

# TRAILS OF SAAMI SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

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*Abstract:* A cluster of issues are addressed: How Saami have handled a stigmatized identity vis-à-vis the Norwegians; how a rewarding sense of “being Saami” has been expressed within local communities; how striving for a “national” expression provokes ethnopolitical struggles among themselves and not just vis-à-vis the Norwegians. And—how do Saami intellectuals handle non-Saami writings about these issues?

*Résumé:* Nombre de thèmes sont adressés: comment les Saami ont-ils vécu une identité stigmatisée vis-à-vis des Norvégiens; comment un sentiment positif d’«être Saami» a été exprimé dans les communautés locales; comment la lutte pour une expression «nationale» provoque des débats éthno-politiques parmi eux-mêmes et non seulement vis-à-vis les Norvégiens. Et, quelle est la position des intellectuels Saami envers les écrits non-Saami concernant ces thèmes?

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## Introduction

I wish to begin by considering three general issues, the first of which is Wittgenstein’s “family resemblances.” The notion of “family resemblances” refers to the distribution of common elements among members of certain kinds of categories (Wittgenstein 1953:31e-32e). A population may share a number of characteristics—A through to F, for instance. We may say—loosely or precisely—that this population constitutes a “culture.” However (Wittgenstein insists), no one individual or even sub-group within the population will possess exactly the same combination of characteristics. Thus characteristic F will be missing in one case, E in another, D in yet another and so forth. In general terms, this draws attention to (among other things) “patterned diversity” within a culture.

And why should this be of concern to us? It directs us to *how* Inuit (here I

include Greenlanders within that family of resemblances) or *how* Saami recognize each other — supposing they do.

Given the wide diversity of situations in which Inuit, or Saami, interact these days — different occupations, levels of education, lifestyles, even different citizenships (Soviet, American, Canadian or Greenlandic; Norwegian, Swedish, Finnish or Soviet) — it seems to me that some concept of family resemblances is central to resolving *two* levels of questions: Do you/they recognize each other? If so, how?

Let us also keep in mind that such “families” of resemblances may be serial. In one context the Inuit and the Saami are separate “families,” but in the Fourth World and/or northern peoples context(s) they combine.

However, for my present purpose I place the emphasis differently: we should not allow ourselves unexamined assumptions about ethnic homogeneity and, even more serious perhaps, about ethnic solidarity.

To take an example from another part of the world: American Jews usually claim that they can recognize each other but the Jewishness of English Jews is likely to be hidden from them — all they see are English men and women. On the other hand, Israelis maintain that they can recognize fellow-Jews anywhere. Most of us don't *test* knowledge of this kind which we assume we possess — and *there* is an important point.

With respect to the Saami, there appear to be “soft” or porous and “hard” sides to their boundaries: the Finnish and Norwegian/Swedish sides, respectively. The Finnish and Saami languages share family resemblances from which Norwegian and Swedish are excluded. Occupationally, too, there are affinities (including participation in reindeer pastoralism) between northern Finns and Saami that are weaker or absent between Saami and Norwegians or Swedes.

At this point I shall review some basic facts concerning the Saami.<sup>1</sup> Gross census figures, which are sociologically insensitive, and provide no more than some benchmarks as to absolute and relative sizes<sup>2</sup>, put the Saami population in Norway at 30 000, in Sweden at 15 000, in Finland at 5000 and on the Kola Peninsula in the Soviet Union at 2000.

In Norway, the domain I will mainly consider, 24 000 of that 30 000 Saami live in the two northernmost provinces; that is to say, 15 000 in Finnmark and 9 000 in Tromsø. However, within the Saami population of these two provinces there are marked differences between those of the coast and those of the interior (tundra). The formal markers of such differences are linguistic and occupational. In the interior, there are fewer than 10 percent non-Saami speakers; this ratio is *reversed* along the coast on account of “Norwegianization,” and is a matter of serious cultural consequences since the coast is where the majority of Saami have lived. Occupationally, seasonal transhumance lasted well into this century along the coast, where fjor-

dal fishing and small-scale farming, often in combination, remain the primary occupations today. The reindeer pastoralists—perhaps 2000 persons in the two provinces together—use coastal pastures in the summer but “belong” to the tundra and such villages as Karasjok, Kautokeino and Masi. It is there that they pay their local taxes. There is also a sedentary population living on the tundra, in those same villages and in small settlements strung along river courses, practising a mixed subsistence and monetary economy of different combinations.

But behind these formal markers of difference—between coast and interior, sedentary and nomad—there are a host of behavioural differences. Indeed, these latter obtain even within the same community, if most usually between persons separated by generations and/or education. There arise—as we will see—serious ambiguities and even contradictions among Saami about being Saami, and about what one should do, if anything, about that.

