

Need and Misery in the Eastern Periphery: Nordic Sámi Media Debate on the Kola Sámi

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Published in *Acta Borealia*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 19-36, 2011

This article investigates Nordic Sámi discourse on the Kola (Russian) Sámi through analysis of texts from Sámi newspapers and journals 1992-2009. Among the findings are that the relationship between Nordic and Kola Sámi is frequently discussed as a donor-recipient pattern similar to that of general Western discourse on “the [global] South” and the 1990s’ “great misery discourse” on Russia. This portrayal of the Kola Sámi is here referred to as “the discourse of need”. However, the study also finds that this most divergent subgroup of the Sámi people is accepted into the border-transcending Sámi “nation” without question - it is never challenged that they are part of a larger “us”. The article also comments on some similarities between the discourse on the Kola Sámi as a “suffering” group, and certain patterns in Nordic Sámi self-representation. In comparison, a selection of non-Sámi media texts displayed less interest in the Kola Sámi; their paying attention to the group was more dependent on its members being perceived as victims of crisis and/or injustice; and they articulated the discourse of need more often. The two decades from which texts were drawn (1990s and 2000s) differed mainly by the latter period showing a general decrease in interest in the group; and by Sámi media being less dominated by the discourse of need, and containing more texts portraying the Kola Sámi as culturally and politically active.

Key words: Indigenous, National identity discourse, Russia and the West, Kola Peninsula, Media studies, Kola Sámi

The Sámi - one border-transcending indigenous people?

According to the Nordic Sámi Council’s *Sámi Political Program* of 1980, “The Sámi are one people, whose fellowship must not be divided by national boundaries” (Sámiráđđi, 1980: 2). Similar statements often appear in modern Sámi political rhetoric, and sum up a core discursive construction in Nordic ethno-politics: that a certain set of people constitute *one Sámi ethnic collectivity* that transcends state borders and internal cultural divides. This does reflect certain realities: in traditional Sámi culture and its modern incarnations there are similarities cutting across state borders and Sámi subgroups; most Sámi languages are spoken on several sides of the borders; the different subgroups have some historical experiences in common; and modern pan-Sámi institutions and organizations further bridge the divides (cf. Rantala, 2009). Still, just like with all ethnic groups, alternative identity constructions are possible.

Sámi cultural-linguistic subgroups are indeed different enough that, thinking counterfactually, they could have come to consider themselves (and have been considered by outsiders) as separate ethnic groups. Strong variations are found in for example their traditional languages, material culture (clothing, art, etc.) and folkloric traditions. Different parts of Sápmi¹ are even conventionally associated with different subgroups - it is generally agreed upon what are traditional South Sámi areas, North Sámi areas, etc. If state borders had been drawn with respect to internal Sámi divisions, these might have gone on to serve as focal points for indigenous ethno-politics in Fennoscandia, rather than the idea of “one border-transcending people”. As it turned out, the states not only disregarded regional differences between

indigenous communities, but even split up the traditional territories of microlevel nomadic groups. This approach to colonization made it overwhelmingly likely that modern indigenous ethno-politics in the region would involve a strong border-transcending aspect. Robbins (2007: 7) refers to this as “imposed internationalism”. The first key event in Sámi ethno-political internationalism took place in February 1917, when Norwegian and Swedish Sámi activists met in Trondheim. The first *institutionalized* expression of pan-Sámi ideology came with the 1956 establishment of the Nordic Sámi Council. The latter part of the century saw the creation of official Sámi representative organs which, although part of the “divisive” states, have border-transcending aspects: the different states now have similar Sámi institutions, and these have established fixed forms of cooperation.

Despite increasing international cooperation, however, one Sámi subgroup still stands out – its political situation, organization, socio-economic conditions, majority religious affiliation, traditional languages and historical experiences all sharply deviate from the “norm”: the Kola Sámi, a minority within the minority.² The indigenous languages of Russia’s Kola Peninsula (Akkala-, Kildin-, Skolt- and Ter Sámi) are all of the Eastern Sámi branch, while the Nordic side of the border only houses a few traditionally Eastern-speaking communities: the Inari Sámi (Finland), and parts of the Skolt Sámi (Finland and Norway). As for religion, the Sámi communities of the West were engulfed by Protestant (formerly Catholic) states, while those in the East became Russian Orthodox. The only Russian Orthodox Sámi communities who ended up in Nordic countries were, again, the Skolts of Finland and Norway.³ What has set the Kola Sámi apart most dramatically, however, is the Soviet experience. For it was during the 1900s that modern Sámi politics were born - in the West. The 1917 Trondheim conference, taking place only a month before Russia’s February Revolution, included no delegations from the collapsing empire; the first international organization was founded within a Nordic political framework, and had no place for the Soviet Sámi; the 1970s’ radicalization of the Sámi movement was a Western phenomenon; and the subsequent legal-institutional “revolution” that brought the Sámi specific rights and representative organs did not penetrate into the USSR. By the 1980s, when the borders started opening up, the divide between the Kola and Nordic Sámi (formerly only linguistic and religious, and not even clear-cut, at that) had been deepened by several generations growing up under radically different conditions, and central ethno-political institutions and symbols had been created without the former’s participation. The post-Soviet socioeconomic crisis served to set them even more solidly apart from their “kin” in the rich welfare states. It is here our study begins: as the Iron Curtain falls, and Nordic Sámi media get access to their estranged “brothers and sisters” in the East.

