UNIVERSITY OF THE ARCTIC

Module 6
Early Administration

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Key Terms and Concepts

- traditional state
- colonial administration
- Rupert's Land
- Treaty of Cession
- Royal Greenland Trade Company
- Sami codicil
- Sami taxation

Learning Objectives/Outcomes

Upon completion of this module you should be able to

1. discuss the nature of the expansion of European political power in North America, Russia, and Scandinavia/Greenland.
2. identify the important similarities and differences in the colonial administration among North America, Russia, and Scandinavia/Greenland.

Reading Assignments

The course instructor will assign readings from the required textbook by Freeman (2000), *Endangered Peoples of the Arctic*.

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Overview

In the sixteenth century, human societies around the world began to undergo what would in time be deemed major transformations. One of these transformations was economic: the rise of capitalism; the other was political: the expansion of the state system. Both had enormous consequences for the lives and communities of indigenous peoples across the circumpolar North and around the world.

This module focuses on the early European colonization and administration of indigenous peoples and Aboriginal lands in North America, Scandinavia, Greenland, and Russia from the sixteenth century to the early twentieth century. The module will draw your attention to the nature and limitations of traditional states and will examine how the particular attributes of early state administrations allowed indigenous peoples to maintain a relatively high degree of internal political autonomy—notwithstanding cultural impacts—when Europeans expanded north in Scandinavia, west to Greenland and North America, and east to Siberia.

Lecture

Introduction

As we saw in the previous module, European nations engaged in significant exploration and trade during the period spanning from the latter part of the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century. The British and the French went to Canada; Russians went to Siberia; and Scandinavians went to Lapland and Greenland. A primary motivation for European exploration was the quest for resources: fur, fish, and minerals. As Europeans sought to secure access to resources either from Aboriginal lands or through trade with indigenous peoples, Europe sought to establish its political authority.

In all three regions, Europeans did secure a foothold on Aboriginal lands and to a limited extent over Aboriginal political communities. Early European administration was weak by comparison with the political power of modern states today. Lacking the financial, organizational, and military resources of later modern states, early attempts at administration and governance were limited. It is true that there were significant economic and demographic changes—brought by new technologies, trading systems, and disease—however, the organization of Aboriginal political life endured. As we will see in the next module, modern state-building led to radical changes to Aboriginal political life.

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Traditional State Administrations

What is a state? One famous definition is that of the German sociologist Max Weber. He defined the state as an organization consisting of a regularized administrative staff that is able to sustain the claim to the legitimate monopoly of the control of the means of violence and to uphold that monopoly within a given territorial area. It is important, however, to make a distinction between traditional states and modern states. Traditional states were not strongly centralized and had small bureaucracies. Very importantly, traditional state boundaries were not always well defined and lands often were not contiguous. As a consequence, traditional states often had frontiers rather than precisely marked borders; and the administrative reach of the traditional state beyond forts and military outposts was very weak. Consequently, traditional states were marked by a high degree of cultural and political pluralism, a pluralism that would be challenged by the rise of modern states. In Siberia, North America, and northern Scandinavia, the colonial administrations fit closely the model of the administrations of traditional states. European powers would have difficulty making the claim to uphold a monopoly of political authority over indigenous peoples and Aboriginal lands, especially the further one moved from the centre of administrative power. Nevertheless, this power and accompanying influence did grow, as the cases below demonstrate.

Scandinavia

Scandinavia has the longest history of contact between northern indigenous peoples and European states. Throughout the Middle Ages, contact between Europeans and the Sami was intermittent. There were early efforts to colonize Finnmark, the northern-most part of Norway, as early as the ninth century; and the colonization of Sami lands was almost invariably pioneered by missionaries and traders. With increasing interest in the North expressed by Norwegians, Swedes, Russians, and others, the Sami increasingly began to play an intermediary role in trade.

In addition to trade, taxation became an increasingly important issue affecting the lives of the Sami people. According to Scott Forrest (1997),

> One of the earliest examples of Sami taxation was a decree by the King of Sweden in 1277 granting traders, known as *bikarls*, [the right] to tax the Sami with whom they traded.[1] As the emerging states began to take direct control over these taxation regimes conflicts developed, especially in northern Sweden where claims overlapped. In some cases, such as the

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[1] Lennard Sillanpää (1994), *Political and Administrative Responses to Sami Self-Determination* (Helsinki: Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters), 38.

