a common centre for Icelandic cultural heritage institutions with high-quality exhibitions on selected national treasures" (www.thjodmenning.is).

In spite of the fact that most of the Saga manuscripts originate from the 14th and 15th centuries (Nielsen 2002:3), and several from even later periods, the returned manuscripts are seldom used to present the history that Icelanders share with the Danes. An exception is the Bible of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson, printed at Hólar in 1584. It was the first translation of the entire Bible

printed in Icelandic, and serves as a key object in a section of the National Museum's permanent exhibition "The Making of a Nation". In this section, called "Under Danish Rule", we learn how the Reformation in Iceland incited a series of conflicts ending with the execution of the last Catholic bishop, *Jón Arason* (1484-1550), which furthermore initiated a period of increasing Danish power and influence over the colonies (www.thjodmenning.is). We are also informed that we know little of the life of ordinary people in Iceland during this period of time, as the later manuscripts are more often religious texts. "The Making of a Nation" presents Danish royal authority not only as causing a reduction of freedom for the Icelanders, but also inciting progress in business, and spurring the Icelanders to take their "first steps into the modern world" (www.thjodmenning.is).

The pew-ends from Kirkjubøur

The Faroe Islands are situated in the North Atlantic, halfway between Norway and Iceland. The first settlers here were Irish monks, who were displaced by Norwegian Vikings in the 800s. The islands were Christianized in 999, and from 1111, *Kirkjubøur*, the southernmost village on *Streymoy* (on the west coast), was established as its first diocese. From 1152, Kirkjubøur was subject to Nidaros Diocese in Norway, and it served as an episcopal residence during the Middle Ages (www.faroeislands.dk; Young 1982; Mortensen 2008). The white washed parish church, *Ólavskirkjan* (St. Olav's church), was built as part of the Catholic episcopate in the 1200s, and remains the oldest church still in use on the Faroe Islands today. It was from this church that a delicate mediaeval church interior with pews holding beautifully carved pew-ends (*Kirkjubostolarnir*) was removed and brought to Copenhagen. This occurred in 1875, one year after a thorough restoration of the church had been initiated. Albeit not as contested as the case of the Icelandic manuscripts, the return of these pew-ends to the Faroe Islands was likewise a lengthy process followed by discussions on the origin and purpose of these eminent pieces of craftsmanship.

The restoration of *Ólavskirkjan* in the early 1870s was the immediate cause of the decision to remove its interior. As early as 1860, the ocean swells had threatened to rupture the ground on which the church is resting, and in the light of the building's poor condition, the ruin of another mediaeval church on Kirkjubøur, located further from the shoreline, was considered for restoration, namely the larger fourteenth century cathedral *Magnuskatedralurin*. It was (and still is) popularly referred to as "*Mururin*" (the Wall), since it is merely a ruin. The project was halted, however, supposedly due to weak support outside of the *Sydøstströmo* parish, to which Kirkjubø belonged. The project was closed down in 1868 (Krogh 1988:21). Following this, restoration of the old parish church (*Ólavskirkjan*) remained the only alternative. The scope and methods required for this rescue operation were discussed over several years. Common to every report and discussion, however, was the emphasis on the preservation of the ancient pieces of church interior (Krogh 1988:23).

The concern for the interior was, however, set aside when the master builder from Tórshavn, (the Faroese capital), *Guðbrandur Sigurðsson* (date of birth unknown), began to restore the parish church in the early 1870s. He had previously built a church in Suðuroy (which was later moved to Hov), and was also responsible for the radical reconstruction of the church in Tórshavn (today's Tórshavn cathedral) in the mid-60s. Sigurðsson held true to the contemporary neo-gothic ideal in

reconstructing the parish church at Kirkjubøur. He raised the walls in order to construct an arched vault, inserted pointed arch windows and added a church spire on the rooftop. The new pew system of evenly shaped chair blocks contributed to a radical change in the atmosphere of the church. It was consecrated in 1874 by Dean *Venceslaus Ulricus Hammershaimb* (1819-1909), a well-loved Lutheran minister who contributed to the formation of a Faroese identity by collecting folklore and founding a Faroese written language (Krogh 1988:24; Joensen 2003). Even if the reconstructed church was a fine example of contemporary style, the locals regarded its interior as “simple” compared to the original. The mediaeval pieces of furniture were however no longer compatible with the restored church room, and the pew-ends were in their current state not deemed robust enough for ordinary use. But their value as antiquities was recognized, and together with the district governor (H. Finsen), Dean Hammershaimb wrote a letter to the Ministry of Church and Education (*Ministeriet for Kirke- og Undervisningsvæsenet*) in Copenhagen, proposing that they take care of the antiquities in exchange for financial support for the commission of a new altar piece for Ólavskirkjan. The Ministry forwarded the letter to the Royal Museum of Nordic Antiquities (Det Kgl. Museum for Nordiske Oldsager), a precursor to Denmark’s National Museum (*Nationalmuseet*), and the board replied that the museum was interested in some of the pieces: the bishop’s throne, a copper plated cross and the eighteen pew ends, thus leaving the rest of the interior (a series of wooden figures, a decorative Madonna sculpture, and the church’s old altarpiece) in Kirkjubøur (Krogh 1988:23-27).

