

THE VIABILITY OF THE FORTHCOMING NORWEGIAN SÁMI PARLIAMENT:  
AN ASSESSMENT

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements of the M.Phil. in Polar Studies  
at the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge

June 1989

## DECLARATION

In accordance with University of Cambridge regulations, I do hereby declare that: this thesis represents my own original work and conforms to accepted standards of citation in those instances in which I have availed myself of the work of others; this thesis is not now being submitted nor has been submitted in the past for any other degree, diploma or similar qualification at any other institution; this thesis is greater than 10,000 words without exceeding the maximum allowable length of 20,000 words, excluding footnotes, tables, appendices and bibliography.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to a number of individuals, without whose assistance the preparation of this thesis would have been a much more arduous task.

I would like to thank the staff, visiting scholars and students of the Scott Polar Research Institute whose enthusiasm provides a stimulating work environment. Special mention must be made of my supervisor, Piers Vitebsky, whose guidance and assistance proved invaluable, and of Ericka Engelstad for reading sections of my work and providing helpful suggestions. I am also grateful to Priscilla Renouf and to Mark Nuttall for their assistance.

I owe my thanks to Pat Little for typing this thesis, and to Rosmary Graham who assisted with the word processing.

Finally, I thank my parents without whose moral and financial support this thesis would never have materialized.

## C O N T E N T S

	page
Declaration.....	II
Acknowledgements.....	III
Contents.....	IV
List of maps, photographs and figures.....	VI
Abstract.....	1
Introduction	
1) Objectives.....	2
ii) The Sámi people.....	3
iii) A note on the concept of ethnicity.....	8
Chapter	
1 The post-war Sámi movement in Norway 1945-1975.....	10
2 The Alta-Kautokeino hydro-electric project as an ethnopolitical catalyst.....	25
3 The Sámi Rights Commission	
3.1 The origins of the Sámi Rights Commission and its mandate..	35
3.2 The Government - creating the Sámi Parliament as a response.....	40
4 The Sámi Parliament and the management of Sámi ethnic identity	
4.1 The structure and function of the Sámi Parliament: a point of contention between the Sámi organizations.....	45
4.2 Reindeer pastoralism as a central idiom of Sámi identity...	52
4.3 Other symbols of ethnicity among the Sami.....	65

5	A final analysis: the prospects for the viability of the Sámi Parliament	
5.1	Three versions of what could conceivably constitute success.....	80
5.2	The Finnish Sámi Parliament: an example of a parliament's limitations?.....	85
5.3	The key issue of representation in Norway.....	89
	Glossary.....	93
	References List.....	95

## List of maps, photographs and figures

Figure	page
1 Map. The Sámi settlement area and dialect regions.....	4
2 Map. Finnmark county, administrative units.....	11
3 Map. Sámi constituencies.....	46
4 Photograph. The Sámi school; learning how to dismember a reindeer carcass.....	70
5 Photograph. Reindeer pastoralists.....	70
6 The Sámi flag as adopted by the Nordic Sámi Council in 1986....	76
7 Photographs. Extracts from a montage by the Sámi artist Iver Joks, "Seek harmony with nature"	
a "The 'stage' of our times".....	77
b "The claim of the sacrificial altar".....	78

## ABSTRACT

In 1987, the Norwegian Government passed the Sámi Law, which expressly protected the interests of the Norwegian Sámi as an ethnic group and provided for the establishment of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament, a representative body to be elected by and among the Norwegian Sámi. This body will replace the current Norwegian Sámi Council. Although the reform reflects Government response to Sámi demands for greater ethnic self-determination, the Sámi Parliament can, as yet, only act in an advisory capacity.

The passage of the Sámi Law has exacerbated the division between Sámi ethnopolitical factions, as reflected in the polarization of the three Norwegian Sámi organizations *vis-à-vis* ethnic self-determination. The Sámi organizations project different versions of a Sámi ethnic identity as shown in the way they manipulate ethnic symbols. These differences in approach towards ethnic identity management reflect differing experiences of Norwegian/Sámi relations. Thus the essence of a Sámi ethnic identity is no longer straightforward, owing to codifications of Sámi ethnicity imposed from without. This has implications for the viability of the Sámi Parliament: its credibility depends on it being representative of the Sámi population in general. Since decisive powers have not, as yet, been conferred upon the Sámi Parliament, its symbolic significance will, at least at the outset, be paramount. In light of these considerations, the Sámi Parliament may be unsuccessful in gaining the support of that sector of the Sámi population which experiences a Sámi ethnic identity as problematic.

## INTRODUCTION

### 1) Objectives

In the autumn of 1989, the Norwegian Sámi, an indigenous ethnic minority, will for the first time elect representatives to their own ethnic body, the Norwegian Sámi Parliament. In many respects, the event represents a victory for the Norwegian Sámi, marking as it does, a move away from State guardianship and encapsulation, towards a situation whereby the status of the Sámi as an ethnic group is to be determined by the Sámi themselves.

For the purposes of this thesis, the *viability* of the Sámi Parliament is to be assessed in the light of two interrelated factors: its structure and its degree of popular support. In accordance with this my main objective is to discuss how ethnic self-identification is no longer a straightforward process for the Sámi, owing to "imposed colonial encounters" (Paine 1985). I shall examine the implications this problem has for support for the Parliament, which by its very nature depends on being a *representative* body.

I shall begin by reviewing the ethnopolitical events that led up to the establishment of the Sámi Parliament. These events should not be seen as isolated incidents in Norway, but as just one expression of an increase in ethnic self-awareness among the Sámi in general, and among indigenous ethnic minority groups worldwide. Subsequently, I shall examine how both external and internal factors forced the Norwegian Government to respond positively to the ethnopolitical demands of the Sámi. Government reforms

provoked a mixed response among the Sámi, and I shall demonstrate how the various responses are reflected in the way different Sámi groups view their ethnicity, and attempt to manage it accordingly. Finally, I pose the question of whether a single ethnic body can accommodate the different Sámi ideologies reflected in different approaches to identity management whilst retaining its credibility.

The geographical bias of my analysis towards Finnmark, and more especially inland Finnmark reflects my personal experiences, as I taught for a year in the inland Sámi community of Kárášjohka. I speak Norwegian but not Sámi.

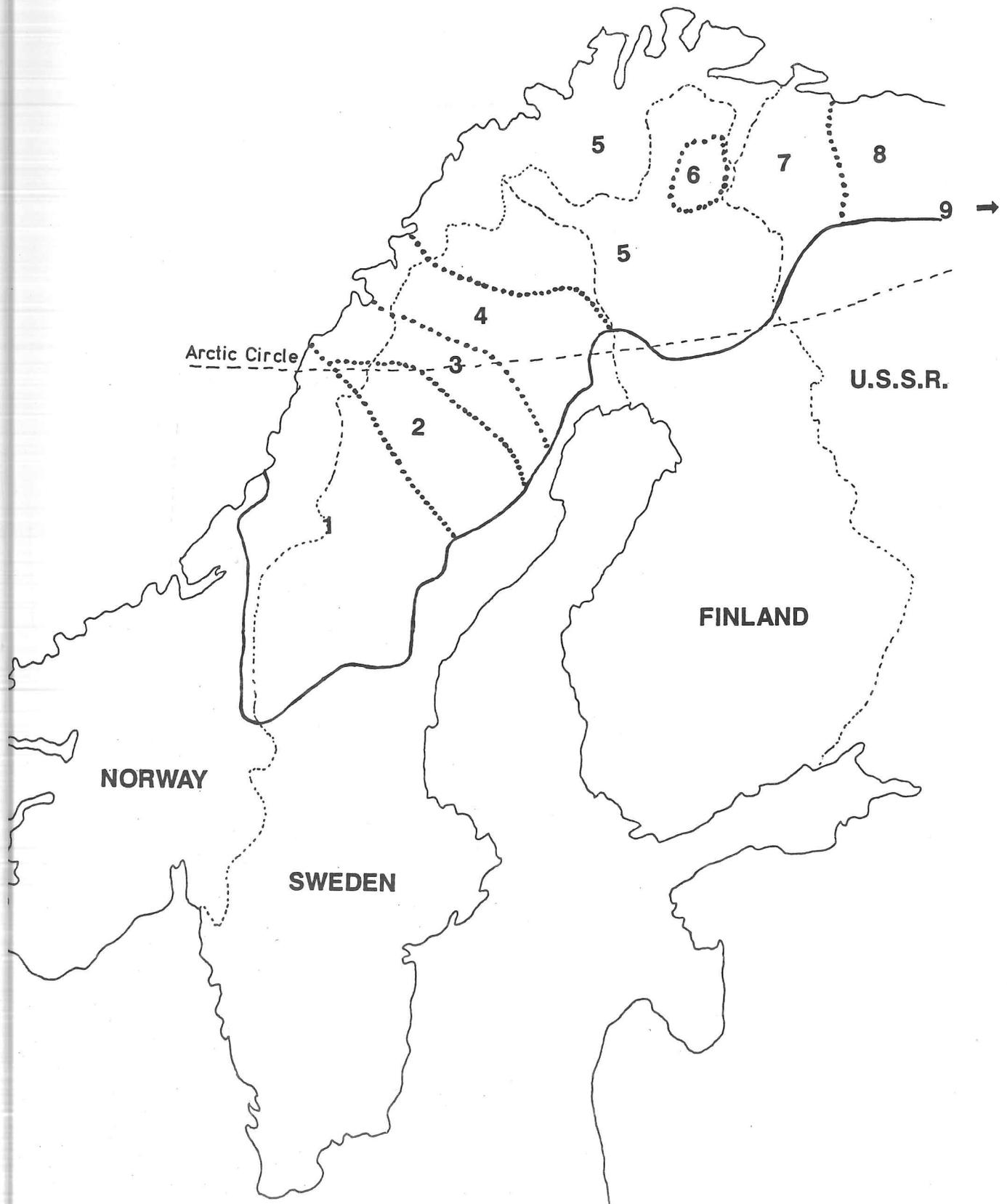
A brief note is in order on some linguistic points. Whereas I use the term *Sámi Parliament* in headings, English connotations of the word "Parliament" preclude me from using the word in the body of the text, since the Sámi Parliament has at present no legislative or decisive powers. Thus I refer to it by the Scandinavian term, *Sámithing*. The 'core' area of Norwegian Sámland is made up of the two municipalities of *Kárášjoga gielda* and *Guovdageainnu suohkan*. The main community within each of these respective administrative units is *Kárášjohka* and *Guovdageaidnu*. I use this Sámi orthography to replace the Norwegian *Karasjok* and *Kautokeino*.

#### 11) The Sámi people

The Sámi are said to be the autochthonous people of Scandinavia. The present-day area of Sámi settlement covers a large area from the Kola peninsula in the north-east, stretching across the county of Lappi in northern Finland, that of Finnmark in Norway, and extending down into the counties of Troms, Nordland and

# The Sámi Settlement Area – Dialect Regions

Figure 1



The Sami dialects 1. South 2. Ume 3. Pite 4. Lule 5. North 6. Enare  
7. Skolt 8. Kildin 9. Ter

Trøndelag in Norway and those of Norrbotten, Västerbotten and Jämtland in Sweden (Figure 1).

There are no exact statistics as to the number of Sámi. Estimates range from 30,000 (Nesheim 1979 p.7) to a rather optimistic 300,000 (Siuruainen and Aikio 1977 p.11) although the figures most often quoted lie between 30,000 and 60,000. More than anything, the confusion surrounding these demographic statistics stems from the difficulty of defining who is Sámi. The problem becomes a matter of concern when a definition is required for political reasons, such as with the establishment of the Norwegian Sámithing. Ruong (1982) gives the national Sámi populations as 40,000 in Norway, 15,000 in Sweden, 4000 in Finland and 1500 to 2000 in the Soviet Union (p.9).

Much has been written about the origins of the Sámi, and many theories postulated. They have been variously placed with the Samoyeds, the Finns and the mongoloid race (Beach 1988) but as some authors point out, perhaps the correct question to ask is not where the Sámi came from, but when they originated as an ethnic group with a Sámi identity (Hætta 1979; Beach 1988). The important aspect to this question is that the Sámi have occupied their Scandinavian settlement areas since pre-historic times, before the Scandinavian States had defined their boundaries.

Central to Sámi identity and culture is the Sámi language, which although on the decline in the South Sámi area, is very much alive in the core Sámi settlement area. Sámi belongs to the Finno-Ugric language group, a branch of the Uralic family. The best known related languages are some Baltic languages including Finnish, and

Hungarian. Other related languages are those spoken in some eastern and northern parts of Russia and north-western Siberia (Nesheim 1979). The Sámi language is divided into a number of dialects (Figure 1) which can be broadly classified into South Sámi, North Sámi and East Sámi. The dialects are not necessarily mutually intelligible; a North Sámi speaker cannot generally understand the South Sámi dialect and *vice versa*. Since North Sámi is the dialect spoken in the core Sámi area of Finnmark and adjacent regions in Finland and Sweden, this is rapidly becoming a 'standardized' form of the Sámi language. North Sámi is the dialect most used in the Sámi media and is most accessible to outsiders wishing to learn Sámi. Perhaps such a standardization is necessary if the Sámi language is to be given a chance of survival at all.

Originally, the Sámi lived in small semi-nomadic social groups or *siiddat* (sg. *siida*) which formed the basis of their hunting, fishing and gathering activities (Aarseth 1975). This form of livelihood was, however, to change during the late Middle Ages, in response to the effects of colonization and heavy taxation. We learn from a late ninth century account given to King Alfred the Great by the North Norwegian chieftain Ottar (Ohthere), that the Sámi were taxed for furs and other natural products by Norwegian chieftains living along the coast of Nordland and Troms counties (Lorenz 1981). The so-called Lapp-tax was later used by the emerging nation-states of Denmark/Norway, Sweden and Russia to consolidate their sovereignty in the north. The Swedish/Dano-Norwegian border was not drawn up until 1751, thus taxation

districts overlapped, and many *siiddat* were subject to the taxation administrations of two or three Crowns. Taxation pressures enforced the Sámi to over-exploit stocks of fur-bearing animals, such that by the end of the sixteenth century, the more sought-after species were on the point of extinction and wild reindeer herds were dwindling. This, together with the absorption of the Sámi into different neighbouring States, undermined the hunting/gathering economy and the *siida* system, forcing the Sámi to specialize (Hirsti 1980).

Thus, it is not until the sixteenth century that Sámi groups distinguished by economic activity, emerge. The "mountain" Sámi maintained a semi-nomadic life-style based on, by now, reindeer pastoralism, and to a large extent retained the *siida*-system. Sámis in coastal areas, however, faced direct resource competition from settled Norwegian populations, and were forced to become sedentary, basing their economy on fishing, livestock-rearing and other farming activities. The *siida*-system among the coastal Sámi disintegrated with sedentarization and as marriage across ethnic boundaries became more commonplace (Aarseth 1975 p. 30 ff). Another Sámi group is often distinguished, that of settled inland Sámi, or "forest" and "river" Sámi. This group maintained a mixed-economy based on farming, fishing, hunting and gathering (Hirsti 1980).

The cultural systems of these three Sámi groups developed largely independently of each other and the differences between them is reflected in modern Sámi ethnopolitics.

### iii) A note on the concept of ethnicity

My approach in this thesis has entailed reference to certain terms linked to the concept of ethnicity. These terms, notably "ethnic group", "ethnic boundary" and "ethnic symbol" will need some clarification.

Ethnicity refers to just one of a number of possible ways in which individuals may be bound together to form social groups. Ethnic attachments may be defined by an individual's identification with a "culturally specific set of value standards" (Barth 1969 p.25). Insofar as cultural values are implanted in early childhood, ethnicity may be regarded as the most basic form of identity, entailing strong emotive forces. However, whether ethnic bonds are immutable or flexible and thus whether ethnicity is a primordial or a subjective phenomenon appears to be the point of some contention among anthropologists (Barth 1969; Epstein 1978; Smith 1981).

It appears that the effects of industrialization and the spread of "mass produced" cultural norms have in many cases infused ethnic bonds with a new lease of life, often with a political salience, when in theory these bonds were supposed to have been rendered obsolete. In the words of Paine (1985), it is as if "as persons become increasingly aware of the erosion of their cultural boundaries, so they become self-conscious about their cultural identity" (p.59-60). This realization of the vulnerability of the individual may be said to be a driving force behind the need to seek security within the "circle of one's ethnic associates" - the

ethnic group (Epstein 1978 p. xiv).