Here it is as well to note that in Finnmark the Saami (following the official statistics) account for somewhere between one-fifth and one-sixth of the provincial population; and in Tromsø perhaps no more than every 16th person *is* a Saami. Note, too, that in both provinces there is a third ethnicity (besides Norwegian and Saami) and that is Finnish, or *Kvaen*, peasant immigrants principally from the last century.

The second general issue is—as signalled in my title—that of “self-consciousness.”

If we are to enquire into nationalism and cultural identity among the Saami we must explore Saami self-consciousness, although this raises questions about interpretive authority, or specifically one’s own assumption of competence to address the issue. A lot has been written about the Saami, *but who does the writing?* The answer to this question may tell us much about Saami self-consciousness.

There are some classical writings by Saami (in Saami originally) about their way of life and written in the first person; among these are Turi (1910), Baer (1926), Pirak (1933) and Skum (1955). During this period as well, Larsen (1912) handled cultural identity in the genre of the novel. Larsen has been followed, two generations later by Mankok and Sarri Nordra, and in poetry, by Utsi (1970) and Valkeapää (1974).<sup>3</sup> There are others besides.

But well into this century, “Lappologi” really belonged to clerics and linguists—names such as J.A. Friis (of *Laila* fame), Jacob Fellman, Just Qvigstad, K.B. Wiklund, Konrad Nielsen, T.I. Itkonen, Björn Collinder and Asbjörn Nesheim—none of whom were Saami. These writers neither possessed a Saami self-consciousness nor manifested an awareness of their own position vis-à-vis the Saami.

Such was still very much the situation at the time of the first Nordic and Saami Conferences in Jokkmokk in 1953,<sup>4</sup> though there were several promi-

nent Saami figures by that time; two of whom—Israel Ruong and Hans Henriksen—had been brought into the fold of “Lappologues” by none less than Professors Collinder and Nielsen, respectively. Ruong (who eventually had a personal professorship at Uppsala in Finno—Ugric) had been Collinder’s *amanuensis* for years and possessed qualities that would have made him an excellent ethnographer.<sup>5</sup> Henriksen (while earning his living in a mundane job in Oslo) was Nielsen’s assistant in the compilation of the great Norwegian and English Lapp Dictionary. Henriksen became the key representative from Norway on the Nordic Saami Council.

There have been some recent changes in the roster of authors concerned with the Saami. We may speak of two lists of writers: non-Saami and Saami, respectively. Symbolically, at all events, the Saami list is a little longer than the non-Saami. Certainly by the 1960s, the Nordic Conferences were “Saami” (rather than “Lappologue”) occasions.

Sometimes, non-Saami academic writers on the Saami and Saami authors have adopted a competitive stance toward each other. Saami writers are very likely to regard academics as disqualified when it comes to talking or writing about Saami self-consciousness.

But to ensure that things are not too neat and symmetrical—with clear either/or loyalties—a number of Saami writers are themselves academics.

Furthermore, there is a third group—non-Saami by parentage (in a few cases, mixed Norwegian-Saami)—but raised in a Saami world as much as a Norwegian one. Many of them are academics.

So who does qualify to tell us about Saami self-consciousness?

It is *not* sufficient to say Saami writers themselves: some have tackled the issue, others of them seem to studiously avoid it. The same is true of non-Saami academics. The difference is, of course, that when Saami people speak or write about Saami self-consciousness it is based on their *own* experience (which is not without problematic implications, as we will see) and when non-Saami academics do, it is based on *others’* experiences. Possibly the non-Saami raised in a Saami environment—as a kind of *métis*—would be the most interesting. In *all cases* there will be problems of interpretation and of generalization.

So what do I conclude from this?

1. There is no one entity—“Saami self-consciousness”—but many trails to follow;
2. that I cannot assume competence, nevertheless I undertake to follow some “trails,” fully aware of my interpretive and generalizing pretensions!

A complete study might examine novels and poems, but in a brief article, limits must be drawn.

I have decided to look (for the most part) at what *one person* has had to say—or write. I choose an academic who has been around for a good while—myself. (Of course there will be "digressions" to others.)

The last of the three general issues is what I call the "temptation of chronology." My point here is that it is all too easy to accept the account which follows as a *narrative* and to see the changes that fill that narrative as *progress*.

To an extent this is *true*—i.e., people sometimes see it this way themselves. After all our story *begins*, in the 1950s, with a fractured minority people, the majority of whom carry a stigmatized identity, and *ends* on October 9th 1989 with the convening of a Saami parliament in the presence of the Norwegian king.

But it is an illusion in serious respects. Underneath the surface of glittering political triumph, we must ask what cognitive changes have taken place within the "family of resemblances" called Saami? What changes in everyday behaviour and attitudes? And far from the everyday, what changes in reaction to crisis? For that matter, how correct is it to speak of political triumph?