The pew-ends, comprising the most remarkable part of the parish church interior, received particular attention when they were registered in the museum’s protocol in 1876. Yet a thorough study of them was not made until archaeologist and military captain, *Daniel Bruun* (1856-1931), met with eager questions about the “Kirkjubostolarnir” from his Faroese friend, *Jóhannes Patursson* (1866-1946). Patursson was a wealthy local farmer with a nationalistic spirit and a strong interest in cultural history. Bruun got to know him in the course of his many travels to the Faroese Islands, when performing archaeological and cultural historical research on behalf of the National Museum. Patursson proposed that the coats of arms on the pew-ends would be helpful when studying Faroese (cultural) history, and he turned out to be right. Bruun identified the coats of arms of both *Erik of Pomerania* (1382-1459) and his consort, *Philippa of England* (1394-1430) on one of the most elaborate pieces. Erik was the Nordic Kalmar Union’s first King, and he married Philippa on the 4th of October 1406, thus Bruun concluded that the benches were made between this date and 1430, the year of the Queen’s death. This assumption corresponds with a later C-14 dating (Krogh 1988:21-31).

The uniqueness of the carved pine boards is linked to the quality of their craftsmanship. Two of the eighteen pew-ends clearly deviate from the others in terms of style and quality, in that they are simpler and lacking in any pictorial motif. But the sixteen remaining pieces have been identified as sophisticated craftsmanship originating from a prominent – perhaps Norwegian – workshop for church furniture from the first half of the 15th Century. Every motif depicts a religious scenario or portrait, yet the variations in the shape of each wooden piece reveal slightly different functions, e.g. two of them have served as prayer desk gables. A further three are asymmetrically shaped, and depict more complex scenarios, e.g. the Virgin Mary both in a mother-and-child scenario and in a Visitatio-motif in which she is depicted as kissing Elisabeth, who is pregnant with John the Baptist. It is on the latter that we find the royal coats of arms that

led Bruun to his conclusion (Krogh 1988:28-70). But for what church it was produced and who was responsible for the production of the church interior, remained, at this point in time, an unsolved puzzle.

In 1901, when the aforementioned farmer, Jóhannes Patursson became member of the Danish Parliament, he stood at the forefront of a Faroese national movement, and used the opportunity to demand that the pew-ends be returned (Krogh 1988:30, 111; Joensen 2003:48). Patursson was allegedly close to making an agreement on repatriation, but the process was interrupted by the fact that he was not re-elected for the Parliament in 1906. From that year onwards, two political parties, *Sambandsflokkurin* (the Union Party) and *Sjálvstýrisflokkurin* (the Independence Party) dominated the political field on the Faroe Islands (Patursson naturally belonged to the latter). The two parties illustrate a duality in the Faroese identity. In fact, secession from Denmark never attained 50% of the population's votes, which is remarkable compared to e.g. Iceland, where almost 100% voted for sovereignty. But if the national movement on the Faroe Islands has perhaps been less accentuated than in the other Nordic nations, it has been sufficiently influential to lead the Faroese to demand the return of national documents and ethnographic material for a national museum and archive (Joensen 2003:45-51). The interior from Ólavskirkjan remained a central case in every question of repatriation.

Patursson, who served as a parliamentarian in several rounds during the early 1900s, made renewed demands for the pews in 1918, 1919 and in 1928-36. None of them led to any action, nor did those of the later *Dean Jakúp Dahl* (1878-1944) (Krogh 1988:111-112). In 1955, it was decided that the Faroese National Board was to enter into negotiations with the Danish government and Denmark's National Museum about the repatriation of Faroese cultural heritage. The staff of the museum *Føroya Forngripasavn* in Tórshavn however stated that the material retained in Denmark would need thorough registration before any repatriation could take place. The need for a proper museum building was also highlighted. Yet the negotiations continued, and when the Danish Prime Minister, Hans Christian Hansen (1906-1960), visited the Faroe Islands in 1958, a demand for the Bishop's chair and the pew-ends was presented anew. The historical value of the unique pieces of Nordic mediaeval church furniture however made Denmark's national antiquarian conclude that they belonged to the National Museum of Denmark. He moreover argued that the pews were not even of Faroese origin, referring to the research of *Tage E. Christiansen* (1918-1984), inspector at the National Museum of Denmark from the late 1940s until his death.