Ethnicity, discourse and the media: talking nations into existence

According to Jenkins (2008: 103-104) there is a “major fault-line within social theory” regarding what constitutes a collectivity: one approach bases classification on objectively verifiable commonalities between individuals, another deals with “people’s own understandings of their inter-personal relationship”. Jenkins concludes that there are in fact “two different kinds of collectivity”: one “exists inasmuch it is recognized by its members”, the other “is constituted in its recognition by observers”. Researchers approaching what they see as the same ethnos from such different points of departure may end up looking at two different groups: if one defines the Sámi as “people who self-identify as Sámi” and the other as “people who speak/have ancestors

who spoke a Sámi language”, these two collectivities will not be identical in terms of what individuals belong. While both types of research may yield valuable results, this study concerns the Sámi as an identity community, and furthermore sees identity production as intimately connected with discourse.

Discourses here refer to patterns of “speaking about and understanding the world (or a part of it)” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2006: 9). They contain assumptions and opinions about what is relevant and irrelevant when debating a phenomenon; how other phenomena are connected to it and in what ways; what characterizes it; what potentials it has, etc.⁴ Disagreeing discourses on the same phenomenon are called *antagonistic*, and the set of all discourses on said phenomenon are referred to as its *order of discourse*. The infinite field of imaginable but unarticulated discourses on the phenomenon is referred to as the *constitutive exterior* (ibid.: 37-38, 60-62, 69, 150).⁵ Authors promote their discourses in the hope that these will come to dominate the order of discourse, their version getting “distinguished as the legitimate one”, causing others to get “pushed to the margins” (Nyssönen, 2007: 14).

While discourses often communicate the beliefs and assumptions of their authors, they of course do not always reflect authors’ honest opinions - they may also be instrumentally applied “tactical discourses” (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005: 95-122; Nyssönen, 2007: 14). Equally obviously, the consumer does not automatically internalize and replicate all discourses s/he is exposed to: what is articulated by the author may be so different from the discourse held to be “true” by the consumer, that the message is rejected (cf. Fairclough, 2003: 49-50). Even so, the order of discourse on a phenomenon limits the ways in which we are likely to interpret it – and those who do perceive said phenomenon in a way that radically deviates from a dominant discourse will find it very hard to have others agree with them or find their point of view meaningful. They may even be actively prevented from articulating their point of view by censorship, or less formal social sanctions.

While mankind is naturally inclined towards solidarity with a community of known individuals, self-identification with and active support of a larger group that includes people who will never meet one another, is dependent on the widespread acceptance of a discourse maintaining that this group exists and has relevance. In the words of Gaski (2008a: 6) “categories of nation and identity are not fixed, but given meaning through discourse”. Kaufman (2001: 3-5, 23) touches upon this in his critique of primordialism, and it is also what Mann (2005: 59-61) talks about when discussing the spread of national identities in Europe in the 1800s among people who initially could not articulate clearly what “country” their locality was part of. Antagonistic discourses may frame the same set of people as a separate “nation”, as a “subgroup” of a larger ethnic group, as an entity only fit for assimilation into a “more advanced” group - or as not at all belonging to the same group, but rather constituting several “peoples”. The Norwegians, Swedes and Danes could easily be alternatively construed as one ethnos: authors may invoke linguistic similarities, common majority religions, historical association, similar socio-economic conditions, geographical proximity, etc. Similarly, the “Sámi nation” could be construed as several separate population groups - not only by invoking the above-mentioned variation between traditional cultural-linguistic subgroups, but also by reference to the fact that most Sámi individuals are quite integrated into their countries’ majority cultures: most Sámi individuals speak their state’s majority language, while many do not speak any Sámi language; double ethnic identities (e.g. “Sámi” and “Norwegian”) are far from uncommon; and members of the group are

deeply affected by their countries' "everyday culture" and political specificities – in the words of Rantala (2009: 7) "we are all children of our particular systems and rules". Indeed, some have characterized the Sámi as "hardly recognizable" as one "cultural entity" (T. Thuen quoted in Gaski, 2008b: 222). Another way of putting this is that "Sámi culture" is characterized first and foremost by multiculturalism. Arguably, this makes discursive processes even more crucial for preserving and developing a sense of "national unity" – in societies where there is little common cultural ground for people to base a feeling of collectivity on, common values, beliefs and identities are of prime importance – and these are products of discursive processes.

Modern society's central arena for the construction of such "imagined communities" is the media – which not only reflects what discourses are available and which ones dominate, but also "produces reality" (Eide & Simonsen, 2007: 14-16): it is the main source of information for the majority of the population, and hence where authors fight for their version of events to become dominant. Another impact of the media on identity formation is that the mere existence of media outlets claiming to be "ours" maintains the existence of an "us" – "Sámi media" constitutes an institutionalization of the idea that "the Sámi" exist as a (media-consuming) community. In the Sámi media world there seems to be some awareness of this role: for example in an interview with Skogerbø (2003: 379-380) the head (at the time) of NRK Sámi Radio⁶ explicitly described their work as important for ethnic revival. The role of media outlets as actors and main arenas in the discursive maintenance of an ethnic "us" – and the filling of this category with meaning – makes them excellent sources for investigating the order of discourse on matters pertaining to the ethnic "self", and its constitutive "others".

Although the discourse articulating the Sámi as one ethnic community is currently dominant, there are still antagonistic positions on this ethnic group – differing e.g. on the relevance and implications of concepts such as "self-rule", "rights" and "indigenouness". More interesting for the subject of ethnic identity, there is also a lack of consensus about what people fall within the category "Sámi" (cf. Åhrén, 2008: 13). Are non-Sámi speakers accepted? What genealogical credentials are needed? Is one's Sáminess reduced by not participating in traditional economic activities – and which? Tellingly, a 2007 conference in one of the central Sámi municipalities was called "Who is a Sámi, and when am I Sámi enough" (Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007). Exclusion from and inclusion into the ethnic collective, and demarcations of difference from "normal Sáminess", are the objects of study here. Are the Kola Sámi out-grouped due to their differences, or does the discourse of Sámi border-transcending unity hold even when confronted with the most deviating subgroup? In the latter case, are they discussed as "just like us", existing differences being played down – or are they an "internal other", recognized as part of the group yet systematically discussed as somehow deviating from Sámi "normalcy"? If the latter question is answered in the affirmative, then *how* is this internal minority discussed?