### Organizational Framework

Bearing in mind what I have said about the dispersion of the Saami—geographically, ecologically and culturally (including linguistically)—I distinguish between *social levels* of self-consciousness:

"community"	vs.	"nation" or supra-community
=unitary		=pluralist
(with respect to values, sanctions, rewards, etc.)		

So it is not self-consciousness itself that I look at but, rather, trails of behaviour which, I suggest, emerge, "socialized" from it—that is all I can reach; the dynamics of an *individual's* consciousness of him—or herself—elude me.<sup>6</sup>

For "community" I focus on the Laestadian congregation—a fundamentalist movement from early in the 19th century which saturated Saami—and Finnish-speaking communities in northern FennoScandia. When I was in the field through the 1950s and 1960s there was scarcely a Saami village without such a congregation. Furthermore, the congregation was just about synonymous with the married adult community; and emphasis was placed on collective self-consciousness.

At the level of "nation" or supra-community, I look at the the principal Saami national associations in Norway.

However, the question is, how does one proceed from the lower to higher

level? How do the few activate the many to this end? I answer this (answer by illustration) in two sections labelled “Ludic Bridges.” I invoke the notion of *play* to communicate the temper of the times—experimental and idealistic, fearful and cynical, and above all else, self-reflexive. By “bridge,” of course, I wish to invoke passage, movement—but let it be noted that this “traffic” does not always flow in the one progressive, emancipatory direction.

There are two of these “bridging” sections because the affairs of the pastoralists and their sense of self cannot be subsumed under those of the non-pastoral Saami. The concept of community-as-congregation, for example, does not help us towards the reindeer pastoralists’ sense of self. They have never doubted who they are, culturally; never doubted their self-worth. “Norwegianization” has been held at bay; however, their cultural prerogatives have often been under external pressure and blatantly attacked at times. Double ironies are embedded here: governments rue their lack of control over the pastoralists even as they present them as embodying the “true” (Nwg. *ekte*) Saami culture, and *that* raises the ire of other Saami. One consequence is the marked strain of symbolic opposition in relations both with Norwegian officialdom and with other Saami too.

### Community-Congregation

Sitting, listening, for countless hours, in Laestadian meetings, I sensed a distinction being played out between *doing* and *being*. The church *does*, the preachers were for ever telling us. That is, it created God in its own likeness. However, the preachers assured their congregations, we believe God created man in His own likeness and so it is left to us *to be*—not to reach for salvation by such “doings” (*gjerninger*) as the use of prayer and the sacraments.

Elsewhere I have written (Paine 1988a):

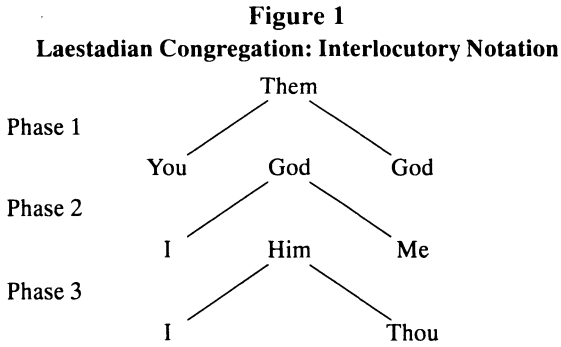
The essence of the distinction between *being* and *doing* is time. *To do* is predicated on the passage of time but *to be* is to hold time still. *To do* is to set a cause into motion that will be rewarded, in time, by its effects; but *to be* carries its own reward—it is both cause and effect. The Laestadians would like *to be*, timelessly, God’s Children. (p. 36)

Further:

[It seemed as though] in the space of each meeting Laestadians re-enact their spiritual history. Timeless and without linearity in the ordinary way, biblical events, events pertaining to Luther and to Laestadius, and contemporary relations with Norwegians, are blended together. . . . Experientially, [each meeting] is about the transformation of a congregation of sinners to a congregation of reborn. But also week after week, year after year through a century and a half, the “death” and “rebirth” of the hundreds of village congrega-

tions has also been a major force keeping alive a sense of being Saami, as opposed to the stigmatized “Lapp.”(p. 37)

I believe the achievement of redemptive, collective self-consciousness is achieved in and by the congregation in three phases (Fig. 1).



Phase 1 The preachers’ message is that the access of the Saami (you) to God has been severely controlled by the clergy (them); this is a subversion of the religious relationship. The clergy are “Nicodemuses” or “thieves of the night.”

Phase 2 In the place of the “you” by which the clergy address one, the preachers introduce a self-reflexive relation between “I” and “me.” This helps each to think about himself, instead of leaving it to “them” (the clergy) to measure his or her conduct by their criteria. So in the place of talk about Nicodemuses, the congregation is told about Ananias who helped Saul change into Paul.