> region around Inari, the Sami were taxed by all three kingdoms.[2] The transition from loosely defined taxation schemes to territorial control is provided in the example of the Swedish taxland system.
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> The Swedish tax law of 1605 recognized traditional forms of Sami economic activity, such as reindeer herding, as the legal form of land use north of the Lapland Boundary, while agriculture was reserved for the south.[3] This differentiation is somewhat laudable, as it appears to grant legitimacy to Sami land use and territoriality. However, the system established fixed and exclusive definitions of territory (taxlands) which did not coincide with the Sami's own *siida* organization and territory, although they were loosely based on existing herding areas. The collective basis of herding was also changed, as use of taxland was "delegated to an individual in return for rent or tax paid to the Crown."[4] The taxland system was reformed in 1695 and taxation was established at the village level. This reform served to fix the membership and territory of Sami villages which are reflected today in reindeer herding collectives known as Samebys.[5]

After 1326, competition between Denmark–Norway and Russia for political authority over Sami lands led to the subjection of the Sami to joint taxation of competing European powers. This situation lasted more than four hundred years.

Although nominally under the control of one European crown or another, the Sami remained the majority population. This began to change during the 1600s and 1700s. Scandinavian settler colonization gained momentum; at the same time, missionary work received renewed interest. One of the most notable missions was led by Thomas von Westen in the early 1700s. He took great efforts to learn the Sami language and to translate liturgical writings into the Sami language.

In spite of the expansion of European influence, the land of the Sami remained very much a frontier area. When Sweden and Denmark–Norway, for instance, concluded the border treaty of 1751, a supplement to the treaty was added,

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[2] Sillanpää (1994), 38.
[3] Pekka Aikio (1993), Cultural Sovereignty in Northern Aboriginal Nations: The Predicament of the Sami, in *Social Sciences in the North*, edited by Louis-Jacques Dorais and Ludger Müller-Wille (Ste-Foy, Canada: International Arctic Social Sciences Association), 16.
[4] Hugh Beach, Myrdene Anderson, and Pekka Aikio (1992), Dynamics of Saami Territoriality within the Nation-States of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, in *Mobility and Territoriality: Social and Spatial Boundaries among Foragers, Fishers, Pastoralists and Peripatetics*, edited by Michael J. Casimir and Aparna Rao (New York: St. Martin's Press), 67.
[5] Beach et al. (1992), 68–70.

known as the Sami codicil.[6] The Sami codicil recognized the rights of the reindeer herding Sami to the pasture lands on both sides of the newly fixed, international "border," as well as provisions for limited self-governance. The Sami codicil's importance stems from the fact that it recognized, in a legal international treaty, "the right of the Sami to freely cross the border as part of their seasonal migration of reindeer herding" (Forrest 1997). The text of the codicil states:

> The Sami need the land of both states. Therefore, they shall, in accordance with tradition, be permitted both in autumn and spring to move their reindeer herds across the border into the other state. And hereafter, as before, they shall, like the state's own subjects, be allowed to use land and share for themselves and their animals, except in the places stated below, and they shall be met with friendliness, protected and aided. . . . (from Sillanpää, *Impact of International Law on Indigenous Rights in Northern Europe*, 1992, 6; reproduced in Forrest)

The codicil, however, forced pastoral Sami to choose citizenship in either Sweden or Denmark–Norway and established the states' right to regulate trans-border reindeer husbandry. Yet, as a whole, the document must be taken as remarkably respectful of Sami interests. It shows a level of commitment to the survival of the Sami and their way of life that is lacking from later state policies towards Sami reindeer herding. (Forrest 1997) For these reasons, this codicil has been referred to as the Sami Magna Carta.

Until the nineteenth century, the primary interest of the state in the Sami was largely limited to Christianization and exacting taxes; in other spheres, the Sami continued to enjoy considerable autonomy. In spite of the gradual erosion of their political and economic independence, the Sami were more or less left in peace until the nineteenth century.