The ethnic group can exist only in relation to another ethnic group. The way in which the actor presents himself as part of his own group as opposed to any other is therefore significant. Thus a set of cultural criteria, which may include such features as dress, language and certain economic activities, is adopted and cultivated by the group as ethnic differentia, making up the ethnic boundary. These cultural values are self-consciously invested with new meanings, and assume a symbolic function such that they become "eloquent statements of identity: of ... similarity to and differences from, other people" (Cohen 1986 p. ix). These recodified distinguishing features or ethnic symbols are consciously or unconsciously used and manipulated in order to demarcate ethnic boundaries. Incorporation into or exclusion from an ethnic group is determined by the way in which the actor relates and is perceived to relate to the boundary markers. Thus ethnic belonging is self-perceived as well as prescribed by others (Barth 1969; Kennedy 1982 Introduction).

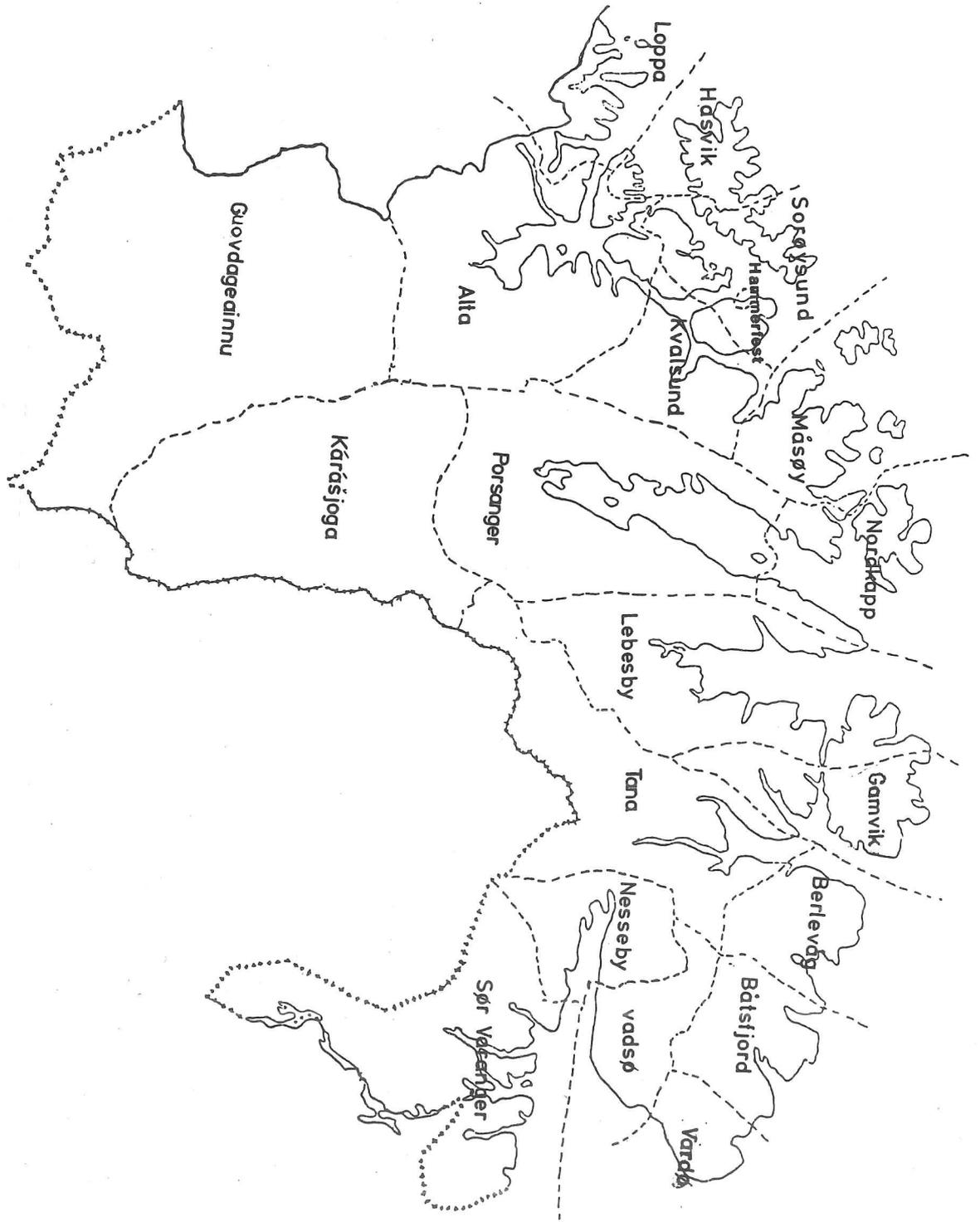
## Chapter 1

### The post-war Sámi movement in Norway 1945-1975

The first attempts at ethnopolitical mobilization among the Norwegian Sámi were made during the first half of this century. At that time, activities among South Sámi and North Sámi were organized largely independently of each other. The early North Sámi movement must be viewed in relation to the harsh Norwegianization policies to which the Sámi, and especially the North Sámi, were subjected between 1850 and the Second World War. These Norwegianization policies, which had their roots in the geopolitical and ideological conditions of the day, were aimed at creating a culturally homogenous population in Norway and especially Finnmark (Jernsletten 1986). Thus the demands of the first Northern Sámi activists were centred upon cultural (non-material) and particularly educational issues.

The pre-war movement was dominated by a handful of enthusiasts, most of them Sámi teachers. This group successfully campaigned for one of their number, Isak Saba from Nesseby, to be elected to the *Storting* (Norwegian Parliament) as representative for East Finnmark in 1906 and 1909. They also edited a Sámi newspaper *Sagai Muittalægje* (The News Teller) between 1904 and 1911. Other projects however were less successful. Various Sámi organizations cropped up and then disappeared again in such places as Kárášjohka, Tana and Nesseby, between 1911 and 1930 (Minde 1986) (Figure 2 for administrative units in Finnmark). Attempts were also made at establishing Sámi political parties. One such party

Figure 2



in Finnmark forwarded candidates in the 1921 *Storting* election but was not successful.

The overall impression of the spasmodic, highly individualist-orientated pre-war Sámi movement is one of failure. It did not succeed in infusing the Sámi population with the political and ethnic consciousness necessary for mobilization. Nor was it taken seriously by State authorities. It was only with the socio-economic and political changes that characterized post-occupation Norway that the seeds of Sámi organizational life were able to take root and develop. The 30 years following the war saw the establishment of a hierarchical organizational network rooted in a common ideology of ethnic pluralism. This provided the Sámi population with the necessary "constructive alternative" which the pre-war protest movement had not been able to supply (Eidheim 1971 p. 43).

An understanding of the dynamics and significance of the Norwegian Sámi movement entails an examination of the post-war phenomena that allowed it to emerge and that fuelled it. Also important is the way in which the movement manifested itself structurally and ideologically and the degree to which it succeeded in mobilizing the Sámi population in general.

From the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries the official Norwegian State policy pertaining to ethnic minority groups amounted to one of assimilation. The phase before World War II may be termed the *active* assimilation phase, manifesting itself in a deliberate attempt to impose Norwegian standards and values on the Sámi, in the spirit of Norwegian nationalism and social-

Darwinism. The post-war phase, lasting until about 1960, was characterized by a policy of *passive* assimilation as asserted by the Norwegian Labour Party, *Det Norske Arbeiderpartiet* (DNA), whereby national laws and regulations made no allowances for ethnic differences (Thuen 1980 Introduction).

The Germans carried out a systematic scorched-earth policy in northern Norway during their retreat in 1944, razing Finnmark entirely to the ground. After the war, the Norwegian authorities initiated a massive rebuilding campaign which served to confirm, in the minds of the Sámi, the value of the ideology behind the passive assimilatory policy (Bjørklund 1986). The scorched-earth policy had the effect of erasing all visible ethnic markers in the landscape. The standardized, centrally planned construction work that was initiated symbolized the start of a new cultural era where ethnic differences, previously evident in material cultural manifestations, were superficially eradicated. The bureaucratic network linked to the rebuilding policy, anchored in Norwegian cultural values, did not recognize the ethnic diversity of Finnmark's population. Indeed some architects saw it as their duty to plan the rebuilding programme so as to "neutralize these contrasts [between ethnic groups] ... which [do] not have full confidence in each other" (Bjørklund 1986 p.34).

Until the 1960s, Norway's post-war political landscape was dominated by DNA which had grown in strength since the inter-war Labour movement. The way in which the rebuilding programme was planned and executed was symptomatic of DNA's general policy towards ethnic minority groups, which can be summed up as equal

(identical) rights for all. It is DNA's policy that can be held responsible for splitting the Sámi population *vis-à-vis* the Sámi movement. On the one hand, DNA's equality and welfare ideology undermined ethnic differences, so discouraging self-assertion on ethnic grounds. On the other hand, a more liberal attitude towards minorities was emerging in the national political arena, as reflected in Norway's active participation in the formation of the Human Rights Declaration (Eidheim 1971 p.43), allowing for the emergence of interest groups, including ethnic organizations.

The rapid social and economic changes that Finnmark experienced after the war may be said to reflect the combined effects of the industrialization process and the development of the Welfare State. The development and standardization of public services, an increasing number of bureaucratic organs and settlement centralization are all variables in these processes. The effect was to raise the standard of living for all inhabitants of Finnmark. For the Sámi, however, deriving benefit from the new wealth was more problematic than for the rest of the population, since it entailed a high proficiency in Norwegian idioms and ideals. The Sámi had to deal with an increasing array of institutions which were equipped to deal only with Norwegian cultural systems. As inter-ethnic contact became more necessary and commonplace, Sámi values became irrelevant outside the private sphere of inter-Sámi communication. Against this background, it is understandable that the newly established Sámi associations did not attract wide Sámi support - tangible benefits could be derived only by promoting a Norwegian identity and in the process understating

one's Sáminess. As Eidheim (1985) points out, "the more effective and successful the welfare state becomes on its own premises, the more negative is its effect on ethnic self-respect for an increasing number of Sámi people" (p.160).

Finnmark was, and to some extent still is, a stronghold for DNA. In order to consolidate its power locally and make its ideology compatible with the local polyethnic scene, Finnmark *Arbeiderparti* translated ethnic problems into regional and economic problems. Thus issues relating to development disparities between central Sámi areas and Norwegian urban settlements in Finnmark were treated by local politicians as core/periphery problems. The effect of these politics was to ignore the existence of an ethnic minority through the rejection of ethnic minority problems.

A Norwegian *Arbeiderparti* politician, Hans Rønbeck, mayor of Kárášjoga for many years from the mid-1950s, personified this political ideology. It is symptomatic of the change in the Sámi political climate over the last twenty years, that faithful and enduring support for him has now turned into bitter memories of the "tyrant". In furthering his party's aims, Rønbeck exploited the dilemma experienced by Sámi who felt that a choice had to be made between a Sámi identity and a higher standard of living. His policies of turning Kárášjohka into a tourist-haven, centralizing the educational system and filling important posts with non-Sámis were met with the resistance of only a handful of, in his words "Sámi activists" (Dahl 1970 p.133).

In defence of his policies, Rønbeck maintained that:

Assimilation is necessary and unavoidable.  
The Sámi population will mix with Norwegians and

drift more and more into Norwegian society. I am not advocating Norwegianization policies ... but economic policies. Our country may become a poorer country in cultural terms when the Sámi culture disappears, but nobody can survive on culture (Hans Rønbeck cited in Dahl 1970 p. 176)

The tentative pre-war Sámi movement had demonstrated that there were three channels through which it was possible to present Sámi issues and demands to the central political system: directly through a national political party (notably DNA); through separate Sámi political parties (by presenting Sámi lists of candidates at local and national elections); and through pressure groups. The first of the above channels proved the most successful during the first half of this century. Backed by a short-lived Sámi newspaper *Ságai Muittalægje*, the Sámi teacher Isak Saba from Nesseby stood as the Socialist Parliamentary candidate for East Finnmark in the 1906, 1909 and 1912 *Storting* elections. Appended to his Socialist programme was a rather moderate Sámi political programme. The Sámi campaign and Isak Saba's candidature was a success insofar as Saba was elected to the *Storting* in 1906 and 1909 (Minde 1980).

This coalition between the Socialists and the Sámi movement marked the beginning of strong Sámi support for DNA that continues to exist today. Saba saw the alliance as natural:

The other political parties in this country have worked to wipe out the Sámi nation from this earth. Socialism will not do this. It wants brotherhood between all nations (Minde 1980 p. 88).

Saba's low profile in the *Storting*, however, indicates that the relationship was not as simple as envisaged. He hardly ever took up issues relating to his Sámi political programme in the *Storting*, and was condemned in that forum for not being

representative of the Sámi (Jernsletten 1986). The dilemma faced by Sámi politicians as to what extent national political parties should serve as vehicles for Sámi politics has been given extra poignancy with the establishment of the Sámithing.

It is interesting that the pre-war Sámi movement in Finnmark was dominated by Sámis in the fjord districts. This is shown by the readership distribution of *Sagai Muittalægje*, the northern Sámi mouthpiece between 1904 and 1911 (Jernsletten 1986 p. 55).

The post-war Sámi movement differed significantly in form and strategy from the various pre-war attempts at Sámi political mobilization. Firstly, it was not until after the war that Sámi pressure groups became viable prominent features in the Sámi political landscape. Secondly, a shift in the geographical emphasis of the movement, from coastal regions to inland regions, appears to have occurred. Finally, perhaps most importantly, the ideological foundations of the movement became more concerned with the legal and political implications arising from the Sámi being recognized as a distinct ethnic group and as an indigenous people. This last point reflects the shift in official policy towards the Sámi from one of active to passive assimilation.

In view of the domination of *Arbeiderpartiet* in post-war Finnmark politics, it is significant that the first major development in the chronology of Norwegian post-war ethnopolitical activities occurred outside the county. In 1948, *Norske Reindriftssamers Landsforbund* (NRL) - the National Association of Sámi Reindeer Pastoralists - was formed in Tromsø by the initiative of South Sámi pastoralists. NRL claims first and foremost to

represent the economic and social interests of reindeer pastoralists, and by virtue of this it is now recognised as one of the three major Sámi ethnopolitical organizations. It is significant that this first national Sámi organization did not present itself at the outset as an ethnic organization. An association based on common economic interests was far more consonant with the post-war political ideology of non-differentiation on ethnic grounds. The aims of NRL are to "further the economic, social, cultural and technical interests of reindeer Sámis, and in this capacity to present the demands of reindeer Sámis to county and state administrative authorities" (Aarseth 1978 p. 18). NRL serves as an umbrella organization for nine county or local pastoralists' organizations. It has adopted a stronger political profile in line with the politicization of ethnicity.

In the same year that NRL was launched, a local Sámi association was formed, again outside Finnmark. *Oslo Sámiid Searvi* (Oslo Sámi Society) was established by Oslo-Sámis, students, scientists and others interested in Sámi matters. Initially, the association's primary function was to provide a forum where emigrated Sámi could meet socially. During the early 1950s, however, the Oslo Sámi Society became a national association with the aim of

Working for the social, cultural and economic progress of the Sámi through information dissemination and practical initiatives, and to create an understanding of the special problems of the Sámi (Aarseth 1978 p. 21)

Thus like NRL, *Oslo Sámiid Searvi* assumed the form of a pressure group with definite aims *vis-à-vis* the State. However,

unlike NRL, this new association claimed to have the interests of the whole ethnic group at heart, and to interpret Sámi problems as ethnic problems arising from the disparities in power between the majority and minority groups. As a result of the work of the Oslo association, local Sámi Societies sprang up in the Sámi areas of Finnmark throughout the 1960s. Kárášjohka has always been a politically volatile community where ethnic conflicts come to the fore. It is symptomatic of this that the first Sámi Society outside Oslo was formed in Kárášjohka in 1959 (Kárášjohka Sámiid Searvi). During the next six years this was followed by the establishment of Sámi Societies in Guovdageaidnu, Tana and Porsanger (Aarseth 1978 p.22).