Phase 3 Here one advances beyond the individual’s self-awareness (I/me) towards an awareness of co-identity with each other: a congregational realization of self. It is the I/Thou relationship of Martin Buber in which “I encounter you as another I.” It is reached through ecstatic confession—open confession on the floor of the congregation.

In the fjordal community where I lived, it was really only at this climactic conclusion to the congregational meetings that I heard these Saami openly and joyously acknowledge themselves, to each other, as Saami: “*Mii ibmel mannat Mii sabmelaat!*” (Paine 1988a:2-26).

For a congregation that does *not* “do,” its achievements are considerable. Paraphrased they are two:

1. Justification of the hard conditions of life within the local community.
2. A myth of universality of which the local community is the centre and which is maintained independently of the Church and State (Paine 1988b:166).

This trail of self-consciousness tails off in *my* account of Saami collective self-consciousness – my fieldwork shifted over to the reindeer pastoralists, and still later, to the new ethnopolitics that began emerging in the late 1960s. However, the Laestadian congregation, while no longer the sole focus of collective self-consciousness, remains an enduring presence in many Saami communities (see Björklund 1978; Nystö 1982; Steinlien 1984; Torp 1986).

### Ludic Bridges: 1

I remember, from when I lived on the coast in the village of Kokelv<sup>7</sup> in the 1950s, the disapproval and disparagement meted out, self-righteously, to young women of the village who “dressed up” (in clothes bought through catalogue orders) before taking the steamer to Hammerfest – the regional centre of Norwegian culture and urban life. Once in Hammerfest, the girls, we believed, would do their best to hide their Saami identity. In the village, they were called *riw’go* – the Saami word for a non-Saami woman.

Today in Koklev, there is a *Sami Saervi* (Association), a building housing a small museum, and on festive occasions there will be young people who “dress up” in a Saami *gak’te/kofte* (dress)!

Nowhere along the coast, in the 1950s, did one hear the Saami *joik* (“folk” ballad; Arnberg et al. 1969): forbidden by the Laestadians as the noise of the devil, associated with drunkenness and debauchery, it was also *derided*, by Saami and Norwegians alike, as “primitive.” By the 1970s, the *joik* had been “rediscovered,” and not just by ethnomusicologists but by young Saami who gave it a Country and Western flavour! There were concerts, there were records – they were up near the top of the charts in Norway. One *joik* composition, suitably adapted, was Norway’s entry in a Euro-competition.

In the 1968 NSR (*Norske Samers Riksforbund/Norga Samiid Riikasaer’vi*) was established.<sup>8</sup> Its mandate was to take care of Saami interests on the basis of “Saami premises.” Something of the “watershed” nature of this move may be appreciated by contrasting it with the bitter cynicism of Per Foxtad, the Saami nationalist in Norway of an earlier generation: “You can certainly be Saami” he said, “if you learn to speak Norwegian properly, if you wear Norwegian clothes, if you adopt Norwegian customs – then you will have no difficulties” (Dahl 1970:12). Ten years later, NSR voted *not* to send a representative to the celebrations honouring King Olav’s 75th birthday. Meanwhile, in 1973 the Nordic Saami Institute/*Sami Instituhtta* (NSI) was opened in Kautokeino with a mandate to conduct research on “Saami premises” – meaning that it takes a Saami to understand Saami culture and the circumstances in which Saami find themselves.<sup>9</sup> Also in 1973, the seventh Nordic Ethnographical Congress/*Nordiske*



*etnografiske möte* was held in Tromsø with *Samfunnsforskning og minoritetssamfunn* [Social Science Research and the Minority Society] as its theme—one of the plenary speakers was Alf Isak Keskitalo who was about to take up an appointment with NSI.

He spoke, he said, as a “minority representative at the complementary majority’s congress” (Keskitalo 1976:18). He had some hard words. Even minority participation in research, he said, upholds “a very subtle form of majority-minority relationship with a nearly oppressive function” (ibid.:20). And in respect to the people who are researched, “majority scientists tend to fix attention on the more archaic aspects of the minority group, and thus underestimate its complexity and differentiation” (ibid.). Most striking of all, though, was his statement as to why he chose to speak, not in his native Saami (“unintelligible to most of you”) nor in Norwegian, the majority language, but in English. To speak in Norwegian would be to subscribe to the “linguistic asymmetry”—a characteristic of majority-minority relations—even while speaking out against that asymmetry, thereby reducing all that he had to say to “nothing but a word game” (ibid.16).

Another “ludic” case-history that I should present briefly is about non-Saami academics’ work in relation to the ideology of writers conscious of their Saami identity; it is a “reciprocal” of the Keskitalo one. Non-Saami academics are likely to think—or wish to think—that their research is “objective” and “truthful,” and as such cannot bring harm to its subjects. Claims may even be made that our research helps its subjects. Saami nationalists, however, will, in circumstances relating to their *own* position, denounce the “objectivity” as a sham and as damaging to their people; but as their circumstances change, so may, quite radically, what they say about some piece of academic research. My case in point is the research—the research career, really—of Harald Eidheim: Norwegian social anthropologist and the most important non-Saami academic writer on the Saami.