Other studies on minorities in the media have reached troubling conclusions: minorities tend to experience marginalization and stereotyping in public debate. In Norwegian media, for example, the Sámi are seldom discussed at all – and when there is mention, they are often presented as "exotic", and/or as a group in conflict with "Norwegian society" (Eide & Simonsen, 2007: 28-35; Skogerbø, 2003: 364, 367, 373-378). The question posed here is thus, in one sense: how does the transnational Sámi minority discuss one of its minorities? Does it conform to recognizable patterns in "minority journalism"? We must also consider that while the Kola Sámi are within Sápmi, they are also within

Russia - firmly placed in the “abroad” from a Nordic point of view. In “foreign affairs journalism” there has been noted a tendency to focus on “dramatic” events such as crisis and conflicts, and to portray locals as constantly in need – passive receivers of “our” assistance. Foreign affairs journalism may also present locals in “Orientalist” ways, associating “them” with traits such as irrationality, barbarism and aggressiveness (Eide, 2009: 19-21, 30; Eide & Orgeret, 2009: 127-128, 134-135). Have such conventions in minority and foreign affairs journalism influenced Nordic Sámi reporting on the Kola Sámi, or has the dominant discourse on border-transcending national unity prevented such “contamination”? These questions will be answered after a brief presentation of the analyzed texts.

About the dataset

The data is analytically divided into eight compendia, each constituted by all relevant texts (that is, texts mentioning the Kola Sámi) found in one source, in a certain period. The periods were set to (1) the 1990s; and (2) the first decade of the 2000s, mainly due to a hypothesis that Sámi media discourse on the Kola Sámi would be influenced by general media discourse on Russia, which according to Hønneland (2005: 117-118, 172-173) began to undergo a shift towards the end of the 1990s – enthusiasm for cooperation abated, and Russia was more often discussed as a “rich country” and less as a country with a “poor” population needing Western aid. Three rather different Sámi-oriented publications were chosen, analysis starting on the first issue published following the fall of the Soviet Union and ending in 2009.

Daerpies Dierie (DD1: 1997-1999, DD2: 2000-2009) is a semi-quarterly South Sámi Christian magazine based in Snåase (Snåsa, Norway).⁷ It is financially supported by the dioceses of Härnösand (Sweden) and Nidaros (Norway). Texts are in Norwegian, Swedish and sporadically South Sámi. The readership is not limited to Christians, but rather includes people interested in South Sámi affairs.

Gába (G1: 1996-1999, G2: 2000, 2003-2009) is a society- and culture-oriented magazine focusing on Sámi women and issues considered of special interest to them.⁸ Its publisher is the international civil society organization Sámi NissonForum (Sámi women’s forum) with offices in Kárášjohka (Karasjok, Norway). *Gába* is multilingual, and read by people in Finland, Norway and Sweden.

Ságat (S1: 1992-1999, S2: 1/3 of all issues 2000-2009⁹) is a Norwegian-language newspaper (sporadic items in Sámi) aiming to inform “Sámi not speaking or reading Sámi, and non-Sámi interested in Sámi politics” about “events in the entire Sámi settlement area” (Skogerbø, 2003: 382).¹⁰ Its publisher is Ságat-Sámiid áviisa AS (Leavdnja/Lakselv, Norway), owned by 51 North Norwegian municipalities and counties (47%), Sámi cultural organizations (4%) and 43% by about 500 minor investors (www.sagat.no/index.php?id=21). This is the Norwegian Sámi newspaper with the highest circulation figures (Sámi allaskuvla, 2010: 35-37). According to Skogerbø (2003: 391-392) 35-40% of her survey respondents used it for information on Sámi politics, culture and business life – coming in as the second most important source for such news after the category “local/regional newspapers”.

Texts were checked for articulations that (1) explicitly denied, or problematized, that the Kola Sámi were part of the Sámi ethnic collective; (2) construed them as having opposing interests to the Nordic Sámi or parts

of this group; and/or (3) described them in terms of “weakness” (dependency, passivity, need) in relation to the Nordic Sámi, or conversely “strength” (self-sufficiency, cultural vitality, activism).

Finally, wanting to check for differences between Nordic Sámi and general media discourse, two text compendia were assembled for comparison, based on Atekst (A1: 1992-1999, A2: 2000-August 2009) – a searchable database that covers a variety of Norwegian-language newspapers (www.retrieverinfo.com/se/). A search was tailored to retrieve all texts mentioning the Kola Sámi in all Atekst-registered newspapers published on the Norwegian side of Sápmi.¹¹ These newspapers are not only relevant for purposes of comparison: as Skogerbø (2003: 391-392) points out, regional and local newspapers are important sources of information on Sámi affairs for Sámi readers – such media too, then, are arenas for important discursive battles. However, for the purposes of this article, A1 and A2 will be analyzed as comparative cases to the other compendia.

General interest in the Kola Sámi

It is as expected that in pure numbers, *Ságat* had the most texts on the Kola Sámi among the Sámi media sources, as the other two only come out a maximum of four times a year. In fact, when compared to the total number of *Daerpies Dierie* and *Gába* editions published in the period, their number of texts mentioning the Kola Sámi was rather high. During the 1990s, *Daerpies Dierie* published two relevant texts (note, there was a small number of total published issues in this period), *Gába* 15, and *Ságat* 73; whereas in period 2 *Daerpies Dierie* published 22, *Gába* 14 and the selection of *Ságat* issues yielded 35 relevant texts.