The organizational activities that were taking place in Norway immediately after the war were paralleled by similar developments in Sweden and Finland. Recognizing that the Sámi in these three countries were experiencing similar problems and that distinct advantages were to be gained through collaboration, the Nordic Sámi organizations established a forum for common action. In 1953 the first inter-Nordic Sámi Conference was held in Jokkmokk, Sweden, a result of cooperation between the organizations *Same Ätnam* (Sweden), *Sámi Čuvgehussearvi* (Finland) and *Sámiid Searvi* (Norway). As a result of work initiated at the Conference, a Nordic Sámi Council was formed at the second Sámi Conference in Kárášjohka in 1956. The Nordic Sámi Council was to act as a coordinating body between the main national Sámi organizations and to strengthen cooperation between them (Lasko 1983 p.2).

The significance of the Nordic Sámi Council lay in its rôle as

a unifying organ. Through this Council, the Sámi were able to gain representation in the Nordic Council, thus effecting the political strategy of "playing the Nordic state societies off against one another" (Eidheim 1971 p. 45). The Nordic Sámi Council has been instrumental in widening the scope of Sámi politics from an inter-Nordic context to a global context. In 1976, the Sámi demonstrated their solidarity with the "Fourth World" when the Nordic Sámi Council became a member of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP).

As a response to the growth in the number of local Sámi organizations, an umbrella organization was formed in 1968 in Guovdageaidnu. Oslo, Kárášjohka, Guovdageaidnu, Tana and Porsanger Sámi Societies joined to form *Norgga Sámiid Riikkasearvi*, the National Association of Norwegian Sámi (NSR). NSR claims to represent all Norwegian Sámi irrespective of residence, occupation or language. However, in its early years the membership of NSR was dominated by well-educated Sámi (Aarseth 1978 p. 24). This is largely still true today. NSR are concerned with Sámi social and cultural issues, and their ideology of ethnic pluralism is underpinned by a desire to maintain, strengthen and create ethnic boundaries. NSR have been in the forefront of the campaign for a representative organ for the Sámi and for Constitutional protection of the Sámi as a people. Since NSR's existence depends on it being perceived as representative of all Sámi, it seeks to create an image of Sáminess (according to criteria defined by NSR) and then to incorporate as many Sámi as possible into this image. Hence their Statutes include the paragraphs:

NSR's main aim is to

- ...
- secure that correct information, media coverage and teaching about Sámis and Sámi affairs is based on Sámi premises.
- encourage Sámis to acknowledge their Sámi identity, and strengthen their self-respect in order to consolidate the Sámi community (NSR)

Today, 27 local Sámi societies are attached to NSR, totalling a membership of approximately 2,000. Since the 1970s Norwegian authorities have used NSR as an advisory authority (Hirsti 1980).

Despite a growth in Sámi political activities after the war, the Sámi movement faced the problem of passivity or even criticism among its potential followers. Even today, the majority of Sámi remain ethnopolitically inactive. The Sámi movement could not provide rewards of material gain, in the way that DNA had the potential to do. Support for the pluralist ideals of the Sámi movement was seen as a protest against the Welfare State which provided tangible benefits such as employment, a health service and education (Eidheim 1985).

Perhaps the most significant factor behind the passivity was the abrupt change in State policy towards the Sámi. Suddenly Sámi organizations, supported economically and morally by the State, were presenting a positive reevaluation of Sámi identity. Years of stigmatization and the resultant "cost-mechanism", by which success had to be paid for with one's Sámi identity, were not easily overcome (Aarseth 1978; Eidheim 1971).

Whilst the Sámi movement of the 1950s and 1960s was gaining momentum, the Norwegian State on its part was engaged in promoting the issue of Human Rights at the United Nations. The experiences

of the war had brought about a more liberal attitude towards minorities, and this was to be reflected in certain official initiatives aimed at alleviating "Sámi problems". It is in this context that the discrepancy between national and local (Finnmark) *Arbeiderparti* attitudes to ethnic minority problems clearly comes to the fore.

In 1953, the Norwegian Government established the Sámi Council for Finnmark - *Samisk Råd for Finnmark* (SRfF). This organ acted as a consultative body for State and county authorities. Its members were nominated by Finnmark County Council (Minde 1980 p. 100). This represents the first indication that the Sámi were becoming officially recognized as a distinct ethnic group with consequent special needs. A Sámi Committee report from 1959 describes SRfF as

The decisive breakthrough for the more positive attitude, as founded during the occupation period, towards the distinct Sámi social pattern.  
(NOU 1984 p. 482).

The war had shown the Sámi to have a "national", anti-Nazi attitude, which was now being used in Sámi agitation activities, and which was to be held in respect (Minde 1980).

As a result of the work of SRfF and the Sámi Society in Oslo, a Sámi Committee was established in 1956 to examine social issues pertaining to the Sámi population, and to make proposals based on the findings. The reform proposals in the Committee's report which was submitted in 1959 were met with some scepticism by many Government Departments. It was, however, at the local authority level in Finnmark that the report created the greatest incitement (Dahl 1970 p. 33).

The report created a dilemma for DNA. For the first time in an official context, the report recognized that equal rights were not necessarily synonymous with identical rights - shaking the very foundations of DNA's ideology. Amongst other things, the report referred to special Sámi rights in relation to the use of natural resources, to the consolidation of the Sámi language and to the establishment of a "Sámi administration run by the Sámi" (Dahl 1970 p. 33).

In central Sámi areas, the reforms proposed by the report gave rise to intense political conflict. The local councils in these areas were dominated by Norwegian *Arbeiderparti* politicians for whom Sámi problems were regional problems. The report was incompatible with their local policies. Many Sámi organizations had, however, supported the report and even contributed to it. The conflict reached a peak in Kárásjohka as shown by the events surrounding the dramatic "Easter Resolution". Hans Rønbeck, seeing the report's proposals as a threat to the validity of his "development" policies, called a public meeting to "discuss" its contents during the Easter weekend of 1960. In advance of the meeting, signatures had been collected for an "anti-committee" petition. The credibility of this petition was, however, undermined when it was later found that many of the signatories did not understand the contents of the petition (Dahl 1970 p. 34).

The Easter meeting, led by Rønbeck, gathered 89 people. Those present passed the Easter Resolution, a point by point rebuttal of the Committee's proposals, by a majority of 87 to two votes.

The Resolution included the following articles:

We feel at one with the rest of the country's population, and we have neither asked for nor wished for special rights or special duties in relation to other inhabitants in Norway.

...  
We protest against all initiatives that necessitate the establishment of special organs for the Sámi ... we find that type of guardianship both cruel and unnecessary.

...  
We believe that the Committee's proposal on the further introduction of the Sámi language in schools is a fateful step back that will hinder advancement and create great difficulties for our youth in their future lives.

...  
(Cited in Dahl 1970 p. 34-35).

This event, as engineered by Rønbeck, represented a rejection of all that the Sámi movement stood for. Minde (1980) identifies two aims behind this policy. For the first it was an attempt to legitimize the assimilation policies of Finnmark *Arbeiderparti*. Secondly, it was a ploy to undermine the Sámi movement by demonstrating its unrepresentativeness (p.105). It should be added that the political environment of Kárásjohka at this time was influenced by Rønbeck's rôle as a "political entrepreneur" (Eidheim 1971 p. 11 ff) - a politician working for personal gain. It is significant, however, that he was able to exploit the Sámi dilemma *vis-à-vis* the State to further his own ends, and in so doing weaken the identity consciousness of many less "sophisticated" Sámi.

The effects of the so-called "Rønbeckian-line" of DNA politics were clearly revealed during the controversies surrounding the notorious Alta dam affair in 1979. This time, dissatisfaction with the politics of the established Sámi movement engendered the birth of a new Sámi organization based on a policy of assimilation.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Alta/Kautokeino Hydro-electric Project as an ethnopolitical catalyst

The Norwegian Government's post-war decentralization programme, aimed at transforming peripheral areas into economically viable units and integrating them into the national economic system, entailed the realization of extensive development projects in Finnmark. Examples of such projects are mining initiatives, road-building schemes and hydro-electric power development projects. For the Sámi, these programmes are not in themselves controversial issues, providing as they do, a higher standard of living. They become controversial, however, when in executing these development plans, the State exploits its rôle as guardian *vis-à-vis* the Sámi population, without taking sufficient heed of Sámi rights and land-use patterns.

It is against this background that the Alta/Kautokeino hydro-electric dam scheme should initially be viewed. However, this project was to give rise to the most far-reaching and profound conflict between the Sámi and the Norwegian State this century. Initially a land-use conflict, the Alta/Kautokeino Affair evolved into a political and moral issue pertaining to the fundamental rights of the Sámi as an indigenous ethnic minority. It was presented in the media and by its Sámi protagonists as an inter-ethnic conflict, but in reality, the conflict transcended ethnic borders, creating divisions within the non-Sámi and the Sámi segments of Norwegian society. These divisions reflected differing

opinions vis-à-vis State policy.

The debate arising from the Alta/Kautokeino conflict served to expose and politicize latent ethno-political dilemmas within the Sámi population (Brantenberg 1985 p.24). These dilemmas are anchored in the problematization of Sámi ethnic identity which occurred as a consequence of ambiguities in State policies affecting the Sámi. The formation of a new Sámi organization *Samenes Landsforbund*, SLF (the Sámi National Association) in 1979 and the subsequent polarization of Sámi ethno-political organizations are manifestations of these dilemmas.

The catalytic properties of the Alta hydro project lie in the way it provided an opportunity for the Sámi to present the Sámi problems as a fundamental question of principle. For the first time, the Sámi were able to communicate that their needs as a people could not be fulfilled by initiatives aimed at keeping their "culture" alive, but that their cultural viability was dependent upon the recognition of special collective Sámi rights (Thuen 1980 Introduction). Thus the Alta conflict gave the Sámi the opportunity to challenge the very foundations of the Norwegian legal system. In so doing, they gave the hydro-electric dam issue metameaning; the problems at stake would not be solved by an agreement over the fate of the Alta/Kautokeino river. In presenting their case, however, the Sámi were subject to the constraints of Norwegian institutions and Norwegian interpretations of "Sáminess". It was this limitation that was to prove most problematic for the Sámi in their cause, revealing as it did that the essence of a Sámi ethnic identity was no longer

straightforward.

The Government's final decision to regulate the Alta/Kautokeino river was passed by a royal resolution of 15 June 1979. For the State, this issue was no different from any other hydro development scheme. The Government's pragmatic approach is seen in the way financial compensation was arranged for the land-owners and land-users (notably reindeer Sámi) whose interests would be damaged by the project (Solem 1981 p.34). It is also demonstrated in the way damage to reindeer pastoralism was ascertained in terms of square kilometres of pasture land and the number of deer thereby affected (Bjørklund and Brantenberg 1981 p.13). Addressing the *Storting*, a Cabinet Minister summed up the damage to reindeer pastoralism thus:

... the regulation of Virdnejavri (lake) will involve the loss of pasture in spring and autumn for 21 reindeer. There are no migration or transhumant routes here. That is all" (Bjartmar Gjerde cited in Bjørklund and Brantenberg 1981 p.13).

This statement is representative of what Bjørklund and Brantenberg call "the Norwegian understanding" of reindeer pastoralism (p.29 ff). This is an understanding that likens Sámi pastoralism to other primary sector occupations and more specifically, to other forms of livestock management. It is symptomatic of this understanding that reindeer pastoralism is administered under the Ministry of Agriculture, by agronomists. As a result of this interpretation of Sámi pastoralism, the Norwegian authorities were able to insist on divorcing the Alta question from the question of Sámi rights. This is clearly demonstrated in the mandate of a meeting held in 1979 between the Government and Sámi

organizations to discuss Sámi rights (Chapter 3). The paradox behind this is that the current Law of Reindeer Pastoralism, passed in 1978, expressly protects this livelihood as a Sámi activity (Arnesen 1980 p. 74). The Alta conflict was in fact a debate on the link between reindeer pastoralism, which was seen by the Sámi as threatened by the dam project, and the future of Sámi culture, which the State had a moral duty to secure.

The dramatic events that followed the Government's decision to carry out the hydro project, demonstrated that for many Sámi and Norwegians, the dam project had a symbolic value. Not only did it represent a threat to reindeer pastoralism as a viable livelihood, but it also represented a threat to the Sámi culture as a whole, through the central significance (both material and symbolic) of reindeer herding to the viability of Sámi culture. Paine (1982) talks of culture as "an entwining of the ecologic and economic with the symbolic". Hence, although reindeer pastoralism is not economically central to the Sámi culture (only ten per cent of Norwegian Sámi depend on this way of life) "in the symbolic there is a defence of the ecologic and economic" (p. 96).

The construction work at Alta began in June 1979, but was hindered by a crowd of Norwegian and Sámi protestors, the "People's Action Group against the development of the Alta/Kautokeino river". This group which was formed in 1978, had set up a protest camp at the construction site at Stilla. Chained to each other, the protestors sat in a line in front of the construction machines. The protest camp remained at Stilla until October 1979, when the Government announced that it would present a parliamentary report

on its intentions in carrying out the construction work. The work at Alta would be discontinued until the report had been discussed in Parliament (Mikkelsen 1980; NOU 1984 p.51).

The People's Action Group was dominated by Norwegians from southern Norway, and claimed to represent conservation interests as well as Sámi interests. Its protests in Alta were paralleled in Oslo by the "Sámi Action Group", which in the autumn of 1979 pitched a *lávvu* (Sámi tent) outside the *Storting*. A letter was sent from the *lávvu* to the Government demanding "that the Government/Parliament halts the construction work ... until the Sámi question, raised in the courts, has been solved legally" (cited in Mikkelsen 1980 p.128). The request to halt the construction work was rejected and seven members of the Sámi Action Group began a hunger strike. The hunger strike was called off when it was announced that the Alta issue would be reviewed by Parliament.

Further pressure was put on the Government to review Sámi rights when later in October, NSR asked the Government to initiate a discussion on the legal situation of the Norwegian Sámi population. This led to a meeting in Vadsø, Finnmark, between State representatives and the Sámi organizations, a meeting which was to result in the setting up of the Sámi Rights Commission in January 1980 (see Chapter 3). However, the Government still intended to forge ahead with its plans to regulate the Alta watercourse.

The Sámi protestors in Oslo and Stilla had presented the Alta issue as a Sámi issue, as had the southern Norwegian press.

Inherent in this interpretation of the Alta dam project is the "Sámi understanding of reindeer pastoralism" which sees this way of life as an integral part of the Sámi cultural complex (Bjørklund and Brantenberg 1981 p. 17). By connecting reindeer pastoralism to Sámi rights, these protestors (backed by NRL and NSR) presented a version of Sáminess in which pastoralism plays an important part, both materially and symbolically. Since pastoralism is the only Sámi livelihood legally protected by the State (Chapter 4 below), any negotiations between the Sámi and the State regarding Sámi rights to land and water must be conducted within the context of this livelihood. The importance of reindeer pastoralism as a legal and political resource was particularly apparent in the Alta case, which involved two court hearings. In both cases, the court ruled in favour of the State.

In December 1980, the Court of Appraisal at Alta judged that the objections raised against the Government's construction plans were legally invalid. This ruling was followed by a Government announcement that construction work would recommence. This provoked renewed demonstrations at Stilla in January 1981. Almost a thousand protestors gathered at the construction site. State authorities reacted by despatching 600 police to Alta to clear the protestors away (NOU 1984 p. 51). Later the same month, members of the Sámi Action Group began a second hunger strike in Oslo, demanding that the construction work should be halted until the Alta question had been discussed by a representative Sámi organ. The hunger strike was called off after a month, when the Government announced that work at Alta would be postponed until Tromsø Museum

had carried out archaeological investigations at the site.

During the Appeal Court hearing, held in the Oslo Supreme Court in 1981, NRL and NSR allied themselves with the reindeer herders directly affected by the Alta dam development, claiming that their interests were representative of the collective interests of all Sámi, whom NSR and NRL between them claimed to represent (Brantenberg 1985 p.34). By employing the services of three social anthropologists and a Canadian expert on aboriginal rights and international law, the Sámi defence was able to extend the legal implications of the Alta hydro-electric installation to encompass the basic issue of indigenous rights (Svensson 1984). The defence was not successful: in 1982 the final judgement was passed which granted the State permission to allow the Norwegian Hydro-Electric Power Company to carry out the construction plans (*ibid.*). The verdict did however acknowledge that the principles of indigenous rights as embodied in international law would be valid in cases where land incursions posed a threat to Sámi culture.

Whilst southern Norwegians and Sámi claiming to be represented by the policies of NRL and NSR generally deplored the State's handling of the Alta question, other Sámi and some Norwegian inhabitants in Finnmark were strongly critical of the way the protesting Sámi had presented the issue as an infringement of Sámi rights.