Greenland

Continuous European colonization of Greenland came much later than in the case of Sami lands. The Norwegian–Danish Lutheran priest Hans Egede arrived on Greenland's western coast in 1721 and established a trade and mission station near modern-day Nuuk, marking the first European incursions since the time of the Vikings. His mission served to convert many Inuit to Christianity; his efforts in trade were not as successful. (Nuttal 1994) As a result, the Danish government took over responsibility for trade in 1726. Although commercial

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[6] Parts of this section of the module on the Sami codicil are borrowed from Greg Poelzer (2002), *Indigenous Rights and Self-determination: Models and Options*. Module 12 of Bachelor of Circumpolar Studies 100: The Circumpolar World (Athabasca, AB: Athabasca University and the University of the Arctic), 3–4.

activity remained slow, the government formed the Royal Greenland Trade Company—Det Kongelige Grønlandske Handelskompagni (KGH)—in 1776 and a Danish Greenland trade monopoly was established, which lasted until the end of the Second World War. Colonies and trading posts were established around the coast.

The year-round presence of the Danes in Greenland's Inuit west-coast communities was felt in the hierarchy of authority that included—besides missionaries—inspectors, traders, and their assistants. Traders began to occupy positions of real power over the Inuit, determining wages and distributing goods. Most Danes stayed no longer than a few years before being replaced by another employee of KGH. However, the Danish colonialist attitude towards Greenland was isolationist and aimed to protect the Inuit hunting culture. Far from being exploitive, any trade had to benefit the local population, which was a different approach from most other colonial powers. In spite of a KGH effort to prevent the Inuit from becoming dependent on trade goods, these goods did eventually become integral parts of Inuit diet and hunting technology. (Nuttal 1994)

A gradual warming of Greenland's coastal waters in the early nineteenth century resulted both in a migration of seals to colder waters and the arrival of large stocks of cod. This marked a major transition from hunting to fishing. Though Inuit culture valued the hunting of sea animals, the Danes encouraged the rapid development of a cod fishery. As many Inuit were unable to continue whaling and hunting, traditional hunting camps were abandoned and many moved to larger settlements in search of employment. (Nuttal 1994)

As we shall see later, after the Second World War, Denmark abandoned its isolationist policy. Colonial status was abolished formally in 1953, and the road was paved for Home Rule, which came to be a quarter of a century later.

Canada

In 1534, Jacques Cartier voyaged up the St. Lawrence River, marking the beginning of sustained contact in Canada between indigenous and European peoples. In North America, Europeans first returned for the rich fish stocks of the North Atlantic. However, it was not long until Europeans began their expansions across both continents in quest of furs—that is, the British and French moved west across North America. In the process, indigenous peoples experienced enormous changes in their lives. Europeans introduced new technologies, such as steel axes and firearms, as well as Western belief systems, such as Christianity. They also brought disease. Population losses in Canada were of a similar order. Moreover, European markets altered subsistence patterns within Aboriginal communities and changed trading relations among indigenous peoples themselves. Other significant changes occurred, as well.

Finally, European contact led to a number of territorial changes among indigenous peoples. The Cree, to highlight one example, who were hunter-gatherers of the boreal forest, from northern Quebec to northern Manitoba, pushed westward as far as northeastern British Columbia as a result of the fur trade, and eventually a number of these Cree adopted a Plains way of life.

In Canada, as throughout North America, the fur trade was one of mutual exchange. Indigenous peoples traded on a voluntary basis, and while there is ample evidence that exchanges were not always equitable, especially for the indigenous peoples, there is also evidence that many indigenous peoples were skilled negotiators and were often able to obtain favourable returns for their furs. By the end of the fur trade period, Europeans in Canada had managed to cross the continent to the Pacific Ocean and maintained their presence through the construction of a series of forts in strategic locations.

Colonial policy afforded considerable autonomy within Aboriginal communities, while at the same time it encouraged change in Aboriginal ways of life. One explanation for the relative non-interference in Aboriginal communities is that, since Aboriginal peoples were the primary producers of furs, it was better to leave a good thing alone. The fur trade was a period of hands-off with respect to the Aboriginal way of life. While relations of dependence and subordination emerged during the course of the fur trade, in part because of the reliance of indigenous peoples on European commodities, some anthropologists and historians nevertheless suggest that this was a period of “non-directed cultural change” (Miller 1989). Aboriginal lifestyles were central to the fur trade, and Europeans generally did not want to tamper with a successful system of commodity production. (Satzewich and Wotherspoon 1993)

While economic factors were no doubt important in the formulation of state policy, another explanation can be found in the nature of colonial and absolutist regimes themselves. In contrast to the modern states that were to succeed them, colonial and absolutist states had frontiers, not borders. While “frontier” refers to an area on the peripheral regions of a state (not necessarily adjoining another state) in which political authority of the centre is diffuse or thinly spread, borders are precisely demarcated boundaries, and the encompassing territory is subject to a high level of surveillance and internal pacification by the political administration.