Christiansen had taken part in a joint Faroese-Norwegian-Danish archaeological research project on Kirkjubøur between 1953 and 1955, and was intensely preoccupied with the origin of the pews and gables. While Captain Daniel Bruun had suggested that the interior was prepared for Mururin, Kirkjubøur's unfinished cathedral, Christiansen deemed it more likely that the pews were intended for a larger, probably royal church on the Norwegian west coast, similar to the Apostle church (Apostelkirken) in Bergen, which had been demolished in 1531 (Krogh 1988:30-32, 70-74, 111-113). He completely denied any possibility of the benches having been designed for the allegedly unfinished Mururin, and in a referendum from a meeting on the possible repatriation of the chairs from 1958, Christiansen argues that the arrangement of the pews in the parish church (which was known from nineteenth century reports) could not have been original, as both the wooden boards and their painted decorations appeared to have been adjusted to fit

the church room. Christiansen's thesis about the Norwegian origin of the pew-ends was largely accepted, and they were exhibited as examples of "Norwegian mediaeval art abroad" at Norway's National Collection of Antiquities, in connection with the Norwegian 11th centennial national anniversary in 1972 (Krogh 1988:71-74).

Times were changing, and in 1977, six years after the repatriation agreement with Iceland had entered into effect, the Danish Ministry of Culture finally agreed to repatriate the pew-ends and chair gables. This happened despite the uncertainty about their origin, but on the condition that a proper museum building with sufficient exhibition facilities would be established beforehand (Krogh 1988:116). The new building of *Fornminnissavnið* (the Faroese National Museum) was however not completed until 1995, and the Kirkjubøur chairs were not returned until 2002 (www.fornminni.fo).

It is worth noticing that in 1988, the Danish archaeologist and architect Knud J. Krogh published "Kirkjubøstolene og Kirkjubøur" (The Kirkjubøur chairs and Kirkjubøur), in which he raised questions about the assumption that the Magnus Cathedral had never been completed. Pointing to contemporary archaeological finds, he offered a new interpretation of the building remains, and found it most likely that Mururin had been roofed and put to use at some point in time. He moreover legitimized the theory of the pew-ends actually having been created for a Faroese church, e.g. by pointing to a coat of arms depicting a ram as the central motif. The walking ram was the official Faroese coat of arms during the middle ages, and was reintroduced with the Home Rule Act of 1948 (Krogh 1988:66-70, 75-102, Mortensen 2008:10-13). What conclusively convinced Krogh about the interior having been intended for the Faroese diocese, was the interrelatedness of the motifs of the aforementioned prayer desk gables that was revealed through interpretation on the basis of a letter written in 1420 by the German *Johannes Teutonicus* (?-1430), who was appointed Bishop of the Faroe Islands in 1408. Teutonicus wrote that a church for St. Brendanus and a memorial chapel for the godly bishop Erlendur had recently been erected at Kirkjubøur, and that he was in the process of repairing an older church. The latter may have been Mururin. Bishop Erlendur, who was never canonized, and undoubtedly St. Brendanus, corresponds very well with the figures on the gables (Krogh 1988:103-110). Hagiographic research has later confirmed that the St. Brendan's cult had spread from the Rhine estuary to the Nordic countries, and that German traders probably introduced it to the Faroe Islands. We also know that Eric of Pomerania established international fishery agreements that included the West-Nordic islands (Mortensen 2008:17-19). The Faroese case demonstrates that repatriation processes are likely to produce new knowledge about historical environments. Our image of the mediaeval Kirkjubøur is certainly changed; from a poor, desolate diocese with one small parish church and an unfinished cathedral, to a buzzing, international trade center with the economy to establish and run three churches in parallel.