Norwegians in Finnmark were echoing the "Rønbeck-line" of *Arbeiderparti* (AP) politics in their denouncement of the Sámi activists' involvement in the affair. The dam represented economic

progress, and the Sámi stood for their region's "backwardness". That the Sámi were now claiming rights as a separate people was seen by some Finnmark-Norwegians as a threat to the "Norwegianess" of Finnmark. An AP newspaper in Finnmark contained such comments as

... if you [the Sámi] are going to become a new nation then you'll have to find a new country ... The national anthem is no problem it's just Go-ko-Ho" (anonymous reader's letter in *Finnmarksposten* 13.10.1979, cited in Mikkelsen 1980 p. 131).

(Go-Ko-Ho is a disparaging reference to the *joik*, a form of Sámi vocal music).

The protests of the Alta demonstrators were met by Sámi counter protests, paving the way for an emerging internal Sámi debate. The representativeness claimed by Sámi protesting against the dam scheme was problematic for many Finnmark Sámi, especially coastal dwellers. These Sámi were not able to relate to reindeer pastoralism as a Sámi ethnic symbol. Indeed, for many coastal Sámi, reindeer pastoralism represented an economic liability since reindeer often cause damage to property and farmland at the coastal summer pastures (Brantenberg 1985).

The stigma that many coastal Sámi had suffered on account of their ethnic identity, which in itself was perceived as a hindrance to economic advancement, prevented them from showing solidarity with those Sámi who were now so unreservedly clamouring for the recognition of Sámi rights. For the coastal Sámi, the Labour movement represented a way out of the economic difficulties of the inter-war years, but this way out presupposed that the Sámi would share the cultural premises of Norwegian society (Bjørklund 1981).

The Alta affair provided those Sámi who could not fully relate

to the Sámi ethnic identity as projected by NSR and NRL with the opportunity to present and politicize their own version of Sáminess. In the summer of 1979, the Sámi National Association (SLF) was formed by a group of coastal Sámis from Tana, as a protest against NSR's policy in the Alta affair. SLF openly supported the Alta project, and stressing their loyalty towards the Norwegian political and legal system, they supported a policy of equal, that is to say, identical rights for all, irrespective of ethnic background.

As the SLF Sámi newspaper writes:

It is the 'Norwegianized' Sámis that SLF has brought forth into the daylight. SLF has activated people ... for whom NSR with its Sámi flag, with its demands for rights to land and water and drama at Stilla ... was too high-flown, visionary, theoretical and academic for the ordinary man and woman (editorial in *Ságat* 6. 5. 1989).

The dilemma facing SLF today lies in its attempt to reconcile the apparently contradictory policies of promoting a Sámi ethnic identity (as an ethnopolitical organization) and opposing any differential treatment on ethnic grounds.

The polarization of Sámi organizations that occurred during the Alta affair can be seen as a consequence of the State policy of linking reindeer pastoralism to Sámi culture as a whole. The vulnerability of this livelihood, together with the protection afforded to it by the State, allowed reindeer pastoralism to be promoted and exploited as an ethnic boundary marker, or ethnic symbol, in the pursuit of ethnopolitical goals. The Alta affair demonstrated how the cultivation of pastoralism as an ethnic symbol becomes problematic for those Sámi who cannot relate positively to

this symbol.

The coastal Sámi, as represented by SLF, found that their needs were best catered for by the State and more specifically by the Labour movement, and thus their ethnic affiliations became less relevant. Hence SLF serves to legitimize the assimilation policy of the State, whereas NSK and NRL challenge the State's authority by moral opposition, as shown by the dramatic events that characterized the Alta affair. The State's increasing tendency to accommodate the demands of its (and SLF's) "adversaries", as shown by the setting up of the Sámi Rights Commission, has exposed the fact that SLF was not formed around an ideology, but rather as an opposition group to NSR.

## CHAPTER 3

### The Sámi Rights Commission

#### 3.1 The Origins of the Sámi Rights Commission and its mandate

At the recommendation of the Ministry of Justice and Police, the Sámi Rights Commission was appointed by a royal resolution in October 1980. Its first report, a volume of 700 closely-written pages, was published in 1984 (NOU - Norges Offentlige Utredninger 1984).

Although the direct origins of the Commission can be traced to the demands for the recognition of Sámi rights which sprang from the controversies surrounding the Alta hydro-electric project, this was not the first time that the Government had been confronted with this problem.

In 1956 the Sámi Council of Finnmark (SRfF), the Norwegian Sámi Council's predecessor, called for clarification in the extent to which the Sámi had a right to the continued exploitation of their traditional areas in the face of intrusive developments such as mining, hydro-electric projects, forestry and sports hunting and fishing. It was pointed out by the SRfF that the Sámi considered the mountains and the peninsulas and islands by the coast, which they had utilized "since time immemorial", as their domain (NOU 1984). It was at the same time emphasized that this right was enjoyed by farming, hunting and fishing Sámi as well as by those with reindeer.

Another instance when the legal basis of State ownership of

Finnmark's land was seriously questioned was a law doctorate thesis of 1972 entitled "The right to the land in Finnmark" (Tønnesen 1972). This report, based on a thorough investigation of Finnmark's legal history, poses the hypothetical question of whether a law ought not to be passed granting Finnmark's population certain ownership rights to the land. In neither of these cases was the Government willing to look into the question of Sámi rights.

An apparent change of attitude came in the autumn of 1979 when the Government initiated a meeting in Vadsø, Finnmark, to discuss the question of Sámi rights. As a direct consequence of this meeting, the Sámi Rights Commission was established. The meeting had its background in several dramatic demonstrations against the Government decision to carry out its plans of constructing the hydro-electric installation at Alta. In the wake of these events, it was NSR who asked the Ministry of Justice to initiate a discussion on the broad aspects of Sámi rights in Norway.

Present at the meeting in Vadsø were representatives of Finnmark County Council, some local Councils in Finnmark, Sámi organizations, farmers' organizations and the Norwegian Sámi Council. The Government delegate made clear that the aim of the meeting was to "give the invited delegates the opportunity to put forward their views on issues involving the rights of Sámi reindeer herders or other groups of people in the Sámi settlement areas of Finnmark. What is not the purpose of this meeting is to discuss the concrete case of the hydro-electric project in Alta" (NOU 1984 p.150). NRL's leader characterized the meeting as an historical

event, in that it was the first time that Government had agreed to a dialogue on Sámi rights (NOU 1984 p.150).

At the meeting, it was suggested from several quarters that a Public Commission should be set up to look into the legal position of the Sámi. There were, however, a number of delegates who warned against granting an ethnic group special rights to natural resources, among them prominent *Arbeiderparti* politicians in Finnmark. The mayor of the predominantly Sámi, predominantly *Arbeiderparti* municipality of Kárásjoga said at the meeting, "I am frightened of such thoughts [of granting special rights to the Sámi]. It will not strengthen solidarity between people, but it will create conflicts among the Sámi themselves and between Sámi and Norwegians. We must be very careful about making such demands" (NOU p.151). Such views are gaining strength today as Sámi rights are becoming officially recognized.

As a result of the outcome of this meeting, the Government set up the Sámi Rights Commission in the autumn of 1980. Various other proposals of importance to the Sámi population were also implemented. These included the expansion and strengthening of the Norwegian Sámi Council and the setting up of a Commission to look into cultural issues (NOU 1984 p.42). These developments did not, however, imply a change in policy on the Alta project. Construction work went ahead despite continued protests and despite the fact that the formal legality of the scheme had not yet been finalized by the Supreme Court.

The task given to the Sámi Rights Commission involved an examination into the general and political rights of the Sámi.

More specifically, proposals were to be made concerning constitutional protection of the Sámi and the establishment of a democratically elected representative body - later to become the Sámithing. Most importantly, the Commission was to look into the rights that the Sámi may have to land and water in Sámi settlement areas. Finnmark is the main focus of this work (Smith 1987). The Government resolution concerning the mandate cites:

... the Commission's report will include the most important issues connected to the management of land and water in Finnmark. The report will attempt to examine the current legal situation and evaluate the need for any changes.

Other legal questions which have recently been raised will also be examined. These include the issue of constitutional recognition of the status of the Sámi. The questions of a separate census/electoral roll for the Sámi and possible directly elected representative organs will also be examined ... (NOU 1984 p. 42).

It was decided that the Commission of 18 members should be made up partly of persons with special insight into Sámi society and partly of experts in history and property law. The Commission was to have several Sámi members. A number of interest groups were to be represented, among them the Sámi organizations, some municipalities with a Sámi population, farming and fishing organizations, the Ministry for the Protection of the Environment and the Ministry of Justice and Police. A Norwegian Professor of Law chaired the Commission.

Certain developments with their background in the controversies surrounding the Alta hydro-electric project hindered the Commission's work in the start phase. There was disagreement within the Commission, as to which aspect of the work should be

given priority. The SLF delegate, along with certain other members, strongly advocated that the question of rights to land and water be tackled before considering other legal propositions, such as democratically elected organs. The reasons given were that the question of land rights was the primary issue in the Commission's mandate and that the outcome of research connected with land rights may have implications for a new constitutional paragraph and the mandate of a representative organ. Neither the Government, NSR nor NRL supported such a change in priorities. These parties stressed the importance of speed in the Commission's work, albeit for different reasons. Whereas the Government was doubtless concerned about the negative repercussions the Alta affair might be having abroad, NRL and NSR's view may be best summed up in the Norwegian proverb "Whilst the grass grows, the cow dies" - an inquisition into land rights would take time, and some of the fervour for making reforms may cool down during that period.

The Commission concluded that a change in strategy whereby the land rights issue was given priority would be impractical, given that the present approach formed the basis of the Government's long-range programme of 1982-85. In addition, consideration was given to public expectations of quick results. This disagreement among the Commission's members did not disappear, and the order in which the Commission tackled its mandate was again made the focus of dispute by, amongst others, the Commission's SLF representative at a meeting of the Commission in March 1983.

Another problem faced by the Sámi Rights Commission at the outset, was that from October 1981 to June 1982, NSR

representatives boycotted all Public Councils and Committees. This was in protest against the re-initiation of construction work at Stilla in Alta in September 1981. The withdrawal of NSR's representative from the Sámi Rights Commission was regarded as a hindrance, but did not stop the work. On this matter, the chairman of the Commission declared "... it is difficult, both in principle and for practical reasons, to examine questions of Sámi rights without the broad participation of the Sámi organizations", (NOU 1984 p. 53). The NSR boycott was to some extent successful, but also self-defeating, and for this reason it was called off after less than a year, despite continued construction work in Alta.

The Sámi Rights Commission's first report was well received, especially by NSR. It made recommendations upon two main issues, concluding that Norway's "obligation" to the Sámi population should be constitutionally endorsed, and that a representative organ for the Sámi should be established. However, the Commission found it particularly difficult to reach an agreement on the mandate and voting criteria of the latter. The question at the heart of the Sámi Rights issue - the right to land and water, has yet to be finalized by the Commission.

### **3.2 The Government - creating the Sámi Parliament as a response**

As already explained, the demands arising from the Alta Case did not represent the first time that the Norwegian Government was asked to confront the question of Sámi rights. It is pertinent to ask which circumstances forced the authorities to respond to these

demands for the first time in the early 1980s. The answer must lie in new forces within and without Norway, questioning the Government's indigenous rights policies. Certainly the Alta affair caught the attention of the Norwegian and international public through extensive media coverage and dramatic protest actions taken by its protagonists. In this uncomfortable spotlight Norway was forced to consider her treatment of the Sámi, especially in view of her international reputation as a champion of Human Rights.

It is probably true to say that the Sámi put their case more effectively and more convincingly during the Alta affair than previously. Armed with a concrete example of an ugly incursion into their pasture lands, coupled with a large back-up of non-Sámi protestors and the brutal action of state representatives, the police, the Sámi were able to gain considerable public sympathy in their plight. The Government's reputation was at stake. On one level, the setting up of the Sámi Rights Commission may be seen as an attempt by the Norwegian Government to keep her political integrity intact, both at home and abroad.

At home, Sámi issues became very topical with the Alta Case, and many Norwegians, including *Arbeiderparti* members, were highly critical of the way the Government had tackled the demonstrations,

and of its determination to carry out the project. The Government was able to save face somewhat by presenting the Alta issue purely as a hydro-electric development scheme, to be dealt with as any other power development project. Hence the granting of compensation to those whose interests were damaged by the project (Solem 1981). At the same time, however, the Government was forced to respond to NRL's and NSR's interpretation of the Alta affair: the hydro project represented an encroachment on Sámi territory and natural resources and was thus linked to indigenous rights.

The international pressures on the Government in the context of Sámi rights are embedded in the work Norway has done in the international arena, especially on Human Rights. Norway has supported the basic principles of indigenous rights in all relevant United Nations connections. In 1970 she ratified the three UN Conventions: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Covenant on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Although none of these Conventions deal specifically with indigenous populations, Article 27 of the Civil and Political Rights Covenant is the most relevant for the question of indigenous rights:

In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group,

to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language. (cited in Brownlie 1978 p. 171).

In the Supreme Court's final judgement of the Alta Case, this Convention was not found to be relevant. The verdict included the statement,

The court found that questions of international law could be considered in a regulatory case only if that water regulation caused strong and very damaging encroachments upon Sámi interests with the consequence that the Sámi culture was threatened (cited in Svensson 1984 p. 163).

The State claimed that the Alta Dam scheme did not constitute a breach of International Law.

Norway supports the interests of indigenous peoples world-wide through granting substantial financial support to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP). The IWGIA was established in 1968 to support oppressed indigenous groups mainly by information dissemination. In 1980, Norway granted 325,000 Norwegian *kroner* (c. £30,000) to the IWGIA (Bjørnebye 1981 p. 9).

The Scandinavian governments are substantial financial contributors to the WCIP, Norway being among the most generous. The WCIP is an indigenous representative organization established in 1975. Its broad aims include securing political, economic and social justice for indigenous peoples and strengthening the concepts of indigenous and cultural rights. The Sámi were among the founding members of this Council and play an important rôle in its workings. The Sámi are represented on its board of five members. Norway was instrumental in gaining consultative NGO status for the WCIP at the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

This is an important forum where the WCIP can hope to influence states in their treatment of indigenous peoples (Kleivan 1981).