Eidheim has sought to understand how Saami cope with the “stigma of inferiority”—especially evident along the coast—in relation to Norwegian-speakers and Norwegian culture. The central questions have been: how do coastal Saami live with the stigma; how do Saami activists—nationalist authors, NSR leadership, members of NSI—grapple with the problem? He has reflected over the dilemma of the activists (in “the Lappish movement”): the more they pressed their programme, the greater the resistance they encountered among many of their own people.

The traditional rejection of Lappish identity by Norwegians has deposited a stigma of inferiority in the Lappish population, which in some areas overrules all new moral principles advocated by the leaders of the movement and prevents a positive response. (Eidheim 1971a:7)

I would also like to draw attention to a couple of acknowledgments that Eidheim makes: “During my fieldwork I have enjoyed the hospitality of many people who in various ways have exposed their private dilemmas of identity to me” (Eidheim 1971a:8); furthermore, he thanks Saami activists, “who have taken me into their confidence and introduced me to their political backstage—a position from which I have been able to gather much valuable information” (ibid.).

Of entering a coastal Saami village, he writes: “I knew, of course, that I was on the edges of the Lappish area, but my eyes and ears told me that I was inside a Norwegian fjordal community” (Eidheim 1971b:52). After a while, though, he “discovered” that Lappish was the domestic language in most households but that it functions as “a secret language or code, regularly used only in situations where trusted Lappish identities are involved” (ibid.:55). Eventually, they “became more careless with the ‘secret’” (it helped that he could enter into simple conversations in Saami). It was at this point that people whom he had come to know best in the village “started admitting me to their personal dilemmas of identity. This would often take the form of confessions: they were after all a kind of Lapp” (ibid.:54, 55).

What was made of all this—of the “secret” and the sharing of it with a Norwegian ethnographer? The fieldwork was done in the early 1960s, and by the time of Keskitalo’s speech to the Seventh Nordic Ethnographic Congress, in 1973, Saami activists would say (to me, and I’m sure to others) “There’d be no stigma if Eidheim hadn’t invented it!” In short, non-Saami ethnographers’ habit of collecting “dirt” about our people, our culture, injures us. But by the 1980s, things had changed on all fronts. So that just as the fjordal villagers had earlier drawn comfort from sharing their secret with that sympathetic stranger in their midst, NSR leadership now began to seek his thoughts about strategy on the ethnopolitical front. Eidheim, now “Harald,” sitting in Oslo for the most part, became a conduit of information and contacts. He wrote about the cause of NSR in the newspapers; he attended (sometimes arranging) meetings with parliamentarians; and so forth. The academic ethnographer became a resource person for his erstwhile critics.

## **Ludic Bridges: 2**

In the 1950s and 1960s when I was attached to various pastoral camps, the interface between Saami and non-Saami identity (in the Saami pastoralist view of the matter) was expressed less around language policy, pasturing rights and such like (which is not to say these were not important issues) and more around the reindeer: “When it comes to our animals, each of us is his

own boss everyone of us wants his herd to grow — *there's* the motivation for our hard way of life'' (Paine 1987b:7, 13).

What also belongs to this familiar proposition — of the reindeer as a key or summarizing symbol — are the expressions of Saami-ness attached to the utilization of reindeer products. Consider the following scenario. Ellon Ailu had sold a dozen animals alive to the Kautokeino Co-operative; so as we returned to the winter pastures, he had a wad of banknotes tucked away inside his heavy winter clothing, and that is all:

On cue, as we entered the cabin, the women looked askance at the money and began hectoring Ellon Ailu: "Where's the tallow? the blood? the intestinal lining? the heart? the tongue? the head and the marrow bones?" They weren't even mentioning the better joints of meat; and they hadn't finished yet: "Where are the skins for the clothing we all wear? And the sinew for the sewing of that clothing?" (Paine 1987b:3)

This was no isolated instance.

Arising from all this are a couple of insistent claims: only "we Saami" understand reindeer (a non-Saami cannot possibly understand what this means to us) and only "we Saami" know how to utilize properly its different products.