The high interest shown by *Daerpies Dierie* in period 2 is perhaps particularly notable considering that this publication is aimed at a Sámi subgroup living at the opposite end of Sápmi. A recurring subject was, unsurprisingly, ecumenical cooperation and other Christian activities. *Gába* is notable for several of its texts on the Kola Sámi being written by Kola Sámi – giving the “object” of discourse a rare opportunity to actively participate in the shaping of Western discourses on it. Skogerbø (2003: 364-365) notes that such access to “national” media by minorities is crucial for the development of equality and mutual respect between different groups in a multicultural society. However, *Gába*'s provision of such access is not all-inclusive: being a women's journal, it is a platform only for half of the Kola Sámi population – the half that traditionally dominates Kola Sámi civil society.

As for *Ságat*, there was an initial flurry of texts about the Kola Sámi surrounding the collapse of the USSR, followed by a slow decline of interest until 1998 – when a wave of articles on the socio-economic crisis began to appear. This conforms to the pattern one may expect in “foreign affairs journalism” of heightened interest in times of crisis and conflict. However, focus on the East was not lost in the new Millennium – *Ságat* has continued to report on Kola Sámi affairs.

In the Atekst search, the most interesting finding was that nearly all texts in the compendia came from one newspaper – *Nordlys*, the main North Norwegian regional newspaper (published in Tromsø), which is part of the media group A-Pressen, owned mainly by the Norwegian Confederation of Labor Unions (LO), Telenor Media and Content Services, and 3% by Fritt Ord – the Freedom of Expression Foundation (see www.apressen.no/eway/

default.aspx?pid=276&trg=Main-6191&Main_6191=6254:0:10,2271:1:0:0).

We may note that while Nordlys' coverage of the Kola Sámi increased simultaneously with Ságat's coverage – as the economic crisis loomed – its interest fell markedly during the 2000s (A1: 42 relevant texts, A2: 24). It would seem that the non-Sámi media's interest in the Kola Sámi was more dependent on perceived "crisis" than was the case for the Sámi media. As we shall see, though, the Nordic Sámi discourse on the Kola Sámi was nevertheless rather heavily characterized by "dramatic" discourse.

The discourse of need: "Our brothers and sisters [. . .] are suffering"¹²

A large part of the texts in all compendia articulated what is here referred to as "the discourse of need", in which the Kola Sámi are focused on as a group suffering different ills which Nordic Sámi actors are helping them overcome - or at very least, it is stated, *should* be helping them overcome. The group is particularly often described as suffering from poverty, neglect or active suppression and exploitation by other groups in Russian society, and social ills such as alcoholism and unemployment.

This discourse conforms to Eide's (2001b: 19-20) and Eide and Orgeret's (2009: 125-135) description of "development aid journalism", a type of foreign affairs journalism, which groups the world into "rich countries"/"the West" and "developing countries"/"the South" - the former being portrayed as helping (or charged with the obligation to help) the latter. In fact, general Norwegian public debate on Russia was deeply affected by development aid journalism tendencies during the 1990s – Hønneland (2005: 108-114) refers to this as "the great misery discourse" on Russia, a portrayal of the country as suffering from (often quite exaggerated) economic and social need, and appeals for Norway to act as a "good Samaritan".

Certain elements in the discourse of need on the Kola Sámi are identical to the great misery discourse on Russia, for example journalists' status reports from Russia about horrifying poverty and complete dependency on outside aid. The Norwegian Sámi Mission¹³ articulated this discourse in a particularly active fashion. Arguably, since they received donations from private individuals in the West for poverty-alleviating activities in Russian Sápmi, they had an interest in such a discourse dominating the Western media landscape. The great misery discourse on Russia having already gained dominance, people did not doubt that Lovozero's Sámi population "survive on bread and tea" when not eating at the Sámi Mission's soup kitchen, and that "many would have died" without their activities (*Nordlys*, 2 September 1998). Some, like Norwegian Sámi Parliament President Ole Henrik Magga, criticized the Mission's "old-fashioned missionary activity" (*Ságat*, 7 December 1996), but the Mission's framing of the situation prevailed – even people unfavorably disposed towards them preferred supporting their activities to letting ethnic kin starve to death (cf. *Ságat*, 26 October 1998).

Sámi media discourse on the Kola Sámi had also prior to the Russian economic meltdown tended to portray them as "the losers of the tundra" - first suffering from repression and forced collectivization during Soviet rule, later being barred by Western tourists from traditional lands, and having poaching soldiers threaten them with weapons (*Nordlys*, 11 November 1993, 14 January 1995). Some, such as the author of this reader's letter, concluded that the only chance of the Kola Sámi lay with

. . . brothers and sisters in Norway, Sweden and Finland. Brothers

and sisters who must not sleep [. . .] Only a powerful focus from the West on the small peoples' situation in "New Russia" today, can secure their traditional activities and culture [. . .] in this lawless society, where even the best of the Bolshevik propagandists could not have drawn a better caricature of Capitalism, indigenous peoples do not have good conditions for survival. (*Ságat*, 4 November 1995)

And so, Sámi Parliaments, municipalities, organizations and individuals were charged with the responsibility to provide aid. People who followed their words with actions were singled out and lauded in the media - like a Norwegian Sámi "Santa Claus" who gave clothes and ski equipment to a local who "was to pass it on" to those in need (*Ságat*, 3 May 1995), or the Sámi youth organization that sent boxes of old clothes to Lovozero (*Ságat*, 28 November 1998).