By financing international indigenous interest groups and supporting measures taken in international fora to secure indigenous rights, the Norwegian Government is recognizing that national political systems may have shortcomings in dealing with this question. Thus it seems hypocritical that the Alta Case was dealt with in the Norwegian Supreme Court which in turn has its authority from the Norwegian Constitution and Parliament.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Sámi Parliament and the management of Sámi ethnic identity

#### 4.1 The structure and function of the Sámi Parliament: a point of contention between the Sámi organizations

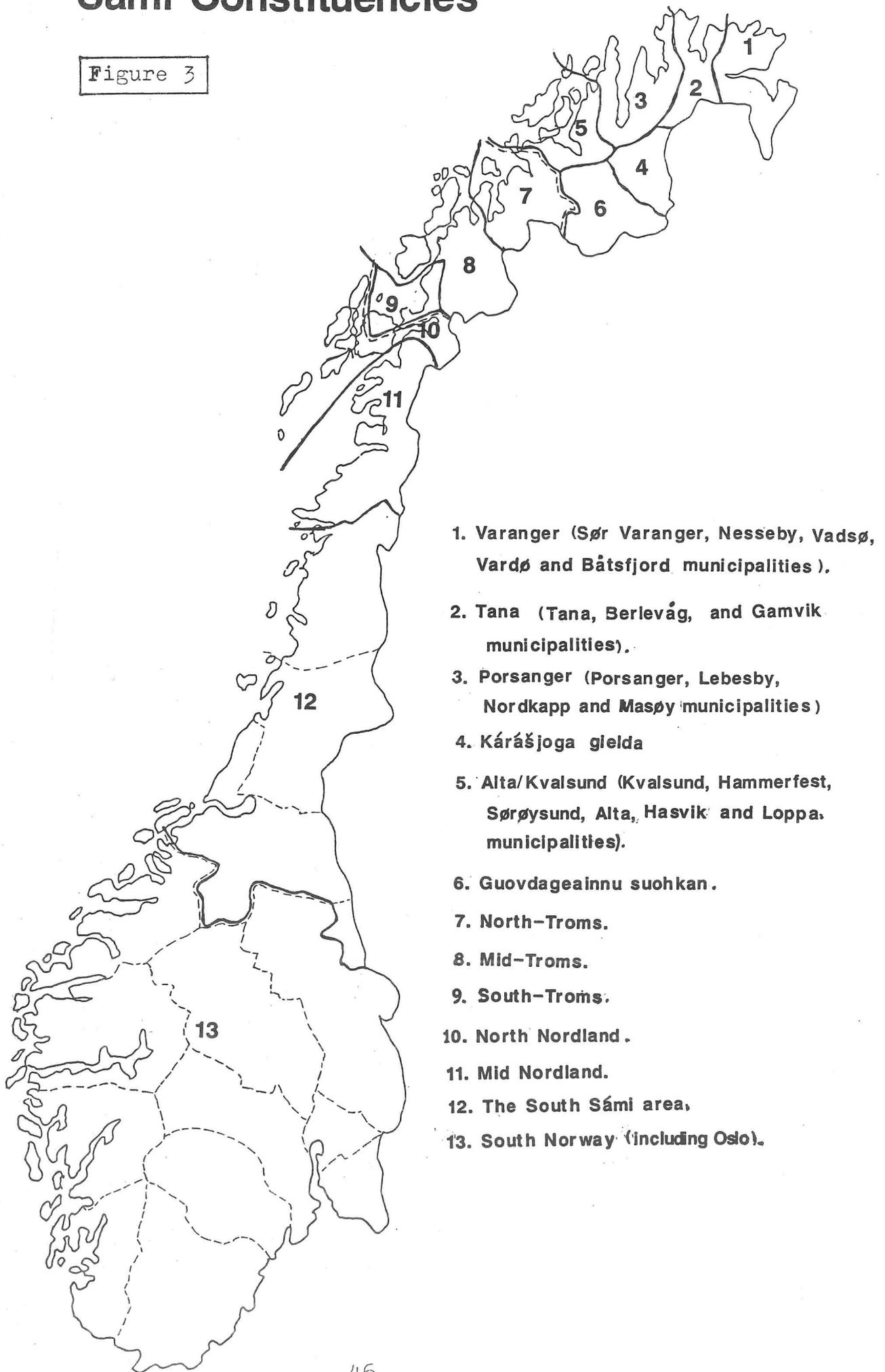
The Sámi Law, based directly on conclusions drawn by the Sámi Rights Commission was passed by the Norwegian Parliament in May 1987. It should be added, however, that only two of Finnmark's 20 municipalities (Karášjoga and Guovdageainnu) approved of the Law at the preliminary review stage. Section One of the Law lays the premise for the following sections, it states: "The purpose of the Law is to ensure that conditions exist within which the Sámi people in Norway can secure and develop their language, their culture and their social life" (Odelstingsproposisjon 1987 p.123). The emphasis here is that the Sámi as a group should have the opportunity to decide for *themselves* how best to secure their own future.

The following sections of the Law deal with the constitution of the Sámiþing. The Sámiþing is to be a nation-wide body elected by and amongst the Sámi population in Norway. For this purpose, Norway has been divided up into thirteen constituencies, six of which are in Finnmark and eleven of which are in the northernmost counties of Finnmark, Troms and Nordland (Figure 3).

The constituency-divisions of the Sámiþing are designed on a regional basis, such that minority and politically weaker Sámi groups (the south and coastal Sámi) are secured ample representation. Thus the size of a constituency does not represent a

# Sámi Constituencies

Figure 3



certain number of Sámi, but is determined by the special ethnopolitical interests of the constituents (NOU 1984 p.517 ff). In addition, minority interests within each constituency are catered for by the election of three representatives by proportional representation, such that the organ will have 39 representatives (*ibid.*).

For election purposes, lists of candidates are to be drawn up in each constituency. Any individual eligible to vote may nominate candidates. Lists of candidates may also be forwarded by organizations, societies and political parties. A list must have the support of at least fifteen members of the electorate. Anyone in the Sámi electoral register can be nominated as a candidate, and is then under obligation to receive votes. The Sámithing is to sit for four years at a time.

In order to be eligible to vote, propose candidates and receive votes, an individual must enter himself into the Sámi electoral register. For this purpose, a language criterion is used to determine ethnic belonging. A Sámi is one who feels Sámi and who has Sámi as their first language, or who has at least one parent or one grandparent who has Sámi as their first language. It is thought that these criteria are sufficiently broad to embrace all who may consider themselves as Sámi and who would therefore wish to partake in the elections. The Sámithing is to have its own administration, probably in Kárašjohka.

The Sámi Law is somewhat evasive in its description of the Sámithing's scope and activity. Section Two of the Law opens with the paragraph:

The Sámi thing's scope includes issues which, in accordance with the opinion of the Sámi thing, are especially relevant to the Sámi as a people. The Sámi thing can, on its own initiative, raise and express its opinion on all issues within its sphere of interest. It can also, on its own initiative, submit matters to State authorities and private institutions, etc. The Sámi thing has decisive authority when this is a consequence of other decisions in the Law or is stipulated in another way.

Other public bodies should give the Sámi thing the opportunity to express its opinion before they take decisions on issues within the Sámi thing's scope (Odelstingsproposisjon 1987 p. 123).

Thus for the present, the Sámi thing is an advisory body, although it does have decision-making powers over the disposal of public funds for particular purposes (Smith 1987).

Matters important to the Sámi population are currently administered by the Norwegian Sámi Council under the Ministry of Labour and Local Government. The Norwegian Sámi Council is an advisory body of 18 members who are nominated by various relevant organizations and institutions such as the Sámi organizations, local councils and trade organizations. The members are appointed by the State for four years at a time. Section Three of the Sámi Law states that "The Sámi thing is a continuation of the Norwegian Sámi Council". The Sámi thing will assume all the functions, rights and duties of the Norwegian Sámi Council (Smith 1987). The main difference, then, between the present administrative system for Sámi affairs, and that which is envisaged under the Sámi thing is that the latter is to be representative of Norway's heterogeneous Sámi population and of course, larger.

As allowed for in the Sámi Law, there is a possibility that the Sámi thing's powers will be extended, once it is established;

there are three ways in which this may happen. When the Sámi Rights Commission has completed its work and arrived at a decision concerning the management of land and water in Sámi settlement and farming areas, it may give some authority in this area to the Sámiþing. The Sámi Cultural Commission may likewise grant authoritative powers in the cultural sphere, when it has completed its work. Thirdly, the Sámiþing itself may raise questions concerning its own mandate with State authorities. In other words, it is expected that the Sámiþing will define its own rôle as it becomes established (Smith 1987). The lack of a definitive mandate is to some degree due to the high priority given to the question of representative organs by the Sámi Rights Commission, as the question of rights to natural resources has yet to be finalized. As maintained by the Sámi Rights Commission: "it is difficult to discuss the question of administration of natural resources divorced from the question of rights to natural resources" (NOU 1984, p. 452).

The Sámiþing itself is a controversial issue and the source of tensions between certain sections of the Sámi population and between certain Norwegian and Sámi groups. The main foci of the controversy are the voting criteria and the organ's mandate, reflecting the recurrent problems in ethnopolitics, those of representativeness and the inseparability of ethnic issues from regional issues.

The current problems linked with the structure and function of the Sámiþing derive from the disagreement between the three main Sámi organizations as to the rôle such an organ should have. The

combined membership of these organizations numbers just under 5000 (NOU 1984; SLF 1987) and may be considered broadly representative of the Sámi population as a whole.

NSR is in favour of a separate Sámi electoral register. Thus the organization aims to encourage as many Sámi as possible to partake in the elections in order to secure the organ's representativeness. In addition, NSR proposes to partake actively in the elections itself, by presenting lists of candidates in the majority of the thirteen constituencies (Finnmark Dagblad, 24.4.89, p.8). At the same time, however, NSR aims to maintain its "political neutrality" (NSR 1988, p.9). It would appear that these two objectives are incompatible. The NSR and NSR-Youth association in Kárášjohka have formed a coalition with two Sámi political parties: the Sámi People's List and the Sámi Nomad's List to form the *Sápmelas Álbmotlihttu* (SÁ) (Sámi People's Alliance). The original Sámi People's List with its definite political profile partakes in national general elections. SÁ describes itself as "an election alliance for the Sámi population in Kárášjohka". The main aim of SÁ is to block the Norwegian political parties from entering the Sámi thing. NSR's national working committee disapproves of this coalition, since NSR's name is not used on the election programme nor on the list of candidates (*Ságat* 5.4.89, p.5).

In line with their anti-separatist policy, SLF's official opinion is that a separate electoral roll for the Sámi is incompatible with Norwegian Law and international conventions, pointing especially to the Norwegian Personal Registry Law, and the

UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination. The organization considers the Sámi Law to have been passed without taking due consideration of the views of all the Sámi organizations and is therefore "appalled that the State in this way continues to use its old 'clenched fist' tactics against the Sámi" (SLF 1987, p.15). Instead of an organ voted exclusively by Sámi, SLF favour the continued existence of the Norwegian Sámi Council, the members of which are appointed by the State. SLF has said that it will boycott the Sámiþing elections, in that it will not present candidate lists, but its members are of course free to choose whether they sign on the electoral roll or not (Tonstad 1987; *Ságat* 11.7.1987).

NLR maintains that it makes a clear distinction between organizational and political work, and this is the reason it gives for not actively partaking in the Sámiþing by expressly forwarding candidates for election. During the Sámi Commission's discussions on the issue of constituency divisions, NRL proposed a separate constituency for reindeer herders. This proposition was grounded in the special needs of herders as an occupational group and in the special position of reindeer pastoralism as an identity factor for the Sámi population as a whole (NOU 1984 p.529). It was rejected by the Sámi Rights Commission: a separate constituency for reindeer herders would rekindle the notion that reindeer pastoralists are the "pure" Sámi. This would undermine the Sámiþing's status as a representative organ for all Sámi, irrespective of occupation (*ibid.*).

#### 4.2 Reindeer Pastoralism as a central idiom of Sámi identity

Yet this notion remains a powerful one, both on the material and, increasingly, symbolic level, where reindeer herding enjoys a special status among the various local economic activities. It is as yet unknown whether the findings of the Sámi Rights Commission will have implications for the administration and allocation of natural resources in Sámi areas, although it may be presumed they will; hence the present rather vague and limited mandate of the Sámi thing. The degree to which Norwegian State authorities take heed of the concerns and demands of the Sámi thing depends on how representative of all Sámi the organ becomes. As the mandate demonstrates, it is in the sphere of rights to land and water - the issue central to the Sámi question - that Norwegian authorities are most reluctant to loosen the reins. It is the issue of rights to natural resources that has provided the ammunition for the State's "divide and rule" strategy, splitting the Sámi population into ethnopolitical factions.

These factions are founded on differing policies towards the issue of self-determination. They are largely coincidental with ecological niches and thus livelihood, a symptom of State policy which recognizes reindeer pastoralism as the only Sámi livelihood. In order to explain different Sámi attitudes *vis-à-vis* self-determination, it is necessary to discuss the link between reindeer pastoralism and Sámi livelihoods.

Although overt cultural manifestations of ethnic belonging are dictated by both ecology and transmitted culture, ecological

adaptation is not necessarily a reliable ethnic boundary marker (Barth 1969). This is definitely true in the case of the Sámi, who maintained, and to some extent still maintain, strong ethnic links whilst occupying different ecological niches: tundra, forest and coastal regions (*ibid.*). Previously, economic inter-dependence was instrumental in maintaining ethnic bonds between the inhabitants of these three niches (Eidheim 1971). During this century however, and especially since the Second World War, various external factors have led to personal allegiances being directed towards occupational groups, with ethnic bonds across economic niches becoming less relevant. This is the underlying factor behind the differing approaches to ethnic identity construction that characterize the three main Sámi organizations and that account for their support, or lack thereof, for the Sámiþing. It is broadly true to say that the various ethnopolitical factions coincide with identifications with different primary-sector occupational groups.

To account for these ethnopolitical differences one must look at the inconsistent nature of State policy towards the management of primary resources as exploited by reindeer pastoralists, inland Sámi, and coastal Sámi. Also important is the way ethnopolitically active Sámi have used or rejected elements linked to primary resource exploitation as symbols in their construction and promotion of Sámi ethnic identity. The two are very definitely linked, and together provide an explanation for the split in opinion within the Sámi population *vis-à-vis* self-determination and the Sámiþing.

Despite occupation not being a reliable ethnic boundary

marker, primary resource exploitation is a recognized Sámi value, both for urban and rural Sámi. In communities where this activity dominates (usually in inner Finnmark's tundra region) it affects the social organization and demography of the community (Paine 1982) and thus may be said to be crucial to its cultural viability. The most significant of these primary resource activities is reindeer pastoralism. Its significance lies in its economic and social importance to inland Finnmark communities, in its rôle as a reliable ethnic boundary marker (only Sámi are allowed to herd reindeer, although not all Sámi are reindeer herders), and as a consequence of this in its rôle as a symbolic political resource (Brantenberg 1985 p. 36).

Reindeer pastoralism is a subsidiary or main occupation for approximately 2500 Norwegian Sámi, just under ten per cent of the Sámi population in Norway (NOU 1984, p. 94). It is interesting to note that SLF give this figure as just under five per cent, a figure based on a somewhat optimistic number of Sámi in Norway (SLF 1987 p. 13). Over three-quarters of those active in reindeer pastoralism are based in Finnmark, where approximately 200 families are responsible for almost 150,000 domesticated reindeer (Paine 1982 p. 10; NOU 1984 p. 94).

Since 1751, when the national border between Norway and Sweden was drawn up, reindeer pastoralism has enjoyed the benefits of special rights granted by the Norwegian State. These rights may originally be based upon a respect for a Sámi legal system (Arnesen 1980, p. 76) but strategic considerations and the occupation's distinctiveness are other possible factors.

Today, these special rights are codified in the new Reindeer Pastoral Law of 1978. The Law stipulates that the practice of reindeer pastoralism in the "traditional Sámi areas" is a special Sámi privilege, and that no other ethnic group may do so (Arnesen 1980, p.72). This special privilege is anchored in the legal principle of usufruct rights to the land, entailing strong legal protection, but not ownership rights. The usufruct rights are valid irrespective of ownership rights. In Finnmark most of the land used for pastoralism is Crown Land; the State considers itself as owner of 96 per cent of Finnmark's land. As the Alta case shows, usufruct rights thus do not provide protection from expropriation (*ibid.*, p.73).

The 1978 Reindeer Law also provides for special administrative bodies. The local administration is centred upon pastoral districts of which each of the counties Troms, Nordland, North Trøndelag, South Trøndelag and northern Hedmark are one, Finnmark county being divided into two pastoral districts. The local administrative bodies are under the pastoral committee which is appointed by the Crown and acts as technical advisor to the central pastoral administration and to pastoral research. This central pastoral administration is based in Alta, Finnmark, and is responsible to the Ministry of Agriculture (Dunfjeld 1979 p.35). In connection with this Law, Norwegian authorities saw it as imperative that reindeer pastoralists were strongly represented on these local and administrative bodies. NRL regard this as being the most important aspect of the new Law (*ibid.*, p.36).

In passing the Reindeer Pastoral Law, Parliament was

expressing its view that this activity is central to Sámi culture, and as such should be protected. The opening paragraph reads:

... the purpose of this law is to create the conditions within which the ... exploitation of pastoral resources ... provides secure economic and social circumstances and protects the rights of those who are engaged in reindeer pastoralism and preserves reindeer pastoralism as an important factor in Sámi culture ... (Arnesen 1980 p. 74).

No other Sámi occupations are expressly protected because they are practised by Sámi - as indeed they could not be, since they are practised by "Norwegians" too.

Reflecting the dual rôle of reindeer pastoralism as an important Sámi economic activity and as an ethnic boundary marker, NRL works for the social and cultural interests of its members as well as for their economic and technical interests (NRL 1988). In 1986, NRL was able to secure an annual reindeer pastoralism agreement with the Ministry of Agriculture. The agreement is meant to further social as well as economic interests. It provides for price guarantees for reindeer meat and skin, along with various other subsidies aimed at encouraging optimal production and quality products. NRL is itself partly financed through this agreement.