For the pastoralists, "you are what you eat" is a truism enveloping their culture. But at all points — when an animal should be slaughtered and how, and how the meat should be prepared — the Norwegian market opposed Saami praxis. The rub for the Saami was, of course, that they had also to sell their meat as a market product. Here it must suffice to say that the market demands *lean* meat whereas Saami, still today, celebrate the *fatness* of their meat.<sup>10</sup>

Today, though, self-consciousness talk — anguished talk — about the quality of reindeer meat is sidelined as the pastoralists find that control of access to the pastoral life itself has been lost: Norwegian law now determines how many, and who among them, will continue as pastoralists, and how many animals they may have. The law (*lov om reindrif*) came into force in 1976.<sup>11</sup>

Then in 1979 an ad hoc group of seven young Saami — they called themselves the Saami Action Group (SAG) — put up a *lavvo* (tent) outside parliament. They declared that they would stay put and keep a hunger-strike until parliament rescinded its authorization for the damming of the Alta River, flowing through ancestral Saami lands. The dam threatened reindeer pastures as well as the tundra ecology/economy of the village of Masi (Paine 1982).

What I want to stress here is, first, the significance of the SAG event, and secondly, its ludic properties:

instead of shaping themselves to the politically dominant reality—to the world outside them—the strikers shaped it to themselves, and they attained *their* reality in the very act of portraying it by expressing the reality as they saw it, the strikers led many Norwegians to rearrange their own experience concerning their nation. (Paine 1985a:201)

[The effect] was to place two new and troubling questions on the Norwegian political agenda: “Who are Saami? What are Saami rights?” The important thing about these questions is that they implicitly assert: “There *are and will be* Saami! There *are* special Saami rights!” These questions superseded the traditional Norwegian question . . . : “Why should anyone wish to remain a ‘Lapp.’” (Paine 1985a:228)

In denoting the hunger strike as drama, I am separating it from every day reality—and *make-believe was important to the impact that SAG achieved*. Those seven momentarily became “the Saami” and their *lavvo* the summarizing symbol of Saami culture. A similar political mission has been recognized for carnivals (Manning 1983), but carnivals are set apart in time and space from other activities. SAG, by contrast, “*usurped* time and place and intruded, unbidden and unheralded, upon the routines, consciences and, above all, the imaginations of the citizens and politicians of Oslo—and eventually the whole country” (Paine 1985a:227).

But exactly on account of its “playfulness,” this kind of behaviour arouses disquiet, apprehension, suspicion among many Saami, and the hostility of some. It is strange and rather offensive behaviour, far removed from the “traditional”; many “would rather continue in the game of survival without trying to roll the dice” (Anderson 1982:109).

Others ask *whose* “Saami premises” are being activated? NSR, for example, was seen as romanticizing the reindeer pastoral minority among the Saami population, presenting them as *the* standard bearer for *the* true Saami culture. The contrary view was—these nomads are really an anachronism in the modern world. If they represent Saami culture, some would say, we can no longer regard ourselves as Saami. Little wonder, then, that the hunger-strikers—in Oslo of all places, with their *lavvo* of all things!—provoked a strident backlash in some Saami circles in the north.

In short, this is the Saami nationalist writers’ dilemma (seen also in the case of Alf Isak Keskitalo). Committed to Saami expression of self-consciousness, they elevate their own experiences (and interpretations thereof) as though they are shared by all Saami; but the painful truth, at the moment, is that among themselves Saami claim different experiences, or, where one might suppose that experiences are similar, there are very likely

to be markedly different interpretations. This is particularly troubling when working for a consensual *political* Saami front (below).

Recently, another kind of crisis was visited upon the pastoralists: “Chernobyl” (Paine 1987a; 1989). The accident provoked different Saami voices. Sometimes it was talked about in terms of metameaning and final causes:

“Chernobyl” encodes a message about social darwinism. “Chernobyl” is cited as evidence for the demise of Saami culture; in particular, the disappearance of reindeer pastoralism in an agricultural come industrial world. And Saami sometimes add, that in the view of many non-Saami, the demise is overdue. The media, in attempts to keep “Chernobyl” newsworthy, also portrayed it in such metameaningful terms. But the media never said what some Saami know subjectively and say — that “we are an outlawed people” (a South Saami), that “we realize that we don’t count for much” (a North Saami). “Chernobyl,” in other words, has not just remained an accident for the Saami but has become, for many, an embodiment of history, cropping up in conversations, from time to time, linked to other happenings in Saami non-Saami relations. (Paine 1989:141)

At other times I would hear it talked about in terms of *stigmatization*: reindeer meat, their “quality product” they call it, was rendered unclean. However, dramatic differences in degree of radiation of pastures and animals undermined solidarity in the face of adversity. Radiation in the South Saami areas was exponentially higher than among the North Saami — in places as much as 10 times or more. This difference predisposed the North and South to different “Chernobyl” strategies with respect to the all-important domestic reindeer meat. The North wished the government to raise the radiation limit enough to free *their* meat for the market. This was done. But it was of no help to the pastoralists of the South. Worse than no help, inasmuch as they argued that making an exception of reindeer meat in this way *added* to the stigmatization factor; what housewife, they argued, would buy reindeer meat when this means risking more contamination than with any other meat? It would be better to withdraw all reindeer meat from the market until such time as its radiation falls to the level of other household meats. The bitterness of the South Saami, a small minority within a minority, was directed less to the government than to their own northern-dominated national association of Saami reindeer owners (*Norske Reindriftsamers Landsforbund/Norgga Boazosapmelaccaid Riikasearvi*).