At this point it is important to emphasize that the economic crisis did indeed strike hard among the Kola Sámi, and that much of the Western aid did benefit those who needed it. However, parts of the donations were also used in ways that were not so much beneficial for the Kola Sámi community as they were beneficial for certain individuals (Øverland, 1999: 164-165). Scandals relating to misuse of aid – and rivalries over controlling it – have been included among the many factors that caused the 1998 schism that split the Kola Sámi into two political organizations (cf. Øverland, 2001: 28-29).¹⁴ In the texts here analyzed, however, it was simply assumed that the aid was used correctly. Such a lack of debate on the actual efficiency of aid is a characteristic often observed in general development aid journalism (Eide & Orgeret, 2009: 130-132).

When the crisis subsided, the media's focus on socio-economic misery was toned down – though for certain, the narrative of "complete social collapse in Russia" does at times resurface: for example an article in *Daerpiet Dierie*, January 2007, which concerns a "photo documentary" called *Welcome to Shittown*. The title is taken from graffiti on the road sign of a Kola Sámi village, and the documentary's focus is stated to be on the group's "social misery". The Nordic Sámi photographer states of his pictures that they reflect "poverty, starvation, dirt, cold and contempt. Hardly any pictures express joy and hope".

For the most part, however, attention was now turned towards less basic needs, such as assisting the Kola Sámi cultural revival and establishing Nordic standards in Russian Sámi rights and policy. While particularly the latter type of text often concentrates more on the Kola Sámi as politically active shapers of their own destiny, focus still tends to be on developing "normal" (i.e. Nordic) conditions in the East, and "we" are often charged with the responsibility of assisting "them" in this political project. In *Ságat*, 1 March 2005, for example, the *Jokkemokke declaration* of the Sámi Parliamentary Conference¹⁵ is presented, in which the Nordic countries are advised to ratify an extensive Sámi rights' convention and then "seek to include Russia in an obligating and convention-based cooperation on Sámi conditions and rights" (*Ságat*, 1 March 2005). Recent attempts of Kola Sámi activists to import the Nordic Sámi Parliament model are also often discussed in this fashion.

It must be emphasized that many Kola Sámi do indeed want rights and institutions similar to those which their Nordic kin enjoy – and the Kola Sámi leaders that are given the opportunity to speak in Western media are also adamant that they do want, for example, a Russian Sámi Parliament. But what is not investigated is this: is there any opposition within the Sámi

populace of Russia to the idea of, for example, a Sámi Parliament? People who are critical of the import of Nordic Sámi institutions (or for that matter, Nordic Sámi aid) do not seem to be heard. Also, there is a lack of debate on whether a Sámi Parliament in Russia is a realistic goal to work towards – or even how this Nordic model must be adapted to suit a much smaller constituency, very different challenges and a completely different political system. It is simply taken for granted that what “we” have in the West should appear in Russia also, and there is little or no debate about how these ideas could manifest in practice. Whether one agrees or disagrees that Russia needs a Sámi Parliament, the lack of critical discussion surrounding this important issue is unfortunate – and what is worse, this is just one symptom of a general lack of detail in accounting for how Kola Sámi politics works. Information is scarce or non-existent about what laws, institutions and Sámi organizations exist. This gives the general impression of an enclave of Sápmi that constitutes a “blank slate” for the import of Western institutions – and it under-communicates the extent to which the Kola Sámi are politically active.

The discourse of need dominated Nordic Sámi media particularly in the 1990s - in *Daerpiet Dierie* 50% of all relevant texts were found to articulate it, in *Gába* 40% and in *Ságat* 52%. In this period it was also particularly reminiscent of the great misery discourse identified by Hønneland and the “misery reportage” of development aid journalism discussed by Eide (2001b: 19-20) - in which Western journalists seek out extreme poverty and social ills, and leave out local activism, focusing instead on active and committed people from the journalist’s own country – “development aid workers or missionaries”. This division of the world into donors and recipients shaped the great misery discourse on Russia, and this “script” was then used to understand the relationship between the Kola and Nordic Sámi – the discursive construction of Sápmi’s East was modeled on that of the Global South. In period 2, however, the percentages of texts that articulated the discourse of need were down to respectively 31.8% (DD), 21.4% (G) and 31.4% (S). Also, these texts focused less on socio-economic need, more on institution-building and problems of cultural revitalization.

As for the Atekst compendia, the percentage of texts articulating the discourse of need was 59.5% in period 1 – higher than any of the Sámi media. In period 2, the percentage fell to 41.7%, which is still higher than any of the three Sámi sources in the same period.

Countering the discourse of need

Even though the discourse of need was the most dominant framing of the Kola Sámi, particularly in the 1990s, some texts did portray them as combating their problems themselves, or focused on Kola Sámi activists’ role in pan-Sámi politics. Other texts balanced the discourse of need by highlighting local cultural revitalization, or cultural contributions to the rest of the Sámi people. Generally, Nordic Sámi media had far more texts of this kind in the 2000s than in the 1990s.

In *Gába* and *Daerpiet Dierie* politically empowering framings increased from 33.3% to 50% (G) and from none to 27.3% (DD), although in *Ságat* there appears to be a very slight drop – from 34.2% to 31.4%. For comparison, the Atekst compendia showed a pronounced drop in such articulations from one period to the other – falling from 21.4% to 12.5%. It should be noted that several of the texts that discuss Kola Sámi political activism simultaneously contain articulations of the discourse of need – that is, while presenting Kola Sámi activism, they also carry the message that the Kola Sámi have serious problems and need “Western” assistance.