The distinction between borders and frontiers is crucial to understanding Aboriginal political life prior to modern state-building. Unlike their modern state successors, British North America tolerated a plurality of ways of life on the social, cultural, and political frontiers of the state and, thus, the autonomy of indigenous peoples. For that matter, these states did not have the administrative capacities to do otherwise. The notion of the “frontier” in British North America was captured not only by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, which “reserved”

lands for indigenous peoples that were not the territory of extant colonies, but also by the very existence of Rupert's Land, a massive territory owned and administered by the Hudson's Bay Company. The Royal Proclamation of 1763 recognized indigenous peoples as autonomous political communities. It is to Canada's First Nations peoples what the Sami codicil of 1751 is to the Sami.

Russia

In 1581, Ermak Timofeyevich crossed the Ural Mountains, marking the start of sustained relations between the peoples of northern Asia and those of European Russia. This marked the beginning of huge changes in Aboriginal life in Siberia. During the seventeenth century, indigenous peoples experienced population losses of 30 to 40 per cent. The Yukagir population, alone, fell from 4,500 to 1,500, mainly as a result of smallpox. Moreover, European pressure on wild reindeer led to the transition of hunters into herders on the Siberian tundra.

However, as was the experience in the previous cases, state policy afforded considerable autonomy within Aboriginal communities, while encouraging change in Aboriginal ways of life. One of the most important documents of colonial administration under Tsarist Russia was the 1822 Statute of Alien Administration in Siberia. This document of late Imperial Russia was the central legal basis regulating Aboriginal-state relations. The emphasis on gradual and voluntary change was its most important feature; for the peoples covered by the statute this meant almost total cultural and administrative autonomy.

One key difference between Tsarist colonial administration and the pattern experienced in North America needs to be highlighted. In Tsarist Russia, the fur trade was less of a trade than the coercive extraction of furs from indigenous peoples. Like the French and the British in Canada, the Russians constructed a series of forts called *ostrogs* along strategic waterways across Siberia. These forts served as collection points of *yasak*, which was a tribute imposed on indigenous peoples to be paid in furs—primarily sable. To ensure the collection of furs, hostages were often taken and held in the forts until the tribute was paid. Communities that refused to pay *yasak* were subject to military force. These differences in the treatment of indigenous people in the fur trade reflected broader economic differences between Western and Eastern Europe. While trade, exchange, and market relations were growing in Western Europe, feudalism and serfdom showed no signs of waning in Russia.

In all other aspects, however, *absolutist* Russia pursued a paternalistic policy of protection from the increasingly dominant European peoples. In Russia, for example, the indigenous peoples subject to the payment of the *yasak* tribute were to be protected from Russian "thievery" (violation of the tsar's decrees) and corrupting vices. No tobacco or liquor was to be sold; no gambling was allowed; and no "insults" (obidy) of any kind were to be tolerated. The Russian

people were to stay away from the indigenous people subject to the payment of the *yasak* tribute. Moreover, even in an otherwise repressive regime as Tsarist Russia, indigenous peoples were often not subject to the same laws as were Russians. The case of murder poignantly highlights the difference: an Aboriginal murderer had to compensate the relatives of the victim but remained alive, whereas a Russian convicted for a similar crime was condemned to die. Finally, there were some areas, such as Chuktoka, over which the Tsarist state claimed domination, but were never conquered, let alone colonized, until the Soviet period.

Alaska

In "The Alaska Natives,"[7] Fae L. Korsmo introduces Russian America in this way:

> When Vitus Bering and Alexii Chirikov and their crews landed on the Alaskan coast in 1741, they opened the way for more than [half] a century of Russian fur trade. Russia extended its empire to Alaska as part of the sweep across Siberia. Whereas peasants were brought to till the soil and colonize Siberia, . . . farming made little headway in Alaska. Few Russians actually settled in Alaska. Instead, the sea otter became the main [focus] of the Russian hunter-traders. . . . The Russians forced the Aleuts to hunt sea otters and fur seals for them, taking advantage of the expertise and equipment the Aleuts had developed over thousands of years of living in their marine environment. As a result of the harsh treatment as well as new diseases brought from the European continent, the Aleut population declined by at least 80 per cent during the first and second generations of Russian contact. (Fortuine 1989, Gibson 1989, and Veltre 1990, cited in Korsmo 1994)