Once again, then, I had to put away any idea of mobilization of solidarity on the basis of simply being Saami (1989:154ff.). Moreover, fieldwork at that time in one of the worst contaminated South Saami districts, confirmed how each family made their own decisions as to how best to cope. A memorandum sent to a government department demanded that: “individual solutions be accepted.” This may strike others as an inefficient, ultimately dan-

gerous, way of tackling a catastrophe such as “Chernobyl,” but it is consonant with all that we know about Saami (and other) pastoral society and culture. Consider: no hierarchy, discretionary authority, easily divisible capital with anticipatory inheritance—always in ecologic circumstances of uncertainty.

### Nation-association

The foregoing belong to the temper and circumstances in which the goal—admittedly but one of a series, but a symbolic benchmark—of a Saami parliament was achieved in 1989 (after a long struggle).

The NSR program is built around four principal demands: (1) that the Saami people be mentioned in the Norwegian constitution; (2) that there be a Saami elective assembly; (3) that Saami become a second official language in areas of Saami concentration; and that (4) Saami usufruct—where practised from time immemorial—be accepted as having bestowed “ownership.”

In 1979, a dissenter group broke with NSR, charging that its leadership was élitist and radical. It attacked two positions advanced within the NSR: the embracing of the pastoral nomad as the symbol of Saami culture and the deliberate distancing from the symbol of the Norwegian Crown.

The dissenters founded SLF (*Samenes Landsforbund/Saami Aednamsaervi*). It was to provide a “non-ideological” alternative to NSR whose demands (in the SLFers view) constitute a cultural regression, a “going back” to a condition that Saami had “left behind.” “[We] honour and respect the constitution, the king and his government, parliament and other official authorities” (*Sagat* [a Saami newspaper], 1-1-80). “What rights do Saami lack today? It is difficult to suppose that any so-called ‘special rights’ would be an improvement over what we already have in our democracy” (SLF 1979:1).

NSR and SLR are cultural alternatives and the alternatives are politicized in terms of relationships to the nation-state. The SLF say that Saami have obtained “equality” (*likhet*) with Norwegians and should now be allowed to enjoy the rewards of their Norwegianization. But, say NSR, this would ensure the demise of Saami culture, we must strive for recognition of “equal worth” (*likeverd*)—if semantics are any witness, “politics” have been unleashed!

It is important to note that the NSR-SLF difference is as much about Norwegian culture as it is about Saami culture. The SLF people have learned a new culture (Norwegian) and are enjoying it. For the most part they are farmers or fjordal fishermen; some of them are drawn into municipal or provincial (as opposed to national) politics. They enjoy active membership in

one or another Norwegian political party. This is a larger world than the Saami one they knew, and altogether more challenging and rewarding. They belong to a new Saami *petit bourgeoisie*. Yet it is among the NSR that one finds the greater competence in and appreciation of the intellectual domains of Norwegian culture (tertiary level education among them is not uncommon)—and they put this competence to polemical use against the threat of “Norwegianization” that still faces Saami culture.

The NSR leadership enjoys the transnational participation in Fourth World affairs. Also, it is the NSR that catches the imagination and enthusiasm of academic anthropologists. SLF have been ignored when not derided. Why? First of all, I see no cause for surprise—anthropology’s reflexes lead it to the NSR camp (and to “working relationships” between some—but not all—academics and nationalists). Both the NSR and much of anthropology are committed to what Kroeber called “value culture”—indeed, it is their principal resource. Thus “the culture of the Saami” is a shibboleth; the oneness or wholeness implied in the phrase such as “the Saami” is assumed where it should be demonstrated.

On the other hand, I believe that, among other messages, what SLF-ers are saying to us (academics and much of NSR leadership) is: “You ‘university overclass’ may call us Saami, but we’re not—not any longer!” In other words, they are talking about cultural succession: of a culture that is no longer “real” for them being replaced by another.<sup>12</sup> I agree with Ingold (personal communication) that the SLF message is one which rejects cultural power brokerage: “By calling us Saami, you are asserting symbolic control over us; you are saying that we are still in your bailiwick, that you ‘own’ us as subjects to be studied, defended, patronized. We don’t need this!”<sup>13</sup>

I hope I have now said enough (much has been left unsaid) to suggest how Saami engagement in issues pertaining to “self as nation” is one of *doing* and of *division* (not of being and unity).

The NSR-SLF battle<sup>14</sup> was heated up by acute awareness of the fact that the Saami Rights Commission *Samerettsutvalget* had a mandate to prepare broad recommendations to parliament. The Commission was established in 1980 as a direct consequence of the hunger strike the year before.