Greenland: an exemplary process of repatriation

Indigenous peoples around the world admire Greenland for its many achievements in the promotion and protection of the rights of its indigenous people (UN: PFII/2008/EMGI/14). The Greenlanders' estimated success is however not solely linked to the ILO 169 ratification, but also to post-colonial political trends in the wake of WWII, as well as the prior experiences with the decolonization processes of Iceland and the Faroe Islands. Like most former colonial

territories, Greenland underwent a piecemeal process towards self-government: First with a period of UN-supported decolonization leading to the island becoming part of the Danish Kingdom in 1953, then with home rule in 1979, accompanied by a contract on repatriation of national archives and Greenlandic museum material, and, following a referendum in 2008, also self-rule, implemented in 2009. The local government is now in control of the police and courts, a greater share is taken of revenues from its natural resources, and Greenlandic (*Kalaallit*) has become the *only* official language. Many Greenlandic residents see the latter development as a step towards independence from Denmark (Jensen 1983; BBC News 21 June 2009; Breukel & al. 2010; www.dk.nanoq.gl). The repatriation of museum material following the introduction of home rule has played an especially important role in this process, as for the Danish government it was a means of signalling respect for Greenlanders' need to elaborate and preserve a separate *national identity*.

In 1982, a large collection of watercolours – most of which are painted during the mid-1800s by the Greenlandic huntsman *Aron of Kangeq* (1822 - 1869) – was handed over to the Greenlandic home rule government by the Danish Queen *Margrethe II*. The watercolours were of special symbolic value to the Greenlanders, as Aron holds the title of Greenland's national painter. His pictures offer a unique *inside* perspective of Greenlandic life and folklore (Thuesen 2007:343; Utimut 2004:21). The former seal hunter also depicted the first meetings between Greenlanders and European missionaries, including conflicts and violent episodes (Rosing and Hagen 1986:250; Kaalund 1997). Ethnologist *Signe Rink* (1836 - 1909), the widow of colony inspector Rink (1819 - 1893) who invited Aaron and other Inuit to send him drawings and recorded legends of tales, wittingly separated the pictures with motifs of conflict from the rest before presenting them to the National Museum of Denmark in 1905 (Rosing & al. 1986). The Rinks moved to Norway in the 1880s, bringing the “less fortunate” watercolours with them, and the pictures are retained today in the magazines of the Cultural Historical Museum (*Kulturbistorisk museum*) in Oslo. It is worth noticing that none of Aron's pictures are on exhibition in Greenland's National Museum today, but his motifs are distributed on postcards and posters.

The return of the watercolours however initiated a lengthy process of repatriating 35 000 items from the National Museum of Denmark in Copenhagen to Greenland's National Museum and Archives (*Nunatta Katersugaasivia*) in Nuuk in accordance with the gradual improvement of storage and exhibition facilities in the latter. The agreement stated that both Greenland and Denmark should retain a representative collection of objects, thus the ground was prepared for future cooperation between the two national institutions, strengthening the scientific ambitions of Greenlandic museum professionals, as well as Greenlandic research in general. A bilateral Greenland Secretariat located at the National Museum of Denmark was instrumental during the process of repatriation that lasted until 2001, recording protected archaeological sites and monuments for a database to document the repatriated material. In 1999, an Arctic research centre – SILA – was established at the National Museum in Denmark, in response to the lack of a continuous scholarly environment concerned with Arctic and Norse archaeology. The centre became an integral part of the museum in Copenhagen after the repatriation process had been completed, and a new contract was signed between the two national museum institutions agreeing that the purpose of SILA is ”to carry out advanced research based on the museum collections in Denmark and Greenland, to support the scholarly environment of Arctic and

North Atlantic archaeology in its widest sense, and to facilitate the exchange of researchers within the Danish Realm” (www.natmus.dk). Providing general guidelines for cooperation and scientific development on the subject of repatriation, the Danish-Greenlandic repatriation process is acknowledged by UNESCO as exemplary (Baily 2007; Utimut – return 2004; Rosing & al. 1986).

Repatriation of Sámi material

Just like the National Museum of Denmark in 1982 offered the newly established Nunatta Katersugaasivia a large proportion of their Greenlandic collection, the Swedish Museum of Ethnography deposited its Sámi collection in Ájtte, the new Swedish Mountain and Sámi Museum opening in Jokkmokk in 1989, in an act of repatriation. None of the 11 Sámi museum institutions established in Norway during the 1970s, 80s and 90s were offered anything similar to this (WP2 Sápmi; Recalling Ancestral Voices: 51). Two of the oldest, richest and largest collections of Sámi material in Norway are situated in the Norwegian Museum of Cultural Heritage (*Norsk folkemuseum*) in Oslo (transferred from the University of Oslo’s Ethnographic Museum in the 1950s) and in Tromsø Museum in Northern Norway. Yet there has been no transfer of *museum* items from Norwegian institutions to Sámi museums so far (2012). The only case of a museum artefact having been repatriated to the Norwegian area of Sápmi is that of a sacrificial stone, a *sieidi*, displaced from Gárgovárri Mountain in Kautokeino (*Guovdageaidnu*) in 1906 and exhibited first in the Ethnographic Museum in Oslo, later in the Norwegian Museum of Cultural Heritage, before it was transferred to Sápmi in 1997 and returned to the same spot in 1999 (Pareli 2007). This was an isolated event spurred by claims from a local community that their fishing luck had diminished following the removal of the stone, and did not reflect any organized wish for repatriation of ethnographic Sámi material in general.