In 1988, four new financial settlements were included in the agreement. Educational grants are allocated to encourage young people from pastoralist families to seek higher education. A retirement payment scheme is available for those who retire after 57 years of age but before the Norwegian retirement age of 67, this is to make it easier for young people to enter the occupation. Subsidies are available for kindergartens with children from pastoralist families in order to provide these with "a special

pedagogic alternative", and establishing grants are available for pastoralists wishing to set up businesses that will extend their income base (NRL 1988, p.7). In 1989, the Reindeer Pastoral Agreement amounted to 76 million Norwegian *kroner* (c.£7,000,000) (*Nordlys* 2.2.1989, p.11).

The extensive State subsidies enjoyed by reindeer pastoralists reconfirm in the eyes of some non-pastoralist Sámi and Norwegians the myth that pastoralists are the "genuine" Sámi. The subsidies also have a counter-effect, however, demonstrated in the increasing conception of reindeer pastoralism as an uneconomic, outmoded activity, artificially kept alive by State money, by virtue of its being "a way of life".

Reindeer pastoralism is facing economic and ecological problems caused by growing herd sizes coupled with a decrease in available pasture land, a situation that leads to over-grazing. This fact, in addition to the occupation's economic dependence incites headlines such as "Sámi destroy mountain areas!" and "Reindeer pastoralism must sweep before its own door" (*Nordlys* 30.8.1988; *Nordlys* 19.1.1989, p.8). NRL's leader admits that in the most important reindeer pastoralism areas of Kárásjoga and Guovdageainnu, reindeer owners will soon be living on State subsidies alone, if the current trend continues (*Sáogat*, 26.8.1987, p.7).

In order to realize the substantial economic potential of pastoralism and to clean up the occupation's image, extensive measures were initiated by NRL and the reindeer pastoral administration to count deer and to encourage increased slaughter.

The problems are very much localized to Finnmark, and especially West Finnmark where almost half of the country's domesticated reindeer have their winter pasture (NOU 1984, p.94). The controversies surrounding forced deer counts and slaughter-incentives led to a split within NRL and to the establishment of a new pastoralist organization, *Boazu Ealahus Searvi* (BES) centred on Guovdageaidnu and Kárášjohka. BES members, typically the large reindeer owners, are opposed to the new measures and refuse to allow their animals to be counted (*Finnmark Dagblad* 16.5.1989, p.14). NRL, however, recognize that the future of the occupation depends upon a reduction in herd size on the maintenance of a high quality product "otherwise we may just as well pack our bags" (NRL leader, Odd Erling Smuk to *Finnmark Dagblad* 16.5.1989, p.14).

Although the problems facing reindeer herders cannot solely be attributed to outside forces, they do demonstrate the occupation's vulnerability to external factors. Increasing economic development has meant that pasture land has been eaten into piece by piece. The Alta dam is the classic example, but there are plenty of other equally significant but lesser-known encroachments of pasture land. The effects of these are most in evidence in the inner Finnmark tundra region which supports the majority of Norway's domestic reindeer in winter. Examples of land encroachments that have seriously affected reindeer herding are hydro-electric power stations, use of the land for military purposes, mining installations, roads, and ever increasingly, tourism in the form of motorized travel over the tundra, increased road traffic and holiday cottages. Paine (1982) describes how it is not just the

few square kilometres of expropriated land that have consequences for reindeer pastoralism, but that the effects of one incursion set off a chain reaction, the consequences of which are felt by many herding units or *siiddat* over a large area. The repercussions may be of a social as well as of an economic nature.

A number of key factors account for the vulnerability of a reindeer management system compared to other forms of livestock management. Reindeer pastoralism is dictated by the psychological and biological needs of the animals, and as a collective activity it is dependent upon close working relationships between herders (Paine 1982 p.15). As a transhumant activity, pastoralism is extensive in land-use and the specific nutritional needs of the animals at different times of the year make it sensitive to weather and ecological factors. The system is at its most vulnerable during spring calving and autumn rutting, when disturbances may interfere with biological processes. The range used during these seasons, connecting winter and summer pastures, is relatively narrow, and it is here that environmental changes have the most adverse effect (*ibid.*, p.19). Changing migration route in response to an incursion is difficult, both on account of the "limits of reindeer ability to learn and to discriminate" (*ibid.*, p.28) and because such a change generally involves colliding with the migration routes of other *siiddat*.

The material importance of reindeer pastoralism for Sámi culture is not only evident in its direct significance for herders and their families. It is crucial to the economic and cultural viability of whole Sámi communities on the tundra, as it forms just

one integral element in the whole tundra adaptation (Bjørklund and Brantenberg 1981). This is especially true for the smaller communities such as Máze, Šjoušjavre and Lappoloubbal, but less so for Kárášjohka and Guovdageaidnu, which can be characterized as semi-urban with a much stronger market economy. The economy of the smaller tundra villages is largely characterized by natural resource exploitation, and although reindeer pastoralism is central in this context it cannot in itself function as a cultural entity. Non-pastoralists within these communities practise what Paine (1982) calls "occupational pluralism", exploiting such *naturalia* as fish, berries and game birds as well as having a small farm or salaried employment. Pastoralists also engage in other forms of primary resource exploitation. Thus one can say that the tundra adaptation forms the basis of a cultural unit centred upon, but not synonymous with, reindeer pastoralism. This naturally means that non-pastoral Sámi within these communities are able to identify positively with reindeer herding as an important Sámi occupation, and as an ethnic boundary marker. They themselves are a part of the world with which reindeer pastoralism is identified from the outside.

The Sámi notion of being part of a tundra cultural whole, and therefore identifying positively with reindeer pastoralism is also evident among sedentary Sámi inhabitants of the larger tundra villages, Kárášjohka and Guovdageaidnu. This is especially true for older inhabitants who experienced these villages before they became fully integrated into the market economy. Many of the settled people in these two communities have kinship or close

friendship ties with pastoralists. Elements from the reindeer world are a part of everyday life for these people. Reindeer carcasses or steaks are often given by pastoralists to their family and friends and products made from reindeer skin may be made in the home. The majority of these settled Sámi enjoy close links with the tundra environment, usually through hunting, fishing or picking berries. For many of these people, the promotion of reindeer pastoralists as the genuine Sámi is not problematic. It may become so, however, for those who do not enjoy close contact with the reindeer world. They often speak Sámi, and so are not recognized and cannot recognize themselves as Norwegian, yet neither can they identify with the cultural symbolism inherent in reindeer pastoralism.

As demonstrated, reindeer pastoralism is important as a material manifestation of Sámi values on a par with the exploitation of other primary resources. This is especially so on the tundra, where Sámi are in a large majority. Of all the primary sector activities generally carried out by Sámi, reindeer pastoralism has become recognized by outsiders, and as a consequence also by some Sámi, as the most genuine manifestation of Sáminess available. This myth arises from the special State protection the occupation receives, by virtue of it being "central" to Sámi culture. Encapsulated within the mono-ethnic environment of reindeer pastoralism, herders and their families are able to maintain and nourish a set of distinguishing features relating to their lives which make up a dynamic culture (Thuen 1980, p. 16). It is not insignificant that the snow scooter, an important technical

aid in the pastoralist's work, has become incorporated into Sámi cultural values, and has almost assumed the status of being a Sámi cultural or identity symbol (see Joks' montage, Figure 7, Chapter 4.3).

The most important part of the pastoralists' ethnic barrier is their specialized expertise. Paine (n.d.) calls this occupational expertise a "praxis", a "fusion between knowledge, understanding and responsibility" (p.9). The importance this knowledge assumes in inter-ethnic contexts is well demonstrated by the way South Sámi reacted when their expertise was being infringed upon by "experts" following the Chernobyl accident. Expert advice aimed at lowering bequerel levels in deer was not always taken, the herders preferring to assert the exclusivity of their trade, and therefore their ethnicity, by attempting to lower bequerel levels using methods independent of those prescribed by "the experts" or outsiders (*ibid.*). The expertise boundary also represents an ethnic barrier impermeable even to most sedentary Sámi.

State recognition of pastoralism as a Sámi livelihood allows those Sámi who can identify with their livelihood either materially or symbolically to enjoy a strong ethnic sense of self. This in turn forms the basis of political demands to be recognized as a separate ethnic group, which by virtue of its indigenous status has certain rights pertaining to the use of land and water and to greater self-determination. It is not coincidental that NSR, the organization that embodies this ideology, draws its members largely from inner Finnmark, nor that NSR's political ally is NRL, the reindeer Sámi organization.

Pedersen (1987) emphasizes the importance of primary sector occupations to Sámi material culture, and therefore to the experience of being Sámi. It follows then, that State resource management policies which do not link ethnicity to the exploitation of a particular resource can undermine the cultural identity of those Sámi who depend on that resource. This is clearly seen in the case of coastal Sámi, many of whom still depend on a combination of farming and resource exploitation, especially sea and fjord fishing (Pedersen 1987).

Since the Second World War, ocean-going vessels equipped with modern fishing technology have heavily exploited the fish resources off Finnmark's coasts. Those coastal Sámi who partly rely on these salmon, herring and cod resources, with their smaller vessels and conventional equipment, are not able to compete (Pedersen 1987). Norwegian industrial fishing off Finnmark reached such dimensions that the Ministry of Fisheries has implemented a prohibition on spring cod fishing by anybody, whether Sámi or Norwegian. SLF's mouthpiece, the newspaper *Ságat*, calls this policy "yet another nail in the coffin for the coastal Sámi culture" (*Ságat* 6.5.1989, p. 3).

The absence of laws and regulations aimed at securing coastal Sámi a viable economic resource base reinforces the perception that the only true Sámi livelihood is reindeer pastoralism. This inconsistency in State policy towards the Sámi is however founded on the deep irony that a combination livelihood based on farming and natural resource exploitation pre-dates reindeer pastoralism as a specialized livelihood; this only emerged three to four hundred

years ago (Brantenberg 1985 p. 33).

Previously, strong ethnic bonds 'existed' between coastal dwellers and reindeer Sámi, transcending ecological niches. When the latter came with their deer to their coastal and island summer pastures, they relied on the help and hospitality of their coastal ethnic counterparts. In return, coastal Sámi were given reindeer meat and other reindeer products (Eidheim 1971 p. 26). Each partner in this relationship called the other *verdde* (guest-friend). This social institution broke down, however, when the Sámi in coastal communities were brought into the money economy after the war. With this development came the social stigma of a Sámi identity which was especially strong in coastal communities where Sámi are usually heavily outnumbered by Norwegians. The response among many coastal Sámi to this stigma was to assume a Norwegian ethnic identity and to sever all bonds with anything Sámi (Eidheim 1971). This accounts for the ambivalent, if not hostile, relationship today between coastal and reindeer Sámi. The promotion of reindeer Sámi as the 'genuine' Sámi serves to accentuate the rift between the two groups.

Today, conflicts of land use during the summer months exposes the antagonisms between coastal and reindeer Sámi which to some extent still exist. Spring in Finnmark is hailed by a deluge of bitter letters in local newspapers, complaining of careless herders and damage caused by reindeer: "... I am willing to shoot those animals that come on to my land ... and just because the owners can't be bothered to look after their own vermin ..." (*Finnmark Dagblad* 16.6.1988). For these Sámi, reindeer herding becomes an

"economic liability" and a "contrastive symbol" (Brantenberg 1985) p. 36), they feel more affinity with their fellow-Norwegian coastal dwellers than their own ethnic group.

#### 4.3 Other symbols of ethnicity among the Sámi

The viability of the Sámiþing will depend on the support and participation of the Sámi population in general. This will, in turn, be dictated by the extent to which those legally eligible to vote identify themselves as Sámi. As more Sámi adopt urban lifestyles and take a greater active part in Norwegian institutions, aspects of Sáminess become less relevant and the essence of being "Sámi" less obvious. In their efforts to mobilize the Sámi, those active in the Sámi movement promote "new holds [sic] for self-identification" to provide the Sámi with a way of expressing their ethnic identity in modern society (Eidheim 1985). The success of the Sámi movement may be measured by the extent to which Sámis choose to accept or reject these new manifestations of Sámi identity.

The maintenance of ethnic identity in polyethnic societies with continual interaction between groups, is dependent upon the existence of criteria for determining ethnic belonging. These criteria make up the ethnic boundary. Incorporation into an ethnic group or exclusion from it, is determined by how the actor believes he relates to the ethnic criteria as well as how he is judged by others to relate to them. It is accepted among some anthropologists that it is possible to cross ethnic boundaries and consciously assume a new ethnic identity (Barth 1969).

As we saw in the previous section, even reindeer herding as an economic activity bears a heavy symbolic and political load. Other aspects of Sámi identity - language, the use of visual symbols, Sámi art forms and distinctive modes of behaviour - are also central to the process of boundary demarcation and maintenance. As such, they are vital components of "Sámification". These cultural subsystems are reified through the creation of Sámi institutions and Sámi national symbols as well as through the conceptualization of Sámi cultural markers in modern art form. The sum effect is a cultural renewal, entailing creative processes and political mobilization - a move towards nativization or "Sámification" as opposed to assimilation (Paine 1985).

The protagonists in this process of culture or identity promotion and reification are necessarily sufficiently distanced from the day-to-day living out of the grass-roots culture to be able to view it objectively, from without (Ingold 1976 Chapter 21). The "culture-promoter" is able to manipulate cultural components to serve his own ends and thus "he does not belong to the culture, but the culture belongs to him" (Ingold 1976 p. 246).

Typically, the culture-promoter is educated to a higher level than is average for the Sámi population, often at the universities of Tromsø or Oslo, in the case of Finnmark Sámi. Thus, they are usually employed in the tertiary sector and only engage in those occupations regarded as typically Sámi for recreational purposes. They are known collectively by grass-roots Sámi with a slight irony as "the academics" and by some Norwegians as "super-Sámi".

These culture-promoters often have a high level of competence

in Sámi history and language. Their mobility and contact network with Finnish and Swedish Sámi and even indigenous groups on other continents enable them to gain external impulses for their political activities (Eidheim 1985). Such people tend to be the driving force behind NSR. Within the Finnmark Sámi population they occupy their own social niche, which to some extent leads to their alienation from those Sámi who constitute the target for their political activism. This weakens their credibility as agitators within the local community.

Language is central to Sámi cultural identity. Its importance as a criterion to justify Sáminess is probably second only to Sámi ancestry (McNulty and Magga 1987). It is certainly central to the process of identifying who is Sámi. In Sámi districts a question aimed at ascertaining a person's ethnic identity is invariably phrased "Is she/he Sámi-speaking?"; hence the language criterion in the legal definition of who is Sámi (Chapter 4.1).

The importance of the Sámi language for the promotion of Sámi identity lies first and foremost in its use as a symbol - a national rallying point. Sámi is increasingly used in mass media - newspapers, radio and television, and here it becomes a powerful conveyor of Sámi ethnic issues.

Possibly the most important tool in the ethnic revival process is the education system - insofar as this is geared towards those ends. The teaching of Sámi language in schools infuses it with a status and a worth which it would otherwise not achieve. It is also in schools and colleges that Sámi attitudes towards the Sámitization process become clearly visible, through parental and

student choice. Schools in the Sámi core area are very much Norwegian in structure and function, and certainly in origin, but a string of reforms since the 1970s have orientated the teaching more and more towards the school's immediate locality and thus to Sámi cultural norms. However, there is a distinct discrepancy between the official degree to which the curriculum is Sámi-orientated and that which is possible in practice, due to lack of human and material resources. This can probably best be illustrated by my own experiences of a school in Kárásjohka, a Sámi community in inland Finnmark, where I taught during the year 1987-88.

The school I worked in is typical of schools in central Sámi areas, or Sámi schools. As such, it had three parallel classes in each year: a Sámi-speaking class for the children of settled Sámi, a Norwegian-speaking class, and a class for the children of nomadic Sámi, each with its own curriculum (I speak Norwegian but not Sámi). I taught a number of subjects including Norwegian, English and social studies in a Sámi-speaking class of 13-year-olds. My class had four hours of Sámi and three hours of Norwegian a week. Sámi was also supposed to be the language of instruction, but was only so in a maximum of four subjects; this is not atypical. A lack of qualified personnel, and a lack of personnel who speak Sámi whether qualified or not, in addition to an extreme shortage of Sámi teaching materials are the main problems facing the Sámi school. In an attempt to rectify these problems, unqualified Sámi speakers are given priority of employment, before Norwegian qualified teachers.

Apart from language teaching, Sámi topics are ideally to be

incorporated into the curriculum as far as is possible. Thus *duodji* (Sámi handicraft) and knowledge of aspects of reindeer pastoralism are taught in all three classes, and much emphasis is placed on outdoor life - with such activities as fishing, driving reindeer, and snow-scooter trips across the tundra (Figure 4).