The NSR-SLF controversy was taken into the Commission itself. It started even over Commission membership: to the displeasure of NSR who saw themselves as the only legitimate representative of Saami rights, there was SLF membership as well as NSR. Nor could NSR understand why national associations such as the Norwegian Farmers’ Association were afforded places on the Commission<sup>15</sup>: the presence of Norwegian associations is prejudicial to Saami rights, they argued. The answer to this was clear for SLF: many Saami are farmers. For their part, SLF objected to the inclusion

of the Association of Saami Reindeer Owners for, they argued, it is but a small minority of Saami who follow that livelihood!

So the work of the Commission continually ran into obstacles. But when votes were counted, the "NSR" side could muster sufficient to carry the day. The first volume of the Commission's findings appeared in 1984; something of an anti-climax, it recommended a clause in the constitution and a Saami parliament—but land rights were held over to the next volume (which has yet to appear). NSR, however, had to make concessions: the Saami "parliament" is to be an advisory body, they had wished for more.<sup>16</sup>

Parliament had ratified the recommendations in 1987.<sup>17</sup> Before elections to the Saami parliament could be held, there had to be a national census of self-declared Saami. Forecasters expected 5000 would register—perhaps one in five or six across the country were eligible (on basis of parentage/grandparentage); and 5500 did. There was some anxiety about what the turnout would be like. Norwegian newspaper comment veered between the bored and the half-amused. Along with Karasjok and Kautokeino, Oslo registered the most Saami. Informed opinion is that many Saami adopted a cautious pragmatic "wait and see" policy towards this new creature—a Saami parliament.

There followed party campaigns, sponsoring candidates for the 39 seats distributed between 13 regional constituencies. NSR ran a list as did several of the Norwegian political parties. There were threatened boycotts: the Association of Saami Reindeer Owners Association, arguing their special interest, announced they would declare a boycott should they be denied some reserved seats of their own. They were denied and their boycott was not effective, as far as I know. SLF became divided among themselves; the leadership urged members to boycott the whole proceedings, out of first principles. However, King Olav's acceptance of an invitation to attend the ceremonial opening of the parliament had them scrambling to attend the ceremony!

Voters' turn-out was 75 percent (of the 5500). NSR received 35 percent of the poll and 18 seats, *Arbeiderparti* (Labour Party) 20 percent and 7 seats. Apparently there was little difference between their election platforms. Among the variety of smaller parties making up the balance, several look like NSR satellites. Thirteen women won seats (exactly one-third of the total).

Elected as Saami parliament's first president was Ole Henrik Magga—a prominent Saami nationalist, he had been Chairman of NSR during the period of the hunger strike and the ensuing confrontations with the government; also, he recently assumed the Chair of Finno-Ugric Studies at Oslo after Knut Bergsland (while continuing as one of the research directors of the Saami Institutta in Kautokeino).

But events have run ahead of analysis!



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## Notes

1. For a good overview, see Vorren and Manker (1958 in Norwegian, 1962 in English).
2. But see Aubert 1978.
3. Visual artists and musicians also have expressed Saami self-consciousness; Kaalund (1986) provides an introductory account of Saami painters and sculptors, together with Greenlandic artists.
4. The published proceedings are important source books along with *Sami Aellin/Sameliv*, a yearbook published in Norway. The first five of the Nordic Saami Conferences (1953-62) were published in English (Hill 1960; Hill & Nickul 1969) as well as in Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish. Today, an effort is made to provide a Saami language version of the conferences.
5. For instance, see Ruong 1964.
6. Try Briggs (1970 and 1982) if you want that; and see Cohen (1989) on the self-consciousness of the anthropologist.
7. The village, and my presence in it, are featured in Nielsen (1986).
8. Stordahl 1982 is an essay on its emergence.
9. NSI publishes research papers in its series *Diedut*.
10. More on this is to be found in Paine 1987b.
11. See *Landsbruksdepartementet* 1976; further to issues raised here, see Björklund 1988.
12. Kroeber distinguishes between "value culture" and "reality culture"—I suggest it is the latter the SLF would embrace. For discussion of Kroeber's terms, see Wolf 1982.
13. Ingold's construal (personal communication). Cognate to the present discussion of NSR and SLF is Ingold's on "minority-culture ideology" of "local elites" among the Skolt Saami of northern Finland (Ingold 1976:245-53).
14. A fuller account is given in Paine 1990; for a view of the competition as a conflict in terms of Fourth World ideology, see Paine 1985b.
15. But it is Norwegian practice for all commissions to have broad representation of professional/occupational interests.
16. NOU 1984 is the full text of the Commission's first volume, a 70-page English summary is also available (Ministry of Justice); Eidheim et al. 1985 is a critique of the Commission report by several Norwegian anthropologists.
17. See *Justis- og politidepartementet* 1984.

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