Cultural change also followed, as male hunters were taken from their homes, leaving women and children to hunt. Settlement patterns changed, and Russian Orthodoxy replaced traditional spiritual beliefs. (Korsmo 1994) Other coastal peoples—such as the Koniag, Yupik, Kenaitze, and Tlingit—were affected by the presence of Russians. However, as Russian interests were tied up with the hunting of seal and sea otter, indigenous peoples living in the Far North and interior regions of Alaska had minimal contact with Russians.

In spite of the harsh treatment of the Aleuts, the Russians accepted Creoles (people with mixed Aboriginal and Russian heritage) as Russian subjects and

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[7] Fae L. Korsmo (1994), The Alaska Natives, in *Polar Peoples: Self-Determination and Development*, 81–104, edited by Minority Rights Group (UK). [Online] http://www.alaskool.org/projects/native_gov/ARTICLES/KORSMO/PolarPpls.htm#russianamerica.

devoted significant energy to teaching and preserving the Aleut language (Black 1990 and Dauenhauer 1990, cited in Korsmo 1994). This may be explained as an extension of the Russian form of colonialism, whereby local leaders who were willing to cooperate were co-opted, their followers *integrated*—not assimilated—into Russian society (Svensson 1978, cited in Korsmo 1994). Simply put, assimilation was not the basis of Russian indigenous policy.

In 1844, the Russian-American Company, the fur-trading monopoly, was established as a hybrid governmental and economic organization in Alaska. (Korsmo 1994) The classification system used in its charter became an important source of knowledge for the United States when it purchased Alaska from Russia in 1867. Neither country consulted the societies living in Alaska before making the transaction, and some indigenous peoples in Alaska today continue to wonder how Russia could ever have sold Alaska, of which it had never had legitimate possession. (Pullar 1991, cited in Korsmo)

> In any case, the Treaty of Cession between Russia and the United States recognized three groups of Alaskan people: (1) Russian subjects who preferred to retain their allegiance and were permitted to return to Russia within three years; (2) Russian subjects who preferred to remain in Alaska and enjoy the rights and immunities of US citizens; and (3) the uncivilized tribes who would be "subject to such laws and regulations as the United States may, from time to time, adopt in regard to aboriginal tribes of that country."[8] (Korsmo 1994)

According to Korsmo (1994), the indigenous peoples of Alaska did not sign a treaty with Russia or the United States surrendering their Aboriginal rights.

> Immediately after the 1867 Treaty of Cession, the United States occupied Alaska militarily. . . .The 1884 Organic Act ended military rule in Alaska and made Alaska a customs district. . . . (Naske 1985, cited in Korsmo 1994)

> With regard to Native rights, US rule consisted of a mixture of neglect, assimilation and segregation. (Korsmo 1994)

Conclusion

The colonial and absolutist regimes in North America, Scandinavia, and Russia increasingly became involved in the lives of indigenous peoples until the modern state-building period, especially with the expansion of settler

[8] Between the double quotation marks is an excerpt from the Treaty of Cession (15 Stat. 539), Article III, as quoted in *United States v. Berrigan,* 2 Alaska Reports, 445 (1905); cited in Korsmo (1994).

populations in the development of agriculture. Nevertheless, indigenous peoples remained largely self-determining. This, however, should not be surprising: for thousands of years indigenous peoples throughout the world have coexisted alongside hierarchically organized political communities.

Student Activity

1. Create a timeline of European expansion in one of the following countries prior to the date of modern state-building:
    - Russia, to 1914
    - Canada, to 1867
    - Norway–Sweden, to 1814
2. Identify the dates of key settlements or forts in the North.
3. What does your timeline reveal?

Supplementary Readings

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Glossary of Terms

absolutism	a political theory that absolute power should be vested in one or more rulers; government by an absolute ruler or authority; despotism.
absolutist	a ruler or authority completely free from constitutional or other restraint
autonomy	the quality or state of being self-governing; especially: the right of self-government
isolationist	a policy of national isolation by abstention from alliances and other political and economic relations
laudable	worthy of praise; commendable
pacification	the act or process of pacifying; the state of being pacified; the act of forcibly suppressing or eliminating a population considered to be hostile

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