Regarding the texts focusing on cultural activism, they were overall fewer than the politically empowering ones. In period 1, none of the relevant *Daerpies Dierie* texts contained such themes, and only 6.8% did so in *Ságat*. In *Gába*, however, 40% of relevant texts were found to be culturally empowering. This journal has during the periods under analysis published poems, stories, recipes, etc. by Kola Sámi contributors, which not only serves to communicate that the Kola Sámi possess a rich culture, but also facilitates a cultural transfer from the East to the West. However, as was the case with many politically empowering texts, some of the culturally empowering texts also contained traces of the discourse of need. One such example is the reportage in *Daerpies Dierie*, January 2004 about a Nordic Sámi who travels to the Kola Peninsula. The Sámi there are described as “proud”, and their cultural institutions are described as being of high quality – but, it is noted, this is all despite their living in a situation “20-30 years in our past”. It is a motif well known from foreign affairs journalism that local deviations from “our” normalcy are interpreted as the locality in question “lagging behind us” in terms of development (Simonsen, 2009: 42).

In period 1, the discourse of need dominated completely, and texts containing politically or culturally empowering articulations were not infrequently “watered down” with traces of the opposite. In period 2, however, the image becomes more complex – the percentage of empowering texts increases, particularly the ones focusing on cultural vitality, where *Daerpies Dierie* “jumps” to 27.3%, *Gába* to 50% and *Ságat* to 14.9%. Combined with the drop in texts articulating the discourse of need, this implies an increased “normalization” of the image of the Kola Sámi in Nordic Sámi media. In the Atekst compendia, on the other hand, articulations associated with political empowerment dropped from 21.4% to 12.5%, and those associated with cultural empowerment from 19% to 12.5%.

East and West – a clash of interests?

Almost no texts articulated opposing interests between the Nordic and Kola Sámi: three in *Ságat* (S1) and three in the Atekst compendia (A1:2, A2:1). This is despite there being a significant power imbalance in the Kola-Nordic Sámi relationship: in terms of economy, population size and political infrastructure, the Nordic Sámi clearly have the upper hand. When such unequal actors meet, the result is usually an unequal transfer of culture and ideas, sometimes even exploitation.

None of the Sámi media analyzed mentioned the danger of a one-sided cultural transfer; it was only brought up in *Nordlys*, 9 May 2001 - when Larissa Avdeyeva of Lovozero (the central village of Russian Sápmi) is quoted on her worries about young locals learning the language of the North Sámi, the largest Sámi subgroup, instead of the local traditional language Kildin Sámi. This problem is in fact commonly brought up in discussions about the language situation with Kola Sámi individuals: young members of the group generally only speak Russian, and for those getting the chance to learn a Sámi language, Kildin Sámi has a disadvantage due to its microscopic number of speakers *vis-à-vis* North Sámi's status as a border-transcending *lingua franca* of Sápmi. Scheller (2010) notes that the power imbalance between these two languages also has to do with their differing economic advantages and general status. Though North Sámi is not indigenous to Russia, Scheller's recent study (2010) reveals that it is now the second biggest Sámi language in Russia, in terms of both active speakers and people who

have some knowledge of it. As for the other Kola Sámi languages, Akkala and Skolt have no active speakers in Russia, and Ter seems moribund. Another possible threat to the Kola Sámi from the Nordic Sámi was brought up in a reader's letter to *Ságat*, 22 January 1992, which accused Norwegian reindeer-herding Sámi who wanted to lease Russian pastures as part of a border-transcending cooperation, of using aid money to fund an "imperialist" takeover of foreign pastures (cf. Larsson-Kalvemo, 1995: 87-89). Those involved in the aid project were given equal space to present possible benefits for the Kola Sámi.

As for the idea that the Kola Sámi could represent a threat to the Nordic Sámi, it was even less represented in the compendia. In *Ságat*, 28 February 1998 Otto Borissen expressed dismay that more of the Barents cooperation's indigenous funding went to the Kola Sámi than to his own subgroup – the Norwegian Skolts; and in *Nordlys*, 22 April 1998 it was suggested that Kola Sámi reindeer herders may threaten the Nordic market by exporting their products.

All in all, the possibility that Sápmi's "eastern periphery" (*Nordlys*, 15 December 1995) may have something to *lose* in the meeting with particularly the comparatively strong North Sámi culture, is in the media's blind spot – this position is articulated so seldom that it is more or less part of the constitutive exterior – the "mute sphere". On a lighter note, "enemy imaging" of the Kola Sámi is also absent from the compendia.

Nordic Sámi self-images and images of the Kola Sámi

The Kola Sámi minority is identified – often explicitly – as a constituent part of the Sámi "nation"; it is accepted into the fold without question. The discourse on the Sámi as a unitary, border-transcending nation remains dominant, even when this most divergent subgroup is brought into the debate. This does *not* mean that deviation from "normal Sáminess" never causes Sámi individuals to exclude subgroups from the ethnic collective, but it certainly indicates that it is a position few are willing to voice publicly.¹⁶ Although the Kola Sámi are not treated as an *other* – an alien group with characteristics that sharply deviate from "ours" – they are most certainly construed as an *internal other*, a subgroup on which the majority has a special discourse, portraying them as "weaker" and "needful", giving the majority the role of an "older brother" of sorts. However, it can also be argued that the image of the Kola Sámi as "threatened" does not make them deviate that much from the Nordic Sámi self-image.