Repatriation of collection items from Norwegian museums has indeed been discussed in Sámi museum circuits, but in contrast to the Provincial Council of Greenland, which began to question the ownership and storage of Greenlandic cultural material outside Greenland as early as 1976, museums were simply not on the list of priorities when the Sámi Parliament (*Samediggi*) was established in 1989 (Samediggi, museum report 2004). One reason might be the one presented in a museum report produced by the parliament itself; that the Sámi museums lacked sufficient funding and support from the Norwegian Government, and that other political issues (the right to land and water, protection of languages, etc.) were considered to be priorities at this stage (Samediggi, museum report 2004). Another possible explanation is that judicial rights and international agendas concerning the status of indigenous people drew the Sámi’s attention to what archaeologists refer to as “the reburial issue”, initiated during the 1970s by indigenous peoples in America who argued that the activities of collecting, studying and exhibiting human remains for scientific purposes showed a lack of respect for the descendants of the dead (Hubert 1989; Schanche 2002; Gabriel 2002). Resting their case on the museum field, the Sámi instead focussed on the repossession of human remains from scientific institutions, which turned into a drawn-out process that proved painful to those involved.

The skulls of Hætta and Somby

In Norway, as in Sweden and Finland, hundreds of Sámi graves were opened during the 19th and early twentieth centuries by or under the auspices of scientists. Sámi skeletons actually became

something of a commodity. Any objections to this “business” from the locals were ignored, and with the exception of Orthodox Church leaders in the village of Neiden in the North Eastern parts of Norway, Norwegian priests did nothing to prevent these acts (Schanche 2002:100). Yet disinterring graves was not the only method used by Norwegian Scientists to collect Sámi human remains. The very first Sámi-Norwegian repatriation case is a particularly conflictual one, and related to the skulls of *Mons Aslaksen Somby* (1825 - 1854) and *Aslak Jacobsen Hatta* (1824 - 1854) who were executed after having led a social-religious Sámi revolt against Norwegian officials in Kautokeino (Finnmark County) in 1852. Their bodies were buried outside of Kåfjord Church Yard, but their decapitated skulls were shipped – against Norwegian law – to The Royal Frederick University in Christiania (today’s University of Oslo) (Schanche 2002:99; Bull 1997:206).

Enquiries with regard to repatriation began to be voiced as early as 1976 (the same year as the Greenlanders initiated an early debate on the location of Greenlandic cultural heritage), initially with a request from a relative of Hætta, but the Anatomical Institute claimed to have only one skull – that of Mons Somby. In 1985, when a relative of Somby forwarded an official claim for Somby’s skull, the Anatomical Institute opposed the request, arguing that the skull was *their* property, and that they would refuse to help a brutal murderer like Somby become a martyr (Bull 1996:276; Schanche 2002:99-133).

The Kautokeino rebellion was in fact a brutal one, resulting in the killing of a Norwegian merchant and a police officer, and wounding several more. Whether these killings were politically, religiously or personally motivated has been discussed in several documents and treatises (Zorgdrager 1997). The mental state of the two key rebels has in fact been questioned, in light of the fact that, both before and after the killings, they made the literal claim that one of them *was* God Almighty (Sørnes 2009:276-277). It may seem strange that a revolt that in any case was not primarily politically motivated has been allowed to become a symbol of Sámi resistance and activism, especially since, in so doing, many of the partaking Sámis were violently forced to join a smaller party of religious fanatics. Yet this was the first organized Sámi riot, and it does indeed reflect the general situation and challenges of Sámi communities during the nineteenth century.