The vast majority of the pupils in Norwegian-speaking classes are taught Sámi as a second language, whilst Norwegian is the second language for pupils in Sámi-speaking classes. In both cases, the second language is introduced in the third grade. In the community in which I lived, the parents of the very few children who did not learn Sámi at school at all were subject to a degree of stigmatization. Many teachers and politicians favour making Sámi a compulsory school subject for all in the Sámi core area (NOU 1987).

However, the strengthening of the status of the Sámi language as a school subject and in the community at large, is to some extent dependent upon an improvement in the recruitment rate of Sámi to the teaching profession. The Nordic Sámi Institute and NSR have successfully campaigned for the establishment of a Sámi institution of higher education in Guovdageaidnu. This college, which in the first instance will train teachers, was to have its first student intake in the autumn of 1989. The language of instruction and research will be Sámi. The ultimate objective is that this institution will develop into a Nordic Sámi University (NSR 1988; Diehtogiisá 1989).

Despite these efforts of raising the status of the Sámi language, it is up against considerable competition from Norwegian



Figure 4 The Sámi school; learning how to dismember a reindeer carcass

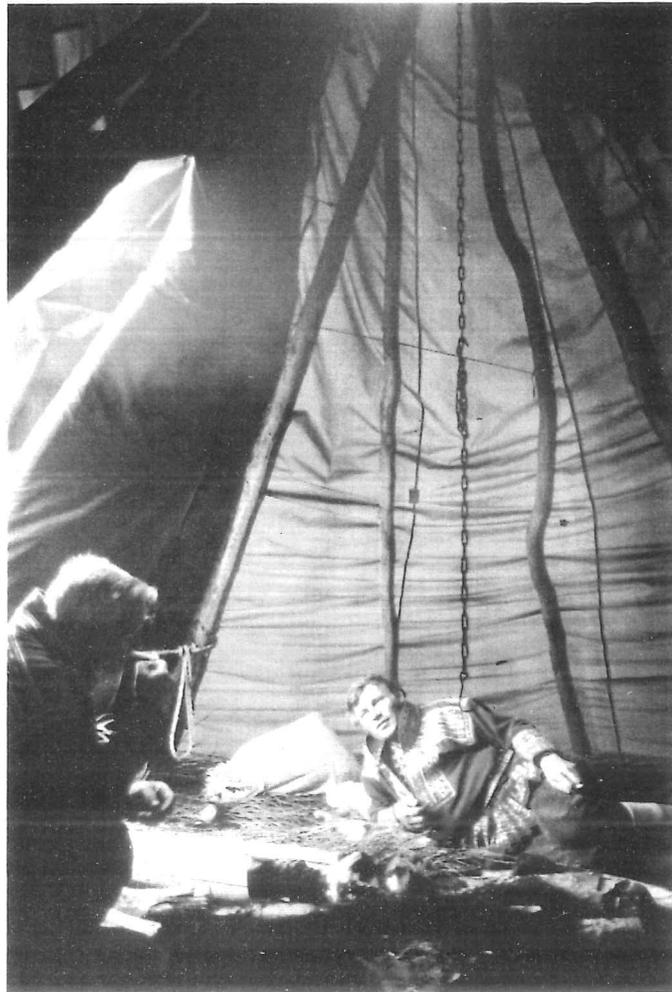


Figure 5 Reindeer pastoralists

and increasingly English, especially through the media and marketed entertainments. Until fairly recently, Kárásjohka parents were free to choose whether their children entered Sámi-speaking or Norwegian-speaking classes. Many who spoke Sámi at home placed their children in Norwegian-speaking classes, although for different reasons. Two categories can be distinguished. For the first, the notion that "You don't get far with Sámi", reflecting a low level of ethnic identity consciousness, but also, perhaps, a practical approach, is the reason given by one group of such parents. Another group, often of a higher income level than the first, grounded their choice in the standard of teaching and the learning environment, supposing these to be superior in the Norwegian-speaking classes. To counteract this tendency, the school now decides which class a child enters, in accordance with his or her first language.

The dilemma faced by Sámi when confronted with the relatively new situation that Sámi language has greater official significance, as shown in the above example, is the cumulative result of a lifetime of experiences where being Sámi was of no social benefit, and where it was advantageous to be familiar with Norwegian language and values. The younger generation have not been subjected to these negative experiences to any significant extent as the active promotion of Sámi cultural identity began already in the 1970s, and as they are able, often more so than their parents, to operate fully in both Norwegian and Sámi cultural spheres. The young generally identify positively with the Sámi language, but there are signs that it is becoming an institutionalized language, to be used

only in certain environments. As I often observed, even classmates in Sámi-speaking classes will speak Norwegian to each other and then suddenly switch over to Sámi, as if by afterthought.

The use of the Sámi language as a symbol plays an important rôle in the Sámi movement's strategy. One of the most evident ways in which this is done, is consciously to use Sámi as opposed to Norwegian in situations where it is impractical to do so, for example at gatherings where the majority do not understand Sámi. There are instances when this is taken to the extreme, and the Sámi communicator will pretend that he or she does not understand Norwegian.

Another way in which language is used symbolically is by reverting to original Sámi names for settlements, administrative units, towns and natural features, where these have been replaced by Norwegianized forms. This can be interpreted as being suggestive of national territorial claims (Sagarin and Moneymaker 1979). The two Sámi municipalities of Kautokeino and Karasjok have recently officially adopted Sámi versions of their names, *Kárášjoga gielda* and *Guovdageainnu suohkan* (*Sáogat* 5.4.1989, p.12). A suggestion from Guovdageaidnu Sámi Society in 1988, to change the name of Finnmark County to *Sámifylka* created a great stir in the county. The suggestion was sent out to the municipalities in Finnmark for comments, but only Kárášjoga and Guovdageainnu responded positively. The others rejected the suggestion. Norwegians in Finnmark regarded the suggestion as provocative and threatening, and maybe this was the intention. Angry letters from Norwegians filled the newspapers with such comments as "How will a

*Sámifylka* without us Norwegians function?", "The next step will be that we have to wear the Sámi costume too", "Why not call it Reindeerland, then we'll be reindeerlanders" (*Finnmark Dagblad* 11.4.1988, p.6; 16.4.1988, p.17).

This incident represents a rôle-inversion, whereby a minority is imposing its values upon a majority. This engenders almost violent reactions, highlighting the asymmetrical relationship between the two groups *vis-à-vis* the State. The incident also demonstrates the powerfulness and efficacy of symbols in asserting ethnic identity.

The process of creating a distinct Sámi culture, to which the Sámi population can relate and which will provide the Sámi with a way of differentiating themselves from other ethnic groups has entailed the re-codification of various cultural elements such that they become ethnic symbols (Ingold 1976). Eidheim (1971) points out that these established symbols, or 'idioms' have a dual rôle. They serve as a Sámi-counterpart to comparable Norwegian cultural symbols, "complementarizing" the two ethnic groups and allowing for interaction between them on an equal basis. They also serve to "dichotomize" the two groups, being unifying objects by which one can identify one's own group (p.79).

It is possible to identify two categories of Sámi ethnic symbols. The most interesting is that set of symbols which have undergone a re-evaluation process. Certain elements from what is popularly conceptualized as being a typical Sámi life-style have been ascribed new functions by their users. Although the participation in their use is not universal within the Sámi

population, these symbols immediately provide a focus for ethnic belonging.

Everyday utensils, such as *guksi* (a drinking vessel) and *náhppi* (a bowl for milking reindeer) are now made not so much for use, as for decoration. *Duodji* (Sámi handicraft), previously purely a utilitarian craft has now become an art form. The distinctive *gákti* (Sámi costume) was worn for its practicality as an everyday garment. Today it is largely worn for decorative purposes, especially in inter-ethnic situations when it is important to demonstrate one's identity. The joik, a form of unaccompanied song, has lent musical elements to a new form of pop joik, played on electrical instruments. The *lávvu* (Sámi tent) is used for weekend fishing trips and is sometimes put up in the back garden. To the extent that these cultural elements are at all used in their original capacity, it is almost exclusively among reindeer herders. Some may wear elements of Sámi dress, if not the whole costume, whilst working, and *lávut* are occasionally used whilst out with the herd (Figure 5).

The Alta dam affair occasioned a particularly spectacular use of Sámi symbols, as part of the Sámi protest action. In the autumn of 1979 some Sámi put up a *lávvu* on the lawn in front of the *Storting* in Oslo. In their Sámi costumes they occupied the *lávvu* whilst one of their number joiked outside. In this instance the *lávvu* clearly demonstrated the dual rôle of the symbol. Its juxtaposition with the Norwegian Parliament at once symbolized the equality between the Sámi and the State and the political or power inequality between them. The political injustice experienced by

the Sámi as a people was demonstrated through these symbols to passing Norwegians, effecting "a politics of embarrassment" (Paine 1985, p.55).

The second set of symbols is made up of conventional national markers which have been translated into Sámi. At the thirteenth Sámi Conference in 1986, a Sámi national flag (Figure 6) was adopted and Isak Saba's "the Sámi people's song" became the Sámi's national song (Nordisk Sameråd 1986). The value of these collective symbols lies first and foremost in the way they at once compare and contrast with the Norwegian versions. There is relatively little interest for celebrating the Norwegian national day in Kárásjohka, but a number of the inhabitants mark the occasion by joining a procession through the village, many wearing the Sámi costume and waving a Norwegian flag. Against this background, a large Sámi flag hanging from the balcony of a house and draped across its front has a considerable impact. In this instance, the existence of a Sámi flag allowed for the positive promotion of Sáminess in a context where ethnic belonging is usually marked by passivity.

Conventional art forms such as pictorial art, sculpture, theatre and literature are instrumental in the process of defining and portraying Sámi culture. Motifs are often fetched from the world of reindeer herding, from Sámi pre-Christian religion or from Sámi folklore. A montage called "Seek harmony with nature" made by the Sámi artist Iver Joks, combines these traditional cultural motifs with living, dynamic elements of culture in a single work of art (Fig. 7). Reindeer antlers hanging from a launching pad

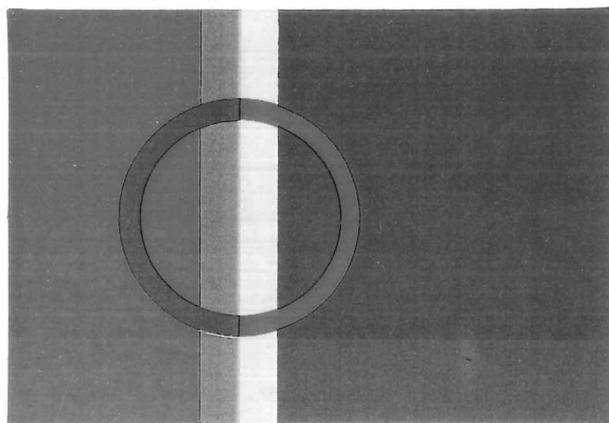


Figure 6 The Sámi flag as adopted by  
the Nordic Sámi Council in 1896 1986

Figure 7 Extracts from a montage by the Sami artist  
Iver Joks, "Seek harmony with nature"



a) "The 'stage' of our times"



b) "The claim of the sacrificial altar"

symbolizes Sámiland in the atomic age. Stones and platforms represent Sámi pre-Christian sacrificial sites; snow-scooters, off-road motorbikes and helmets represent elements occupying an important position in modern-day Sámi society (*Finnmark Dagblad* 21.9.1988, p.3).

There are certain behavioural patterns and ways of thinking and reacting which are recognized as being "typically" Sámi (Eidheim 1985). These are especially in evidence among older people. In an attempt to demonstrate their Sáminess and ethnic difference some younger Sámi appear self-consciously to incorporate some of these elements into their mannerisms. These people tend to be élites who are aware of the importance of maintaining ethnic dichotomy and are able to be self-conscious about this. Within their group they endorse each other's behaviour as being legitimate, because it is "Sámi". Often, these behavioural patterns are linked with the notion that clock-time and what is normally understood as "politeness" are irrelevant. Lateness, visiting at all hours of the day or night and walking into homes without signalling one's entrance are examples. Another is long speech pauses or silences. The notion that nothing is of real consequence and the pointlessness of getting worked up about things is also part of this way of being. A common manifestation of this is a shrug of the shoulders accompanied by the phrase "So what?". This self-perpetuating myth of what it is to be Sámi has perhaps gained in importance since language is no longer a reliable ethnic boundary marker.

## CHAPTER 5

### A FINAL ANALYSIS

#### The prospects for the viability of the Sámi Parliament

##### 5.1 Three versions of what could conceivably constitute success

An assessment of the viability of the Sámi Parliament must be based on those standards by which it would be judged as successful by the parties concerned. The three Sámi organizations, with their exclusive economic interests and different approaches to the construction of ethnic identity, voice differing views as to how Sámi issues can best be managed. The viability of the Sámi Parliament, then, hinges upon the extent to which it can accommodate the aspirations of the three organizations. This will, in part, be determined by whether the State recognizes the Parliament as representative, since only then is it likely to implement reforms demanded by the Sámi Parliament.

A summary of how each organization relates to the key symbols of ethnicity described in this thesis, will serve to illustrate the nature of the ethnic identity each one strives to project. This, in turn, accounts for the differing stances of each organization in relation to self-determination and thus to the importance of the Sámi thing.

NSR actively uses "Sámi" symbols to strengthen ethnic boundaries and thus to further its cause of greater self-determination. This is well illustrated by the Alta case. As the State recognizes only reindeer pastoralism as an exclusive Sámi occupation, NSR was able to use this as a symbol representing all Sámi in negotiations with the State for the recognition of Sámi rights. Since NSR's policy depends on the use of ethnic criteria

to promote "Sáminess", the organization necessarily derives its support from those Sámi - usually inland and reindeer Sámi - who display a relatively rich cultural repertoire, and thus an ethnic self-confidence.

In line with its desire to strengthen ethnic boundaries, NSR supports the establishment of a directly elected representative body. Indeed, NSR initiated the negotiations that led to the establishment of the Sámiþing. There are indications, however, that factions within NSR are dissatisfied with the current constitution of the Sámiþing. Addressing an IWGIA seminar on indigenous rights, an NSR representative called the Sámi Parliament no more than a "re-organization of the Norwegian Sámi Council" (Stordahl 1987 p.70), pointing out that the mandate of the existing Sámi Council and the Sámiþing are very similar. For NSR, the demand for self-determination, implies rights to natural resources as well as the political institutions and powers to administer these resources (Magga 1985; *Finnmark Dagblad* 24.4.1989 p.8). Thus it will not recognize the organ as a viable political institution until it has been granted greater decisive powers, especially in the sphere of rights to land and water. However, NSR continually speak of the "powers" that should be conferred to the Sámiþing in broad, vague terms, and so it would appear that the organization has not, as yet, defined the precise nature of these rights (Stordahl 1987; *Finnmark Dagblad* 24.4.1989 p.8).

Recognizing that the Sámiþing's ultimate power will lie in the degree to which the State regards it as a *representative* Sámi body, NSR initiated a large publicity campaign to encourage as many Sámi as possible to vote at the Sámiþing elections (NSR 1988; *Finnmark Dagblad* 17.1.1989). In order for its policies to be

influential in the formulation of the Sámi thing's demands, NSR propose to present as many candidates for election as possible.

The political exploitation of reindeer pastoralism during the Alta case incited indignation among those Sámi (largely coastal Sámi) for whom the cultural values associated with this livelihood have no place in their ethnic self-identification either symbolically or materially. The Alta affair allowed for the politicization of these Sámi, as seen in the establishment of SLF. This organization, appealing to Sámi groups who have few possibilities to express their ethnicity, rejects the use of ethnic symbols, reflecting its assimilatory policy. SLF is against ethnic differentiation and therefore the establishment of a representative Sámi body, which would only serve to accentuate the coastal Sámi's "second-class" rôle *vis-à-vis* the Sámi. As the SLF leader declared at the meeting in Vadsø which led to the establishment of the Sámi Rights Commission:

... Today's Parliamentary system in Norway is as representative for the Sámi as any system could ever be, and the special Sámi political issues can only be solved through the democracy that already exists (Oscar Varsi, SLF leader, 20.11.1979, cited in Minde 1980 p.87).