Nyysönen (2007: 14, 183, 199-200, 214, 246-251, 331-338) has pointed out that Nordic Sámi self-representation has been characterized by "victim representations" focusing on past and present injustices resulting from the Nordic states' division of Sápmi and subjugation of the Sámi – informed by discourses of indigenous resistance elsewhere, the "self-imagery of a colonized people" has become an important trait of Sámi national discourse. Hence, Nordic Sámi political discourse is often centered on invoking wrongdoing at the hands of southern overlords, and needing to have the results of this addressed – not unlike the discourse of need on the Kola Sámi, where the root cause of their problems is generally identified as the Soviet Union and its harsh treatment of the group. Against this background, we may comprehend that the discourse of need on the Kola Sámi does not contrast with the Nordic Sámi self-image, like the image of the "poor, developing South" contrasts with the self-image of wealthy and self-confident Western states, but rather serves as an extreme version of ones' own story: that of a persecuted minority working

for cultural survival and some measure of self-rule. Magnus Berg (quoted by Eide, 2001a: 11), refers to Western “Orientalist” discourse as “a long narrative about what we *aren’t*”. Conversely, Nordic Sámi discourse on the Kola Sámi may in the final analysis be about “what we *are*”.

One example of the “self-image as colonized” is found in the following reader’s letter to *Ságat*, 24 April 2009:

Far to the north in old times, there was a land with great riches. Fish in the rivers and lakes, animals that provided furs one could sell far down in Europe. Great flocks of wild reindeer to provide food, clothes and more. An area well conditioned for farming and the keeping of domestic animals. Valuable minerals. In time, the rivers also turned out to be usable for power production. To the south of this land, states grew forth, desiring to utilize these riches, and ate their way northwards and further into the country, helping themselves to whatever they could find [. . .]. But there was a problem: this area was already populated, by a people with its own language, religion, culture and way of life. [. . .]. They did not mind trading with the neighboring peoples, but also did not want to be subjugated to other nations’ rule, language, religion and way of life.

This is a type of historical narrative we see quite often in Sámi self-representation, focusing on (1) an “age of normality” where the Sámi were united and not repressed – Gaski (2008b: 225) refers to such references as the “nostalgic act of remembering a lost Golden Age”; and (2) a “Dark Age” where Sápmi is carved up and the Sámi repressed by the states. Such retellings of Sámi history are common enough to be considered a “national myth” – applying Kaufman and Edelman’s terminology, in which “myth” denotes not a falsehood, but a narrative that forms a part of an ethnic group’s “national mythology”: it infuses actual or imagined events with meaning, creating a “shared history” for a group of people, and hence unifies them around an historical experience – establishing them as part of a collective entity, often shaped through struggles with some hostile “other”. Focus tends to lie on collective loss and tragedy, or conversely challenge and victory – the demarcation of “us” from “them”, the threatening ones, is the central function of such narratives (Kaufman, 2001: 16-17). The self-image of having once constituted one unitary people, forcibly separated and repressed by alien states, serves as an ideological and rhetorical basis for political activity aimed at cultural revitalization, demands for state compensation, and increased border-transcending cooperation. In this project the reunion with the Kola Sámi necessarily forms a key part – it is symbolically important that the whole “border-transcending nation” is taking part in the joint effort to secure a future for the Sámi.

Finally, we must note that the idea of “reunion” between the Kola and Nordic Sámi shares more with general media discourse on Russia than a focus on “misery” and other “need” on the Russian side: the Nordic Sámi media discourse also echoes a phenomenon of the 1990s that Hønneland (2005: 107-108, 118-120) calls “the dramaturgy of reunion”. Key elements here are invocations of an age when there was extensive contact between communities in northwest Russia and the Nordic Arctic areas, and a temporary forced break in contacts after the Russian Revolution – followed by an age of reunion represented by initiatives like the Barents cooperation (Hønneland, 2005: 107-108, 118-120). This narrative and the Sámi “national myth” of forced division and current reunion/revival are similar enough that they must be seen as mutually reconfirming.

Concluding remarks

If the results from this analysis are to be boiled down to some general points,

these are the ones: (1) the Kola Sámi are never explicitly out-grouped, but are accepted as a part of the ethnic collective, and (2) the construction of opposing interests between majority/“us” and minority/“them”, often found in general foreign affairs journalism and minority journalism, is more or less absent. Yet, we can trace distinct patterns in the discussion of the group as an internal other: (3a) there is little or no attention paid to potential conflicts of interest between Kola and Nordic Sámi; it is generally assumed that “they” will benefit from “our” activities since, (3b) “they” are weak and in need of assistance from “us”. (3c) Not many texts present antagonistic articulations to this discourse of need, for example stories of Kola Sámi cultural and political activism. (4) Notably, however, the discourse of need, while portraying the Kola Sámi as particularly threatened, does not in fact set them as much apart from the Nordic Sámi as one may think – since the Nordic Sámi self-image is also generally one of a “people under threat” attempting to recover from past injustices brought on by southern states. (5) In the current Millennium, articulations of the discourse of need have diminished and empowering articulations have become more common. Nordic Sámi media were found to deviate from the comparative compendia by (6a) a higher general interest in the Kola Sámi situation, (6b) a generally less pronounced discourse of need. A comparison between the Sámi media sources reveals that *Gába* had a particularly high incidence of empowering articulations in its texts, and generally fewer texts articulating the discourse of need.

As for the discourse of need, the reader may ask: does it not reflect the truth? As has been pointed out, there was and is a deep imbalance between the Nordic and Kola Sámi in terms of power, institutions, numbers, economic means, etc. Is it unreasonable for the more fortunate “brothers and sisters” to charge themselves with the responsibility to offer assistance? If one agrees with the discourse of “one ethnic collectivity”, would it not be morally bankrupt not to offer assistance? It is not in any way the intention of this article to argue against the discourse of Sámi ethnic unity, or efforts at institution-building and emergency-relieving. It does, however, seem appropriate to point out a few problematic consequences of the findings presented here.