The revolt took place one year after the local authorities had several Sámi arrested for disturbing Mass first in Skjervøy community and subsequently in Kautokeino. Additional fines amounting to the total cost of the trials spelt ruin for the arrested Sámi. Both had no previous criminal record, and they were guilty of no more than verbal attacks on Norwegian priests (Zorgdrager 1997:410). In fact, it was a priest who initiated the violence, beating his parishioners with a stick and a hymnal (Sørnes 2009, *ibid*). The episodes of disturbance during the mass must be understood in the context of a pietistic revival movement initiated by Swedish-Sámi preacher *Lars Levi Laestadius* (1800 - 1861), which had garnered wide support among the Sámi people in the Scandinavian countries from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. On the one hand, Laestadianism protected the Sámi from the emerging problem of alcoholism, and provided a belief system compatible with parts of their former shamanistic religion (Zorgdrager 1997:419). On the other hand, it brought them into conflict with the Norwegian church, as well as with Norwegian liquor sellers. *Ole Isaksen Hatta* (1822-1912), the local police officer in Kautokeino, was accused of supporting the religious group, and was accordingly deprived of his position, being replaced by a Swedish officer of bad reputation – *Lars Johan Bucht* (1813 - 1852). Bucht was a friend of the salesman *Carl Johan Ruth* (1818 - 1852), keeper of the local inn (Sørnes 2009:278).

Both men were killed in the revolt, thus the humiliation and degradation of Sámi in Katuokeino has definitely played a part in the escalating situation.

In 1852 the Russian Tsar also closed the Finnish-Norwegian border, causing serious problems for local reindeer herders as they lost important grazing grounds. Even if the Norwegian government replied by denying Finnish Sámi access to Norwegian territory, thus protecting the grazing fields of "Norwegian" reindeers, the economic situation was overall a tough one for the ethnic minority of Sámi in Norway. Their traditional way of life was now being threatened in every aspect (Zorgdrager 1997).

The repossession of the skulls of Somby and Hætta to Sápmi has been important, not only to their relatives, but to the Sámi as a people. A humble and honest apology from their former oppressors for their disrespectful treatment of their dead has long been expected. Following a renewed demand from the President of the Sámi Parliament in 1996, followed by massive media attention, the University Board finally decided to return the skulls (Schanche 2002:110-111). Hætta's cranium was discovered in Copenhagen, where it had been exchanged for a pair of Inuit skulls.

Then, on the 21st of November, 1997, two small Sámi sleds beautifully decorated with heather and moss, and containing the crania of Hætta and Somby, were buried in Kåfjord Churchyard. Relatives of Hætta and Somby attended the funeral along with representatives of the Sámi and the Norwegian government, the latter officially regretting the act of confiscating the skulls and exhuming Sámi skeletons in the name of science. Bishop *Ola Steinbolt* (1934 - 2009) left it to God to judge the people involved in the 1852 revolt (Rapp 1997).

The repatriation of Somby's and Hætta's skulls definitely serves as a paradigmatic case of repatriation in Norway, paving the way for the Sámi Parliament's right to control all research on Sámi skulls and skeletons, as well as for a later repossession of human remains. An interdisciplinary committee was additionally established for the purpose of developing guidelines for research on Sámi skeletons and remains. There have been some reactions to the fact that a political organ is allowed to deny scientific research, both to Norwegian and Sámi academics (e.g. Holck 2000:44; Buljo 2008).

Last year, on the 25th of September, a second round of repatriation and reburial of human remains took place, this time in the previously mentioned area of Neiden, situated in the border areas of Norway, Finland and Russia. The *Skolt Sámi*, or *East Sami*, as they are also called, is a Sámi minority related to indigenous peoples on the Russian Kola Peninsula, and are mainly Russian Orthodox. 94 human skulls of Skolt Sámi were reburied following an Orthodox memorial service (*Parastos*), and the Vice Principal at the University of Oslo, *Ragnbild Henum* (1967-) expressed regrets on behalf of the University of Oslo for the unlawful intervention against an indigenous group. Representatives of the Norwegian Government also attended the ceremony. Protests against the reburial were reissued by Norwegian scientists, as well as by Skolt Sámi fearing that potential insights into their origins would be buried along with the skulls (Ruud and Nilsen 2011; Karlsbakk 2011).

Nation Building in Sámi and Greenlandic Museums

The border situation of the Skolt Sámi clearly demonstrates that, quite unlike Greenland, Sápmi is an area of historically mixed ethnicities, integrated within several nation states. This of course

complicates the processes of political unification, as well as cooperation in the field of cultural politics, both within and across the state borders. Territorializing across state borders is today limited to the Sámi minority group of reindeer herders, with separate conventions regulating the activity. The Sámi political institutions and organs established within and crossing over the states of Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia are indeed contingent to the varying cultural and minority politics of the respective countries that govern them. As a result, the regional Sámi museums in Norway encompass Norwegian counties and Sámi areas rather than representing transnational Sámi regions, except from the Lule Sámi museum in Drag (Nordland County), which partly addresses a Swedish Sámi audience (EuNaMus WP2; www.reindrift.no).