Instead of constructing a form of ethnicity based on the positive promotion of ethnic symbols, SLF ascribes an inverse function to these symbols: they stand for all that SLF does *not* represent. Being an ethnopolitical organization, however, SLF's *raison d'être* depends on the existence of some form of ethnic boundary. Thus it promotes a form of identity based on non-pastoral primary-sector livelihoods, stressing at the same time that these activities are also important for non-Sámi sectors of the population (SLF 1988; *Ságat* 3.5.1989 p.3).

SLF bases its ideology around unreserved support for the

State as shown by its statutes: "The Sámi National Association ... shall honour and respect the King and his Government, Parliament and other public authorities ... " (NOU 1984 p.361). State support assumed a symbolic function in SLF's version of Sámi ethnicity. Problems arose, however, when the State altered its policy, recognizing the Sámi as a separate ethnic group with separate rights. SLF was suddenly placed in an adversary position *vis-à-vis* the State. As Brantenberg (1985) points out, SLF's new anti-Government position undermines the organization's original ideological foundations that: "Sámis are first and foremost Norwegian citizens, with the same rights and duties as others, and no more" (*Ságat* 3.5.1989 p.3). Thus SLF rhetorically denounces the separate registration of Sámi, citing examples of how such a register could be abused, and evoking memories of the brutish plans war-time occupancy authorities had for the "unclean" and "useless" coastal Sámi (SLF 1987 p.16). In retaliation, NSR calls this "terror-propaganda" (*Finnmark Dagblad* 12.4.1989 p.4). In short, SLF's version of a successful Sámithing would be an indirectly-elected body (voted through local councils) with a similar mandate to that of the Norwegian Sámi Council, that is to say, a purely advisory function (SLF 1987 p.17).

Thus, assuming that the Sámithing will provide the main forum for ethnopolitical debate, SLF will either have to support its activities, and change its ideological premises, or withdraw from ethnopolitics altogether.

The constituency-divisions, which are purely regional, provide for the potential over-representation of coastal Sámi (compared to inland and, more especially, reindeer Sámi). This could induce the recognition of their primary-sector livelihoods as *Sámi* and

possibly demystify the importance of reindeer pastoralism as a Sámi livelihood. It is thus thoroughly ironic that SLF does not encourage its members to partake in the elections.

Whilst the symbolic aspect of reindeer pastoralism is a positive and a negative political resource for NSR and SLF respectively, the ambiguity of this symbol has made NRL at once its victim and its exploiter. Thus, in the words of Brantenberg (1985) "Herders may find it more advantageous ... to defend their interests in terms of 'economy' only" (p. 42). The reaction of the Sámi Rights Commission to NRL's request for separate constituencies for reindeer Sámi clearly exemplifies how NRL has fallen victim to the exploitation of pastoralism as a symbol. Establishing such special constituencies might "rekindle the attitude that only as a reindeer Sámi can one be a genuine Sámi" (NOU 1984 p. 530). NRL's political activity depends, however, on the strong symbolism inherent in pastoralism, which the organization has successfully exploited in negotiations with State authorities. The dual rôle of NRL as a "trade union" and as an ethnopolitical organization reflects the material and the symbolic significance of herding.

NRL has a vested economic interest in the promotion of ethnic boundaries, thus in its rôle as an ethnopolitical organization and NSR's "ally", NRL supports the Sámithing. In its "trade-union" rôle, however, the organization is rather more reserved in its support, since provisions were not included to secure the representation of reindeer Sámi (*Nordlys* 14. 1. 1989 p. 26; *Ságat* 21. 1. 1989 p. 12). The dilemma forces NRL to keep a low profile in the debate leading up to the first Sámithing election.

As this survey demonstrates, the three Sámi organizations, with their different approaches to the construction of ethnic

identity and their differing policies on the issue of self-determination, are largely representative of exclusive economic interests (Paine 1985 p. 57). This reflects the fact that the Sámi have had to formulate their demands on Norwegian premises: economic interests and political ideology are legitimate bases for organizational activity within Norwegian society. Thus the ideological split within the Sámi population is to some extent attributable to the impossibility, within the Norwegian system, of presenting the needs of a group solely in ethnic terms.

**5.2 The Finnish Sámi Parliament:  
an example of a parliament's limitations?**

An examination of the experiences and problems of the Finnish Sámi Parliament can provide a revealing prognosis for the viability of the Norwegian Sámi Parliament. The Finnish case provides a natural comparison. Those factors or "variables" pertaining to the ethnic minority situation in both countries, and which dictate the form of ethnic action taken, are very similar and in some cases identical. Hall (1979) points out that the most important variable is "domination and the way it is achieved" (Introduction). Certainly, in this context, the spirit of the Norwegian legal and political systems bears much resemblance to its Finnish counterpart. Another important variable which has implications for the indigenous minority situation is the colonial history of the States concerned. Both Norway and Finland were dominated by foreign powers until 1814 and 1917 respectively. The waves of nationalist fervour that ensued among the majorities, resulted in the cultural suppression of their national minority groups. It appears that this was less strong in the case of the Sámi in Finland, however, perhaps in view of the two peoples' common Finno-Ugric pre-history.

The Finnish Sámi Parliament was first elected in 1972 on the basis of a trial election. Regular elections commenced from 1975. The establishment of the Parliament should be viewed in the light of the growing pan-Sámi movement during the 1950s and 1960s (Eidheim 1971; Ingold 1973). It has its background in the work of the Finnish Sámi Committee which was established in 1971 as a response to general land encroachments in the Sámi settlement area of northern Finland.

As well as outlining the structure and function of a Sámi representative organ, the Commission also undertook a comprehensive review of the cultural, economic, social and legal situation of the Sámi in Finland and laid down proposals for a Sámi Law. The Law proposals represented an attempt to secure Sámi use of renewable natural resources through State recognition of a specific Sámi area - the "Home Area" - they were not, however, considered by Finnish State authorities (Beach 1988).

The Norwegian Sámiþing is modelled fairly closely on its Finnish counterpart, although the former has a firmer political base. The Finnish Sámi Parliament, as the Sámi call it, or the Delegation for Sámi Affairs, as it is officially known (a significant difference in terminology) is a purely advisory body with no decision-making powers (Müller-Wille 1979 p.67). Its 20 representatives are elected amongst and by a registered Sámi electorate. Although there are no constituencies as such, eight of the representatives must come from the "Sámi Home Area": two from each of the Sámi municipalities Utsjoki, Inari, Enontekiö and northern Sodankylä (Vuotso). Ninety per cent of Finland's Sámi population of approximately 4500, live in this area, although only about thirty per cent of the Home Area's population are Sámi. The

remaining 12 representatives may come from any part of Finland.

Partly as a reflection of the relatively low-profile of Sámi ethnopolitical organizations in Finland, none of the Sámi Parliamentary candidates stand as representatives for political parties, organizations or interest groups. Thus candidates are elected on the basis of "popularity ranking" (Ingold 1973 p.242). This contrasts with the Norwegian system which allows for political and other interest groups to forward candidates. There are advantages and drawbacks with both arrangements. The active participation of national political parties will surely colour the Sámi thing with Norwegian political values, undermining its status as an ethnic body. On the other hand, strictly personality-based elections do not promote representativeness.

The Finnish Sámi Parliament came under the Ministry of State until 1986 when it was transferred to the Ministry of the Interior. Its mandate is somewhat more specific than that of the Norwegian Sámi thing. It applies only to the "Sámi Home Area", listing a number of issues on which the Parliament is to "take initiatives, make proposals and present statements to authorities" (Müller-Wille 1979 p.68). These issues include conservation, mineral exploitation, reindeer herding and the use and conservation of water resources (*ibid.*). The mandate does not confer any decisive powers upon the Parliament.

The Finnish definition of a "Sámi" for legal purposes is based on the objective or ascriptive criteria of language and descent. Unlike the Norwegian definition, there is no subjective criterion. A Finnish Sámi is one who speaks Sámi or who has at least one parent or grandparent who speaks/spoke Sámi. This gives rise to the rather puzzling situation whereby a largely subjective

phenomenon, that of ethnic belonging, is determined on the basis of values imposed from without. A person does not actually have to feel Sámi to partake in the Finnish Sámi Parliament as elector or candidate. The Finnish definition of who is Sámi is all the more puzzling in view of the fast decline of the Sámi language in Finland. The prominent position occupied by language in this official version of Sámi identity has been described as "self-inflicted ethnocide as though one were driving one huge spike into one's ethnic coffin" (McNulty and Magga 1987 p.38). Ingold (1976) on the other hand sees the lack of a subjective criterion as representing an attempt by the Sámi movement to "renationalize" strayed Sámi (p.236). It certainly seems incongruous to mark ethnic belonging by a language criterion alone, when only about forty per cent of the Finnish Sámi population speak Sámi as their main language (NOU 1984 p.200).

Election participation of those who have allowed themselves to be registered has oscillated between just over eighty per cent to just under sixty per cent in the 1983 election. It could be that behind this relatively low 1983 figure lurks an element of disillusionment with the Parliament.

On the one hand, the State does not pass on all cases pertaining to the Sámi population to the Sámi Parliament. Significantly, it is often the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry that by-passes the Parliament (Aikio 1987). On the other, the demands of the Parliament often pertain to basic rights and are frequently ignored or rebutted by the Finnish authorities (*ibid.*).

Reindeer pastoralism is materially more important to the Finnish Sámi, relatively speaking, than it is to their Sámi neighbours. Thirty per cent of the Finnish Sámi population depend

on reindeer pastoralism (NOU 1984 p.220). Thus land encroachments and the need to protect natural resources are of extra significance in Finnish Sámi politics. So far, however, the Sámi Parliament has not been able to secure official recognition for reindeer herding as an exclusively Sámi occupation, as it is in Norway and Sweden.

The Finnish Sámi Parliament's successes have been in negotiations with the Government relating to language and culture reforms. This is symptomatic of a feature shared by the Fennoscandian governments in their dealings with the Sámi. The States concerned divorce cultural issues from those pertaining to "fundamental" (economic and land) rights, being willing to lavishly support the former at the expense of the latter.

A cynical view of the Finnish Sámi Parliament is that it represents a "patch-up deal" on the part of the Finnish State in the face of ethnic minority demands for greater self-determination. The Finnish experience demonstrates the dilemma faced by a welfare state in attempting to consolidate a welfare ideology (equal rights for all) with its neo-colonialist position.

### **5.3 The key issue of representation in Norway**

The current structure and mandate of the Sámiething reflects a compromise between the proposals of four parties - the three Sámi organizations and the State. It does not represent the specific demands of any single group. The provisions of the Sámi Law allow for the Sámiething to define its own rôle once it is functioning.

As the Sámi Commission concluded:

Natural development will ensure that the scope of this body will in future be extended with respect to matters of particular importance for the Sámi population (NOU 1984, cited in Stordahl 1987 p. 70).

In the light of this, the key to the Sámi thing's viability lies in whether it really will be a mouthpiece for the Sámi population as a whole, through its representativeness.

Stordahl (1986) points out that there are three aspects to representivity: to be representative, an organ must represent, be representative of, or respond to the wishes of those whom it claims to represent (p.95). Thus a distinction can be made between the Sámi thing's claim to "represent" and its actual "representativeness". Herein lies a potential problem: the supporters of the Sámi thing are likely to claim that it represents certain ideals not shared by other sectors of the Sámi population - notably the coastal Sámi, so preventing the organ from becoming representative.

Since representivity is a "primary political value of the First World" (Paine 1985 p.52), it can be used by the State to legitimize its rejection (or approval) of demands made by the Sámi thing. However, it lies in the power of the Government to manipulate the political significance of representivity in any way it wishes.

The Sámi thing relies for its representativeness on active voter-participation, and this is the crucial factor underlying its viability. Whereas the powers of the Sámi thing can be negotiated, participation of the Sámi population is outside the Sámi thing's sphere of control. The potential voters are the Sámi thing's power-source, and for this reason it is they who are the targets of NSR and SLF polemics. Without sufficient back-up the Sámi thing will be branded as "unrepresentative" and will be in no position to negotiate "on behalf of the Sámi people".

The individual Sámi's response to the arguments of NSR and SLF, is determined by two factors. The most crucial is whether the

individual feels Sámi enough to be willing to be classed as such. The second is whether the individual perceives "Sámi issues" as being materially or symbolically relevant to his or her life and if so, whether the Sámi thing is regarded as influential enough to be able to do anything about these issues.

From Sámi interest during the run-up to the first 1989 election, it is evident that whereas SLF arguments have predictably gained a foothold in coastal areas, NSR can boast a high level of interest in the core Sámi area of inland Finnmark. A total of 5500 Sámi entered their names in the register that forms the basis of the 1989 electoral roll. This figure should be viewed in conjunction with the estimated total of 30,000 Sámi in Norway (NOU 1984 p.86). However, a census carried out in 1970 in the Sámi districts of north Norway (the three northernmost counties) revealed that only 9175 people were unconditionally prepared to declare their Sámi ethnicity (*op.cit.* p.85). For several reasons the results of this census are not regarded as a reliable estimate of the total number of people of Sámi descent in Norway (*ibid.*).

Approximately 40 per cent of the total electorate and 60 per cent of the Finnmark electorate are registered in the two constituencies of Kárášjoga and Guovdageainnu (*Finnmark Dagblad* 11.5.1989; 16.5.1989). In contrast, only 156 Sámi have registered themselves in the coastal Sámi area of Nesseby [Constituency No.1 Figure 3] (*ibid.* 11.5.1989).

SLF and NSR are quick to use these figures in their respective propaganda campaigns. NSR attributes the low level of interest among the coastal Sámi to SLF's anti-Sámi thing campaign. At the same time, however, NSR legitimizes the Sámi thing as representative, by relating the number of enrolled Sámi to the

census of 1970:

[We] are very satisfied with the number of registered Sámi and look forward to the autumn election ... Over half of those who regarded themselves as Sámi in the 1970 census, are now registered (NSR leader Ragnhild Nystad to *Finnmark Dagblad* 11. 5. 1989 p. 2).

SLF, on the other hand refer to the "20,000 Sámi who share SLF'S view" (the 'unregistered' Sámi) and question the representativeness of the Sámi thing, especially in the light of the lack of interest from coastal areas (*Ságat* 12. 4. 1989 p. 5).

In the final instance, the Sámi thing's representativeness at any one time is subject to Government interpretation. The question of active Sámi support for the Sámi thing does, however, reveal a seemingly intractable problem. Lacking definitive powers, the Sámi thing can only in the first instance enlist support by virtue of its status as an instrument for the consolidation of ethnicity. As such, it may only appeal to a certain sector of the Sámi population - those for whom ethnic identity is not problematic. This situation may reduce the Sámi thing's credibility as a representative organ, so reducing its negotiating powers *vis-à-vis* the State. This vicious circle of credibility highlights the paradoxical nature of the Sámi thing. It was ostensibly established to allow the Sámi population to decide upon and control their own future, but does not empower them with the means to do so.

## GLOSSARY

### Sámi terms

BES	Boazu Ealahus Searvi - The Reindeer Pastoralism Association
Duodji	The art of Sámi handicraft
Gákti	The Sámi costume
Guksi	A drinking vessel of wood, a <i>duodji</i> article
Guovdageaidnu	The Sámi village of Kautokeino in inland Finnmark
Guovdageainnu suohkan	The Sámi municipality of Kautokeino in inland Finnmark
Kárášjohka	The Sámi village of Karasjok in inland Finnmark
Kárášjoga gielda	The Sámi municipality of Karasjok in inland Finnmark
Lávvu (pl. lávut)	A Sámi summer tent
Náhppi	A wooden bowl, previously used for milking reindeer, a <i>duodji</i> article
Oslo Sámiid Searvi	Oslo Sámi Society (established 1948)
Searvi	Association, society
Siida (pl. siiddat)	The social group forming the basis of reindeer pastoralism activities; the settlement of such a group "reindeer village"

### Norwegian terms

AP	Arbeiderpartiet	) 'The Norwegian Labour Party'
DNA	Det Norske Arbeiderparti	)
NRL	Norske Reindriftssamers Landsforbund - The National Association of Sámi Reindeer Pastoralists (established 1948)	
NSR	Norske Samers Riksforbund - The National Association of Norwegian Sámi (established 1968)	

SLF Samenes Landsforbund - The Sámi National Association  
(established 1979)

SRfF Samisk Råd for Finnmark - The Sámi Council of Finnmark  
(established 1953, superceded in 1964 by the Norwegian  
Sámi Council)

Storting - The Norwegian Parliament

-ting - (English *thing*) - deliberative assembly

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