First, undeniably the situation of Kola Sámi culture is precarious, there were and are socio-economic challenges, and the relationship between the Kola Sámi leadership and the authorities of Murmansk Region could be better – and indeed, these are things that need to be discussed in Nordic Sámi media. However, the uneven balance between texts telling about various forms of “need” and texts focusing on local political and cultural activism gives a general impression of the Kola Sámi as possessing less initiative and agency than they actually do. It is a tendency which, in the final analysis, cultivates an erroneous impression that the Kola Sámi are completely dependent on the Nordic Sámi – which is not a good point of departure for border-transcending cooperation.

Second, there is too little information and debate on the specifics of Kola Sámi politics, and Russian indigenous politics in general. One may get the idea that Russia is somehow a “tabula rasa” when it comes to indigenous policy, a vacuum that needs to be filled by the import of Nordic institutions - whereas, in fact, Russia does have a complex field of indigenous laws, institutions and organizations, containing both obstacles and possibilities, and constituting a very real political landscape for the Kola Sámi to navigate. The general lack of information about precisely what organizations and actors are active in the field of Kola Sámi politics also makes it difficult for Nordic Sámi consumers to put the news from Russia into context.

Third, the combination of a lack of detail in articles on Russian Sámi politics and a somewhat programmatic journalism of support for “the Kola Sámi cause” provides a poor foundation for critical journalism. Kola Sámi politics has seen its share of internal conflicts, unfortunately also including accusations of undemocratic behavior and improper use of funds. This is not reflected in any of the text compendia. Furthermore, we do not see too often that the roles and behavior of Western actors are looked at critically – nor the actual efficiency of the projects they get involved in. These are things that need to be debated in the media.

Notes

1 “Sápmi” here refers to the geographical Sámi “homeland”, but may also refer to the ethnic collective.

2 Even the number of Nordic Sámi who have actively registered in the Sámi Parliaments’ electoral registries far exceeds the 1,991 who self-identified as Sámi in the Russian 2002 Census: 2009 numbers for Norway, Sweden and Finland were 13,855, 7809 and 5317. The full number for Finland is 9350, but many of these are below the age of 18, whereas in Norway and Sweden, persons under voting age cannot register. Sources: Norwegian Sámi Parliament (2010), Swedish Sámi Parliament (2010), Finnish Sámi Parliament (2008), Russian Census (2002).

3 Similarly, only a small group of Protestant Sámi ended up on the Kola Peninsula – the Filmans. According to Leinonen (2008) they vanished as a group during the first half of the 1900s, due to assimilation and Stalinist purges.

4 Though this article deals with texts, other forms of signaling with the intent to communicate (visual, aural, etc.) may also be analyzed for discursive constructions (Fairclough, 2003: 54).

5 Terminology applied here follows Jørgensen and Phillips, excepting only that they refer to the constitutive exterior as “the field of discursivity”.

6 Norwegian public broadcasting’s Sámi-oriented unit, soon to be renamed “NRK Sápmi”. The interviewee referred to is Nils Johan Hætta (interviewed 29 September 1999).

7 Most issues were kindly supplied by the editor on request; others were obtained from the Sámi Church Council office in Oslo and Tromsø University Library. Issue 4/1997 was impossible to get hold of, which is of course quite unfortunate as the number of issues in the 1990s is already low.

8 A complete set of *Gába* issues was kindly supplied by the publisher on request.

9 *Ságat* came out with an increasing number of issues per week, making it exceedingly unrealistic to investigate all published issues. Hence, S2 consists of texts drawn from a selection of *Ságat* issues: March-April and September-October 2000-2009. *Ságat* is available in the National Library in Oslo, Tromsø University Museum Library.

10 Skogerbø here quotes then editorial secretary Oddgeir Johansen (interviewed 29 September 1999).

11 My search included all Atekst-registered newspapers published in North Norway and Trøndelag, two areas that together constitute almost the entirety of what is generally considered to be Norwegian Sápmi. Note that Atekst does not include all local newspapers in this region, e.g. *Finnmark Dagblad* and *Finnmarken*.

12 This quotation is from *Ságat*, 26 October 1998.

13 The Norwegian Sámi Mission has traditionally worked with evangelization among the Norwegian Sámi. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, it expanded its activity to Russian Sápmi.

14 This point of view has also been given by several Kola Sámi activists interviewed during fieldwork for the NIBR project Russia in pan-Sámi politics. The reader should note, however, that the reasons for

the 1998 schism were manifold and not only a consequence of scandals related to misuse of and rivalries over aid. It is in any case not a controversial point of view that the large aid influx had some negative consequences for Kola Sámi society. For instance, Valentina Sovkina, elected to lead the Kola Sámi by the First (2008) and Second (2010) Congresses of Murmansk Region Sámi has stated that “some people just took the money and handed it out, became ‘big people’. That’s an unhealthy process, it creates a mentality of dependency. I’m against giving such packages of humanitarian aid, which we had so many of earlier” (interview with author, Lovozero, Fall of 2009).

15 The Sámi Parliaments are official advisory/participatory organs headed by elected Sámi representatives. The Kola Peninsula is the only part of Sápmi without such an institution. The Sámi Parliamentary Conference is a plenary of Sámi Parliament representatives from Norway, Sweden and Finland. The Kola Sámi send observers.

16 Norwegian Sámi media do, however, contain some articulations antagonistic to the idea that the Sámi are “one ethnic group”. Certain Norwegian Skolts some times represent themselves as a separate ethnos in conflict with the North Sámi subgroup, which now outnumbers them in the Norwegian part of their traditional territory. Perceiving “Sáminess” as synonymous with *North* Sáminess, some Skolts are alienated and attempt to detach themselves from the collectivity. The discourse on the Skolt as a separate ethnos is, however, completely marginalized.

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