The cultural political situation of the Sámi is further complicated with Sápmi being constituted by culture and language based subdivisions (roughly divided in East, Central and South Sápmi) within which each respective Sámi group now dwells, and in which are spoken at least four distinctly different languages. By comparison, *Kalaallisut*, the official language of the Greenlanders consists of three main dialects, which, with a little effort, may be comprehended by representatives of all Greenlandic Inuit (norden.org). Of course, Greenlandic Inuit culture is also diverse, and 22 museums with a varied degree of activity and visitors are scattered across the island's vast area (www.museums.gl). Yet the decision to establish a unifying national museum institution in Nuuk must have been an easy one, considering that both the academic competence as well as the tourist industry is concentrated here, in this still rapidly growing university-city. Besides, there are no railways, no inland waterways, and virtually no roads between towns on Greenland, making an extensive distribution of resources appropriate.

The concentrated scientific and museological competence provided by a national museum like *Nunatta Katersugaasivia* in Nuuk can not be found in any Sámi museum institution. It is only fairly recently that Sápmi has been regarded as a nation, and aspirations of nation building in the Sámi museums have developed gradually. Most Sámi museums started out as regional or local institutions representing local varieties of the Sámi culture. Sápmi has proved to be a far more complex cultural field than what was communicated during the early years of the Sámi's political struggle for cultural recognition, when the reindeer herders – in 2000 constituting only 10% of the total population – were allowed to become the very symbol of Sámi culture ([Sápmi – becoming a nation](#)). Now Sámi identity is being renegotiated in new museums focusing on typical Sámi labour traditions previously disregarded, such as the coastal Sámi more focused on fishing. Thus, when the Sámi Parliament was granted administrative authority over all Norwegian Sámi museums in 2002, after having openly criticized Norwegian museum policies, the Sámi President, *Sven-Roar Nystrø* (1956-), decided that no single museum should attain the position of 'The National Sámi Museum'. Accordingly, all museums currently under the administration of the Sámi Parliament share national responsibility for preserving and promoting Sámi culture.

The Norwegian Sámi Parliament in fact expresses an *ethnic* rather than a *civic* nationalism, reflected in their museum politics. Folklorist *Olav Christensen* (1955) has studied museum institutions in Finnmark County, the northernmost parts of Norwegian Sápmi, and has found that they do not reflect the cultural diversity of the area. The exception is South Varanger Museum (*Sør-Varanger Museum*), with its exhibition "Boundless water" referring to the Pasvik River being surrounded by three countries and a variety of cultures. The exhibition inspired Christensen to initiate the research project "Co-existence and conflicts in a multicultural

borderland – representations of ethnicity and ethnic relations in Finnmark museums” (*Samvirke og motsetninger i et flerkulturelt grenseland – representasjoner av etnisitet og etniske relasjoner ved museer i Finnmark*). The fact that Norwegians, Sámi and Kvens, another national minority group prevalent in parts of Finnmark, have co-existed and intermingled for centuries, is not communicated in any of the other institutions visited by Christensen. Christensen interprets this evident ethnocentrism as a result of the Sámi Parliament’s political agenda (Christensen 2008). An ethnic nationalism is also revealed through the Norwegian Sámi Parliament’s struggle for exclusive judicial rights to land and water for Sámi. The Parliament’s politics have been criticized by other national minorities residing in the area, as well as by Norwegians. Considering these conflicts, there are hardly any chances of Sápmi as a nation ever becoming more than a cultural and social construct.

Greenlandic museum authorities were of course never confronted with the same challenges as their Sámi counterparts. Greenlanders reside in a separate territory, and only a small minority (ca. 10 %) of them are of Danish origin (www.eu.nanoq.gl). Yet instead of cultivating a separate Inuit identity, Greenlandic museum professionals have chosen to develop a scientific profile embracing the total picture of Greenlandic history, and no requests have been made for the repossession of Greenlandic human remains from Danish institutions (Gabriel 2002). Greenland’s National Museum has in fact been granted responsibility for Greenlandic human remains, but has chosen to let this material stay in Copenhagen, except of course from the famous mummies from Qilakitsoq. These exceptionally well-preserved bodies from the 1400s, with intact clothing, give a unique impression of the Inuit Saqqaq Culture (Greenland National Museum and Archives). Representatives of other indigenous peoples have expressed disgust at the exhibition, and protests from Greenlanders, who entertain a strong death taboo, made the museum professionals rearrange it in a separate room so that those who do not want to see it may choose to pass it (Gabriel 2002; Nielsen 2002). The calm beauty and dignity of this exhibition may have contributed to its gradual acceptance. Anyhow, in having decided to display these bodies, the National Museum of Greenland has revealed itself to be a scientific, rather than a political institution. I am not arguing that this is a situation representative of Greenlandic politics as a whole, and maybe it is a virtue of necessity, as Danes still hold prominent positions on Greenland, but the island’s inhabitants clearly display a will to live and work together with those of Danish or mixed origin, as they do not refer to themselves as Inuit but simply refer to themselves as *Greenlanders*.

Future plans for repatriation of Sami material

In order to modify the impression I have given of Sámi museums serving simply as political tools for the Sámi Parliament, as well as of the Parliament lacking in dedication to the development of the Sámi museums as scientific institutions, I will now focus on processes going on in the Sámi museum field today that will change the future picture. The Sámi Parliament has in fact recently listed the needs for improvements of their museum institutions, stressing an increase in scientific and conservation competence. In 2006 and 2007, three Nordic Sámi museums recorded Sámi objects in Scandinavian institutions outside of Sápmi in a project called “Recalling Ancestral Voices – Repatriation of Sámi Cultural Heritage”. Besides providing an overview of existing Sámi material, the project aimed to secure and develop mutual respect between Sámi museums and non-Sámi museums administering old and significant Sámi collections. Approximately 70 000

objects were recorded. The Norwegian Museum of Cultural Heritage (*Norsk Folkemuseum*) is in charge of the oldest and largest single Norwegian Sámi collection, and is presently willing to transfer half of it, 2200 artefacts, to Sámi museum institutions (Harlin 2008:195). A plan for repatriation has finally been outlined, and was formalized in March 2012 (*Bååstede: Tilbakeføring av samisk kulturarv*, 2012)

This initiative did not, however, come from the Sámi Parliament, but was taken by the board of the Folk Museum (the Norwegian Museum of Cultural Heritage). Partaking in the huge collection of Sámi material, both the Folk Museum and the Cultural Historical Museum (KHM) in Oslo, are members of a Sámi museum association (*Samisk museumslag*), and, following an agreement between the two, a decision was made to initiate a process of repatriation of parts of the collections with the Sámi museums. The Sámi Parliament was contacted in 2008, and a work committee established in 2009 (Leif Pareli 2011). Repatriation is a resource-intensive process, and the needs of the Sámi museums are being documented in on-going processes (White paper no 8, 2011 – 2012 “The Activities of the Sámi Parliament 2010”). A similar process is going on in Stockholm between the Nordic Museum (*Nordiska Museet*) and the Swedish Sámi. Important Sámi collections also constitute a part of the *National Museum* in Helsinki, Finland, yet no plans concerning these have so far been developed there.

Conclusion

With reference to the examples of Sámi and Greenlandic repatriation processes, we have seen that the status as indigenous people may be applied very differently in order to make museums defend and develop a national identity, depending on the political situation of the people in question. The Sápmi situation indicates that explicit political agendas tend to collide with scientific aims, as well as the ideal of museums serving the role of critical social institutions. It turns out that the Sámi museums focus on Sámi ethnicity, and leave out cross-cultural perspectives. The scientific focus of Greenlandic museum authorities demonstrates that a national identity is not necessarily dependent on an ethnic focus in a narrow sense.

The answer to the question of why repatriation processes were not initiated earlier between Norwegian and Sámi museum institutions is as complex as the cultural political situation of the Sámi itself. Complicated administrative and political structures at the museums, the young Sámi Parliament’s political priorities, the relatively recent financial responsibility granted to the Sámi Parliament, as well as the slow progression of repatriation issues in European museums in general, represent different explanations. Moreover, Norwegian authorities do not share the step-by-step experience of repatriation of a former colonial empire like Denmark. The cases of Iceland and the Faroe Islands show that the Danish National Museum’s generosity in questions of repatriation developed only gradually.

The recently outlined plan for repatriation of Sámi cultural heritage, *Bååstede*, indicates that the Sámi museums are entering a new era of scientific focus and enhanced cooperation with non-Sámi institutions in the interest of mutual exchange of competence. Not surprisingly, a delegation of museum professionals from the Norwegian Museum of Cultural Heritage (*Norsk Folkemuseum*) and the Norwegian Sámi museums went to Nuuk in 2011 in search of inspiration for the work that lies ahead.

Notes

- ¹ A University was in fact established in Christiania (Oslo) already in 1811, but Norway left its union with Denmark in 1814.
- ² The system was continued until Iceland became a separate nation in 1918, but the University of Copenhagen kept influencing life and culture in their former colony during the first half of the nineteenth Century as university teachers and professors, as well as bishops, still had their education here (Thór 2007:72 -74)

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